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80pc city buildings faulty due to Rajuk corruption

Experts tell roundtable, slate govt for not implementing master plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 80 percent structures of Dhaka city were not constructed with proper plan and design due to massive corruption at Rajdhan Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk), speakers said at a roundtable conference yesterday.

The roundtable styled Strengthening Public and Private Organisations for Planning and Development was organised by urban and regional planning (URP) department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and

Technology (Buet).

Iqbaluddin Chaudhury, secretary of the ministry of housing and public affairs, chaired the conference moderated by Abdul Quayyum, joint editor of the Prothom Alo.

Dr Roxana Hafiz, associate professor of the URP, presenting the theme paper said there are not adequate numbers of qualified planners in different development agencies.

She also criticised the government for not implementing the Dhaka Metropolitan master plan.

"No-one has ever been punished

for violating the city master plan. That is why the city is growing in an unplanned way," she said, adding, the master plan also has several flaws.

Iqbaluddin told the roundtable that a section of corrupt officials allow developers and owners to construct buildings with faulty designs. He asked the Rehab, an association of private sector developers, to build structures within the law, as the future of the city's development depends on its activities.

"I had a very bad experience with the Rajuk. I didn't see much honesty

among its officials while working as its chairman," he added.

Dr Rahmatullah, programme coordinator of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), emphasised human resource development for a well-planned city as well as a developed nation, as our population has now become a liability.

An urban expert, Prof Nazrul Islam said policy planning of the city is worsening day by day since independence.

"All organisations involved in city development should be

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Zealots threaten anti-Ahmadiyya steps again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Islamist extremists at a rally yesterday reiterated their pledge to go for a tougher movement if the government does not declare the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim immediately.

Extremists under the banner of International Khatme Nabuwat Movement, Bangladesh (IKNMB) organised the rally after Juma prayers in Tejgaon Nabisco crossing in the city.

They also criticised Dr Kamal Hossain for pleading for the Ahmadiyyas in court on the ban on Ahmadiyya publications.

The IKNMB leaders Mahmudul

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APPOINTMENT OF ADMINISTRATOR AT BGMEA

Businesses smell a rat as govt jumps at court order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The business community smells a rat in the government decision to promptly appoint an administrator that replaces the elected office bearers of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA).

Businesspersons suspect the move is nothing but an attempt to influence the BGMEA election slated for February 17 to elect people loyal to the government.

The elected office bearers can

play a key role in appointing employees, since the BGMEA provides direct employment to over 18 lakh workers, they explained.

They said although a Dhaka court asked the government to appoint the administrator, it did not direct it to 'immediately' implement the order.

They also sought the prime minister's intervention to stop the appointment of a government official to run a private sector trade body. The move will damage the image of Bangladeshi exporters with

foreign buyers, they added.

The government on Thursday appointed the administrator to replace the executive committee of the largest trade association of Bangladesh following a court order on January 3.

Criticising the decision, the business people said the government should work hand in hand with the private sector to cope with the post-MFA era. Instead, it has shown its intention to control the private sector by appointing a public

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Tremor jolts Chittagong again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A moderate earthquake jolted the port city and its adjoining areas yesterday morning, officials said.

The tremor, measuring 5.13 on the Richter scale, hit at 9:54am and lasted for 36 seconds. The epicentre was 349-km from the city.

Panic-stricken people came out of their houses during the tremor. No casualty or damage of property was however reported.

The tremor recorded at the lone seismic observatory at Ambagan in the port city is the sixth one after December 26 strong earthquake which whipped up tsunami, leaving a trail of devastation in a number of countries in Asia and Africa, officials said.

The December 26 earthquake was measured 7.36 on the Richter scale with its epicentre 1019-km from the port city.

Benapole strike called off

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

Five organisations of Benapole port users called off an indefinite strike after the authorities concerned accepted their demands at a meeting at Jessore Circuit House yesterday.

Forest and Environment Minister Tariqul Islam, also the minister-in-charge of Jessore district, mediated between the government and the representatives of the port users.

As per decision of the meeting, warehouse charges have been reduced to Tk 5 per ton from the enhanced rate of Tk 21. Similarly, the weight charge has been reduced to Tk 30 per ton from the enhanced rate of Tk 50. Other charges have also been reduced.

The government incurred a revenue loss of Tk 35 lakh during the strike enforced by the port users on January 1.

Thousands of empty trucks have started assembling in front of the land port after receiving the news of withdrawal of the strike.

Yesterday's meeting was attended, among others, by Secretary of the Shipping Ministry Ismail Jabiullah, Port Chairman Amjad Hossain Sarker, Customs Commissioner Rafiqul Islam, member of the Port Authorities Lutfur Rahman, President of C&F Agents Association and former MP Ali Reza Raju, Senior Vice President of C&F Agents Association Shamsur Rahman, Sirajul Islam, Nuruzzaman, Khairuzzaman Madhu, Habibur Rahman, Lutfur Rahman, Kamal Hossain, Ali Akbar and Babul. Deputy Commissioner Abdul Wazed and Superintendent of police Shahidul Islam were also present.

Mild cold wave may sweep Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna divisions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The weather office in Dhaka yesterday forecast mild cold wave for three days from today in the regions of Sylhet, Rajshahi and Khulna divisions.

The temperature may fall by one degree Celsius in Rajshahi division and Mymensingh, Tangail and Ishwardi districts.

Early morning fog may disrupt traffic movements especially in Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Mymensingh areas.

The lowest temperature between 5:00am and 7:00am yesterday was recorded at 9.6 degrees Celsius in Srimongol while in Rajshahi it was 9.5, Chuadanga 9.7, Jessore 10.2, Satkhira 10.8 and Ishwardi 11 degrees Celsius, met officials said.

Meanwhile, two children and an old man died from cold related ailments in Meherpur, reports UNB.

They are Rezaul Haque, 75, of Keshabpara, Baby, daughter of Shahabuddin of village Modondanga and Arif, son of Khalil of village Islamnagar.

Prayer Timing		
January 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:30	6:05
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:00	4:15
Maghrib	5:30	5:35
Esha	7:00	7:30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

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PHOTO: AFP

RAGING RAFIQUE: Bangladesh's Mohammad Rafique smashes a massive six over long-on during his blazing 69 on the second day of the first Test against Zimbabwe at the MA Aziz Stadium yesterday.

HEALTH SECTOR PROGRAMME

Donors stick to preconditions for fresh funding

REJAU KARIM BYRON

Donors may decide to pump approximately \$600 million into the Health, Nutrition and Population Sector Programme (HNPS), if the government agrees to their conditions that include immediate resolution of half of the 36 audit objections to its previous health programme.

If the government is willing to meet the terms and conditions, representatives of 15 donors led by the World Bank (WB) will sit with the officials concerned on January 31 to February 3 to discuss their participation in the \$2.4 billion HNPS.

"The government is agreeable to act on the audit objections," said a health ministry source, "however, there are a few conditions that it finds hard to accept."

Sources at the planning ministry said in some cases the donors differ so widely in their terms and conditions that the government finds them really tough to cope with.

The previous \$2.9 billion Health and Population Service Programme (HPSP) ended in 2003 amid disagreements and dissatisfaction of the donors.

The office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Cag) made 36 audit objections against corruption and anomalies in implementation of the HPSP. But none of the objections were addressed and the government went ahead with the new health programme, HNPS, last year, without getting any commitment from the donors.

Before committing any amount to the HNPS, the donors now want the government to act on at least half of the objections, and the WB has proposed to provide technical help to deal with them, if necessary.

The donors also want the government to adopt a work plan they have submitted earlier before sitting for the final negotiations.

If the government is agreeable, the WB will seek a board approval

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Garment fire kills 231 in 15 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 231 garment workers died and more than 1,100 were injured in fire-related incidents including Thursday night's fire at Narayanganj since 1990, according to the news items published in the dailies.

It is alleged that most of the garment factories lack fire-preventive equipment and those who have hardly take proper safety measures.

Working in a garment factory is highly risky, but the authorities seem apathetic about it and workers have taken it as a fact of their struggling life.

The authorities responsible for ensuring a safe atmosphere for thousands of garment workers seem reluctant to take actions against factory owners failing to maintain basic safety measures.

The owners getting 'preferential' treatment as entrepreneurs of the largest foreign currency earning sector in Bangladesh tend to ignore safety rules such as keeping heat and smoke detectors and an alternative electricity system.

A Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) law making it mandatory for the factories to have an emergency fire exit to prevent casualties is also grossly ignored.

PRIVATISING FIVE LAND PORTS

Minister sees no scope now to revise proposals

RAFIQ HASAN

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain has said he would not comply with the directives of the cabinet division on economic affairs to revise his ministry's proposals on privatising five land ports.

The five land ports are Sonamasjid in Rajshahi, Hili and Birol in Dinajpur, Banglabandha in Panchagarh and Bibir Bazar in Comilla.

The shipping ministry had proposed to develop the land ports by private sector on build, operate and transfer (BOT) basis while the cabinet division has asked the ministry to follow Bangladesh Private Sector

Infrastructure Guidelines.

The proposal is at the final stage and it will take a long time to revise it according to private sector infrastructure guidelines, the minister said on Monday.

"I am not going to revise the proposals after so much work for the last two years," he said.

"Had the government approved the proposal, privatisation process of the five land ports would be completed by one year and the government would get increased revenue," he said, adding, "The plan can not be implemented during the present government's tenure if we revise it."

Claiming that the proposals were prepared on the basis of govern-

ment's existing rules and regulations, the minister said its consultation and documentation process has already cost around Tk 25 lakh.

A vested quarter in the government was responsible for delaying every development initiative, he said.

On the basis of a decision to build 11 land ports taken at an inter-ministerial meeting on November 9, 2002, the shipping ministry finalised the process to develop five land ports on BOT basis in the first phase and submitted the proposals to the cabinet division on December 12 last year.

The Infrastructure Investment

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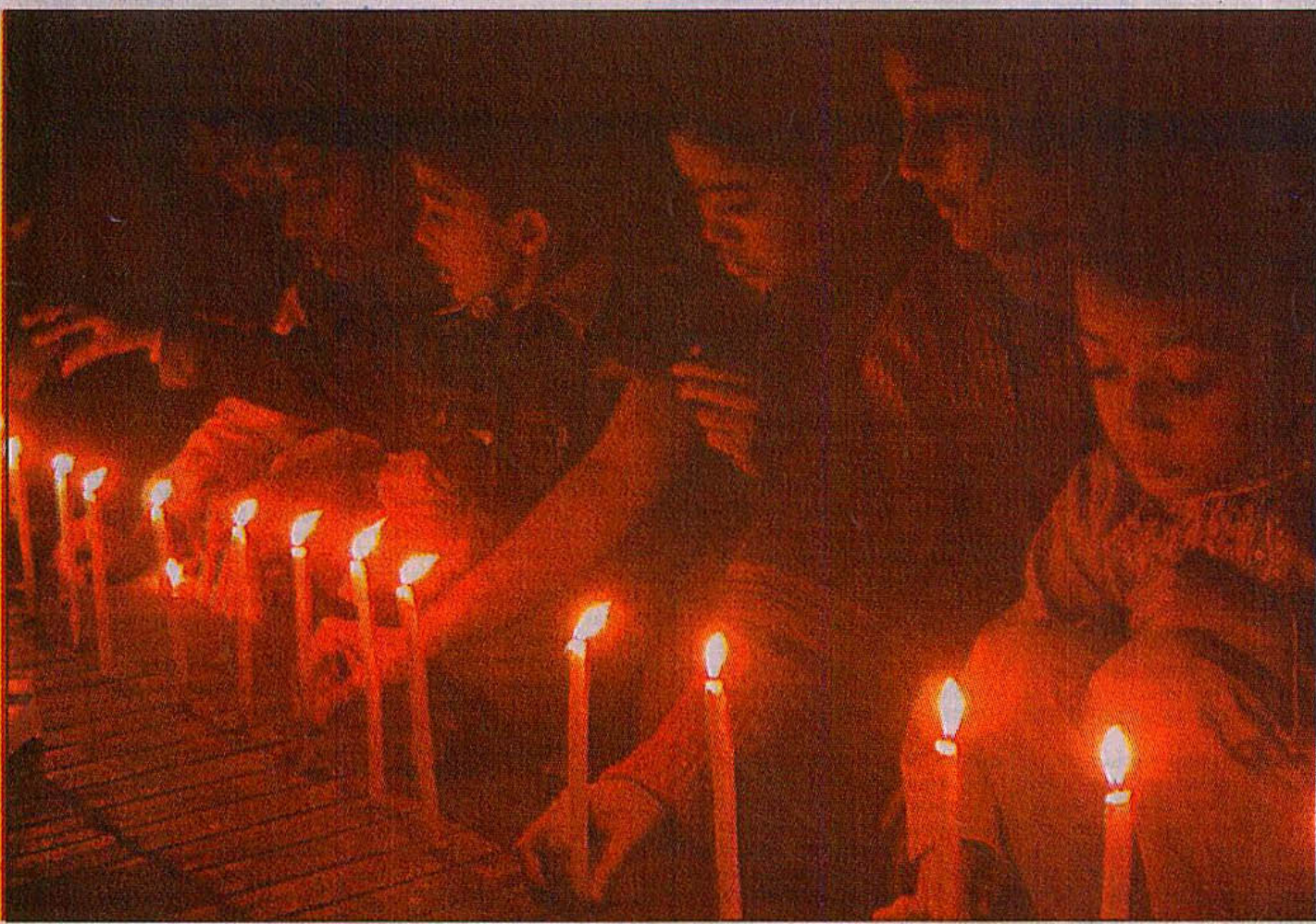


PHOTO: STAR

Three organisations—Angikar Bangladesh, Prakritajan and Barcik—arrange a candlelight programme at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital yesterday in memory of the tsunami victims.

Teenage boy clings to tree for 10 days

AFP, Port Blair

A teenage boy clung to a tree for 10 days in India's remote Andaman islands chain without water or food after the tsunami before being plucked by a helicopter rescue crew, one of 17 survivors found Thursday.

"I used to cry but after a few days tears would not come to my eyes. I had nothing to eat, no water to sip and there was no help," 14-year-old Murlitharan said in the Andamanese capital of Port Blair.

Murlitharan was flown from the devastated island of

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POWELL, ANNAN TOUR TSUNAMI DEVASTATION

Plight of survivors in camps, death toll tops 1,65,000

AFP, Colombo

US Secretary of State Colin Powell yesterday visited areas of Sri Lanka devastated by the December 26 tsunami, saying afterwards he was impressed with how survivors were helping each other recover from the calamity.

Powell, winding up his three-nation tour with a media conference at Colombo airport, reaffirmed US support for the victims of the tsunami and earthquake.

He said the United States had committed roughly 25 million dollars to Sri Lanka, including 10 million for temporary housing and a 10 million dollar program to put

affected Sri Lankans to work.

"As long as it takes (the Sri Lankan government) to rebuild infrastructure and reconstruct their society, the United States will be here with them," he said.

He said a contingent of US marines was due in the country as well as engineers and medical personnel, but denied that the American forces would be in any way involved in the country's long-standing conflict between the government and Tamil Tiger rebels.

"The US military presence is strictly for humanitarian purposes and not to affect the political outcome," he said, before heading to Nairobi, where he will witness the

signing Sunday of a peace agreement for the Sudan.

Powell, after arriving in Colombo from Jakarta mid-morning, travelled by helicopter to the battered southern region of Galle, where the US marines are to be based.

The sight of destruction was not as bad as what he had witnessed in the Indonesian province of Aceh but nevertheless testified to the fury of the tsunami which killed at least 30,615 people in Sri Lanka.

Pockets of houses along the coast were reduced to rubble and the beaches were littered with debris. Boats were washed up on the shore and overturned, and one tug boat

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