

Motijheel in downtown was built during the Mughal period. During the time there was a big Mahal for Mirja Mohammad, which housed a large pond known as Sukaku Mahal's pond. The area was later named Motijheel. A mazar called Shahjalal's mazar where fairs were organised existed. Motijheel and Dilkusha gardens were in the same place earlier. The road dividing the two places was constructed during the British rule.

## Anarchy reigns city public transport system

Errant taxi drivers show no respect for law

TAFIQUE ALI

To the unrelenting suffering of thousands of commuters every day, city taxi drivers, three wheelers and buses have created an anarchic situation in the public transport system, either refusing to go to destinations or charging exorbitant fares, which the public can hardly afford.

The traffic police officials who are supposed to control the situation say that the mechanism to fight such irregularities in the public transport sector has failed. They say the 'wrong people' are driving taxis, buses and three wheelers with forged licenses. The police telephone numbers displayed on each taxi and three-wheeler for the disappointed commuter to lodge a complaint yield no result whatsoever in streamlining the unruly drivers. When a commuter threatens a defiant driver of police action, the usual answer is, "Do whatever you can but don't threaten me of police action, we buy them every hour." For the thousands of helpless



Drivers of taxicabs at a city stand dictate their own terms.

commuters every day moving from one place to another within the city is getting increasingly difficult day by day. Many housewives, office goers, school children say that rickshaws

offered an alternative mode of transport for them but many city roads are now off limits to rickshaws and they have no choice other than virtually begging of the taxi drivers to take them to

their destinations.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Joint Commissioner (Traffic) Monjurul Kader said that this is not a new situation prevailing in the city's

public transport sector. "It is a common phenomenon that drivers of various public transportation modes manipulate certain situations to extract undue fares and harass the passengers in different manners."

"It is not possible on part of the police alone to streamline the entire traffic system," said Kader. "The process of issuing driving license is faulty and situation is such that the wrong people who even do not know the ABC of traffic rules obtain driving license quite often."

Lack of proper education is a major factor that contributes to the situation, he said, the DCC too has its responsibility to enforce traffic rules in the city.

"Powerful associations of drivers and owners of the public transport vehicles often override the normal enforcement of law," said the joint commissioner.

The common excuses that the drivers of various public transport modes make for their errant behaviour include high amount of daily deposits to the vehicle owners and price hike of

essentials. When it comes to travelling a short distance the drivers almost invariably refuse to go saying, "the fare won't be viable for me".

City commuters by buses and different kinds of human haulers are also frequent victims of more fares than fixed by the government.

Having finished a banking job at Bakshi Bazar, a teacher and mother of three children from Dhanmondi, Nasira looked for a transport to return home on a Wednesday afternoon. She said that about a dozen taxicabs stood at an intersection but none of the drivers agreed to take her to Dhanmondi.

As she approached a CNG-run auto rickshaws nearby, the driver demanded Tk 150 --- three times more than the fare. At one stage, Nasira waved to a police sergeant on a motorbike who ignored her saying he would come back later. She then approached another sergeant,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

### 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.

"By withdrawing corruption case, she [prime minister] says she has stopped corruption, by leaking out question papers, she says she has stopped copying and by patronising criminals and militants, she says she has stopped criminal activities"

-- Sheikh Hasina

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League President

Said at a discussion at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh, on Thursday.

Source: The Daily Star

"Development took place in the Pakistan period, during the tenure of (President) Zia and Khaleda Zia and not in any other government's tenure"

-- Saifur Rahman

Finance Minister

Said at the divisional meeting of BNP's student wing JCD, on Thursday.

Source: Prothom Alo

"It is not possible for me alone to decide on it. It is a matter of [political] decision"

-- Lutfuzzaman Babar

State Minister for Home Affairs

Told reporters when asked if the government will publish the report of the one-member judicial inquiry commission of Justice Joydul Abedin that linked a foreign enemy with the grenade attack on August 21, on Sunday.

Source: The Daily Star

"I am getting justice. Justice will prevail and I will be acquitted in all the cases if the trials are conducted neutrally"

-- HM Ershad

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman

Told reporters in his instant reaction, after a Dhaka Court discharged him from two graft cases filed over 15 years ago, terming the cases "false" and "fabricated", on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"Students in the general education system will now be deprived socially, academically and professionally"

-- Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury

State Minister for Education

Told reporters warning of dire consequence for the controversial decision of the government to recognise Dawra degree of Qawami madrasa equivalent to master's degree in Islamic studies or Arabic literature, on Monday.

Source: The Daily Star

"India and Bangladesh were friends, are friends and must remain friends"

-- VK Duggal

Indian Home Secretary

Told reporters after courtesy calls on Foreign Minister M. M. Khatun and Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, on Thursday.

Source: The Daily Star

"We are fine. Thank you for at least asking which the government did not bother to ask"

-- Maya

The daughter of Ada Chhacha, a victim of August 21, 2004 grenade attack

Told reporters when asked how they were doing, Sunday.

Source: The Daily Star

## No safety and compensation for the construction workers

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Unsafe work conditions kill or inflict serious injuries to hundreds of construction workers every year in Dhaka without the victims receiving proper compensation.

Poor implementation of the relevant compensation laws, corrupt labour leaders and attitude of the owners for compensating a victim make the situation even bleaker.

According to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) data, between August 1 and August 26, at least 50 persons were brought dead to the hospital in unnatural death cases and most of these bodies were of construction workers falling to their deaths from construction scaffolding. Deaths and injuries resulting from electrocution are also quite common. The data also reveals that the number of injured workers is more than a hundred within this period.

Workers at the hospital morgue said that the number of the deceased or injured workers is more than recorded, as the

hospital authority did not always record the cause of death or injury in the register.

On Thursday, Mohammad Jewel, and Keramat Ali, two construction workers fell down from a six-story building at Jatrabari. Mohammad Jewel died on the way to hospital and Keramat Ali was severely injured. The accident occurred when the workers were plastering the outer side of the building standing on a makeshift scaffolding. Relatives of Mohammad Jewel told Star City at the morgue that they had received Tk 5,500 for burial of the body at his village home. The relatives were not sure about any compensation for the death of the young man.

Not all the victims of construction site accidents come to DMCH for treatment, so the data produced by the hospital is revealing little of the high rate of fatality in the construction sector, said Kawsar Ali who is a construction contractor and brought an electrocuted construction worker to DMCH on Thursday.

After an accident the so-called labour leaders make most of the

compensations, according to construction workers. The owners of the construction sites always fear labour unrest and tend to please the leaders.

During negotiation with the owners the labour leader embezzles the bulk of the money and offers little to the victims.

Azizur Rahman president of the Building Construction Workers Union told Star City on Saturday that they have to face threats and pressure from the owners while seeking compensations for a victim.

"When a serious accident occurs sometimes the local political leaders interfere in favour of the owners and try to negotiate a minimum amount for compensation, often embezzling bulk of the compensation," Rahman said.

Rahman admitted that labour leaders sometimes steal a part of the compensation but said that get at least some compensation ticks down to the poor victim. "If the accident remains unnoticed to the labour organisations, the owners readily decline responsibility.

Real Estate and Housing

Association of Bangladesh (REHAB) officials said that awareness among the workers and the developers over safety could prevent high rate of casualties in the construction field.

Rehab Vice President Mohammad Abdul Awal told Star City that for establishing a safe working environment in the construction sector, a code of conduct is coming soon for the owners and developers.

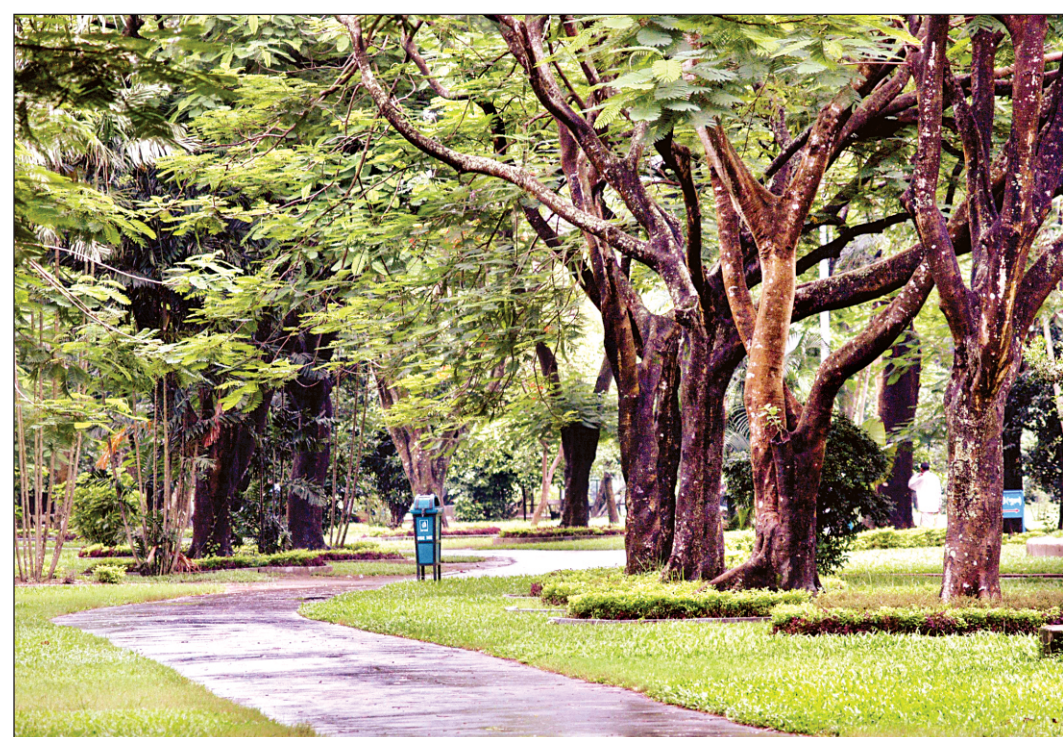
The workers are not accustomed to wearing helmets or shoes while working, even many of the workers are not aware of the danger of high voltage electrical cables overhead, he said.

Under such circumstances most developers are reluctant to introduce safety measures, which might increase the construction costs.

"Depriving the victims of construction accidents is an inhuman act. Unfortunately there is hardly any law to force the owners to maintain the relevant safety measures or have a mechanism for compensation," Awal said.



Construction workers on an under-construction building without any safety gear.



Memories of Dhaka bring back lot more greens than today.

## Dhaka: Yesterday, today and tomorrow

The Daily Star (TDS): What is your first memory of Dhaka?

Syed Manzoorul Islam (SMI): It was really a happy memory. I came to Dhaka with my father in 1959 by train when I was in class IV. At that time the train station was in Phulbaria. When the train was passing Salimullah (SM) Hall my father showing the hall told me that he had stayed in the hall during his studentship and I felt thrilled. During that trip my father gave a whole taka to spend it as I like and I gorged on cotton candy. In 1963, I came for the second time and spent half of the day in zoo, which was in

Ramna Park.

TDS: What was the city like when you first came to Dhaka?

SMI: In 1968, I came to Dhaka when I admitted in Dhaka University. During that time the city was green. It was more horizontal than vertical. The tallest building was in Motijheel that was of 13 floors. The city was quiet. The areas like Dhanmondi and Siddheshwari were absolutely residential. Suhrawardi Udyan was a huge place. Dholai khal was a strong flowing canal. More than 60 percent building in old Dhaka were in their original

shape and in use.

TDS: What do you miss most in the city as compared to your early days in Dhaka?

SMI: I miss the green -- the freedom to walk in the city. Now footpath is taken over by vendors, beggars, construction materials, solicitors of donation to mosque; and it has become a total mess.

TDS: How has the change in the city influenced your life?

SMI: It has influenced my life very negatively. The continuous traffic congestion added a feeling

of frustration. If one cannot do the appointment in time it brings frustration and added a feeling of disgust. I am very pessimistic about the city. Wetlands are occupied; Dhaka has less green space, less breathing place, less recreation space. The intensified urbanisation affects the children. The huge playground for thousands of children in Bijoy Sarani has turned into an army museum. Why it should be there? It should be in cantonment area. The monument in Suhrawardi Udyan is in total contrast with naturalness.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Syed Manzoorul Islam