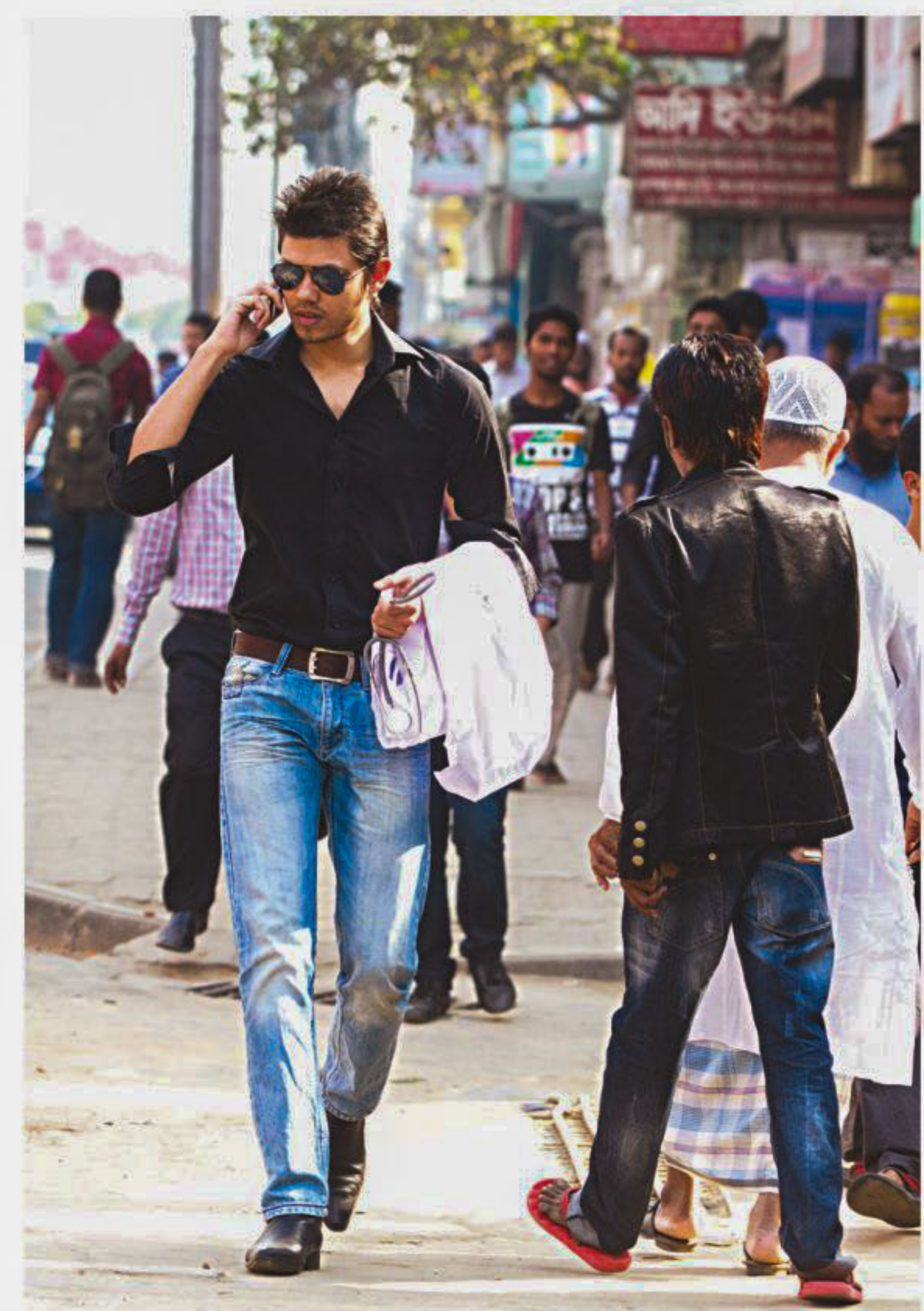


**SPOTLIGHT**

# The dreadful Karwan Bazar

Perhaps one of Dhaka's oldest business districts, Karwan Bazar, where caravans of yore once parked, still remains one of the busiest hubs of all commercial activities in Dhaka, from white collar business to a massive grocery market and the ever smelly wholesale depot of fish that sits here every morning.

Yet, it seems nobody is really bothered about the thousands of workers who make their way here every day, come rain or shine, often with mind-numbing and soul-sucking traffic and road conditions.

Most of the roads here are wide enough for at least three cars to pass side by side, but you wouldn't know that during the day. Hundreds of cars are parked on both sides, leaving just narrow alleyways for traffic to trickle through. Often, even the curbs are half occupied the bumpers and boots of cars, without space for people to walk.

The condition of most roads is appalling, perhaps as full of craters as Mars would be, with craters big enough to form small ponds even in light rains.

Then there are the roadside vendors. This is a spot where almost everything --from shoes to shirts and tech knickknacks-- are available for a pittance, and throngs of people are always here, buying something or the other.

Though the grocery and fish markets start at the wee hours of the night as prod-

ucts arrive from all over the country, offices usually begin about 8 or 9am, and the rush hour precedes that.

Anyone with office in Karwan Bazar needs to factor in at least half hour extra to navigate just inside the area, in addition to allowing for the traffic jam on the road, made worse since its right beside the junction of main thoroughfares like Nazrul Islam Avenue and Panthapath, and proximity to Tejgaon. Also, the hours spent trying to get a CNG or rickshaw to actually go there. Moreover, the buses to and from Karwan Bazar are always teeming with people, with a majority of the passengers standing for the entire commute, from a lack of empty seats. The unbearable heat and humidity of the summer only adds to the hardships, stuck inside a small bus with a bunch of strangers, not all of them nice people, especially for women. There is also the added menace of pickpockets inside public transports like buses and legunas (a pick-up truck locally modified to seat people in the back).

It makes it very difficult for most office goers to look forward to mornings, and even the journey back is robbed of the joy of finally getting home.

Also, since the main roads are not open for the rickshaws to ply on, so anyone intending to avoid buses has to take an extra long route, such as through Zia Colony and Raja Bazar. The roads here are narrow,

broken and very congested, and get muddy and clogged with drain water during rains. The stink of the drain water and the nearby bazaars will not make it any easier. The rickshaws get stuck in the mud, and the pullers cannot move them for they themselves struggle to get a balanced footing.

Inside Karwan Bazar, the mud and the puddles make driving hell, and God forbid if a car tries to maneuver around the potholes, the tailback could stretch as far back as Banani or Kakoli.

The main roads are not particularly safe for pedestrian crossing for the dangerous traffic, which leaves options like Projapoti underpass, or the overhead bridges, for people to rely on. These are a permanent safe haven for muggers, to find and loot hapless victims, especially after dark. One such person is Shumon, an employee of ATN Bangla, who said, "One day I got out from office around 8.30pm, and not many people were around. While I was going through the underpass, two guys held me up at knifepoint. They took all my money. Thankfully, I had thought of leaving my laptop back at the office that day."

And it is not just true for the underpass, as almost all of Karwan Bazar is rife with muggers and people of questionable character after dark every day.

Another issue with working in Karwan Bazar is the food. There are no affordable

and good restaurants around, and if you are used to quality food, you can expect none nearby. Many offices do have their own canteens, where you will find inexpensive but good quality food. A lot of people opt for the food courts in Bashundhara city, as it is nearby. But how often can you travel all the way to the market by a rickshaw through the muddy mess? Some restaurants can be found nearby, but even a plate of khichuri costs around Tk 150, and it becomes a bit too expensive for eating every day.

This scenario gets worse in the month of Ramadan. Everyone wants to get home for iftar as soon as office ends, and the roads gets really crowded and often stay blocked for hours. It usually takes almost twice as long to get home in Ramadan.

Since, there are so many important offices, like media houses, utility offices and banks, like Ittefaq, ProthomAlo, ATN Bangla, BASIS, Bdjobs, and Petrobangla, people's rush to Karwan Bazar everyday is obvious. So why can we not have these problems dealt with? An initiative to fix the roads and the security environment to make it easier for the everyday ordinary men, those who are integral to the economy and our survival, a little bit easier?

**By Sania Aiman and Mormee Mahtab**  
**Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed**

