

# Rickshaw ban plan for two roads deferred again

SULTANA RAHMAN

The plan to make Dhaka's two major roads rickshaw-free has been deferred to the first week of November before the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit slated for November 12-

13 in the capital.

The plan which was scheduled to be implemented by the end of August has been stalled temporarily due to the countrywide serial bomb blasts on August 17, sources said.

Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) at a board meeting in July decided to make the two roads --

from Elephant Road to Jatiya Press Club and from Shapla Chattar to Ittefaq intersection -- off-limits to rickshaws.

"After the countrywide bomb blasts, this issue has lost its importance to the home ministry. That is why we have to change the plan," a top traffic official said.

Sources said the plan will be tabled at the next meeting of the home ministry which will discuss security issues of the Saarc summit.

Meanwhile, necessary preparations have already been taken to free the two roads from rickshaws and other non-motorised vehicles.

The authorities have no plan to increase the number of buses on these two roads after making them off-limits to rickshaws. At present, some 3,000 buses, minibuses and human hauliers are operated on these roads.

"The plan will benefit people as it will reduce traffic congestion," the traffic official said.

The commuters support the plan but most of them complain about the poor condition of buses and inadequate number of CNG autorickshaws and taxi cabs. "The public buses are not comfortable. Most of them are worn out," said a regular passenger.

Leaders of Bangladesh Rickshaw-Van Malik-Sramik Sangram Parishad have expressed concern over the rickshaw ban. They said the government is imposing such ban without arranging alternative work for the rickshaw-pullers.

It is believed that some four lakh rickshaws ply in Dhaka, although 79,616 are officially registered. But the rickshaw-ban move has become a delicate issue as both the DCC and the communications ministry are reportedly hesitant to implement the plan which may reduce the popularity of the ruling party.

The DCC has a plan to ban rickshaws from three other major roads shortly. These are Progati Sarani to Mouchak, Bangla Motor to Mouchak and Rokeya Sarani to Farm Gate.



The road from Shapla Chattar to Ittefaq crossing in the city will be made off-limits to rickshaws by November.

## Tale of a fortuneteller

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

Nur Mohammad tells your fortune. But he does not know where his own fortune lies.

You can spot him at a corner in the Ramna Park or in front of the Dhaka College. The middle-aged man with long greasy hair sits before a layer of cards spread on a cheap floor mat and a parrot in a cage besides him.

"I predict people's destiny," Nur Mohammad said, flashing a row of teeth that were ironically clean in contrast to his dirty appearance. Asked how, he pointed to the cards and said that each of those has a certain symbol.

"When someone wants to know his or her destiny, I recite some verses from the holy Quran and my parrot picks up a certain card. Then I interpret the symbol in the card. It costs Tk 50 per person."

When asked which verses he recites from the Quran he could not specify. But he explained the meanings of the symbols. For example, Nur Mohammad said the peacock symbol means "marriage to a beautiful woman."

"If you are a woman, it would mean you will find a good husband."

What if a person is already married? "This would mean that the couple will have beautiful children," Nur Mohammad quipped.

So what do the cards say about his own destiny? "I leave it to God," he said.

Nur Mohammad used to be a village bard and part-time beggar before becoming a fortuneteller. "I came to Dhaka five years ago from Chuadanga. I used to write poems," he said talking to Star City in front of the Dhaka College.

"I have no home. I roam the streets during the daytime and sleep at mazzars or bus stands at night. My wife and son live in the village."

Nur Mohammad said he came to Dhaka as he was unable to provide enough money for his wife and son. "Perhaps I should never have married when I could not even provide enough for myself," said a despaired Nur Mohammad.

With tears in his eyes he said: "I can suffer myself but I can't see my loved ones suffering in front on me."

Where did he learn fortunetelling?



A fortuneteller like Nur Mohammad waits for customers sitting on one of the city roads.

"My uncle. I got this parrot after his death. I studied at a madrasa till class six. I could not continue further."

"Some days I make Tk 150 to Tk 200 by fortunetelling...sometimes more. But there are days when I even beg," he frankly admitted.

"Poor people and even sometimes people like you come to me to know their fortunes. I charge Tk 50 from people like you. For the rest, I charge

Tk 20 or 30," he quipped.

Does his fortune telling work? Nur Mohammad replied: "Destiny is in God's hands. I only cite the possibilities in a person's life."

"I am a poor man. I have to earn money for my food," he added.

Why did he choose this profession? Nur Mohammad replied with a question: "Why have you become a journalist? Couldn't you be someone else?"

2x2

10x6

8x2