



Unauthorised electric three-wheelers powered by rechargeable batteries operate in Chittagong city with the authorities concerned hardly taking any action to stop those. A huge amount of electricity is used to charge their batteries. Most of this electricity comes from illegal connections. The photo was taken in Katgor area recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Unauthorised battery-run vehicles flood Ctg city

MINHAJ UDDIN, Ctg

Hundreds of unauthorised commercially run electric three-wheelers have flooded Chittagong city, consuming a substantial amount of electricity daily from the national grid.

Mainly two types of electric vehicles, motor-rickshaws and easy-bikes, ply the city roads. The motor-rickshaws are similar to ordinary paddle rickshaws but with a battery-run motor set under the body and are powered by four rechargeable batteries. On the other hand, the easy-bikes look somewhat like CNG-run auto-rickshaws but are powered by five rechargeable batteries.

Power Development Board (PDB) sources said each of the auto-bikes, which have to be charged eight hours daily, consumes 7-8 units of electricity when a motor-rickshaw consumes around 2-3 units every day. Together the vehicles use more than 4,000 units of electricity a day, which cost no less than Tk 30,000 or monthly Tk 9 lakh.

Samaresh Kumar Biswas, deputy director of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), Chittagong, said all motor vehicles need six types of documents to be on roads but the motor-rickshaws and easy-bikes had none. "These vehicles are illegal and we are asking people not to use them," he told The Daily Star.

Leaders of the easy-bike owners' association and showrooms of motor-rickshaws revealed that around 500 easy-bikes and 300 motor-rickshaws are regularly plying in the city. Only in the Katgor circle, more than 300 easy-bikes ply five different routes, they said.

"The association takes Tk 5000 from an owner initially to be listed for the route. Thereafter, there are a monthly charge of Tk 250 and a daily charge of Tk 10 to bear various costs to keep the vehicles on the road, including managing the law enforcers," said Elias Mia, a driver of Katgor area.

Many other drivers shared the same information. So did Kamal Uddin, leader of Easy-bike Owners Association, when this correspondent talked to him pretending to be a new auto-bike owner.

The motor-rickshaws, however, do not have any owners' association. They have to pay police through the showrooms from which they buy the vehicles, said Md Monir, owner of Dhaka Auto Rickshaw, situated in Patenga sea beach area. A motor-rickshaw owner has to pay Tk 300 per month to keep

the police content, he added.

Although the owners and drivers have to pay different quarters to ensure that the vehicles stay on the road, they earn a pretty good amount as they get a huge number of passengers mainly because of cheap fare. For a trip to the sea beach from Katgor, a rickshaw charges Tk 30 while an easy-bike takes only Tk 10.

But each of these shaky vehicles carries nine passengers when they are made to seat only five, including the driver, said commuters.

Saiful Islam, a resident of Chawkbazar and regular user of the bikes, said, "Though these vehicles charge less, they are not comfortable to ride. You have to cram into an easy bike, as it does not go without picking up nine people."

Only a few of the vehicle owners recharge their vehicles at home. The recharging is mostly done in several garages that have been set up with the required facilities in the neighbourhoods where the vehicles run.

Locals complained that these recharging stations use electricity connections illegally.

Jafar Alam, a resident of Controler Mor area, said most of the recharging takes place at night, illegally using electricity from different electric posts. "Because of this illegal power consumption, we have to suffer from load-shedding."

BRTA official Samaresh Kumar Biswas said BRTA faces too terrible a manpower crisis to conduct drives. He also said it is the responsibility of police to check whether the vehicles have required documents. "If the law enforcers carry out their duties properly, no vehicle can run without required documents," he said.

PDB Chief Engineer Md Ralsuddin Sarker admitted that PDB incurs losses for the illegal consumption of electricity by these vehicles. "We would soon conduct drives to identify the garages and vehicles that use illegal connections, and would take legal actions accordingly," he said.

Police denied taking bribes from the illegal vehicle owners but admitted that some vehicles are plying in the city. "I do not know anything about police involvement in taking money from the owners of these vehicles," said Tanvir Arafat, assistant deputy commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (traffic). "We do not allow these illegal vehicles on the city roads. On an average, we seize 8-10 easy-bikes and as many motor-rickshaws every day."

ENDING POLITICAL DEADLOCK OVER POLLS Akbar Ali Khan places four proposals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former adviser to a caretaker government Dr Akbar Ali Khan yesterday placed four proposals, including formation of an interim government comprising AL and BNP lawmakers, to end the political deadlock over holding free and fair polls.

Awami League (AL) will select five from BNP's existing 36 lawmakers while BNP will select five, including the prime minister, from AL's 274. "And the new cabinet will conduct the next parliamentary polls," said Khan.

He was addressing a seminar "Peaceful transition of power: Options for Bangladesh", organised by Centre for Sustainable Development, a pro-BNP non-government organisation, in the capital's Cirdap Auditorium.

Akbar's proposals come against the backdrop of concerns raised by different quarters that a chaotic situation may arise in the country if the two archrival political parties fail to reach consensus over the burning issue.

The BNP-led 18-party alliance has been waging movement to press home its demand for restoration of the caretaker government system and hold the next general polls under it for free and fair polls.

The AL-led ruling alliance abolished the

caretaker government system on June 30, allowing general elections under elected partisan governments. BNP termed the act as "throwing the country into a political confrontation".

Addressing the seminar, Maj Gen (ret'd) Fazle Elahi Akbar, defence and strategic affairs adviser to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, said military intervention was inevitable if the present unrest situation was not resolved in an amicable way.

"This time they (the army) might stay for five to ten years," he said.

Akbar, in another proposal, said the president could seek advice from the Supreme Court, in line with the constitution, on holding the next parliamentary polls under a caretaker government, like the one in 1996.

The third proposal states that the BNP and AL each will name 10 neutral persons and the parliament will elect five each from the two panels. These 10 persons will elect the chief adviser. If they fail, the chief adviser will be selected through lottery.

The fourth proposal states that the BNP will place its plan on holding the next national election and then a referendum will be held on this proposal.

Akbar said the main two archrivals -- BNP and AL -- could bring any changes to the four proposals once they agree to any one of them.

Muria Haor at risk for over-fishing

UNB, Bhanibazar

The existence of Muria Haor in Bhanibazar of Sylhet is now under threat for lack of a fish sanctuary along the vast water body, once bountiful with fish resources.

Unabated fishing through use of current nets and mosquito nets not only disturbs fish breeding but also destroyed sanctuary of many species of fishes in the haor.

Once the home to at least 115 species of fish, several species including Rani, Bagha Air, Rayek, Madhu, Pabda, Chital, Boro Bain, Ritha, Boal, Koi and Magur are now rarely found in the eight square mile haor.

Besides, sand carried by hill and flood water has filled some 19 marshes of the area.

With the degradation of the haor, livelihood of the people of 17 villages surrounding it is now at risk.

A number of projects were taken up for developing the haor, but none of those had been implemented in the last 41 years.

Muria Union Parishad Chairman Abul Khayer said if the Muria Haor projects are not implemented soon, the haor's geographical features and ecology of the area will be under threat in the next one decade.

Inhabitants of the haor area said the haor once resounded with chirping and fluttering of migratory birds including Balihans and Golgolihans only 15-20 years ago.

But, various species of birds including heron, Kora, Kori-Kata, Shamukbhagri, kite and Pankouri have been disappearing day by day, they said.

No initiative was taken to save the plats of the haor, they added.

Upazila Fisheries Officer Kabir Ahmed said Tk 50 crore is needed for the uplift of Muria haor.



A girl and her younger sibling try to keep warm within a towel too small to cover the two of them in the shivering cold in DC Hill area of Chittagong city yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Obituary

METRO DESK

Porija Karim Talukder, a former government employee, died of brain haemorrhage at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital yesterday. She was 66.

She left behind four sons and two daughters. Her namaz-e-janaza will be held at Mohammadpur Eidgah in Sunamganj town after Zohr prayers today.

Death anniversary

METRO DESK

Today is the second death anniversary of Prof Bazlul Mobin Chowdhury, former vice chancellor of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

He joined the IUB as a vice-rector and took his responsibility as the VC in 1997 and continued till his death, says a press release.

Prior to that he served Rajshahi University as the chairman of the Department of Sociology from 1976 to 1977. From 1990 to 1992, He was a professor of sociology and registrar at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet.

Students of Comilla vocational instt win award for enterprise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of students of Bangladesh Survey Institute, a vocational education centre in Comilla, won "Enterprise Challenge Award 2012" yesterday.

The British Council in Dhaka handed over the award at Ruposhi Bangla Hotel in the capital. At the ceremony, 100 students from 20 technical and vocational training institutes presented their ideas about a low-cost, eco-friendly waste management system in Bangladesh.

The winning team was awarded Tk 1 lakh to implement its ideas, while the runner-up team from Tangail Polytechnic Institute received Tk 75,000.

The programme was jointly organised by the British Council, Bangladesh Technical Education Board, and Directorate of Technical Education.

The students will have the chance to work under the supervision of the British Council for a year, said Md Ashiqur Rahman, project manager of Skills for Employability, British Council. They will also be provided with opportunities to become successful entrepreneurs, he added.

Prof Abul Kashem, chairman of Bangladesh Technical Education Board, said the chances that the winners will become successful entrepreneurs are high because they have technical skills to bring their dreams to reality.

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