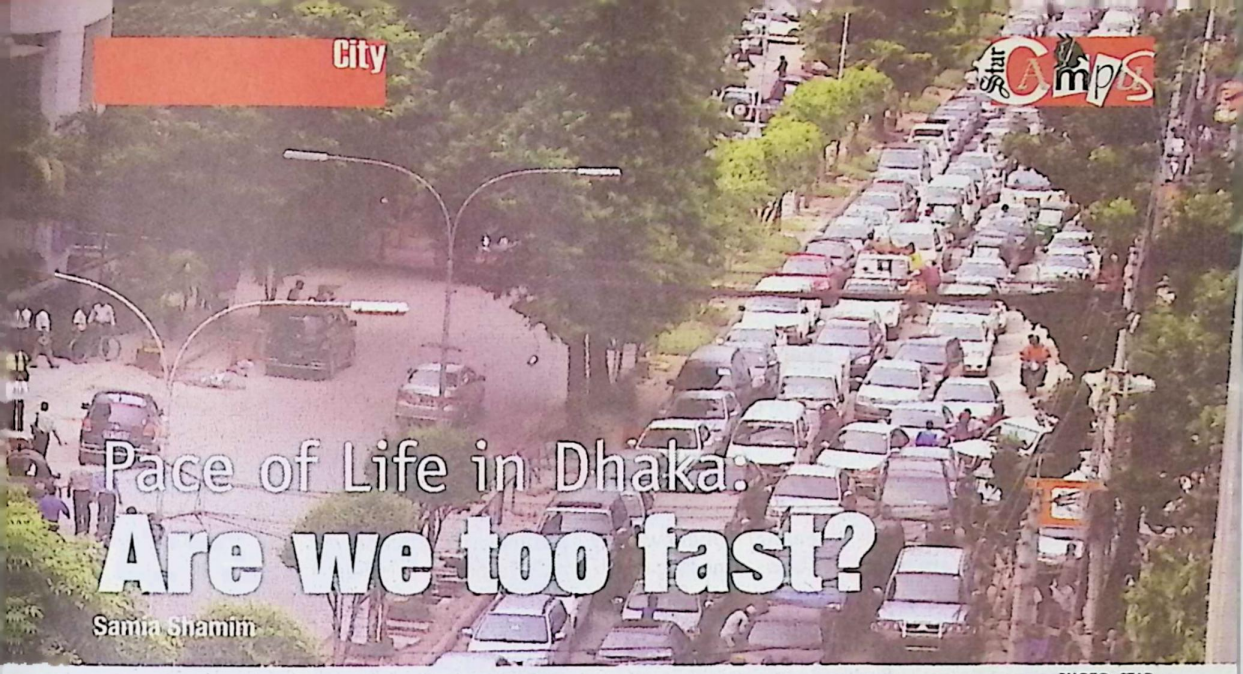


Pace of Life in Dhaka: Are we too fast?

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PHOTO: STAR

GIVEN all the problems we face living in Dhaka, we do suffer from a lot of stress in a day's work. The morning rush to reach workplaces in time, the scare of not being able to find transport in time, the loss of precious time sitting (or standing) inside a local bus in slow traffic, every situation adds to the tension and stress to our regular lives. The roads and footpaths of this city are unfriendly to pedestrians. Uneven, punctured with open drains and potholes, and with unruly traffic most of the people take their lives in their hands when they are on the streets.

The pedestrians' speed of walking provides a reliable measure of the pace of life in many cities all over the world. Unfortunately that measure cannot be tested here in Dhaka. We need a measure, which will show the impact of waiting long hours in traffic jams on our physical and mental health, and how prone we are to losing our life on the streets. There is also the chance of being victim to assaults like pick pockets, hi-jackers and "molom-parties" which increases the level of health hazards tremendously.

Amidst all this, as in any other city, life in Dhaka for all of us has always been about moving ahead. Getting through school, college and university, it is expected that we all join the work force. The competition is always there, who can get there first. We are always on the run. The fast speed of life makes everything seem like a blur. Once into jobs, we look for promotions as quickly as possible. So we work long hours to impress our boss. Keeping up with the fast pace of life as such, we miss out on many other things, which are essential for a healthy living.

A survey conducted by the British Council revealed that individuals living in fast paced cities tend to have heart diseases because of poor lifestyle and less time for health. The modern day work place treats individuals like machines. What they ignore is the fact that in the long run both physical and mental healths depreciate. Individuals may go ahead with a promotion or two, but they lose their health ultimately. Our work places do not provide us with health options. We rely on fast food shops for lunch. Office goers end up eating a lot of rich and oily food, which contribute to excess weight and heart disease. Many take up excessive amount of caffeine with unlimited free office coffee. Smoking off the work stress, many people just ask for heart and lung diseases. Getting back home after a long day's work, we are too tired for any other activity but rest. There is no time for exercise or relaxation. One suggestion could be including a gym area inside every work place. Yoga sessions should also take place as a de-stressing activity. Foregoing family time for long hours of stressful work should be reconsidered. It all has impact on their relationship with their children. Working parents spending little time with their children face problems like alienation, which may last forever.

Addressing all these problems, which affect our health and well being, it is essential now that we look for solutions. We must re-think about the pace of our lives, which depends on the balance between productivity at the work place and a healthy living. We could have shorter work hours everyday, providing workers with everyday leisure, and to balance that off have them work till they are 70 years old. Or we could have 3-day weekends to lower the chance of losing our lives on streets. Being a little laid back does not equate to being lazy all the time. There should be time available for simple activities like 'thinking' too. Where is the time we need to stand back and smell the roses? This is a question we all should keep in mind.