

## Commuters held hostage by bus operators

**SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY**  
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Commuters in the city are held hostage by the bus operators who increases fare and change routes at will but offer poor

service. Some of the operators charge high fare in the name of providing "special" or "sitting" services but passengers allege this has been a farce. "They are cheating us due to

lack of proper monitoring," said Mahmud, a resident of Mirpur. "They increase fare whenever they want." The fare for sitting service buses, running from Azimpur to Mirpur, has been increased

from Tk 5 to Tk 7 without any reason," Mahmud said. "Now they are going to increase the fare again due to the latest fuel price hike." Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials said

they have been informed of the fare hike and they are going to investigate the matter. "The fare fixed for this route is Tk 5. Increasing this fare is a violation of rules," said a senior official of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority.

Duldul Paribahan said, "Buses are usually late due to traffic congestion. What can we do?" Although the operators charge high fare in the name of providing sitting service, most buses are overcrowded during the rush hours.



"We are ready to pay extra money for the special services but we often see passengers standing inside the buses," said Kabir. A ticket seller said, "Commuters can wait 10-15 minutes for the next bus but they usually jump into one which are already filled."

But the commuters said they board a crowded bus in order to save time. "There is no assurance that I will get seat in the next bus," said a passenger. He said the drivers do not switch on fans or air-conditioners to cut fuel consumption. "But we have to pay more for these services," he added.

About the so-called special or sitting services, BRTA officials said these buses take regular permits for any of city's 48 routes. "Only a few operators have permission to set up ticket counters at specific places," said an official. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has recently evicted many illegal tickets counters from different parts of the city.

Ripon, a ticket seller of

### 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.



"Opposition leaders like Sheikh Hasina and Dr Kamal Hossain have said many things against the government. If they are not arrested, why should I be?"

-- Bidisha Ershad  
Second wife of Jatiya Party chairman HM Ershad  
Said in fury at her Baridhara President Park apartment after she was arrested on charges of cheating, theft and ransacking the house, following a case filed by her husband, on June 4.  
Source: Prothom Alo

"We tried to meet Sumon, but the Rab members drove us out when we identified ourselves as Sumon's parents"

-- Abdul Hakim  
Father of Sumon -- killed in Rab 'crossfire'.  
Told journalists accusing the members of the elite anti-crime force Rab for the killing of his son, on May 31.  
Source: The Daily Star

"I think the government will positively consider materialising the dream for a self-reliant and clean city. If it does not, I will move with the people to realise the demand"



-- ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury  
Mayor, Chittagong City Corporation  
Told journalists explaining his proposed 'city government' at a press conference styled, "City Development: Expectations and achievements of city dwellers" after taking oath, on June 2.  
Source: The Daily Star

"If anybody continuously provokes us, what can we do!"

-- Safiul Bari Babu  
General Secretary, JCD, ruling party student wing  
Told journalists reacting on his party cadres' attack on common students on the Dhaka University campus, on June 1.  
Source: Prothom Alo

"How can a person with no portfolio in the government discuss national security issues of Bangladesh with another country's intelligence officials?"



-- Saber Hossain Chowdhury  
Political Secretary to leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina  
Told journalists asking the prime minister to explain in which capacity her son and BNP's Secretary General Tarique Rahman had discussed national issues with the high intelligence officials of the US, on June 4. Source: The Daily Star

## Traffic radio channel service yet to reach drivers, commuters

**FAIZUL KHAN TANIM**  
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Many people have been deprived of the information of the much anticipated traffic radio channel because of lack strong advertising allege most drivers and commuters around the city. A few drivers gathered near the Karwan Bazar mosque said they hardly heard the news of the channel broadcast on radio frequencies. With little advertising in newspapers, television and other methods, the facilities that this channel will offer to drivers remains unknown. The channel is broadcast on 103.2 MHz (megahertz) on the FM band in two shifts -- 7:30 am to 11:30 am and 3:30 pm to 7:30 pm daily, said sources from Bangladesh

Betar. Bangladesh Betar's Additional Chief Engineer, Dilip Kumar Saha said: "We provide effective technical support to run the program. We find that workers and facilitators of the project are enthusiastic. Positive reports from as far as Gazipur and Kaliakoir are coming in." The channel was officially launched on May 26 with Information minister M Shamsul Islam as chief guest at the inauguration. The function was held at the Bangladesh Betar's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar office. Betar authorities said, the objective of the channel is to make drivers aware of the traffic rules and the points of traffic congestions and give information of any accidents.

But the channel does not transmit vital information -- traffic congestion and road accidents. Yellow taxicab driver Shahjahan said, "Radio traffic channel was supposed to ease traffic problems in the city. There was a huge traffic jam all around the city on May 29 especially in the Shahabagh area due to the problem at Dhaka University, but no news of the congestion was aired, instead songs were played and traffic rules indicated." Another driver said both the presentation style and time of the programme should be changed. Traffic rules from outdated books should be updated. Sources from Bangladesh Betar and Information Ministry said that in a recent meeting

held on this channel, a decision was made that facts on traffic congestion will not be aired at the moment. The decision-makers feared that when commuters hear about a specific roads been congested, they will panic, will try to use other alternative routes and create even bigger jams. No alternative decision has yet been on when and how to air congestion information. According to another Bangladesh Betar engineer there is a lack of equipment like high quality 'digital audio control' sound mixers, CD recorders, microphones and other related items. A studio to transmitter link (STL) dedicated only to transmit news to the exact destination is urgently required. Presently a mobile van link is used for this

purpose. Dearth of manpower has been another major drawback, the engineer said. The Engineering section has not yet been given the manpower they needed. Betar sources allege that traffic police does not fully cooperate, as two traffic sergeants or inspectors are expected to be at Bangladesh Betar station. A special radio control room has been set-up for the two law enforcing officers to receive information that can be transmitted on the channels, but none showed up. When DC traffic (South) Ansar Uddin Khan Pathan, who was also present in the meeting on traffic radio channel, was contacted, he said: "We are waiting for a hot line to be set-up to send informa-

tion to Bangladesh Betar from our control room." "There was no specification that two traffic sergeants had to be at Bangladesh Betar office. We have our own set-up from which information will be passed via telephone." When asked why news of traffic congestion still not broadcast, Pathan said: "We are ready to send traffic information once in 10 minutes. We are just awaiting orders from the top level and concerned ministries. As soon as instructions are given, we are well equipped to transmit information regarding traffic congestion."

## Vagrants spoiling Ramna Park

**CITY CORRESPONDENT**  
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Visitors and joggers who use Ramna Park have complained that the vagrants inside the park are undermining the ongoing beautification project. The park-goers fear that the beautification will be of little use with these groups of destitute people loitering inside. "Most of the park properties like the trees, umbrella-shelters, the lake, the slippers, swings and the children's playground are used by these people who often damage the park's facilities," said Sayeed, a Dhaka University student and regular visitor to the park. Others like Sayeed also echoed the same sentiment.

The park's own security guards and personnel from Providence Security, the private firm responsible for security in the area, are struggling to protect the park from these floating people. "Even if we throw them out and bar them from entering through the gates, they easily climb the low fences and get inside," said Zia Uddin, a security guard. He added that the destitute population spend the night at the High Court premises and roam around the park during the day as soon as the Court's business hours start. Security guards pointed out that the boundary fencing from Kakrail Mosque gate to the Star gate is not high enough to prevent

intruders. "The vagrants usually climb over the fence which is less than three feet from its brick base," said Rafiqul Islam, supervisor of the park's security guards. Guards from the private security group suggested that the fence should be made as high as six feet atleast like the one from Star gate to Baishaki gate. Repairs and height increase of fences have helped reduce social crimes like prostitution, drug peddling and mugging at the park. These incidents used to scare visitors away in the past. "I had stopped going to the park two years ago due to the frequent criminal incidents which even occurred under broad daylight," said a resident of Shahbagh who has now

returned for afternoon jogging. Other visitors alleged that in the past some Ramna Park security guards used to receive monthly tolls from tea-vendors, flower-sellers, sex-workers, drug addicts and street urchins. Although these problems are no longer acute, urchins are still a menace. "The lake is still being polluted by the vagrants and most visitors do not go near it," said Ismail Hossain, a jogger. The urchins cause the most destruction to most park properties like the umbrella-shelters, benches, swings and slippers of the children's playground. The illegal trespassers also regularly pick out bricks from the brick bases, light bulbs, flowers and bits and pieces of other park

items. Under the beautification project, new slabs have been placed on the benches, the damaged umbrella-shelters have been fixed, and the brick base of the children's playground has been repaired along with most of the other damaged items. Apart from repairs to three existing sheds, two new sheds, one exclusively for females, are also being constructed. Along with the plantation of new trees and plants, the level of walkways have been increased by two to three inches so that they do not go under water during the monsoon season.



Floater and groups of destitute people pollute the clear waters of the lake in the Ramna Park