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Traffic problem in Dhaka

Dhaka, the capital of the country and one of the most densely populated mega-cities in the world, has been lacking in proper infrastructure, considering mobility, pollution etc. It is a matter of utter dismay that Dhaka is still

deprived of an effective mass transit system even though the population is over 13 million with a fair possibility that it will be doubled by 2015-2016.

Like environmental issues, congestion in a mega-city like

Dhaka is a matter of long discussion and that's why transportation engineers are engaged in prolonged studies to solve the problem. Congestion and its pattern varies from city to city depending on the population density, city area, percentage of roads, traffic management etc. We can't expect the same congestion index in Dhaka (only about 614 sq. Km) and Delhi (about 3000 sq. Km). We can't compare Dhaka with New York or Bangkok as well.

Policy makers all over the world are also concerned about the energy efficient transport system that means more passengers have to be catered to with minimum fuel consumption. What is happening in Dhaka is simply the waste of working hours with wastage of imported fuel resulting in huge pollution. In this regard, something has to be done which would be practical as well as serving the necessity of the people in the coming years.

Buses are the main transport here in Dhaka where people love to use rickshaws for short trips and to some extent people use expensive auto-rickshaws under compulsion. But the overall situation of the transport sector is rather far from satisfactory as people are not getting proper transport in required direction in the rush hours. Moreover, private cars are also creating huge congestion not only due to the lack of roads but also due to the absence of available parking places. Mixed traffic (slow & fast moving) is another reason

behind traffic jams. The average speed of traffic has come down to only 4-5 Kph. From environmental point of view this traffic speed is responsible for pollution. Traffic management is also failing to handle such a huge traffic and what will be the situation after 10-15 years is a matter of great concern now.

People losing 1-2 hours daily due to severe congestion in a hot humid Dhaka is nothing new, all are accustomed with this. We have already seen many meetings, discussions in this regard but the problem is yet to be solved. A heavy mass transit, that is metro rail is long overdue as it can carry at least 5-10 times more passengers at higher speed than buses. Subway would remove congestion permanently & make the city less polluted as it is driven electrically where the fuel consumption is also less in comparison to the present transport system. There is also provision for future expansion in subway which is impossible in all other systems like monorail/sky-train (light rail). On the other hand, expressway would only facilitate the private cars & highway buses, that's why there should be a heavy mass transit network in the metropolis connecting the city entries at a shallow depth for the mass people so that expressway could be constructed later and networks beneath the first one could also be constructed if needed.

Engr. Shafiqul Alam
One-mail

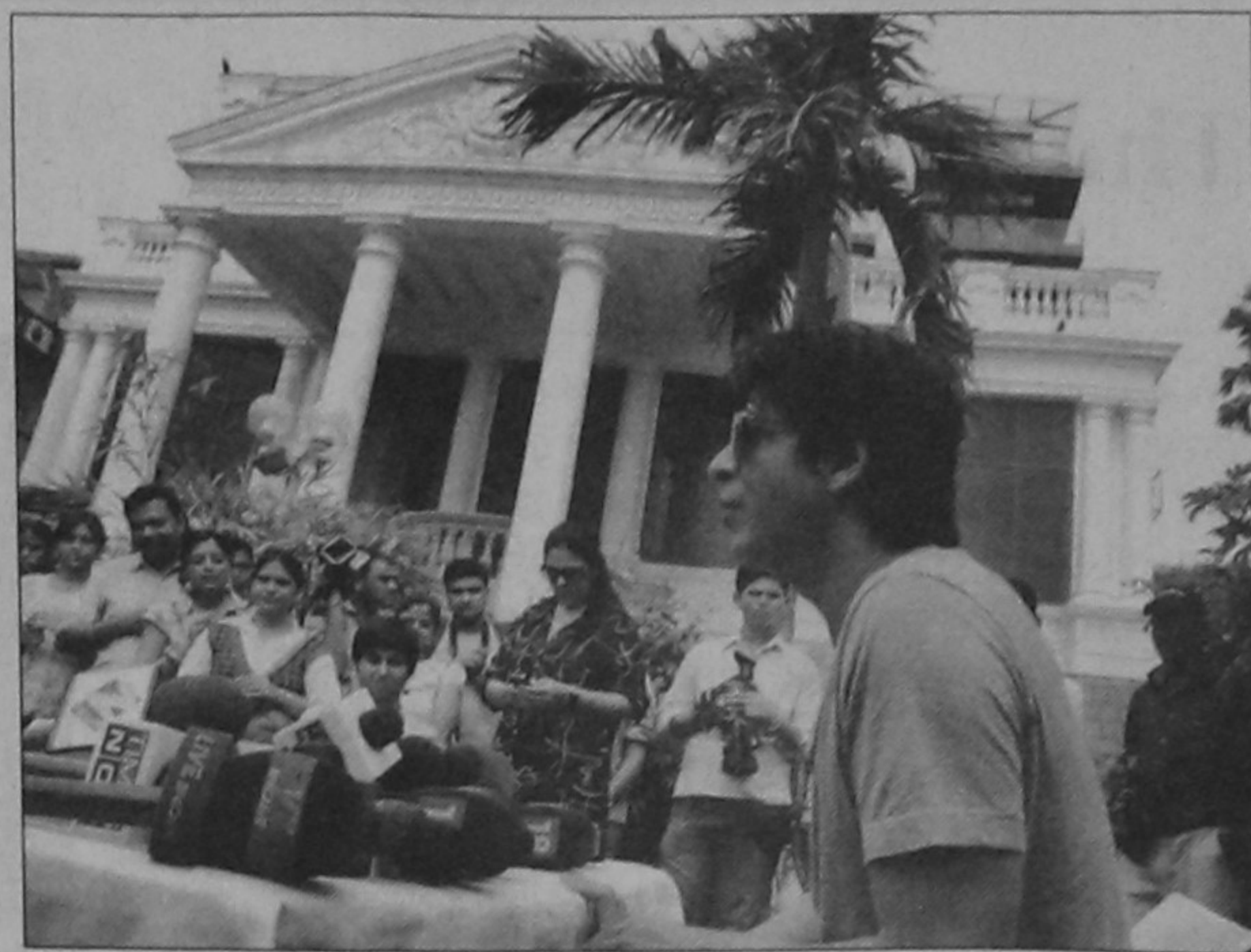


PHOTO: AFP

Shahrukh Khan

It is indeed shocking to know that Bollywood superstar Shahrukh Khan was detained for about two hours early at New York airport in the US because his surname featured on the most common list. The actor, who is visiting the US to attend a South Asian event where he was the guest of honour was released after Congress MP Rajiv Shukla spoke to the authorities in the US and the Indian consulate. The actor was detained after his name flashed on the computer. He was asked several questions about the purpose of his visit. His hand baggage was checked. He was not allowed to even make a phone call for nearly an hour. The actor tried his best but he could not convince the immigration officers. This was not the first incident of a Muslim being harassed by the US immigration

officers. Previously former president of India APJ Abdul Kalam was also harassed in the same fashion. It is really unfair to judge Muslims in this way. Just because he has a common surname does not mean that every Muslim can be taken as a suspect or considered to be a terrorist.

The American authorities should adopt a methodology so that well-known people like Shahrukh Khan and APJ Abdul Kalam are not harassed like this in future. They should focus on getting the actual suspects, rather than harassing innocent people.

Nazmus Saquib
Dept. of English
Stanford University
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Rickshaw issue

After a long interval, my old friend Mr Rahat of Malibagh has resurrected himself again ("Let's not be biased", DS 17/08/09) on the subject of the total banning of rickshaws from Dhaka's streets. Once again as in the past, his letter is a kitchen of pious platitudes, dreams, innuendoes and hope, without any pragmatic suggestion to solve the perennial traffic headache. His letter takes me to task for advocating the continued existence of rickshaws. I am proud to do so. I too would like to see the end of the rickshaw within my lifetime, BUT only if there is a viable alternative. The letter "Minister's Position" right next to his letter would perhaps help to educate him, as many of the answers are staring him in the face, but I doubt it.

To repeat the facts once again, that Mr Rahat himself admits in his letter, there are 400,000 rickshaws and about the same number of private cars in Dhaka. Rickshaws occupy about 30 sq ft of road space as against 72-90 sq ft for the stretched out Gas Guzzling

Monstrosities. Cars occupy more than 75% of available road space while mostly carrying one or no passenger at all, while most rickshaws average 1.76 passengers (50% of Dhaka's population against 1-2% of the privileged class). Rickshaws add around Tk. 10 crore EVERY DAY to the GDP providing livelihood for about 20-25 lakh rickshaw related people, while cars spend much more, much of it in valuable foreign exchange. I will not even mention the air, noise and light pollution of cars, which are additional "bonuses" to keep our doctors busy.

Mr Rahat says rickshaws are the MAJOR cause of traffic jams. If so why is there gridlock on the roads that have been rickshaw-free for many years? He also says that rickshaws are an extremely dangerous form of transport. Yes, they do cause a few scratches and broken limbs (usually after being hit by a car), but they fall far short of the killing spree of thousands that motor vehicles kill and maim and disable every year. But Mr Rahat is an honourable man,

so he sheds some crocodile tears seeing a man pulling others in a degrading fashion by which he feeds his family. But not a tear is shed for the 40-50 lakh BE-KAR and BE-BUS men, women, children, old, infirm, disabled etc people who want to get a cheap and fast transport to offices, shops, bazaars, hospitals, schools etc on rickshaws.

I am sure car owners will be glad to read Mr Rahat's revealing the 'truth' that Mirpur Road is free from traffic jams after rickshaws were banned there. My own experience of Mohakhali Road, which was declared rickshaw-free in Ramadan of 2007, suggests otherwise. After forcing the fasting public to walk on the pot-holed road initially, this anti-people rule fast lost steam and was ignored most of the time. Since Jan 2009, rickshaws and cars had become compatible and there was even a perceptible improvement, because many of the saner car owners (yes, there are quite a lot of them in my neighbourhood) saw the advantage of taking a short and cheap rickshaw ride to

their offices in Banani, Gulshan, Niketon etc keeping their gas guzzlers in the garage. Of late the cops are back with a bang (punctured rickshaw tyres), the traffic jams more intense and the tempers of the rickshaw-travelling public more frayed. Is this, the traffic authorities' sadistic response to the masses for the holy month? Are they so under-employed, that they have taken recourse to this method of intimidation once again to provoke the fasting public in the Ramadan of 2009?

Perhaps only the authorities (if any) and Mr Rahat can answer these queries.
Sikander Ahmed
Niketon, Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Systems loss

As part of the government's measure to implement CHT peace accord, one brigade of the army comprising 35 army camps and 3 infantry battalions shall be withdrawn from Chittagong Hill Tracts by Sept'09. The process has already been started with the withdrawal of some army

camp. It is alright if the service of the army is not required there and in that case their continual stay is nothing but mere wastage of govt. money. It is learnt from the newspapers that one brigade comprises not less than 3,000 persons. There is no other alternative but to maintain these personnel keeping them idle without any job. Again this is wastage of govt. money. So this loss being incurred is due to government's action. This is govt. systems loss like the systems loss in the power sector. The govt. systems loss is a very common phenomenon in all government agencies, small or big but this is not being taken into account seriously.

Md. Delwar Hossain
East Rampura, Dhaka

Rights of women

Mr. Aminur Rahim wrote in DS on 19 August on the rights of women and urged the women of Bangladesh to stand up for their rights and not give in to their husbands. I wholeheartedly agree with him.

Women in Bangladesh society continue to fight for basic human rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of movement, freedom from violence and harassment and equal rights in education, politics, household matters, marriage, inheritance and the list goes on. Women fight for their rights every day.

It's a tiresome road and it's time women got some help. That is why I urge all Bangladeshi men, if you have a mother, a sister, a daughter, to stand up for the rights of women. If you hear chauvinist banter, say something. If you see harassment or violence against women, intervene, if you have a decision to make, don't discriminate.

Basic concepts such as these need to be instilled in all Bangladeshis, not just women.

Ashna, AU

Clinton Foundation

When President Bill Clinton was in the White House office, he had to get all his plans and programmes with whatever

noble intentions passed by the Congress. He had also to face the critics and the press to justify his intentions. But after successful completion of his tenure in the office of the President, Clinton has now freely devoted himself to the activities of his foundation, that is, "The Clinton Foundation" which seeks to address some of the world's more pressing challenges, such as HIV/AIDS, global climate change, and extreme poverty - through collaborative and systematic efforts. By this time, the Clinton Foundation has achieved remarkable success in controlling HIV/AIDS, adverse effects of greenhouse gases, eradicating poverty and promoting healthy education environments. In a recent letter received by this writer from the former US President Bill Clinton who is also the President of the Clinton Foundation, Clinton wrote:

"This year, the global economic crisis has tested our momentum. But our planet is still warming at an alarming rate. HIV/AIDS is still invading the bodies of people around the world, and malaria is still infecting children in Africa. Currently, one in three kids in the U.S. is overweight or obese - a serious health issue that I struggled with as a child. Thanks to the tremendous support of the individuals like you, my Foundation has been able to meet these challenges and continue our work to reach even more people in the U.S. and across the globe. This week is no exception. Last Thursday I announced new pricing agreements we negotiated with Pfizer and Mylan that will help turn the tide of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic."

While wishing a grand success of the great efforts undertaken by the Clinton Foundation, I take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt greetings to former President Bill Clinton on his birthday which fell on the 19th August. Professor M Zahidul Haque Chairman Department of Agricultural Extension & Information System SAU, Dhaka

History speaks

This month of August speaks many things about the powerful nations. Although now the USA calls itself the most civilized nation but this month August reflects many things. In this month in 1945, the US air force dropped atom bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima killing millions of innocent people. These shows how deadly Americans can be to gain victory or success.

Md Mahbubur Rahman Student of European Standard School Alevels Old town, Dhaka

Separate water supply line

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, according to a front-page report of your daily of 19 August 2009, issued instructions to Wasa to install separate supply lines to distribute pure drinking water to Dhaka city dwellers. The reasons mentioned in the news item are to stop wastage and resolve the existing problems. The instructions were passed on to a delegation of Bangabandhu Prakashali Parishad and Institution of Engineers Bangladesh, while they made a courtesy call with the PM. The installation of the total water line of the city is really a gigantic task and it involves huge money and time. Moreover, when the installation work will start, digging hazards will surely cause immense sufferings to the city dwellers. The existing position of digging the city roads by different agencies is intolerable to the city dwellers. The standard of drinking water in Dhaka city at the moment is not that low excepting sporadic complaints from some quarters. Acute public sufferings of the city dwellers at the moment are not due to drinking water, though a lot of things remain to be done in this regard. Water logging from short lived rain, mal-coordination among different agencies, leaving the dug roads un-repaired for long, frequent load shedding, among others are the major problems faced by the city dwellers.

Installing separate water lines is perhaps not the number one problem and does not need to be solved overnight. The right thing should be done at the right time!

Matin bin Zahir
Trishal, Mymensingh

Withdrawal of troops from CHT

The government has taken the decision to withdraw a few army camps from the CHT in conformity with the peace accord that was signed on 2 December 1997. We hail this initiative. The peace accord is a historic achievement by the Awami League regime which could successfully pacify the volatility in the region that had been continuing since 1960. Though then AL government signed the peace accord but it did not implement it properly due to dilly dalling or time constraint.

A mainstream political party sees the peace treaty as a threat to our sovereignty. They want to gain political mileage.

The only thing which is worrisome for the government is that a miscreant group is still active.

So, the government is doing it phase by phase. At the same time law and order has to be maintained in that region. Md Zonaid Emran Dept. of Political Science University of Dhaka

Volleying back....

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The personality of a nation (August 21, 2009)

I am very impressed that Mohammad Badrul Ahsan could think about the personality of a nation! I am thrilled, and it has given me impetus to think in a new direction.

Thanks, Mr. Badrul.
Naimuddin Bhuiyan

There is a saying that if you feed the ravens, one day they are going to peck out your eyes. That is exactly what has happened to us. We indulged in mischief, and now mischief is indulging in us. We are reaping the fruits of what we sowed.

Romena Chowdhury

Mr Ahsan, America has, in modern times, an unblemished record of sticking its nose in other countries' business.

Brent McMaster

Makes sense! A nation should have personality of its own since it's nothing but a collection of individuals who should have personalities. I would say our national personality is a reflection of our own personalities: subservient, greedy and credulous.

Rahim Shaikh

The writer should have told us what is our personality. He opened a subject, but didn't close it. Mr. Ahsan, next time please finish what you start.

Sushama

These type of writings are eye-openers. It has stirred my imagination and forced me to think of something that never existed in my imagination.

Syed Iqbal Ahmed

A relevant topic for us when the country seems to have lost its spirit of the Liberation War.

Anu Shahriar

Next time Mohammad Badrul Ahsan, why don't you write about the personality of our politicians? People need to know their true faces.

Abedin

Very well put. The bottom line is we have no personality.

Ramjan Ali

A strange predicament for us! We are persons with a nationality, but a nation without personality. What about our intellectuals and civil society leaders? Are they aware that the image of this country is slipping in the outside world? Just carry a Bangladesh passport to foreign airports to know what others think of us.

Abdul Kader Khan

I fully agree with Mr. Ahsan that we as a nation have lost our sense of pride as well as sense of humiliation. But I would like to add that while lacking sense of genuine pride we have an excess of false pride going to the extent of preju-

dice!
N.D. Saha

Very true. In this country there is no shortage of people who aren't ashamed of their wrongdoings. There is neither any ceiling nor any flooring on our self-esteem. Educated people seem to have lost their sense of guilt and shame.

Taher Ali

Let us not blame the nation. We the people are responsible for the miserable condition of this country. It's an accepted norm in this country that nothing is wrong, if it leads to money!

Saidur Rahman

Madhupur forest merely exists (August 23, 2009)

What a sad story!! Thanks to DS for printing the 1962-2003 maps of the forest. Probably it has shrunk more in the last 06 years. If the government wants, they can still recover the lands and bring back the forest as it was in 1962, if not more than that. It will take 10 years for the plants to grow and convert the area back to forest. The government has to concentrate on saving the environment.

Sohel Ahmed

Madhupur forest is valuable in ecological terms. Forests are

decreasing day by day everywhere in Bangladesh. Madhupur is the largest plain land forest in the country. But the forest was regenerated and reshaped with commercial production of pine-apples and bananas, which isn't acceptable according to forest rules.

Hasan Kamrul

I do not want to blame only the forest department. The main criminals behind deforestation are politicians and army officers who have ruled Bangladesh. Even the most responsible officials can't differentiate between forest and plantation.

Md. Sohan Ali

What is there to say? We are the only people who are experts at digging our own graves, if not for our children. Have they ever thought the money the forest officials were making by destroying the forests? Why are we so environmentally unfriendly? Why are we so shortsighted? Can't one govt. be just a little future oriented?

SZ Tahmina

It's a fact and it's happening on a regular basis. Our greediness and lack of social ethics are mainly responsible for it. Reforestation is the only way out.

Jilany

Thanks to Pinaki Roy for high-

lighting a burning issue that needs immediate government attention, rather quick intervention.

This report indicates that the country is passing through very bad days so far as the conservation of forest and wildlife are concerned. The government has given right responsibility to a wrong department to save the forest and its wealth in the country and at the same time asking it to send money to government exchequer.

Dr Reza Khan

I hope The Daily Star along with other newspapers will be able to generate a policy to give these lands back to the indigenous people. Hope you will launch a campaign to SAVE our FORESTS too.

Natasha Ahmad

Madhupur forest could have been a shelter for our future generations, not just protecting them environmentally but a hub of aesthetic enjoyment. A sustainable policy as well as awareness is necessary. We demand a strong BAPA role in this regard.

Advocate Bablu Sherif

A good work done by The Daily Star.

The Govt/HC should start an investigation to ferret out the culprits behind the demise of Madhupur forest.

Dr. Md Altaf Hossain