



thecitythatwas

Ahsan Manzil or the Nawab's palace was built in 1872 close to Waisghat in old Dhaka, and was named after the Nawab Ahsanullah Bahadur. Partially destroyed by a tornado in 1888, the building was abandoned and housed homeless people for many years until it was refurbished.

e-mail: starcity@thedailystar.net

Crimes thrive behind political shield

SULTANA RAHMAN

Rapid deterioration of law and order situation is worrying top police officials, who think political connection is the main cause behind most city crimes.

They said requesting customary anonymity that their records show most of the victims of crimes as well as arrested criminals are directly or indirectly involved with one or the other political parties.

Violent robberies, killing, snatching, mugging, theft and

rape are among the most common crimes of the city taking place at an alarming rate.

"We have to stop politicians in power patronising and influencing criminals before we can do something in the field," a police official said.

Police officials at different thanas of the city are also worried about a recent plan of the Home Office, which said that the police would have to arrest criminals within 48 hours after a crime is committed. If the concerned official fails to arrest, he would face official action, in which he

would have to show cause for the failure.

After the Prime Minister's approval, the plan might be implemented this year, sources said.

Field level police officials who are in the forefront fighting crimes are now apprehensive about the plan, which they think might turn them into scapegoats. They said that in most cases whenever they arrest a person there are undue interferences from different political quarters and also from top police officials.

The field level officials are

usually spend 'huge' amount of money in bribes to get posted to one of the lucrative city thanas. These young men usually do not want to upset the influential political quarters or his top bosses and therefore abide by the orders to release criminals, a senior official at Dhanmondi thana said.

"If the influential persons stop helping criminals, the situation will be under control," he added.

According to Police Head Quarter, at least 47 murders have taken place this current month. Criminal activities are likely to

increase, warn police. At least nine killings have been reported between Friday to Sunday at different areas of the city.

Police sources said that they were producing crime figures of those, which were recorded at different police stations. There are many gruesome crimes, which are never reported to the police, they said.

Gangs of hoodlums, mostly with light homemade arms and some with modern weapons such as pistols and rifles, have virtually taken over all the small and large localities of the city. Politically

motivated transfers of skilled police officers have largely contributed to the rise in crimes. Moreover, interference by politically influential individuals has also played a role in the worsening situation, concerned sources claimed.

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Shahudul Haque blamed the waning tolerance of the general people for lawlessness. He however claimed that the law and order situation is under control and killings, robbery, rape and other crimes were isolated incidents.

Gurdwara Nanak Shahi: A spiritual refuge



Worshippers at the gurdwara gather to listen to the priest.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Humming of verses like 'Everyone is equal in the kingdom of God' will touch your mind. The message of humanity, universal brotherhood or communal harmony is sure to reach you heart through the Kirtan (hymns) of the Ragi (singers of religious verses).

On entering the Gurdwara Nanak Shahi complex inside the Dhaka University campus, anyone would feel the strong presence of humanity reigning over all religions.

The gurdwara or temple of the Shikh community is the only place in Dhaka city where followers and admirers of Guru Nanak, founder of Shikh religion, can gather to pay their respect and pray. The temple is run under the auspices of a board of management based in India's Kolkata.

"The difference is that the Shikhs pray for the wellbeing of every living soul on earth while most other people pray for their own communities and faith only," said a follower.

The Gurdwara Nanak Shahi was founded in the seventeenth century. The area back then was called Sujatpur and later became known as Ramna. The legend is that Guru Nanak himself had come to Sujatpur in 1504.

The temple has a single domed room surrounded by several smaller quarters. The smaller rooms are linked to the central one with pillared ways. The arrangement enables a large number of followers to sit, pray, and

listen to hymns.

The scripture or 'Guru Granth Sahib,' is kept on an altar in the middle of the central room. It is a compilation of the best things of all religions and sayings of 37 followers of Guru Nanak. The Granth Sahib acts as a guideline for all Shikhs.

The overhead marble dome is called 'Palki Sahib'.

"There are no Shikh citizens in Bangladesh," said Bhai Peyara Singh, 'Head Granthi' (Priest) of the temple. "Mostly the foreigners staying in the city, or visiting the country are the ones who come here. However, a large section of people belonging to other religions are regular visitors too," he added.

"I have come to visit this temple because both Guru Nanak and Guru Govind Singh came here," said Gurdip Singh who hails from India's Punjab.

'Sangat' or religious meeting are mandatory for a gurdwara. The temple is filed with worshippers and visitors at 11 am every Friday when sangat takes place. It is followed by 'Langar' or community kitchen. "Any God's soul is welcome to have food at the langar," said the head priest.

The priests say that the only mentionable inconvenience they face while running the temple in Dhaka was with the visa duration. As all of them were Indian citizens, they had to renew their visas regularly. The head priest believed that provision for obtaining a long-term visa would have made their work easier.

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.



"There are no Shorboharas (Outlaws) in the southern regions, they are all Awamihara."

-- Altaf Hossain Chowdhury Home Minister

Answering to a public interest notice of Jatiyo Shangshad Assembly, September 16. Source: Prothom Alo

"During the rule of the previous government there were 10 killings a day, now 15 killings take place every day. This is the basic difference between the two governments."

-- Hossain Mohammad Ershad Chairman, Jatiya Party

Speaks at a 'meet the press' program on September 18. Source-The Daily Star

"It is not the duty of a journalist to find out whether the number of animals in the zoo is declining or increasing."

-- Curator of Dhaka Zoo

Mofizur Rahman remarking on the decline of zoo inmates

"Things would not have been so complicated had the government discussed with the opposition in the very formation stage of the steering committee. The government is unwilling to withdraw two non-MPs from the steering committee."

-- Abdul Hamid

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Party Awami League Commenting on the current structure of the Commonwealth Parliamentarian Association (CPA) conference steering committee, September 19. Source Prothom Alo, Daily Star

"You have done a remarkable job by publishing the photograph. If you don't do it how will we mend ourselves?"

-- F H Khan

A ruling BNP leader of Chittagong Speaking to Prothom Alo on September 20 about a published photograph of a listed hoodlum of Chittagong who stood behind two ministers at a party programme. Source: Prothom Alo

Unlicenced taxi drivers add to traffic chaos

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Hundreds of youths, rendered jobless by banning of two-stroke vehicles such as tempos and baby-taxis, have started driving black taxicabs without any valid driving licenses, according to an investigation.

This new breed of drivers is not only causing numerous minor accidents on the city streets every day but also adding new problems to a deteriorating law and order situation in the urban areas.

According to officials of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)

Traffic they are unable to trace absconding drivers of taxicabs, as they do not have any backup record anywhere.

Hundreds of black cabs were introduced to the city following banning of all two-stroke vehicles in the face of severe air pollution. A bulk of the transport workers, who were rendered jobless due to the ban, started driving cabs unable to obtain a proper driving license.

Most of these drivers do not qualify for any license as the law requires a minimum educational qualification of class eight for the applicants. Most of these drivers do

not have any formal educational qualification.

"Many of these new taxicab drivers cannot even read the meters and they depend on the passengers to read the fare on the meter," said a commuter.

Drivers said that the driving test conducted by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is too tough for them to pass. They said even educated people might find it difficult to answer some questions, which are mostly related to motor vehicle parts rather than driving on the roads.

"In the test they will ask you more

questions as if you are an automobile engineer and an expert mechanic," said a driver, who obtained a fake license for Tk 500 after failing a test in which a 'middlemen' (dalal) had demanded Tk 5,000 for a proper license.

Most of these new drivers have resorted to obtaining fake licenses, which look almost like the original ones. As soon as a prospective candidate arrives at the BRTA office at Mirpur, scores of people approach the candidate and offer a license within 24 hours for fees ranging from Tk 300 to 500.

All over the city, traffic sergeants and constables are aware of the anomalies involving driving licenses but they tend to ignore them on humanitarian grounds, said a traffic sergeant.

"We are aware of the problem and whenever one such driver is caught, we prosecute him but then we also think about his livelihood and let him go with a small fine," said the sergeant requesting not to be named.

Drivers said that they did not know what to do in this situation. They said they were paying huge amounts of 'formal and informal' fines for the irregularities under which they were forced to work. Traffic officials said that they file up to 330 cases a day against fake licenses.

"When we talk with cab owners they say that they don't get drivers with genuine licenses. Almost 80 percent license is fake," said another sergeant.



A black taxicab on the city street plies without a driving license. Victims of a system?

Zoo animals too dear for monkey business

The sale of deer this year is poor, as the Rajshahi Zoo sells a deer at Tk 7,000, much lower than our price. The price of a deer at the Dhaka Zoo is fixed at Tk 24,000

SOHEL ISLAM

The Dhaka Zoo is facing problems dealing with the growing deer and monkey populations, as it runs short of funds for their food, sources said.

"As many as 98 deer of two species in excess have made the situation even more difficult," said a zoo official requesting anonymity.

"The sale of deer this year is poor, as the Rajshahi Zoo sells a deer at Tk 7,000, much lower than our price. The price of a deer at the Dhaka Zoo is fixed at Tk 24,000," said Dhaka Zoo Curator Mafizur Rahman. Last year, the sale of deer fetched about Tk 12 lakh.

The number of monkeys is also increasing. "Nobody buys monkeys from us. We have problems dealing with the monkeys," said another zoo official, preferring not to be named.

"We have already spent funds from the next year's budget since we did not have enough money for their food. We are

always short of funds to run the zoo," said the official.

"We are not worried about other animals and birds because there is a demand for them from other zoos and parks. A few days back, we sent a pair of Royal Bengal Tigers, other animals and birds to Rangpur Zoo," said Rahman.

The Dhaka Zoo has some other problems. "Most of the sheds for the animals, built in 1974, have become rundown. The zoo earns at least Tk 3 crore each year. But no significant renovations and restructuring have been carried out since then," said a high official at the zoo.

"These dilapidated sheds fail to attract the visitors' attention. We have already

submitted a Tk 29 crore project for facelift of the zoo to the ministry concerned," the zoo official said.

As many as 40 cages of the zoo became empty after some rare animals died. The authorities did not fill the cages with other animals.

Although there have been at least 35 posts lying vacant for long, the livestock and fisheries ministry did not fill the vacancies.

"Seven temporary employees have not got salaries for three months, although they are providing service to the zoo. If the government confirms their service, they will work better," said one of such employees.



Born and bred in the zoo, spotted deer population is on the rise.