

EID HOLIDAYS

Festivity followed by anxiety

CITY CORRESPONDENT

From the very onset of one of the longest-ever eid holidays, the city looked deserted. An estimated five million people left the city prior to the start of the holidays amid confusion over the date of the festival and mainly over the uncertain political situation of the country. All knew the fate of our democracy would be decided during this period in Dhaka.

With the shutdown of all newspapers for four long days during this critical time of our politics many felt little left out. The city dwellers, who chose to stay back switched from channel to channel in search of latest news on the situation. Especially on Thursday when the city was abounded with rumors. Those who were spending the eid holidays in the peaceful rural areas did not have much peace in their minds. They desperately rang up friends and relatives in Dhaka having access to private TV channel for news.

It was on Friday, the last day of the BNP led four party alliance government that the city looked absolutely deserted. The festive mood of the city dwellers faded and replaced by an unknown apprehension. From late Friday the city witnessed a lull when all vehicles went off the roads, buzzing shopping cen-

ters shut down and families stayed indoors glued to their TV sets. Street fighting erupted between rival political parties at various points of the city leaving hundreds injured and several dead.

On the eid day and the day

authorities denied the families access into the south plaza.

"South plaza was always opens to public during eid where thousands of families come to pass the afternoons of eid holidays, we cannot understand why they should make it off-

rickshaws and I feel very happy with the earnings. I want to return to my village after the holidays," Kamal said.

Rickshaw pullers were not alone to enjoy the exemption of fees. Three wheelers, CNG run vehicles and taxicabs also enjoyed the same exemption of fees over their vehicles by their owners during the eid holidays.

City dwellers enjoyed the city during the holidays. The city looked much cleaner with almost no pollution. Footpaths were free from encroachers. Many families were seen taking strolls on the streets till late in the night, which was unimaginable a week ago. Smartly uniformed RAB personnel patrolled the deserted city roads on powerful motorbikes and vans while police were also seen in pickups at different parts.

"This is the city where we want to live. The footpaths are free from encroachers and we enjoy walking in the footpath that we cannot do usually. The streets are free from vendors and other nuisance," said Sirajul Islam a resident of Rampura.

The law enforcers during the eid holidays played a crucial role in controlling youngsters who usually drive too fast in the city taking advantage of empty roads.

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after parts of the city however wore a different look. Dressed in colourful clothing, men, women and children flocked into public parks, lakes, Sangshad bhaban area, Dhaka zoo and many other recreation spots of the city.

"There are little options for recreation in the city. We have to go to the same spots repeatedly," said Arif Ahmed, who came with his three children to the Shishu Park.

For thousands of families visiting Sangshad Bhaban area brought in a frustration when

limits to people, especially families with children, this is unacceptable" said a visitor.

Those rickshaw pullers who decided to work over the eid holidays, enjoyed five days of unlimited access to all VIP roads. The owners of the rickshaws also waved all fees for the shifts. Kamal from Shatkhira stayed back in the city during the holidays just to pull rickshaws.

"Today for the first time I pulled rickshaw over the Mohakhali flyover, the owners have exempted all fees over the



To the suffering of millions no buses or public transport took to the streets yesterday. The picture was taken yesterday from Mohakhali bus terminal.

Mega city sans detailed map

WAHIDA MITU

Travellers in the city are left handicapped, as Dhaka --one of the mega cities in the world -- does not have a proper map indicating landmarks, places and direction for smooth commuting.

Some map manufacturers are deliberately not printing the city map for their personal reasons, while others are not doing so as they are worried about illegal reproduction of maps and invading copyrights.

There are several government-approved organisations that print the maps. None of the maps printed by these companies indicate places like Kamrangirchar, Old Dhaka, Badda, Khilkhet, Rayerbazar, and Tejgaon.

"The map will look clumsy if we detail every bit of information of each area in the city in one map," said MA Hadi, managing director of The Mappa Limited.

"However, we are in the process of bringing out a detailed map of the city by next year, and are hopeful that our efforts would be successful," he added.

But he said certain dishonest printers simply copy the maps his organisation produces.

"It is painful that these printers make brisk business with all our hard work," Hadi said. "Unfortunately there is no law to prevent or control copyright exploitation," he added.

Several types of maps are sold in the city. Among them city maps, tourist maps, thana (police-station) based maps and Bangladesh district-based maps are selling well," said another map manufacturer.

When asked why all details are not provided in a single map, a manufacturer of a thana-based map said that it was just a business policy. "If we include all details in one map, sales of other maps



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would drop," he said.

"This is a reason why we hold back most information, and is the case with all other map manufacturers," he added.

"It is not easy to print every detail, but if the demand increases we will try to publish one," said Mosharraf Hossain, proprietor Graphosman.

"This exercise will cost us a lot of money and will also be time consuming, which are the main obstacles to our efforts," he added.

He further said that like other manufacturers he too is

afraid of illegal reproduction.

Map manufacturers usually get the structure of the map from different sources like the Local Government Engineering Division (LGED), Director of Land Records, Rajdhani Unnayan Katripakkha (Rajuk), Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and Survey Department of Bangladesh, while manufacturers too have their own survey teams to get further details.

Eid and political chaos jam the ether

DURDANA GHIAS

Over the last six days the cell phones were abuzz with short message service (sms) in the absence of newspaper for the four-day Eid holiday and due to tense political situation.

Cell phone companies were overwhelmed with limited capacity in their servers while most subscribers complained of undelivered and delayed messages. Millions of people sent sms on the eve of Eid and in the midst of volatile political situation in the city.

Over five million people who left the city to spend the holiday were anxious to know what was going on in the city. They kept calling friends and relatives in Dhaka desperately.

"I got over 35 calls a day from people outside Dhaka who were desperate to know about the situation in the city with the political situation reaching its

climax and no newspaper to report it," said a newspaper journalist.

The usually jam-packed thoroughfares in the city wore a deserted look while the sms traffic in the ether reached its peak to the point of a snarl-up.

People like sms because it is cheap and convenient and sometimes an sms is more effective than a phone call, opined many subscribers.

The cell phone network became jammed with messages but the fact was denied by most cell phone operators.

"We gave an offer of 50 percent off for sms for Eid and we had a tentative estimation that of 80 percent of our subscribers will send sms. But we did not face any problem in handling the extra flow," said an official of Bangla Link.

"There was no jam in the network though the sms flow was five to six times more than the usual," Shahed Zubair, head of public relation and communi-

cations, Bangla Link.

"We have a capacity to serve 3.5 million subscribers but we have a consumer base of 900,000 so it was within our capacity. If anyone complains of undelivered sms then it can be the problem of others networks," Intekhab Mahmud, chief commercial official, City Cell.

"Every year when I try to send sms during Eid and New Year a big part of my messages remain undelivered or delayed," said a cell phone user.

Syed Yamin Bakht, general manager of Grameen Phone, the leading cell phone company in the country also ruled out having any problem with the server while tackling the extra surge.

But not all of the officials denied the problem. One of them spoke honestly about the glitch and the process to address it.

"If there is any congestion in the server we have a system of



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reserve from where we try to send the messages following the queue. Sometimes people go to remote places where the capacity constraint is suppose 3000 that reaches 6000 in a day so there can be temporary congestion for hours. It is not possible to solve the problem overnight so we are working to frequently monitor the situation," Asif Iqbal, head of marketing, Aktel.

There were also interesting sms which was swapped among the city dwellers and over the country like -- 'whether or not negotiation between four succeeds whether or not the moon is sighted Eid mubarak to all!'

It was a very witty sms, which indicates that people are yet to set aside their sharp sense of humour even in the face of a political gridlock.

KHOKA'S CORNER



LACK OF MAINTENANCE

The DCC installed these expensive and designer park benches on Minto Road recently under its beautification programme. Lack of maintenance has already started taking its toll on the benches that our honourable mayor set up at the cost of valuable public funds.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN