

Can Dhaka Traffic Be Improved?

by A M Eusuf

In the recent past, to facilitate improved traffic movement, a number of thoroughfares have been declared to be one-way roads. Although all types of vehicles violate this rule occasionally, the rickshaws almost always do it. The New Baily Road is a glaring example of such violations.



Traffic violations take place in the very presence of the traffic police on duty. In the past, they would at least try to bring some semblance of sanity. Now they look the other way.

THAT the traffic situation in Dhaka city is in a terrible mess, is an understatement. What are the reasons for this deteriorating situation? The reasons are many and complex. One reason, of course, is that although Dhaka has grown from a small town at the time of partition, to a metropolis of more than 8 million people, and traffic has grown from several hundred motorised vehicles, horse-carts and rickshaws, to hundreds of thousand motorised and non-motorised vehicles, particularly rickshaws, the road network remains virtually the same. There have been cosmetic changes here and there, and beautification of some roads, road islands and road dividers, but not increase to road mileage has been very negligible. Therefore, when there is a pressure on a major road due to some reason, there is hardly any alternative road to take.

Dhaka is growing towards the north. The main posh areas of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara are located towards the north of the city centre. Towards further north, we have the international airport, Utara township and Tongi. Until recently only two main roads linked up these areas with the city centre — the Airport Road and the Tongi Diversion Road, both of which merged with the New Airport Road at Mahakhal. So from that point onwards there was only one road — the New Airport Road. There is another road towards the north — the Rampura Road via Baridhara. But until recently the condition of this road was so deplorable that it could not be used as a trunk road. I don't know whether in the meantime the condition of the road has improved. If so, a large number of north-bound vehicles can now take this road.

There is yet another road which, if used as a thoroughfare, can ease traffic congestion to a considerable extent. I am talking about the road which passes through the Dhaka Cantonment and meets the New Airport Road at a point beyond the railway gate. If the Cantonment road is opened to north bound traffic (excluding bus and truck) the pressure on the New Airport Road from Mahakhal to the railway gate will be considerably eased. In this connection it may be mentioned that a road has been constructed connecting the New Airport Road with Mirpur at Ibrahimpur (Kachukhet Market) at a considerable cost. But the benefits of this road could not be realised as part of the road remains closed to traffic although it has been completed almost a year ago.

During the last few years several new link roads have been constructed. These are Bijoy Sarani, Panthapath and the road linking the Tongi Diversion Road from in front of Sonargaon Hotel. The benefits of these roads are there for everybody to see. Unfortunately, construction of link roads falls far short of requirement and expectation. For instance, Bijoy Sarani should have been further extended to link Old Air-

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At any time, about 30 to 40 per cent of the rickshaws on the roads are empty. They move around in search of a fare. Pressure on the road could be eased if empty rickshaws are not allowed to move aimlessly.

Yet another factor contributing to traffic congestion is the deplorable condition of the roads. Most of the city roads are

in a sorry state of disrepair. All

which causes tremendous traffic jam.

Footpaths and a good part of the road is always occupied by hawkers and vendors. The road surface available for movement of traffic is so reduced in the commercial areas that traffic congestion is inevitable.

In the recent past, a lot has been said about political meetings on roads. There is no doubt that such meetings cause serious dislocation to traffic movement. It has also become fashionable to hold various other types of meetings — religious, social, cultural and the like, blocking whole or part of the road. A road is a road, should be used as such and for no other purpose.

Rallies and processions have become very common. Most of the time, irrespective of the number of participants, the road or the lane is totally blocked. The traffic is seriously dislocated. As rallies and processions cannot be banned it has to be ensured that the procession/rally does not occupy the whole road. The traffic should be allowed to move normally.

Outdated traffic signals contribute to traffic congestion. In most of the traffic intersections where there are traffic lights, the green light allows traffic to move from opposite directions and also allows right turn. The traffic is, therefore, at collision course. The traffic lights at New Elephant Road will illustrate

this point. In more advanced countries, this would not cause much of a problem as traffic going straight will move first and those turning right or left as the case may be will wait for their turn. But not so in Bangladesh: there is a mad rush to cross the intersection and a serious traffic jam is created. Traffic lights should be organised in such a manner that the traffic is not at a collision course.

At some intersection the synchronisation of time is not very logical. A good number of vehicles take a right turn towards Minto Road at Shahbagh intersection. But the green light indicating right turn remains on for not more than a few seconds which allows only a few vehicles to take the right turn.

At some other intersections the traffic light and the traffic police work at cross purposes. Take the case of Panthapath-Green Road intersection. There is traffic light, but there is also a platform for the traffic police at the centre of the road. Most of the time the hand signals shown by the traffic police on duty, who cannot see the traffic lights, are opposite to what has been indicated by the traffic lights. This creates unnecessary confusion for the road users.

It also happens in many cases that the traffic police on duty allows traffic to move although the red light is on, frustrating the road users who have the right of way at that particular point of time. Such actions

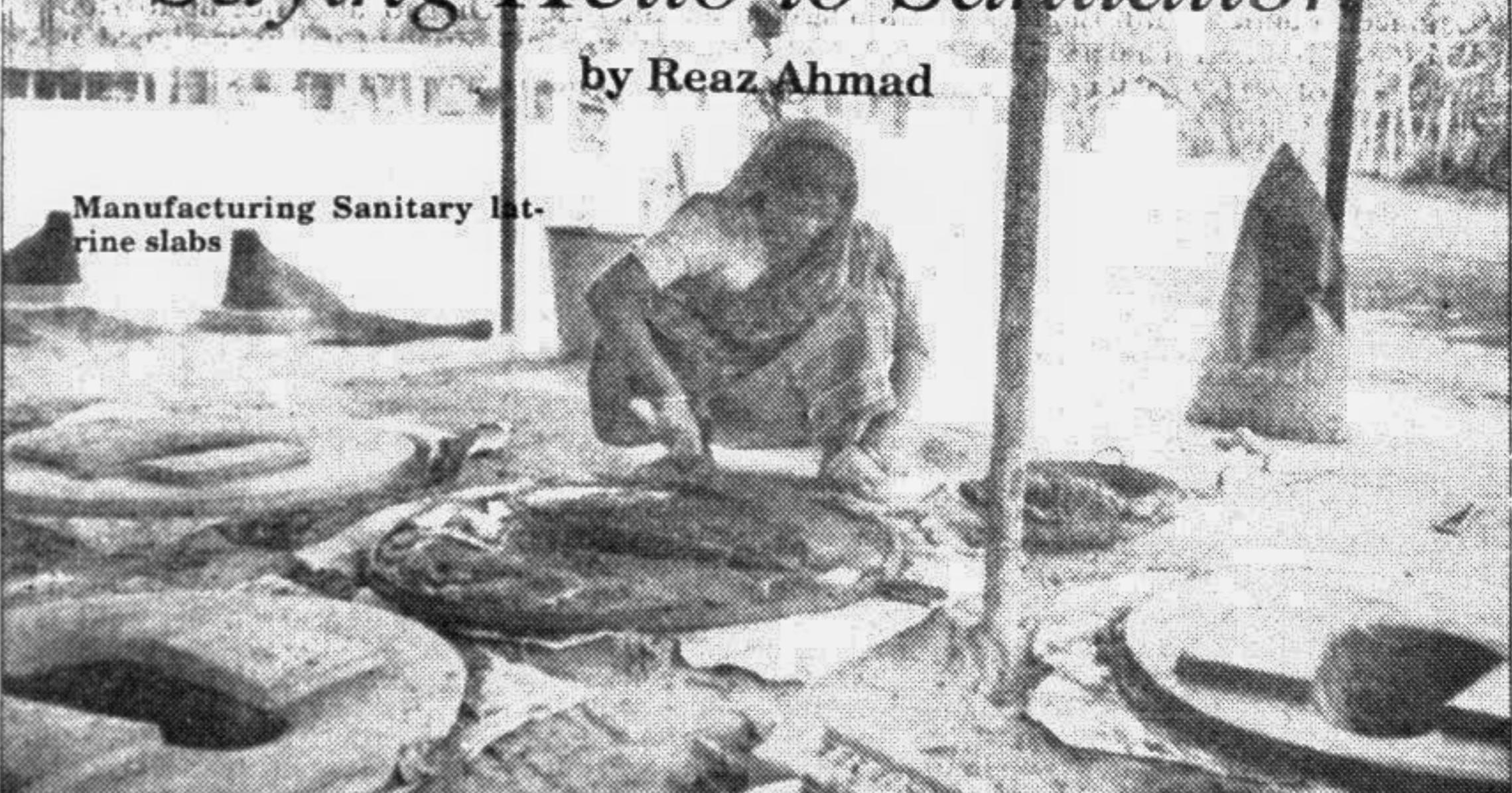
are ostensibly taken to ease traffic flow. I don't think this helps to untangle the traffic jam. Normal traffic movement should not be obstructed.

One major cause of traffic congestion is uncoordinated digging of roads by various agencies — WASA, T&T Board and others. Such diggings are required to lay pipes and cables and therefore, unavoidable. What is avoidable, however, is digging the same road over and again, for which coordination amongst the various agencies is a must.

The causes of traffic congestion are many and varied. One can go on and on listing the causes. In the foregoing paragraph, I have mentioned some of the major causes. In the following paragraphs I shall make some suggestions for improving the situation.

Saying Hello to Sanitation

by Reaz Ahmad



OUTHERWISE a serene typical village, Shishnagar

— one specialty has turned it to be unique for which the villagers can take pride.

One hundred households in Shishnagar under Chowgachha

thana of Jessorh have built one sanitary latrine each.

Nasima Begum, Director of

Shishu Niloy, says even before

her organisation became a

partner to NGO Forum for

Drinking Water and Sanitation

in 1989, it used to link up

motivation on water and sanitation

with its other programmes like

child education, health and

group formation for savings.

Apart from Shishnagar,

Shishu Niloy, a Jessorh-based

NGO, scored hundred per cent

success in sanitation coverage

at some other villages as well.

These are: Mohammadpur,

Phulsara and Shoula under

Chowgachha thana and Khatia

under Sadar thana in Jessorh.

Shishnagar is a hard-to-reach

remote village of Chowgachha

where people belonging to

Hindu and Muslim communites

have been living in peace

from time immemorial.

Shishu Niloy started its ac-

tivities in Shishnagar back in

1988. However, its water and

sanitation programme got into

motion with sinking of a tube-

well in the village in 1990. Yet,

not before three more years

passed by, that Shishu Niloy

ventured sanitary latrine drive

in Shishnagar.

There were hardly five tube-

wells in Shishnagar and again

not in very good shape — it was then when we

started sinking tube-wells in

1990," recalls Nasima. Only

five per cent homesteads in Shishnagar

had sanitary latrine attached

in 1993 and the rest

were not even aware of health

hazards they themselves ex-

posed to by discharging excreta

under the open sky in the

fields, says Nasima.

Shishu Niloy chose Shishnagar

for setting a target of hun-

dred per cent coverage with an

aim to create an example that

neighbouring villages would feel

inspired. Besides, there was

enough life and sincerity among

villagers. "It was like a candle to

be lit; Shishu Niloy lit it, and

the light spreads, spreads and

spreads," — describes an active

worker in this field.

Initially, things did not move as fast and uninterrupted as it is now.

There were people not at all en-

lightened and used to argue about

the necessity of hygienic

sanitation.

They even sometimes took it as an unwanted

intrusion into their private life

that wants to command their

drinking, bathing and washing

habits.

In 1995, continues Shivani,

government sanctioned

13 sets

of

sanitary

latrines

for

the

village

and

so

on

on