



Getting good mileage in Old Dhaka, 1984.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR

## Dhaka in the Eighties

For me, the eighties was a decade of rediscovery. Completing my studies in the United States in 1983, I started working as a software engineer in an emergent area in California that someone had nick-named Silicon Valley. I came home to Bangladesh every time I had earned a vacation. While here, I spent most of my free time on the streets of Dhaka.

That's because I had a passion for photography and wanted to observe and photograph life in Dhaka's streets.

I saw many *Tokais* in the streets. They were children who walked the streets slinging a large bag over their shoulder where they collected all manners of discards including paper, bottles, bits and pieces of metal, even discarded rubber sandals.

One day I followed two *Tokais* for several hours. Their work was not the drudgery I had imagined. While collecting they met all manners of people, ate snacks and goofed off with other kids. Once their bags were full, they headed to a neighbourhood at the heart of the recycling ecosystem in Old Dhaka. They sorted their collection into separate piles of paper, glass, plastic, sandals, metal etc. Their buyer weighed each pile separately (as the price varied between categories) and paid the *Tokais*.

What happened to these items? I followed the movement of the collected sandals, which were lumped with several hundred others. They were sent to a small factory, also in Old Dhaka, where they were cleaned, melted and poured into moulds to make new sandals.

*Tokais* are long gone from Dhaka's streets. Bangladeshi children of that age today spend their days in school.

There were things on the streets that are no longer seen today. For example, a variety of snacks sold from open containers, such as *achar* and *hawa mithai*, have been replaced by packaged snacks. Corner cigarette stalls hung a rope that smouldered slowly; the smoker lit his cigarette without wasting a matchstick. There were fountain pen vendors who displayed them neatly behind glass in an attaché case. Near every courthouse were rows and rows of typists who were ready to type your legal document for a small fee. Streets were shared by rickshaws, bullock carts, *thelagaris*, and various automobiles.

I also paid attention to street art. Rickshaw painting technique was perhaps less refined than it is today, but that did not stop the artists from imagining larger than life damsels, heroes and villains. Movie theatres had huge giant signboards. Advertisement billboards were simple, often containing a sentence or two extolling the product, accompanied by paintings of unknown models. A popular graffiti was "I Love You" usually inscribed with flourish on a wall. Whether this declaration was meant for the world in general or for a particular romantic target (perhaps residing in the house behind the wall) I could not tell.

The eighties were a difficult time for Bangladesh. But walking the streets of Dhaka, I learned about the energy and resilience of our people, which is timeless. I had left Bangladesh at a young age and these trips enabled me to rediscover my native land.

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### BARISHAL SHER-E-BANGLA MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL

# Fire safety adds to Covid-19 worries

SUSHANTA GHOSH, Barishal

Last Monday, there was a fire on the ground floor of coronavirus unit at Barishal's Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital. While there were thankfully no casualties, the incident exposed the hospital's unpreparedness in the case of fires.

On a visit to the hospital, this correspondent found multiple exposed wires at different wards in the old building. The hospital has undergone little to no renovation in recent years, and a meagre number of fire safety equipment was available.

"The wires are worn down. Those have not been changed in a while and the building needs renovation. Otherwise thousands of patients, attendants, doctors and staff are being put at risk every day," said Dr Sudip Halder of SBMCH Indoor Doctors' Association.

The hospital's coronavirus unit was established at a new, five-storied building which was inaugurated this year. On Monday, the fire broke

out from a short-circuit and was brought under control within thirty minutes, said the unit's in-charge Dr Maniruzzaman Shahin.

Md Ripon, an attendant to a patient admitted at the unit, said, "It was very sudden and we saw smoke spreading. It was very scary and my relative (the patient) started crying out of fear."

In June 2015, four people were injured after a fire broke out at the main building of SBMCH, said hospital sources.

Oliver Guda, executive director of Barishal's public works department told the Daily Star that the coronavirus unit was inaugurated recently despite there not being enough fire safety equipment. "This building needs a 240 kV generator but it only has a 60kV one which was borrowed from the nurses' unit on an emergency basis."

"Patients have to use heaters and air conditioners. The generator cannot support this and hence a fire broke out from a short-circuit," said

Oliver.

"The contractor will not be able to set up complete fire safety measures till August," he added.

Assistant Director of Fire Service and Civil Defense at Barishal, Faruque Hossain Sikder, said, "There are no fire safety measures at the old building or the coronavirus unit, save for a few fire extinguishers. We have visited these buildings and sent a letter to the authority to set up proper safety measures last year, but there has been no progress. They haven't received fire safety training either."

Faruque said they suggested the SBMCH administration to set up reservoir, high den, hose pipes and safe electric wires but these suggestions were not implemented.

"The coronavirus unit was opened in a hurry in March. There is a reservoir but hose pipe and other equipment are missing," he added.

The building where the Covid-19 patients are being treated, still has some finishing touches left to go.

Lift hasn't been set up there yet.

Meanwhile, SBMCH Director Bakir Hossain said they have sent a letter to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) for setting up complete fire safety measures and replacing the decades-old wiring at the old building. "But we did not receive any allocation," said Bakir.

"We opened the coronavirus unit earlier than planned because of the crisis. The unit only has a few extinguishers but there are sparks often as people are using heater," he said, "We have written to DGHS several times. We wrote to them just a couple of days ago but we haven't received any word. Now we have decided to stop the use of heaters."

On May 27, five patients died in a fire at the Covid-19 unit of United Hospital in Dhaka. Fire service later assessed that the unit was lacking in safety measures and violated the Bangladesh National Building Code.



**NOT THE TIME TO HIT THE BEACH!** With shutdown being eased, people in Chattogram city have started to flock Rani Rashmoni Ghat, popularly known as Kattali beach. Yesterday being the weekend, youths with horses, who remained out of work for the last couple of months, were also seen trying to lure customers for a ride along the beach. *Inset*, a spirited group of bikers on port city's Link Road, where many are not only ignoring physical distancing, masks or helmets but also common sense.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



## Heritage sites left uncared for in Sylhet

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Most archaeological sites in Sylhet, even the protected ones, have been left uncared for as neither the Department of Archaeology nor the local administration are being able to take proper care of them due to the coronavirus pandemic.

In recent visits to such sites in the city and nearby upazilas, this correspondent found that many of the protected sites' were being gradually grabbed and some were missing artifacts -- either misplaced, damaged or stolen.

A section of the Jaintiapur heritage site in Sylhet was being used as a parking lot for trucks while its megalithic remains were left unattended. Even the notice that says the site is protected has become worn out and almost impossible to read. There are total

seven heritage sites in Jaintiapur, which need immediate attention.

The condition of Laurer Garh at Sunamganj was not any better either.

As tourists are not flocking to the sites due to the recent shutdown, most archaeological sites lie neglected.

According to DoA, there are 17 protected sites in Sylhet division and around 700 archaeological monuments, which are not officially protected under the Antiquity Act.

Abdul Hye Al-Hadi, chief coordinator of Save the Heritage and Environment, said, "Archaeological monuments and sites are always neglected. During the pandemic when people are confined to home, some vested quarters are taking the advantage to destroy and grab those. As the archaeology

department doesn't have site or district offices, local administration should step forward to protect the heritage sites."

Archaeologist Dr Ataur Rahman, regional director of DoA, said, "It was quite difficult to protect all archaeological heritages in regular time as we don't have offices in many districts; this recent pandemic has made the situation even worse."

It is important to have district and site offices at every archaeologically enriched localities. "Our regional office for Chattogram and Sylhet is located in Cumilla and we are not able to look after the heritages, spread at every corner of the divisions," he mentioned.

He said they are urging the local administrations to take proper care of the sites, as they have responsibilities and allocation.

Contacted, Md Hannan Miah,

director general of DoA, said, "Some minor incidents of misplacing a few artifacts from archaeological sites are taking place during the pandemic, but nothing major will happen as we are alert in this regard. Maintenance of most sites is not being possible at this time due to a crisis of contractual workers. But we are trying to encourage them to work maintaining physical distance."

Local administrations are also helping them to keep the sites protected, he said.

Asked, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Jaintiapur Nahida Parvin said, "Usually, the archaeology department assigns people, mostly locals, to look after the sites. We will get in touch with them to inquire about the present condition and make sure they are being looked after."

## Three arrested in Rangpur for defrauding jobseekers

*Forged documents recovered, case filed*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police arrested three alleged frauds on Thursday afternoon on the charge of taking money from people in the name of giving them jobs at Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur.

Osman Gani (27), Tanvir Hossain (23) and Jahidul Islam (24) were held in front of the university in the city's Parkmore area where they went to collect money from a jobseeker, said police.

Forged recruitment documents, four bank cheques and four national ID cards were seized from their possession, said the law enforcers.

The gang already took Tk 4 lakh from another jobseeker, said Muhibbul Islam, a sub-inspector and in-charge of BRUR

outpost police.

Abu Hena Mostofa Kamal, registrar of BRUR, filed a case accusing the arrestees on Thursday night, said the SI.

Yesterday, a Rangpur court sent the fraudsters to jail when they were produced before it, the police officer further told The Daily Star.

According to sources at Begum Rokeya University, a circular was published four months ago to recruit manpower at hird-grade and and fourth-grade, through outsourcing.

The fraud gang used the circular as an opportunity, although the recruitment process, has remained halted due to coronavirus pandemic, said university sources.



Officers and personnel of Kamrangir Char Model Police Station gather at the yard for their daily round of exercise. The police station has adopted the routine, from 7:30 to 8:30 every evening, to boost their fitness and immune system. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

### COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGY

## Job creation, inclusive growth must be the centerpiece: study

UNB, Dhaka

Amid the growing impact of Covid-19 on the country, a recent study says job creation and inclusive growth must be the centerpiece of the recovery strategy.

The study, carried out by the Centre for Research and Information (CRI) said the risk of broadening the inequality gap is more than ever before, and jobless recovery might put the progress of the past decade at risk.

In addition, the demographic dividend that Bangladesh has been enjoying might quickly turn into demographic liability, it added.

Imran Ahmed, Deputy Executive Director at Shakti Foundation and a former research fellow at the McKinsey Global Institute; and Syed Mafiz Kamal, a senior analyst at CRI, co-authored the paper.

Low income and or labour-intensive jobs, which represent most of the informal sector and a significant share of SMEs, have been most affected. Many of these jobs are temporary and will come back as the economy opens. However, some of the job losses will be more permanent, it said.

According to CRI estimates, the "permanent" impact job loss is estimated to be around 6 million, which would nearly double the unemployment rate. It would affect approximately 24 million people.

Countries like Vietnam and New Zealand have announced that they are not opting for an immediate "V" shaped recovery; their policymakers are prioritising on employment generation and inclusive growth. The authors of the report believe a similar approach should be taken for Bangladesh.

## Gas supply restored to parts of Dhaka after 8hr disruption

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gas supply at seven areas of the capital was disrupted yesterday for nearly eight hours, after a distribution line caught fire.

The disruption occurred after Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) workers accidentally severed a pipe while working on a sewage line in West Shevrapara around 3am, said Shakhawat Hosen, deputy general manager of Titas Gas.

At 4:47am, a fire broke out at the severed gas line due to a spark from an electric transformer nearby, said Abdur Rahman, senior station officer of Mirpur Fire Station.

As the fire could not be doused immediately, the gas connection was switched off around 5am. The supply was restored around 1pm, after the pipeline was repaired.

"The fire was confined to the pipeline, so there was no major damage. But the valve at Amin Bazar had to be switched off," said Ali Mohammad Al Mamun, managing director of Titas Gas.

Gas supply in Dhanmondi, Shyamoli, Mohammadpur, Kallyanpur, Kazipara, Shevrapara and a part of Mirpur was unavailable during the period, he added.