

Drivers fear increase in toll collection ahead of Eid

SYED TASHFEEF CHOWDHURY

As Eid-ul-Fitr approaches, drivers of all types of automobiles in the city fear a rise in toll collection by a section of dishonest traffic police.

"Before any festival like Eid every year, the traffic constables stop vehicles and collect money in the name of checking licence, fitness or other documents," alleged Rafiq, a CNG autorickshaw driver, near Karwan Bazar.

The traffic policemen mainly target buses and trucks entering the city and collect illegal tolls at a regular basis. The most 'lucrative' spots for the policemen are Gabtoli, Sayedabad, Jatra Bari, Ashulia and Tongi bridge.

"Since these are the five busiest entry and exit points of the city, any policeman can become a millionaire within a year or two by collecting tolls from each vehicle passing through these points," said Rafiq.

He said the drivers of each bus or truck have to pay around Tk 100 a day and the rate increases during any special occasion. The minimum rate is Tk 50 for other

types of vehicles such as delivery vans, taxicabs and rent-a-car minibuses.

The unethical practice of charging tolls by traffic sergeants and constables is nothing new to the city-dweller. But over the years the trend took an alarming turn due to lack of adequate punitive measures against the corrupt policemen.

The busy intersections of the city like Malibagh, Fulbaria, Khilgaon, Mohakhali, Bijoy Sarani, Mirpur Darussalam, Chankharpul, Hatkhola, Tikatuli and Farmgate are just few of the 138 spots where business is quite good for these cops.

In most places, the policemen engage some street urchins to collect the money. After receiving the tolls, the policemen distribute the amount among themselves.

If a driver or owner refuses to pay the toll, he is subjected to harassment. The policemen often seize their licence and registration documents or file cases against them on false charges, allege the drivers. They are forced to give toll to release the documents.

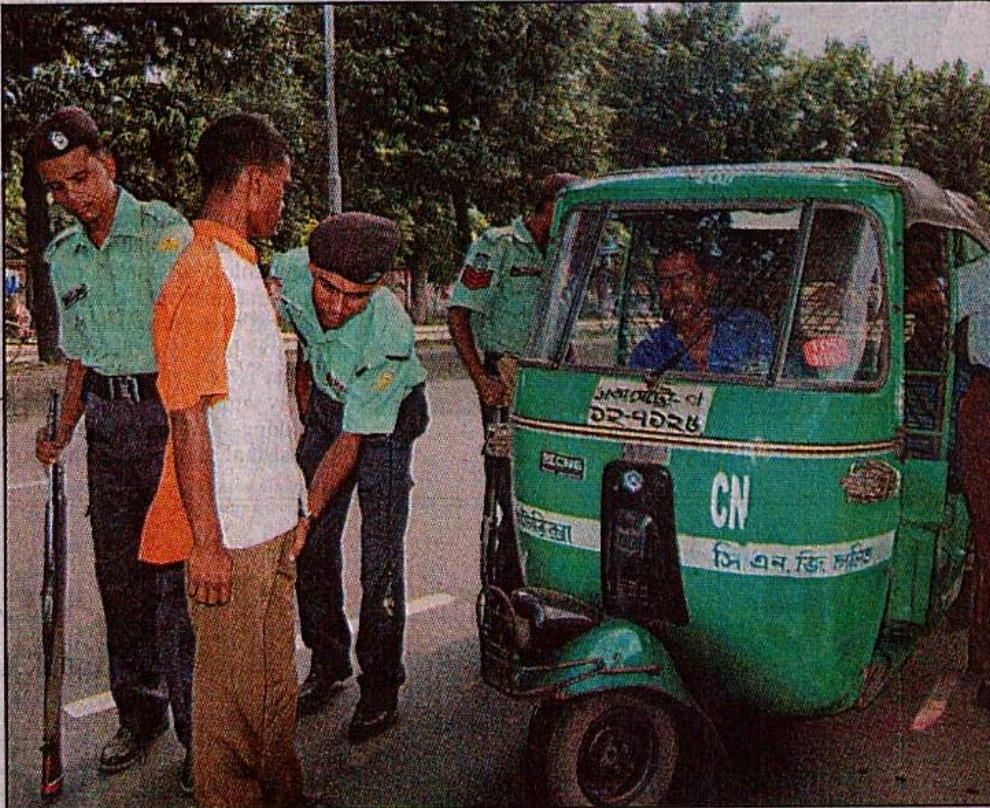
The authorities have tried to

root out such problems time and again. Even last July, the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested seven traffic policemen including three sergeants and sued them under the speedy trial act.

After that incident, such unethical practices had stopped for quite some time. But the trend increased again with the beginning of Ramadan and the authorities are now facing a hard time trying to eradicate the illegal toll collection.

"We take stern action when we receive any allegation against any policeman," said Ansaruddin Khan Pathan, deputy commissioner of Traffic (North), Dhaka Metropolitan Police. "The punishments include stalled promotion, stalled increment in salary and even termination of the accused from the police force," he added.

Pathan said the victim can also file case against such officers. "We have taken exemplary steps against a sergeant arrested at Gabtoli and against a number of constables a few months back. We request the city-dwellers to inform us about such malpractice."



Traffic policemen stop vehicles to check legitimacy of documents.

Cable operators in dispute over distributorship

Government intervention sought

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh (Coab) has urged the government to solve the dispute over the distributorship

of nine pay-channels of Star Group by this month as they fear Star channels may be stopped due to non-payment of fees.

The members of Coab pay quarterly fees for the pay-

channels in advance. Most of the Coab members have paid Nationwide Communication Ltd, the distributor of Star channels for July-September period, and their next payment is due

this month.

"We are not sure who is the authorised distributor of the nine pay-channels of Star Group. We cannot pay any distributor without government's approval as this may be an act of money laundering," said Parvez Anwar, president of Coab.

The row over distributorship started on July 1 this year when MGH Infocom Ltd (MIL) declared that they are the new distributor of Star Group in Bangladesh.

"Star Group has appointed MGH as the new distributor and they have terminated the contract with Asiatic Securities Investment Ltd of Singapore," said Abdur Rahim of MIL.

Asiatic Securities appointed Nationwide Communications Ltd (NCL) as the distributor in Bangladesh in 1997. NCL officials claimed they have an agreement with Star Group, which will remain valid until 2006.

Following an appeal, a Dhaka court put an injunction on information ministry and Bangladesh Television against granting licence to a new distributor of

Star Group.

"We are the authorised distributor of Star Group since 1997 and we have an agreement until 2006. We have nothing to say against MGH but we filed the case to protect our right," said Asfar Khair Mithu of Nationwide Communications.

Mithu said the government should have clear rules and regulations to protect the local cable operators and distributors who are doing business with government permission.

MIL arranged a press conference in Dhaka on July 24 to claim their rights as the distributor of Star Group. "We have shown the press the documents of our distributorship. And Chandra Shekhar Sethy, vice president of Star Group from India was present at the press conference," said Abdur Rahim.

He said MGH has applied for licence from BTV and no objection from information ministry. "We hope to get no objection from the ministry soon."

Information Secretary AMM Nasiruddin said the government

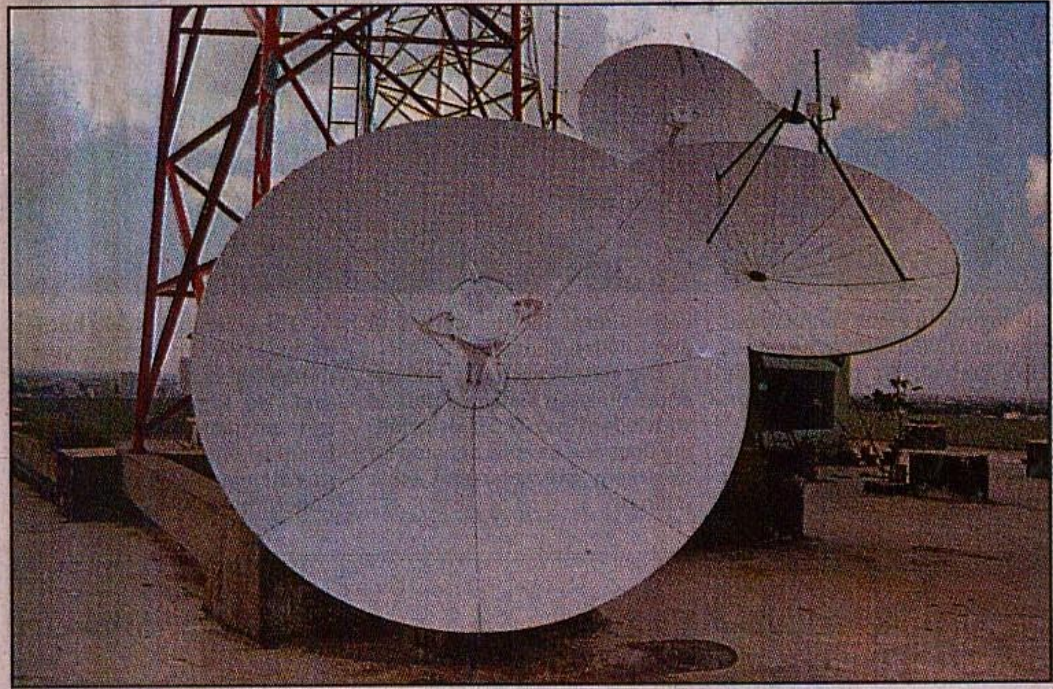
has nothing to do with deciding the distributorship, as this is a private business. "We are verifying the documents of both the parties at this moment."

According to NCL, 256 cable operators in the country has about 1,75,000 subscribers. "Some operators are exploiting the situation and not paying us, but so far they are showing Star channels," Mithu said. "We will claim our fees for it."

Coab President Parvez said they pay Tk 12 crore every year as pay-channel fees and 32.25 percent VAT (value-added tax) and supplementary duty. He alleged the distributors raise channel rates arbitrarily without government permission.

"The government should take immediate action to solve the problem of Star channels otherwise this may jeopardise the satellite cable market of the country," he said.

Star Group is currently showing nine pay channels -- Star Movies, Star Plus, National Geography, Star World, Star Gold, Adventure 1, History, Star News and Channel (V).



Finish work of Khilgaon Flyover by December 31

Ministry asks LGED to drop 2 additional components

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives has given the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) tougher instructions to complete the construction of the much-awaited Khilgaon Flyover by December 31 this year.

With the idea of expediting the construction of the flyover, the Ministry has dropped two additional components -- construction of a bridge at Dhanmondi and a road at

Agargaon.

The deadline followed a high profile meeting at the LGED had already missed two deadlines in February 2003 and June 2004. The construction of the flyover began in September 2001.

The LGED proposed to complete the construction of entire project, including the two additional components, by June 2005, but the ministry cited the two components as causes for delay in main project.

The ministry asked the LGED to include the two additional

components in another of the Prime Minister's priority projects and construct them separately.

Ministry officials said the LGED included the two components with the Khilgaon Flyover project violating planning disciplines, as the Dhanmondi Bridge and Agargaon road has no link with the flyover.

According to LGED officials, the estimated cost of the flyover has shot up to Tk 81.84 crore from Tk 74.50 crore. Ministry officials said the LGED recently included

construction of surface-level footpath, drainage divider, road overlaying and relocation of utility services as incidental components.

A senior official of the Ministry of LGRD and Cooperatives told The Daily Star that the bridge and road construction were not included in the main flyover project.

He further said the additional components that need approval from the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne), is time consuming. He

said all obstacles have been removed making it possible to complete the flyover by this December.

"If the LGED is sincere in its endeavour, it would be possible to meet the December deadline as 80 percent work of the 2,505-metre long flyover has already been completed," he added. The official said decision has also been taken to request Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to inaugurate the flyover in the first week of January.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"Practically they (Newspapers) do not act like fourth pillar (estate?), as they are termed. They spread the hot flavour of ginger everywhere and create tantrums about aubergine"



-- M. Saifur Rahman

Finance Minister

Told newsmen on October 21 at local circuit house in Habiganj blaming newspapers for curtailing the image of the country.

Source: Prothom Alo

"We also see information terrorism. How it would look if we bring it under the jurisdiction of RAB?"

-- Nazmul Huda

Communications Minister

Said at a meeting in his ministry on October 20.

Source: Prothom Alo

"Most newspapers in our country are against the government and are slanted towards the opposition. They are published with the motto: Good news is no news. Bad news is good news. So, the data collected from news reports would not be authentic"

-- Dr. Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain

Health Minister

Told newsmen on October 21, commenting on Transparency International's report on corruption featuring Bangladesh as the most corrupt nation in the world.

Source: Prothom Alo

"Media has created anarchy over the rising price of onions, garlic, green chilli and aubergine. There should not be much ado about it as people would not die if they do not eat them."

-- Aminur Rahman

Commerce Secretary

Said at a meeting with business leaders at the secretariat on October 21.

Source: Prothom Alo

"It is the state counsels who lacked sincerity and were reluctant to take my assistance"

-- Abdul Kahar Akand

Investigation Officer, Jail killing case

Told journalists on October 21 blaming the state side that accused him of making 'farical investigation'.

Source: The Daily Star

"I was only five when my father was killed and had been waiting for 29 years for justice. But the judgement has plunged us all into despair"

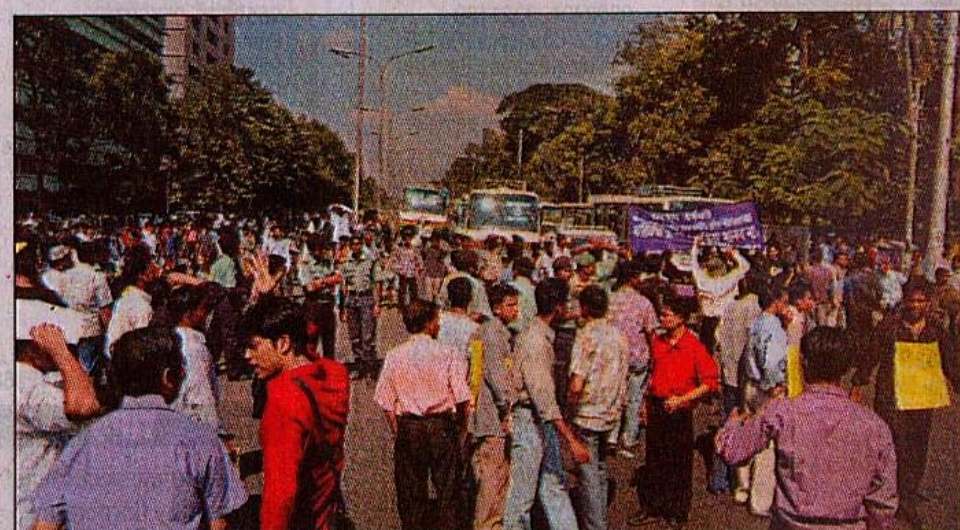
-- Sohail Taj

Awami League MP and son of Tajuddin Ahmed

Told reporters commenting on the verdict of jail killing case on October 20.

Source: The Daily Star

WE MUST STAY



Hundreds of Queens University students, took to the streets blocking the Kakoli intersection on the Airport road at Banani, yesterday around 1:00 p.m. for about an hour in protest of the institution's being on the list of those private institutions recommended to be shut down in a UGC report. This caused a traffic snarl up as the public on the busy airport road suffered most.