

## The ordeal and hassles of women commuters

Workingwomen need more buses in office hours

DURDANA GHAS

"Apa, we cannot take you; our women's seats are filled up," said a bus helper to Lubna, a young lady, standing at the busy Karwan Bazar intersection. Buses were swooshing past her with the helpers saying similar

things.

Even though some of the helpers were considerate enough to give her a ride, she herself was not ready to board a bus without a place to sit on because all the buses were crammed with, to say precisely, men.

"I really cannot think of get-

ting on a packed bus and with no place to sit on because it is very difficult to stand in a bus crammed with men," she said. "Sometimes I feel like walking all the way home [to Mirpur] but the distance and the condition of the streets and its footpaths put me off," she added.

Most women commuters in Dhaka city have to face similar situation once in a while. In a city where commuting without a private transport is quite hard for even men, women commuters have to face more difficulties. "A male passenger can get on a crammed bus during emer-

gency, but a woman has to think several times before getting on a packed bus and in the meantime the bus also disappears," said Tihi, a young workingwoman.

"In the late afternoon, before the iftar hours, the situation becomes terrific. Even if I can manage to get on a bus it takes almost one hour to reach the destination when in other times it takes only 15 minutes," she said.

According to women commuters, men mostly occupy the five or six seats designated for women in the buses.

"If you ask the men to vacate the seats they say 'why don't you stand there with other passengers? What happened to your so-called equal rights?'" said Nazneen, a regular commuter.

Standing in a packed bus can be very embarrassing for a woman as a section of male passengers try to pinch or touch her unnecessarily. Riding a bus late at night is also very insecure.

"Women and girls in our country are not used to catch a bus by running after it. They are not brought up that way. So many times they miss the running buses and stand for an hour or so to get into a bus safely," she added.

However, many women commuters said that the situation is better than before because of the introduction of sitting service buses with ticket counters.

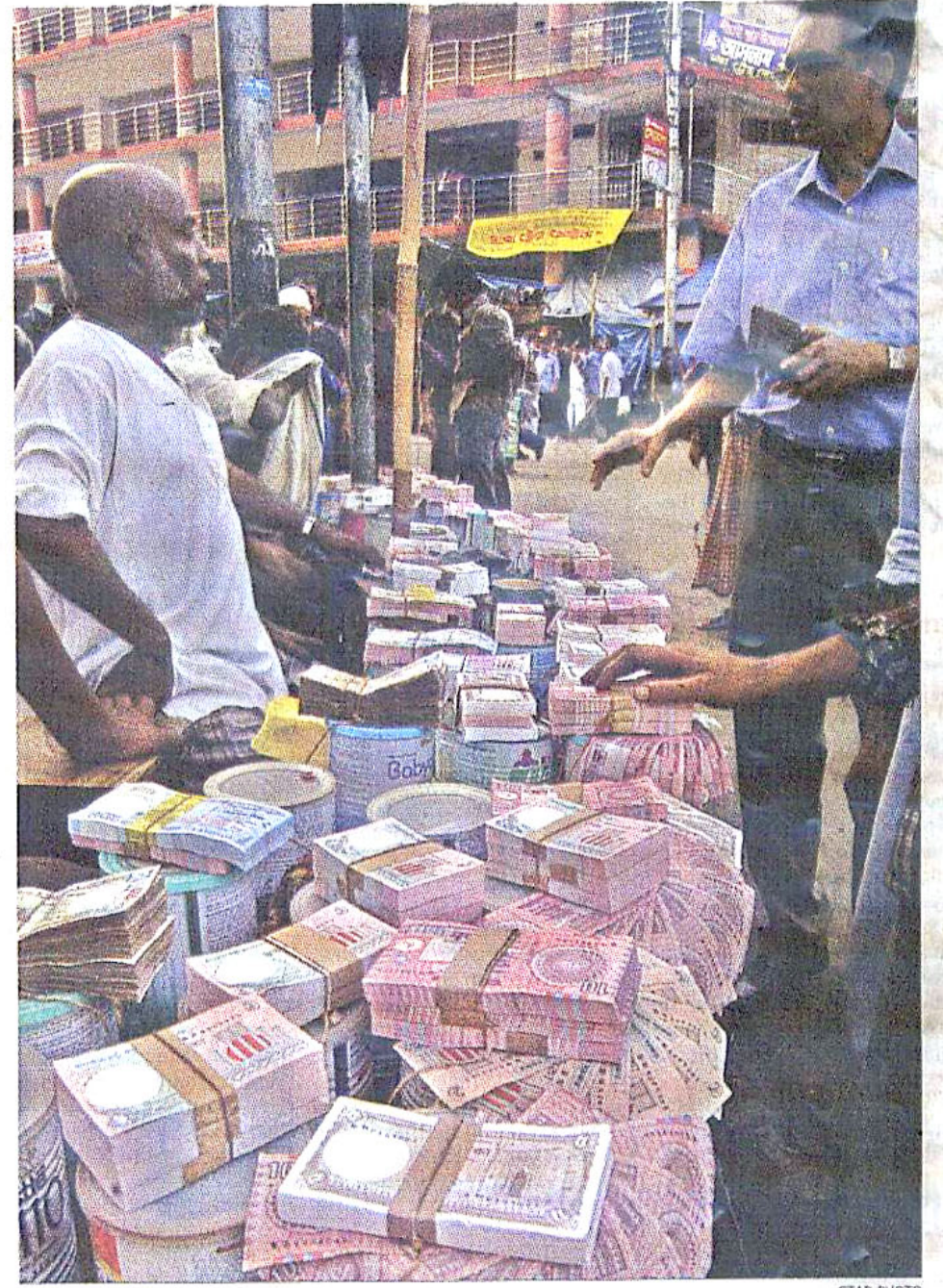
"At least now I can buy a ticket, stand in the line, get on a bus decently and reach the destination safely," said Tina, a service holder.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



A woman commuter in the Farmgate area struggles to board a public bus.

## MONEY MAKES MONEY



STAR PHOTO

With Eid knocking at the door the traders of newly minted notes are doing brisk business in the city. A seller on a footpath at Gulistan is bargaining with a customer yesterday who came to collect notes for giving Eid to children.

## Thriving trade of mugged and stolen mobiles in the open

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Shady trading of cellular phones is on the rise at various markets thanks to increased incidents of muggings and thefts in the capital.

The muggers and thieves are turning greedier and more ruthless as they are able to make a quick buck without even risking too much when they sell or trade in their booty of choice, cellphones, at these markets.

With the growing popularity of cellphones, the criminals find it easier and more lucrative to target their victims for cellular phones.

Most of these cellphones usually end up at mobile phone markets at Islampur, Gulistan, Bangabandhu National Stadium and Baitul Mukarram National Mosque or with hustlers working

in the vicinity of Gabtoli intercity bus terminal.

The thriving business of this type of cellphones is controlled by an organised cartel and one such cellphone usually changes hands multiple times, sources said.

With the 'right connections,' a stolen or snatched cellphone can even be retrieved from these places, added the sources.

Rehan Mahmud, an undergraduate BBA student at a private university, tracked down his Nokia N92 cellular phone, an expensive model that had been snatched from him by muggers, at one of these markets. Mahmud wound up buying back his phone.

Last month, muggers attacked Mahmud and robbed him of his phone while he was on his way home from a friend's place at

Mohammadpur.

"Around the corner of Taj Mahal Road, three men approached my rickshaw and held a dagger to my stomach. They took off with my wallet and the cellphone before I could do anything," said Mahmud.

Mahmud went to a local cellphone shop in Uttara the next morning and told the shop attendant about the mugging incident. He was quite startled as the shop attendant was unusually curious about specific details of the incident.

"He asked me a lot of questions about the incident -- especially about the exact time and location where the mugging took place," said Mahmud.

"After hearing me out, the attendant told me that there might just be enough time left for

me to get my phone back," Mahmud said adding that he was asked to come back after lunch with a few of his friends.

With a glimmer of hope in the horizon, Mahmud, along with his friends, met the attendant at the specified time. The attendant took them to Islampur Market in Gulistan.

"He asked my friends to stay in the car and keep an eye out for anything suspicious. He went inside [the market] asking me to wait outside the entrance. He was back in about ten minutes and took us to the rear of the market. There were a lot of hawkers, selling DVDs, just outside the market. My phone was found with one of the hawkers [a hustler] and I bought it back for Tk 5,500," said Mahmud.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Stolen mobile phones are often sold along with the worn out sets on the footpath in the Bangabandhu National Stadium area.

## INFLUX OF JOB SEEKERS AHEAD OF EID

## Unlicensed rickshaws grow as untrained pullers spring up

CITY CORRESPONDENT

With Eid only a week away, hundreds of poor people from across the country are rushing to Dhaka to earn some cash before the festival and most of them opted for pulling rickshaws which is an easily available source of income in the city.

The huge rush contributed to further increase in the number of unauthorised rickshaws in the city although Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has been conducting drives against the unauthorised rickshaws since first of Ramadan.

This situation is quite normal before Eid every year but this year the influx of people from villages is higher due to two spells of devastating floods and the beginning of the Monga, a famine-like situation, in the northern region.

During the 'Monga' (near-famine) period (usually September-October), the labourers particularly in the 16 northern districts face a tough situation due to lack of work. This forces them to migrate to Dhaka and other cities in search of work.

Asked about the increase of unauthorised rickshaws ahead of Eid, a traffic official said, "the problem appears more acute before Eid and such festivals but there is no special traffic management plan to deal with the unauthorised rickshaws."

The influx of rickshaws with 'untrained' pullers become the main source of gridlocks ahead of Eid, he said.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials, rickshaw garage owners and top officials of the Traffic Wing of DMP also admitted the absence of a proper rickshaw management.

DCC provides licence to rickshaws for the city while DMP implements traffic system but they do not have any coordination over rickshaw management.

DCC sources and traffic officials at DMP said the drives



STAR PHOTO

Hundreds of unauthorised rickshaws are pouring into the city ahead of Eid.

against unlicensed rickshaws could stop some rickshaws temporarily from plying, but could not stop the increase in the number of unauthorised rickshaws in the city.

Syed Jahangir, chief of the Wheel Tax Wing of DCC, said, "We have total support to the police drives against unauthorised rickshaws but due to shortage of manpower we could not join the police team during the drives."

He said in the DCC area there are only 79,606 licensed rickshaws while a huge number of rickshaws are running in the city without licence. The city corporation does not have any assessment about the number of unauthorised rickshaws.

However, the city corporation has issued 1,76,000 rickshaw-pulling licences as rickshaw owners rent the three-wheelers to the pullers in shift system and one rickshaw is given to two or more rickshaw-pullers a day.

Monsur, 32, came to Dhaka from Rangpur only a week ago and took a rickshaw from a garage in Mohammadpur. He paid Tk 70 a day to the rickshaw owner. A couple of days ago a police team seized his unauthorised rickshaw.

"I didn't know that the rickshaw was unlicensed. I didn't have any idea about authorised and unauthorised rickshaws. Now I'm in big trouble as I have to pay the owner half the price of the rickshaw. I don't have the money," said Monsur.

Lal Mia, a rickshaw garage owner at Mohammadpur, said DCC is not giving any new licence although the demand for rickshaws in the city is growing. "This is the main reason for increase of unauthorised rickshaws in the city."

He said the city corporation should allow more rickshaws in the city and develop a proper traffic management for rickshaws and other non-motorised

transporters. Syed Jahangir of the DCC Wheel Tax department also laid emphasis on the coordination between DCC and DMP in rickshaw management. He admitted that there has been no initiative to control rickshaws in the city in a planned and coordinated way.

According to an unofficial assessment by the DMP, near about one million unauthorised rickshaws are plying in the city and the number is increasing day by day.

Zahurul Islam, a traffic inspector at the DMP, said police tried hard to reduce the number of the unauthorised rickshaws in the city and seized about 50,000 rickshaws in last two years but it could stop the influx of unauthorised rickshaws.

Saidur Rahman, deputy commissioner (traffic) at DMP's south division, said a coordinated traffic programme and a proper management system can

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22