



hello dhaka

Weekly weather forecast for the city	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	High 27C Low 21C Overcast, storms, humid.
	High 29C Low 24C Clouds and sun, warm, humid.	High 29C Low 24C Clouds and sun, warm, humid.	High 29C Low 24C Humid with clouds and sun.	High 28C Low 23C Mostly cloudy and very humid.	High 28C Low 23C Mostly cloudy and very humid.	High 27C Low 21C Very humid, Saturday	

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Trains timetable turns into a farce

MIZANUR KHAN
Most trains that move to and from Dhaka's Kamalapur railway station cannot maintain a time schedule because of run-down locomotives, dilapidated railway network and poor management, causing immense sufferings to passengers.

Late departures and arrivals of trains have become a commonplace over the years, passengers allege. Sitting at the platform with their baggage, many passengers said sometimes they have to wait several hours to catch trains.

"I can hardly recall the last time we started from Dhaka and

passengers from the capital to different destinations across the country while bring another 7,000 into the city a day, according to Ashok Kumar Dey, station manager of Kamalapur station.

Bangladesh Railway (BR) presently runs ten local trains between Narayanganj and Dhaka, one between Dewanganj and Dhaka and three commuter trains from the capital to Jamalpur and Brahmanbaria everyday.

"Intercity trains are late by maximum 30 to 40 minutes but passengers have to wait for local trains even for two to three hours," said NC Shaha, station master of Kamalapur, standing at the plat-

metre-gauge and broad-gauge lines are 36 to 50-year-old, 54 are 31 to 35-year-old and 86 are 21 to 30-year-old.

Sources said successive governments ignored railway sector during Pakistan regime and also after independence. The country now has 28,000 km of paved roads while it had only 400 km when the British rule ended in 1947. But the railway network of 2,880 km at that time, mostly set up before 1905, still remains almost unchanged.

"We do not have adequate number of engines. Sometimes we have to take engine from a train and fix it to another, which takes time. If a train arrives late, it forces us to change timetable for others, which is unavoidable," said the station manager.

He said they try to run the trains on time but most of the Dhaka-bound trains are always late. "That is why the departing trains cannot also leave Kamalapur on time."

The punctuality rate for departure is 90 percent for the intercity, 85 percent for mail or express and 75 percent for local trains. The intercity trains' punctuality rate for arrival is 90 percent, mail or express 75 percent and local trains 60 percent.

On October 3, the punctuality rate was 94 percent for intercity, 76 percent for mail-express and only 47 for local trains, according to the railway control room records.

"We cannot maintain the timetable of local trains now because of the route-line damage during the recent devastating flood. On Dhaka-Narayanganj route we cannot run the train at a speed of more than 20 km per hour, which was 40 km earlier," said Mohammad Belaluddin, divisional transportation officer (DTO).

Intercity Jamuna that starts



Passengers disembark the Surma mail from Sylhet even before it has come to a halt. This train scheduled to reach at 9:45 am yesterday arrived 33 minutes late.

PUNCTUALITY RATE OF PASSENGER TRAINS		
TRAINS	DEPARTURE	ARRIVAL
Intercity	90%	90%
Mail/Express	85%	75%
Local	75%	60%

Source: Railway Control Room

reached our destination on time," said Arifur Rahman, a government official who often travels to Lalmonirhat by train along with his family.

Rahman's three children, bored and impatient with waiting at the station to catch a train for every trip, would prefer bus journey next time when they go to their village in the northern district to meet their grandmother.

Every day 42 trains including 16 intercity, eight mail or express, 11 local and three commuter trains depart from or reach at Kamalapur, the biggest station in the country.

They carry around 9,000 pas-

engers from the capital to different destinations across the country while bring another 7,000 into the city a day, according to Ashok Kumar Dey, station manager of Kamalapur station.

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Intercity Jamuna that starts

Intercity Agnibeena (Dhaka-Jagannathganj Ghat) and Egarosindhu (Dhaka-Kishoreganj) run very late as they move with same engine and compartments. "In some cases we run three trains with only one rack in a day. We just change the names," said Belaluddin.

Intercity Jamuna that starts

from Tarakandi at 2:30am and arrives at Kamalapur at 8:40 in the morning, turns into Agnibeena and moves for Jagannathganj Ghat within next 40 minutes and reaches the destination at 15:20pm. The same train, changing its name, starts again after 30 minutes and returns to the capital at 22:00pm.

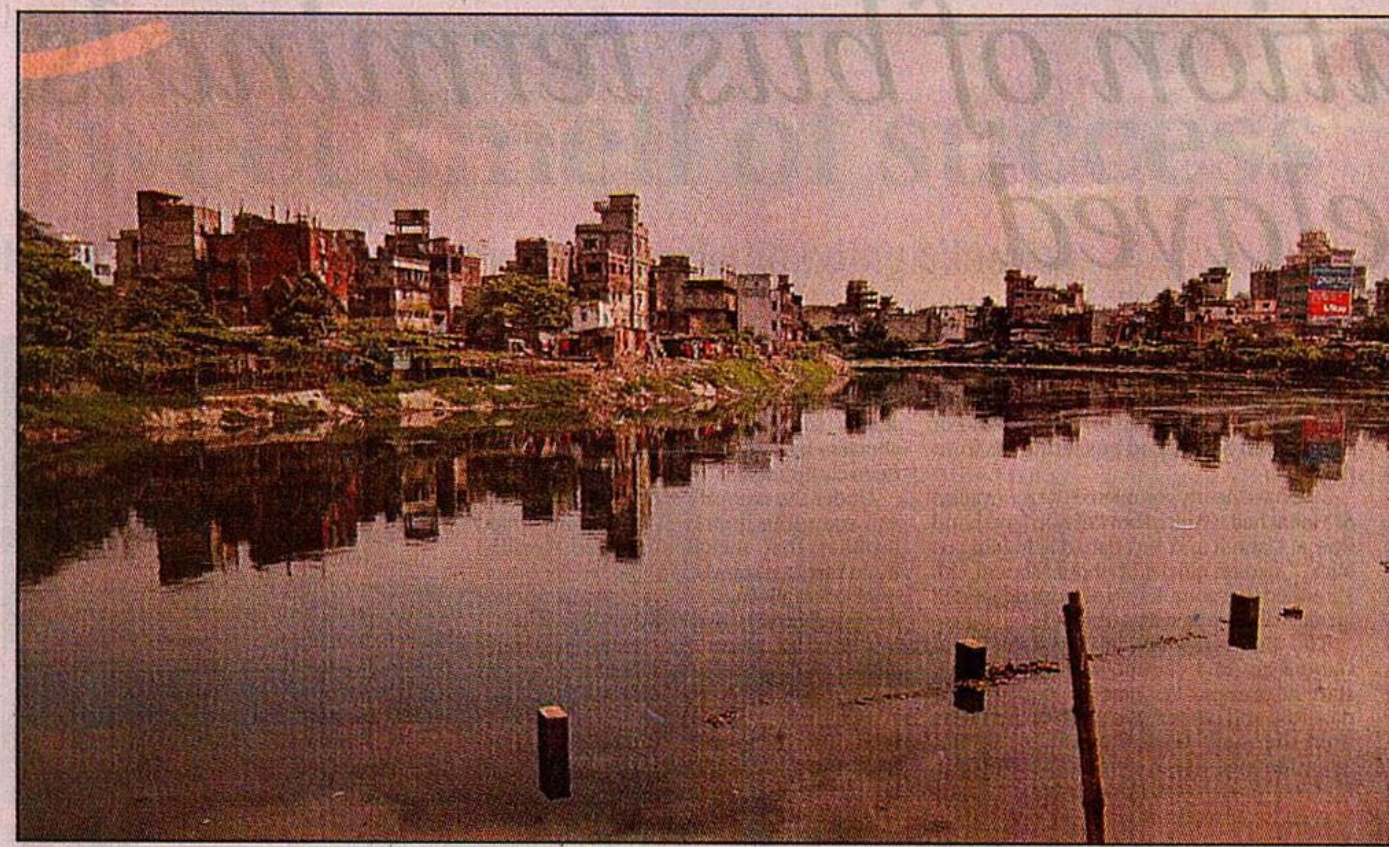
Sometimes trains are late because of accidents, mechanical problems, poor signalling, engine failure and negligence of railway staff. "Accident is however still very rare. It happens once in a month on average," said the DTO. Train accidents are frequent on Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes.

Railway officials also blame smugglers for delay of trains specially on bordering routes. When the trains run along the 50 km border with India from Akhaura to Comilla, smugglers often stop trains by pulling chains to upload or download their goods.

Trains on Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet routes almost

every day experience delays for the illegal activities of the smugglers.

Passengers allege they do not find any official booklet on trains' timetable. Bangladesh Railway's booklet has not been updated for last one year but a book written and published by a railway official is being sold in the ticket counters at Tk20.



The city's waste water accumulated in Dholaikhal -- which has now been converted into a sluice gate by Wasa authorities -- is pumped into the Buriganga.

Dholaikhal in name only

SULTANA RAHMAN
A Dhaka canal crucial to storm-water retention has ended up in mindless encroachment and breakneck construction of residential and commercial structures, logging up 1,353 square kilometres with rainwater in monsoon.

The Deb Dholaikhal, popularly known as the Dholaikhal that has shrunk to a narrow drain, was flowing through the heart of Old Dhaka to provide internal communication four decades ago.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is now constructing a box culvert filling up the western end of the canal to pump out stagnated rainwater in a slapdash plan that reminds Dhaka residents of how most of the waterway lost out to encroachment in South Jatrabari, Mirhazirbagh, Kajla and Kutubkhali, stopping the water flow into the citywide

canal network.

DCC Chief Engineer Idris Mian said Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority) did not file a complaint against what he said was development work on the canal.

"Waste from nearby factories collects in the stagnated water with no outlet for disposal," Dholaikhal area resident Rokeya Begum says.

Part of the canal dried up because of the DND embankment construction and a new road a local brick-kiln owner built across it dumping truckloads of earth. The brick-kiln manager says the road would be removed in monsoon.

"Most of the Dholaikhal was sold out years ago when some influential people in collaboration with officials of the Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's Office demarcated their plots paying land tax in their names," Jatrabari resident Shamsul Alam

alleges.

Initial occupiers of the canal have sold the plots to hundreds of city dwellers. "Local people are seen dumping truckloads of solid waste into it in a bid to grab it," said a resident in Kajla area.

Dholaikhal area was named after the canal excavated in 1608-1610 by Islam Khan, the first Mughal Subedar of Dhaka. Crossed by an iron suspension bridge connecting Fraashganj (French-ganj) and Gandaria, it once represented the lower course of the Balu River.

The canal took off from this river near Demra and went southwest through Dhaka to join the Buriganga near the Mill Barrack. It branched off into two channels, one northward and the other westward right through the city crossing Dhaka-Tejgaon Road.

For many years, Dholaikhal was used for boat race and other sports, including swimming, and

the banks of the canal were abuzz with annual fairs on festive occasions. One of the famous piers was the Panch Bhai Ghat at Rakanpur that the Hindu community used to immerse images of deities into the waters of Dholaikhal after puja.

Dhaka city boasted 26 natural canals, including the Dholaikhal, but none of them have been saved and the consequences can be felt in monsoon when waterlogging halts city activity. A recent inter-ministerial meeting has marked 26 canals for immediate recovery, but little progress has been made.

Although the dredging of the 17-kilometre Buriganga comes to an end, the authorities have allegedly ignored the need for saving the dying canals, including the Dholaikhal, which connects the Buriganga with the city's peripheral towns and villages.

Zero Point displays wrong info about distance of cities

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON
How far is Mymensingh from Dhaka? The answer is 122 kilometres. But the structure at Zero Point in Dhaka says it is 193 km believe it or not.

Distances of major cities from Dhaka inscribed on the Zero Point structure have not been updated for long, although road distance of many cities have changed over the years because of the construction of new link roads and bridges.

According to Roads and Highways Department (RHD), distance between the capital and Mymensingh was 193 km when the route was through Muktagachha via Tangail. The distance reduced by 71 km when a direct road was constructed in early 80's.

The structure at Zero Point reads the distance of Pabna from Dhaka is 164 km (via Nagarbari-

Aricha ferry service). But that particular route does not exist now as Nagarbari Ghat has been shifted to Paturia shortening the distance by several km.

Moreover, most of the vehicles now use the road via Jamuna Bridge after its inauguration in 1998 and the distance of Pabna from Dhaka through this route is 236 km. But the Zero Point's structure does not mention the distance through this new route.

The distances of only 17 districts from the capital are inscribed on the round shaped structure, although it has enough space to show distances of all 64 districts. The structure has 16 slabs in its four parts and each slab has space to display distances of four places.

Almost every big city has such a centre point where the distances of other cities from that particular point are displayed. The municipi-

pal or city councils usually update the information time to time with the development of road communication.

Dhaka's Zero Point was marked during military ruler Hussain Muhammad Ershad's regime and the structure was built at the road intersection in front of GPO to display information for convenience of the city residents.

Zero Point got a new name "Noor Hossain Square" after the fall of General Ershad, as a mark of respect to Noor Hossain, a political activist who was shot dead by the police at that place during anti-Ershad movement on November 10, 1987.

Surprisingly the structure at Zero Point has now become an orphan as officials at Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Roads and Highways Department or the Department of Public Works do not know which department

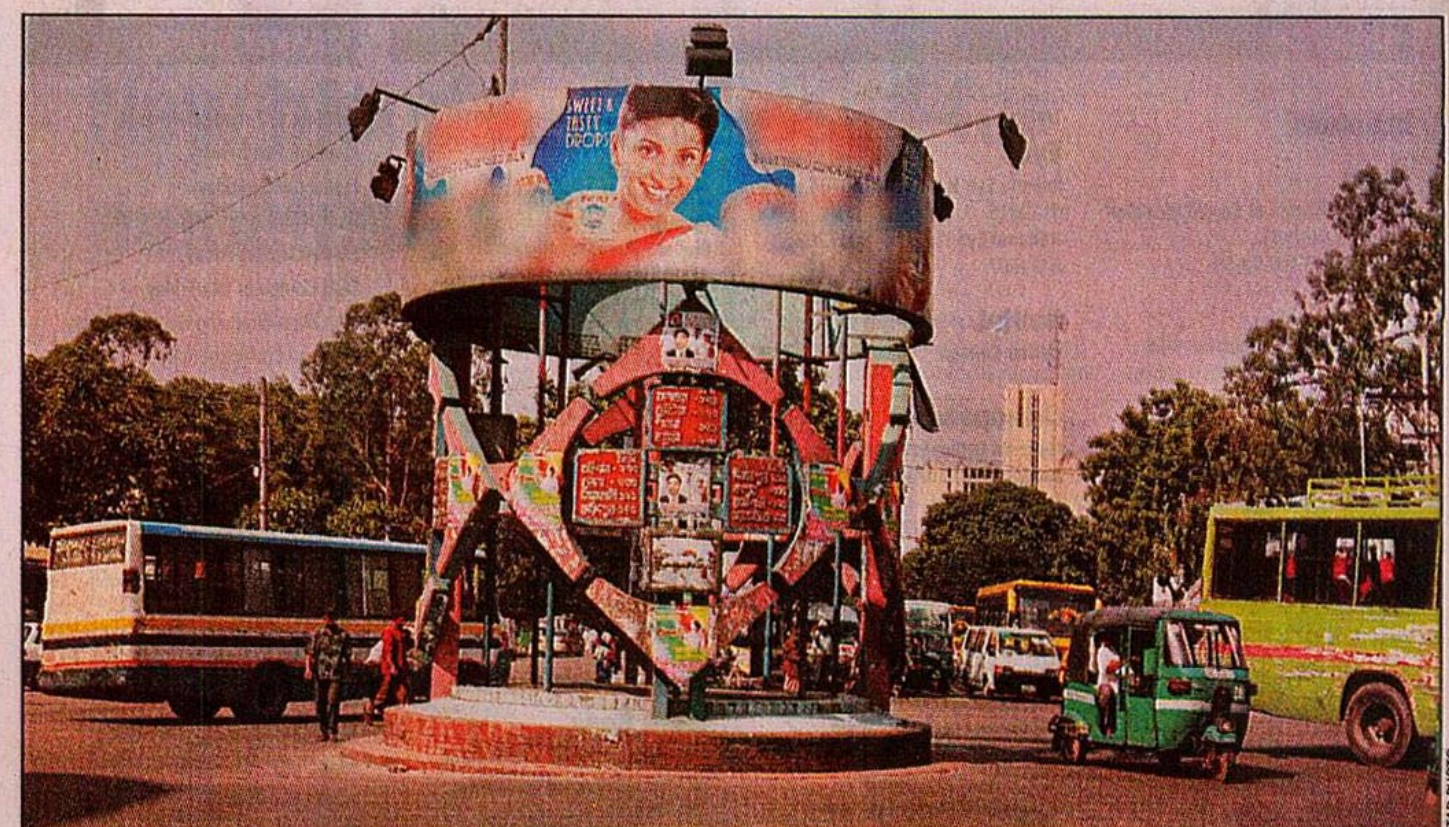
constructed the structure.

Iqbal Kabir, executive engineer of Zone-5 of DCC, could not find the records despite his repeated attempts. "We have records from 1992 at this moment," he said.

Kabir said if he could find the records that prove it as a DCC property, he would take necessary steps to update information inscribed on the structure and ensure that it would display actual distances of all 64 districts.

The Zero Point structure shows distances of different cities from Dhaka as follows:

Barisal-277 km, Bogra-228 km, Chittagong-264 km, Comilla-97 km, Dinajpur-414 km, Faridpur-45 km, Jessore-274 km, Khulna-335 km, Kusthia-277 km, Mymensingh-193 km, Noakhali-191 km, Pabna-164 km, Rajshahi-227 km, Rangpur-335 km, Rangamati-340 km and Sylhet 346 km.



The structure at Zero Point, the centre from which distances to various destinations are calculated, is not yet updated.