

Dhaka's transport situation a crisis without end

It's mostly about management

THE wildcat strike by rickshaw pullers on Thursday which led to mayhem and arrest, the return of the pollution belching two stroke engine baby taxis after the authorities promised a clean up and their inability to put on the road sufficient number of buses to serve as an alternative, all point to a problem of poverty and urban management more than anything else. They should be read not in isolation but as part of the general problems plaguing Dhaka, which are swiftly turning into a crisis.

Dhaka has become almost unmanageable and is bursting at the seams. As the only growth zone in the country it attracts both the hustlers and the survivors. And those already living here will not move out because there is no options elsewhere. As a result there is a need for cheap modes of transport, which the infrastructure is unable to provide. The gap is filled by the informal sector with rickshaws and baby taxis not fit for the road. Because the size of the urban poor is huge and growing, there is no shortage of drivers. Thus there is a dual crisis: Of providing affordable transport to its middle and lower middle class as well as traffic management.

In case of the baby taxis, the crisis is increased by the pollution generated by them. Dhaka's urban environment may well have collapsed and the pollution is just one sign that we see or smell. But baby taxis provide adequate transport as well as employment to a huge population that also have political clout so the authorities have to back down again and again.

Failure to take care of the roads and make it vehicle worthy is a whole new story and everyone believes that the road repair industry is the best provider of political payments to cadres. Thus the issue of accountability doesn't arise here. Hence, the roads may not be fit for more buses and the rate of decline of buses worthy for movement rise quickly. On top of it is the toll collection, believed to be patronized by whichever party is in power.

Hence we don't have a transport problem or a poverty problem but a general problem of systemic failure. Various regimes have favoured a quick fix approach causing immense suffering to the people. The trend is towards continuing that tradition. If only the ruling parties knew how much support they could get by managing things the right way instead of ad-hoc management of all problems.

But still, they can be resolved if the authorities are serious.

NGO sector needs streamlining but a realistic one

One has to be clear about its role before deciding

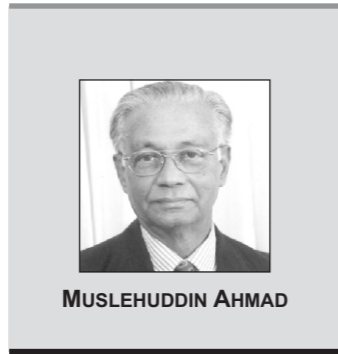
THE Government has decided to set up regulatory measures for the NGOs. This was long in coming, as the NGOs have been perceived as recipient of huge funds with no accountability. But accountability is not a serious issue in Bangladesh and what has brought them into focus is their recent involvement in partisan politics. Part of this is because of the personal ambitions of certain leaders but much of it is the result of the political crisis that every organisation linked to public aspiration experiences. It's as much a development issue as it's a political one.

The NGO sector is one of the great success stories in Bangladesh and it has probably done better in most cases than the government. But the problem has been one of locating their social role and identifying the parameters of performance. Their closer link with the donors also makes the government uneasy as it seeks monopoly with all kinds of foreign connections. Most importantly, the close network that many NGOs have with people at the field is something the political parties want to use and the government envies. All this has added up to the present situation. It would be pertinent to remember that both the GO and NGO development is donor supported and none is accountable to anyone.

It's best to recognize that the GO-NGO collaboration has been an established fact for long and this is hardly the time to revive ancient rivalries. In fact, NGOs are the private sector development arm of the government much more than representative of the community spirit. In a weak state where the service delivery capacity of the government is limited, the NGOs have filled a critical gap.

The best thing would be to get over the troubles and leave NGOs alone while their involvement in politics and civil society activities are debated before being decided. Don't mess just because the authorities have power.

Sharon to visit White House again



MUSLEHUDDIN AHMAD

THIS is the third time Ariel Sharon, the Prime Minister of Israel, has been invited to visit the White House and meet President George W Bush. Sharon is a mass murderer suspect as the proceedings of a Belgian court reportedly reveal. Earlier he was declared "indirectly responsible" by a special Israeli court for the mass murder of hundreds of Palestinian men, women and children in Sabra and Shatila in 1982. After the judgement of the Israeli Special court Sharon had to resign as the Defense Minister of Israel during Israeli invasion of Lebanon. With such a bizarre military past in terms of having hands in murdering innocent civilians, it's not unlikely that he would feel "sorry that Israel did not kill Arafat in 80s." (front page NY Times Feb 1). This clearly shows his arrogance and attitude towards Arafat. He also has the audacity to express openly the desire he harboured to kill someone who has been the leader of the Palestinian people. This also points to his responsibility for the murder of innocent civilians in Sabra and Shatila. The prosecution side in Belgian court may have well noted these for their work. All these also explain Sharon's recent military aggression against Arafat including confining him in his headquarters in Ramalla for the last two months. It's also baffling that the rest of the world has been watching such an unprecedented situation helplessly as the US has been supportive of Sharon actions and indeed American officials have said "the siege in Ramalla is fine with them" (James Bennet NYT Feb 4). Washington is indeed still asking Arafat to act more decisively against the radicals. Indeed, he himself is a prisoner in the hands of Israeli radicals. As

Arafat himself is helpless, he has been bearing with such personal humiliation and political subjugation unprecedented in the world political arena.

One continues to feel disappointed to find that a person having such a dreadful military past was elected as the Prime Minister of Israel a country that boats of democracy. One also fails to understand how the US lends support to the bellicose actions of such an aggressive person against a nation - the Palestinians. If Arafat's action

"Peace Now" activists do desire an amicable solution with the Palestinians including withdrawal from the occupied territories for the purpose of peace in the area. But they are still a minority and the rest of Israeli population minus the extreme rightists would have to make up their mind finally in terms of a lasting peace with their neighbours the Palestinians who happen to be their distant cousins.

This aspect of the political development within Israel is very crucial for the US Administration for setting

and regional politics, but he is a weak man when it comes to dealing with the US. This is generally the case with all Israeli leaders as Israel depends fully on the US for its survival and prosperity. So the US needs to set its policies keeping in view its overall political and strategic interest in the region. The geopolitical situation in the region has changed and particularly so after September 11. Now the US and the allies are set to go against global terrorism. This would obviously need wider support and such

EU's Javier Solana also was quite critical. He reacted after Colin Powell ended his brief talk at the World Economic Forum in New York regarding dealing with the "rouge regimes". Javier Solana said the allies do not just want consultations. They want a real vote "For me, the coalition is a collective ambition to share responsibility, but to share also decision making." This shows that EU has a different view about the "axis of evil." The discussions on the Middle East was fairly extensive, many expressing serious

conflict. It is obvious that the US will meet Israeli leaders more often, but it's a one sided policy to totally ignore the other party in the conflict. This does not bode well for a peace broker which poses to be honest and neutral.

If the US really wants peace in the Middle East which would greatly help it combat terrorism effectively, then it should ask Sharon to lift its siege on Arafat and also on the Palestinian territory, allow him to move freely and work for creating an environment that would reduce terrorism. Sharon's sudden meeting last week with three senior leaders of the Palestinian Authority, while dumping Arafat as "irrelevant" was an eye wash or simply a bluff to show to the US Administration that he was serious to talk to the Palestinians. It's also possible that Sharon was looking for an alternative to Arafat. But the Palestinian leaders stuck to their position. Therefore, the meeting produced nothing.

The present aggression, blockade, political assassination, killing of stone-throwing boys etc will only aggravate the situation. Israel would continue to face more of the suicide bombings as the population has been under total Israeli siege that made Palestinians' life unbearable. Therefore, the desperation has been leading even a Palestinian woman to go for a suicide bombing. These unfortunate developments due to Israeli military excesses which have been duly emphasized by the reservists in their statements must lead the US to rethink about its policies in the region. One may safely say that if Israel lifts its blockade, stops further killings of Palestinians and takes its forces and tanks out of Palestinian territories, acceptable calm would return to the area. This has to be accepted by the international community for the purpose of bringing the parties to the negotiating table. The insistence of Sharon on a total calm for a week is unrealistic. Relative calm leading to political negotiations would certainly improve the situation and may ultimately stop the violence altogether.

Muslehuddin Ahmad is a former Secretary and Ambassador and founder president of North South University

SPOTLIGHT ON MIDDLE EAST

The present aggression, blockade, political assassination, killing of stone-throwing boys etc will only aggravate the situation. Israel would continue to face more of the suicide bombings as the population has been under total Israeli siege that made Palestinians' life unbearable. Therefore, the desperation has been leading even a Palestinian woman to go for a suicide bombing. These unfortunate developments due to Israeli military excesses which have been duly emphasized by the reservists in their statements must lead the US to rethink about its policies in the region.

or alleged non-action "enhances" terrorism, Sharon's action is nothing but state terrorism. The international community and particularly the US should note these unacceptable Israeli actions which are creating worst precedence in the world political stage. The world should also take note of the written statements of many Israeli military officials and reservists who refused to serve in the West Bank and Gaza because, they said, Israeli policies there involved "dominating, expelling, starving and humiliating an entire population." Their written statements also said, "The price of occupation is the loss of Israeli Defense Forces semblance of humanity and corruption of all Israeli society." The reservists also clearly pointed out the excesses committed by the Israeli forces. In an interview with Yedioth Ahronoth, the most widely circulated newspaper, they reported "incidents during their service in which soldiers had fired at Palestinians who did not endanger them, including stone-throwing boys as far as 100 yards away." The statement also emphasised that "Zionism is not occupation." This shows that a good section of the Israeli population that includes the

their final position on the Israeli-Arab conflict. Sharon's days are certainly numbered and blind support to his actions is only antagonizing the Arab world to an irreparable extent and also promoting terrorism in the region. The same has been having consequential effects on the other areas of the world too and particularly in some sensitive areas of the USA. Terrorism cannot be stopped by military action; the political solution of the basic problems that create terrorism is a must for eliminating terrorism and sooner the US understands this better would it be for curbing terrorism. Nobody is asking the US to stop supporting Israel, but it should not be a blind support that endangers the security of the US citizens. The whole world knows that the US is the only country that can make Israel listen to reasons and act accordingly. Even Sharon cannot afford to say no to the wishes of America, which should be good for America and the rest of the world.

Indeed, a word of caution from the White House to Sharon, regardless of some domestic political repercussions, may alter the situation dramatically. Sharon appears to be egoistic in terms of his domestic

concern over the way Sharon has been handling the situation there. King Abdullah II of Jordan voiced his serious concern and mentioned this as the "burning injustice of Palestine" and added, "The present situation in the Palestinian areas is very dangerous and requires immediate international intervention to help steer the parties away from the brink." This shows King Abdullah also lost faith in American efforts and therefore he called for an international intervention. French Foreign Minister, as usual, was very vocal and said, "If we want responsible Palestinian authorities to commit themselves fully to the fight against terrorism, which is also their enemy, they must be given a political space, political oxygen, political perspective. If you say we won't resume the peace process until terrorism is defeated, the terrorists will be the winners." His use of the words "which is also their enemy" is very significant and clearly identifies the terrorism the Palestinians face from Sharon's Israel. The time has come for the EU to take lead in the affairs of Middle East. This is especially important as the US Administration has been showing "unilateralism" in dealing with the

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Restoring confidence in the UN -- need of the hour

AMM SHAHABUDDIN

WITH the continued efforts both within and outside the UN, the demand is gradually growing for its urgent reform to save the world body going the League of Nations way that died almost unsung and lamented in the hands of its over-zealous protectors when, in the process, the League lost its identity and ideals for which it was established after the First World War (1914-18). Already the UN has lost much of its image that was created by its founding fathers in 1945 literally out of the ashes of the World War II, because of abuse and misuse veto power by some of the Permanent Members of the Security Council to serve their strategy. Now the sound of the campaign is getting louder for expanding the SC membership from its present 15 members of which five (USA, UK, France, Russia and China) are Permanent Members enjoying the all-powerful veto or negative vote which can ditch any proposal that does not serve their interests.

The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has just started his second term in office, has been deeply involved in the issue. He told a press briefing in May last year at UN HQ in New York that an expansion of the SC is expected in near future to be done through a decision of the UN General Assembly. The proposed expansion is likely to include five more Permanent Members, one each from Asia, Africa and Latin America, plus one each from Japan and Germany, in view of their growing influence on global economic and political fields thus giving Asia, the most populous area of the world, three seats of permanent membership against seven for the rest. Similarly, the number of non-permanent members of the SC will be raised from its present strength of 10 to 15 or so, elected by the GA on a two-year term. But the run for the political reforms of the UN, more

particularly of the Security Council, considered as the executive body of the UN, stops with the most intriguing part of the whole process -- that the new PMs would have no veto powers like their 'fellow' PMs. Why this discrimination? Why this new 'caste system' being introduced in the membership of the SC when all members of the General Assembly, now numbering 189, big and small, are on the same footing, enjoying one vote for each member country?

Veto system outlived

Any attempt or effort to bring about political reforms to make the UN as agile and effective, as its founding fathers envisaged it to be, should not stop with the expansion of the Security Council only. It should stretch to uproot the pernicious veto system to make the Security Council a real healthy body. Simultaneously, the 1950 Uniting for Peace resolution of the General Assembly should be invoked to adopt any necessary action to meet a critical situation needing armed action... Also the almost forgotten Military Staff Committee should be brought into action...

its utility

When the world body came into being in 1945, many 'ifs' and 'buts' had to be considered to strike a balance of interests between the West and the Soviet Union. Then US President Franklin D Roosevelt (who actually coined the name "United Nations"), Joseph Stalin, supreme leader of Soviet Union, and Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of UK, were the major characters to give the UN charter its present shape, by incorporating the now controversial 'veto' power given to the five Permanent Members of the Security Council with the noble idea of saving the UN from any catastrophe because of wrongdoing by any of the five PMs. Thus due to this foresight and farsight of the founding fathers, the UN ship sailed smoothly in the troubled waters during the long-drawn 'cold-war' period which came to an end with the demise of the Soviet Union.

But unfortunately with the Soviet Union the hitherto praised balance of power was also gone, making a tremendous change in the global

political scenario, throwing up the only superpower, America, as world's policeman. It cannot, therefore, be denied that under such circumstances, any world power will be prompted and tempted to use or misuse its veto power in the SC to serve its strategy in power-politics.

It is quite logical that any political reform of the world organization should begin with the most important organ of the UN, the Security Council, known as the executive body of the organization. The first thing, therefore, that it needs most

stripping the incumbent five PMs of the veto power, thus giving all of them equal voting rights. Under the new system, all matters of substantive nature should be adopted by the SC by a two-thirds majority, while matters of procedural nature by a simple majority.

'Uniting for Peace' Resolution

In case there is a stalemate or a deadlock in the Security Council over a sensitive question regarding maintaining international peace, or

when the SC had bogged down in the quagmire created by a veto-wielding power.

Military Staff Committee

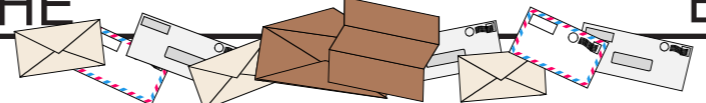
Another UN body, affiliated with the Security Council, which has been ignored consistently and kept hanging, depriving it of its duties and responsibilities, in peace-keeping and peace-making operations, also deserves mention here. This august body, called the Military Staff Committee, established under Article 47 of the Charter is supposed, to

advise and assist the SC in all questions relating to the SC's military requirements for the maintenance of international peace and security, the employment and command of forces placed at its disposal and shall be responsible (under SC) for the strategic direction of any armed forces at its disposal. What a wide range of power has been given to this committee which is, in all respects, the armed wing of the UN executive body, that is the Security Council. But what caricature the veto-wielding big powers have made of it! It is nowhere to be seen, sometimes even the Security Council is dished aside by them, when they take to armed action against a recalcitrant state, in their own style. But the Charter provision, made under Article 46, categorically says that "plans for the application of armed forces shall be made by the Security Council with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee," which, under Article 47, "shall consist of the Chiefs of Staff of the Permanent Members of the Security Council or their representatives".

Simultaneously, the 1950 Uniting for Peace resolution of the General Assembly should be invoked to adopt any necessary action to meet a critical situation needing armed action, whenever there is a stalemate or deadlock in the Security Council over the issue. Also the almost forgotten Military Staff Committee should be brought into action to conduct all armed operations to be undertaken by the armed forces provided by the Security Council, instead of leaving it to the whims of one or a few member countries. In this context it may be mentioned here that former US President Bill Clinton, in his speech at the 52nd General Assembly session in 1997, dealt with the issue, when he endorsed, as a first step, the enlargement of the present 15-member Security Council. Let the GA members take it up seriously at the next Assembly session to give the Security Council a new shape, a vigorous look, instead of just a face-lifting treatment. Let UN remain a symbol of hope for the peoples of the world and not become a failure in itself due to political follies committed by some.

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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Police BMR delayed

As seen on the Ekusey TV, it is understandable why the professional morale of the police force is down. The guns are older than the vehicles and many vehicles are more than 20 years old. How can the police chase revolver-toting terrorists on high-speed motorbikes dragging super-heavy wooden 303 rifles, riding on *pankhira* which run slowly and then break down?

The government (Home Ministry) knows more about the inner details of administration and maintenance than the outsiders and the Planning Commissioner is waiting to process the project proposals; but the funds are simply not there, or not even enough. The rate of development of

the miscreants have passed all records, and that too, without any government assistance! How come development is so topsy-turvy in some sectors?

Anyway our glamorous politicians are not interested in backroom operations such as maintenance.

The media may be told how this huge credibility gap within the Police Dept is going to be narrowed down, otherwise the casualty figures in the gang-world would rise. Now the public is assisting the police informally in catching the armed robbers, but they catch them more dead than alive.

Izzy Dhaka

Am I not a Muslim?

While endorsing the views of Ahmad Jamali (January 4) fully, I took the opportunity to add a few lines. The Creator creates mankind with only one virtue special rationality, the sole entity, the excellence of Him as He said in the Holy Quran and as the rational beings, we must uphold the sanctity of this Godly virtue. The religion gives us guidance on how to lead our life to the path of honesty in our spontaneous inborn way, deliverance from hurting others and jealousy to others, etc and to keep ourselves away from the dirty path of evils and it is the true religion. The rituals can not make one perfect unless he/she shows respects to the inherent

moral values. One pious man cannot be intolerant to religious and cultural values of others. But what are we seeing now?

In the name of religion we are recklessly committing all the nuisance defaming religion as a whole. We are yet to understand that Islam is a universal religion and has the virtue of adaptability with any culture. Where Islam goes it has assimilated the culture there. Islam in Arab did never deny the existing culture there, Iran-Iraq (Mesopotamia) accepted Islam within the purview of their own culture, Turkey, Malaysia, Indonesia had not abandoned their own culture and heritage while embracing Islam and not even later till to-day.

In Bangla-Bharat sub-continent

Islam at the advent period enjoyed that acceptance. The spiritual leaders, Sufis who preached Islam in the area had never been against the culture and heritage of the soil and when the religion had gone to the hands of vested Mullahs, Moulavis Islam took a different shape. We have already lost our many cultural heritages branding those as Non-Islamic. Rankhi Bandhan etc is not of Hindu's only, no religion was lined there. Now we are hearing raising slogans that Pholea Boishakh, Poush Mela, Nabonnaya Utshav should be abandoned. Even we are hearing, Ekushay February, Saheed Minar, Shikha Anirban are against our religion. Unfortunately our so-called educated citizens (not

enlightened) are sputtering these frequently. But they are yet to know what is complete code of life. They never try to understand the nature of interest forbidden by our Holy Prophet and the interest charged by well-defined banks and financial institutes of the present day. They think only the outer rituals shall award them supreme bliss or complete emancipation or eternal happiness in heaven. They cannot get beyond their sacred books and fear to visualise the inborn spiritualistic aspect within him and even fear to listen to what other religion says.

Like Ahmad Jamali I have my very faith that my Creator shall count my obedience to my parents-seniors-teachers, living on honest

earning, doing everything possible for my children, helping destitute to my ability and judging none on religion. And He shall not expel me from the universal Islam and on the Prophet and the interest charged by well-defined banks and financial institutes of the present day. They think only the outer rituals shall award them supreme bliss or complete emancipation or eternal happiness in heaven. They cannot get beyond their sacred books and fear to visualise the inborn spiritualistic aspect within him and even fear to listen to what other religion says.

Md Zahirul Haque Dhaka

CU problem

The problem of the Chittagong University remains unresolved. Although many articles have been and many meetings held, the authorities concerned remains nonchalant. Would they ever wake

up from their slumber and think about the miserable condition of 15,000 students of CU?

Though the government has changed hands the CU administration is mysteriously passive. Are there no competent senators who can amalgamate the two rebel political groups? While the nation builders destroy the campus, their children are sent abroad for higher education. But our destiny was destined to stay here for their interest and suffer.

However, I appeal to the authorities, we the general students want to study. Please alleviate us from these difficulties and give us a good campus to continue our study.

Muzanur Rahman CU