POINT COUNTERPOINT

Dhaka city planning, traffic and commuter train service

HERE are discrete plans by various organisations apparently said to be concerned with the improvement of city services in Dhaka. All projects, planning and even policies are tied to the availability of external loans. The Dhaka beautification project, not to speak of Mohakhali flyover, has also been subjected to external loan. There is a talk of underground road link between the old airport road and Agargaon to waste another World Bank finance. Though the activities and plans of RAJUK, PDB, DESA, Titas Gas, WASA, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), BRTA, Railway, and Ministry of Works and LGRD call for coordination to build a city of a future population of about 150 to 180 million, there is no coordinating institution which is essential at this stage for comprehensive, orderly and efficient planning and implementation. New institutions like Public Utilities Board for Dhaka, and Urban Redevelopment (or Infrastructure Development) Authority under a new Ministry of National Development directly headed by the Head of the Government, and represented by a senior Minister or a Minister of State may be given a

Presently a World Bank consultant group is preparing Strategic Transport Plan for Dhaka under Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCB). Their transport policy and approach is based on a conception that Dhaka people will remain poor for ever and the plan shall be for a capital city of a poor nation. It is not unnatural for any Westerner not to appreciate the vision of the people. It is the responsibility of our people to dream, plan and build a futuristic slum-free city with all sustainable amenities, taking into consideration our climate, topographical condition, culture, public safety arrangement, healthy environment, sanitation facilities, utility supplies, ideal housings, waste treatment facilities, perfect transport network, and arrangement for mitigation of adverse effects of natural calamities

Recent flooding has again alarmed the people of the need to think of a coordinated city planning, preserving all the wetland, water bodies, canals and rivers from blockage and filling. The water bodies may be linked to ensure natural flow of rain water. Roads could pass overhead these water bodies as may be necessary. The sides of these water bodies may be used for walking and landscaping. This is a common practice in many developed countries with land

We shall need vast areas of land to build many garbage treatment, effluent treatment and water treatment plants. There must also be provision for movement of a large No city can be livable without open space including parks, play train lines. The argument that the

recreation space and the like, which will also eat into some space that could otherwise be available for roads for traffic.

It is a common knowledge that combination of surface road, overhead road, railway or subway transport and, in specific cases, water way transport, is a practical means of commuting in any big city in the world to provide the citizens the right of convenient and safe movement in the city. This is also one of the fundamental duties and responsibilities of the state. In view of the present public complaint about traffic congestion and probable increase in population in the city, total rail crossing time will be six hours or so is not for every vehicle. No crossing may block the traffic for more than 50 to 60 seconds at a time. Japan adopts "pedestrian first" policy. Thus the frequency of pedestrian road crossing can well be understood. In Dhaka also the situation might be similar some day. One must not come forward with simply negative arguments due to lack of experience. This sort of simple problem should not stop us from utilizing these vital existing facilities that might cost billions of taka to acquire. If the land is lost, no amount of money can buy it again. We should not think of repeating the mistake of shifting Fulbaria station stations. Most of the railway stations must be easy to access, have entrance level platforms, sufficient parking space, and provisions for buses to pick up and leave passengers, space for taxis to wait in line to pick up passengers, and other

New elevated light train: In addition to a light train line planned (as per RAJUK map) from Kaliganj to Gazipur via north of Uttara, Savar and other places there, another light train or elevated light train or trolley bus service may start from this line somewhere near north of Pallabi to touch Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Tejgaon and proceed further to Dhanmondi, Azimpur, Sadarghat

and to finally touch Dhaka-

Narayanganj line at some place

between Saidabad and Gandaria

Development of Tejgaon railway

station: This is an excellent and

convenient location for linking

existing railway, future light train

and bus or other transport network.

Even if it is not possible to develop it

fully immediately, no short-sighted

hasty plan should be allowed to

destroy its long-term potentiality.

No land should be allowed to be

grabbed. Any unplanned develop-

ment in and around it must be stopped immediately until long-term comprehensive plan is ready

and end up at Kamalapur.

and approved by all concerned.

Circular railway, elevated light train and bus: As in most of the big cities with land constraint, a circular railway touching all population centers of the city, from where long distance railways and roads move out tangentially or radically to link satellite towns may be built in Dhaka. Many new roads or railway lines may have to be elevated to save

wetland and canals and rivers. Elevated roads for guided trolley bus service or light train or monorail (in some special place) may be considered for next phase of mass transit in the city.

No wetland should be filled without comprehensive study. If

necessary elevated roads or train

lines may be constructed to dis-

tances of 90 minutes to 2 hours'

journey from the city centre. This

will help elimination of slums by

allowing the slum dwellers to live in

their own rural areas and lead a

wholesome social life as committed

in the constitution for all citizens.

People can commute from such a

distance and will finally get used to

it as in developed countries with

locally: The manufacture of

coaches at the railway workshops

which already undertook some

manufacturing works may be given

Manufacture of railway coach

land constraint.

a serious consideration. Various rail line equipment may also be made

test track.

Rapid bus transit and subway: There are suggestions of rapid bus transit on surface roads with dedicated lines, but this is impractical in Dhaka, and for that matter, in Bangladesh, in view of limited land area for such wide roads. Subway may not be our immediate choice in view of risk of inundation of major areas of the city every year and our lack of technological capability to counter the effect

Mustafizur Rahman, PhD is Chairman, The Institute of Development Strategy, Dhaka.

Test track: To maintain or improve the quality of the railway service, the Railway authority should build and use a 3- to 10- km

Development of water way: As also suggested by many, in addition to other mode of transport, we may fully develop our river and waterway transport system by utilising part of the existing infrastructure, which the government is also con-

immediately.

Management of traffic and establishment of continuous, safe foot path will ease much of the existing traffic congestion within the city immediately, but it will not solve the problem without mass transit. When public transport system will be developed, the rickshaws shall also disappear naturally. I think, we should not evade our responsibility any more and immediately start acting wisely before the city is turned into a huge slum in place of a slum-free metropolis.

IN MEMORIAM

Ode to my friend Jessie

NASHID KAMAL

HE stood there with her gracious smile, she held out her hand and said, "Here, hold t, I am there for you!"

Jessie alias Shahnaaz Ahmed breathed her last at a local clinic on December 11. She was fifty one years old. She was one of my dearest friends and was an Assistant Professor of English in the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). Jessie oined in 1998, and as I got to know her in a professional capacity, I was so delighted to discover such a uniquely generous person. I can surely say that Jessie was one of the finest human beings that I have ever

I had met Jessie much earlier in the mid seventies. I saw her as a new bride, at twenty one she looked like the most stunning bride! Coupled with her physical beauty, her inner beauty shone through her face. She endeared herself to whoever she met, her friends, elders, colleagues, staff, and students all had a place in her heart. Her bubbly nature, always vibrant with words, passion, compassion, and sincerity are the yardsticks of what we seek to achieve but fail to do so. Jessie had not failed, she had set the standards and stood there for friends forever.

She spent a lot of her time doing social work, as part of which she held debates for poor students in a school where she did charity work. She was President of the Zonta Club. She asked her friends to contribute



Late Shahnaaz Ahmed (Jessie)

Jessie possessed a serenity with which she could greet her friends, she could offer a smile and her golden complexion clad in a self coloured sari, remained the emblem of a welcome person for those who frequented through her life.

Indeed, once she brought me a photocopy of the poem Bonolota Sen to recite. I often wonder if in her favourite poem Jessie had ever seen

Like Jeebonando Das, we the friends of Jessie have walked through the million waves that abound, have traveled many unknown islands, but Jessie had given us peace, she had brought in the joy of "mukhomukhi boshibar" Bonolota Sen.

Nashid Kamal is Professor of Population-

Management of traffic and establishment of continuous, safe foot path will ease much of the existing traffic congestion within the city immediately, but it will not solve the problem without mass transit. When public transport system will be developed, the rickshaws shall also disappear naturally. We should not evade our responsibility any more and immediately start acting wisely.

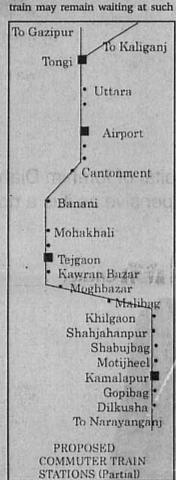
there must be built massive additional infrastructure. Now we must find out what we can do immediately, possibly with our own resource, such as-

Immediate development of Kamalapur-Tongi section for commuter service: It may be emphatically proposed that the existing double lines between Tongi and Kamalapur may be used for commuter service after building necessary additional stations at distances from about 0.75 to 1.5 km. Work may also start simultaneously to develop this double-line into four-line track. As our people have not yet enjoyed convenient masstransit train system in the city, this might give them the first taste of commuter train service. For comfortable service, the selection of passenger coaches must be proper

There are people inclined to think that about over twenty-two railway crossings in this section will aggravate road traffic if commuter trains run every three to ten minutes. They also like to suggest that Kamalapur station be shifted to longi. They may remember that the Dhaka railway station was shifted from Fulbaria to Kamalapur with a lot of fanfare. Though a number of unplanned structures are built here and there to diminish the beauty and function of this grand station, there is no sense in thinking of its shifting. Tokyo train station, probably the busiest in the world, where the famous bullet trains depart from and arrive at every few minutes, and a host of other long distance and commuter trains arrive and depart almost continuously, was built in 1872 and no one ever thought of shifting it. It is beautified and made to respond to the changing needs. All trains in the city are not necessarily running overhead. Rail crossing waiting time is optinumber of garbage trucks in future. mally reduced by good signaling. One vehicle is not to cross all the

and losing part of railway property

Kamalapur-Narayanganj and Tongi-Joydevpur railroad with stations at intervals of 1 to 1.5 km: The Laksam-Dhaka line that is planned for shortening Chittagong-Dhaka distance by about 80 km may make Dhaka-Narayanganj route more important as such it shall be developed further. The train stations may not initially be costly structures, but they must provide for at least four lines to allow passage of fast long-distance express train while one local/commuter



CONCERN

US Dollar losing strength but not its throne

HE US Dollar has finally chosen the path of a relentless slide downwards that almost everyone has been anticipating. For over two years, most pundits are hoarse from calling the dollar short; few listened but most ignored till October this year when the market acquiesced and acted.

This dramatic turn of events however begs the question, has the mighty dollar that adds up to about 64 per cent of all global central bank's reserves, is about to relinquish its pre-eminent role as the premier reserve currency of choice? The jury on this is still out. Whilst Euro is the next rightful contender, it is still however a distant second, accounting for approximately 20 per cent of global reserves with central banks. But on the other hand for Central Banks around the world, not to partly diversify into Euro would tantamount to

To many economists around the world, if anything that looked certain for long time, the demise of the dollar was the one. The imbalances created in US economy through over-spending and over-borrowing was simply unsustainable. The current account deficit is only a few basic points away from hitting a record 6 per cent of GDP, and the budget deficit depending how it is calculated is hovering around the 5 per cent range of the GDP. Excess by any measure, and its absolute size can make many countries in this world bank-

These gaping holes have not suddenly appeared from nowhere, but has been growing for the last few years. The consequent foreboding was predictable, but everyone chose to ignore it, including the chief protagonist: the US administration. For the US to run with such an imbalance for so long, and the world to ignore, also needed help from the Asian surplus economies, namely apan and China, to willingly fund the deficit through their purchase of US Government debts. Not entirely an altruistic act by the Asians, as the purchase helped to keep their own currency undervalued and sustain their export driven economies.

The US administration was hoping that this status quo could go on forever, as it would allow both the government and the consumers to continue with their profligacy, and keep spending like no tomorrow. The market indeed took its time to react; perhaps had waited to see some policy driven corrections to redress the imbalance, but nothing was forthcoming, which is why this time the sentiment had firmly turned against the dollar and the renewed accelerated slide against Euro commenced around October this year. In the last three years the US dollar has lost 35 per cent of its value against the Euro and 24 per cent approximately against the Yen; yet we have not even begun to redress the macro economic imbalances of the US econ-

Speculation abounds about how much further the dollar has to fall before the market regains faith in the currency. If the dollar has to take the brunt of the entire correction by itself then it is conceivable to see a more severely wounded dollar, perhaps another 30 to 40 per cent fall from its current value. On the other hand if the correction is aided by pro-active fiscal policy measures by the US government, and further supported through currency revaluation especially by the Japanese and the Chinese, the Europeans having already taken quite a hit, then we just might see a lesser fall in dollar value.

Whatever maybe the new value of dollar albeit lower than what it is today, it is unlikely that another currency will take up its central global role.

Curiously with the sharp rise of the Euro, there is not too much of an outcry from the Europeans. This is because some of the European economies like Germany have lived through a much higher exchange rates in the early 90's when the German Mark (as a proxy for Euro) was at \$1.43. So a little more to go from its current exchange rate of one Euro = \$1.34, before the exports to the US really begins to hurt.

The Euro Zone, with its own problem of subdued growth can ill afford a further revaluation, as it will begin to hurt its own exports. It comes as no surprise to learn that the European Central Bank is not too keen for the Euro to become a major contender to the US dollar as a reserve currency. However it has left this decision of an enhanced global role as reserve currency, to be

determined by market forces. Any concerted effort by the global Central Banks, especially those in Asia who are carrying large reserves, to diversify their US dollar holdings into Euro is bound to precipitate the dollar's fall. However, Asian economies with their currency pegged to the dollar, may at least for a short while, have best of both worlds. By diversifying into Euro they safeguard their depreciating dollar investment, but consequent devaluation of the dollar has no effect on their export, owing to the pre-existing peg. Notwithstanding, this is not likely to happen in a rash or haste; whilst indeed a creeping diversification may have already begun a long time ago. In 1999 when the Euro was born, it consisted approximately 13.5 per cent of global reserve, which by the end of 2003 had gone up to 19.7 per cent. Current financial conditions can only add fuel to

Notwithstanding the market imperatives for a rise in Euro's prominence, US dollar as noted earlier is way ahead in the pecking order for reserve currencies. This is partly because of its dominant role as a trading currency of choice between third parties. Also in foreign exchange trading terms, which is driven by amount of real trade and partly speculation, Euro is around 20-25 per cent of global FX trades whilst US dollar has a solid 40 per cent base. So as long as the influential role of dollar in global trade remains, it is likely to remain rooted as the principal reserve currency for global central banks. The Euro will indeed make some headway in percentage terms but dethroning of the dollar is still far away.

Ghalib Chaudhuri, a former investment banker, is currently managing partner of an independent

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The person should have strong interpersonal skill on communication and liaison with government and nongovernment agencies with service provider to work for the vulnerable groups and for their children.

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Profile of the Position: The position will be based in the vagrant homes located outside Dhaka under Central Regional Programme, Dhaka S/he needs to have overall experience in the field of psycho-social protection, human & legal rights issues, counselling, capacity building, mainstreaming of socially disadvantaged groups. The person having experience in any institutional care centre would be treated as additional advantage. Additional responsibilities will include coordination of similar activities in the same region of Concern Programmes in Bangladesh.

Requirement: Masters in Social Science or Equivalent degree with at least 3 (three) years experience in the development sector. In case of highly qualified and experienced person the educational qualification

High level of understanding in project design and ability to produce different reports of high professional

RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION OFFICER — VAGRANT HOME Profile of the Position: The position will be based in the Central Regional Programme, Dhaka, however require visits to different homes/projects within the region. S/he needs to have experience in developing management information systems, conducting research individually, data collection, data analysis compilation and documentation in the areas of socially disadvantaged groups, sex workers, their children drug user, street children and mentally ill & retarded people.

Requirements: Masters in Social science/Statistics with 2-3 years working experience in the development sector.

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and names & addresses of two referees to: Human Resources Department, GPO Box No. 650, Dhaka-1000 by 27 December 2004. Please include your contact address and telephone number. Please mark the envelopes with the position applied for. Any sort of persuasion will be treated negatively. Due to the volume of applications, only candidates under positive consideration will be informed of the outcome.

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