



the city that was

Bengal Times was published from Dhaka in 1869 and circulated twice a week on Saturday and Wednesday. Three of its four-column pages were filled with advertisement and some on the last page too. Most of the advertisements were from Kolkata and some from Dhaka and London. The rate of advertisements was the highest in Bengal Times than any other in Dhaka. A rupee was the lowest advertising rate.

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'Now how to get my voter ID card, Sir?'

DURDANA GHAS

Many people in the city are yet to get their voter ID cards and in a fix since they do not know from where to collect those.

Who missed the date of collecting the ID cards are in trouble. There is a lack of adequate publicity on the part of the authorities to let people know from where they will have to collect the cards.

"Around three months ago my entire family and I went to take pictures for voter ID cards. We all were very enthusiastic. But till now we have not got the cards," said Nazli, a resident of Mirpur.

"After the voter listing work was over, we got a notice that anyone can go to the centre to correct mistakes in their forms. But after that we did not get any further notice," she said.

A few weeks ago the authorities announced in Uttara through megaphones asking people to collect ID cards from the voter listing centres.

"When we went there, we were told that some cards are being distributed and the rest will be distributed later, but we still don't know when or from where," said a resident of Uttara Sector-11.

A resident of Moghbazar said he missed the date of collecting his ID card and now he does not know from where to collect that.

"I was supposed to collect my voter ID card from Ispahani Girls' High School on a Friday. I could not go there as I was busy on that day. I went on next Sunday and they asked me to come on Friday next," he said.

"When I went there on next

Many city dwellers who missed the date to collect it are still in a fix



Voter ID cards ready for distribution at DCC ward 50.

Friday, the gatekeeper stopped me and said that there was no one in the school. There was no notice to inform us about what I should do. When I contacted the school authorities they could not say anything. I do not know what to do now. There is no notice on the TV or in newspapers about where we can collect the cards," he added.

Principal of the school expressed ignorance about voter registration. "All the work has been done by the voter registration authorities. We just gave them the venue. Our teachers and staff were not involved," he said.

Asked, an official at the

Information Centre of the Election Commission (EC) said that the ID cards are being distributed from the registration centres rather than centrally.

"Those who did not collect their voter ID cards in city corporation areas can collect those from the offices of their local ward commissioners. At the upazila level the undistributed cards can be collected from Union Parishad offices," he said.

Munshi Bazul Based Anju, ward commissioner, Ward 7 (Mirpur), said those who missed the ID card collecting date are coming to his office every day.

"Right now there are three to

four thousand ID cards kept in my office and people are coming to take those. This morning we gave away around 150 cards. I think all will be distributed within this week," said Anju.

"We are also knocking them by making phone calls and sending peons to inform them to come to the office," he said.

Asked, Sarwar Morshed, deputy secretary, EC, said, "We came to know about this problem. We will definitely take steps to let people know from where they should collect their ID cards."

"There are 4 district election officers in four areas of Dhaka. Anyone can call the officer of his

respective area to get information," he added.

On the other hand, there are also cases where people are not collecting their ID cards in time from the ward commissioner's office.

"We had 43,000 cards of which 40,000 has been distributed. There are 3,000 cards left at the office. We are going to people's house and announcing in the area using megaphones to come and collect those but they are saying they cannot come because they have to go to office," said Md Abdus Salam, a

volunteer at the Ward Commissioner's office of Ward 50 to help in the work of voter list and distribute the cards and

senior vice president, Dhanmondi Progoti Shangho.

Asked, another official at the Information Centre of the EC said that election related information was published in 10 newspapers with phone number of the centre (9116971) for any kind of queries.

"Our target is to enlist 8 crore people by June 16," he said.

According to the Information Centre, 95 percent work of the voter ID card distribution has been done. Till June 7, 76,213,680 voters have been registered or primary forms have been filled in; 26,38,54 ID cards are ready and 40,137,699 have been distributed.



STAR PHOTO

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"As you [Awami League leaders and workers] remained united, I have been able to come back to you. Thank you all."

-- Sheikh Hasina

Awami League Chief

Said at a meeting held at AL chief's Sudha Sadan residence after her release, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"We did not announce a popular budget ... I do not wish to take part in the elections."

-- Mirza Azizul Islam

Finance Adviser

Said at a post-budget press conference at the National Economic Council of the Planning Commission, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I am afraid of closed-door meetings. There is no reason to hide if you want to do something good."

-- ATM Shamsul Huda

Chief Election Commissioner

Said at a press briefing, on Wednesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"I will not go abroad. Why should I? All things I have are in Bangladesh. I want to stay with the people as I have been."

-- Khaleda Zia

Detained BNP Chairperson

Told reporters after the hearing on the charge framing in Niko graft case at a special court, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias



Hassles of the helpless commuters

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

When Mushfiqur Rahman set off for a job interview in a late June morning, he thought it was going to be a great day.

He thought he would turn up at the office in Mohammadpur exactly five minutes before the interview, have a pep talk with his would-be employers and pick up some sweets on his way back home before popping the good news to his family.

Thinking about the wonderful day ahead, Mushfiq, out in his trimmed business shirt, combed-back hair and polished wingtips, queued at the bus stop.

But the day was not as great for him as he thought. After waiting at the bus stop for more than 30 minutes, missing two buses and having a vicious argument with the bus operator, Mushfiq decided to take a three-wheeler instead.

The fresh graduate made the mistake by snubbing the first CNG three-wheeler he came across after the driver demanded a high fare. It did not take him long to realise the blunder as every three-wheeler and taxicab he approached afterwards refused him a ride.

Suddenly, it started to rain while the sun shone brilliantly

above his head. "Great," Mushfiq said to himself, "as if things were not bad enough as it is."

Another half an hour later, Mushfiq found himself pleading to the umpteenth taxicab driver to 'help' him and take him in. "Brother, I really need to be in Mohammadpur in 30 minutes. Please give me a ride and help me out," he said.

"The traffic is really intense over there," the grey-haired driver smiled, apologetically. "Besides the taxi needs to be refuelled and there are no filling stations in that area," he said before scooting off.

It was not before another hour when Mushfiq finally managed to reach his interviewers' office, a good 40 minutes after the interview time.

Mushfiq, in his half-drenched shirt and mud-covered shoes found out that his interview was cancelled for being late. "I smiled, thanked the receptionist and came out of the office. But truth be told, I felt like screaming out loud," he told Star City.

William Shakespeare once said better three hours too soon than a minute late. However, in the capital city, the trend of time keeping is often quite the opposite.

"It is not that we are terrible time keepers," said Moshfiul

Alam, a high school teacher, "but rather, it is the excessive traffic tailbacks and lack of public transport facilities that make punctuality a big issue for anyone living in the city."

Indeed, for the thousands of helpless commuters every day moving from one place to another within the city is getting increasingly difficult day by day.

Cases of a businessman keeping his clients waiting at the office, a student turning up late for an examination, public service vehicles leaving and arriving late have become the norm rather than the exception.

While bulk of the population has to rely on buses and minibuses to travel between places, the capital city has only around six thousand buses and minibuses to accommodate its 14 million commuters, sources said.

"On average, over 500 buses out of the 6,000 tend to sit idle for technical problems," said an official of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority. "Therefore, the whole city virtually has to depend on around 5,500 buses each day."

Many housewives, office goers, school children say that rickshaws offered an alternative mode of transport for them. But

many city roads are now off-limits to rickshaws and they have no choice other than virtually begging of the taxi drivers to take them to their destinations.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Joint Commissioner (Traffic) Jasimuddin said this is not a new situation prevailing in the city's public transport sector. "It is pretty common these days that drivers of public transport modes manipulate certain situations to extract undue fares and harass the passengers in different manners."

It is impossible on the part of the police alone to streamline the entire traffic system, he said. "The process of issuing driving licence is faulty and the situation is such that some people who do not even know the ABC of traffic rules obtain driving licence quite often."

About 80 new cars, minibuses and other vehicles hit the streets of Dhaka every day. There are rules, but many people do not obey them.

"I honestly do not think there is any solution to the transport problem. There are just way too many people here," said Mushfiqur Rahman, a resident of Goran. "I reckon we will just have to spend the bulk of the rest of our lives sitting in traffic jams."

New breed of street vendors

They are rising everyday with new products

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

A knock on the car window wakes up the drowsy commuter.

"Sir, would you take some popcorn?" offers the source of the knock, merely four feet tall, standing beside the car with a sack full of his merchandise.

In a few minutes a startling thump. "Lemon sir? It's only 10 taka," insists an older face.

Not even a minute's pause -- another knock follows. Someone else offers towel, hand fan or a bunch of roses and this goes on as long as the red signal lingers.

Street vending has gone through many transformations over the years. New breed of floating vendors have taken over the streets of Dhaka with innovative marketing strategies. They come in every size and age group with an array of products.

"This is a popular business among the poor because it does not require a huge investment. We cannot afford a permanent shed so we have become mobile," said a towel vendor at Farmgate.

There was a time when newspapers, peanuts and herbal medicine were the products sold by the floating vendors. Some vendors preferred pedestrians while some hopped on public buses and lectured commuters about their product.

Things have taken a new turn in last few years. Today street vendors sell almost everything they could carry, starting from candies, popcorn, towel, lemon, hand fan, cooled bottled water, seasonal flowers, stuffed toys, candy floss, cigarettes, toothbrush, pen, children's book, even pirated copies of latest popular books, and many more.

Busy traffic intersections are the places where they usually operate.

Some of the most popular places for them are the traffic signals near Shahbagh, Hotel Sheraton, Saah fountain, Bijoy Sarani, Zia Uddin, Manik Mia Avenue, Dhanmondi road no 27 and Moghbazar intersection.

Morsheda, a young woman, travels every day from Begunbari slum to Karwan Bazar intersection with her entire family at the crack of dawn. "My first task is to buy lemon from Karwan Bazar wholesale market while my

father goes to Shahbagh to buy flowers and my husband gets towels from Gulistan."

Morsheda's mother looks after her baby and the goods while they persuade customers.

Morsheda explained every vendor has a particular traffic signal to operate his or her trade. They remain stationed at the pavement nearby.

Usually unknown faces are not allowed unless they are relatives or friends to the existing vendors. However, this rule is being broken every day as thousands of destitute people are rushing towards Dhaka seeking job.

Sometimes the police drive them away but they return after a while.

The vendors change their products with changes in season. Traditional hand fans made of palm leaf and cooled bottled water is the most prominent item in summer.

Lemon and popcorn are also the two biggest hits of recent times. Vendors attribute the

surge to a bumper production of lemon in Sylhet and corn production in North Bengal.

"In early summer I start with watermelon slices. Then I switch to cucumber and mango chutney. In winter I sell carrot slices," said Abdul Hamid, a vendor selling sliced cucumber near Farmgate.

Another vendor said, "I sell small hand towels in summer while in winter I switch to light woollen sweaters."

For them, a little traffic jam is always good for business. Income depends on traffic condition, weather and experience of the hawker.

Average income of a vendor is Tk 150 to Tk 200 a day.

Borhan Ali, a 9-year-old expert popcorn seller stationed near Bashundhara City, gives his insight. "It depends on attitude. I keep on nagging unless they buy something. I prefer women who seem more compassionate," he said.

Some older vendors who cannot move fast pretend to be ill

to sell their products.

Borhan starts his business at around 5:00pm after finishing school hours. He sells around 20 packets of popcorn till 10:00pm. Borhan mentioned that sales go up during weekends and festivals like Pahela Baishakh or Victory Day.

The business that apparently seems safe has risk factors too, the vendors said.

"Sometimes we cannot return to the sidewalk when the green signal is on. Minor accidents are a regular feature," said Harun, a candyfloss seller at Bijoy Sarani.

"Often the commuters leave without paying us. It is not always their fault as the vehicles start to speed up as soon as the green signal is on. There is nothing we can do about it."

"There were many occasions when I had to run with speeding cars to get my money. Sometimes people throw the money on the street making it risky for us to collect. Sometimes our products get under the wheels of vehicles," he said.



A common scene at road intersections.