



How they would roll

The Daily Star talks to 5 mayoral candidates for 2 Dhaka city corporations

HELEMUL ALAM and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Once one starts walking in Dhaka city, soon it gets pretty difficult for the pedestrian to stay on the footpath for a variety of reasons, most prominent of them occupation by hawkers.

The situation gets awful particularly before the sundown when people start rushing back home after the day's work and the hawkers find the hours suitable for catching buyers.

Sohrab Miah, who has been running a footwear shop on Bangabandhu Avenue for the last five years, said it was his only source of income, and if evicted, they would face huge problems.

He is one of the thousands of hawkers living on petty businesses using the footpath in exchange for bribe because renting a shop in a market is way beyond their affordability.

One trader said 10 "linemen" collected Tk 30 for a single "shop" and Tk 100 for two "shops" from each trader daily, between Bangabandhu Avenue and Bangabazar.

Some of the money goes to police and some to the ruling party men, he added.

Terrified at the prospect of eviction, Sohrab said, "Authorities should rehabilitate us before conducting drives. It's impossible for us to rent a shop for 10 to 15 lakh taka in a market."

Occupied walkways are not the only nuisance the city dwellers endure. They are greeted by open garbage containers and their spillovers on the street.

"It's very bad to keep garbage in the open space. It's also harmful for the environment," said Arif Khan, who lives near Taltola bus stand where several dumpsters occupy almost half the road.

Arif said he had to inhale air mixed with sickening stench every time he boarded a bus there and that the road had been a garbage transfer station for the last one year.

More than 600 containers are kept on roads across the capital, from where the waste is taken to the two landfills in Aminbazar and Matuail. Defending themselves, the two city corporation authorities blamed scarcity of land for this.

Every day, Dhaka city generates 5,000 tonnes of garbage but only 70 percent of it is collected, worsening the waste management situation.

For the city people, there is apparently no escape, even for some time, when the breathing space is getting squeezed gradually through the destruction of parks and playgrounds.

At Tikatuli, a verdant park which saw gaggle of kids playing decades ago is now replaced by an office of the Rapid Action Battalion.

First a community centre was built on the park in the late 1990s, and then Rab-3 rented it.

Though the two city corporations annually allocate Tk 7.3 crore in total for maintenance and development of parks and playgrounds, their action seems regressive rather than progressive.

Like Tikatuli, the parks at Karwan Bazar, Sharafatganj, Narinda, Sayedabad, Jatrabari Chowrasta Park, Girza Urdu Road, Pallabi, and Tantibazar are destroyed.

Problems follow the city dwellers to their houses as well. After sunset, mosquitoes start buzzing around, and over the years, due to a lack of proper measures, it has turned into a menace.

A messy waste management system and a lack of cleaning drives in lakes and drains have caused the spread of the problem to bus stops, train stations and open spaces as well.

For Mahmud Khayer, a resident of Khilgaon, the insects that are able to give people fatal diseases are little "terrorists".

"As dusk falls, these terrorists fly into my room. No matter what I do to prevent them, they come swarming into my room," he said.

Golapi Begum, of Kalyanpur Slum, said, "In the last two years, I did not see any anti-mosquito drive. Before that, some DCC staff used to come and spray insecticides as eyewash."

The Daily Star took the problems to five major mayor aspirants in Dhaka and listened to their ideas about addressing them. Here are their plans in brief.

A menace quite manageable

HELEMUL ALAM and FAHD MANNAN

Despite all the racket over the city corporation elections, residents of the capital are unlikely to miss the annoying and lingering whining near the ear ending in bites on exposed skin and itchy swellings.

Tending to come out at dusk, dawn and in the dark, only females of these flying insects have been preying on generations of the young and old year round, sucking blood to develop their eggs.

Some of the 12 species in Dhaka, among the 115 found around the country, are even dreaded for transmitting through their saliva some serious, even life threatening diseases like dengue, which the Directorate General of Health Services says claimed 105 lives since 2002.

With humid conditions in an ever growing urban habitat providing an increasingly hospitable sanctuary for the menace, is there nothing to be done except to sit back and keep swatting at the persistent pests?

Or is there hope the new city corporation mayors can bring an end to it?

Culex, among 12 species of mosquitoes in Dhaka, primarily responsible for infestation
Gradual genetic change making them immune to available insecticides
Chemical, biological control, awareness, cleanliness tools for fight
City corporations call staff shortage key barrier

Surprising as it may seem there is a crucial role that can be played right at home with the answer to the problem lying with where and how mosquitoes breed and live.

Culex or the species comprising 90 percent of what plagues the city is unique for the fact that its two-week lifecycle can begin with the eggs being laid even in the dirtiest water, provided it is stagnant.

Infestation, irrespective of day and night, drops from January to May, stays constant till July and then rises till December. It primarily poses the threat of filariasis, an infection with filarial worms transmitted through its bites.

The other most common type, aedes, recognisable for their white stripes, requires the same period but prefers fresh standing water, especially that collecting right after rains, near and in households where darkness prevails.

It tends to feed during the day, with the frequency rising till June and then dropping again. This is the species blamed for spreading dengue.

The scourge gets adequate opportunities

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Annisul

Awami League-backed candidate in the north Annisul Huq would give hawkers a certain period of time of the day to sell their products so that pedestrians do not face hassles in the streets.

Widening footpaths would be another measure to increase walkability of the city, he said.

Annisul thinks lack of maintenance of parks and playgrounds is a

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Tabith

Tabith Awal plans to allot a specific place and specific time to hawkers so as to help them continue their businesses and the pedestrians use footpaths without hindrance.

The BNP-blessed candidate in the north has also long-term plans to build skywalks and under-passes.

His plan about waste management is that the

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Saki

Mentioning that in the current context, it is impossible to evict hawkers because goons control the footpaths, mayor aspirant in north Dhaka Zonayed Saki plans a different action.

"...if the goons are brought to justice, it will be a lot easier to control hawkers," he said, adding that the petty traders would be given a specific period of the day to do their business

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Kafee

The thoughts of Abdullah Al Kafee, the mayor hopeful in the north, agree with those of his rivals Tabith Awal and Zonayed Saki when it comes to waste management.

The garbage would be collected before dawn, he said. The Communist Party of Bangladesh-backed candidate said gas and fertiliser would be produced from the waste. "The corporation

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Khokon

Eviction of hawkers after their rehabilitation is one way Sayeed Khokon is mulling to free the footpaths, if elected mayor of Dhaka South City Corporation.

To improve garbage management, the Awami League favourite will engage locals through Panchayet and Community Club and give them fund, land, and infrastructural support.

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Uttara Bank Limited declared 20% cash dividend for the year-2014 passed the Annual Report-2014 along with the profit and loss account in its 32nd Annual General Meeting held on Thursday at the International Convention City, Bashundhara-3 (Rajdarshan), Joarshahara, Khilkhet, Dhaka. Presided over by Mr. Azharul Islam - Chairman of the Board of Directors of the bank; Mr. Iftekharul Islam, the Vice-Chairman; Mr. Shaikh Abdul Aziz - the Managing Director and other directors also attended the meeting.

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