

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day

Dhaka's Nightly Kafilas

by Samia Islam

Have you ever seen the night life in Dhaka city? It does not have any Hard Rock cafes or Planet Hollywoods to colour our lives but it does have a phenomenon that is possibly ubiquitous to this city alone (at least in this century). Long time ago when the Bedouins roamed the deserts with their merchandise one would find silent herds of camel carrying their wares to distant places and greener pastures. The ships of the desert would be seen going off in one disciplined file following one another. This was known as the *kafila*. Take the Gypsies for instance. These roving European brethren of the Bedouin were also not accustomed to staying in one place for long. In this case one would find their caravans going off into the sunset, not settling down anywhere for more than a few days. Then you had the first Frontier Settlers in North America. From what we have seen in the Client Eastwood movies they also appeared to have travelled to reclaim land for new settlements in Indian territories with a long line of carriages or coaches that would stretch on for miles carrying their life savings. This would at times attract bands of outlaws and robbers, whence we got the term *highway robbery*.

The culture of Gypsies, Bedouins and Frontier settlers haven't got much to do with this write-up though. Rather it's specifically about their indigenous form of transportation — the caravans, trailers and kafilas. The monotonous lines of weary camels and horses that invoked so much curiosity in us, and imbued us with a sense of adventure that overcomes the mind when we read Steinbeck wherein the hero is off to strange and dangerous territory in search of his identity and a place to call his own. To fight all odds with the shotgun slung in his saddle. Not fearing the bandits or the enraged and unpredictable

Indians portrayed to be the symbols of notoriety.

A similar caravan can be seen plying the streets of Dhaka at night. In the 20th century, they are not living, breathing, snoring animals but long lines of trucks carrying all sorts of things from the city to the northern districts of the country. Due to regulations, these trucks don't have permission to enter the city limits before sundown. So they wait in the outskirts of the city (unless special provisions are made) till it's time to get in. Once inside they unload their wares. The merchandise mainly comprises supplies of vegetables, fruits and perishables from the villages in the northern districts to the capital. Soon they are ready to start off once again with truck loads of goods that are necessary to meet the demands in the markets of the districts and towns of their origin. They go in single file making their way through the darkness. However, they do know where they're going and where they've been unlike the heroes in the movies. That doesn't make it any less scary or unsafe. A solitary vehicle if waylaid has lesser probabilities of getting away. So they flock together and find comfort in the knowledge that they are not alone. It is hard to believe that even with the 21st century when criminals are using Cyber technology, we in our country still live in fear of highway robbers and bandits. This doesn't, however, imply that dacoits are less fearsome than computer hackers or mad bombers or strange cult followers. When one is all alone, so many things can go wrong. The mind could play tricks if nothing else. It is therefore quite appreciable on the parts of the truckers to have devised this age-old technique in a new package to match the times. This gives them a sense of security and a touch of the days of yore to the observers.



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina receiving a bouquet from ex-BNP MP Matiur Rahman Chowdhury on the occasion of his formal joining of the party in the city yesterday.

BNP using EC : WP

By Staff Correspondent

The politburo of the Bangladesh Workers' Party criticised the government for influencing the Election Commission (EC) for the benefit of the ruling party.

They criticised the 'farcical' decision of the EC to hold by elections few days ahead of the general elections and then postponing the same on the pretext of natural calamity. The credibility of the EC for its own actions will now come under scrutiny, they added.

They also criticised the EC for having raised the election expenses to 9 lakhs from its earlier limit of 3 lakhs.

Rather than stretching its tenure, they urged that the ruling party should take measures to hold general elections under a caretaker government.

BIGU concerned over fire-deaths

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union (BIGU) expressed its deep concern at the death of 9 workers in fire incidents at *Tasaka Fashion Ltd* and *Paa Apparels* recently.

They condemned the management of these factories for its negligence regarding the safety measures of the workers and criticised the government for its failure to ensure factory regulations in the garment industries.