

thecitythatwas

According to a local legend, there were graves of four fakirs (religious preachers) in the area of Fakirapool. A pool (small bridge) suddenly emerged over them one night and the place was named after it. However, historians believe there were graves and a small bridge was built on it afterwards that evolved the name of Fakirapool.

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Trucks, rickshaws causing traffic jam at night

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The city has been experiencing a huge traffic jam with the abrupt increase of vehicles on the streets from 8 pm onwards making passengers trapped for hours in an endless gridlock.

Long queues are seen on almost all the major city roads including Mirpur Road, Panthapath, Gabtoli, Shayamoli, Maghbazar, Rampura, Mohakhali, Shahbagh, Mouchak, most points along VIP roads after dark. Traffic police are often seen desperately trying to ensure a smooth flow of traffic.

Traffic officials said one of the reasons is that trucks are allowed to enter the city before 8 pm.

"Hundreds of trucks halt at entry points for over 12 hours enter the city at the same time, resulting in an uncontrollable rush of traffic," said Jahurul Haque, Traffic Inspector-1, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

He said a solution to the problem could be the construction of bypass roads.

"It is unfortunate that the busiest city in the country does not have a bypass road. Vehicles to Narayanganj from Gazipur would

not need to ply via the city main, if there were bypass roads freeing the city of traffic hazards by half," said Haque.

Rickshaws were made off limit along many main roads and the traffic department had made a rule that they would not allow rickshaws before 10 pm and at certain places the time was extended to 11 pm. The rule that was strictly enforced for a few months is now seem relaxed.

The ban is now unofficially up to 8 pm and rickshaws ply many roads after 8 pm and a combination of rickshaws and trucks entering the city roads at almost the same time, brings traffic movement to almost a standstill.

"Rickshaw vans, push carts and other slow moving vehicles who anxiously wait all day long get on the roads at the first given opportunity and cause chaos to the already crowded streets," said a traffic sergeant at Maghbazar intersection, the area with the biggest traffic jam.

Rickshaw vans loaded with goods from old Dhaka and other areas queue up from 6:30 pm onwards opposite the Ramna Police Station to disperse to different destinations via the Maghbazar intersection. Their

waiting comes to an end after 8 pm as they are permitted to ply along the roads off limit to them during the day.

The same scenario could be experienced at other entry points along the Tongi Diversion road.

"There is no alternative road to get to Karwan Bazar, Satrasta or Mohakhali from Sadargaat, Gulistan, Swargaat or Fulbaria except through the city. So I wait for the time to come to use the road," said Sahidul, a van driver who regularly carries goods between old and new Dhaka.

Many people have made it a habit to use the roads on rickshaws after 8 pm.

"To get to Dhanmondi, Kalabagan or Eastern Plaza from Maghbazar during the day, one has to break journey twice at Eskaton and Sonargaon road," said Sayeed, a resident of Maghbazar. "So it is better to wait till after 8 pm where I can get to these areas in a single journey by rickshaw," he added.

City businessmen said they despatch goods to customers only after 8 pm as they cannot afford to deliver them in motor vehicles.

"The entire network in the city for rickshaws, vans and pushcarts

is broken and transport within the city during the day is virtually impossible. It's too late to deliver goods after 10," said Nazimuddin, a furniture businessman at Panthapath.

Traffic department officials blamed the rapid growth of vehicles and narrow city roads for the severe jam and department statistics show that on an average more than 80 registrations are issued in a day to vehicles. The actual number is at least double than that of given number.

They also said that the government is trying to widen narrow roads by acquiring and demolishing some roadside structures, but a few organisations have obtained stay orders from high court, that are interrupting the whole process.

They also blamed government's lack of vision in constructing the flyovers in the city.

"The Mohakhali flyover has increased the traffic hazard in at least four points -- Banani, Kakoli, in front of the prime minister's office and Mohakhali itself while easing the traffic flow along only two roads at the Mohakhali intersection," said a frustrated DMP (traffic) high official.



City streets came to a standstill after 8 in the evening almost every day in the past week.

Social campaign to ensure safe, healthy food

CITY CORRESPONDENT

There is no alternative to launching a social campaign to ensure safe food for the consumers who are subject to health hazards due to use of poisonous chemicals and pesticides in food items, especially vegetables and fruits.

Discussants at a roundtable in Dhaka on Tuesday made the observation, expressing concern over the uncontrolled and injudicious use of chemicals in foods.

"It is not a matter of political debate, but of the safety and existence of the nation," said Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi, convenor of Safe Food Movement, organiser of the roundtable, calling for a movement against unsafe and unhygienic food.

Mohammad Abdul Hye Majumder, an environment expert, presenting the keynote in the roundtable said poisonous chemicals used in vegetables have both short and long term harmful impact on environment and human health.

He listed the pesticides and other chemicals containing organo chlorinate, mercury, lead and organo phosphate, which are being used rampantly by farmers and traders for killing pests, or preserving and colouring vegetables. Vegetables should be brought to the market at least 10 days after spraying such poisonous chemicals, he added.

Poisonous chemicals are also used in meat, oil, salt, spices and other food ingredients, according to a list presented in the roundtable. The keynote also refers to the type of adulteration and poisoning of food in different stages from cultivation to marketing.

The farmers and traders are using the poisons for more production and more profit while the consumers have become the victims of health hazard, the discussants

observed. Farida Akhter, executive director of Ubinig, an NGO, said people are consuming the poisons used in vegetables. Describing the dangers of insecticides and genetically engineered vegetables, she called for a campaign for 'alternative agriculture.'

She said political parties could play a big role in ensuring safe food for consumers by incorporating the issue in their election manifestos.

The government is conducting mobile courts regularly to check food adulteration but it is inadequate to curb the adulteration and poisoning on foods, said Saiful Islam, leader of a faction of the Workers Party of Bangladesh.

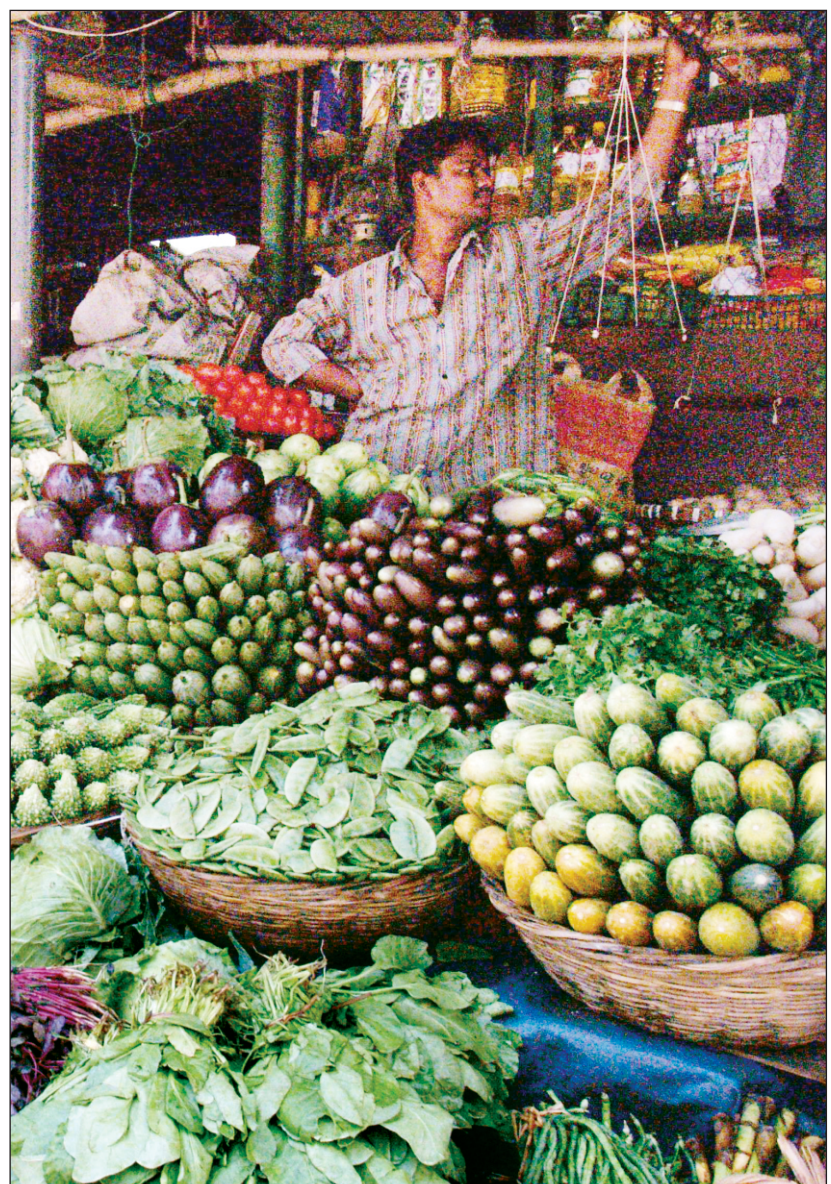
He laid emphasis on building mass awareness about the use of poisons in food.

Amid the grim picture of unsafe food marketing presented in the roundtable, a private organisation showed a ray of hope to come out of the grave situation. Sirajul Islam of the Agro Biotech Limited said they are cultivating food grains and vegetables using 'helping insects' instead of poisonous chemicals and selling those in the market.

"Without using pesticides and chemical fertilisers, we are able to produce more food grains and vegetables compared to the production using chemical fertilisers. Our production cost is also 42 percent less," he said.

The government alone cannot check adulteration and poisoning of food. People have to resist this practice, Ferdous Qureshi said summing up the discussion. He said scientific innovations and campaign are needed to ensure safe food for consumers.

"A social movement for safe food is a demand of time," Qureshi said stressing the need for pressurising the government and administration for necessary reforms in the legal framework and their implementation as well as raising public awareness.



Golam Mostafa, a student of class I, came with his mother at the photography exhibition in front Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi yesterday. He was busy taking notes about the events of August 15, 1975 and the names of other national leaders to prepare himself with answers as his teacher will ask him questions about the fateful events of 1975 in his next class.

Errant builders go unpunished despite penal provision

TAWFIQUE ALI

Errant builders and real estate developers mostly go unpunished for violating building codes and rules, though the building construction act clearly spells out the penalty for such misdeeds, but the Housing and Public Works ministry, and Rajdhani Unnyan Kartirpakkhya (Rajuk)

refrain from applying the law. Despite rampant violations of building rules particularly in the city, authorities have punished none so far under the Building Construction Act.

Government amended The Building Construction Act of 1952 in February 2006 incorporating specific penal provisions for violators but authorities concerned are yet to exercise the

law. "A section of unscrupulous builders and real estate developers are always against such provisions," said the public works secretary Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury, "They create hindrances the moment we serve a notice or proceed with legal action."

"We face various impediments in exercising punishment

against such violators," he said.

There are some sections that are habituated to malpractice in construction exploiting loopholes in existing rules and obstruct implementation of the law.

The secretary said when authorities move to take any action, such builders resort to various tricky means like filing writ with the High Court (HC) and take advantage of court's stay

order. Rajuk too has some drawbacks in implementing the law, he added.

Citing the example of Modhumoti housing company, the secretary said that the developer filed a writ petition with the HC in the face of government's legal action.

The verdict said that the area developed and sold could not be

reverted, but at the same time the developer would not be allowed to extend further.

"But the housing project was developed on a flood flow zone," Chowdhury said.

"We have to wait until Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) is gazetted and Dhaka Building Rules come into existence, to put the law into practice and punish violators of

building act and rules," he added. Government had initiated legal action against Modhumoti before the specific penal provision was enacted.

"Attributing the situation to court cases or something else is just a lame excuse to evade responsibility, said a highly placed source from Rajuk. "In fact, exercising the law is deferred to serve interests of a

certain vested quarters," he added.

"A section of developers and builders are bribing top officials of the works ministry to put the law on hold and continue the malpractices," the source said.

Dr. Shahdeen Malik, an advocate of the Supreme Court of

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