

LICENSING RICKSHAWPULLERS

# Thousands to be deprived of livelihoods

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Several lakh rickshawpullers are to be deprived of livelihood as Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) plans to go tough on unlicensed rickshawpullers.

The city corporation is providing only 1.76 lakh driving licences to the rickshawpullers while different sources said the number is not less than 10 lakh in the city.

According to DCC, there are about 79,000 authorised rickshaws and 10,000 rickshaw-pullers in the city. Based on the statistics, DCC has set a target to grant licence to 1.76 lakh pullers considering two shifts for each

three-wheeler.

DCC has so far provided 1,46,000 licences to the pullers.

"None would be allowed to pull rickshaws without driving licence," said Sayed Jahangir, chief of the Wheel Tax Department of DCC.

He said the city corporation on every Saturday provides rickshaw-pulling licence and by the end of the present fiscal year they will reach the target of 1.76 lakh.

According to DMP, DCC and rickshaw-garage owners, there are 5 to 6 lakh authorised and unauthorised rickshaws in the city and the number pullers is almost double.

If the number of rickshaws is kept restricted within 1.76 lakh, around 8 lakh unlicensed rickshawpullers will become jobless, sources said.

Not only the rickshawpullers, a large number of people are involved in related jobs such as rickshaw assembling and repair, and selling of rickshaw parts.

Asked how will DCC deal with the huge number of unauthorised rickshaws, rickshaw-vans and unlicensed pullers, Jahangir said: "We will discuss it with DMP and then will decide about the ways to tackle the situation."

About the fear of possible forgery of licences due to very

poorly made licences, he said the licences do not have any security features. These are merely printed papers with DCC seal. DCC does not have funds to make forgery-proof licences.

DCC collects Tk 30 from the applications for each licence.

According to the government's Strategic Transport Planning, a 20-year plan for Dhaka, rickshaws are daily carrying 34 percent of the total number of passengers in the city. In STP, rickshaw is considered as the feeder transport service.

Rickshaws are seen as one of the main reasons for traffic congestions in the city as the number of rickshaws has grown

over the years due to lack of any controlling mechanism.

Moreover, road space of the city has not been increased to allow movement of more vehicles with the rapidly growing population in the city.

Morshedul Anwar, head of the subcommittee of the Regional Transport Committee, told Star City that as roads are not constructed with the arrangement of rickshaws, these are creating trouble in the main arterials of the city road networks.

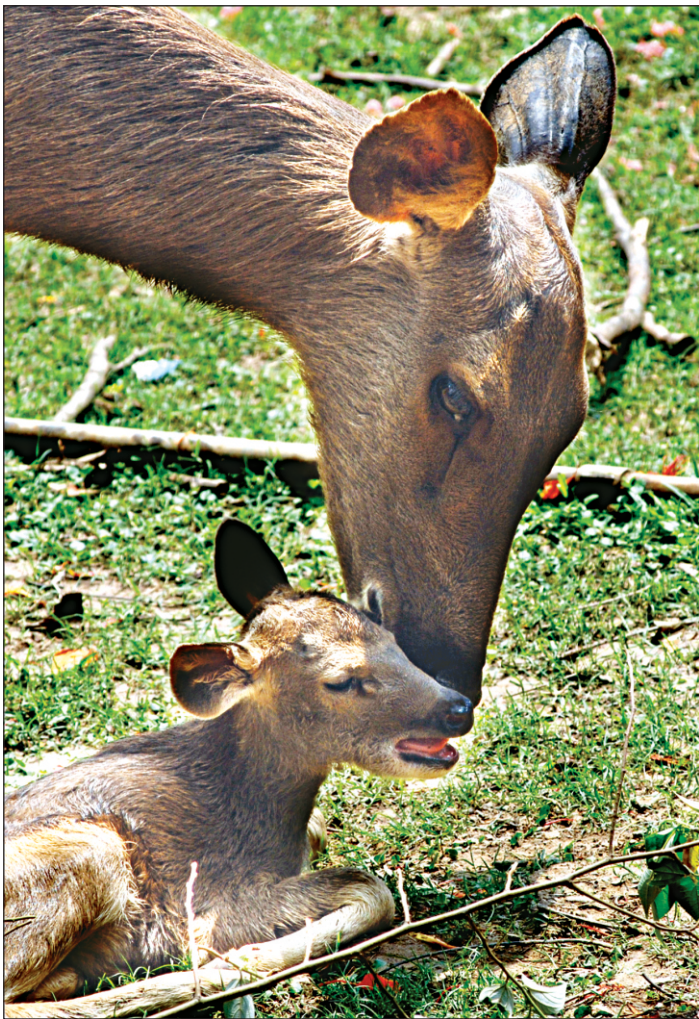
There should be more rickshaw-free and rapid moving roads in the city, he said.

About the possible transport

crisis if only 1.76 lakh rickshaws are allowed to operate in the city, he said if buses were utilised in a proper system, demand for rickshaws would reduce. "The problem is not transport gap but unemployment of thousands of people."

"Safety is another concern. Rickshaws are plying with the high speed motorised vehicles in the same road lane and risking lives of the passengers and the pullers," he said.

"We always helped DCC in controlling the number of the rickshaws. We should remove unauthorised rickshaws and pullers from the roads in phases," Morshedul said.



## Baby Samber dies in Dhaka Zoo

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The joy of having a baby in the Samber family did not last long at Dhaka Zoo. The newborn died on Saturday at around noon.

The baby was born on Thursday morning in cage 2. Zoo officials said that the baby was very weak since birth and the mother rejected the baby. It died due to lack of nursing from its mother.

"Dhaka Zoo always attracts more visitors when new babies are born. The crowd was quite curious about the Samber cage on Friday", said Kazi Fazlul Haque, curator, Dhaka Zoo.

"We cannot handle newborns after they are born. Wild animals are sensitive to smell. If we handle the baby it gets human odour. Mothers usually rejects babies with unusual odour", Haque added.

Samber, also known as sambar or sambhur is the common name for a large, spotted, dark brown Asian deer with mane, particularly of the Indian species.

They are mostly found in India and Nepal and eastward through Southeast Asia. Sambers live in forests, alone or in small groups. Samber's primary food group is grass,

sprigs, fruit and bamboo buds.

Dhaka Zoo brought 10 mature Sambers from Africa in the 1980s. Later the number increased to 15. In the 1990s four of the Sambers were sent to Kuwait and Bahrain as gifts.

Earlier a week ago four of the Sambers died of Tuberculosis. Current number of Samber population in the zoo is 7. Among them 5 female and 2 male.

Haque said that they were not sure whether the mother had tuberculosis.

"To prevent the disease we are adding medicines with the food of all the Sambers", Haque said.

Food supply was increased for the entire herd, said zoo officials. For each deer they are serving 12kgs of grass, 1kg vegetable.

Dhaka Zoo has a good reputation of breeding kept animals. Early this year dingo, Langur (hanuman), holook gibbon (ulluk), nilgai, waterbuck, and lion families saw some new faces. Zoo officials are also thinking participating in international animal exchange programme.

On an average day Dhaka Zoo attracts around 10 thousand visitors. The numbers reaches up to 30 thousand on Fridays and other holidays.

ONE-WAY TRAFFIC

## Dhanmondi chaos starts disappearing



A policeman in Dhanmondi stands guard to implement the recent decision to turn roads in Dhanmondi into one-way thoroughfares.

STAR PHOTO

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Dhaka Metropolitan Police's (DMP) bid to smoothen flow of traffic in Dhanmondi during rush hours by imposing one-way traffic in several streets have been greeted with warm responses by the local residents.

Dhanmondi, best recognized for its towering buildings, hospitals, private schools and more importantly, its slapdash traffic congestions and pollution, has altered to a great extent since

DMP declared one-way traffic in a number of its streets.

"It is quite remarkable to see such smooth flow of traffic. There are even no honking, and the frequent sites of cars pushing from the middle of nowhere to create gridlocks that lasted for hours is not there either," said an excited Tanzil Ahmed, resident from Dhanmondi.

While children shambling with their schoolbags and toddling their way to the schools across the static gridlocks espe-

cially in the mornings and afternoons used to be a common spectacle that roughly symbolized Dhanmondi even a while back, Dhanmondi residents find it difficult to recognize the fact that the situation is quite different now.

"It is quite hard to believe that the unbearably lengthy queue of cars that pickled the Dhanmondi streets has disappeared," said Madeeha Hafeez, a banker from Dhanmondi.

"It is evidently the most effec-

tive measures been taken by the authorities to smoothen the otherwise exasperating conditions of traffic in Dhanmondi," she added.

However, opinions seem to vary from commuters to commuters. Several Dhanmondi residents alleged that although abrupt traffic hold ups are as frequent as they used to be, they still tend to take place from time to time, as confusions about the new regulations are still apparent amongst local residents. Chauffeurs and dwellers from other parts of the city are not fully aware of the new policies as well.

"There have been times when the situation was even worse than the usual turmoil. Although a number of law enforcers are stationed before the streets with the one-way signs and posts, numerous cars still manage to come through the wrong way and creates huge traffic confusions," said Rakib Hasan, resident from Dhanmondi.

"That sort of confusion has arisen quite a few times since then as general people are still confused about the exact details concerning the roads that were made one-way. In times like these the rickshaw-pullers also tend to charge outrageous fares, as they have to take longer routes," added Rakib Hasan.

Abdul Hakim, a rickshaw puller said, "This new policy has

made our task even tougher as we have to take longer and trickier routes to reach destinations, and we had to increase our fares for this".

The roads of 6, 7, 8, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9A, 10A, 11A, 12A, 13A, 14A and several other residential areas of Dhanmondi were brought under the purview of this new DMP scheme. According to this scheme, one-way traffic will be applicable in these streets from 7:00am to 9:00pm except for the holidays.

"The scheme is promising and is likely to be effective in the long run provided that the traffic officials handle the situation responsibly and sensibly," said Jahangir Alam, an urban architect and resident of Dhanmondi.

"Honestly, I am quite sceptical about the consistency of the traffic police's performance and role in this matter. I appreciate their efforts to ease the situation, but it seems quite unlikely that they are going to be as strict as required and ensure that the orders are kept in the long run," he added.

As reported by DMP officials, around 150 members of the riot police have been deployed to monitor the one-way traffic system.

While the recent steps taken by the authorities seem laudable, majority feels the need of consis-

tency and enhancement of further steps to improve the planning and rules in the residential areas.

"Different aspects such as parking facilities, allotment of plots, pedestrians rights, segregation of commercial and residential areas, along with rickshaws and cars need to be taken into account in order to ensure proper planning and pacify the overall situation," said Jahangir Alam.

According to Jashim Uddin, Joint Commissioner of the traffic department of DMP, the responses from Dhanmondi residents about the new regulation have been encouraging.

"Living in Dhanmondi has been quite a bit of nightmare for the local residents with all the haphazard traffic congestions. And as the recent schemes have been enforced to ease the overall situation with great success, the responses from local residents of Dhanmondi have been very encouraging indeed," said Jashim Uddin.

"The kind of torture that the residents of Dhanmondi have to go through due to all the traffic chaos during the school and office hours is simply agonizing as it is the right of every citizen to be able to live in peace," he added.

## In remembrance of a vanished home

Following a story published in Star City (on April 25) concerning Shankhanidhi House, an elegant historical edifice in Tipu Sultan Road currently under illegal occupation, Ananda Gopal Sankhanidhi, successor of Bhajahari Saha Banik Sankhanidhi, came from Kolkata to see his ancestral home. He spoke about his visit, Dhaka City and other related issues with Durdana Ghias

SC: Did you exchange this house like many did when they left the country?

AGS: Shankhanidhi House was our Mandir Bari or family temple. It was built in the Bangla year of 1307. It was a Debottor property (religious property which cannot be sold). So we did not exchange it.

SC: What was the main business of the Sankhanidhi family?

AGS: We were in the business of ayurvedic medicine. We also imported Hicks thermometers and alcoholic ingredients for medicinal use from London. We manufactured painkillers, antiseptic medicine, quinine-based medicine and ointment.

SC: When and how did your family obtain the name Sankhanidhi?

AGS: Actually our family surname is Shaha Banik. My great-

grandfather and his brothers were awarded the title Sankhanidhi in Dhaka at a conference of Sanskrit pundits from Banaras. All the pundits were given two sankhas along with other items. So the pundits awarded the brothers the surname Sankhanidhi (mine of conch). It was used by the brothers and later by all the descendants of this family.

SC: Tell us about Shankhanidhi House.

AGS: The Temple at 38, Madan Mohan Basak Lane (now named Tipu Sultan Road) is our Thakurbari where our family deity Shri Shri Radha Binode Jiu was worshipped. My grandfather's old residence was attached to this temple house. My great grandfather, Bhajahari Saha, was friends with the Bhawal Raja, Tripura Raja and Kuchbihar



Raja. They used to go hunting together. Gour Nitai Shaha Street, Bhajahari Shaha Street, Lal Mohan Shaha Street and Bhagabat Prasanna Shaha Street are the four roads of old Dhaka which are still under the name of our family members.

SC: What are your memories of the house?

AGS: I spent my childhood in Shankhanidhi House. We had a nat mandir (the front space of the temple) and inside the temple was a monikotha (where the idols were placed). There were deer heads, china stands and other valuable furniture adorn-

ing the rooms and the staircase. There was a billiard room and all kinds of musical instruments in the music room. We celebrated Pohela Boishakh, Akshay Tritiya or Chandan Jatra, Radhashtomi and many other festivals. Fairs were arranged in front of the house on the occasions of these festivals where people from all religions took part. There was a nahabat khana where prominent musicians played sehnai.

SC: When did you last see the house? How was it at that time?

AGS: Last time I saw Mandir Bari was in 1965. At that time there were the idols. Arati (worship)

was performed. Our people also were there. I came to Bangladesh in 2002 at the invitation of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) as a life member. But at that time I could not visit the house out of fear.

Now the place seems like a haunted house. The sheer indifference of the inhabitants to the architectural beauty of the place is disconcerting. They are using the house as if it is something they have got for nothing so they can use it in whichever way they please. They have partitioned the verandah, built brick walls where they seemed convenient. The



"It is true that my ancestors built this house but now it is a part of the heritage of Bangladesh. Of course my roots are in this country. But I have not come here to claim anything," says Ananda Gopal Sankhanidhi.

ground floor contains several mechanical shops and the courtyard is an automobile workshop. The temple is a lube godown and remains under lock and key. Tears came to my eyes to see all this.

The house I made in Kolkata is a miniature of Shankhanidhi House. I built my house following that design because I can never forget what I left in Dhaka sixty years ago.

SC: Did your family own any other house in Dhaka?

AGS: I do not know the exact number of houses we had in the city. I heard that it was around

one hundred. In Tipu Sultan Road we had several houses. A few contributions of the Sankhanidhi family to Dhaka city that I can remember now are the sundial and the ghat at the lily pond in Baldha Garden, the Christian cemetery in Wari, a dharmashala (free guest house) in Kamalapur and the Wari Club.

SC: You visited Dhaka in 1965 and 2002. What are the changes that struck you this time?

AGS: This time I was caught by surprise to see the speed in which the city is shaking off its old features and putting on new looks. I saw many significant old houses missing which I had found last time. They are being replaced by new buildings. It is happening in Kolkata also. This is depressing but times are cruel. When I see the vintage car rally in Kolkata then I feel how important it is to preserve old things.

SC: Why did you leave your country?

AGS: This is a big question. After partition there were lots of disturbances. There was insecurity. Safety is the first prerequisite of human life. We had to flee to Kolkata leaving all our properties.

SC: Do you hold anyone responsible?

AGS: My fate.

SC: Do you still think that your roots are in this country?

AGS: Of course my roots are in this country. Rangpur is my grandmother's home. Comilla is my mother's home. Khulna and Jessore are my in-law's home and Dhaka is my home. I was born here and I am proud of it.

SC: How do you feel when some people call your ancestral home 'enemy property'? Do you think you are an enemy to this country?

AGS: It hurts me. Why will it be called enemy property? How and in which way I am an enemy to this country?

SC: What is your desire regarding this house?

AGS: I want this house to get back its due respect like the Dhaka nawab bari (Ahsan Manjil). It is true that my ancestors built this house but now it is a part of the heritage of Bangladesh. It should be the concern of the Government of Bangladesh.

SC: How did you feel when Star City contacted by phone to know about Shankhanidhi House?

AGS: I felt like the parent who is seeing his dead child come back to life.

SC: How do you feel after seeing your ancestral home after four decades?

AGS: I cannot express my feelings. I am feeling like I regained a golden part of my childhood, which had been lost a long time ago. But I have not come here to claim anything.