

Booming population eating away living standard

CITY CORRESPONDENT

After nearly a decade in the city of their dreams, Khasru Hossain and his wife Rahela Begum boarded an inter-district bus headed towards Tangail at Mohakhali bus terminal earlier this month, bidding goodbye to the capital.

Not because of some great betrayal, but a series of escalating indignities: meagre income that can hardly manage their expanding family, rising costs of living, and the closure of the brokerage firm where Khasru used to work.

Over the past decade, Khasru and his wife saw the number of her family members become three-fold. But her family income increased only slightly. Life was getting difficult with rising costs of living including house rents.

After Khasru lost his job, the family finally gave in, making the wrenching decision to leave the city. He and his family joined millions others in their quest to go back to their villages to enjoy the Eid vacation there.

Only Khasru and his family are not coming back after celebrating Eid.

"The window of opportunity is closing," said Khasru. "It is a good time we finally go back to the village and look after the

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farmlands."

However, unlike Khasru and Rahela, the hundreds of thousands of other families that left the capital city for the Eid-ul-Azha are slowly coming back.

According to a report of the World Bank, Dhaka's population of a staggering 13 million people crowded into 2,000 square kilometres area, makes up over 10 percent of the country's whole population creating one of the highest urban densities in the world.

At a conference on "Urbanisation and the development of Bangladesh" on December 4, leading environmentalists, urban experts and economists expressed their concern on the low standard of living in Dhaka due to its enormous population density.

The city has now over 1

crore 30 lakh residents and the annual rate of increase in population is around 5 percent, said a report presented at the conference.

If the population continues to rise at this rate, the city will have a staggering size of population by 2012, making it the third largest city in the world in terms of population.

Each year that passes, Dhaka garners another 400,000 people who come to call the city home. An estimated 73 percent of this additional people migrate from rural areas.

Economists and urban experts attributed the high growth of population to the higher income prospects in the city. With income prospects being higher, Dhaka's population is growing much faster than the rest of the country.

This huge increase in population along with its

pressure on the city's limited land and weak urban services makes Dhaka one of the most densely populated cities in the world.

Transportation sector in the city is severely affected by the influx of people.

"People are virtually spending their days sitting in traffic jams," said Mozammel Huq, imam of a city mosque. It took three hours for him to reach Malibagh from Tongi while he was on his way to Syedabad to catch a bus to Sylhet.

Many others would agree with Huq.

Urban experts say the problems in the transportation sector is mainly due to the population density of the city, which is now believed to have reached over 34,000 people per square kilometre, says a World Bank report.

People are cluttering the city at an alarming numbers as job prospects in the outlying districts are drying up. With farming and other traditional trades have declining profits; people look up to Dhaka for hope.

This rate of this influx has risen by 50-90 percent in the last 20 years. The consequence is a rise to an overcrowded situation despite the fact that the city has expanded on every side. Uttara, Tongi, Gazipur, Savar, Demra etc are now considered major parts of the city.



The cramped streets of Dhaka make it difficult for the dwellers to get a little space even on pavements all year round. It is only during the Eid holidays when they find some fresh air to breathe.

Bumpy, potholed roads at Dania unrepaired for long

MAHTABI ZAMAN

The main road of Dania at the southeastern end of Dhaka where four lakh people reside has been in a dilapidated condition for the last two years.

Carpeting of the road starting from Dolairpar has been damaged severely but there has been no initiative to repair the road, causing immense sufferings of the locals. The road was last carpeted with bitumen in the beginning of 2006.

As the area is not under the Dhaka City Corporation all the development work are supposed to be done by Shyampur Union Parishad.

However, chairman of the Union Parishad Mohammad Lutfor Rahman said they do not have funds and logistics for carrying out development work in the area.

He said local MPs often pledged to take the responsibility of development with the help of the local government ministry. But since there is no political government in power now, there has been no development work for the last two years.

The road has become unfit for commuting as a large number of potholes have developed. Even after a slight rain the road gets waterlogged due to poor drainage system.

Not only the main road, the other roads in the entire Dania area are now in the same condition. The other roads in Rasulpur, Goalbarimor,

Paterbagh, Kutubkhali and Shanir Akhra are awaiting repair for years.

The Kutubkhali road is often overflowed by the adjacent canal, which drains out the water of this area. Although the canal was re-excavated a couple of months ago, its depth is decreasing and it overflows even without rain.

Locals said poor construction and lack of timely repair are responsible for the present condition of the roads in Dania. Mohammad Anwar, a CNG driver, said the road has become unusable due to inadequate and poor carpeting work.

Moreover, the roads are damaged within a very short time by heavy trucks used for carrying

construction materials to feed the rapidly growing urban area.

Monirul Alam, a restaurant owner, said "Loaded trucks run frequently every day, causing damage to the roads. But there is no initiative to repair the roads."

Due to the dilapidated condition of the main road, rickshawpullers tend to avoid the road.

"I have to wait for at least half an hour every morning to get a rickshaw to reach the main road where bus is available," said Umme Habiba, a college student residing in Dania.

Saiful Islam, who works at a private bank, however never waits for rickshaw. He said he walks through the road full of potholes to reach

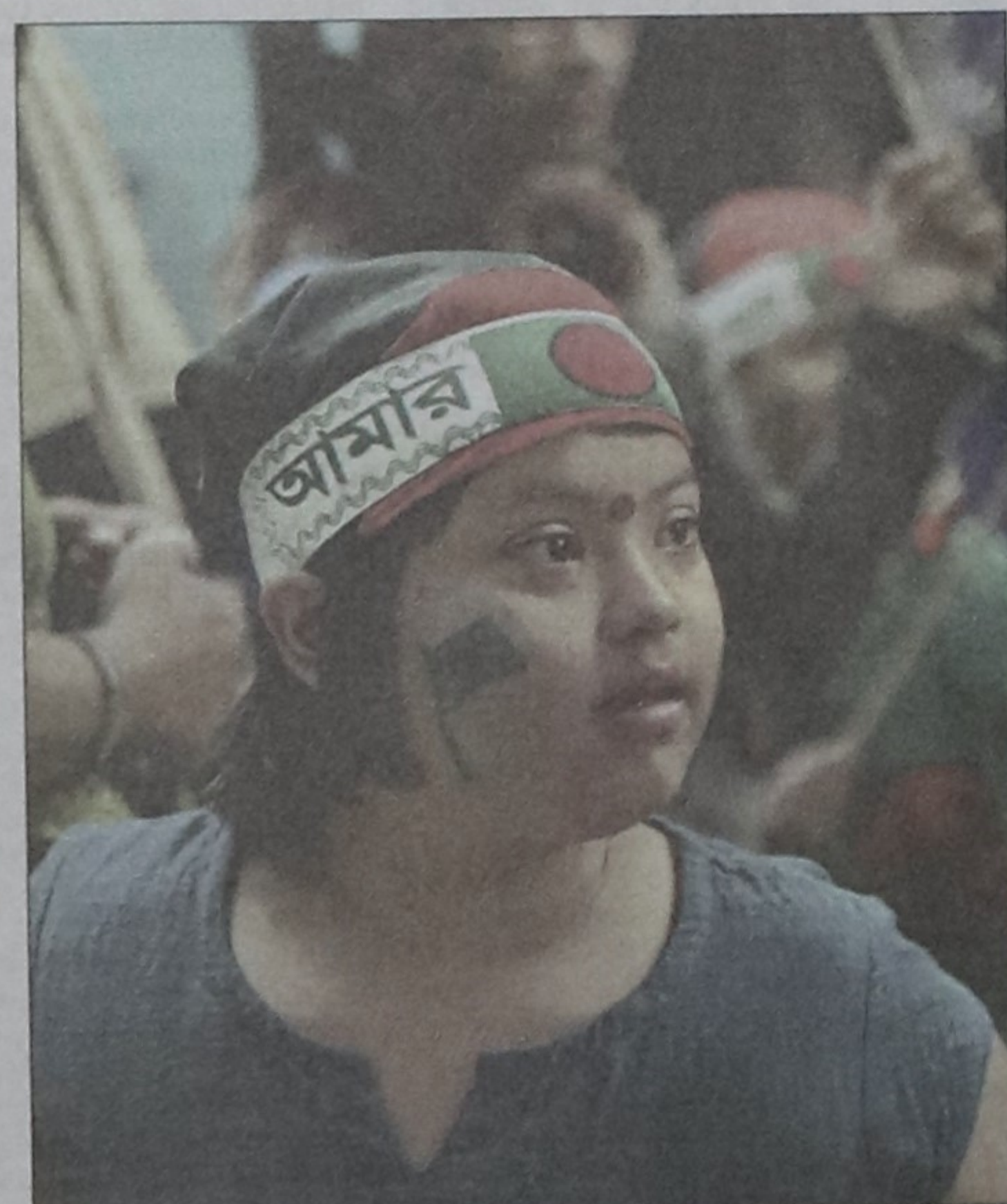
the bus stop in time.

"I don't want to pay double fare. Rickshawpullers now charge double the amount they used to demand two years ago as the road has been damaged severely," he said.

Ibrahim, a rickshawpuller, said, "It is true that rickshaw fare has increased. But you have to think about our hardship and the damage of our rickshaws caused by the broken road."

Rehana Begum, a regular commuter, said the broken road has caused her back pain.

"On the rainy days rickshawpullers avoid trip to Dania. They sit idle on the main road but do not want to take passengers," Ismail, another Dania resident, said.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Children from different walks of life celebrate the victory day in their own ways. Two flower-selling girls wrap red and green headbands as they share a moment of joy amid an otherwise dreary life. A cute girl enjoys time with her parents, while a peanut vendor has also not forgotten to remember the day.



The bumpy, potholed streets of Dania is a nightmare for vehicles.

STAR PHOTO