



A large number of commuters, especially those belonging to middle and lower middle class, depend on buses braving all odds.

autorickshaw or cab in sight. Very often I have to take a rickshaw to Hatkhola roundabout and even beyond to catch hold of a taxicab. And often, sensing the urgency, they ask for more than what the meter would read," he says.

Again you don't even know exactly where you can find a cab, says Syeda Mustari Alam, who lives in Jigatola and works at BRAC's head-office in Mohakhali. "I usually come to Jigatola bus stand to catch a taxi, but sometimes I seem to be waiting for ages and still there is no taxi. I think there should be some cab stands, so that when they are not available on the road one can go to a designated place in search of one," she observes. She also points out that most of the cab drivers drive recklessly and would not bother to pay heed when asked to be cautious by passengers. "I try to pick elderly drivers," she adds. Besides, cab drivers also have a knack for not wanting to go to certain destinations giving flimsy excuses. Like they usually will refuse to go to Mirpur or Cantonment or Old Dhaka. They are extremely reluctant to go short distances, sometimes not even for extra money, though they are supposed to go anywhere they are asked to.

Those who are fortunate enough to have their workplaces within a distance that can be covered by rickshaw also face similar problems. "From 8.30 to around 10 am onwards they (rickshaw-pullers) would not go to Motijheel or to any place through Motijheel, because of the traffic jam" complains Aftab Ahmad, a junior officer in Mercantile Bank's Head office at Motijheel.

Many believe the main reason behind commuters' plight in Dhaka is the city's unplanned and unbridled growth. Commercial complexes have been built in residential areas. Dhanmandi alone is the address of around 40 educational institutions including schools, colleges and universities as well as around a dozen shopping malls. The result is impenetrable traffic jam. One just needs to pass through Dhanmandi from 1 to 3 pm when several thousands of homebound school-going children and their parents turn the entire Dhanmandi area into a virtual chaos. Dead tired from long rigorous school hours, the young boys and girls waiting in rickshaws and cars impatiently for the next intriguing knot of traffic in to getting eased, accompanied by their equally disturbed parents, make a sorry sight.

Commuting troubles have also affected the Dhakaites lifestyle; the Dhakaites are less and less inclined to go out of their houses. "I prefer sitting on my verandah or watching television than going out, sweating and gathering dust," Faisal Iqbal, a young marketing executive working for AKTEL, says. Among other reasons, community difficulties contribute to the diminishing social contact between people. "In our youth, visiting relatives' house often along with the entire family was a major part of entertainment, but things have changed now. I have not visited my younger sister's house for the last three and a half years though it is only 20 minutes rickshaw from my house," says 50 plus Azizur Rahman, a high official in Bangladesh Bank. "The very idea of going out just gets to my nerves", he ends.