

the city that was

Shaymoli, a northern place in Dhaka was named as this area was covered with lots of green in 1957 when Abdul Gani Haider, a social worker of Becharam, Deuri came here and built his own house. The local people sat together in a meeting led by Gani to name their residential area. Former Minister Hafizuddin was present in the meeting where the participants proposed to name this area as Shaymoli.

e-mail: starcity@thedailystar.net

Record price leads to slump in gold sale

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

A record high gold price has caused a slump in sale in local market even in Eid time, said jewellers at different markets in the city.

The flow of customers has reduced everywhere - be it a showroom with shining glass and dazzling lights in a posh area or a small shoddy one in the old part of the city.

At present 22-carat gold is selling at Tk 10,000 a bhori (11.6 grams) while 21-carat that is popularly known as gini shona sells for Tk 9,700.

It was only December 2003 when 22-carat gold was available in local market for Tk 9,400 and 21-carat for Tk 9,100 a bhori. Gold price was Tk 7,900 per bhori in December 2002, up from only Tk 6,300 in July 2001.

"How can people opt for it

when the price is going beyond their buying capacity," commented Manan Ahmed of Milon Jewellers. He said only those who have social obligation like wedding of children or near ones buy gold ornaments these days.

"As a kid, I have always seen my mother and aunts wearing only gold ornaments unlike junk ones that girls wear today. When gold price rose to Tk 20 a bhori in 1950s, they used to say nobody would buy it," recalls Farida Hossain, a 62-year-old housewife in Dhanmondi. "And the present price is beyond our imagination."

Like Farida, most people from the middle-income group believe it is becoming impossible for them to purchase gold these days.

"Usually we see a good number of customers after the 15th of Ramadan, but this time we do not see any prospect," said Tarun Saha of Amin Jewellers at Dhaka New

Market. He said huge orders are placed after mid-Ramadan for Eid and upcoming wedding season.

When asked what is the in-demand during Eid, the gold traders mentioned mostly antique designs, copper polish, polki, kundan and rhodium polish. They said white gold has huge demand but there is a shortage in its supply.

They however said the little business that Eid brings every year has also lessened this time. Earlier people used to buy small items like pendant, a pair of ear stud or locket as Eid gift but now they do not buy those things.

"Now even one ana (one-sixteenth of a bhori) of gold costs Tk 700 and it comes Tk 800 to Tk 850 if you add making charge. Can anything be made out of one ana gold?" said a salesperson at a jewellery in Eastern Plaza.

The traders said the price went

up because of a rise in global gold price. They said the price did not come down once it increased after the terrorist attack in the US on September 11, 2001. Moreover, Iraq war added to the price hike.

"We bring gold from abroad. But customers fail to understand that if there is a rise in dollar price in currency market, it is obvious the gold price would increase," said a trader.

The traders said they do not expect a decrease in gold price soon. They said it could only reduce if gold price falls in global market.

"Please do not write about it at all," said a salesperson at Alanker Niketan in New Market. "It may curtail our business by scaring customers even before they come. Customers do not understand the reason and blame us for the price hike."



A large jewellery shop in Baitul Mukarram visited by few, as most believe that gold is beyond their reach.

MINISTRY SITS ON FENCE WITH NEW VEHICLE EMISSION STANDARDS

New vehicle emission standards await ministry approval

MANISHA GANGOPADHYAY

The government has been sitting on newly proposed vehicular emission standards for the last three months, while current standards remain unenforceable, allowing below-standard vehicles to pollute the city's air.

The new standards, drafted by Air Quality Management Project (AQMP), a division of the Department of Environment, were sent to the ministry in July. They would have replaced standards laid out in the 1997 Environmental Conservation Act during the Awami League administration.

Under existing standards, all vehicles, regardless of engine and fuel type, are subject to a single standard for emission. On the other hand, the new draft outlines separate standards for different vehicles.

For example, the current standards limit emission of black smoke, measured in Hartridge Smoke Units (HSUs), for all types of vehicles to 65. Under the new provision, the limit varies according to vehicle types, with trucks allowed the maximum limit of 90 HSUs.

Rezwan Hayat, deputy director of AQMP believes the new standards are more realistic and will make the law more effective. "Diesel and old petrol engines must maintain separate emission standards from the CNG and new

petrol engines," he said. "The current standards are unrealistic, and if they are enforced there wouldn't be a single car on the city roads," adds SM Abdul Quadir, project director of AQMP.

The new emission limits are determined according to fuel type, vehicle weight, seating capacity and whether or not it is old or new vehicle.

However, the government is in a dilemma as to whether the new proposal should be approved as it would appear that the standards are being lowered.

"This would reflect poorly on the government," says one ministry official.

The draft that has been sent to the ministry is part of a \$6 million joint initiative by the World Bank and the government to control urban air pollution, especially targeting Dhaka City, which has over 250,000 motorised vehicles.

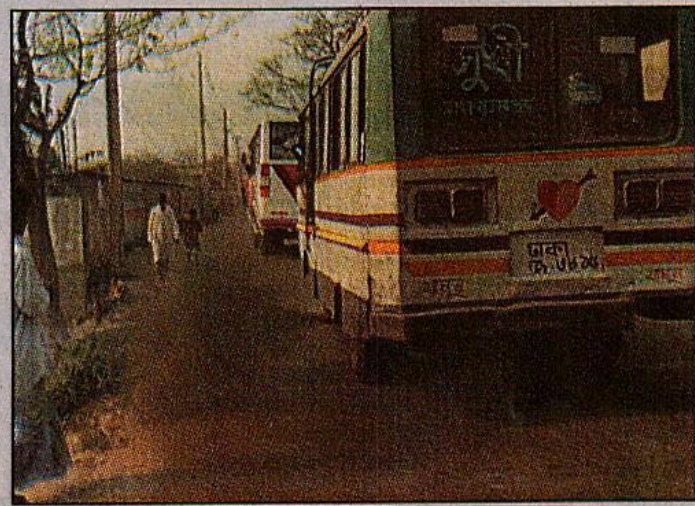
According to the World Bank, vehicular emissions - including carbon dioxide, hydrocarbons, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter - are the dominant sources of air pollution in the city of around 10 million people.

After the withdrawal of two-stroke three-wheelers from the city in 2002 the main culprits of deteriorating air quality are diesel engines and poorly maintained petrol engines, which release carcinogenic particulate matters and large volumes of black car-

bon smoke. If inhaled in large quantities over an extended period of time, air pollution can cause a number of physiological problems including neurological, cardiovascular, and respiratory disorders as well as cancer.

During the dry season, the Air Quality Index, measured at an air quality monitoring station at the Parliament, has reached over 300, putting it in AQMP's 'extremely unhealthy' category.

After approval the traffic department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police will enforce the new rules. AQMP plans to provide technical support to the police, who will conduct random roadside tests at four checkpoints. Each inspection is

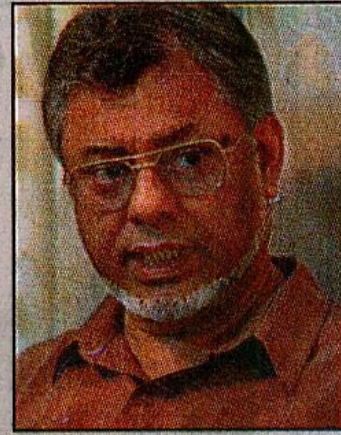


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expected to last for 5-10 minutes. Another obstacle to the pollution control project is the difficulty in establishing four permanent checkpoints due to the lack of space required for pulling over vehicles and the implications this has on exacerbating traffic jams.

Once the new plan is approved, AQMP will embark on a campaign for creating greater public awareness on new standards through media.

"We believe if the proposal is passed into law and enforcement is effective, the standards can significantly improve our environment. However, the process is likely to be held up at the ministry because of the political risk involved," maintains an official.



"DTCB is not an organ of DCC"

-- Quamrul Islam Siddique, ex-executive director, DTCCB

Quamrul Islam Siddique served as chief engineer of Local Government Engineering Department, chairman of Power Development Board and secretary to the government in various ministries. He was appointed executive director of Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCCB) on contract after his retirement last year. On completion of the one-year contract, it was renewed for another year about three months back. But on October 12 the government cancelled his contractual appointment for alleged violation of service discipline and conflict with superiors. After the contract was cancelled Siddique talked to Mizamur Khan of the Star City explaining his experiences on the board and conflict with the communications ministry and Dhaka City Corporation.

Star City (SC): We would first like to know about your experiences in the DTCCB? Did you like or dislike it?

Quamrul Islam Siddique (QIS): It was very challenging for me and professionally I enjoyed my work. I was in DTCCB for 15 months as the fourth full time executive director. Two of my three predecessors were former secretaries who have played an important role in shaping up the DTCCB. The major challenge that I faced was how to give DTCCB a shape of a professional body to plan and co-ordinate the traffic and transport system of greater metropolitan Dhaka.

SC: Was not DTCCB a professional body before you joined?

QIS: From the very beginning the DTCCB lacked professional staff. The ED, as head of the organisation, cannot do his work if professional groups do not support him. When this organisation was approved by a resolution of the cabinet in 2001 it was clearly spelled out. But nothing was done to recruit people like transport planner, transport modeller and land use planner, which all are vital positions.

There are three additional executive directors - one to look after transport planning and policies, the second for traffic engineering and traffic management and the third to look after support services and co-ordination. But there was a serious lack of good professionals who have a sound background. Most people were on deputation from Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and it was not possible to run the DTCCB with those unprofessional workers.

Most of the officials were simply dumped from other organisations and some of them came as timeservers as it was thought that DTCCB was a temporary organisation. After few months they went back or were transferred.

SC: Did not the government mean that by DTCCB they would improve the traffic situation in the city?

QIS: Definitely it was a very clear decision of the government and since the World Bank has funded DTCCB's all projects it was a very clear understanding from the day one that the organisation should be a permanent and independent one. It was basically the weakness of the communications ministry that they never tried to make it permanent. After my joining I took an initiative to remove the basic weakness.

If it is not made a permanent organisation you will not get any good officials. Otherwise you will get people who get jobs nowhere.

SC: Did the Ministry of Communications or the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) help you after you took the initiative?

QIS: This process has to be handled by the ministry of communications, not by the DCC. As per rules of business approved by the cabinet, the DTCCB falls under the ministry. There is no doubt, no confusion about it. DCC has nothing to do about the organisational strengthening and capacity building of DTCCB. That is one of the misunderstandings of the chairman of the DTCCB, who is also the mayor of Dhaka. He thinks the DTCCB lies under him but that is not the situation.

When I started my move, the communications ministry started the process and sent a proposal to the establishment ministry. I took this matter as one of my first agenda to strengthen the DTCCB and to improve its capacity building.

SC: And DCC?

QIS: When I started this initiative, there was an objection from

the mayor's side. He tried to delay the process on various pretexts. It was not DCC's job, because the corporation is composed of conservancy, health, social welfare and other departments. DTCCB is no way a department of DCC. This must be clearly understood.

We are responsible only to the communications ministry and the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry for all of our activities.

And DCC, which is under the local government ministry, tried to stall the process. Even out of the way they sent a letter to the establishment ministry giving an objection to the communications ministry's proposal. They have no authority to infringe upon the rules of business, which is assigned to other ministries.

SC: What was DCC's point?

QIS: There was no argument in favour of that. DTCCB's present jurisdiction is 1,500 sq km that covers all the areas in Narayanganj, Savar, Keraniganj, Gazipur, Tongi, even Narsingdi and Manikganj. And DCC's areas are just one fifth of DTCCB's

SC: Why did DCC object to the process?

QIS: This is totally the way the DCC thought of. DTCCB's jurisdiction is just like the Dhaka metropolitan jurisdiction of Rajuk. Dhaka metropolitan jurisdiction of Rajuk is 1,500 sq km. But if we go up to Narsingdi and Manikganj that will be much more. This fundamental issue could not be taken with a good grace and understanding by the mayor.

I told him that we did not work only for the Dhaka City's jurisdiction. We have to work with other municipal authorities and even other different organisations to make a total plan, although the existing Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) was limited only within the capital city.

The DTCCB is working for a much bigger programme, which is called Strategic Transport Planning. That would be, next five years as a short-term plan and next ten years as mid-term plan and next 20 years as a long-term plan with an investment of \$ 4-5 billion.

A section people in the DCC thought that if DTCCB is really have good capacity building, good professional ability and if we can really plan for such a big investment, then DCC would be side-tracked.

SC: Was DCC afraid of that?

QIS: Obviously DCC would not be the sole player in it. They would be one of the important players, stakeholders.

SC: If so why the mayor was selected as the chairman of the DTCCB? Was not it a wrong policy from the very beginning?

QIS: The role of the mayor was basically for co-ordination. Various organisations are involved in many aspects of traffic and transport where co-ordination is lacking. The mayor could play an important role to co-ordinate these. One of the basic problems of the Dhaka transport is rickshaw. But the control of the rickshaws' registration and licensing solely lies with the DCC.

All the studies have shown how rickshaw is jeopardising the traffic system of Dhaka. Some days back a daylong strike called by the rickshaw owners proved how beneficial the city is without rickshaws. The DTCCB has also conducted several studies where we made it clear that we are not to remove rickshaws from the entire city. We are to remove rickshaws from only eight roads of the city. The government approved this and also by the DTCCB board meet-

ing which was chaired by the city mayor. But unfortunately whenever we took up this matter with the board it was always deferred.

SC: But why he has been selected as the chairman of the board?

QIS: Things are very clear on administrative control and the function of the board. I do not find any confusion and duality in it.

Being a chairperson, his role is to preside over the board meeting and mostly to look into the co-ordination aspect. Rickshaw is one of the major issues. Many of the road space that we have developed we found encroached by illegal trading and business activities. And many of these trade licences have been issued by the DCC.

The other agency activities are not that much. There are electricity authorities like Desa or Desco. During the widening of roads and footpaths, if there was a need to remove light poles or distribution lines, they did not make any delay. If they get the money in time, they shift it without delay. The executing agencies like RHD and DCC in most cases delayed payments to Desa, Desco or Wasa for shifting those utilities.

SC: But to co-ordinate all city development programmes chairman needs to have authority...

QIS: Most of our co-ordinating issues practically lies with the DCC and very few with other agencies. If you ask about the co-ordination, almost 80 percent issues are DCC's own activities - such as the roads have been blocked by unusual location of garbage containers. When we started widening the roads we found these containers blocking the roads and footpaths. These are again related to DCC.

SC: What about other 20 percent?

QIS: There was no problem at all. The only problem was they were not given the money in time. This problem again is lying with the implementing agencies like DCC.

SC: Why could the DTCCB not make eight city roads free from rickshaws in the last two years?

QIS: This was agreed upon from the very beginning by the ministry and by the board; but later on whenever we raised it at meetings it was always deferred.

We said deferring is not a good way to handle the problem because public opinion is in favour of the rickshaw off-limit plan. We commissioned a very good social study and engaged a very good NGO to create awareness of the people, and we found quite a favourable response. They want more buses. We have talked to the private bus owners association and BRTC. They all agreed to provide additional buses.

SC: Why did the DCC object?

QIS: It was on a wrong connotation that there would be public outcry but all of our studies showed no such public outcry will take place. There was no pressure from Prime Minister's Office but always from the DCC. Rather there is a high level committee at the PMO called Dhaka Shushashon (good governance) Committee which asked us to work out an alternate livelihood plan for the rickshaw-pullers. We have already convinced the World Bank and have taken a decision to float a revolving fund of 25 crore taka to provide to all these affected rickshaw-pullers. We have also talked to the rickshaw owners association leaders who have welcomed the plan.

SC: Why was your contract

with the DTCCB suddenly, especially after the shifting of DTCCB's office, cancelled?

QIS: The government can always cancel any contract. I have nothing to say. But when the DCC mayor illegally removed my office from the Jamuna Shetu Bhaban, I told that I could not work in such a dishonourable situation.

SC: Did you have any conflict with the mayor?

QIS: I cannot work on something, which is against the government's regulation and procedure. I reported all thorough that DTCCB's future lies with the Ministry of Communications and not with the DCC mayor.

I have told from the very beginning that the DTCCB is not a department of DCC like a conservancy department or health department. And the mayor should understand this.

From my side, I fully understand my jurisdiction but if the mayor does not understand his jurisdiction that is his matter and I cannot accept a situation where he usurps over the others. This is very much known to donors and I think they will take it seriously unless DTCCB's authority is not clearly spelled out. I believe the donors would have to take up this matter first with the government that what DTCCB should do?

SC: What was the reaction from the World Bank?

QIS: They have expressed their surprise and indignation over the whole process. For DCC there are many other things to do. Our solid waste management is so poor in the city. Many of the footpaths are occupied by the hawkers. There is no operation from the DCC but they are shifting DTCCB's office! Just to curb the DTCCB's growth and activity it was done so. It is entirely a wrong move to kill the whole process.

SC: What did the communications ministry say?

QIS: The parliamentary standing committee on communications ministry took a resolution to strengthen the DTCCB further and recommended amendment to the DTCCB Act to give it a cover of a national organisation, not to keep it within the domain of DCC. And if the law is amended in any way its chairmanship will not lie with the DCC.

All these things are known to communications ministry. But I cannot tell you why the minister is not sorting this out and why the cabinet division is not looking into it.

But I believe, today or tomorrow, these questions are bound to come, cabinet division must have to look into this matter; and the Ministry of Communications, may be they are now under some sort of inaction, would have to come in an action.

SC: But why not now?

QIS: I cannot tell you. May be the communications minister is not exerting his position but he would have to do it today or tomorrow.

The DCC shifted the office illegally and they cannot hold it for long. It cannot work under the control of mayor of DCC because its jurisdiction is five times more than the DCC's existing jurisdiction. No donor will come to fund DTCCB's project, which will be only limited to DCC's only.

SC: Is there any legal action against it?

QIS: I have informed everything in details to the ministry and I have told that the equipment, which has been damaged, programmes which have been lost, are lost in the situation. Many staff has also resigned.