

Nawab Ahsanullah introduced electricity to Dhaka on December 7, 1901. A Bengal Times report states: When Nawab Sir Abdul Ghanie was to be knighted, his son Nawab Ahsanullah promised a reward to every person who illuminated his dwelling in honour of the event. "If you maintain my Father's Izzat (honour), he himself promised and also through others I will make you Khooshie (happy)." The meaning of Khooshie to him was electricity.

CNG-run autorickshaws exceed limit

Many vehicles ply with false documents, allege police

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The number of Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) run autorickshaws is two and a half times higher than the number of taxicabs in Dhaka, the latest vehicle count under the Strategic Transport Planning Project (STP) of the communications ministry revealed.

But when these two modes of transport were introduced in the city, the government had set a limit of equal numbers of taxicabs and three-wheelers to be plied on the streets.

The STP consultants in their report said the investment cost for autorickshaws is lower than that of taxicabs, which is the main reason for the increase in the number of the CNG-run autorickshaws in the city.

Police and other sources told Star City that a large number of CNG three-wheelers are plying Dhaka streets with fake documents.

When the government introduced taxicabs in 1998, it

According to the STP, about 30,000 CNG-run autorickshaws are plying the city streets. But the data of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) show 12,095 authorised CNG-run autorickshaws in the city.

capped the number at 10,000. The limit was relaxed in 2004 to 12,000.

When CNG-run three-wheelers were introduced in 2002, the maximum number allowed was 12,000 and later it was increased to 13,000.

Before December 2001, there were some 40,000 autorickshaws in Dhaka, almost all of them fitted with 2-stroke petrol

engines. Because of severe air pollution, the government banned those two-stroke autorickshaws from the metropolitan area and introduced CNG-run autorickshaws instead.

The STP traffic survey found that autorickshaws account for 30 percent of all motorised vehicles in the capital.

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30,000 CNG-run autorickshaws are plying the city streets. But the data of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) show 12,095 authorised CNG-run autorickshaws in the city.

When asked about the discrepancies in the numbers, top BRTA officials admitted that a large number of CNG run autorickshaws are unauthorised.

"We are unable to catch the illegal autorickshaws," said a director of the BRTA. "The BRTA is a regulatory body and it does not have any implementation force. This gap in authority encouraged the illegal autorickshaws to ply freely."

He said that coordination of the implementation and regulatory bodies could easily stop plying of illegal autorickshaws on the streets.

It is widely alleged that some corrupt BRTA officials are involved in faking registration documents.

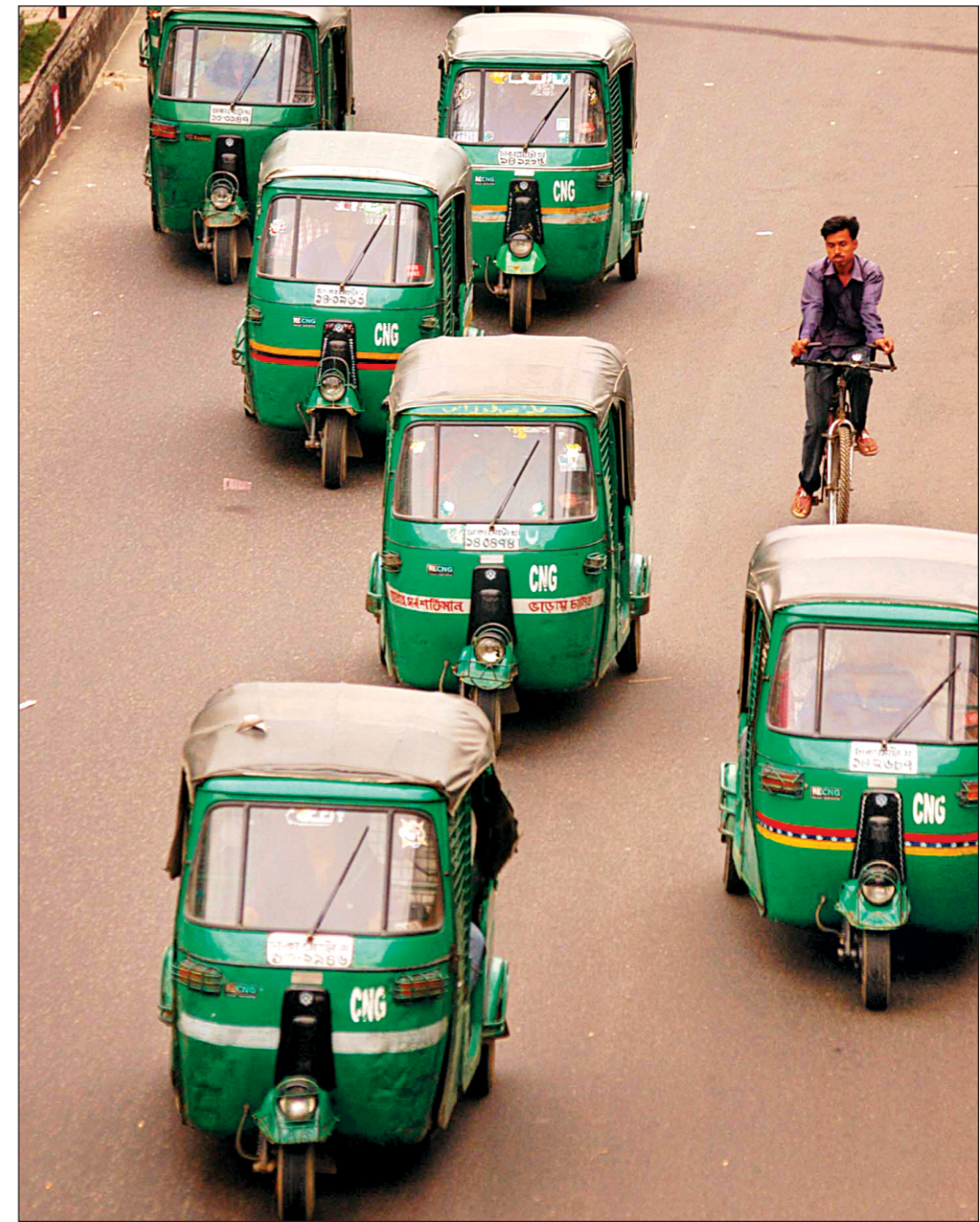
The unauthorised CNG-run autorickshaws carry number plates of authorised vehicles to dodge the police.

"We can still identify fake documents," said a traffic sergeant. "But most owners of the vehicles are politically influential people and we don't have the courage to take action against them," he added.

Feroz Al Mujahid Khan, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) traffic (South) told Star City that if the number of CNG run autorickshaws plying in the streets given by STP is true, then the authorities need to carry out special drives to catch the illegal ones.

"We carry out regular drives against the unauthorised vehicles, comprising of representatives from BRTA, DMP and the owners associations, and legal actions are taken against those caught with forged or no documents."

But he also added that such drives will turn futile if the sources of forged documents are not wiped out.



STED ZAKIR MOSSANI

DCC drive against unauthorised billboards

TAWFIQUE ALI

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has started tearing down illegal billboards on a special drive following the recent collapse of a number of unauthorised hoardings, killing two, and tax default by advertising firms, according to DCC sources.

A number of gigantic commercial hoardings, mounted without permission on the premises of a filling station on the Pragati Sarani, collapsed with a moderate storm on June 16, killing the two and damaging properties.

"Following the collapse, we decided to knock down all unauthorised billboards in the city if advertising agencies failed to

remove them by June 30," said DCC's Chief Estate Officer Md Abu Taleb.

"The demolition drive is also aimed at the advertising agencies which defaulted on tax and those which installed billboards without permission," he said.

Of the more than 10,000 billboards in the city, only around 200 are authorised, said Abu Taleb. The DCC has however estimated that around 700 billboards are unauthorised.

The DCC has informed the Outdoor Advertising Owners Association (OAOA), an organisation of advertising agencies, of its decision, setting in the meantime the deadline for paying 'model tax' by the agencies for hoardings on private premises.

But hardly has any of the errant

advertising firms responded to the deadline, Taleb said.

The DCC at present collects 'model tax' at a rate of Tk 150 for each square foot of signboard installed on DCC-owned land and Tk 75 for those on private land.

"We carried out four drives since the beginning of July and pulled down 10 to 12 billboards," Taleb said, adding that the major constraint in the drive is that it takes quite a long time, a lot of equipment and manpower which the DCC lacks.

The number of tax defaulting outdoor advertisers is 100 to 150 on the DCC land and several thousands on private land, according to a DCC source.

Only 40 to 50 outdoor advertisers turned up to pay the overdue

taxes within the deadline.

"We have started blacklisting those outdoor advertising firms that failed to respond within the deadline and we will never grant them approval to install hoardings in future," said a highly placed source at DCC.

"From now on, even the companies that hire billboards for advertisements to promote their commodities and services, will face legal actions if they rent a billboard without checking whether it is authorised or not," he said.

Several thousand unauthorised billboards have been installed dangerously in the city flouting safety rules, according to experts. These may lead to more accidents any time.

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Boatmen on the riverside are busy making new boats and repairing the old ones, worn out during the rainy season, which is almost drawing to a close.

Quadruplets exposed to risk of infection

Crowds throng hospital for a glimpse

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The quadruplets born at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) Hospital on Saturday are in stable condition, but doctors and the babies' relatives are worried as they are exposed to infection due to huge crowd of visitors.

"If this unwanted situation continues to prevail, anything can happen to these newborn babies which will go beyond our control," said Dr Md Abdul Mannan, assistant professor at the Department of Paediatrics, BSMMU Hospital.

Sources said another woman gave birth to quadruplets at Central Hospital in Dhaka in 2002 who were shifted to BSMMU Hospital, but they all died due to infection.



"These four babies are at risk of such complications," said Dr Mannan, adding that they are yet to be sure about when the babies will be free from risk.

"The babies are premature and underweight. The mother is suffering from malnutrition as she didn't have proper diet during her pregnancy," said Dr Mannan.

Dr Uzzal Mitra, another doctor at the Paediatrics Department, said: "It's better for a newly born baby to be at least 2.5 kilograms in weight but the average weight of these quadruplets is under 1.3 kilograms, which can cause complications."

Despite being concerned over the crowd, the relatives of the quadruplets expressed joy for this rare incident.

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Billboards in front Dhaka Sheraton have been torn down as part of the DCC drive.

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