

# Carjacking rampant in city

## Police unable to recover most stolen cars

TAWFIQUE ALI

Carjacking has become rampant in the city as a well-organised gang can easily make fake documents for stolen cars with the help of a section of unscrupulous officials and staff of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

Police records say a total of 1,108 incidents of car theft occurred in the first 11 months of 2005 while 1,361 incidents took place in 2004.

According to different sources concerned, the dishonest staffs of BRTA and ports and in some cases the police are involved in the process of gobbling up a stolen car. In most cases, the police fail to recover stolen cars.

Carjacking is occurring recurrently usually at nights before weekends or holidays, said a number of victims. "It has been a recurrent incident in the city," said Enamul Haque from DOHS area whose car was stolen recently.

"Unscrupulous officials of BRTA are very much involved in these crime as they make new papers for the stolen cars," said an officer at Khilgaon Police Station. "In that case, police can hardly do anything to recover a stolen car."

BRTA Chairman MA Momen could not be contacted for his comment despite several attempts, but a BRTA official seeking anonymity said the carjackers can make fake papers themselves without involvement of the BRTA staff.

A CID inspector has recent seized a fake registration and bluebook issued from BRTA for

one Mini Akhtar. CID officials said a vehicle inspector and an assistant technical demonstrator of BRTA are involved in the malpractice.

"Though the records of the said bluebook have been found in the BRTA's register volume and in the computer, BRTA officials concerned have denied

legal papers.

Arif Khan, sales operation manager of a multinational company, went to Pallima Sangsad in Khilgaon by his Toyota Premio on October 19 last year to attend the Qulhwani of his aunt. A gang of four hijacked the dark blue car at around 9:30pm.

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their involvement," said the CID inspector on condition of anonymity.

The CID has seized the records and sent the handwriting for expert examination.

According to a source in the police, carjackers have their syndicate at the seaport also. Sometimes they manage to put a stolen car in the port through underhand dealing with a section of port officials. The car later comes out of the port with completely new engine number and

Khilgaon police first detained the car's driver and interrogated him for two days but they failed to trace the thieves and recover the car. "Later the police asked me to accept what has happened and make a claim for the insurance money," Khansaid.

A gang of four armed with pistol and cleaver hijacked a white Toyota Corolla from Chowdhurypara in Khilgaon at around 11:00pm on December 29 last. The incident took place when the car owner, Masudul



Parts from stolen cars sold openly at exorbitant prices at Dholaikhal.

Gani, was parking the car in the garage of his residence returning from a party on that evening.

Quibria Nomani's white Toyota Premio was hijacked at around 11:30pm from near Gulshan Circle-1 on January 12. The carjackers attacked the driver and sped away finishing their operation in half a minute, said Nomani's elder brother

Golam Quibria.

Expressing his disappointment over the police role in retrieving the stolen cars, Quibria cited the example of Dudu Khan, one of his relatives, who had to bribe Ramna police to recover his Carina car hijacked from Bailey Road around six months back.

Khondaker Enamul Haque, sales manager of an American

company, lost his Toyota Corolla to the carjackers at 11:30pm on January 13.

On his way back from a party in Gulshan, he stopped at a friend's house in Banani. As Enam's elder brother Morshed Iqbal was sitting in the car parked on the road, a gang of four youths reached the place by a silver colour car. Three of the thugs attacked Iqbal, dragged him

down the car and fled away with the vehicle.

Police have not been able to recover any of these hijacked cars.

"I am trying to make a headway into the incident using Rab sources," said Ziaur Rahman Zia, a sub-inspector at Gulshan Police Station who is investigating Enam's case.

According to Gulshan Police, a

gangster named Sagar leads the group of carjackers in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara areas.

Acting Deputy Commissioner of Detective Branch Shafiqul Islam said the police face problem in dealing with carjacking cases and fail to recover most the stolen cars as the carjackers change the physical features of the stolen cars in no time.

They bring new chassis numbers from Singapore and Thailand. Due to the newly punched chassis number, the police cannot identify the original number, Islam said.

A total of 30 recovered cars have been lying with the DB police at present, as their identity cannot be ascertained with altered engine and chassis numbers.

The carjackers change colour and other physical features of motor vehicles randomly at roadside automobile workshops. There is no government monitoring of these activities.

Such alteration makes the police job difficult, Islam said. He added that motor vehicle rules oblige the workshop owners to ask for genuine papers from a car owner at the time of any alteration to a vehicle but unfortunately the practice is not in place.

As per existing rules of the BRTA, a vehicle owner has to obtain permission from the BRTA even before altering its colour.

The existing law treats carjacking as a simple incident of theft. "But there may be a major crime behind theft of a car or altering features of motor vehicles," said Islam.

# Unprecedented security at Ijtema

IMRUL HASAN

Pilgrims gathered at the 41st Biswa Ijtema, by the River Turag at Tongi on the outskirts of the city amidst tight security.

This is the second largest Muslim gathering after Hajj and the Tablig Jamaat's annual get-together that began on January 27 and will end today.

Although medical supplies were free, water supply and hygienic sanitary facilities were insufficient to cater to more than 20,00,000 devotees that flocked the spot.

Against the backdrop of countrywide bomb attacks, tight security measures have

been taken to ensure safety of the people performing Ijtema.

Reportedly, around 22,000 personnel from the police, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), several intelligence agencies, other law-enforcing agencies, Ansars, Bangladesh Rifles and armed forces have been deployed.

The RAB built a three-tier security cover in their effort to ensure security.

"We have been deployed in and around the venue as part of foolproof security," said an on-duty top official of RAB10.

"We have also set up eight observation towers at different

important points which control CCTV monitoring room to keep check on the vast Ijtema compound," he added.

This year 25 medical centres and camps have been set up to ensure the devotees from home and abroad with proper healthcare.

"I was suffering from fever two days after my arrival. I feel better having taken treatment from the medical centre," said Nur Ali, a devotee from Mymensingh.

"We offer facilities like free supplies of medicine, ambulance services and mobile operating theatre," said Dr. Ahmed Sharif, from the Dhaka Medical

College Hospital (DMCH).

"We treated almost 2,000 devotees the day before the Ijtema," said Dr. Parvez, another DMCH medical officer.

A visit to the area showed that because of the insufficient water supply, people are forced to bathe and perform their ablution from the same reservoir.

"This practice is not in keeping with the Islamic laws, but we are bound to do so because of the lack of water supplies. We pray that Allah would forgive us," said a devotee from Narayanganj.

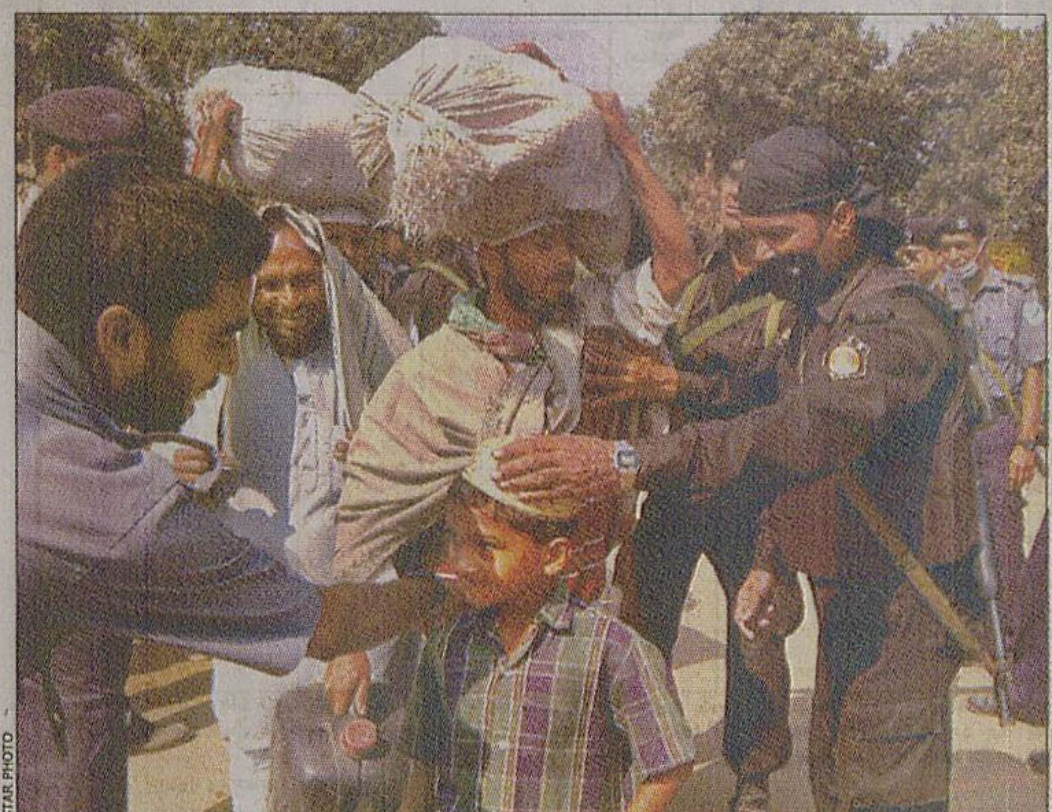
Five Bailey bridges have been erected on the Turag River to facilitate devotees' entrance to the place of worship, said an organizer of the Ijtema.

"Some groups have been appointed to monitor the sanitary facilities and they are trying their best to keep the environment neat and clean," said an official of the Ijtema Organizing Committee, requesting anonymity.

Regarding the number of foreign devotees he said: "About 3,000 foreign devotees have arrived at the Ijtema grounds. Most of them are from India and Pakistan. Special security has been arranged for them."

Sources of Ijtema Organizing Committee said that Tongi became the permanent venue for Biswa Ijtema when the then Pakistan government in 1967 allowed the organisers to use the land on the bank of the river Turag. Later the Bangladesh government allocated 160 acres for the purpose.

The three-day long Biswa Ijtema ends with Akheri Munajat that begins at 11 am.



Security at the Ijtema venue was strictly enforced.

# Dreams come true

## Photo exhibition by street children in the city

WAHIDA MITU

Since his childhood, Saddam had a dream of taking photographs of the objects that impress him, but he could never afford it as he is from a poor family.

Finally his dream has come true. He has become a photographer and the photographs he snapped are now on display at an exhibition in the city.

Sadaam and five other street children got the opportunity to be 'photographers' under a unique initiative by the Population Services and Training Centre (PSTC) and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAid).

The first street children's photography exhibition titled "Visible" is being held at the National Museum in the city. "I had a dream to take photos of my street life and now feel very happy as I did it, and I desire to continue it," said Saddam.

Melissa Hurd and Ara Jerejian, project co-ordinators of Visible Photo Project (VPP), supported by PSTC, trained them up in photography course for three months. Later, they were asked to take photos of the things that attract them. After taking the photos, the co-ordinators asked them to narrate the reasons that prompted them to take the photos.

The whole programme took 10 months to complete. Thus 45 photographs taken by Saddam, Polly, Raju, Lovely, Tariqul and Milon are put on display.

All the pictures on display portray the painful life that they once led as street children. The subjects of the pictures are written in both Bangla and English right beside the photographs. In the notes they narrated the reasons for taking the photos.

"I tried to portray the life of



Street children admiring with joy pictures taken by themselves.

the street children as well as the life of street people through my photography," said Saddam.

Humayun Karim came to the exhibition out of curiosity and found it very amazing. It was beyond his expectation to see such photos taken by the street children. "The subjects of the photos are good and the language is touching," he added.

Other visitors appreciated the effort of organising such an exhibition.

"It is an innovative step to let the people know about the creative ability of street children," said another visitor, Lubna Chowdhury, who is an

official of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Dhaka.

"The photographs taken by those children are very impressive. Lovely's photograph titled 'breaking bricks -- older couple' is a striking one," said Samina Rahman, a student of Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University.

The exhibition aims to develop the communication skill and analytical ability of the street children and to create scopes for them to boost their self-confidence to go ahead in life, said Prof Milon Bikash Paul, executive director of PSTC.

"We have a superficial idea about the street children and through this exhibition we will be able to learn the actual conditions and lifestyle of the street children," he added.

He also said that because of illiteracy street children suffer from lack of communication. Through this effort they had the opportunity of using the photographs as a means of communication to project their lifestyle and also their dreams.

Australian High Commissioner Douglas Foskett inaugurated the exhibition on January 21 and it will continue until February 4.