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Down to Earth

Rising Distress of Old Dhakaites

By A.S.M. Nurunnabi

The denizens of old areas of Dhaka city are at present leading a life of extreme distress on account of a number of acute civic problems. According to recent print media reports, these wide-ranging problems including traffic jams, terrorism, extortion, irregular power supply, hijacking, chaos in telephone service, and an abominable sewerage system have reached monstrous proportions. The combined impact of these ills has very adversely affected the normal life of Old Dhaka, particularly in the field of commercial activities. For example, as stated by observers, in the Moulvi Bazar area previously, about 30 thousand wholesale traders used to assemble from all over the country every day; the figure has now reportedly dwindled to 15 thousand. The traders in Islampur area have mainly blamed the perennial traffic jams in their area as the prime cause for decline in business activities. The same problem has become a serious impediment to business in Nawabpur and other trading areas in Old Dhaka.

The attitude of the concerned authorities in dealing with such serious problems appears to be one of indifference and neglect. This has led the inhabitants of Old Dhaka to feel like discards or outcasts; that they do not count for much in the development process that is going on in the newer parts of the city.

The normal civic amenities in this part of the city have deteriorated so much that the whole area could pass for a concentration camp. The narrow streets

get so congested as the day advances that there is little room for open air. The handful of parks that previously existed have, in most cases, passed into the hands of illegal occupants. The playgrounds and the few open spaces are also in the process of disappearing into the hands of land-grabbers.

There are other aspects of the neglect affecting almost all parts of Old Dhaka. In these areas where about 31 lakh people live, medicare facilities are hopelessly inadequate. There was a time, about three or four decades ago, when renowned doctors of the city used to set up their chambers in the old part of the city. Nowadays no leading doctor comes to this part of the city for practice which also lacks diagnostic lab of good standard. There is only one government hospital, namely the Mitford Hospital and a number of smaller hospitals and clinics under the management of the Dhaka City Corporation. On account of shortage of doctors, mismanagement and corruption, ordinary patients of Old Dhaka don't receive medical treatment worth the name. It is also alleged that there is a class of officials and employees at these establishments who routinely harass poor patients.

Other aspects of urban life in Old Dhaka are equally distressing. On account of acute traffic jams, extortions, and terrorism, trading activities in some areas like Shyam Bazar, Rai Shaheb Bazar and Thari Bazar, are in the doldrums. Complaints to law-enforcing authorities generally produce no result. As a result, the anti-

social elements get all the more daring in their illegal activities.

The majority of business activities of the city take place in the old part, and the bulk of the country's manufactured and imported goods find its way to the warehouses of the big guns in business. These business establishments and warehouses are located in the Chowk Bazar, Moulvi Bazar, Imamganj, Islampur and Armanitola areas. It is alleged by businessmen of the old areas that, instead of controlling traffic and clearing the roads by preventing unauthorised parking of vehicles, the traffic police on duty remain busy checking the papers of the goods that go in and out of the warehouses, for reasons obvious to all.

Because of an administration that is pathologically apathetic to public woes, number of vehicles of all sizes and shapes (most of which are unauthorised) roadside shops, roadside hawkers, unauthorised encroachment of roadside land and illegal factories have multiplied in Old Dhaka, creating an unbearable traffic congestion situation for hours on end. The hundreds of thousands of man-hours wasted on the roads, would appear to be a colossal sum in terms of money.

The tragedy of the situation is that due to lack of effective measures by the concerned authorities to arrest the decline in the living standard of the residents, let alone improve it, the dwellers of the old part of the city seem to be destined to live a life of endless miseries with no prospect of redemption in the near future.

Hezb threatens 'biggest' bombing in Kashmir

ISLAMABAD, Aug 11: A Muslim guerrilla group that claimed responsibility for a deadly bomb attack on Thursday in Indian-ruled Kashmir was quoted as threatening to launch its heaviest bombing in 10 years against India, report Reuters, AP.

"In a day or two we will launch the biggest bombardment, not seen in the last 10 years," Hezbul Mujahideen group leader Syed Salahuddin said in an interview published by Pakistan's mass-circulation Urdu-language daily Jang.

"India will have to pay a heavy price for rejecting the ceasefire," he said about a cease-

fire his group called off last Tuesday for what it called India's refusal to hold tripartite talks with Kashmiris and Pakistan.

The group has claimed responsibility for Thursday's car bomb attack in Srinagar, summer capital of the Indian Kashmir, in which 12 people were killed and more than 20 wounded.

In a statement faxed to Reuters today, a group spokesman expressed his regrets that a New Delhi-based photo journalist was killed and seven other journalists were wounded in the Srinagar bombing.

'Eviction of slum dwellers severe violation of human rights'

By Staff Correspondent

The eviction of slum dwellers from 44 settlements of Dhaka city is a severe violation of human rights as well as the constitution of Bangladesh, and the eviction process is not acceptable anywhere in the world.

Members of a fact-finding committee comprising four members from two international human rights organisations — Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR), Bangkok, and Centre On Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE), Geneva — made the observations at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

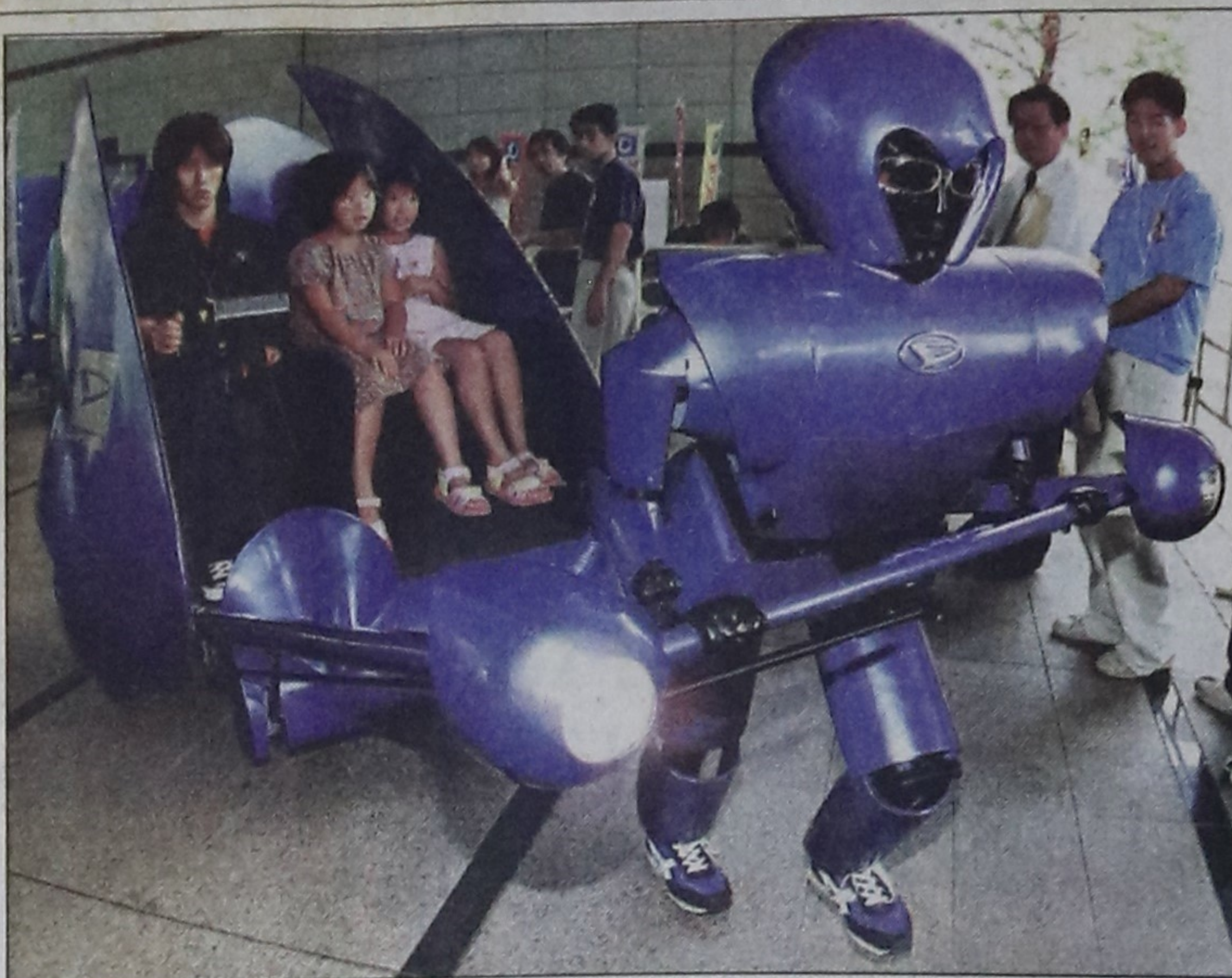
"During our investigation, we talked with the slum dwellers, academic people, NGOs, government officials, ministers, architects, town planners and many other people. But despite repeated attempts, we failed to meet the home minister," said Kenneth Fernandez, the leader of the fact-finding committee of COHRE.

The committee found that approximately one lakh people of about 19,432 families have been made homeless by the government under the directive of

the home minister, and police carried out the acts.

During the eviction move, the authorities gave the families less than 24 hours to vacate their homes, which is in violation of section 5 of Ordinance XXIV of 1970 that requires 30 days of eviction notice, the committee members said.

Police beat up the dwellers with stick, injuring many of them, especially women and children during the eviction moves. The people were severely traumatised, many fell sick and eventually succumbed to disease. See page 11 col 8



Rickshawpuller: Japan's automaker Daihatsu unveiled a robot wearing sneakers at a robot festival in Osaka yesterday. The robot which weighs 300 kilograms is operator controlled as it pulls a rickshaw at a maximum speed of three kilometers per hour.

—AFP photo

Domestic investment should be doubled in next 2 years

BEA annual conference told

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a conference in the city yesterday underscored the need for increased domestic investment for generating employment and facing the challenges of globalisation of trade.

Domestic investment should be doubled in the next two years and contribution of manufacturing sector to GDP should be increased by at least 25 per cent, they said at a working session of the biennial conference of Bangladesh Economic Association.

Small enterprises in the country are facing the biggest challenge of trade globalisation and these are being marginalised by multinational companies, the speakers noted.

Hafiz G A Siddiqui of North

Mastaan shot dead by gang members in N'ganj

From Our Correspondent NARAYANGANJ, Aug 11: One person was shot dead in Mahmudpur area of Pagla on Thursday night.

The victim Amjad Hossain, 30, who was known as a local mastaan, was shot dead by some of his gang members over land dispute at around 9.30 pm.

According to police, Amjad, son of Hasan Ali of Bhuiagar area of Fatullah was a worker in a local re-rolling mill.

He started business with a local 'criminal syndicate' only few months back.

Local mastaans Jasim, Saidur, Salauddin killed him while they were returning together from the residence of the land owner.

Police could not arrest any of the three accused till filing of this report at 7.30 pm today.

They recovered one 9mm revolver from Jasim's house. A case was filed with 'Fatullah' thana in this connection.

South University chaired the session which was addressed by A K Azad, Debapriya Bhattacharya, Zaidi Sattar, Julhas Uddin, M Azizur Rahman, Prof Joty Prakash Dutta and Syed Jamal Uddin.

The three-day conference being held at the Institution of Engineers ends today.

The speakers pointed out that the domain of small enterprises is being captured by multinational companies and export-oriented industries are getting focus, rather than those

producing import substitutes. Industrial units are also getting concentrated in urban areas, with their main thrust on consumer items.

Debapriya Bhattacharya said policy makers should identify some special sectors for boosting investment and give more emphasis on those.

He said it would be a difficult situation 'if we cannot increase domestic investment and generate employment.'

Zaidy Sattar said to achieve See page 11 col 7



Children at a drawing contest at Shilpakala Academy in the city yesterday on the occasion of the National Mourning Day on August 15.

—Star photo

Remark on judiciary History would someday evaluate PM's courage, says Kibria

People are the supreme authority, and the judiciary like two other organs of the state — executive and legislative — must be accountable to them, reports UNB.

This was the focal point of a discussion in the city yesterday, where legal experts, intellectuals and government officials admired the prime minister's concern about accountability of judges and lawyers.

Sangsadiya Ganatantra Parishad organised the discussion on "Independence and accountability of judiciary" at the CIRDAP auditorium.

They said it was the duty of the prime minister to pinpoint loopholes in the state organs and call for removing those.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria, who also spoke on the occasion, hoped the prime minister's "courageous statement" would help remove sluggishness of the judiciary, bring back people's confidence in the judicial delivery and ensure justice and peace.

He said the prime minister's statement was sensible and justified, and believed history would someday evaluate her political courage.

The finance minister was critical of the trend of using her statement for political ends.

State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed, Justice KM Sobhan, Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, former DU VC Prof

BFTA to stage demonstration today

Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Association (BFTA) will stage demonstrations at thana, district and divisional headquarters today as part of its ongoing agitation programme to realise 100 per cent salary from public exchequer, reports UNB.

It will also form human chains at district headquarters and Dhaka city tomorrow from 11 am to 12 noon.

In the capital, the BFTA will hold a rally at Muktangan today and form a human chain tomorrow.

AL demands probe into registration of phoney voters' at Khaleda's house

By Staff Correspondent

The ruling Awami League has once again demanded of the Election Commission (EC) to investigate registration of 'phoney voters' at the cantonment residence of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

In a statement yesterday, AL noted that preparation of an accurate voters list is mandatory for free and fair elections.

Referring to BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's response to the allegation of phony voters, the statement signed by AL office secretary Advocate Abdul Mannan Khan criticised Bhuiyan for 'shifting the responsibility of registration of false voters on the EC.'

Mannan Bhuiyan had said in a statement earlier that if there was some wrongdoing in registration of voters at the residence of Khaleda Zia, the onus lies with the EC.

Earlier on Wednesday, AL See page 11 col 3

Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, DU teachers Prof Aminul Islam and Dr Mizanur Rahman. Advocate Gazul Haque and journalist Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury were among those who spoke.

Kibria said the prime minister and the members of parliament are all accountable to people, but judiciary does not have such accountability.

Supreme Judicial Council, which is now underway, would help establish accountability of the judiciary, he hoped.

The finance minister regretted that some lawyers were seen more concerned about the fundamental rights of criminals than those of the ordinary people.

Police produce the criminals before the court, that they are often freed on bail thanks to legal loopholes, ignoring the social problem. "Time has come to question why an accused in seven murder cases gets bail. People will no longer keep mum," said the finance minister.



Prof Firoza Begum dead

Eminent gynaecologist Prof Syeda Firoza Begum died of cancer at her Dhanmondi residence yesterday morning. She was 71, reports UNB.

Firoza Begum was the former president of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) and chairman of Shishu Hospital. She was also involved with many professional forums and organisations.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed deep shock at the death of Prof Firoza Begum.

In a condolence message yesterday Sheikh Hasina said Firoza Begum was a prominent physician and social worker. "The nation will remember her contribution to the medical services."

See page 11 col 6

36-hr transport strike in S-dists from tomorrow

MAGURA, Aug 11: Transport workers called a 36-hour transport strike in southern districts from Sunday morning to realise their demands, reports UNB.

Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samik Federation (southern zone) announced the programme today protesting filing of 'false cases' against its leaders, including Kazi Humayun Kabir and Sohrab Hossain.

They also demanded an end to harassment of workers by police and transport owners in various parking spots.

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Bangladesh has only 8%. Together we can rewrite this statistic and give back our country the much needed 25% of forest reserve.

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