

SOCIAL MEDIA

Terrific traffic

'Rush Hour' was a term that brought great joy when I was younger as it was truly a great film. Never could I imagine that the same terms would one day cause so much distress, being the norm at all times in our beloved Dhaka city. Nowadays, the roads are clogged whenever I go outside, as if it is the peak of rush hour. And I hate it!

The ubiquitous influence of traffic is felt heavily and expressed in various ways. It has made navigation extremely difficult. Despite the harsh statements made by numerous netizens that Dhaka is no longer habitable due to the soaring number of vehicles, the uncompromising heartbeat of the city seems to prove otherwise.

How much time do commuters spend stuck in traffic on an average in this metropolis?

As I pondered while being a victim of one such congestion at Bijoy Shoroni, I could not help notice how every passenger to my left and right were transfixed by their smartphones. Of course, the distant traffic light wore a shade of red, so the drivers and riders too, did not hesitate to do the same. The girl on the motorbike in front of me suddenly stated that she needed to update the condition of the road.

Long gone are the days when only cars had to wait at a signal while the motorcyclists sped away into freedom. The Good Samaritan typed away faster than the pace of the surrounding vehicles on a Facebook page, which I recognised immediately as Traffic Alert.

Such community-powered pages like Traffic Alert, Dhaka Traffic Alert and Traffic Alert BD are reasonably helpful for navigation, enlightening us with instantaneous digital information within seconds. They notify us about road conditions in a simple manner. Either you can check for information about busy roads by scrolling through the pages or you might inquire about a specific road and someone tends to answer it shortly.

Users post photographs and videos sometimes for a more vivid representation.

Another helpful weapon to fight the visible force of traffic is the undisputed Google Maps. It provides route planning and real-time traffic conditions for travelling, with the traffic situation shown with coloured lines on the roads. Red meaning highly congested, and green meaning easy flowing.

These pages on Facebook do not always show the 'dark' side of traffic. Often users post pictures and videos of dreamlike near-empty roads or highways while others congratulate the fact, almost as if in a celebratory manner. Recently, one user even asked whether it was Eid, as the time it took him to reach from Uttara to Rampura by bus was only 32 minutes!

The digital race ushered in an 'epidemic' and it seems that no matter how much we proceed towards transforming into a digital nation, the traffic jam seems to lasso us back to an analogue era. Apart from being informative, such pages now also serve the purpose of letting people vent off the frustration that results from the long tailgates that choreograph with perfection, perhaps due to its repetitive nature.

The sarcasm expressed in the comments will surely get one chuckling. Someone even commented that we should set the world record for wasting time in a traffic jam.

An intriguing fact is the lack of explanation for what caused a tailgate, as you drive up to the front and realise that nothing was wrong. The year-round accidents and roadwork contribute heavily to the congestion.

Not to mention the increasing number of VIPs visiting the city. I mean what good is an eerily empty road on which they zoom away in mere seconds? In order to feel the true essence of our beloved city and its streets, one should experience it in its unaltered state; only then will they appreciate it.

It would surely be a miraculous blessing to one day see the hazardous traffic under control. However, we all know that it will not come easily. The traffic system needs significant changes, which will not happen instantaneously, especially when there is a rising trend now whereby a few elites exploit their influence and rank to take advantage of the roads, while the majority are left behind, stranded.

With digitisation, everything demands to be faster now, our smartphones, cars, the Internet...the list is endless. Yet, if we ourselves are not fast enough, then the cause remains meaningless.

As I sit and type in another infamous traffic jam, I cannot help but wonder whether we as a people took the story of The Tortoise and The Hare a bit too seriously. As we are moving at this pace, all we can do is just sit and say, "slow and steady wins the race," as we will not be going anywhere fast, anytime soon!

By Al Haq

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