



Star city

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thecitythatwas

In the wake of the Language Movement, the Bordhoman House, the residence of East Pakistan chief minister, was converted into the Bangla Academy. The Bordhoman House was constructed for the raja of Bardhaman after the proscription of the division of Bengal.

Harassed, haunted at home

CITY CORRESPONDENT

As visitors turn toward Zia International Airport (ZIA) from the main Airport Road, they are likely to be stopped at a recently set-up checkpoint manned by two *ansars* and a policeman.

The checkpoint, set up to 'discourage' people from visiting the airport, has probably stopped visitors of rural background coming to see an airplane close up. But it has failed to rid the airport of dozens of unscrupulous men openly operating near the departure and arrival gates.

On Tuesday, incoming passengers, mostly Bangladeshi workers in the Middle East, emerged with their luggage, as an Emirates flight arrived from Saudi Arabia. In the presence of policemen, *ansars* and other officials, each passenger was grabbed by two or more middlemen.

About 15 minutes later, three passengers boarded a Bikalpa taxi and paid Tk 300 to a middleman. When asked why the passengers had paid money, one of them replied that they had no other option as the middlemen grabbed their luggage trolley.

Despite the presence of large numbers of personnel from 28 agencies, including National Security Intelligence, Director General Forces Intelligence (DGFI), the police, detectives, *ansars* and magistrates for mobile courts under the chief metropolitan magistrate, ZIA

still remains a den of touts and middlemen victimising innocent passengers.

Officials say the organised gangs of brokers, middlemen and traffickers are so powerful that they are unable to do anything about it. Things have improved at ZIA, but harassment of innocent passengers continues. In the early morning and in the evening when most officials are off, the gangs' activities increase, an official admitted.

The civil aviation's acting director of ZIA, Moshequul Anwar, said his office is responsible for monitoring law and order within the fenced area. Outside, it is the job of the police, he said.

"We are working with police to stop harassment of passengers," said Moshequul Anwar.

Neamul Bari Baru, general secretary of the Airport Transport Central Committee, said the situation has improved to some extent over the last four months.

More than 600 taxis belonging to Bikalpa, yellow cab and other vehicles are operating at ZIA, he said. "The middlemen get money from taxi drivers and passengers," Baru said.

Three nurses led by Farid Uddin Ahmed were waiting near the landing tunnel inside the arrival lounge. Deployed by the health ministry, the three in white apron were watching passengers of Thai Airways flights from Bangkok. The ministry dispatched five doctors and 12 nurses to

the airport in the wake of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak.

"We are watching every incoming passenger and requesting them through posters to report to the medical team in case of any physical discomfort," said Ahmed.

Near the immigration, Dr Nilufar was waiting with her staff with masks on. She said they had instructions on how to receive a suspected SARS patient.

"We have two ambulances waiting outside. As soon as a suspected patient arrives we have to transport the person to the Infectious Diseases Hospital," said Nilufar.

Near the conveyor belt, where some passengers from Bangkok were already waiting, CAAB (Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh) officials said two glass windows were built to prevent thefts of luggage. The waiting passengers can see luggage handlers on the tarmac through the windows.

"These glass windows have helped curb luggage thefts so much that we are thinking of enlarging them," said a CAAB official. Thirty close-circuit cameras have recently been installed to tighten monitoring of airport strategic points, he added. But sources in the engineering section of the CAAB said that three cameras were out of order.

Few feet away from the conveyor belt, a nervous-looking man stood by two large suitcases and a large bundle. Khorshed Alam said he had

arrived from Saudi Arabia and was detained by customs officials. The officials around Khorshed were excited, as his suitcases were full of lifesaving medicines worth lakhs of taka.

"I have brought the medicines to sell in Dhaka," Khorshed said. Asked if he had had any contact at the airport prior to arrival, Khorshed remained silent.

At the departure lounge, two plainclothes policemen walked two men tied with a rope toward the office of the airport magistrate. The men were arrested for trespassing on a mobile court, said one of the policemen.

"We will charge them for trespassing under the Civil Aviation rules which forbids anyone from entering protected areas such as the airport without any purpose," said a court official.

"The maximum penalty for the offence is a Tk 1,000 fine," he said. Originally, the two men were middlemen belonging to a strong crime syndicate, he added.

"They will instantly pay the fine and walk free and we cannot do anything," he said adding a proposal to increase the penalty for trespassing to Tk 5,000 has been pending with the law ministry.

The mobile court seems to be working, but it is too poorly manned to do anything for the airport's myriad problems.



Touts cart away the luggage of a passenger at Zia International Airport.

Pull over for a cheap car



CITY CORRESPONDENT

Looking for a potential buyer for your old car? Want to get a fresh one not minding whether it has been used before? Or want to own a car but your pocket's saying 'don't dare'?

Don't worry, Car Haat is there for you.

Car Haat is the place where the city's second-hand cars are sold and purchased in a systematic and hassle-free manner.

Every Friday, the *Haat* (temporary market) sits at the Rajdhani High School premises on Manik Mia Avenue opposite the Sangsad Bhaban from 10:00am to 8:00pm. City dwellers who want to sell their private vehicles off can put them on show at the *Haat* after paying a registration fee. Those who are

interested in buying at a comparatively cheap price can look around and choose from a wide range of used cars.

The *Haat* organisers are responsible for ensuring smooth handling of this process.

This concept is the brainchild of Ripon, Nahid and four other friends. They are the pioneers of this new style in cast-off car market of Dhaka City.

"In the Middle-East, they have places similar to Car Haat. But their approach is a bit different from ours. They usually buy a number of second-hand cars through auctions from various sources and then sell it to the buyers at the stipulated location. But we couldn't follow the same concept here because it would've

demand an enormous amount of cash involvement," said Ripon while explaining the backdrop on how the *Haat* came into being in 1999.

"We were a bunch of graduates who wanted to do something unique and at the same time make a living out of it. We had numerous discussions and wracked our brains before we finally decided to open the Car Haat. We also thought that it required minimal investment, something that won't go beyond our means," added Ripon.

Initially, the *Haat* drew a poor response from the city dwellers. "Despite putting several advertisements in the leading newspapers, few people turned up at the *Haat* in the beginning. It took two years for the market to gather momentum

and we haven't looked back since. At present, the *Haat* has become so popular that we really have to struggle to accommodate many of our potential clients as there is hardly any space left to make room for their vehicles," says Nahid.

As many as 120 cars, jeeps and minibuses can be accommodated at the Car Haat which only sits on Fridays. On paying a registration fee of Tk 250, one can secure a spot in the *Haat*.

"Each weekend, 12/15 cars and other vehicles are sold from Car Haat. From all successful sales, the *Haat* keeps a 2.5 per cent commission in TK 1 lakh. We also sell from our office at Shohanbagh," informs Ripon.

Once a car is registered the entire responsibility of selling it then shifts on the shoulders of the *Haat's* sales representatives. But the owner of the car must deposit all the relevant documents of his automobile to the *Haat* organisers and tell his expected price to them before the vehicle is put on display.

The representatives have thorough understanding of the condition of each car. So, a potential buyer can get a good idea about the model, strength of the engine and other aspects in a short time. They can even go for test-drives along the Manik Mia Avenue to judge for themselves.

There are twenty-three young sales representatives who are always available to help buyers and sellers at the market. Most of them are students of different universities who work there part-time. Each salesperson gets Tk 300 for the entire day's work. If anyone can sell a vehicle, he gets an additional Tk 150 as performance bonus.

With the advent of this used-car market, some age-old notions of Dhaka residents are changing also.

Sumon had put advertisements in different newspapers to sell his 1988 model Toyota Station Wagon. Strange as it may sound, he never received a single call from any potential buyer. He then turned to Car Haat: "One of my friends told me about this market. I came here with my car and things have turned out wonderfully well for me. I've just sold my car at a price which matched my expectations," said Sumon, adding that newspaper ads rarely brings such results.

Buyers are satisfied too with the *Haat's* performance. Zulfiqur Hussein bought a red 1991-model Toyota Corona Ex-Saloon at Tk 3,25,000. "The most heartening aspect is the knowledge that the organisers of Car Haat themselves will verify every paper of the car with the BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority). I won't have any trouble with paperwork. It's a great relief for me," said Hussein.

hello dhaka

Roads to avoid Green Road
Digging by DCC underway

North Mugda
BTBT installing phone lines

Mohakhali to Banani Highway
Flyover under construction

Khilgaon Crossing
Flyover under construction

Traffic still snarls

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Despite remarkable improvement in traffic flow in some major thoroughfares of Dhaka City, a good number of roads are still reeling under serious snarl-ups.

Commuters face serious problems while passing through several parts of Mirpur Road Science Laboratory, Mohakhali, Moghbazar, Satmasjid Road in Dhanamndi, Jatrabari, Malibagh, SAARC Fountain at Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel and the entire Dhanmondi area.

Gulshan Avenue leading to Gulshan-2 roundabout, formerly a residential backwater, has suffered greatly from an increase in commercial operations.

Compounding the problem of increased traffic in this area are the numerous schools with students being picked up individually by private cars.

After making some city roads off-limits to rickshaws, suffering of the city dwellers travelling on the lanes and by-lanes has multiplied as most of these narrow thoroughfares are in a dilapidated condition.

"I have to attend my office at Azimpur from Mirpur every day. The ride from Mirpur to Kalabagan is much smoother, thanks to the ban on the movements of rickshaws and better public transport," said Prakash Chandra, a government official.

"But from Dhanmondi Road No.6 the bus moves at a snail's pace due to the presence of non-mechanised vehicles," he said.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police's (DMP) Traffic Department officials believe that the main reason for traffic chaos is the presence of rickshaws. Their belief is further proven by the return of a relative discipline on

Mirpur Road and Panthapath after rickshaws were banned there.

On April 17 the traffic officials held a meeting, involving leaders of the rickshaw-pullers on how to reduce traffic congestion from many of these routes.

"From June this year, the rickshaws will be made off-limits to the part of Mirpur Road from Science Laboratory to Azimpur and to the Tongi Diversion Road from Mohakhali to Moghbazar completely," said an official of the DMP who attended the meeting.

The DMP will call the members of Rickshaw Owners' Association to a meeting to discuss

the issue within a day or two.

"Illegal rickshaws still ply on the city roads. There should be 87,000 licenced rickshaws in the city, but more than twice the number is out there on the roads. This is one of the reasons that Dhaka is experiencing the traffic congestion. We will request the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to cooperate with us (the DMP)," said a source of the DMP.

"The DMP will carry out a massive drive to oust illegal rickshaws from the city roads from next month," said another source at the DMP.



Traffic grinds to a halt at a city thoroughfare yesterday.