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Down to Earth

Hopes for relief from city's traffic woes

By A S M Nurunnabi

Lately we have received some encouraging pieces of news about city's traffic situation: the country's first fly-over is to be built near the city's Khilgaon rail gate. It will have a span of 474 metres with two loop lanes costing an amount of Tk 55 crore. The construction work is due to start shortly and is expected to be completed in a year's time. The fly-over will hopefully relieve the awful traffic jams on Sayedabad-Malibagh Road, easing life for thousands of people in Khilgaon, Goran, Basabo and Mothertek areas.

The other fly-over construction projects at Jatrabari and in Mohakhali will be taken up later with World Bank financing.

Another encouraging report is that the government is going to introduce an electric-run Elevated Mass Rail Transit System (EMRTS) in the Dhaka Metropolitan City for easing the regular traffic jams as well as arresting the alarming health hazards by the increasing air pollution.

Under the proposed system, a 51-kilometre long single rail line will be constructed about 30 to 60 feet above the ground on some of the city's important roads. Each day 20,000 passengers per hour in each direction would be able to avail the speedy service of the proposed electric rail service by the year 2010 if the project is implemented properly and timely.

The above schemes show

promise of tackling the city's critical traffic situation which has been steadily deteriorating, so much so that, at present, there is hardly any road in the city which does not experience prolonged spells of traffic jams. The newly-introduced one-way traffic system in some of the city roads has been found to be hardly helpful in mitigating the suffering of the people. The obvious reason is the limited road space of the city which cannot accommodate the ever-burgeoning road transports including the horrendous proliferation of cycle rickshaws.

The time-frames fixed for the fly-overs and the mass transit rail system seem to be fairly long. The fear is that, while the schemes are under process of implementation, the connected infrastructural aspects and the population pressure will be assuming an alarming increase in volume, further deteriorating the road traffic situation.

In this context, the issue of dispersal of some of the city's population away by generally adopted processes has assumed great urgency. The generally adopted processes include building an overhead network of express ways, construction of by-passes or going underground. The third alternative is undertaking satellite township projects.

Keeping the third alternative in view, RAJUK has already drawn up plans for building new townships and satellite towns to ease the pressure of growing city population. Such

plans include construction of new townships called Purbachal and Jhilmili and satellite towns Uttara Phase III and East Baridhara.

It is reported that RAJUK has set a time frame of eight years to complete the Purbachal township. It has set five years to complete the Jhilmili township.

Uttara Phase III will be completed in five years while the East Baridhara satellite town will require roughly 10 to 13 years to be made ready for habitation.

The Purbachal project is reported to have made some progress, though it is said to be slow. This has raised doubts in some quarters whether the time-frame fixed for the project can be adhered to unless the pace of progress is sped up. The implementation of the other projects is yet uncertain.

There are pessimists who say we have seen different governments making a plethora of promises and pledges, but few were delivered. We are yet to see how the present schemes for fly-overs and mass rail transit system will be handled by the authorities concerned. The question of fund constraints may be there as always, impeding the progress of the projects. In that case, the city's mammoth problem of population and traffic congestion may remain unsolved, rather the problems may get more acute with the passage of time, turning all our hopes into mere pipe-dreams.

Power failure: Four PDB men suspended

Four PDB men, including two engineers, have been suspended following breakdown of national power grid on Wednesday, reports UNB.

They are executive engineer of the Grid Conservation Division, Dhaka (East), Nikhil Ranjan Chakraborty, assistant engineer Mohammad Shafiqul and Inmenen Harun-ar-Rashid and Hasanuzzaman.

The four have been suspended for negligence of duties that caused breakdown of Ghorashal-Ashuganj 230KV power transmission line, a Bangladesh Power Development Board announcement said yesterday.

The action was taken on the basis of preliminary report of the probe body formed by the government following power failure.

PM opens cricket stadium at Fatullah today

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate Khan Saheb Osman Ali National Stadium at Fatullah in Narayanganj today, an official handout said yesterday, reports BSS.

The first phase construction of the cricket stadium has been completed at a cost Taka 25 crore.

State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, Obaidul Quader yesterday visited the stadium. Shamim Osman, MP, accompanied the state minister during the visit.

Khaleda offers Jumma prayers at Kaa'ba Mosque

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia yesterday offered Jumma prayers at the holy Mosque of Kaa'ba Sharif under the royal management, reports BSS.

According to a message received here from BNP sources, Khaleda took part in a special munajat seeking divine blessings after the Jumma prayers.

A number of Bangladeshis also offered their Jumma prayers at the holy Mosque and took part in the special munajat. Earlier, a large number of Bangladeshis called on her and exchanged greetings.

50 hurt as traders, employees of 2 markets clash in Sylhet town

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Sept 15: At least 50 people were injured, 20 of them seriously, in a clash between traders and employees of two markets in Sylhet town today.

The seriously injured were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital while others to private clinics. The clash between the traders and employees of Brahmanmayer bazar and the nearby Hawkers market began at 2 pm and continued till 4 pm.

Both the groups exploded crackers and fired shots during the clash.

Five shops were also ransacked. Police said Badshah Miah, a trader of Brahmanmayer bazar and an employee of the nearby Hawkers market had an altercation that led to the clash.

Ershad

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Ershad said "we can bring impeachment motion against the Speaker for cancelling my parliament membership illegally."

"Only the people who elected me in five seats can cancel my membership, the Speaker has no rights," the JP chief told the audiences.

Mozammel Hossain Lahu MP, Mostafizur Rahman MP, former MP Lily Chowdhury and Moshirur Rahman Ranga accompanied the JP chief.

Harkatul Jihad

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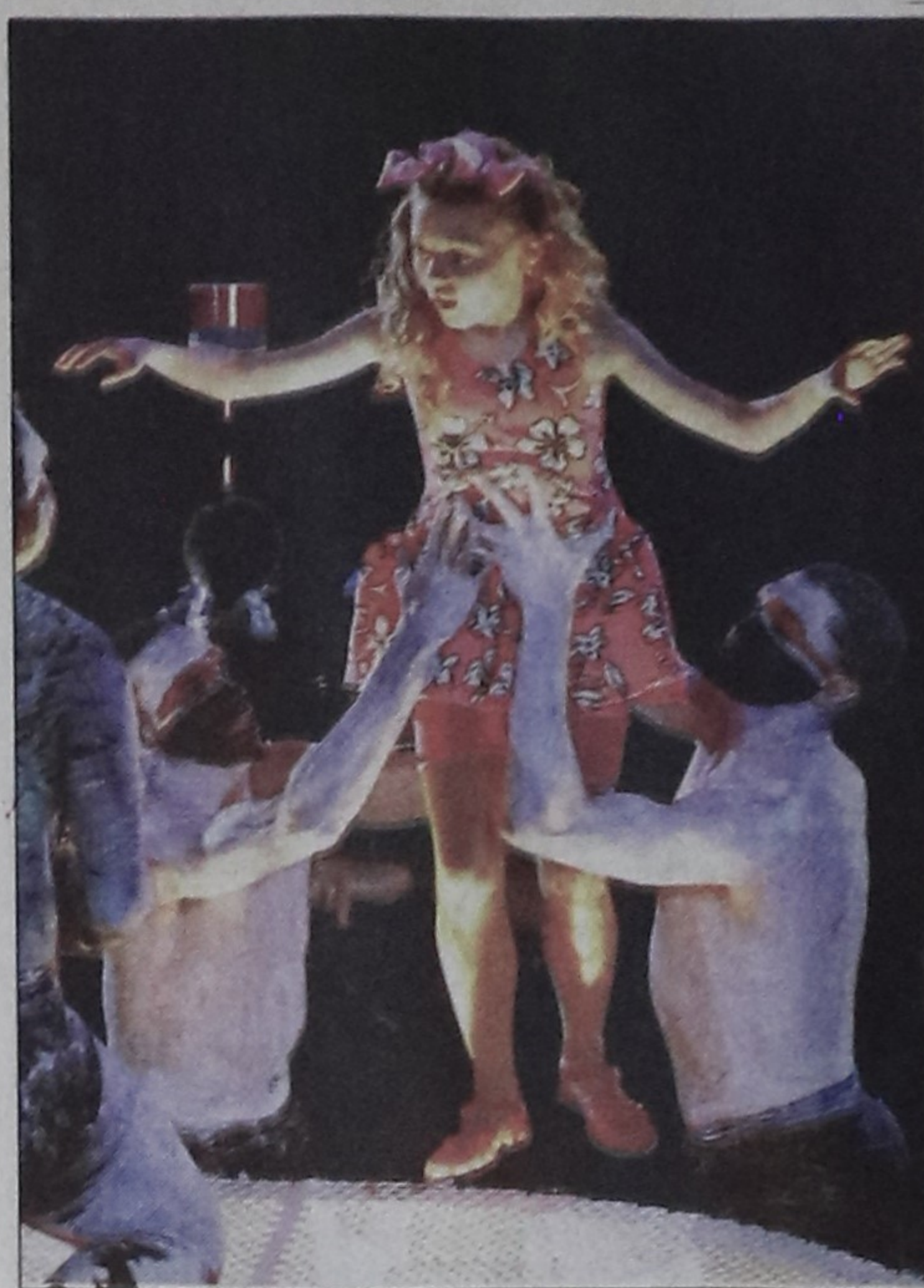
Police official.
Hafez Abul Hossain said Mufti Hannan has been implicated in the Kotlipara bomb plant case with political motive. This was Hafez Abul Hossain's fault while gossiping with the youngsters over a cup of tea at a roadside tea stall on Thursday morning.

The youngsters identified as Jibbo League activists belonging to 'Whip group' of the ruling party became furious about Hafez's comment. They roughed him up and handed over to police.

The students of Pather Baraz Secondary School staged a demonstration in front of UNO office at noon on Thursday protesting arrest of their religious teacher on false charge.



Historic moment: Jang Choo Pak (L) of North Korea and Eun-Soon Chung of South Korea carry a special flag at the head of their joint delegation during the opening ceremony of the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney yesterday. — AFP photo



Young performer Nikki Webster is helped by unidentified performers as the show of the opening ceremonies for the Summer Olympics in Sydney eases from the "Girl & Reel" segment into the "Djakapurra and clans and Wandjina" segment. — AFP photo

Negotiations with IFC fall flat AES financing Haripur power project from own resources

By Sharier Khan

The financial closing of the 360 MW Haripur power plant of AES has been stalled as the power company's negotiations with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) over a 63 million dollar credit line has fallen flat, official sources said.

AES did not accept the IFC credit terms and conditions, as they were "too rigid for an investor," said a source without elaborating further why the negotiation failed.

However, AES is going ahead with the Haripur power plant construction works from its own resources. Industry insiders said the US company has already imported the main component of the power plant — the gas turbine — and is expecting to begin its installation from next week.

"In any case, AES is continuing to finance the project from its own funds," said a source, "and it has already spent US 120 million dollars. It is determined to complete the project on schedule."

The 200 million dollar project is scheduled to start partial operation from June as its construction works are progressing rapidly, sources added.

AES was negotiating with the IFC, the private sector-banking window of the World Bank, over the 63 million dollar credit side by side with other commercial financial institu-

tions. As per schedule, the financial closing — an official formality to show how AES is financing the project — was supposed to be completed in late 1998. Due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and later some tough stance taken by the WB-IFC last year, it became uncertain.

The IFC, as a pre-condition to giving the credit to AES, was seeking a partial risk guarantee (PRG) from the WB against financing a power project in Bangladesh. The WB, on the other hand, was asking Bangladesh to meet some of the conditions including giving a guarantee that the government would purchase power produced by AES plant. The government, under pressure from the WB, agreed to meet the conditions in late 1999. The Haripur power project again gathered steam.

But the years of negotiations between IFC and AES failed to close a deal as the power company did not find the IFC terms and conditions favourable. The US company would pursue other commercial sources now.

AES would be fined should it fail to complete the project on schedule due to financial closure problems. However, if it failed due to the government's inaction, the government would be fined, which is to be paid to

AES. AES has already informed the Power Development Board (PDB) that from June, the gas turbine component of the project would be commissioned and it would be able to generate and supply 240 MW from that period till the plant becomes fully operative next year. The Haripur plant would generate power through a combine cycle system where both gas turbine and steam turbine technologies would be used.

Though the plant was initially scheduled to start full operation from 2001, the project is now expected to go into full operation from 2002 as deadline in its negotiation last year and bureaucratic tangles slowed things down.

The PDB was always sceptic that AES would not be able to proceed with the works as per schedule as it could not settle the issue of financing. The Haripur plant would consume around 80 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf). AES would purchase this gas from PDB at the rate of 2.4 dollar per unit. The move is expected to significantly contribute to the growth of the gas sector. AES would sell Haripur power at a fixed tariff of 1.73 cents per unit for 22 years. This tariff is said to be one of the lowest power tariff in the world.

78 held from ZIA car parking area

By Staff Correspondent

Police arrested 78 people including nine women and 26 children from the canopy and car parking area of Zia International Airport for harassing incoming passengers over the last three days.

A police squad from cantonment police station and airport police box conducted the operation and arrested them on charges of forcibly carrying the luggage of passengers.

Earlier, police arrested five people from the canopy area on the same charges on Thursday. Twenty-one people were also arrested the day before.

Police sources said that these people, known as *lattu party*, sometimes took away luggage from the passengers. A section of beggars popularly known as 'dollar beggars' were also arrested during that time.

According to police, the operation was carried out following an instruction from the ministry.

Of the arrested, nine women and 26 children were sent to the vagabond shelter at Mirpur in the city. Sixteen were sent to the CMM's court, police said.

Landslide kills 9 in Andhra

HYDERABAD, India, Sept 15: Nine people were killed and three trapped alive in a landslide today in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, a provincial minister said, reports AFP.

Andhra Pradesh Home Minister T. Devender Goud told the state assembly that a landslide "forced the roof of an illegal quarry to cave in, killing at least nine workers."

The incident occurred in Kataram village near the port city of Visakhapatnam some 750 kilometres (465 miles) northeast of the state capital, Hyderabad.

"Senior officials have rushed to the site to oversee rescue operations and excavators have been pressed into service," said Goud.

JU fines 9

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raf Hossain Hall.

Nuruzzaman Bijon, a third year student of Electronics and Computer Science department who was mainly responsible for the incident, has been fined Tk 7000. Manirul Haq Shakil Tk 7000, Kamrul Ahsan Monju, Lutfur Rahman Shishir (3rd yr Government and Politics) have been fined Tk 5000 together. The others fined Tk 1000 each are Kamrul Ahsan Monju, Lutfur Rahman Shishir (3rd yr Economics), Sadiq Hasan Khan Manan, Faruq Hossain Suman (Physics), Abdul Halim and Abdul Ahad (3rd yr Government and Politics).

Nuruzzaman Bijon with 20 other students beat Jiban, a 3rd year student of Anthropology department and a resident of Al Baruni Hall, on the night of April 20 following an altercation. They locked Jiban's father in his room while beating him outside.

Musharraf

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"I have been able to convince the UN Secretary General (Kofi Annan) to visit Pakistan and play his role in resolving the 53-year old dispute of Kashmir with India," he said.

He did not indicate when the visit could take place.

Musharraf said he met with some 15 heads of state and governments during his stay in New York and discussed the Kashmir issue.

"They want early solution of the problem and we are ready for dialogue with India," he said.

"I am not concerned about the current visit of Indian Prime Minister (Atal Behari Vajpayee) to the United States. They have their own interest and we have our own," he said.

Musharraf expressed satisfaction at Pakistan's relations with the US.

Washington has consistently called for a resumption of political dialogue between Pakistan and India, which both carried out tit-for-tat nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

The Pakistani ruler said he was hopeful Pakistan would get financial support from the International Monetary Fund.

An IMF mission is currently in Islamabad to review the government's economic reforms aimed at reducing budgetary deficit before the fund's board takes a decision on a bailout loan package for the country.

AL election office

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for the elections right now and keep in touch with the party's election office regularly.

"We left none of the 21-point pledge in our election manifesto untouched. More or less, we worked on each and every point in the last four years," she said, assuring that the task would be completed before the polls.

Hasina said her government formulated the national budgets in line with her party's election pledges and blamed other parties for ignoring their promises once they go to power.

The PM also referred to the problems, which her government inherited, in implementing her election commitments.

Blaming the post-75 governments for 'pushing the country back to the pre-independence state', the AL chief noted that a nation cannot progress unless the party that led its struggle for independence is in power.

"Awami League belongs to the people who had been deprived all these years. Whatever we have done, we have done for meeting their basic needs," she said. Eighty per cent of the budgetary allocations during her rule were made for the welfare of these people.

"I firmly believe these people will support us in the next elections," Hasina said. She

however cautioned against moves against the election and the democratic process in the country.

In this regard, the PM blamed the BNP-led alliance of four opposition parties for 'conspiring to foil democracy by creating anarchy'. The people have rejected the four parties terming those 'defeated forces at different times,' she said.

Without referring to the anti-AL propaganda involving India, Hasina said the party that led the nation to independence can never harm it. Rather, she said, the defeated forces of '71 are active to 'turn the country into Pakistan again'.

The PM also highlighted her government's achievements at home and abroad.

"In only four years, we've established the most efficient and skilled administration. Our sound governance has ensured development at home and earned reputation abroad."

Explaining the AL strategy for electrifying this time, Kibria said they would go for a positive campaign. "We will highlight our achievements... We will go for the elections on the basis of our achievements, not commitments."

House of Boral's sister attacked: Two arrested

BAGERHAT, Sept 15: Police today arrested two people from Chittalmari upazila for damaging house of the sister of slain Awami League leader Advocate Kalidas Boral, reports UNB.

The arrested are Sheikh Tuku Mia, 40, and Ayub Ali, 40.

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