

# Bangladeshis build careers in New York traffic

THE NEW YORK TIMES

ABOVE a Korean fried chicken restaurant in Jackson Heights, Queens, Showkat Khan worked the room of mostly Bangladeshi men, speaking Bangla with a few English phrases mixed in, his enthusiastic message of opportunity broadcast through a crackling amp. At one point, he held aloft a copy of New York City's Civil Service newspaper, The Chief.

"You are here to make money in this country, and to get a better life," Khan said.

There was more than one way toward that American dream, he acknowledged, outlining a few options. But one path seemed to stand above the others, if only because Khan had already paved the way: He is a traffic enforcement agent.

Khan is part of an influx of Bangladeshi immigrants who earn a living by writing parking summonses for the city, a curious and growing presence navigating the choking traffic and bumper-to-bumper sea of parked cars.

Bangladeshi immigrants, who represent less than 1 percent of the city's population, now make up between 10 percent and 15 percent of the 3,000 traffic agents, Robert Cassar, the president of the union representing the agents, said.

The Friday after Thanksgiving, which many New Yorkers mistakenly believe offers a holiday reprieve from usual parking restrictions, is in fact one of the busiest days of the year for traffic agents. Mohammed Chowdhury, who is from Bangladesh and supervises traffic operations for much of Queens, said his officers might write three times as many tickets on that day.

"The next morning, everyone is feeling lazy; and who is going to get up and move the car?" he said. "If there is street cleaning on Friday where you live, almost 80 percent of the cars won't be moved. They'll all get ticketed."

In the last decade, union officials said, at least 400 Bangladeshi immigrants have become traffic agents in New York, opening a new career path to those who traditionally find their way in this country from behind the wheel of a taxicab. City records put the number at slightly less than 200, but Police Department officials said they suspected the number to be higher because many employees do not list their birthplace.

Salaries start at \$29,000 a year, but the insurance benefits and pension are generous. A college education and citizenship are not needed; one must be legally eligible to work in the



NEW YORK TIMES

Showkat Khan, centre, a traffic enforcement agent and union official, helps applicants prepare for the Civil Service exam in New York.

United States and possess a high school diploma. Residency requirements are also slight.

Before becoming an agent, Sheikh Zaman was an airport security guard in New York, a job that did not have the stature of his occupation back home in Bangladesh, where he oversaw murder, rape and robbery investigations for the national police force. He assumed that his chances of securing a job with the New York Police Department were next to nil, but he could not help wondering why he saw so many of his countrymen wearing police uniforms, writing summonses.

"I saw a lot of Bengali people walking around the city, writing tickets," he recalled recently. He asked how they got hired. "I was surprised," he said. "They told me this was a very easy job to get."

Zaman took a Civil Service test in 2008 and began his new career the next year.

"I love my job, I respect the job," Zaman, 40, said. "Nobody likes getting tickets, but I enjoy the job. It gives me security. I'm happy."

The proliferation of Bangladeshi traffic agents has a lot to do with word of mouth, much of it from Khan, a 53-year-old traffic agent and union official whose informal advice and encouragement to Bangladeshi immigrants turned into sit-down seminars, in which he helps applicants prepare for the Civil Service exam.

"I had thought having a uniform meant you were born in America; that was a misunderstanding," recalled Khan, an energetic man who made a living as an itinerant magician in his native Bangladesh. "When I joined, I opened the door."

At a recent seminar, one person in attendance, Md Shamim Al Mamun, 33, said he had been in New York for only 16 days. Asked what he intended to pursue, Mamun said, "I'm interested in traffic enforcement."

The work can be challenging. The agents sweat through the summer, shiver through the winter and bristle year-round at the insults shouted as they slip parking tickets under windshield wipers. The insults can be particularly unsettling to new immigrants only in the country for a few months. "A lot of people say, 'Go back to your country,'" said Jamil Sarwar, a parking enforcement officer for several years. "But I ignored them because I know I'm doing no wrong. I work for the city."

Of the hundreds of Bangladeshi immigrants who became traffic agents over the years, about 100, including Sarwar, went on to be police officers, Khan said.

The influx initially caused some friction.

"Not only was there a language barrier, which is abating, but our Bangladeshi brothers and sisters were very standoffish at the beginning," Cassar said. But over time, he

added, they have become less insular and more willing to assimilate and adopt what he called "the traffic mentality."

The tension also extended to Khan's seminars. He said the Police Department's Internal Affairs Bureau had investigated him a number of years ago and questioned him about the sudden surge of his countrymen into the department. Police officials would neither confirm nor deny that an inquiry had taken place.

Khan said the bureau also wanted to know if he was making income from his job seminars; he said that, in fact, he lost money for each one he held. " 'Come to my funeral' -- that is all I would ask of people," he said.

There are more than 74,000 Bangladeshi immigrants in New York City, according to census figures. At one point, immigrants from Bangladesh were receiving more licenses to drive yellow cabs than any other immigrant group. (It was a somewhat strange affinity; many had never driven in their home country.)

In New York, law enforcement and cab driving have a complicated relationship. Taxi drivers are frequently robbed, and the police often come to their aid. But many taxi drivers resent receiving tickets over infractions that can easily wipe out a day's pay and threaten their licence.

These days, the draw toward the traffic enforcement jobs can be felt in the office of Shah Nawaz, an insurance broker, who specialises in accident policies for livery and yellow-cab drivers. His office, in the Bangladesh Plaza, an office building in Jackson Heights, is as important a port of call for cabbies as the restaurants along Lexington Avenue.

Nawaz recalled that a cabdriver client had recently scaled back to part-time driving because of a new job as a parking enforcement officer. Not long afterward, a 24-year-old livery driver, who had sat down across from his desk to discuss insurance premiums, acknowledged that he was considering a change in jobs. "I drive a cab, but I think traffic enforcement is a better job," the livery driver, Abdul Hafiz, said.

Nawaz's bookkeeper, Mahmuda Haseen, is married to a traffic enforcement agent.

"It is a very prestigious job," she chimed in, noting that her husband had sent photographs of himself in his blue police uniform to relatives back home. Parking enforcement jobs, Nawaz said, had become "a source of pride for a new generation of Bangladeshis."

He gestured to a framed photograph of his 14-year-old son, Sadman, and added: "He says, 'I will be a police officer.' I say, 'It's an honorable job working for the NYPD, why not?'"

## Huawei's Ascend P6 hits market

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

THE global ICT solutions provider Huawei yesterday unveiled a smartphone—Ascend P6—for the Bangladesh market.

The mobile phone features a 1.5 Gigahertz quad-core K3V2E processor and a sleek metallic body.

The smartphone comes with a 4.7-inch high definition in-cell display, 5 megapixel front-facing camera, Android 4.2.2 operating system and a 2000mAh battery.

The phone priced at Tk 34,990 will be available in black cases at all retail shops of Q mobiles, the local distributor of Huawei sets, and SINGER shops.

The company also released two other models: Ascend G610 which bears the price tag of Tk 14,990 and Ascend Y511 priced at Tk 9,490, at a programme at Sonargaon Hotel in the capital.

Baker Zhou, chief executive officer of Huawei Bangladesh; Md Shafayet Alam, director for marketing and corporate affairs, and Morgan Liu, director for device business of Huawei, were also present.

## Ratan Tata sees brighter future for Nano

AFP, New Delhi

INDIA'S struggling Tata Nano, billed as the world's cheapest car, could still have a strong future with a more upmarket image, says Tata group tycoon Ratan Tata, as the company looks to give the hatchback a new start.

Tata told US business channel CNBC late Friday he still had high hopes for the tiny Nano in its home market and abroad.

"A re-launched Nano with some of the differences that we're trying to incorporate, yes I do" believe it has good prospects, Tata said.

"We are going to relaunch the car not as the cheapest car" but with a different "image", Tata said, without giving a timeframe.

When Tata Motors -- part of India's giant Tata group -- launched the Nano in 2009, analysts said it would revolutionise how millions in India travelled. But after poor sales, it become clear the car's unique selling point -- its price -- had backfired.

## Network service firm e.co launched

STAR BUSINESS DESK

A new firm—e.co—was launched in Dhaka on Friday to provide end-to-end services in the field of telecom infrastructure, transmission and network.

Officials of the Bangladesh part of e.co Group, a concern of Axiata Group, also unveiled the logo of the company at the programme at Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel.

"The communication sector in Bangladesh has the potential to achieve substantial growth in the days to come, and e.co plans to be one of the key catalysts in materialising that promise," said James Maclaurin, group chief executive of e.co.

"We expect our journey with millions in Bangladesh to be a remarkable one."

"We feel proud to be a part of Bangladesh at the time when the country is going to celebrate its 42 anniversary of independence," said Andrew Rolt managing director of e.co Bangladesh Ltd.

"e.co promises to be a lot more than just a network infrastructure operator in Bangladesh. Our footprint in this country signifies our desire to grow and unite the nation under the



E.CO

James Maclaurin, group chief executive of e.co, and Andrew Rolt, managing director of e.co Bangladesh Ltd, pose with other officials at the launch of the company, at Radisson Blu Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka on Friday.

banner of communication services of true class."

The core competence of the company lies in developing best-in-class site and sustainable energy solutions, providing superior customer services through dedicated commercial and operations teams, the company said in a statement yesterday.

The firm purchased the passive

network infrastructure assets of Robi, the third largest telecom operator in Bangladesh, and it will deploy its assets for a shared platform by all telecom operators, according to the statement.

Sunil Kanti Bose, chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, and NI Khan, ICT secretary, were also present.

## Wal-Mart to open stores in US capital

AFP, Washington

WAL-MART, the biggest retailer in the United States, is opening its first-ever stores in the US capital -- but some aren't giving it a warm welcome.

Wooed by Mayor Vincent Gray, the big box discounter has made plans to eventually open six locations, ultimately creating as many as 1,800 jobs in a city that, in some neighbourhoods, has more than double the national average unemployment rate.

"Jobs? We need jobs here big time," said Tinisha, who applied for a position at one of the first two stores Wal-Mart is opening in Washington, set to ring up its first sales on December 3.

But not everyone thinks the kind of jobs Wal-Mart offers are a good thing. As recently as this summer, staunch opposition almost succeeded in pushing the retailer to give up its plans.

There are around 4,100 Wal-Marts across the United States and the retailer is the country's biggest private employer.

Offering everything a household could need in a one-stop shopping trip, from food to clothing to appliances to books, Wal-Mart is appreciated -- sometimes beloved -- by bargain hunters.

And that's the message Wal-Mart was selling when it began to get serious about setting up shop in Washington, saying the super-low prices would benefit the city.

## Jolla: Ex-Nokia employees launch smartphone



BBC

The Jolla smartphone is based on software Nokia abandoned in 2011.

BBC NEWS

A team of ex-Nokia employees has released the first handset running on a new smartphone platform.

The Jolla phone - pronounced Yol-la - is powered by open-source operating system Sailfish, but can run most apps designed for Google's Android platform.

The company has paired with a major Finnish network, and hopes to set up a similar deal with a UK operator.

Industry analysts said Jolla faced a challenge in taking on a market dominated by Google and Apple.

Just 450 Jolla phones will be available at launch on Wednesday evening, with the majority going to customers who have pre-ordered the device.

Co-founder Marc Dillon told the BBC the company was in the process of ramping up manufacturing.

He said the phone's ethos was to provide a more "open" approach to how people used their mobiles, a contrast to the relatively closed systems used on the iPhone and, to a lesser extent, Android devices.

"There's different opportunities for people to get apps from different places, different stores," he said.

"We've created a world-class platform. Users will be getting more choice."

The platform - originally called MeeGo - was developed by Nokia, but dumped in 2011 in favour of the company adopting the Windows Phone system.

Nokia released just one handset running the software, the N9-00.

Antti Saarnio, chairman and co-founder of Jolla, told the BBC in May that MeeGo - now called Sailfish - had not been given enough chance to succeed.

"Everybody felt so strongly that they wanted to continue," he said.

Large parts of the Sailfish code were open-source, which meant anyone could expand and adapt the platform, Dillon said.

"We are ramping up our Jolla community right now."

"There's already a Sailfish website so that developers can come and contribute."

According to CCS Insight, 81 percent of smartphones shipped globally from July to September ran Google's Android software. Apple's iOS accounted for 13 percent.

Smaller players such as Blackberry, Microsoft and Mozilla made up the numbers.

Analyst Geoff Blaber, from CCS, said while it might seem Jolla was taking on an impossibly large challenge by trying to muscle in, its strategy could pay off.

"It's easy to characterise this as David v Goliath," he told the BBC. "But the fact is if Jolla can maintain a competitive cost base, there is already an enthusiast base seeking this product. It could be successful."

But Blaber added the handset was a means to an end, and that Jolla's long-term strategy was to create a operating system it could licence to other manufacturers.

"This is the challenge," he said.

"At the moment we have a situation where Android is utterly dominant. They've got to prove the software is competitive and it works."

Jolla may also be buoyed by support in its home country as a result of Microsoft's planned buy-out of Nokia.

Jolla co-founder Dillon said he was getting "stopped everywhere I go".

"We're not trying to piggy-back, but we have seen a bump," said Dillon. "We've had a lot of support in Finland."

Blaber added: "This is the 'what might have been' scenario had Nokia not gone down the Microsoft road with Windows Phone."

## India's economy grows faster than expected

BBC NEWS

INDIA'S economic growth rate picked up strongly in the second quarter, according to official figures.

The economy expanded at an annual rate of 4.8 percent in the July-to-September period, up from 4.4 percent in the previous quarter.

The acceleration was faster than analysts had been expecting.

Asia's third-largest economy has been weighed down by various factors, such as high inflation, a weak currency and a drop in foreign investment.

This is the fourth quarter in a row that India's annual growth rate has been below the 5 percent mark, and the previous quarter's rate of 4.4 percent was the lowest for four years.

Earlier this year, the Indian prime minister's economic advisory council lowered the growth outlook for the

current financial year.

It now expects the economy to expand by 5.3 percent this year, down from its earlier projection of 6.4 percent.

India's economy has been hurt by a range of factors in recent months, including a slowdown in key sectors such as mining and manufacturing.

Slowing growth, coupled with a recovery in developed markets, such as the US, has made India a less attractive option for foreign investors.

Speculation that the US may scale back its key economic stimulus measure has seen investors pull money out of emerging markets, such as India.

This has affected India's currency, which dipped nearly 25 percent against the US dollar between January and September this year.

Though the rupee has recovered a little since then, it is still down about 13 percent against the dollar since the start of this year.

That has made imports more expensive and contributed to a high rate of consumer inflation, which was 10.1 percent October, up from 9.84 percent in September.

High food and fuel prices have contributed to inflation becoming "entrenched", finance minister P Chidambaram said.

As a result, the central bank has had to raise the cost of borrowing in a bid to curb inflation.

The latest interest rate rise in October saw the key rate increase to 7.75 percent.

Some observers argue that high interest rates are hurting businesses and households, and having a negative impact on the economy.

"A combination of weak investment, high inflation and tight monetary policy would not let India's economic recovery gather steam any time soon," Miguel Chanco, Asia economist at Capital Economics, told the BBC.