

Dholai Khal is what remains of the Dulai River. Historically, it was the most important river channel of Dhaka, and most possibly a tributary of the Baloo River. The Dulai River began a little above Demra and flowed south-west through the city to join the Buriganga.



Congestion caused by city's bus menace

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The profusion and congestion of Dhaka city traffic is causing the loss of countless man-hours among the city's workers.

One of the main causes for traffic snarls is the haphazard plying of all sorts of mechanised and non-mechanised vehicles.

The traffic department of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has failed to bring any discipline to the streets, as buses defy all norms and rules and haphazardly enforce stoppages anywhere they want. On-duty traffic sergeants usually ignore the matter as bus after bus keep blocking busy intersections picking up and unloading passengers.

At Nayabazaar in Old Dhaka, for instance, three to four traffic sergeants are constantly manning the small roundabout. Buses coming from Sadarghat or Dholaikhal move into the

North South Road and invariably make stoppages right at the bend of the road, blocking the way of thousand other road users. But the traffic policemen seem oblivious to the problem and plights of commuters.

Similar scenes could be seen at numerous busy intersections, including Gulistan, Motijheel, Shahbagh, SAARC fountain, Farmgate, Bangla Motor and New Market.

Bus drivers blame the traffic indiscipline on competition among themselves for passengers. The traffic chaos takes place in the presence of the police who are well aware of the rules. "Buses should stop one after other in a row by the roadside," said a traffic police inspector of the DMP.

The roles of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and Road Transport Committee (RTC) are also criticised. The organisations are issuing route permits without any plan and have ended up issuing too many permits for a single route, while the other

routes have a small number of buses. As a result, the pressure is mounting on some major routes.

"The organisations give route permit to whoever applies for it, without considering the number of vehicles on the route," said a member of the BRTA advisory board.

Most of the bus drivers are not aware of the traffic rules, as the driving licences are more often forged.

The only measure taken by the DMP is to file cases and fine the transport owners for breaking the rules.

"From January 1 to June 30, traffic police have filed 1,43,836 cases against buses, trucks and private cars, and the government earned Tk 3 crore 45 lakh and 87 thousand from the fines," said a DMP source.

"We have only one way of dealing with this problem and that is to file cases and fine the transport owners," said Sheikh Mohammad Sazzad Ali, deputy commissioner of traffic.



The traffic department of DMP has failed to bring any discipline to the

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"If someone is not up to it she will not run for election, and that is that... Who is bailing women out in any other sectors? When did men ever come to the rescue when women were struggling to overcome all sorts of problems and impediments...?"

-- Maleka Begum
Social Activist and Researcher
Said in an interview with the Star Magazine last Friday, while answering a question about how women will face problems while campaigning for election to reserve seats.

"Police and BDR have started the crackdown according to a list. The real extortionists do not come to the terminal. Their money is delivered to their home or office. But yesterday, the usual extortion continued side by side with the crackdown."

-- A bus service owner
Commenting on the recent crackdown of police and BDR at the city bus terminals.

"The coalition government is persistently violating human rights after coming to power"

Sheikh Hasina
Awami League Chief and Leader of the Opposition
Talking to journalists while visiting the injured students of Dhaka University belonging to her party's student wing

"All the parties pledge independence from the judiciary while in opposition, but forget again when in power."

-- Mujahidul Islam Selim
General Secretary Communist Party of Bangladesh
Discussing the 'Constitution of 1972 Independence of Judiciary' on Friday at Muktibhaban at Purana Paltan. Source : New Age August 2.

"We have made a political union but not an ideological union. We can not compromise with Maududism. We have formed a coalition but did not sell our faith."

-- Fazlul Haque Amiri
Chairman of Islami Oikya Jote
Speaking at a meeting at the Engineering Institute on July 29, as reported by Prothom Alo.

Tanneries retold to relocate

About 500 tanneries, including 200 large units in Hazaribagh, are discharging 4.75 million litres of liquid waste and 95 metric tonnes of solid waste that eventually find their way to the Buriganga River



The government is currently selecting a site for relocating the Hazaribagh tanneries. Experts believe that untreated tannery wastes discharged in such a manner, is causing a wide range of health hazards.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Prime Minister has once again directed the authorities to expedite the relocation of Hazaribagh tanneries to Savar. The Ministry of Industries is responsible for shifting the tanneries soon.

About 500 tanneries, including 200 large units in Hazaribagh, are discharging 4.75 million litres of a variety of extremely toxic wastes and 95 metric tonnes of solid and hazardous wastes into the area's open drains. These eventually wind their way to the Buriganga River polluting the water, land and air. In Hazaribagh and Rayer Bazar areas, experts fear that the underground water is also polluted due to the tanneries.

Considering the extreme pollution of the area, the Prime Minister asked senior officials attending a meeting on July 19 to take all necessary steps to immediately shift the tanneries. The industries ministry is currently busy selecting a site for the relocation process.

Experts believe that untreated tannery wastes discharged in such a manner, is causing a wide

range of health hazards. They have identified about 14 severe diseases including skin diseases, gastric ulcers, asthma, kidney infections and cancers directly deriving from the wastes. About 60 chemicals are used for processing leather. Moreover, residents in the area complain that the pungent air of the area is causing their tin roofs, ornaments and all metallic objects to erode rapidly.

"Water supplies by WASA is not drinkable because of the filthy contamination," said Harunar Rashid, an inhabitant of Hazaribagh. "But we have no alternative to drinking and using such polluted water," he added.

The Department of Environment has identified the tannery industry as the 'biggest pollutant' across the country. Despite pledges by successive governments to relocate, the tanneries have remained where they are. About a million people are adversely affected by the country's ??? largest industry, which has been treated with 'sympathy' because of the large amount of foreign exchange it earns through exports to Europe and America.

Check on car horns

MORSHED ALI KHAN

In a bid to contain noise pollution in the city, the government has decided to introduce strict laws to ban 'powerful' horns and to regulate all sources of sound that creates pollution, sources in the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) said.

MoEF Minister Shajahan Siraj confirmed the decision and told The Daily Star that the Department of Environment (DoE) is now drafting an elaborate guideline for containing noise pollution in the city, which has reached an unbearable level and needs to be addressed immediately.

"We shall finalise the draft within the next two weeks and introduce the new laws as soon as possible," said Siraj.

The minister said that in addition to hydraulic horns, nowadays almost all private vehicles are using extremely powerful double horns creating an atmosphere of deafening noise. Vehicle owners would be asked to remove the additional horns and use a single unit horn, which emits sound that conforms to the decibel standard of the country.

"We shall also focus on all other sources of noise including that of loudspeakers used indiscriminately in thousands of mosques in the city," he said.

DoE sources said that they are working on the draft considering sources of noise in the city. A source said thousands of mosques in the city are indiscriminately using loudspeakers without respect to the environment. For instance, in one small area if there are four mosques, all of them are unnecessarily using powerful loudspeakers at every prayer time. "Every mosque covers an area, so the mosque is

required to let the people of that particular area know about the prayer time. It is unnecessary to blow a set of deafening loudspeakers," said a DoE source.

With no regulation on use of horns and loudspeakers, Dhaka is one of the noisiest cities in the world. According to experts, the noise level in the city's residential, commercial and industrial areas is many times higher than it should be. To worsen the problem, thousands of construction sites and workshops defy time restrictions for works and continue working even during nighttime. The whole situation is exposing the innocent city dwellers, particularly children, to great health hazards.

"Most people living in the city for long time suffer from one or other sort of hearing impairment due to extreme noise," said a specialist doctor of the DMCH.

Moreover, noise pollution is also causing blood pressure and heart ailments, anxiety, gastrointestinal diseases and various other mental and physical disorders.

The owner of a driving school at Dhanmondi said that they did not have any guideline over use of horns. Most driving schools

from where hundreds of unemployed youths learn driving follow part of a driving manual that was introduced in the 1950s, which clearly asks the driver to blow horn at every intersection.

"We are now teaching our students to blow horn at every intersection, we are not aware of noise pollution caused by the horns," said an instructor at a reputed driving school requesting anonymity.

The instructor blamed pedestrians and rickshaw pullers for causing hazards on the roads, which prompt the drivers to blow horns at will.

"If the level of sound is reduced by removing extra horns situation might improve," said the instructor.

