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Down to Earth Overpopulation, pollution threatening life in city

By A S M Nurunnabi

To many, there is a scary outlook for Dhaka City in several respects. Air pollution has reached such startlingly high levels that it has surpassed that of Mexico city and now has the most polluted air in the world. The level of sound pollution must also be among the highest. The uncontrolled spread and sprawl seem to have turned the city into a cavernous monster with its tentacles fanning out most alarmingly in all directions.

The streets have become grossly inadequate to accommodate the traffic of a fast growing city. The few open spaces that were the lungs of the city have been taken over by land-grabbers. Even the beels and low-lying areas of the city, which used to act as catchments for excessive rain water during the monsoon and thus mitigate the flood problem to some extent, have been taken over by anti-social elements and turned into slums or marginal residential areas. Almost all of the lakes and ponds that used to be the most attractive features of the city have been filled up and converted into markets or slums.

Even the river Buriganga life-line of the capital is dying due to severe pollution of its water and large-scale encroachments by land-grabbers. The unplanned transportation system simply amounts to a wastage of time and money. Its waste disposal system is so primitive and ineffective that an epidemic may break out anytime. The drainage and sewerage systems are on the brink of collapse.

Thus Dhaka is already face to face with a grave crisis. But the keen and knowledgeable quarters feel that these problems are solvable, if a comprehensive campaign is launched to make

people more aware of the necessity of drastic action to salvage the city from disaster.

According to these quarters the all-important think to keep in mind is that overpopulation is the main problem of Dhaka. The best way to address this problem, in their opinion, is to stop people's migration to the capital by creating sufficient employment opportunities in other cities. Unemployed people may make a bee-line for places where employment opportunities are adequate. If mills and factories can be set up or relocated in the relatively less populated districts of the northern region, they will find a home for those areas instead of Dhaka.

It has been pointed out by such quarters that governments have, from time to time, encouraged entrepreneurs and given them certain incentives to set up their industries in the northern towns, but due to absence of a convenient road link, and also to an inadequate infrastructure and uncertainty of electricity supply, very few dared to take advantage of the facilities offered. Now that Jamuna bridge has been constructed providing the necessary road link, it now remains for the government to ensure adequate supply of power and give the entrepreneurs certain other incentives, in addition to tax holidays and lower tariffs, which may positively motivate them to locate their projects in the north. This may go a long way in lowering the pressure of population in Dhaka city.

The stark reality is that, owing to resource constraints, it may not be possible to meet the set deadlines of the projects. As a consequence, the city's mammoth problem of overpopulation may remain unsolved; rather the problem may get more acute, turning all our hopes into fruitless dreams.

Another suitable additional strategy is to develop rapidly the suburban areas for dispersal of the city's population. For that purpose, RAJUK has drawn up a plan to build new townships and

satellite towns. The plan includes construction of absolutely new townships called Purbachal and Jheelmeel and satellite townships like Uttara Phase III and East Baridhara. The sponsoring agency for these projects believes that these projects will scale down the pressure of population of Dhaka city and consequently make it cleaner and less polluted.

In bare outlines, the Purbachal project includes 6,150 acres of land covering 10 square miles between the Sitalakkhya and the Balu river. It has about 39,000 residential plots of 10, 7, 5 kathas. RAJUK has set a time-table of eight years to complete this project. The project is reported to have made some progress, but the progress so far made is slow on account of various factors, including legal complications.

According to latest indications, RAJUK will invite applications for allotment of land under this project in May and June next year.

Jheelmeel, another RAJUK township project covers 450 acres of land along Mawa Road. It will have 200 residential plots of 5 and 3 kathas. A time frame of five years has been fixed for completion of the project.

Two other projects, namely Uttara Phase III and East Baridhara, have time frames of five and thirteen years respectively for completion.

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CHITTAGONG, Oct 27: Worried at the rising trend of violence on court premises, judges and lawyers at Chittagong Court Building said adequate number of police should be deployed on the court premises to ensure their safety, reports UNB.

"Deployment of only seven policemen on the compound of the Court Building where 51 courts work everyday draws attention to the fact that the lives of officials and employees here are at stake," said an official preferring anonymity.

He said some 30,000 people on an average visit the Court Building everyday, as over 50,000 cases are pending with different courts.

The judges and lawyers have become anxious about their

Families of sacked Ansars protest with 'empty utensils' in city

By Staff Correspondent

Battalion Ansars sacked in 1994 and their families held a rally at the Muktangana and brought out a procession in the city yesterday demanding their reinstatement.

The rally and the procession were organised by the newly formed Committee for Reinstatement of Sacked Battalion Ansars of 1994.

The processionists carried empty utensils.

Speakers at the rally claimed that Awami League had promised to 'do justice' to the sacked Ansars if it goes to power. But now it is flouting its promise, they alleged.

The sacked Ansars are passing

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"The security measures in our court area are extremely inadequate compared to the growing trend of violence," he said emphasising the need for deployment of more police on court premises.

Public Prosecutor Advocate Kamaluddin Ahmed said, "I'm very much worried about the security at the court."

Eminent lawyer advocate Suvo

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One stabbed to death in Kurigram

KURIGRAM, Oct 27: One person was killed by unidentified assailants at village Dudhkhawa in Rajbari upazila on Thursday night, reports UNB.

The victim was identified as Ayub Ali Mondal, 42, younger brother of Brigadier Mohammad Ali.

Meanwhile, police arrested five people in connection with the killing. They are Robel Mondal, Abdur Rahman, Mukul, Bipul and Rafiqul.

Police and villagers said the assailants swooped on Ayub at about 10 pm on his way home. They stabbed him indiscriminately and left him in a pool of blood.

Ayub, along with two others, including his younger brother Yunus Ali Mondal, was returning home by a motorcycle on the night when the attack was launched. However, Yunus and Sattar managed to flee.

The victim was later rushed to Kurigram Sadar Hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead.

A case was filed with the police.

Sugarcane growers lay siege to UNO office in Rajshahi

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Oct 27: Several hundred sugarcane growers laid a siege to the office of Chhaghat Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and observed a token hunger strike for four hours on the office premises to press home their three-point demand yesterday.

The demands included rise in price of sugarcane to Taka 60 per maund, withdrawal of ban on private crushing of sugarcane and withdrawal of cases filed against the sugarcane growers.

A memorandum containing the demands was also submitted to the UNO.

Earlier, the growers brought out a procession that paraded the main thoroughfares in the upazila headquarters.

The decision to withdraw the transport strike was taken on Thursday night at a meeting between local administration, transport owners and workers with DC Habib Ullah Majumder in the chair.

ICC Asia confce in city from Nov 10

A two-day ICC Asia Conference will begin in Dhaka on November 10, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the two-day conference on Nov 10. International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh announced yesterday.

So far 150 participants, including 15 eminent speakers from Australia, Belgium, France, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, UAE, UK, USA and Bangladesh have registered for the conference as keynote speakers.

Senior executives of UNCTAD, JIBC, and JETRO of Japan, MDC of Malaysia as well as professional experts, academics and economists from other countries will join the conference as panelists.

Chinese Vice Minister for Foreign Trade and Economic Cooper-

Senior Japanese minister quits over scandal

TOKYO, Oct 27: In a fresh blow to embattled Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori, a senior cabinet minister resigned today over allegations of a scandal involving a mistress, drugs and right-wing extremists, reports Reuters.

The departure of Chief Cabinet Secretary Hidenao Nakagawa, Mori's close aide, was intended to placate Young Turks within the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) as well as the opposition, who have all been calling for the prime minister to step down for his latest verbal blunder, analysts said.

"Although it was a matter of

several years ago, it caused great confusion and I believe I should not cause further trouble," Nakagawa told a news conference after tendering his resignation.

The opposition urged Mori to resign to take responsibility for the Nakagawa scandal. The Democratic Party said they were considering submitting a non-confidence motion against Mori.

"We have to watch closely for the most effective timing to do so," Naoto Kan, secretary general of the Democratic Party, told a news conference, adding that the opposition was watching for signs of discontent within Mori's LDP.



Rescued Monir, 6, with his alleged abductors. Police yesterday arrested five people for their bid to take the boy to Dubai to sell him as a camel jockey.

-- Star photo

Under-trial prisoner dies at Khulna

KHULNA, Oct 27: An under-trial prisoner died at a local hospital in the early hours today, reports UNB.

Police said Sohag, 26, was admitted to the jail hospital Thursday evening and later shifted to the General Hospital where he died at about 2 am.

Body of Sohag, son of Harun-ur-Rashid of Basupara area in the city, was handed over to his family after autopsy.

Hundreds of marooned people need food and shelter. Water-borne diseases have broken out in epidemic form, particularly among the children.

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Rising trend of violence Judges, lawyers at Ctg Court Bldg feel insecure

security particularly after the recent killing of top terror 'Murgi Milon' on the premises of Dhaka Judge's Court.

"The present security measure in the Court Building, where 1500 lawyers work, is nothing but a cruel joke," said a lawyer who also declined to be named.

He said it's impossible for seven police constables to ensure overall security at the hilltop court building as a large number of people rush there everyday.

All the judges who work in the 51 courts there are placed under six separate courts. Those are District and Sessions Judge Court, Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Court, Divisional Special Judge Court, District Magistrate Court and Woman and Child Repression Court.

With the advancement of technology, criminals have changed their style of committing crimes. They come to court premises equipped with sophisticated firearms to face their opponents.

Armed terrorists also accompany political leaders when they appear before courts seeking bail or to attend the hearings of their cases. "And it's an open secret," the lawyer said.

When contacted, Metropolitan Sessions Judge M Ismail Hossain said he was worried about security, particularly after the incident that took place in Dhaka.

"The security measures in our court area are extremely inadequate compared to the growing trend of violence," he said emphasising the need for deployment of more police on court premises.

Public Prosecutor Advocate Kamaluddin Ahmed said, "I'm very much worried about the security at the court."

Eminent lawyer advocate Suvo

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Ancient mosque at Sutrapur at risk of collapse

By Staff Correspondent



The 400-year-old mosque at Sutrapur. The mosque is now at risk of

collapse

-- Star photo

The extended part of a 400-year old mosque in Lohar Pool area at Sutrapur in the city is now at risk of collapse as authorities of the Tk 33 crore Dholakhal Improvement Project (DIP) have removed earth from around its foundation to construct a road.

Commissioner of Ward-82, Shahidul Minu, said that despite repeated requests to the DIP officials, none has come forward to solve the problem. He said Nazma Construction, contractor of the project has so far failed to send any responsible official to assess the gravity of the problem.

"People of all walks of life are complaining to me about the risky condition of the Lohar Pool Jame Masjid and dilapidated condition of roads in the area resulting from activities under DIP for three years," Minu told this correspondent yesterday.

Site engineer of Nazma Construction, Iqbal Hossain, said he talked with the Commissioner and has decided to build a retention wall to prevent the mosque from collapsing.

Asked why they did not take any precaution while removing the foundation soil, Hossain said, "The mosque authorities should not have built the extension in this way."

The DIP is part of the Dhaka City Corporation's Environment Improvement Project. A box culvert under Dholakhal is being built under the DIP for drainage of sewage and storm water into Buriganga river water.

Sources said work under the DIP started in 1997 and was

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RMG traders at Ctg observe Green Channel will also widen scope for tax evasion

From Abdullah-Al Mahmud

nessmen and officials concerned said it should have been introduced slowly through experiments, not in a haste.

There should be a scanning system using modern technology. Even on the 2nd day of its introduction, some goods imported in containers were delivered through for ed documents, they claimed. The system of 42 signatures was introduced earlier as Traffic Department officials at the port felt its necessity to check for forger, they maintained.