



Urdu Road suggests the camp of soldiers. Diwanbazar, Bakhshibazar, Mughaltoli, Hazaribagh, Peelkhana, Atishkhana, Mahouthtoli -- all signify that they had been occupied by Mughal civil and military officers and their followers at one time or another in the growth of the capital. Kayetholi signifies the quarters of the Kayets or Kayasthas, the Hindu writers of the Mughal government.

## Terrible tailbacks in old Dhaka make life miserable

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

For the thousands of commuters in old Dhaka, moving from one place to another within and out of the region is a bane. They lose several hours a day for tailbacks.

"Transport condition is terrible here," lamented Md Mabbubur Rahman, a teacher at the European Standard School in old town.

"There are many problems in the area -- health and sanitation problems and then there are the issues with hygiene and unplanned development. But it goes without saying that our biggest problem is their traffic congestion," he said.

"The situation becomes so infuriating at times that many motorists avoid the old town streets by any means," said Anwar Hossain, a resident of Babubazar. "Most CNG three-wheelers or rickshaws do not agree to go to that area because of the traffic jams."

Like Mabbub and Anwar, anyone would agree that Dhaka's old part, best recognised for its antiquated buildings, time-honoured cuisine and ever-friendly residents, is also notorious for its galling narrow streets and slapdash traffic congestions.

The roads are so narrow that two cars cannot pass at a time. Rows of shops and makeshift hotels dotted the streets, further narrowing them.

The markets and bazaars in old town offer no parking facilities, resulting in unwarranted traffic jams. The roads are bumpy, potholed and broken. Many manholes are open with the odd vehicle or two getting their wheel stuck inside them, inviting even more jams.

"Sometimes I feel like giving up my car and getting a bicycle instead. Two-wheelers seem like the smartest choice of transport in these streets," remarked



Moving at a snail's pace on the old Dhaka streets has become a regular feature.

Anwar Hossain.

Anwar might just be right. But the traffic situation on the streets become so unbearable at times that even a slim bicycle would have a hard time getting across the gridlocks.

For the thousands of housewives, office goers, school children in the city's old town, moving from one place to another is getting increasingly difficult day by day.

Everyday lives of the residents and business in the area are severely affected because of the gridlocks.

"Most of the roads are broken. The manholes are open which is very dangerous and every day accidents are occurring. The dustbins are on the road and are so smelly that one cannot walk straight," said Jamiluddin Ahmed, a resident of Chawkbazar.

Ahmed was not exaggerating. During a visit to Babubazar last week, this correspondent saw through a snarl of traffic, crawling slowly over a few blocks of streets, snaking its way from the bend in Chawkbazar towards Babubazar.

It was full of rickshaws, cars, tom-toms and muddy-bottomed pick-up trucks. The residents of the old Dhaka were trying to return home.

But their ride home was anything but smooth, courtesy of the many street-side stalls, pick-up lorries and rickshaw-vans parked haphazardly beside the street.

"One of the main reasons for the jam is the heavy duty transporters that carry goods to and from this business hub," said Ashfaq Hossain, a resident of Shyampur.

The heavy vehicles -- mostly inter-district lorries

and cargo carriers enter through several points that surrounds the old town. Lorries can also be seen carrying construction materials across the congested streets.

Shah Alam, a resident of Shyampur also blamed the heavy transporters for creating severe traffic tailbacks in old town roads. "As if the roads were not narrow enough. The lorries and trucks make them feel even narrower," he said.

The traffic police officials who are supposed to control the situation say that the mechanism to fight traffic jams in old town has failed.

"The streets are so narrow and choked with so many other things that it is difficult for us to maintain a smooth flow of traffic," said a traffic policeman in Faridabad.

"The rickshaws are the biggest offenders. They change lanes wherever they find even an inch of space to squeeze through. Then there are the pick-up trucks and other transporters that make things even worse," he said.

Locals alleged that most of the streets in the old town do not have any police posted to monitor the traffic situation.

The few traffic enforcers who are supposed to be maintaining a smooth flow of traffic are usually found dozing off or mingling with their colleagues, old town residents alleged.

However, officials at the Kotwali Police Station denied the allegations.

"It is not possible on part of the police alone to streamline the traffic system in old town," said an officer at the Kotwali Police Station. "The street conditions are terrible. Most of the buildings are constructed without any plans or proper designs."

"The only solution to the problem is a tangible and long-term plan to refurbish the old town streets and remove the hazards that its residents are being exposed to every day," the police officer said.

## Polls near but mike business still dull

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

After a series of drama in the political arena, it is now certain that the national election will be held on December 29. But the news has not instilled hope into those who provide loudspeaker service during election campaign.

The loudspeaker service providers said they have been experiencing a huge slump in their business for the last two years due to the enforcement of the state of emergency that bans outdoor political activities in the country.

Traditionally, the horn loudspeakers are used as sound system during public meetings, rallies, organisational meetings and election campaign by the political parties and election candidates. The system is witness to every major political events of the country before and after independence.

The ban on political activities was partially withdrawn in May this year but use of loudspeakers is still restricted. According to Election Commission's rules, candidates will be allowed to use loudspeakers in campaign for three weeks before election.

As the election day nears the loudspeaker service providers hoped that the business would pick up pace. They are waiting for the start of campaign.

Industry leaders said the ban on political activities hit their business hard as they are primarily dependent on political meetings.

"Election is like Eid for us. Before every national election political parties and candidates arrange public meetings every day across the city and obviously they hire sound system with hundreds of loudspeakers. This year we haven't seen any sign of activities yet," said Abul Kalam Azad, managing partner, Taj Mike Service.

"Although we are eagerly looking forward to election for a very long time, we

don't see any significant boost in our business after full withdrawal of emergency. When candidates will be allowed to use loudspeakers, there will be too little time before election.

loudspeaker to announce missing child.

Apart from this, the loudspeaker service providers experienced a huge loss in business during the last two years and some companies



Loudspeaker service providers are now waiting for the start of election campaign.

Politicians will not go to all the places for election campaign. That means business will not be as good as it used to be during the last elections," he added.

The mike-service providers hope that campaign will get momentum after Eid.

Joyal Abedin, owner of Royal Mike Service, said during national days and events like Independence Day, Victory Day, Ekushey February or Pahela Baishakh they get some customers.

Besides, there are religious programmes like Waz Mahfil. People also hire

were forced to shut down the business.

The companies still in operation are replacing the old mode of public announcement system with modern digital equipment.

Md Akhtar Hossain, proprietor of Tarango Sound Service, said about 40 per cent mike service providers shut down their business in recent times.

"Cultural programmes were our second important business. But nowadays they tend to hire digital sound system. To survive we had to switch," he said.

## A SHOW WITH A DIFFERENCE



The indigenous community of Bangladesh 'weaved their hearts together' at a cultural programme in the city. At the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre a three-day vibrant festival was held from November 30 to introduce the cultural life of the hill people. Dazzling display of dances and unique songs marked the occasion. Mouth-watering delicacies relished by the hill community were also shown at the festival. Exhibition of indigenous crafts, artefacts and colourful fabrics attracted a large crowd. The festival that concluded yesterday was organised by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility, a project funded by the European Union.

PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

