



ADOLESCENT BEHIND WHEELS:

DANGER ON THE ROADS

ARUN BIKASH DEY

"When the boys of my age enjoyed their days in classrooms reading books and playing in the playground I had to hang by the tempo handle", said Reaz Uddin.

Reaz, now 26, said he joined his tempo driver brother-in-law as an assistant in the port city at the age of 14.

He said this while narrating the story of his becoming a three-wheeler tempo driver.

Wiping his tears with a dirty cloth, he said he used to get Tk 60 a day as an assistant working from dawn to midnight. He used to send Tk 800 to his family a month. He said he was injured seriously while he was getting down from a running tempo and was bedridden for three months.

He became a driver at the age of 16 after working for two years as an assistant, Reaz said, adding that he now earns Tk 400-500 a day.

Child workers in the transport sector are very common in the port city. It is becoming a noisy city day by day as a huge number of people from rural areas come



A child was seen driving a tempo, top, on an important and busy road in the port city while another boy, bottom, works as an assistant of tempo drivers.

to the city everyday to earn their livelihoods. Many take shelter in the city slums along with their adolescent children, most of whom find their jobs in tempos.

Sources said three-wheeler auto-tempo was first introduced in Chittagong in 1987 with 650 tempos.

Nazrul Islam, secretary of Chittagong Auto-tempo Drivers

and Assistants Union, said 950 tempos are running in the port city. There are 1,500 tempo drivers and 2,500 assistants working, Nazrul said, adding that, of them, one third are adolescents.

Sources said the owners engage the untrained adolescent drivers to deprive them. Nazrul said they collect fake licenses in exchange for money. Sometimes traffic sergeants get confused in

verifying these licenses.

When asked, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP-Traffic), Chittagong Faruk Ahmed said the problem has arisen due to lack of co-ordination between the Department of Traffic and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

"When we go for checking the licenses, the drivers show us these. Many of these are false. But we are to wait for at least two to three days to check. If there was co-ordination between BRTA and traffic department, we could take quick decision for action," Faruk said.

Faruk underscored the need for online facilities for quick action to resolve the chaos in the transport sector, blaming the tempo owners of handing over the vehicles to the adolescents to drive.

Abul Kashem Sarkar, president of Chittagong Auto-tempo Owners' Association, said they only permit the license-holders to drive their vehicles. It is not their concern to verify whether the license is genuine or false. It is the duty of traffic department to verify the license.

Admitting the importance of online facilities for co-ordination between the BRTA and traffic department, Salim Ullah, BRTA license inspector, said they regularly conduct drives to identify the fake license holders.

Rashed Hasan, a commuter, said they are to get on the tempos driven by the adolescents risking lives as there is a crisis of vehicles in the port city. He said they have to wait for a long time during the rush hours to catch a vehicle.

Faruk said they will soon take initiatives to introduce more vehicles in the city's thoroughfares. They will also conduct a training programme for the drivers, he added.

Lack of co-ordination between the BRTA and traffic department has created immense threat to the commuters. The commuters want to reach their destination timely and safely. It is their earnest demand to the government for adequate vehicles and trained drivers in the city's thoroughfares.

Laldighi: Witness to history

PRANABESH CHAKRABORTY

Laldighi is not only the biggest pond in Chittagong metropolitan area, it is also an important part of the history. It witnesses many historical events such as movement against British colonialism, Language Movement and the War of Liberation of Bangladesh.

The port city has lost many water bodies and ponds. Laldighi is in the row of losing water bodies.

The pond has been saved due to movement by the rights groups and environmentalists of the port city.

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) constructed a big piling wall to divide the dighi. The retaining wall still stands in the middle of the historical Laldighi violating the court order.

The historical dighi is situated in the middle of the city under Kotwali Police Station.

In the early days of British rule the pond was dug as a big dighi.

The British government constructed a jail named Lal Ghar, northeast of Lal Kuthi. Locals call the pond Laldighi as it is situated in the middle of the Lal Kuti and Lal Ghar.

Famous historian Abdul Hoque wrote in his book titled 'Port City Chittagong' that Rai Bahadur Raj Kumar Ghose, owner of the dighi, was a famous landlord of Burma province Akiab. Later, he handed over the dighi to municipality. He hailed from village Chikdair of Raazan in Chittagong.

A mooring and a hall room was constructed in memory of English magistrate Buckland on the southern side of the pond. And in the western side of the dighi was



The historic Laldighi, top, in the port city and a temple, bottom, on the bank of the dighi.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

another mooring named Rickets Ghat in memory of then commissioner Sir Henry Rickets.

A statue of Queen Victoria was constructed on one side of the dighi, which was destroyed during the anti-British movement. Later, the dighi and its premises were the centre of many movements.

Architect Ashiq Imran told The Daily Star that CCC wanted to create a silent zone and a modern recreation centre for children adjacent to the dighi. A walkway, screening through projector and with light and shade for children was designed.

"City corporation started the

project in 1996 that was stopped due to fund constraint in 1998," said Ashiq, adding that, "We had a plan of facelifting the adjoining buildings of the dighi at that time."

After 1/11, caretaker government's adviser Anwarul Iqbal inaugurated the design and the dighi was opened for the general people, he added. CCC also planned to construct a swimming pool in the dighi.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela), Forum for Planned Chittagong, Bangladesh Poribesh Banchao Andolan along with 15 other socio-cultural and environmen-

talist organisations began movement against the project.

Then CCC mayor announced that spectators of the world cup cricket, especially foreigners, will have facility of an international standard swimming pool.

High Court ordered the CCC to stop the project following a writ petition filed by Bela on May 19.

Bela Coordinator of Chittagong Anwarul Islam Chowdhury said after five or six years the dighi and the adjoining Laldighi premises will be known as swimming pool. He said the dighi would lose its historical character if they did not file case against the step.

Terming it an exemplary success, Anwarul said it is a success because they could save the historical dighi for the time being from CCC's unexpected step.

Architect Zerina Hossain, an organiser of Forum for Planned Chittagong, said value of historical places cannot be measured with money.

Zerina said swimming pool for children can be constructed in the sports complex, school or residential area. There are many places in the port city where swimming pool can be constructed, she said adding that she cannot understand why the city corporation wants to construct a swimming pool in the dighi. "Why do they want to wipe out the character and historical value of the dighi?"

Anwarul said the case is still pending with the High Court in this regard. He urged all concerned to unite to save the historical Laldighi.



the week that was

Workshop on bamboo products

Speakers said at a workshop on Wednesday said bamboo can play a vital role to meet food deficiency as well as economic development of the country.

They exchanged views on research experience titled "Bamboo shoot production, processing and marketing" with the stakeholders and the eminent persons.

Bangladesh Forest Research Institute (BFRI) organised the workshop to exchange the outcome of the project titled "Transfer of technology in bamboo shoot production, processing and marketing from China to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka" at the auditorium of BFRI, Chittagong.

Ministry of Environment and Forests Joint Secretary Dr Nasir Uddin was present as the chief guest in the workshop with BFRI director Dr Wahed Baksha in the chair.

Jasimuddin, National Project Leader (NPL), Bamboo Shoot Project, BFRI, presented the paper.

Dr Nasir said "Bamboo and bamboo shoots are now a great hope for our national economy due to hard works of our researchers. We will have to take it ahead." The environment and forest ministry will provide all sorts of logistic support to the researchers in this regard, he added.

Festival to celebrate new year

Base Textiles Limited organised a festival on Saturday in the port city on the premises of the factory to celebrate the New Year 2011.

The festival was turned into a get-together of the owners and the workers. Rotarian and the Editor of The Daily Peoples View Osman Gani Mansur was present as the chief guest and inaugurated the festival while the Chairman of Base Textile, Shahdat Hossain presided over the inaugural function.

A camp for blood donation was run during the festival. Managing Director (MD) of Base Textile, SM Nurul Huda Chowdhury inaugurated the blood donation campaign conducted by Red Crescent Society, Chittagong unit.

A cultural programme was the main attraction of the festival where the workers of Base Textile performed. The workers expressed their gratitude to the management for organising such a festival.

'Stop begging using children'

Aparajeyo-Bangladesh, Chittagong unit formed a human chain in the port city on Sunday in front of Chittagong Press Club (CPC) demanding an end to begging using children.

Chittagong Metropolitan Public Prosecutor (PP) Advocate Abul Hashem, Kiran Sharma, Bureau Chief of the Daily Bhorer Dak and philanthropist Shawkat Bangalee were present at the programme.

The speakers said it is a punishable offence to use the children in begging after making them physically disabled.

They demanded the government take immediate step to stop begging using children.



'Swapna Jatri' forms a human chain in front of Chittagong Press Club (CPC) in the port city on Friday demanding recovery of playgrounds of the port city from land grabbers.

STAR PHOTO

Victory Day festival ends

A month long Muktijuddher Bijoy Mela-2010 (Victory Day fair) ended on Saturday at the outer stadium in Chittagong.

Muktijuddher Bijoy Mela Parishad organised a press conference at the auditorium of Chittagong Press Club (CPC) on Sunday.

Premier University Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Anupam Sen, Bijoy Mela Parishad Chairman and former mayor ABM Mahiuddin Chowdhury, Kafil Uddin, Paltu Lal Saha, Abul Quasem Chishti and Bakhtair Uddin Khan were present at the press conference.

Workshop on therapeutic theatre ends

Unite Theatre for Social Action (UTSA) and Bangladesh Therapeutic Theatre Institute (BTI) jointly organised a three-day "8th National workshop on Therapeutic Theatre" in the port city at the auditorium of Shilpakala Academy.

A concluding ceremony was arranged on Thursday evening at the end of the workshop. Cultural Officer of District Shilpakala Academy, Chittagong, Moslem Uddin Sikder, distributed the certificates among the participants. Dramatist Ahmed Kabir, Reza Aziz and Obaidul Islam were present on the occasion.

Executive Director of the UTSA, Mostafa Kamal Jatra presided over the concluding ceremony.

Three persons with disabilities, two theatre workers and ten development workers took part in the workshop.