Star city

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thecitythatwas

The 2nd half of the 16th century, Catholics were prominent in Hosehepur in Mymensingh and Sripur near Sonargaon. Among the churches erected by the Augustinians were at Nagori (1675) and Tejgaon (1677). In 1834, the Vicariate Apostolic was created under the jurisdiction of the Sacred Congregation for Propoganda Fide. In 1850 it was divided to the Vicariates Apostolic of Eastern and Western Bengal. Western Bengal's headquarters were in Dhaka.

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RECYCLING

Traditional, informal but vibrant

DURDANA GHIAS

While the government has taken virtually no initiative to manage the waste of sacrificial animals, a traditional and informal recycling sector has emerged under private initiative that earns foreign currency through export.

Thousands of tonnes of animal wastes are being recycled every year informally after collecting them from slaughterhouses and dustbins in the city. After Eid-ul-Azha, recycling of such wastes gets momentum.

Animal organs and bones otherwise thrown away into the bins are collected and transported to Hazaribagh and Lalbagh areas and meticulously recycled by an army of over 2,500 people. Nothing is wasted -- cow's bones, horns, tails, hooves, penis and even ears --- every item is taken care of.

This correspondent found Bhola Mia, a trader of waste organs of animals, working in a factory in Hajaribagh where mounds of cow horns and bones were piled up. He processes these with 20 regular staff and sells to the dealer of a Burmese exporter.

"All parts of the cow are recycled. No part is thrown off unused," he said.

The trader collected around 50,000 pieces of penis and 5,000 maunds of bones this Eid, which is his peak season. In the off-peak season, he collects 6,000 pieces of penis and 500 maunds of bones.

He has deals with around 2,000 scavengers to whom he gives advance money to collect the waste from the city corporation area for him. He buys bones and penis at Tk 220 and Tk 3,000 a maund (38 kilograms) respectively and sells bones at Tk 12,000 a tonne and penis Tk 4,000 a maund.

The penises are desiccated for five to six days before selling those to the dealers. After being exported to Myanmar they process these and export them to China where these are eaten.

Hard substances like teeth and bones are cut in a machine for a regular size and then sold. These are used in making capsule shells by a local pharmaceutical company and some are exported to India. Hooves and horns are exported to Japan and used in making combs, buttons and X-Ray films.

Poultry feed and glue is made from the ear of cow. The ears are boiled and then dried in the sun. Then these are grinded in machine and sold to poultry feed traders. Bone dust is mixed with poultry feeds and fertiliser.

In spite of the existence of recycling at a large scale the sector still remained informal and no substantial amount of money has been invested here.

A research officer of Waste Concern said that ignorance about the usefulness and necessity of recycling and disinterest towards waste products are two reasons educated people shy away from this business.

Poor and uneducated people resort to this work because they do not have any expertise and this job does not need any skill, he said.

Hundreds of people were working in the dank factories sodden with cow blood and waste fluids while the air stank. Their children and family members also live there and were bound to inhale the air reeking off bovine remains.

The city remains clean of the animal wastes at the cost of these people who were working and living in this inhumane condition. Besides, their work does not poison the water like the tanneries do. Around 200 families live in that area and members of almost all these families are involved in this trade.

Bhola Mia was talking to this correspondent sitting in his factory in the midst of a severely polluted environment. The colour of the water was coal black and the air was heavy with particles rising from the waste products.

The trader said that several times he tried to grow plants but the air and water is so contaminated that no plant can survive in this atmosphere.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Workers sort piles of bones and horns at Hazaribagh to be sent to the factories.

Lawlessness rules the CNG culture

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Utter lawlessness has taken over the public transportation sector in Dhaka where drivers of taxicabs and three-wheelers turn off the fare metres and either refuse to take passengers to destinations they do not like or demand outrageous fares from them.

In the wake of commuters' relentless sufferings caused by the public transportation system, no form of disciplinary measures against the violators seem to be in effect as the taxicab and auto rickshaw drivers are making a mockery of the law by ignoring all regulations introduced for taxi cabs a few years back.

"As there are no specific laws for the violation of fare metres, we have to penalize the offenders by applying existing traffic regulations," said Jashim Uddin, joint commissioner of the traffic department. "The offenders become more acquainted with the penalties and all the more defiant having paid the fine a few times."

According to the existing traffic rules, police can fine offenders between Tk 50 and Tk 500 for traffic violations. Police officials usually file cases against serious traffic offenders, who usually acquire bails instantly.

CNG three-wheeler drivers were seen demanding Tk 150 to Tk 160 for a trip from Sadarghat to Dhanmondi compared to the usual fare of Tk 50. For a trip from Farmgate to Kamal Ataturk Avenue, the drivers also demanded around Tk 60 to Tk 80 as opposed to the usual fare of Tk 30 to Tk 35.

City commuters say rickshaws used to be a preferred mode of transport for them but since many parts of the city have been made off limits to rickshaws, they are helpless and do not have too many options but to virtually beg the taxi drivers to take them to their destinations.

Imran Rashid, a resident of Dhanmondi Road 4, was looking for a transport to his office at Motijheel on Thursday. After requesting dozens of auto rickshaws to take him to his office, he could not persuade any of them to take him there, One of the CNG auto rickshaw drivers even demanded a whopping Tk 120 -- almost three times higher than the regular fare.

Frustrated and annoyed, Rashid tried to draw attention of a police sergeant on duty nearby. The sergeant ignored his call and said he would come back later.

"I had an early meeting that day and I had to virtually beg them (three-wheeler drivers) for the trip," a frustrated Rashid said, adding, "At times it really becomes exasperating. Those metres are just pointless and every time the drivers ask for extra fare, I try to convince them to take me on."

Like Imran, thousands of commuters have to put up with similar torments each and everyday in the capital. For the thousands of helpless commuters of the city, travelling from one place to another is getting difficult ever more day by day.

Although the regulations require the CNG-run vehicles carry telephone numbers of the police control room on the backs so that the passengers can report complaints, calling the numbers are rarely helpful, alleged a number of commuters.

However, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) control room sources said they receive around 20 to 30 complaints against taxi drivers each day and take action against them.

"We receive the complaints and inform the nearest on duty sergeant to take action against the driver," said Hamid, a police constable responsible for telephone operations in the traffic control division of DMP.

"The problem is that it takes time for the on duty sergeant to locate the spot of the incident. By the time the sergeant reaches the scene, both the complainant and the driver are usually gone already. This is why it is very difficult to take action against such complaints," explained Hamid.

While the city dwellers continue to endure the same ordeal every day, the CNG-run-vehicle drivers and owners point fingers at each other for the exorbitant fares.

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General excuses used by the drivers to defend their errant conduct include high amount of daily deposits to the vehicle owners and price hike of essentials, while the owners claim that the drivers can afford to pay more than they pay now as deposits and maintenance of the vehicles are very expensive.

"They increased the daily deposit to Tk 600 from Tk 300, and we hardly have any money left after paying the daily deposits," said Salam, a CNG-run auto rickshaw driver from Mirpur.

Nazmul Hasan, owner of 10 CNG three-wheelers at Khilgaon, said, "It's not possible for us to reduce the daily deposits as the price of auto rickshaws and their maintenance cost have gone up tremendously."

Jashim Uddin, joint commissioner of DMP (traffic), told this

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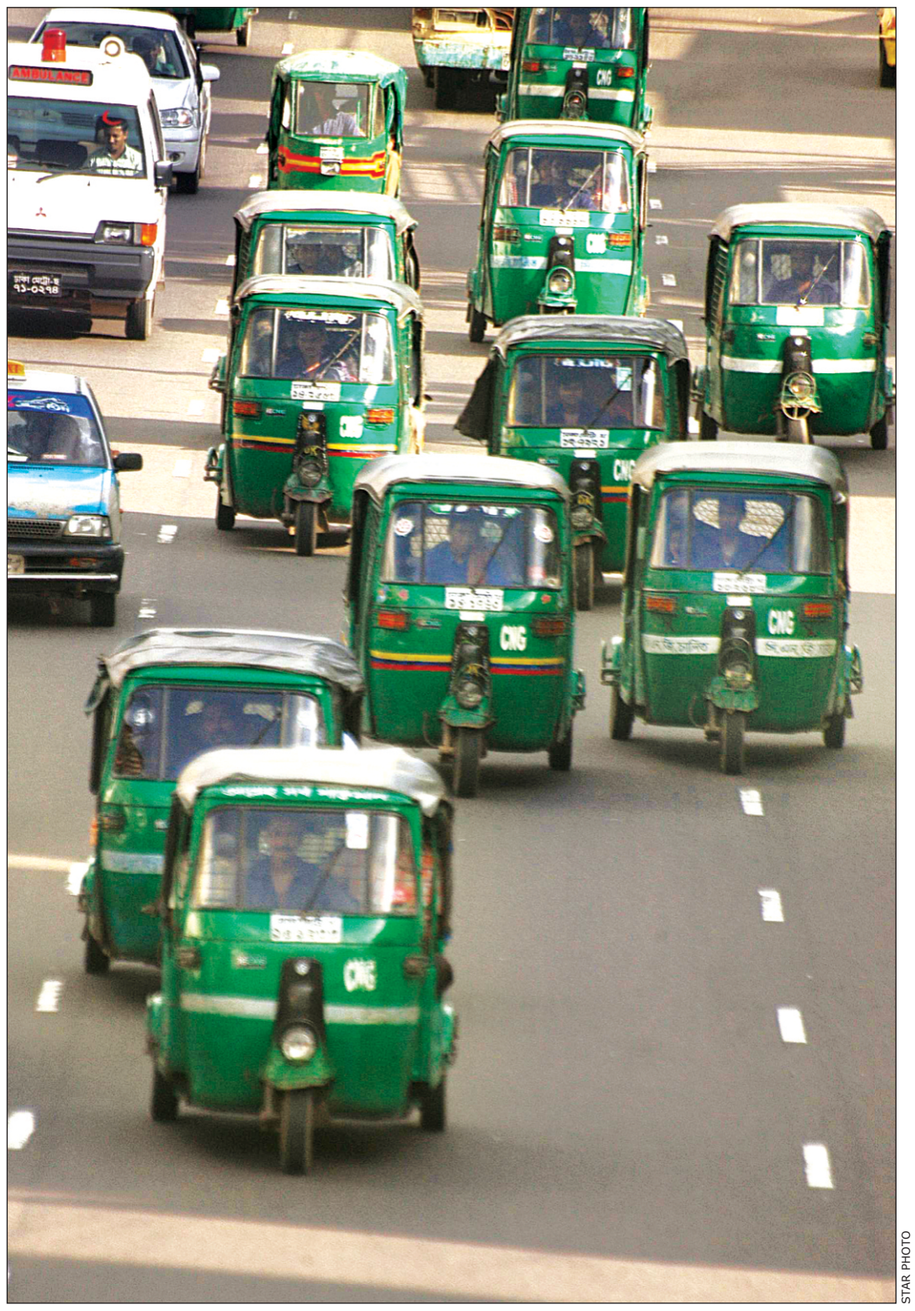

STAR PHOTO

Taxis and CNG Autorickshaws keep defying the laws charging exorbitant fares.

GULSHAN LAKE

Rajuk's dubious U-turn

Four days after evicting the alleged grabber, Rajuk decides to demarcate the plot and hand it over

TAWFIQUE ALI

The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) has made a sharp U-turn from its earlier stand over a claim for a piece of Rajuk land in Gulshan by a certain quarter.

Chairman of Rajuk took a swift eviction move against the land claimants on January 3 as the claimants took possession of a plot at the end of road 4 in Gulshan taking advantage of the poor monitoring by the government agencies concerned during the Eid holidays.

But later, the Rajuk officials retracted from the site facing police intervention.

The decision came from the Rajuk chairman only four days after Rajuk evicted the claimant. Rajuk also decided to demarcate the land and hand it over to the claimants. Rajuk had evicted the same claimants once before.

According to Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), this is just another game of money. "The quarter that approached Rajuk might be so influential that Rajuk had to yield."

This is just unusual of Rajuk to become so lenient over a claim because it is the organisation that usually harasses the people, Ahmad added.

According to the land claimants, Asma Begum and Khondker Abdul Moktadir, the land under CS mark number 385 was returned to its owner through derequisition of LA case number 10.

Earlier on December 30, during the Eid holidays, the claimants erected a metal sheet boundary fence and moved to build a concrete wall. On January 3, Rajuk officials rushed to evict the occupants, but the Gulshan police intervened and asked Rajuk officials to inform the police before making the eviction move.

"The way police intervened seems suspicious because police is not supposed to make Rajuk a party against a land grabber," said an official of the Rajuk eviction team.

Following Rajuk's retreat from the eviction move, its chairman asked the engineering, land, estate and law sections of Rajuk to gather reports on the disputed land for being able to take a well-prepared action against the claimants.

It is still unclear why then the Rajuk chairman abruptly decided to demarcate the plot and issue the land use clearance upon receiving only one report.

The High Court ordered Rajuk authorities to approve land use clearance to its owner on the basis of a writ petition in 2002 that Rajuk failed to comply with. Later, the land claimants filed a contempt case, which is now pending.

The same year, the Rajuk Board took a number of decisions on how the claim can be handled.

Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon said they had to retract from the eviction move as they were not well prepared with documents due to the Eid holidays.

"Now we will demarcate the plot through a tripartite settlement with Rajuk, Dhaka district administration and the land owners," said Haroon, adding, "It is a plot of not more than two and a half katha, but we will exclude any claim of land within the lake and on Rajuk's proposed walkway."

When pointed out that Rajuk had evicted the occupants before and failed to comply with the High Court (HC) directive to approve land use clearance, Haroon said, "Now we will go by the HC directive and demarcate the plot."

Explaining the sudden shift in Rajuk's stand, he said, "I do not know why my predecessor did not act as per the HC directive but I will go by court's directive."

A section of Rajuk officials regretted that Rajuk's caving in to such pressures would not only encourage the land grabbers but also be a blow to the morale of the government officials dedicated to stand against land grabbing.

"This is just one example of many malpractices in Rajuk," Prof Ahmad said, "Though we have been agitating on the streets for the last decade, many lakes and wetlands including Gulshan Lake and Hatir Jheel in the capital have been consistently destroyed because of Rajuk's approbation and mysterious silence."

Both Emdadud Dastagir, the magistrate designated by Rajuk, and the executive engineer (mechanical) refrained from carrying out the eviction drive, said Rajuk officials.

Instead, "Both of them asked other officials to go slow on the action," alleged an official concerned.

Various sources said it is actually one Atiq Ullah, a close business associate of Mirza Khokon,

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STAR PHOTO

Rajuk demarcates a plot in Gulshan lake area to hand it over to its claimant.