

hello dhaka

Weekly weather forecast for the city	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Low: 29 °C High: 31 °C Cloudy, thunderstorms, humid	Low: 30 °C High: 32 °C Cloudy, thunderstorms, humid	Low: 30 °C High: 33 °C Cloudy, t-storms, warm, humid	Low: 30 °C High: 34 °C Cloudy with thunderstorms	Low: 30 °C High: 33 °C Cloudy, t-storms, warm, humid	Low: 28 °C High: 33 °C Cloudy, t-storms, very warm	Low: 28 °C High: 32 °C Cloudy, thunderstorms, humid

source: ecwweather.com

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## Buses becoming slower

Average speed falls from 17 km an hour to 13 km in 2005, may fall to 5.2 km in 2014

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Due to traffic congestions and mismanagement buses are getting slower in most of the busy city streets, causing loss of time, energy and money of the passengers.

Average speed of buses came down from around 17km per hour in 2000 to 12.9 km in 2005 and it is likely to decrease to only 5.2km in 2014.

This was revealed in a study conducted under the Strategic Transport Planning (STP), a 20-year project on the city's transportation system.

The baseline survey pointed out that the bus speed is gradually decreasing due to absence of proper initiatives on city traffic management.

Luis Berger Group of USA, and Bangladesh Consultants Limited, a local consultant, jointly conducted the STP surveys for the communications ministry.

Rafiqul Islam, deputy team leader of Bangladesh Consultants Limited, said they worked on the traffic speed in 2005 and this is the latest survey on this.

"The current trends of Dhaka city transport system suggest that the buses will continue to get slower than our survey time," he pointed out.

The survey was done just after implementation of the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) aimed at ensuring smooth traffic flow in the capital.



City buses move at a snails pace at a road intersection.

The monitoring report on the DUTP revealed that all the examined bus routes got slow between 2000 and 2005 and reached below 13km per hour.

For a trip from Gabtoli to Gulistan via Nilkhet, a bus needed 39.8 minutes in 2000. The trip time increased to 50.2 minutes in 2005, the survey report says.

The average speed of buses on this route was 17km per hour in 2000 and in five years it came down to 13.2km.

A bus required about 40 minutes to finish a trip from Kuril to Sadarghat via Malibagh in 2000. After five years, buses took 50 minutes for a trip on this route.

On Motijheel-Mirpur 10 route

(via Farmgate), buses took 44 minutes to finish a trip in 2000 and in five years the trip time increased to about 50 minutes.

Average speed of buses in 2000 was 15 km per hour on this route while it came down to 13.2km in 2005.

However, average speed of buses on Airport-Gulistan route (via Farmgate) remains almost

the same -- around 67 minutes.

The trip time of buses running between Gulshan-2 and Peer Jangi Mazar (via Mohakhali) was 60.5 minutes in 2000 and 83.5 minutes in 2005.

Average bus speed on this route was 15.1km per hour in 2000 that fell to 9.6km in 2005.

Buses took 36.2 minutes to finish a trip from Motijheel to Mohammadpur via Science Lab in 2000 and the trip time rose to 53 minutes in 2005.

On this route average speed in 2000 was about 15km that decreased to 10.3km in 2005.

The only exception is Gulistan-Mirpur 1 route via Farmgate on which a bus took 60.5 minutes to finish a trip in 2000 and 55.7 minutes in 2005.

As the city buses carry 60 percent of the total passengers, time consuming bus trips cause financial losses and waste of time of passengers.

The slow buses increases travel cost and time. In the monitoring report of DUTP, the time cost of a bus is assumed at Tk 596 per minute. The survey pointed out that 15.3 million taka is lost per day if the buses delay 9 minutes in a trip on average.

The report blames unusual growth of human and vehicle population in the city for the slower traffic movement. Population growth of the city was more than 50 percent while vehicle ownership growth was 64 percent during the survey period.

## How about escalators at footbridges?

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Failing to encourage pedestrians to use footbridges, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is now thinking about alternatives for crossing the streets at busy traffic points.

Financed by the World Bank, DCC is conducting a feasibility study on introducing escalators and other possible ways to make footbridges more pedestrian-friendly.

The suggestion for introducing escalators on experimental basis came at a meeting of DCC with LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal in last February, sources said.

Currently the city has 49 footbridges built at a cost of around Tk 50 crore. However, most of them remain unused as pedestrians are reluctant to use them. The issue became a major concern for the traffic management authorities.

Even the experience of the recently built footbridges at Bangla Motor and Paribagh is similar to other traffic points. Most pedestrians at the busy Bangla Motor intersection still tend to jaywalk ignoring the risk of accidents.

Syed Qudratullah, superintendent engineer of DCC Traffic Engineering Division, said, "The idea of setting up escalators in the open air is very unusual. We are discussing whether it is possible in Bangladesh. No site has been selected so far."

"Consultants are examining the installation and operational costs and other technical issues. We have to consider the weather issue too," he added.

Other alternative options such as bringing changes to design or height of the footbridges are also being discussed, he said.

Md Jashimuddin, joint commissioner for traffic, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they have deployed police personnel near footbridges to persuade pedestrians, but the efforts have hardly yield positive outcome due to apathy of the pedestrians.

He mentioned another point that is women and elderly citizens are having trouble climbing the stairs. So they are still crossing the busy streets risking their lives. Moreover, they are slowing down the traffic resulting in frequent congestions.

With a view to improving pedestrian mobility and building more convenient footbridges DCC has conducted another study with the help of the Centre for Urban Studies.

The study completed in March cited height, steep stairs and negative environment on the bridges as the main reasons behind pedestrians' reluctance to use them.

"I have been suffering from arthritis for the last few years. My bone structures are very weak. Climbing stairs is extremely painful for me," said Majibar Rahman, a resident of

Eskaton while waiting on the footpath to cross the street near Bangla Motor.

Patients suffering from cardiovascular ailments also complain of problems and pointed out risk factors of climbing stairs.

The height of the footbridges in the city is around 5.5 metres that allows the double-decker buses to ply underneath. The height is physically excruciating for many. So many pedestrians prefer crossing busy thoroughfares instead of climbing the steep stairs.

ple spend hours gossiping there. They even sleep on the bridge.

Muggers, pickpockets, drug peddlers and floating sex workers often prowl on these structures. Hawkers have taken over walking spaces on many footbridges, leaving very little room for the pedestrians.

"Many over-bridges have developed holes and cracks on the walking platforms, making it risky to use," Afroz added. "They lack regular maintenance."

Advertisements occupy every



Going up the steep stairs of footbridges is a tough task for many.

The DCC study cited narrow sidewalks of the streets as another problem. Necessity of widening the footpath has been recommended. Average width of the existing footpaths is a little more than 2 metres, the report pointed out.

The study also found insecurity, insufficient lighting and poor maintenance of the footbridges as the discouraging factors for pedestrians.

Afroz Banu, a resident of Paribagh, said, "The environment on the Paribagh over-bridge is very unpleasant. There is no room for walking as peo-

inch of the footbridges. The recently built overhead sheds of the bridges have virtually turned many of them into dark tunnels. After sundown they become risky spot for people as there is no power connection to install lights.

Pedestrians have welcomed the idea of installing escalators. Some elderly citizens suggested token toll system for the facility.

"I wouldn't mind paying a token money to use over-bridges with escalators. The toll can help the government get back the construction cost," said Majibar Rahman.

## BRISK BUSINESS OF UNSAFE DRINKING WATER

Unscrupulous traders sell drinking water in big plastic containers to hotels and shops in the city in the name of ghost companies or without any such labels. Although the water is unsafe there is none to monitor its quality. Right, sometimes street children collect used bottles from offices, wash them up and sell the bottles to these traders.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



## ZIA to revamp transportation system

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Zia International Airport (ZIA) authorities are finally going to reorganise its premium transportation service for airport passengers.

The authorities intend to give the responsibility to deal with the arrangements at the airport to a single transportation company for a better and streamlined service to the passengers, sources said.

"Currently there are over a dozen transportation companies operating with over 300 taxicabs and minibuses at the airport," said an official of Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB). "Giving the responsibility to operate at the airport to one company that is prominent and credible would greatly improve the service at the airport," he said.

The new system will see over 300 air-conditioned, non air-conditioned taxicabs and minibuses readily waiting on

the airport premises for prospective passengers. Six ticket counters will be set up at the two terminals for the convenience of booking vehicles.

Detailed fare charts will be posted near the ticket counters.

"The passengers' convenience will be given utmost importance in the revamped system," said a CAAB spokesperson. "They (passengers) will be able to book vehicles without facing any hassle or nuisances," he said.

The passengers would have to provide the counters with some personal information such as their name, passport number and address before renting the car.

"All in all, the idea is to virtually restart the whole system from the scratch. This way, we hope to remove many irregularities and anomalies from the system," said a CAAB official.

The move to reorganize comes after over two decades of complaints and grievances from

the passengers over the hassles of using the transportation services offered at the ZIA.

This 'premium service' has been present at the Zia International Airport since 1980s. Under this scheme, no commercial transportation vehicle is allowed to operate at ZIA without the authorisation from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB).

"The idea has been to offer security and convenience to the passengers at the airport," said the CAAB spokesperson.

"As we have all the cars and their drivers enlisted in our database, passengers can travel in those vehicles without compromising their safety, without any fear of swindles or frauds," he said.

While it was praised in its early years, the system turned into a source of nuisance for the passengers over the years.

CAAB officials admit that there have been scores of complaints and grievances from

passengers regarding the taxicabs available under the transportation services. Apart from the frequent incidents of overcharging, there have also been instances where drivers forced passengers off in the middle of the street or took undue fares while being in a contract with a passenger, sources said.

CAAB officials say the taxicabs operating at ZIA demand higher charges because they are safer and more secure than other transportation services available in the city.

"Our cabs are safer and more reliable. If you even forget any of your luggage or valuables behind, you can rest assured that you will get it back untouched and undamaged," said an official at the ticket office.

"We charge double as you get an up-down trip with one rental. Besides, the taxi drivers may have to sit around the whole day for passengers. They need the extra money," he said.

However, the tattered taxicabs

with broken front and backlights, zero air conditioning and unprofessional drivers did not look any more secure than the average taxicabs. The taxicabs are also supposed to carry complaint boxes inside the cars. However, none of the taxicabs seem to have any.

A CAAB official said some of these taxicabs may be allowed to operate in groups under the new system.

"One single transportation company would not have the adequate number of vehicles to cover the whole airport, therefore we may allow some of the current companies to continue their services, with some new guidelines of course," he said.

According to sources, the existing 300 taxicabs and minibuses under current transportation companies have been operating without any written guidelines at the ZIA for over two decades.

Everyday, over 15,000 passengers use The Zia International Airport through its 38 flights.



Some taxicabs haphazardly parked in front of ZIA.