

# Sidelined from the sidewalks

Study of a sample 160-metre hurdle for pedestrians

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The sidewalks of Dhaka have all the elements to turn even the most mild-mannered person into a raving lunatic.

The encroached sidewalks strewn with nuisances such as littered debris, garbage, overflowing dumpsters, workshop equipment and construction material along with missing or damaged slabs, open manholes, overpowering smell of urine and human faeces make taxpayers wonder if they have earned any right to walk freely on the streets at all.

You do not need to walk along the thousands of metres of sidewalks in the city to find out about their poor condition -- just taking a stroll down the sidewalk next to your home

would do.

The sidewalk stretching from Baro Moghbazar intersection to the rail gate on Shaheed Tajuddin Sarani is one such sidewalk in the city. When it comes to street nuisances, this nearly 160-metre long sidewalk ticks all the checkboxes.

For starters, 'watch where you tread' would be a good piece of advice for a pedestrian walking down this sidewalk. The track is treacherous -- dotted with potholes and unfinished manhole openings, littered with all sorts of waste, from gas cylinders to construction debris.

If you do not watch your steps on this uneven and hazardous trail, you might find

yourself lying on the ground with a twisted ankle or bumped nose.

Having tiptoed your way across the path, get ready for a tussle through the wave of people coming out of the adjacent mosque having finished their prayers.

You might start to wonder how many people in this city have any civic sense and have regards for other's time and convenience when some of the pedestrians in front of you stop abruptly in the middle of the sidewalk, blocking your way, only to have a chat with someone or buy something from a street vendor.

While you are elbowing your way through the crowd of pedestrians, peddlers and

panhandlers, make sure you watch for the hot cauldrons set up by a snack vendor or a restaurant by the sidewalk. On top of that, watch out for the hazard on both sides of the sidewalk. Or else, you would definitely stumble into one of the stalls selling cigarette, betel leaf (pān) or bus tickets.

However, regardless of how watchful you are, you would need the quickest reflex action to save yourself and your clothes from incoming spitting from pān chewers and wastewater or garbage from stores next to or above the sidewalk.

In case you successfully dodged all that, be sure to save your shoes from the spilling wastewater or sewage dis-

charged onto the sidewalk from adjacent restaurants or buildings.

As you continue along the track dodging foot traffic and keeping an eye on the incoming spits and splashes, hold steady and stay alert for pipes, fixtures and other fittings used for water or sewerage pipelines stacked up on the sidewalk.

If you follow the jagged terrain for another few metres, you will get to the bus stop where hundreds of jittery commuters are waiting for their buses.

Once you manage to find your way through the narrow strip of sidewalk between the jumpy crowd and lampposts, you will have to brace yourself to tackle some trendy cars parked on the sidewalk. Do not even bother if you see a couple of traffic enforcers standing right beside the vehicles parked on the sidewalk. Instead, get ready to go around the parked cars and set foot on the road, braving the rowdy and reckless bus drivers.

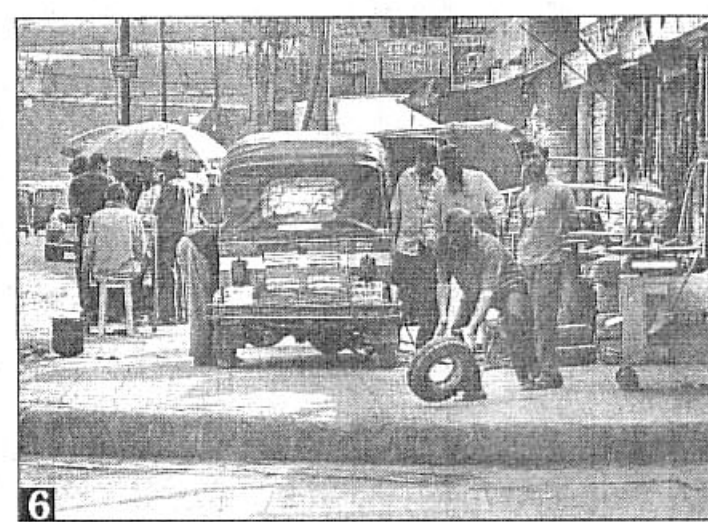
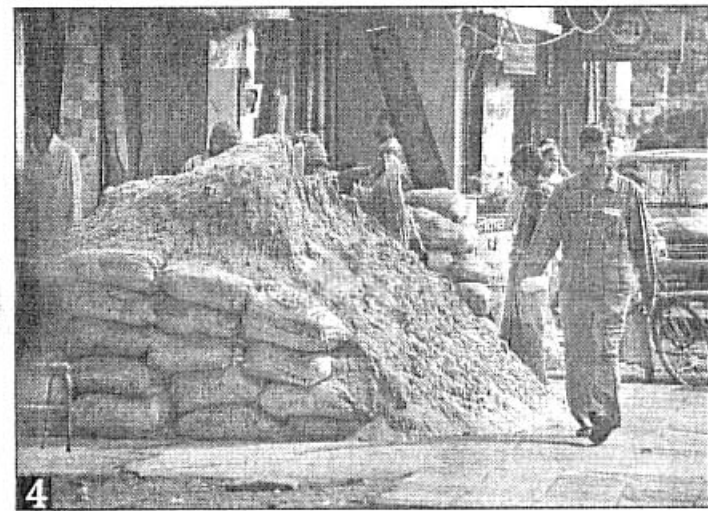
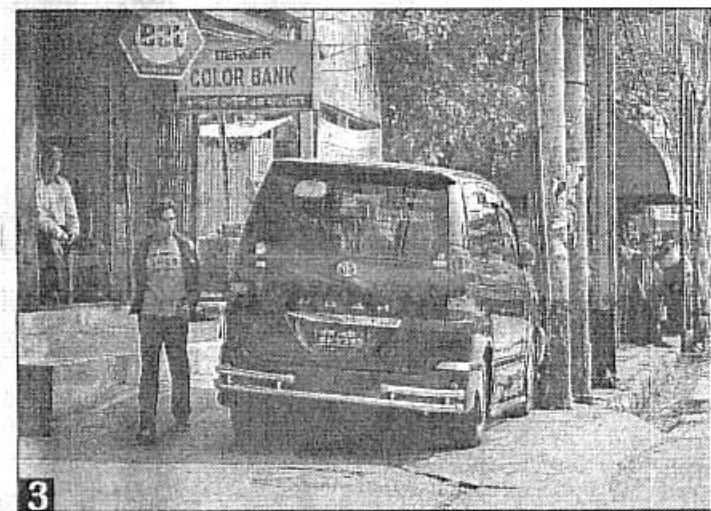
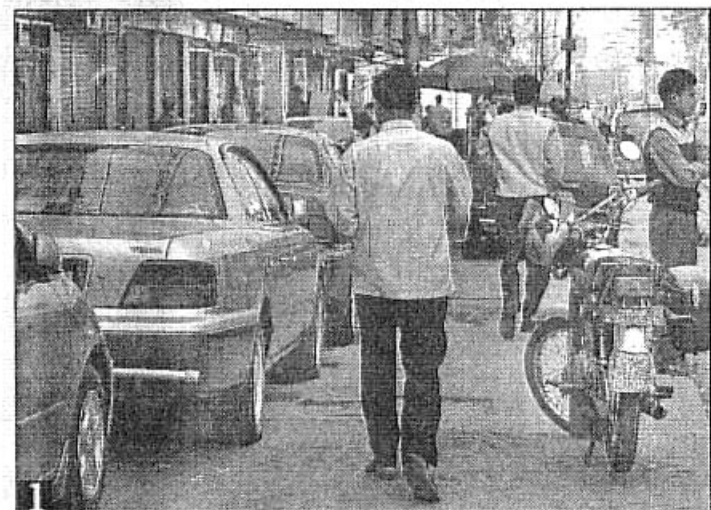
Next up are the mechanical engineering workshops and garages. The sidewalk next to these businesses are vibrant with workers doing their welding work. Do not even dare to ask the workers to let you through or remove their hazardous items or the gas cylinders that are blocking the sidewalk.

After you make it to your destination at the end of this adventurous stretch of the sidewalk, you should feel blessed to be alive and pat yourself on your shoulder for the achievement.

## BATHING IN THE BURIGANGA



People of old Dhaka are taking bath in the polluted water of the river Buriganga. The pollution is the fallout of an incessant flow of effluents from nearby tanneries and other factories for the last thirty years. Ignoring the dangers of taking bath in the polluted water locals are using the river because of acute water crisis in the area.



Some 'activities' on 160-metre stretch of the pavement show 1. footpath being used as a parking lot 2. illegal ticket counters for bus passengers 3. a car parked on the pavement while a passenger shade occupies a major portion 4. construction material brazenly left on the sidewalks 5. a car repairing shop and 6. a CNG repairing outlet on the footpath.

## Sustainable transportation systems

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and land use pattern for an affordable and integrated transportation system comprising both non-motorised and motorised mass transit modes.

"Efficient management of demand and supply of transportation and control over land use and urban growth will enhance the capacity of the system," said Chowdhury. "Government may consider controlling mass migration to the capital city and relocation of readymade garment industries to better manage transport system."

Inadequate public transport services, road networks and footpaths and problem of mixed modes are some critical features of Dhaka's transportation scenario, he said.

According to Chowdhury, 60 percent of Dhaka's commuters walk, 19 percent use rickshaws, 10 percent use bus, 8 percent use other modes and 3 percent

use private cars.

He proposed that association of non-resident Bangladesh investors, among other options, might also contribute to financing transport system development.

Speakers, on the other hand, cautioned of possible dangers of privatisation of transport network if a deal is made dubiously.

Habib Shaheen Tarafder, vice-president of New York-based financing company Marsh and McLennan and former chief engineer at Washington city municipality authorities, said in his presentation that public-private partnership investment is imperative in development of transport infrastructure.

"It is dangerous to rush to any privatisation deal without adequate public scrutiny and discourse, no matter how good it may look," Tarafder said.

A n a n o m a l o u s privatisation deal of a single

segment may jeopardise the prospect of entire communication network."

Political benefit, lack of access to long-term capital, pressure from the investors and demand of the general public for piecemeal solution are the potential factors that drive for privatisation of transport system, he said.

He emphasised public hearing for meticulous review of any privatisation deal and sincere desire on the part of the decision makers for serving the people. "Privatisation of transport system must be in conformity with the of transportation policy."

Dr Abu Reza, development budget advisor, ministry of finance, Afghanistan, said that the present government should take steps towards decentralising education, health service, trade and commerce and develop civic amenities outside Dhaka to free the capital city from traffic congestion.

Noted expert in transportation sector, Dr Rahmat Ullah, who moderated the session, said that it has to be resolved through comprehensive feasibility study whether metro transport system for Dhaka should be rail-based MRT (mass rapid transit) or BRT (bus rapid transit).

Communications Secretary Dr Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman said bureaucratic inefficiency often fails to ensure people's interest in donor-funded projects. Government officials often do not bring harmful aspects of a project in light, neither can they say no to such projects, in the hope of petty gain like foreign trips.

According to Rahman, Dhaka has only 7 to 8 percent open space for road construction compared to 11 percent in Bangkok and 25 to 30 percent in developed cities.

## health, busservices, airlines & train timing

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