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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 Mohakhal 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 and 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

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 Shafullah and in-charge Harun-ar-Rashid and Hasanuzzaman.

The four have been suspended for negligence of duties that caused breakdown of Ghorashat-Ashuganj 230KV power transmission line, a Bangladeshi 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 Brahmamayee 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 Brahmamayee 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 audience.

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

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 electioneering 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 Chitalmari upazila for damaging house of the sister of slain Awami League leader Advocate Kalidas Boral, reports UNB.

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



Prime Minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina inaugurating her party's central election office at Dhanmondi in the city yesterday.

— PID photo

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.

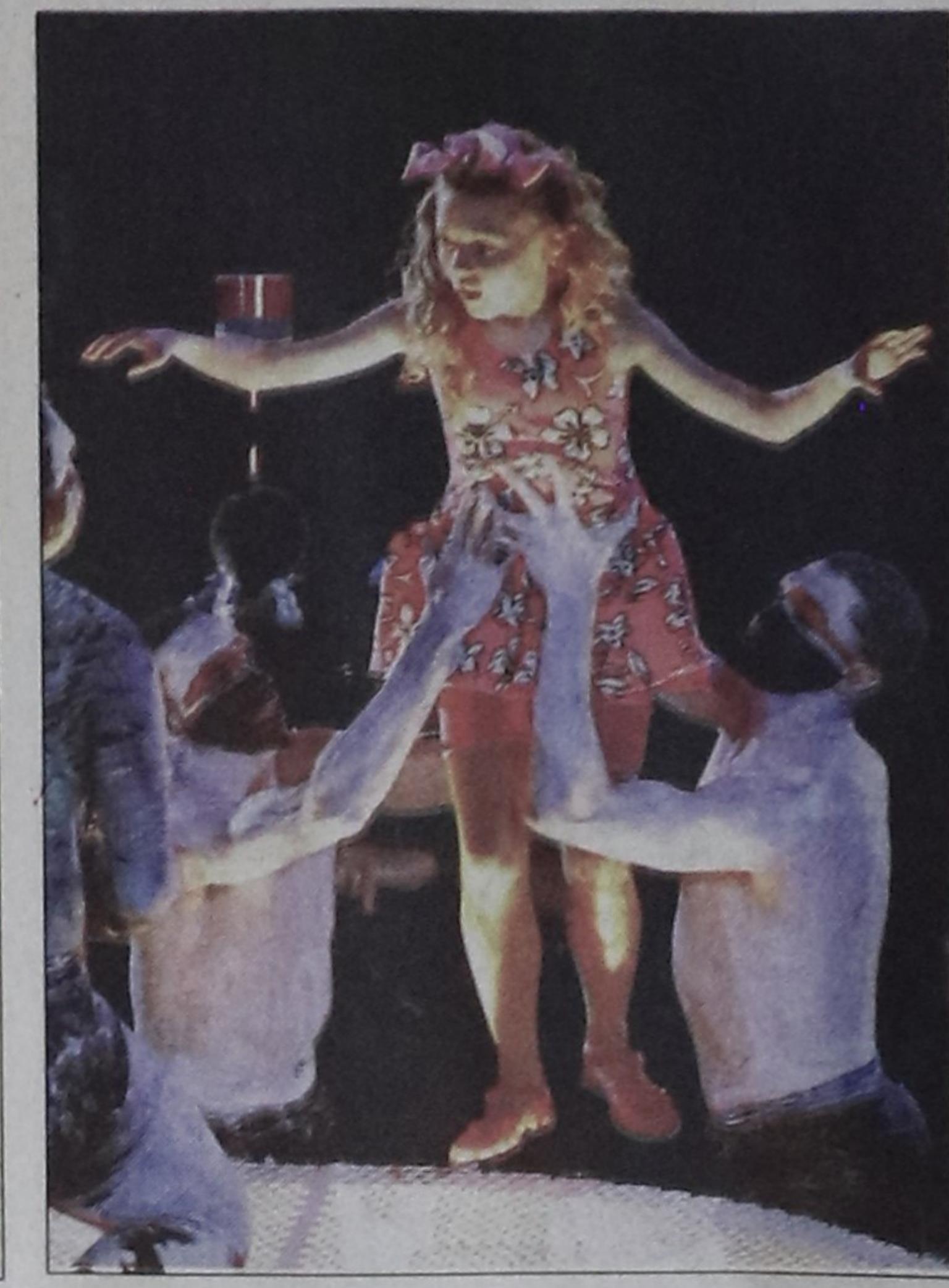
An IMF mission is currently in Islamabad to review the government's economic reforms aimed at reducing budgetary deficit before the fund's board takes a decision on a bailout loan package for the country.

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Historic moment: Jang Choo Pak (L) of North Korea and Eun-Soo Chung of South Korea carry a special flag with the image of the Korean peninsula, 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. — 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 full operation from June as its construction works are progressing rapidly, sources added.

AES was negotiating with the IFC, the private sector lending window of the World Bank, over the \$63 million dollar credit side by side with other commercial financial institutions.

tions.

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 operational next year. The Haripur plant would generate power through a combined cycle system where both gas turbine and steam turbine technologies would be used.

The plant was initially scheduled to start full operation from 2001. The project is now expected to go into full operation from 2002 as deadlock 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/d). 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.

Floods in Vietnam, Cambodia hit over a million people

HANOI, Sept 15: Record flooding in southern Vietnam has transformed rice paddies and rural communities into "desolate lakes," the Red Cross said today, reports AP.

Hundreds of families are living in makeshift shanties crammed onto earthen dikes or along rural roads — the only "high ground" for kilometers (miles) around, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Vietnam said in a report.

"As far as the eye can see, all you see are the roofs of houses and eucalyptus trees," said John Geoghegan, head of the relief group in Vietnam, who made surveying trips earlier this week. "From time to time, you come across dikes with 200-300 families living on them, slowly crumbling."

Record flooding in Cambodia has affected more than a million people in recent weeks, with many made homeless and needing food and other supplies.

In Vietnam, steadily rising floodwaters in the Mekong Delta have forced more than 25,000 families from their homes, leaving them with a critical shortage of food, water and shelter, government officials and relief workers said Friday.

Officials from the provinces of An Giang, Long An and Dong Thap said 184,000 homes have been flooded.

More than 2,500 soldiers, militiamen and volunteers have been sent to help people battle the floods.

Weather forecasters say water levels in some areas have hit 4.8 meters — the level of floods in 1996 when nearly 200 people were killed. By the end of the month, it will likely approach the historic flood level of 5.12 meters reached in 1961.

Nine people have been killed so far since July, with four deaths in Dong Thap and five children killed in An Giang. Initial damage is estimated at \$350 million, doing 25 million dollars of damage to agriculture.

More than 42,000 families are homeless due to the flooding.

The Cambodian Foreign Ministry announced Friday in an appeal for aid.

An earlier report from the

country's official disaster team said 1.2 million people in 13 provinces have been affected, with nearly 30,000 people evacuated and 99,000 homes flooded, including 1,700 that had been destroyed.

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An earlier report from the

DCC spray men

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market. One source said the Chief Health Officer of DCC then resorted to purchase of 50,000 litres of readily available ICON, ignoring its hazardous aspect.

The Mayor stopped use of it on August 20 as dozens of school children at a hostel at Ring Road in Shyamoli area fell sick following ICON spraying on the previous day. The Mayor also ordered an inquiry into the matter.

The three-member inquiry committee in its report quoted doctors as saying that this happened due to insecticide poisoning. The report submitted to the Mayor is now gathering dust on his shelf.

When contacted, Chief Health Officer of DCC Dr Mohammad Ashraf Uddin admitted that ICON-25 had some side effects after spray. But he said those should have been some precautions before its use.

There may