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Footbridges, underpasses in city in sorry state

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Most of the city footbridges and underpasses remain in appalling condition in absence of necessary maintenance and fail to serve its main purpose of ensuring safety of pedestrians.

Besides, unwanted elements such as muggers, pickpockets, drug peddlers, floating sex workers and vagabonds prowl on these structures, creating an unhygienic chaotic atmosphere.

Sources in Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) said there are 51 footbridges in the city while the number of underpass is three. Stairs and walkways of many over bridges and underpasses eroded and became risky to use, pedestrians alleged.

Users complained that the over bridges were not built on the appropriate spots according to the needs of people.

Hawkers had taken over spaces of most footbridges and underpasses leaving very little room for pedestrians. With goods heaped up at the landing, pedestrians struggle to find the entrance and exit.

The overhead sheds and hoardings by the side of the over bridges have virtually turned many over bridges into dark tunnels. After sundown they become a risky spot for people, as there are no lights on the

over bridges. Incidents of mugging have become quite frequent in recent times.

Urban planning specialist Salma A Shafi of Centre for Urban Studies who led a feasibility study for DCC last year cited ill design, height, steep stairs, narrow footpath, eroded condition and negative environment on the over bridges as the main reasons why pedestrians feel reluctant to use them.

"Sidewalks are very narrow in the city and it is difficult to build over bridges with

enough space for this reason. The stairs were built too steep because of it. Climbing up these stairs is physically excruciating for many, especially for the senior citizens," Shafi said.

The over bridges in the city are around 25 feet high so that double-decker buses can pass under it.

Widening of the footpath is urgently necessary, Shafi said. Average width of the existing footpaths is a little more than 2.0m and there are many roads that do not even have a

footpath, she said.

She also mentioned insecurity, insufficient lighting after dark and poor maintenance as the discouraging factors for pedestrians.

Md Jashimuddin, joint commissioner for traffic of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, blamed lack of awareness of people.

"By taking the busy streets the pedestrians are risking their own lives. They also slow down the traffic resulting in frequent congestions," he said.

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PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Most footbridges in the capital are now in an appalling state. The floor of the bridge at Shahbagh intersection developed several holes due to lack of maintenance.

JP lawmaker Momtaz Iqbal passes away

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party Sunamganj-4 lawmaker Momtaz Iqbal passed away due to a cardiac arrest last night.

Wife of late Maj (ret'd) Iqbal Hossain Chowdhury, former cabinet minister and a presidential member of the party, Momtaz, 57, died at about 11:45pm at a hospital in Uttara.

JP Secretary General ABM Ruhul Amin Hawlader said the lawmaker fell sick at her Uttara residence. She was rushed to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared her dead.

A teacher by profession, Momtaz left behind a son and two daughters.

Hawlader said her namaz-e-janaza will be held at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad around noon today.

Anti-Thaksin leader survives attempt on life

AFP, Bangkok

The Thai activist who led a blockade of the kingdom's main airports last year was shot and wounded in the head Friday in an assassination attempt the government said was aimed at inciting fresh unrest.

Doctors said that Sondhi Limthongkul, founder of the "Yellow Shirts" royalist movement that helped topple former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, was out of danger after an operation to remove a bullet fragment from his skull.

Gunmen wielding automatic weapons fired about 100 rounds at his car in a dawn attack, wounding Sondhi as well as his driver and an aide, a local police commander said.

The attack will heighten tensions between Sondhi's Yellow Shirts and Thaksin's rival Red Shirts, who took to the streets of Bangkok this week in violent battles with security forces.

The ambush took place as Sondhi, the leader of the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD) which seized Bangkok's two airports for nine days last year, was on his way to record a

programme for his private television station.

"At least two attackers followed Sondhi's car, overtook it and sprayed it with about 100 rounds of gunfire from AK-47 and M-16s," said the police commander, Colonel King Kwaengwisatchacharn.

"The motive for the attack is still under investigation," he said.

Suriyasai Katsasila, spokesman for the royalist PAD, refused to blame the rival Red Shirts for the attack and suggested it had been an organised hit.

"The operation was quite daring by people who are not afraid of the law.... I suspect the situation may be more complicated than we think," he said.

He had earlier told reporters he was confident the attack was politically motivated. Hospital authorities said that 61-year-old Sondhi was out of danger after a two-hour operation to remove the bullet fragment embedded in his skull and brain membrane, but would remain in intensive care for a week.

Doctors said Sondhi's driver was critically

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'Unite to free country from militancy'

Mujibnagar Day observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday placed wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum, Dhaka marking the historic Mujibnagar Day.

The day was also observed at Meherpur Baidyanathola mango grove commemorating the formation of the first government of Bangladesh.

Hasina placed another wreath on behalf of the party

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina places wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital yesterday on the occasion of Mujibnagar Day.

WAR CRIME TRIAL Prosecutor appointment next week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government would assign investigation agency and prosecutors to try the war criminals by next week and bring charges to International Crimes (Tribunals) Act if necessary, said Law Minister Shafigue Ahmed yesterday.

The law minister was talking to the press after the inaugural session of a two-day national conference hosted by Kendrio Khelaghar Asar at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city.

The minister also said the children should know the history of the country and the teachers should enlighten

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TRIAL OF MUMBAI ATTACKS

Suspect alleges torture, retracts confession

AFP, Mumbai

The suspected Pakistani gunman on trial in India for last year's Mumbai attacks wants to retract his confession, claiming it was extracted by torture, his defence lawyer told reporters yesterday.

The allegation came as the prosecution opened its case against Mohammed Ajmal Kasab, calling the November 2008 carnage in the city a product of Pakistan's "strategic terror culture."

But lawyer Abbas Kazmi said Kasab would fight a string of charges, including "waging war" on India, murdering 166 people, attempted murder and kidnapping. He faces the death penalty if convicted.

"On his instruction, a retraction application has been filed, retracting the so-called alleged confession," said Kazmi. "He's going to plead

not guilty."

The lawyer told reporters that Kasab claimed that the confession, made to a local magistrate while he was in police custody, was "extracted out of coercion and force and it was not a voluntary confession."

He quoted Kasab as claiming he had been "physically tortured."

Friday's hearings also saw Kasab, identified by Indian authorities as a 21-year-old, claim to be under the age of 18 and to apply to have his case transferred to a juvenile court.

"He is still under 18. In such circumstances he is deemed to be a juvenile and this court has no jurisdiction to try this case," Kazmi told the trial court.

But public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam challenged the submission, saying that in both

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7 Ctg militant suspects sent to jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Seven members of Dawat-e-Islami arrested on April 13 for their suspected links to militant activities were sent to jail custody here yesterday.

The Metropolitan Magistrate's court of Kiron Chandra Roy sent them to jail custody as they were produced before it in the afternoon.

Earlier, a team of Special Branch (SB) of police led by

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Prayer Timing		
April 18		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-20	6-25
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Twin quakes kill 22 in Afghanistan

AFP, Herat

Two earthquakes killed up to 22 people in eastern Afghanistan, damaging villages and destroying scores of homes in a remote area near the border with Pakistan, local authorities said yesterday.

The quakes hit overnight in Khogyani and Sherzad districts in Nangarhar province, where police searched for bodies and the injured under the rubble of flattened homes, while the grim process of burying the dead got underway.

"Twenty-two people have been killed and 30 injured. More than 200 homes have been destroyed," Khogyani district chief Haji Said Rahman told AFP.

The 5.5- and 5.1-magnitude tremors, which struck two hours apart at shallow depths, had caused simple mud-brick homes to collapse with ease, said an AFP correspondent.

Funerals for three women and six children began Friday afternoon in keeping with Muslim and local tradition that bodies be buried as quickly as possible.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai conveyed his condolences to local officials and tribal elders in the region, and ordered authorities to provide emergency aid as quickly as possible to the victims.

Twenty people were killed and around 50 wounded, the presidency said in a statement.

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IPL takes off in S Africa today

SPORTS REPORTER

The second edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL), the world's biggest Twenty20 tournament, is all set to begin in Cape Town today.

Last year's runners-up Chennai Super Kings face Mumbai Indians while defending champions Rajasthan Royals take on Bangalore Royal Challengers in the opening day matches at the same venue.

Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraful expects to play the opener but he could well be pipped by South African sensation Jean-Paul Duminy in the opener.

The other four teams involved in the competition will be in action in Cape Town on Sunday and tickets for the

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Robbers stab businessman, loot house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers stabbed a businessman and looted gold ornaments, cash and other valuables worth about Tk 17 lakh from his Jatrabari house early yesterday.

Meantime, burglars stole 35 tolas of gold, electronic goods and valuables worth about Tk 15 lakh from a house in the capital's Mohammadpur.

Injured businessman Abu Ahmed Ferdous was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). He later filed a case with the Jatrabari police station against seven to eight unidentified people.

Police said robbers stabbed Ferdous as he tried to resist them. The robbers held his family members hostage at gunpoint.

Police said robbers looted 33 tolas of gold ornaments, Tk 4.80 lakh in cash, several

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PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Students leaving Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College yesterday after it was closed sine die due to clashes between two groups of Bangladesh Chhatra League activists.

IMF forecasts 'long, severe' global recession

AFP, Washington

The International Monetary Fund on Thursday forecast a prolonged, deep global recession in a crisis "nobody is escaping," with recovery slow and difficult.

Weak capital flows to emerging economies in the downturn will hammer Eastern Europe in particular, the IMF said in releasing two chapters from its twice-yearly World Economic Outlook (WEO).

"The current recession is likely to be unusually long and severe and the recovery sluggish," the multilateral institution said.

The IMF offered no timeline for a recovery from the first global recession in six decades.

"There is some glimmer of hope that the stress is receding," said Stephan Danninger, an IMF economist.

But he said any improvement would merely reduce "extreme levels of stress"

to still "very high levels" of economic stress.

The IMF managing director, Dominique Strauss-Kahn, echoed the grim prognostications.

"2009 will almost certainly be an awful year -- we expect global growth to enter deeply negative territory. This is a truly global crisis, and nobody is escaping," he said in a speech at the National Press Club in Washington.

The IMF said its researchers looked at patterns of business cycles in 21 advanced economies from 1960 to the present.

The study found that fiscal stimulus actions seemed "particularly effective" in helping ending recessions, while monetary policy, such as tax cuts, can help shorten their duration but is less effective.

In the United States, "there is evidence of negative feedback between asset prices, credit, and investment," it said.

In the rest of the world, "the current

recessions are also highly synchronised, further dampening prospects for a normal recovery."

The financial firestorm that began in September after the collapse of Wall Street investment bank Lehman Brothers swept beyond advanced economies and is battering the rest of the world.

The IMF warned that the decline in capital flows to emerging economies "may be protracted, given the solvency problems facing advanced economy banks who provide significant financing to emerging economies."

Emerging economies in Eastern Europe were especially vulnerable because of the heavy presence of Western European banks in their financial sectors and economies.

The IMF pointed out that past episodes of systemic banking stress in advanced economies, such as the Latin American debt crisis in the 1980s and the

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