

## Taking charge of Sadarghat terminal

*Target should be to modernise and boost its revenue*

THE government's decision to take over the day to day operation of the Sadarghat river terminal is a welcome move in that it will relieve the passengers of the hassles and harassments as well as the excessive burden of fees and tolls they have to pay there everyday. And if the Bangladesh Water transport Authority (BIWTA), which looks after the river terminals of the country, can carry out its task of conducting the operation of Sadarghat efficiently, it is also possible to turn this largest river port of the country into a potential gold mine of revenue earning. As it is, the terminal, which is a hub of economic activities, where transactions worth millions of taka take place regularly, can be made into a big source of revenue earning. But neither the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), nor BIWTA has ever given serious considerations to this very lucrative aspect of the terminal.

Since hundreds of thousands of people travel to and from different places through the Sadarghat terminal, its first and foremost task would be to make their passage hassle-free. Any one who has the experience to visit Sadarghat terminal or use its service, knows what an ordeal it is to cross its platform. It is chaos all over. The agents of the launch and steamer services trying to entice the passengers to their preferred vessels, the porters trying to overcharge them for carrying their luggage, while the leaseholders' men taking fees and tolls for entry and use of the terminal at an exorbitant rate. Besides, the greedy and irresponsible launch operators overload their vessels with more passengers than those can accommodate often leading to accidents taking their tolls in terms of hundreds of lives passengers, who had but resigned themselves to the tyrannies and irregularities at the hands of the private operators would now naturally expect better delivery of service from this change in the terminal's management.

But how may the new management also boost its revenue earning from this river port? That will need a good amount of imagination from the BIWTA authorities. If the overall atmosphere of the terminal, the view of both the banks of the river could be transformed into a disciplined, enjoyable and a scenic one, tourists, sightseers and even the common public would be eager to visit it just for the pleasure of it. For the purpose, a green belt has to be created on either banks of river at Sadarghat point.

Environmental degradation centring around Sadarghat terminal with garbage heaps, sewerage, polluted water, in a word, the entirely unhygienic condition of the area is in an appalling state. There is this serious environmental concern which, it is our belief, can and should now be better addressed through government control of the terminal.

However, to tap the huge potential of Sadarghat terminal as a source of revenue, the BIWTA has to be provided with all the manpower and logistics support it would need. Its service has to be modernised. And to top it all, the management has to be made transparent and accountable. On this score, the attention of the authorities concerned is being drawn towards the recommendations this paper had made earlier in consultation with some urban experts towards converting Sadarghat into a modern river port.

## Zoo in a precarious state

*Run it properly, or close down*

A report published in the daily Prothom Alo on Tuesday has made it amply clear why Dhaka Zoo falls so tragically short of meeting the requirements of anything approximating a modern zoo. It has only one veterinary surgeon for more than 2,000 captive animals!

The zoo witnessed premature deaths of animals over the years and many scandalous reports were carried by the print media regarding corruption and abysmal incompetence of the zoo authorities. The animals have to suffer through painful, almost oppressive, conditions in the zoo coming nowhere near their original habitats. They are kept in small cages and are deprived of foods and other necessary things. It has been reported time and again that callous and corrupt zoo employees are responsible for such a state of affairs. Not long ago, a photograph of badly emaciated rhino was published in this newspaper. The problem with such animals is that the zoo authorities do not know what to do with them. Obviously, hostile conditions and poor supply of foods make it almost impossible for the animals to survive. The animals are brought from abroad at a huge cost, only to be pushed to death through utter neglect. The overall situation prevailing here is an insult to the concept of a modern zoo.

The report that the zoo hospital does not have the required equipment and medicines for treating ailing animals shows that the serial deaths, which at times looked like an epidemic, did not sensitise the zoo bosses. Else, there would have been some improvement in this area.

It seems the zoo authorities are blissfully oblivious of the fact that a zoo is not a prison designed to punish the animals. Recreating the animals' natural abodes as far as possible is a task performed with great care in any zoo worth the name. It is not possible to keep the animals alive in an artificial setting for long, particularly when they are deprived of the basic necessities.

The authorities concerned have to review the situation. Without question they are aware of the poor management that has turned it into a squalid prison for the guest animals. The decision makers have to find out ways to make the zoo a reasonably good place for the animals to live in. If they cannot do anything to solve the zoo's problems, they should close it. After all, causing unbearable suffering to animals in the name of running a zoo is something abhorrent to human sensibilities.



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## The media and the terrorists

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SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN

WE are being constantly kept up-to-date by the media about the regrouping and resurgence of the homegrown terrorist groups in the country. Apparently, most of these are based on interrogation of terrorists apprehended from time to time.

Many of these are of course in-depth reports, obviously, from information sifted by the agencies and subsequently provided to the media. But some of the reports, it would appear from the substance, perhaps need further verification and analysis to establish their veracity.

While we should be thankful to the media for keeping the public informed about the terrorists, at this point it may be appropriate to dwell a bit on the way information regarding terror groups and their activities is presented in Bangladesh.

It goes without saying that the role of the media is a very important adjunct in the fight against terrorism. And the media must be taken on board fully by the agencies, more so when sensitive information is disseminated, to ensure that while the idea is to keep the public informed, it does not

mislead, create alarm or help the cause of the terrorists.

Whereas, for the general readers, what they come across in the print and electronic media may convey different senses at different times. For those that want to have the benefit of more detailed information, such reports are of very little help. For example, take the reports of the regrouping of the JMB or Huji (B) that have appeared in the past weeks.

It does not need an expert to say that for the extremist groups regrouping is a constant process, particularly after suffering reversals, as had happened to the JMB and Huji (B) with the arrest and subsequent execution of their senior leaders in 2006, and because of the arrests of a large number of their cadres and mid ranking leaders from time to time since then.

Apparently, a lot of energy, money and time have been invested in these groups by their local and foreign sponsors, and setbacks are something that is factored in, in their structure. And ideology-based groups have long-term objectives which such hindrances may not necessarily be able to derail.

Nothing more specific can be provided

by the media in this regard than what we have already come across lately, understandably so, nor can the agencies reveal anything more for the sake of operational confidentiality, since that might compromise state interest and hinder further action.

But from reading some of the reports one cannot but feel that some of us are prone to let our imagination fly. Information shouldn't be taken at face value; it must be evaluated before being made public. And care must be exercised that it doesn't create panic.

A case in point here is the report that one came across regarding the capability of the JMB to arm itself, in particular the news in a Bangla daily regarding its capacity to manufacture anti-tank weapons. The news implies that the extremist group has set up a weapon factory of sorts for this purpose. That account is derived from the statement of none other than that of the JMB chief Sayedur Rahman.

Obviously, that information has neither been verified nor analysed by the reporter, to ascertain either its possibility or probability. And in all fairness to the agencies, and also to the readers, a report, startling as that might be, should have its authenticity established, before being made public.

I for one have difficulty in accepting the substance of the news. I cannot for one moment believe that a terrorist organisation, that employs terrorism primarily as a tactical expedient, would encumber itself by a logistical problem, which establishing a weapon factory certainly is.

When it is less of a hassle, and relatively safer, to smuggle in weapons and ammunition, it is highly irrational to go for such an option. And manufacturing of rocket launchers, or indeed of any sophisticated piece of kit, requires precision tools, and the even more difficult bit is getting the raw materials for the weapons and ammunition.

And when safety and security are essential for the survival of the terrorists, that involves shifting of camps and temporary bases from time to time, it makes no sense at all to get bogged down with permanent establishments. I have not heard of any mobile arms factory as yet.

However, in the context of security, and in particular of terrorism, not all reports can be verified before they are passed on, because of the imperatives of safety and security, and because countermeasures need to be put in place immediately.

And if the intelligence turns out to be false, having in place the preemptive measures does no one any harm. And here the case in point is the report appearing in some of our newspapers regarding a Huji plan to target our Deputy High Commission in Kolkata.

What our media need is to develop a coterie of journalists with skills to evaluate and analyse issues related to terrorism. That would make the terrorism-related reports more wholesome and actionable.

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## Drive against unfit vehicles

There cannot be two opinions about the need for dumping the unfit vehicles and revoking fake driving licences. But, certain pertinent issues need to be addressed while implementing the above decisions, which may help attain success of the drive to a considerable extent.

M. ABDUL LATIF MONDAL

NEWSPAPERS on June 25 carried reports which said that a meeting held on June 24 under the chairmanship of communications minister Syed Abul Hossain and attended by the representatives of the BRTA, BRTC, Rajuk, Dhaka district administration and transport owners' associations, decided to launch a drive in the capital from July 15 against one lakh unfit and old vehicles and around four lakh drivers with fake licences to reduce road accidents, ease traffic congestions and check air pollution.

Information furnished by the BRTA chairman reveals that in the Dhaka Metropolitan area there are 13,778 vehicles in four categories. Among them, 8,125 trucks and 1,842 vans are over 25 years old and another 1,446 buses and 2,365 mini-buses are more than 20 years old. Besides, there are another 80,000 vehicles plying without fitness certificates.

The meeting decided that in order to implement the government order of April 27, which banned over 20-year-old passenger carrying buses and mini-buses and over 25-year-old goods carrying vehicles in the capital and on inter-district highways, a total of 15 mobile courts, each headed by an executive magistrate, would clamp down on them and other unauthorised vehicles. The drive will continue until further notice, and the seized vehicles will be dumped in two vehicle-dumping yards.

It may be mentioned that the communications secretary had told The Daily Star (DS) about such an imminent drive following the special four-page cover issue in the DS of March 24, which pinpointed various dimensions of traffic traumas caused by unfit vehicles and reckless driving in the capital city.

The stories showed how the reckless and careless driving of the public vehicles, most of which are unfit as per motor vehicle laws, was causing deaths to hundreds of pedestrians and maiming an even larger number of them every year, how they were creating traffic jams, and how they were polluting the air and creating serious health hazards for the people in the capital city.

There cannot be two opinions about the need for dumping the unfit vehicles and revoking fake driving licences. But, certain pertinent issues need to be addressed while implementing the above decisions, which may help attain success of the drive to a considerable extent.

With every passing day, Dhaka is growing larger both in respect of its size and the population. Following the recent approval of the much-talked-about Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of Dhaka city, its size and population will increase significantly.

According to the BRTA sources, around 16,000 buses and mini-buses are running in Dhaka city to serve 10 million plus people. Since we have not yet been able to develop metro-rail or commuter trains or water transportation around the city, buses

and mini-buses continue to be the main mode of transport for the people of the capital city.

The minister for communications revealed in last February that the government was set to import 800 new buses, both single-decker and double-decker, to ease transport in Dhaka city by replacing unfit buses, and that the new buses were expected to ply the city roads within the next six months. This is not a big number compared to the number of unfit buses on the city roads. There should not be a mismatch between taking unfit buses off the streets and putting new buses on the streets.

While commenting on the issue in the online edition of June 25 of the DS, one reader wrote: "Judging by the current population of Dhaka city, I personally think this strategy would come in as handy as the government expects it to be. Wiping out so many vehicles at a go will certainly produce a negative effect on people's lifestyle as a major portion of the Dhaka residents are dependent on heavy vehicles like bus and minibus. While the decision of taking off unfit vehicles from the road can be useful in reducing road accidents, the ban will create a shortage of transportation for the general people. The government can, instead, provide the unlicensed vehicles a chance to get licenses without any trouble for a certain period of time."

While commenting on the government move for getting old vehicles off the streets, the DS in its editorial of June 26 wrote: "No one argues that the many dilapidated buses and other forms of transport we see regularly on Dhaka streets must stay. They have to go. The important point here, though, is that these vehicles should be phased out instead of being put out of action at one go. In other words, action against such vehicles must not come to a

point where citizens suffer. More specifically, the authorities must ensure that as these dilapidated buses and similar vehicles are phased out, they are replaced by new ones or alternative means of transport."

It is shocking to learn that four lakh or so drivers are in possession of fake driving licences. It is almost certain that these persons did not receive institutional training on driving and failed the driving tests conducted by the BRTA. But that was not the end. Brokers and some corrupt officials of BRTA lured them to get licences in exchange of substantial amount of money. It was not possible for these fellows, who are mostly from the rural areas, to distinguish between genuine and fake licences. These drivers with fake licences are definitely liable to punishment. What about the brokers and the corrupt officials of BRTA who are involved in the process?

The chairman of the BRTA stated in the meeting that many groups were involved in making fake driving licences. The secretary-general of Dhaka Sarak and Paribahan Owners' Association told the meeting that with the launching of the drive against fake driving licences at least 20% vehicles would remain off the roads due to shortage of drivers. If a solution to this problem is not worked out, many of the fit vehicles, including buses and mini-buses, may not ply the roads, resulting in sufferings of the people.

In view of what has been stated above, the drive against unfit vehicles should be carefully planned and implemented so that the city gets rid of the junk and the fake drivers and the people do not suffer due to shortage of transport, in particular buses and mini-buses.

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