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## Down to Earth

### A look at rickshawpullers' life

By A S M Nurunnabi

The teeming rickshaws are mainly blamed for the anarchic traffic situation in Dhaka city. Rickshaws are Dhaka's speciality. But the way they are fast proliferating, in most cases without proper licence, they are becoming a cause for our horrible nightmare.

According to an unofficial estimate, their number in the city exceeds more than five lakh, nearly four times the licensed ones. Although the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) reportedly stopped issuing new licences long ago, more and more rickshaws hit the city streets like locusts through spurious means. And the sheer burden of their overwhelming numbers chokes the city roads.

Yet the stark reality is that in the context of our socio-economic milieu, these huge numbers of rickshaws provide equally numerous jobs for the support of an equally large number of families.

A sample survey\* on the rickshawpullers recently provided glimpses of the life of the city's rickshawpullers.

A brief description of the results of the survey bearing on some of the basic aspects of their life is given below.

Obviously, the city rickshawpullers constitute a substantial part of urban labour force. The survey reveals that a higher percentage of the rickshawpullers belongs to the age group between 20 and 35 years. A smaller percentage, even of the age group 45 to 55, or 60 are also found engaged in this profession because mainly in such families the adult sons are indifferent to their parents. A major percentage of members of their families are found to be illiterate and not engaged in any occupation.

An important fact that has emerged from the survey is that a large proportion of the rickshawpullers has no licence. The hassles in obtaining licence, which was stopped long ago, have spawned a new phenomenon: a good number of fake licences bearing the same number and formats as those of genuine ones are available, a corruption commonly practised with the help of evil social ele-

ments.

Although a large proportion of them were previously in other occupations including agriculture, the main motive for their taking to rickshawpulling is stated to be its higher income from it. They survey has indicated, however, that a good number of those who have opted for this profession, are not happy with their new occupation in spite of the comparatively higher income because it involves strenuous labour. On this account, some of them take to other jobs as part-time occupations like hawking of various articles on footpaths.

In most cases, the rickshawpullers do not own the vehicles. In such cases, they ply vehicles owned by others on fixed payments mostly on half-day shifts. A major proportion of them live in kutch houses and city slums.

A majority of them frequently falls victims of physical ailments and is subject to harassment by law-enforcing agencies. A substantial portion of them state that they receive support from the owners of their vehicles in case of financial difficulties. A good number of them cherish the dream of having their own vehicles in future.

On the basis of the data obtained during the survey, some pertinent observations were made which include the following:

(i) Though most of the rickshawpullers are found to earn comparatively higher income, they are not satisfied with the calling because it involves hard labour. Moreover, whatever be their earning from it, it is hardly sufficient to enable them to live with their families free from hardship in these days of rising prices. Besides, there is also no guarantee for a stable income from this occupation.

By and large, the city rickshawpullers have a precarious financial existence. In this context, a story was told by a rickshaw passenger who was riding a rickshaw whose operator was wearing a shirt which was such a tattered condition that most part of his back was bare. That spectacle struck a cord of

### Gano Forum's 'human chain'

By Staff Correspondent

The Gano Forum will organise a 'human chain' in the city Monday to protest eviction of slum dwellers without rehabilitation.

The human chain beginning at 10 am will cover Zero point, National Press Club, Shabagh Crossing, Hotel Sonargaon, Farm gate, Old Airport, Mahakhal and Banani. The programme will end at 11:00 a.m.

Gano Forum general secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik at a meeting at Amtoli Math at Mahakhal yesterday criticised the government for evicting slum dwellers without arranging their rehabilitation.

He termed the government drive 'a move against fundamental and constitutional rights of the country's citizens'.

He called upon the government to initiate rehabilitation programme to provide habitat for the evicted slum dwellers.

The point in telling the story is that if we can take a compassionate view of a rickshawpuller's shaky financial existence as a whole without going into unnecessary haggling over fares and pay up without questioning the agreed fare, this may encourage taking a humane view of the financial straits that a rickshawpuller normally goes through as part of his life.

(ii) In order to enable them to earn some additional income after their daily fixed shifts, some scope may be created at public and private levels for them to get vocational training in such fields as cottage industries, TV and radio sets repairing and other associated fields.

(iii) Forcible clearance of slums by authorities in most cases brings great suffering to many rickshawpullers who live with their families in slum areas. For their rehabilitation it is imperative that their housing conditions be improved. For this purpose, low-cost housing schemes on easy loans with low rates of interest may be a great help for them.

(iv) In order to ensure their protection from harassment and unfair demands from owners and other quarters, there is need for their greater organisation through co-operative societies or unions which may look after their interests not only in the short run but also in the long run when rickshaws will be abolished in the city, with suitable schemes providing them with training, guidance and financial support for their changing over to other more stable professions like operating mechanised vehicles or working as skilled workers in mills, factories or other enterprises, particularly driving 'baby taxis'.

### 3 hurt in N'ganj trawler capsizes

NARAYANGANJ, Sept 10: Three passengers of a trawler were injured today when it capsized in the Sitalakha river after being rammed by an oil tanker near Tanbar area, reports BSS.

Police said they seized the Siddhinganj-bound oil tanker and arrested its Master, Fazlul Haque, in this connection.

The trawler, which was carrying sand, capsized at about 10 am.

The injured persons were admitted to a local clinic. A case was registered with Narayanganj thana in this connection.

Two killed by lightning in Pirojpur

PIROJPUR, Sept 10: Two people were killed by lightning at village Sonakura in Kaukhali thana this morning. Reports UNB.

The dead were identified as Abdur Rahman Hawladar, 35, and his nephew Noor Mohammad, 20.

Villagers said the incident occurred while they were working in the field. Two cows were also killed by the lightning.

### 17 hurt as BCL factions clash in Sirajganj

From Our Correspondent SIRAJGANJ, Sept 10: At least 17 people were injured, three of them seriously, in a clash between two factions of BCL at Tarash thana headquarters this morning.

The clash was sequel to yesterday's clash between the two factions — one led by BCL leader and Tarash Degree College V.P. Abdus Salam and the other by BCL leader, Jewel.

Both the groups used lethal weapons and exploded crackers during the clash.

### Muggers

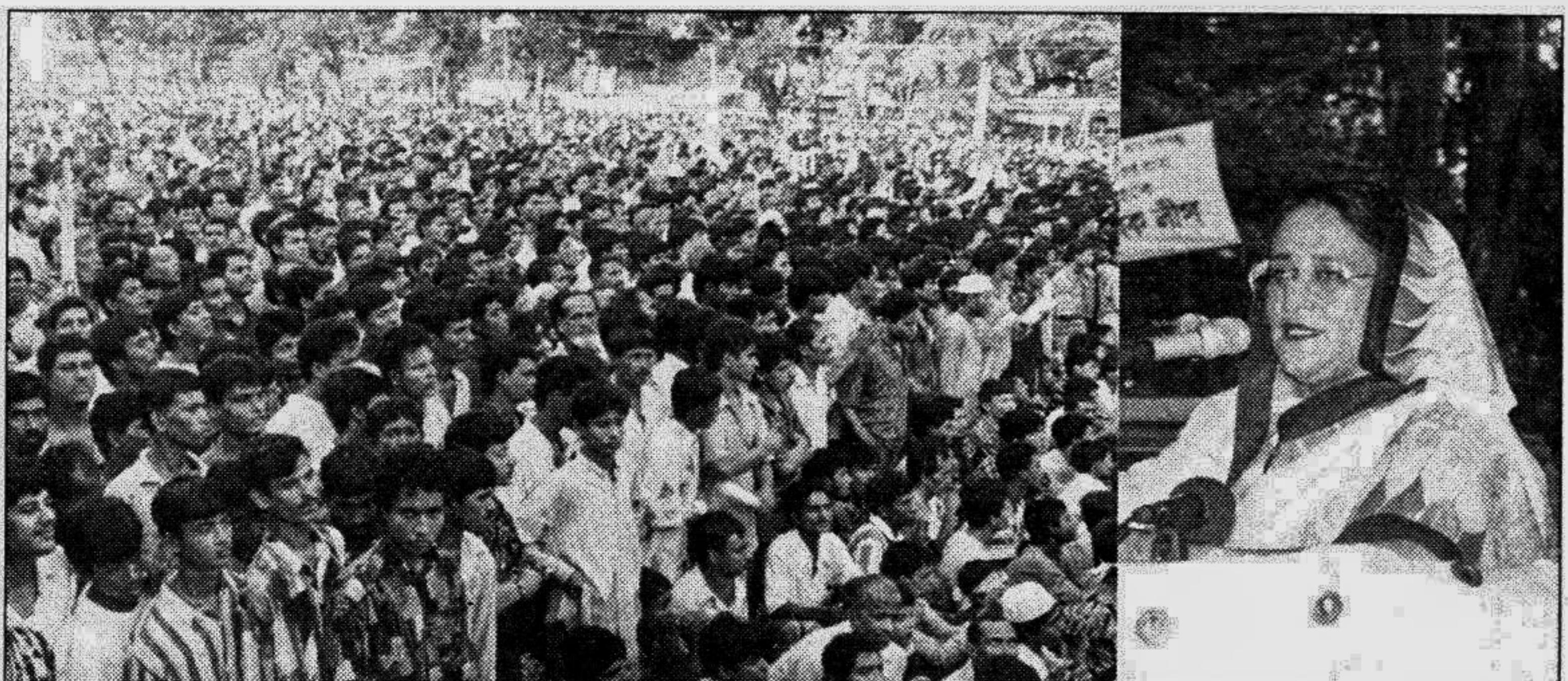
From page 1 Juring constable Rezaul and Ansar Manik. They were admitted to Rajarbagh police hospital.

Babul later told police that his accomplices who managed to escape were Sharab, Monir and autorickshaw driver Iqbal.

A departmental case was filed.

### BNP jt meeting today

A joint meeting of BNP and its front organisations will be held at the party central office in the city at 11 am today, reports UNB.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing a public meeting at Kalabagan Playground in the city yesterday. — PID photo

### Attack on Kurigram DSA office: SI closed

From Our Correspondent

KURIGRAM, Sept 10: A tense situation is prevailing in the town following attack and ransacking of District Sports Association (DSA) office here yesterday.

One sub-inspector of police was closed to police lines yesterday for negligence of duty during the incident.

A group of ruling party activists yesterday brought out a procession in the town demanding cancellation of election to DSA executive committee for what they said enlistment of 'false voters' through some thana committees of DSA.

At one stage, the processionists attacked the DSA office and damaged furniture.

They also assaulted some DSA officials in presence of SI T Azad Chowdhury.

Soon after the incident, ADC (General) and police superintendent visited the spot and talked to DSA officials and journalists. Later, SP closed SI Azad to police lines.

A case was filed with sadar thana in this connection.

Earlier on September 7, district AL president Nazir Hossain at a press conference at his residence alleged enlistment of 'false voters' in the voter list. He demanded cancellation of election to DSA executive body.

Pakistan was once the largest buyer of Bangladesh tea. Once Pakistan used to buy up to 18 million kgs per year though it came down to 5 million kgs last year. So the visit is quite important for us, Chowdhury said.

Other officials said a decision has been taken to hold tea

### Pak team due Tuesday, to help boost tea export

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Sept 10: A Pakistani tea delegation arrives here on Tuesday for talks with Tea Board officials to help increase Bangladesh's tea export to Pakistan, sources said.

The 14-member delegation will be headed by Pakistan Tea Association Chairman Hanif Janoo, Chairman of Bangladesh Tea Growers Association AQI Chowdhury told this correspondent today.

A joint communiqué is expected to be signed between the two countries to increase the volume of tea export to Pakistan.

Tea brokers and traders said tea export declined in recent years due to competition from Kenyan tea.

Chowdhury however said increase in home consumption is another reason behind fall in exports.

He said home consumption has now increased to 30 million kgs from around 15 million kgs 10 years ago.

If the increasing trend in internal consumption continues without increase in production, our export of tea may be threatened, he observed.

About 55 million kgs of tea were produced in 156 gardens in the country. Bangladesh tea is exported to 25 countries of the world.

Meanwhile, Pakistani buyers, for the first time in this season, lent active support to weekly tea auction held here on Tuesday, ahead of the visit of Pakistan delegation.

Average price of tea was Tk 56.55 per kg, an increase of Tk 2. brokers said.

### Gulam Nabi Azad to quit as Cong SG if Sonia....

BANGALORE, Sept 10: Congress general secretary Gulam Nabi Azad today vowed to quit his post if the party president Sonia Gandhi's margin of victory was less than one lakh votes in the bitterly fought election for Bellary Lok Sabha seat against BJP Sushma Swaraj, reports PTI.

If it (margin) is less than one lakh, I will be the first to quit from general secretary," Azad, who is in-charge of party's Karnataka's affairs and who spearheaded the party's polls management in the high-voltage contest in Bellary, told reporters here.

Azad asserted that the Congress would be able to secure majority on its own in the assembly polls in Karnataka.

### 2 quit Cong

Congress party suffered a setback here today when two of its leaders resigned in West Bengal, the United News of India said.

Pankaj Banerjee and Sadhan Pande quit the party alleging the Congress had failed to effectively combat West Bengal's 22 years of Communist rule.

### Maneka says —

Union social justice minister Maneka Gandhi has questioned Sonia Gandhi's credentials to become prime minister saying she had not even done any social work.

It is true she (Sonia) is a foreigner. But more than that, she has not done any social work. She does not have any training. We are not born politicians, but you learn, study and most important you feel you should do something. Gandhi said in reply to a question in Star TV's 'Janata Ki Adalat.'

### Calcutta mourns death of Pulak Bandopadhyay

CALCUTTA, Sept 10: A pall of gloom descended on the music industry here with the tragic death of lyricist Pulak Bandopadhyay who had enthralled thousands of music lovers over the past five decades, reports PTI.

Bandopadhyay's body, clad in Dhoti and Kurta, was recovered from the Hooghly at 1100 hours yesterday after a joint search by the river traffic police, the Howrah police and Calcutta police since Tuesday evening. His son Piyal identified the body.

A suicide note by the 69-year-old, blaming no one for his death, was recovered yesterday by the local police from his residence at Salkia in Howrah district.

Expressing shock at the untimely death of Bandopadhyay, noted Bengali singer-composer Jatileswar Mukhopadhyay said this would create a void in contemporary Bengali music.

Speaking amid sobs, singer Nirmala Mishra, who had immortalised many of his songs, described Bandopadhyay as an excellent lyricist.

Shyamal Gupta, considered a member of so-called 'Trinity' along with Bandopadhyay and Gouriprasanna Mazumdar said his death was an irreplacable loss to Bengali modern music.

Expressing shock at his death West Bengal Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, said he had enriched contemporary Bengali music with his lyrics.

### 8 dacoits held in Jhenidah

From Our Correspondent JHENIDAH, Sept 10: Villagers caught eight dacoits and later handed them over to Kaliaganj police this morning.

Police said, a gang of about 12 dacoits were returning after committing dacoity in the houses of Nomi Gopal and Moti at village Gopalpur.

When they reached near Keyaband at around 6 am, the villagers surrounded them and caught eight of the 12 dacoits. The rest four, however, managed to flee.

The villagers recovered looted goods from the dacoits and handed them over to Kaliaganj police.

Police identified the dacoits as Nasiruddin, Abdul Karim, Minto, Liton, Abdur Rahman, Razzak and Mannan.



The last frontier! The road divider on Biswa Road in the city has become the last resort for Zulekha Begum (with a baby in her lap) and others evicted from a slum at Sabujbagh last month.

—Star photo by Sk Enamul Haq

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