

# Bus stops anywhere and everywhere!

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Most buses in the city pull up anywhere on the road to take or drop passengers in the absence of proper bus stops. In many places private bus operators have occupied portions of roads and to use them as their parking lots or counters.

The stretch from Tajmahal Road to Aurangzeb Road in Mohammadpur remains occupied most of the time as a private company keeps its buses parked on either side of it.

Another private company uses part of Ring Road, one of the widest roads in Mohammadpur and Adabor area, for parking.

"These buses fill up more than half of the road leading to severe traffic congestion in the area, especially in front of the Shia Masjid," said Altaf Ahmed of Mansurabad. "I wonder what will happen to the area when the Japan Garden City, which will have nearly 2,500 apartments, opens," he added.

In some places playgrounds and open spaces are used as parking areas. A private bus company used to occupy the playground in front of the New Colony in Asad Gate. However, they left the spot some months ago much to the relief of the local residents.

Even the sidewalks have been taken over by makeshift ticket booths of bus companies.

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been registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) until December 11, 2001. However, 2,978 private buses and minibuses are now plying in the city according to independent studies. The roads are also used by 1,589 human haulers adding to the pressure on them. Officials of Dhaka Urban Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) and the traffic division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) however said that 5,800 buses were moving inside the city.

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Sirajul Islam, Assistant Director of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) said the DMP's traffic division fixes the routes based on their experience.

"There are no designated transport or traffic engineers. We have never received expert opinions on the matter," Islam said when asked how the routes were fixed. He informed that the DTCB was preparing a strategic transport plan (STP) to ease the problems in the transport sector.

When contacted a senior DTCB official said the STP is an interrelated plan that has different proposals including bus rapid transit and bus bays to ease the crisis due to the absence of proper bus stoppages.



Buses stop haphazardly in the centre of Motijheel to pick up passengers.

## Put the blame on indifference



Pedestrians take risks to cross roads below a deserted foot over bridge.

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

There are 26 foot-bridges and three underpasses in the city but very few people use them.

Where there are no footbridges, the pedestrians should use the zebra crossing which most are not even aware of. Those who know it prefer not to use them and take risky alternatives for crossing roads which often result in serious accidents.

Independent surveys by the World Bank, UNDP and Democracywatch have identified disobeying of traffic rules by the city dwellers as one of the main reasons for accidents. According to the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP)'s traffic department 277 fatal accidents took place in the capital within the last 12 months injuring 464 people.

The tendency to not use the footpath and to walk on the road instead also disrupts the normal traffic flow.

"We do not want to walk on the road. But tell the authorities to make the footpaths free of hawkers first," said Jibon Rahman a private service holder at Farmgate.

Basic personal safety features are also ignored by city dwellers. Motorcycle riders often do not use helmets and people in cars are rarely found with their seatbelts fastened.

Rickshaws and motorised vehi-

cles frequently intrude into the wrong side of two-way roads. To cross the Mouchak intersection many rickshaws and private cars even cross into the other lane near the Century Arcade shopping mall to avoid heavy traffic jam. That in effect creates traffic congestion on the other lane as well.

The majority of the drivers park their cars in no-parking zones. Most professional drivers are not trained and many of them possess fake licenses. They have no regard for the law and park the cars smack on the road disrupting normal flow of traffic.

"I did not get a space in the underground parking of the market. That is why I have no other option but to wait here for my employer," said a driver who had his vehicle kept by the roadside opposite the Eastern Plaza shopping complex even though parking is not allowed on that stretch of the road.

Simultaneous changing of lanes and violation of the red signal especially by CNG-run three-wheelers also causes accidents and traffic snarl-ups.

The law enforcers are partially responsible for the public's disobedience to traffic rules. Some 2,278 traffic policemen have been assigned throughout the city to ensure order. However they have not managed to create an impact and have not gained the confidence of the general public.

### Where is the rule?

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Maintaining traffic rules in the city has become more of an accident

than a rule nowadays because of the ignorance of traffic police about the rules themselves as one incident a couple of days ago shows.

A road mishap took place on Sunday morning around 9 am at Gulshan circle 2 when a private car moved forward after the signal light had turned green but had to suddenly apply brakes to avoid hitting the car in front.

The car at the front drove off without any damages as the driver of the vehicle at the back was cautious and was well versed with the traffic rules. However he unfortunately could not escape being hit from behind.

A vehicle belonging to a leading land developing company could not control its speed and crashed into the private car while a yellow taxicab rammed the Asset Development car from behind.

The irony of the story goes on as a Traffic police officer at the scene started his investigation and wanted all three cars pulled up on the side of the road. As one of the Asset Development officers apparently knew an ASP, contact was made and after a while the police officer present at the scene fined the private car accusing its driver of being the cause of the accident.

Gloating on a win-win situation, the company officials even asked the private car driver to pay damages.

The private car driver, who had a valid license from the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and was fully aware of the traffic rules sternly replied: "According to traffic rules every vehicle should wait if the vehicle in front of it shows brake lights on. If any one strikes from behind, it is the fault of the driver at the back."

Later, fuming at the arbitrary ruling of the ASP, the private car driver questioned whether a traffic system existed in the city.

"What traffic rules? If the traffic police do not know the rules what can you expect from them?"

## Tales from the Traffic (Jam) Week

MANISHA GANGOPADHYAY

What happened in the city during Traffic Week?

"Kichhui Na," is the general observation by majority of autorickshaw drivers. "Nothing."

Traffic Week, the second this year, came and went. Not much has changed in Dhaka, one of the most congested and densely populated cities in the world.

Johor, a traffic inspector of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), himself is not sure what the 'special week' was all about. He handed the phone to another officer to explain to The Star City the meaning and benefits of this vague campaign.

From October 9 to 15, the city fathers embarked on a campaign to spread awareness on traffic rules in an effort to promote safety on roads. The two-pronged plan involved increasing awareness among road users, namely passengers, drivers and pedestrians; and enhancing initiatives among traffic law enforcers. Demonstrations on traffic rules

were given in schools by the DMP. Scouts deployed at city's major intersections made announcements on microphones and sign boards were put up reminding commuters to follow traffic rules and encouraging them to use footbridges.

But, in this chaotic city the rules are meaningless as speeding motorised vehicles share the road with slow-moving rickshaws and crossing pedestrians, each obstructing the others' movement instead of moving in organised and coordinated way.

CNG autorickshaw drivers say during the Traffic Week, the traffic police make more of enhanced effort to check licences and route permits in bid to take outdated or faulty vehicles off the road. Shouldn't they be doing that all the time? According to DMP's traffic department, the enforcement of laws and rules was more aggressive during the week, with the police doing double shifts.

"We seized 438 vehicles during the Traffic Week for running with fake or date-expired documents or

in faulty condition," says Deputy Commissioner (Traffic), Ansar Uddin Khan Pathan. The number of vehicles seized in other weeks hovers around a hundred.

"Prosecutions went up from 2,000 in other weeks to 7,000 during Traffic Week," Pathan said explaining the "achievements" of the campaign.

The city commuters however are not impressed. "That has not stopped traffic jams. The situation is pretty much the same, if not worse than it was before Traffic Week," says Abul Rahman, stuck in a tailback at the Sonargoan Hotel intersection.

"With Puja and Eid approaching, people have more of a reason to be out on the street to get somewhere fast," says Rashida Begum, a pedestrian in the New Market area. "Now Karwanbazar, Motijheel and New Market areas have become extremely congested."

Thirty-five points of heavy traffic have been identified by the city's traffic police office. Traffic congestion has taken such a serious turn as

the number of vehicles is constantly increasing, in addition to the influx of numerous unlicensed rickshaws

"During Ramadan, the poor and low-income people from villages pour into the city looking for ways to increase their earnings, and many of them become rickshawpullers. This trend has a significant impact on traffic problems."

Although the number registered rickshaws has remained at 79,000 for the past five years, Pathan believes over 4 lakh rickshaws are on the streets of Dhaka. "Each day we seize 100-200 unlicensed rickshaws," said Pathan. "These are distributed outside the city among the destitute. They just pay the transportation costs."

The problem with Traffic Week is that it is unorganised and unfocused. This year they have had two and last year one; even the timing of the event is not consistent. And above all, there is no plan to make Traffic Week better, more effective.



PHOTO STAR