

Freedom after midnight

Traffic control system in the city falls asleep after 10pm leaving motorists at liberty when duty hours of traffic policemen end

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The city's traffic control mechanism is virtually switched off after 10:00pm when the traffic department of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) pulls out its officials from their stations leaving motorists in absolute freedom.

According to traffic police sources, working hours of the traffic police end at 10:00pm. After that the traffic mechanism of Dhaka solely relies solely on the traffic signals.

"The traffic police officers work in three shifts a day; the first shift starts at 6:00am and the last one ends at 10:00pm," said an official at the traffic department of DMP.

"There are times when the duty hours may stretch up to midnight. That happens during special occasions or when the traffic conditions are really severe," he said.

However, it is alleged the many traffic enforcers leave their posts well before their duty hours end, resulting in an unruly contest of breaking traffic rules among motorists.

While city motorists have grown accustomed to cruising past red lights in broad daylight, ignoring the stop signal is a common trend at night. For some motorists 'red' has become the new 'green' at many city intersections.

"The situation leaves maximum chance of fatal road accidents," said a



A deserted traffic post at midnight.

traffic officer adding "at other times the motorists cannot drive with freedom due to traffic jams and other reasons".

To make matters worse, hundreds of heavy trucks and other commercial transports including inter-district night coaches enter the city in large numbers as they race with each other on the city thoroughfares.

"They [lorry and bus drivers] seem to be liberated from any traffic regulations and drive recklessly," said Sadeque Hossain, a Malibagh resident.

"As my office is in Uttara, usually it is not before 10:30pm when I reach home," he said, "and

on my way back home almost every night I get firsthand experience of how unruly the lorry and bus drivers can be. And I never see any traffic police around."

Most of these heavy vehicles are inter-district lorries and night coaches transporting goods and passengers to and from the capital. Fleets of lorries can also be seen carrying construction materials across the metropolis.

Hulking lorries and large pickups carrying rods with their long sharp thorny tips sticking out through the back of the vehicle is also a regular scene in the streets.

"You have to be extra careful when driving

around the lorries carrying construction materials like rods. Even a split second late on the brakes may result in serious accidents," said Akbar Hossain, a chauffeur from Green Road.

Besides, many rickshaws are seen paddling their way across the main roads.

With many traffic officials leaving their posts even earlier than the designated time, long queues are seen on almost all the major city thoroughfares in Mirpur Road, VIP Road, Panthapath, Gabtoli, Shyamoli, Moghbazar, Rampura, Mohakhali, Shahbagh, Mouchak and other points after nightfall with countless heavy vehi-

cles lining up.

"Late night Dhaka is supposed to be traffic free. But I face traffic jams almost every night in Manik Mia Avenue intersection, Russell Square, Dhanmondi road 27 and on the Mirpur Road between 10:30pm and 11:00pm on my way back home from my office at Gulistan," said Mizanur Ahsan, a resident of Dhanmondi.

Heavy lorries, buses and pickups were seen heedlessly running along the Airport Road leading to Tongi and beyond, and the road to Aricha.

Traffic officials blamed the policy of allowing trucks and other heavy transport vehicles to enter the city before 8:00pm for the unruly traffic situations after nightfall.

"Hundreds of trucks wait at the city's entry points for hours and enter the city at the same time, creating a chaotic rush of traffic," said a traffic inspector of DMP.

According to him, an effective solution to this problem could be the construction of more bypass roads to ease pressure from the key entry points of the city.

"Bypass roads would certainly make things better by easing the flow of traffic at the entry points. With bypass roads available for use, vehicles to Narayanganj from Gazipur would not need to enter the city's main roads," said Haque.

NO END TO STRUGGLE



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Octogenarian Asia Khatun still struggles to survive. Instead of looking up to her wards she finds a way to survive by selling alur dom or smoked potatoes with spice. She lives on this meagre earning beside residential model school at Mohammadpur.



Mindless car parking is making vehicular movements difficult at many points of Gulshan. DCC itself has rented out some internal lanes in the posh residential area adding to the situation. The above pictures show a common scene in front of National Shooting Federation Complex south of Gulshan Circle 1.

Polls cheer for scavengers

Waste pickers earn some extra bucks by selling leftover posters and campaign materials

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Scavengers of the city are feeling especially fortunate after the December 29 national election. They are busy collecting thousands of posters and other canvassing materials as the political activists are resting after a hectic campaign.

Election posters and other decorative items used for campaign have become the newest source of income for the waste pickers.

The city wore a festive look during the last two weeks of campaign with millions of posters hanging all over the city. Placards, banners and colourful party symbols were also installed by candidates in every constituency.

Waste pickers of all ages started collecting these gleefully the moment balloting stopped.

Mohammad Alim, a scavenger from Begunbari working in Karwan Bazar area said, "It's a boon for us. Now we are working day and night to collect posters."

"It's a good thing that this time the posters were not pasted on the walls with glue, which made them more usable," Alim added.

Before the much-awaited December 29 national election, the Election Commission barred the candidates from putting up posters on the walls. The candidates were only allowed to hang the posters with rope.

"The main roads are almost cleared up. Now we

are moving to alleys in various localities that are still full of posters and other items," said another waste collector, Mohammad Faruque, working near Farmgate.

He mentioned that a huge competition is going on among the scavengers.

The collectors sell the posters, jute ropes and bamboo sticks to locals traders involved in the waste business, who then sell them to Nimtoli market in Gulistan, where a huge business of recyclable materials takes place.

Another collector

Morsheda said, "My family had already started preparing packets with posters that are still intact. The packets will be sold to grocery shops."

The torn papers are sold to the waste traders, which will be resold for recycling. Bamboo used for placards are also being sold as firewood in the market. The jute ropes used for hanging posters are being sold for reuse.

Morsheda said tearing the posters from ropes is very risky as most of them are tangled with electric wires.

Md. Rana a trader from Nimtoli said they are more interested in posters as these can be recycled to make paper cartons.

Many posters and decoration are still hanging in disarray in the city with no sign of cleaning activity from the Dhaka City Corporation's cleaning crews.

Contacted, one of the high officials from DCC requesting anonymity told Star City that they cannot execute the cleaning job in many areas fearing obstruction from local political leaders.



File photo of hundreds of election posters on a city road. Inset, a waste picker collects them to earn some extra bucks.



SHAHNAZ ALAM