

# 'Never felt like it since 16 December, 71....'

DURDANA GHIAS

As soon as the TV channels aired the news around 3:30pm on Saturday the city dwellers went wild with excitement. It was not like winning the ICC trophy or trouncing Australia in the NatWest Series. It was a feeling absolutely different from the previous achievements.

Some were feeling like they won the prize themselves and some compared it to the moments of our independence in 1971. Though some played a different tune, overall the feeling was joyous.

"Even though Rabindranath Tagore and Amartya Sen won Nobel Prize earlier, this is the first time any Bangladeshi has won it and made a place for us in the intellectual arena which is very prestigious and momentous. To the outside world we are not known as the country of natural calamity and political unrest anymore. This is a unique way to represent ourselves," said Shahidullah Hasan, chief engineer, Local Government Engineering Department.

"Today we got the highest order of recognition. I am feeling the way I did at the moment we were independent on December 16 in 1971," said Sabiha Ahmed, teacher, Sunny Dale School.

"It is a glory for all the Banglees. And I think this is the first time the western world



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can emulate a great deed from the east," said Aly Zaker, renowned actor.

"As soon as I got the news I called up my daughter. I can hardly express my feeling. This positive news came when the country is at a critical juncture. I am optimistic that we will go a long way," said Ghiasuddin Ahmad, engineer, Water Development Board.

"It is a rare victory at social, personal and state level. I feel proud that a global solution for

poverty is invented by Bangladesh," said MM Murshid, former managing director, Shadharan Bima Corporation.

"At first his idea of providing micro-credit without collateral were termed 'madness' by eminent economists because those did not follow conventional economics. But today that 'mad-man' showed us the way to international fame," said Rabiul, a student of Economics at Dhaka University.

"In a way I felt bad because there were no jubilant processions on the streets which would have been in case it was a cricket victory. People in our country are yet to grasp the true value of a Nobel Prize," said Farzana, a student of English, DU.

"I am overwhelmed. This joy is not for an individual. It is a big step towards having an identity," said Jahangir Alam, director of studies and head of the Department of English, Sunshine Grammar School and College, Chittagong.

"I am feeling like I got the prize myself. I used to work for Prof Yunus when he first started his project of Grameen Bank. My job was to draw cartoons for his magazine Uddyog (endeavour). The first cartoon of this magazine was drawn by me," said Ahsan Habib, renowned cartoonist and editor of Unmad, a satire magazine.

Last but not the least there are some people who first think of news in the light of their profession before seeing it from a personal angle.

"I was in the midst of an *adda* when I heard the news. I just jumped from it and pelted towards the newsroom because I had to make stories out of it!" said Aminur Rashid, a TV journalist.

# Eid shopping starts

DURDANA GHIAS

Prices of clothing and fabric have increased as the Eid shopping is gaining momentum. Men, women and children from all walks have started pouring into the shopping malls to shop for Eid, only to find prices beyond their reach.

"This year the price of Indian dresses have increased to 35 percent," said Shihab, manager of a shop at the Bashundhara City that mostly caters to the affluent class of the society.

"A dress priced at Tk 2,500 last year is Tk 3,300 this year," he said displaying an Indian dress.

When asked if there existed any syndicate behind the high prices he said he knew nothing, but pointed out to the devaluation of Taka and the general increase in price index as probable reasons.

"Last year sales were better in the latter half of the day than at daytime; but with the load shedding between 6 and 11 pm, business is being terribly hampered. Even though there is a central generator for lighting, it cannot support the air conditioning system," said Shihab, ushering customers to his eye-catching products.

"The price increase is 10 percent more than the last year," said Miraj of Hejal, a local boutique shop specialising in men's wear.

"I like buying from the Gawsia but sometimes I come here because my children like these dazzling malls," said Tahira a housewife in the same shopping mall adding that this year it would be hard for her to maintain the budget for Eid shopping.

"It will not be possible to give gifts to everyone this year because of the high prices, yet I

am trying to buy what is within my reach because I have to give gifts to my relatives," said Rasheda, a businesswoman, shopping at the same shopping mall.

"I think traders should focus on deshi products," she said.

"Our price range is always between Tk 695 to Tk 1,495, whether it is Eid or not," said Mostafa Kamal, branch manager of Westecs at Bashundhara City adding that they have been maintaining this price range for the last four years.

There is a contrast in dress and cloth business during Eid -- the dress sales will rise after the 20th day of Ramadan, while the cloth

trade will simmer, which is the general scenario.

"It very unlikely for the cloth traders to stock the material because once the craze of a new design is over it is not possible to sell those products," said Lutfar Rahman, manager of a cloth store at Chandi Chowk.

"The price has increased at least 25 percent this year and on average the price increases 10 percent each year," Rahman who is in the business for 12 years, said.

"Most of the cloth available is produced Bangladesh but the shopkeepers say that they are imported. The quality of these are

so similar to their Indian counterparts that it is not possible to differentiate the two and the competition is very strong," he further said, adding that the price of the local product is Tk 200 a yard while the same from India is Tk 1,500.

"If government can control electricity wastage and if a ceiling on its use imposed, I believe the situation will improve," he said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Shoppers throng the Bashundhara Shopping Complex despite a general price hike.

# When annoyance exceeds tolerance...

## Enthusiastic traffic officials install over 250 loudspeakers in the city during the traffic month



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The traffic police set up loud speakers at various points of the city.

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Hundreds of loud speakers installed throughout the city continue to pound on the ears of city dwellers, contributing to the already unbearable decibel level of noise as the traffic department celebrates traffic month 2006.

Deployed by the traffic department of Bangladesh police, over 250 loudspeakers are used at some of the noisiest spots of the city throughout the day in a bid to

increase public awareness regarding traffic safety.

"Our goal is to increase public awareness in this matter so that the general people can learn about traffic hazards," said an official from the traffic department.

But the odds against these blaring messages reaching the general public remains daunting as the people, who supposedly are the target audience, are finding this approach rather irritating.

"The traffic congestions bad enough, now that they are trying to deafen us," said Maruf Ahmed, a businessman from Maghbazar.

"I don't see the point of these announcements; they are doing virtually nothing to ease the traffic chaos," he added.

The frequent traffic clog makes these clamorous announcements more infuriating as the deafening announcements continue ceaselessly. The unskilled and untrained announcers, along with the outdated equipment, do not make things any better for the crowds.

"The funny thing is that the spokespersons on the loud speakers are barely audible; nor can you understand what they are saying," remarked Manjurul Alam, a service holder from Farmgate.

A traffic department administrator said that continual announcements are the best possible way to send a message home. "They would not acknowledge the message unless you constantly keep reminding them," he said.

When asked about the subsequent annoyances and noise pollution, he posed the question back to this correspondent. "Do you have better ideas? Most of the population is not literate. I don't see any better alternative than verbal means," he said.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the noise level of Dhaka has been estimated at 60 to 80 decibels, while generally 60 decibels can temporarily impair a person's hearing power and 100 decibels can result in complete deafness.

Vehicles produce 95 decibels of sound and this has been doubled by the sound created by loud speakers is around 90 to 100 decibels which combines to amplify the pollution of noise in the city to a degree that is far

beyond tolerance level.

Despite this hazardous level of noise pollution, the traffic authority's ignorance towards this issue remains arguable.

The Society for Assistance of Hearing Impaired Children (SAHIC) conducted a yearlong survey over the impact of the level of noise pollution on the dwellers of Dhaka at several spots in the city. The survey disclosed that hearing capability of about 76.9 per cent of the people was damaged and suggested that children, patients, vehicle drivers and traffic police officers as most vulnerable.

"The situation of noise pollution has now become worse than it was in the survey period as no initiative has been taken to reduce such pollution in the city," said Prof MN Amin, chief of SAHIC.

## Rejoinder

Unicom Urban Developments in a rejoinder to The Daily Star report headlined "Gold rush in the name of beautification" published on October 8, 2006 states: "We regret the fact that due to severe pollution in the area and unavoidable conditions caused by pedestrians has resulted its poor maintenance of the area and hence is not looking up to the mark". The rejoinder also said that beautification and maintenance of the Mohakhali flyover area is a difficult task. It is an ongoing project and only 45 percent of the proposed beautification has been successfully completed.

**Our reply**  
**We stand by our report.**

# Rural push chokes city with rickshaws

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Number of rickshaws has increased in Dhaka City ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, intensifying traffic congestion in the month of Ramadan.

With the Eid festival a couple of weeks ahead, hundreds of poor from northern districts are rushing to the capital and most of them become rickshawpullers.

From previous experience the police know that a huge number of rickshaws enter the city several weeks before Eid. The police have taken initiative to check entrance of rickshaws from outside by setting up check-posts at the entry points.

The police are also seizing unauthorised rickshaws and

## A famine-like situation prevails in the northern region during this period due to want of job. This year it coincides with the month of Ramadan. "The poor are coming to the city in thousands with the hope of more earning before Eid," Mozibor said

sending those to districts for distribution among the poor. Still, the law enforcers are struggling to

control traffic and the situation remains chaotic due to thousands of rickshaws.

Visiting several rickshaw garages in the city, it was found that not a single rickshaw, faulty and unauthorised, remains idle in the garages due to the increasing demand.

According to the Dhaka City Corporation, there are about 80,000 authorised rickshaws in the city while the number of unlicensed rickshaws is not less than 4 lakh.

Mozibor Rahman, a rickshaw garage owner at Rupnagar, told Star City that during the period between mid September to mid November, the number of rickshawpullers increases in the city due to huge influx of the rural people driven by poverty.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



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Sudden increase in the number of rickshaws adds to the traffic problems.