



Broken windows of the lorry weighing station in Darogar Hat area of Chittagong's Sitakunda, left. Vandals take out their anger on a child's tricycle at the station.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Transport workers turn rowdy in Sitakunda

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resume operation at the station. Experts from Turkey, from where the operating system was brought, will fly in to fix it.”

Police rushed to the spot and fired tear shells to disperse the vandals and clear the road, Masud Alam, inspector of Kumira Highway Police Outpost, said.

Traffic movement resumed around 1:30pm, he added.

Worker leaders said an employee of the station beat up truck driver Humayun Kabir over “realising extortion.”

Contacted, Humayun said he was coming from Dhaka with rice husk on his truck.

“At the load control station an

employee demanded Tk 500, but I refused as the weight of my truck did not exceed the limit. All on a sudden they started beating me up and I fainted at one stage.”

As the “news” spread, workers quickly thronged the station and chanted slogans demanding punishment of the attackers and blocked the highway, locals said.

At one stage, the workers started vandalising the station, they added.

Abdus Sabur, general secretary of Chittagong District Truck and Covered Van Workers' Union, said the workers “only protested” the assault on the trucker and demanded punishment of the attackers.

He added that the damage to the property was not done by transport

workers.

“Those who attacked and damaged the station were outsiders... We do not know them.”

Sabur alleged that realising extortion by employees of the station was an everyday phenomenon, adding that they also tampered with the weighing scale to demand money from the truckers.

Asked, Johnny denied the allegations and said for every tonne of additional weight the government fixed a fine of Tk 5,000 which the drivers did not want to pay.

Zulfiqar Ahmed, executive engineer of RHD, Chittagong, said a case would be filed in this regard. He added engineers from Dhaka would go there and assess the damage.

3 die as car hits auto rickshaw

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

Three people, including a CNG-run autorickshaw driver were killed as a car hit an auto-rickshaw in Brahmanbaria on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway.

The accident took place at around 5:30 am on Saturday at Malihata area of Brahmanbaria Sadar Upazila on the highway, said Sarail Bishwaroad highway police OC Hossain Sarkar.

The OC said a Dhaka-bound car rammed into the battery-run autorickshaw, the victims were inside the autorickshaw.

He identified three victims as 20-year-old Saidul Mia, the auto-rickshaw driver and son of Rukku Mia of Chor-Chartola village in Ashuganj upazila, 19-year-old Nasor Mia, son of Khurshed Mia and 18-year-old Arman Mia, son of Faruk Mia, of the same village.

According to the highway police, auto-rickshaw driver Saidul went to Sarail Bishwaroad CNG filling station with two of his friends Arman and Nasor to get gas for his vehicle around 5:00am. On their way back, a Dhaka-bound speeding car hit the auto-rickshaw face to face in Malihata Bazar area. It is not known exactly

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Absence implies their lack of political will

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Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet, had invited 16 political parties, but eight of the parties, including the Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and CPB, did not take part in the discussion, held at an auditorium of the university.

Representatives of eight other parties present there promised to add road safety issues to their electoral manifestos.

The urban transport sector “informally” evolved without strong political and financial support from local or government levels, said Prof Moazzem Hossain, director of ARI.

The lack of an institutional umbrella resulted in poor or no planning, regulation, operation management or effective enforcement framework, he added.

Prof Moazzem also pointed out that traffic jam and mismanagement in the sector make a huge impact on the country's economy and public health.

Traffic congestion in Dhaka city eats up around 5 million working hours every day and the average speed of vehicles during rush hours has come down to 5kmph, he said, citing an ARI study.

The congestion causes an annual loss of between Tk 20,000 crore and Tk 55,000 crore, he said, citing findings of organisations working on the issue.

“However, about 50 to 70 percent of the losses can be avoided through proper actions,” he said, adding that nine categories of human behaviour are affected by transportation.

He said several bodies including city corporations, Rajuk, Road and Highway Department (RHD), Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and Dhaka Transport Coordinator Authority (DTCA) are working in this sector without any coordination.

In the absence of a single authority to look after the city's transport sector, everyone avoids responsibility, he said.

Citing examples from different megacities, including London and Mumbai, Prof Moazzem said there should be a single institution to take all the responsibilities relating to transport under a specific law.

The institution will be headed by a specific person, may be mayor or the transport minister, and it will be a public sector with the government providing subsidies if required, he said.

Nowhere in the world, the public transport is run by business-minded private sector like in our country, he said, adding, “Urban public transport can't be pure business; it is an emergency public service sector.”

To adopt necessary changes in the sector, including enactment of law,

political commitment is a must, he said.

Colonel Md Mahbubur Rahman, director (technical) of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), said they represent only 0.1 percent in the transport sector with around 1000 buses and 150 trucks.

Nirapad Sarak Chai Andolon Chairman Ilyas Kanchan said he has been requesting politicians for the last 24 years to do something to solve the problems.

“Nothing will be on the right track unless politicians are on the right track,” said the actor-turned-road-safety-campaigner, adding, “Politicians require awareness, they require training.”

Zonayed Saki, chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon, said it is unjust to hold only drivers responsible for road accidents; it is the system which should be blamed.

“Blaming drivers is an attempt to hide numerous government failures in this sector,” he said, adding that a vested group from the ruling quarters is involved in the sector, so they do not want to solve these problems.

Nagorik Oikya Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said no representatives from the ruling Awami League and BNP came to the meeting.

“If leaders from major political parties don't take responsibilities, road acci-

dents won't stop.”

Political parties have to realise that they have responsibility for each and every road mishap. “We can't even clear footpath but we are boasting that we have won ocean, space. We have to change this mentality.”

Krishak Shramik Janata League President Abdul Kader Siddique said the society and politics should be corrected first, then the transport sector.

Referring to frequent road accidents, he said, “Situation has become so horrible that nobody is sure whether he or she will reach home safely.”

Gonoforum leader Subrata Chowdhury criticised Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan for his actions and remarks concerning the sector.

“On one hand, he [Shajahan] is heading a ministry and on the other leading the drivers,” said Subrata, also a senior Supreme Court lawyer.

He added, “People involved in the transport sector are so powerful that citizens become hostage to them.”

Representatives from Bangladesh Workers Party, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Oikya NAP and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh spoke at the roundtable, chaired by Road Safety Foundation Chairman Prof AI Mahbub Uddin Ahmed and moderated by senior journalist Mizanur Rahman.

Pogba

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The 25-year-old Manchester United star - capped 51 times and a pivotal member of the side that reached the Euro 2016 final only to lose to Portugal in extra-time -- told the BBC that France had the technical ability to do well in Russia.

“I'm confident with the French squad, with the players that we have,” said Pogba.

“I'm sure we can do something in this World Cup but I don't want to be over-confident.”

“We have a nice team but the World Cup is in your head too, it's not just technique.”

“It's team spirit, it's more mental than technique. We have to be careful with this.”

The French -- World Cup winners in 1998 and finalists in 2006 -- are in Group C with Denmark, Australia and Peru and kick off their campaign in Kazan against the Australians on June 16.

Away from the World Cup, and despite speculation over his future at Manchester United, Pogba is determined to lift the Champions League with them in what is his second spell there.

Pogba has since his move from Italian giants Juventus in 2016 -- United paid a club-record fee of £89 million (\$119 million) -- won Europa and League Cup medals and on Saturday could add an FA Cup one if they beat Chelsea.

“It would be nice to win the Champions League and the Premier League. Very nice,” said Pogba.

“For a team, you want to win titles, you play to win. You can play the best football and it's true, we want to play and enjoy football but if you don't win a title -- it's good for the eyes, it's good for the eyes -- but you don't win anything.”

Pogba, who won three Serie A titles with Juventus, is a risk taker as reflected by what he most wants to do outside football.

“I would love to go in the sea and see the waterworld,” said Pogba.

“To swim with the sharks, the dolphins and see what's under the water.”

“It's very scary but I'd love to do it. If I don't come back, you know why!”

Interest rates rattle people

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The increase is by two to four percentage points, according to data of a number of banks.

Interest rate for industrial loans has gone up as high as 16 percent, which was 12 percent a year ago. No bank is offering SME loans under 15 percent interest.

Even at that high rates, many banks cannot lend because of liquidity crisis.

“A relatively good client engaged in trading sought Tk 100 crore loans offering 16.5 percent interest last month. But we could not give the loan,” said a branch manager of a leading private commercial bank.

Another entrepreneur, who makes paper cups, has been trying to get Tk 11 crore loan for setting up a new factory. The entrepreneur got half the amount, that too after eight months.

“I am in serious trouble as the loan I have got is not enough to set up the factory. Now I am trying to persuade another bank to take over the loan,” said the entrepreneur.

Bankers see no respite from the situation unless the cost of deposits is brought down. It is also evident in the financial market as a number of measures taken by the Bangladesh Bank and the government have failed to bring down the interest rates.

The central bank in the middle of last month cut the CRR (cash reserve ratio) by one percentage point to 5.5 percent to give liquidity boost to the banks. The finance ministry also made it mandatory for all government agencies to park 50 percent of its deposits in private banks from the previous 25 percent.

“These measures hardly had any impact on the interest rate as the supply was very insignificant compared to the [loan] demand,” said a chief executive officer of another private bank.

The CEO said the CRR cut created only around Tk 10,000 crore fresh liquidity for the banks against a demand of over Tk 77,000 crore, if the banks facing higher advance (loan)-

HIT HARD BY CASH CRUNCH	
In January, BB orders conventional banks to cut ADR to 83.5% from 85% , and Islamic banks to 89% from 90% by June	
Over a dozen banks with around 90% ADR start running after deposits since February	
Banks with liquidity stress offer 10-11% for deposits	
Following meeting with pvt banks, finance minister agrees to cut CRR by 1 percentage point to 5.5%	
The CRR cut gives banks additional Tk 10,000cr , but they need over Tk 77,000cr	
The liquidity crisis has hit the stock market hard	

deposit ratio (ADR) want to bring it down to the ceiling of 83.5 percent set by the central bank.

“Lending rates will not go down unless the deposit rates get down,” said Shafiqul Alam, managing director of Jamuna Bank. He also said interest rates on government's savings tools need to be reduced to make it market friendly. Presently, investments on savings tools offer 11.5 percent interest.

Even some much sought after large business groups, which had been getting loans at seven to eight percent interest rates a year ago when the market rates were over 10 percent, now have to pay 11-12 percent in interests, according to Abdul Halim Chowdhury, managing director of Pubali Bank.

QM Shariful Ala, managing director of Delta-Brac Housing (DBH), a leading home financier, said liquidity crisis cranked up the deposit interest rate to over 10 percent from six percent.

He predicted that the demand for

home loans would go down by 20 to 30 percent this year because of the high interest rates.

DBH had been lending at 8.5 to nine percent interest rates over last two years but it has surged to 12.5 percent since February, he said.

IDLC Finance, another leading non-bank lender, has increased its interest rate to 13.5 percent in February, up from 9.5 percent.

“We are collecting term deposits at 10.5 percent now from seven percent last year,” said Arif Khan, managing director of IDLC.

Even though authorities concerned are pressing lenders to bring down the interest rate to single digits, it is not possible for them because of high cost of deposits, he said, blaming high-interest saving instruments.

Like bankers, he does not see any possibility of lending interest rates going down in the near future.

“Bad loans are another factor that makes new loans expensive,” Arif said.

Key accused

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a witness to the murder, the police official added.

Parents of both victims were busy in jhum cultivation when the murder was being carried out; he continued, adding that the accused hung the bodies with ropes on window grills, to make it look like suicide.

Suman Tripura, Chobi Rani's father, filed a case with Sitakunda Police Station on Friday, accusing four.

Iftekhar Hassan, officer-in-charge of the station, told The Daily Star that they arrested Abul Hossen, the key accused in the killing from his home yesterday.

The names of the other accused could not be revealed for the sake of investigation, he said adding that the accused was produced in court yesterday.

Md Joynal, sub-inspector of the station, who prepared the inquest of the victims' bodies, told The Daily Star that the autopsy was completed yesterday and the viscera samples will be sent for forensic tests to determine how they died.

Suman Tripura, who filed the case, told The Daily Star that they were happy that the accused had been arrested. But they believed that since the criminal was ‘influential’ in their locality, their safety might be compromised at any time.

“We urge police to ensure our safety,” he added.

Are octopuses aliens?

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that these claims have been roundly mocked by the scientific community, who have branded the paper -- published in Progress in Biophysics and Molecular Biology -- as ridiculous and unscientific.

They suggest the Cambrian explosion, a sudden burst of life that occurred around 540 million years ago, was the result of extra-terrestrial intervention.

The paper asks whether this event, which saw the rapid emergence of most of the main animal groups that still exist on Earth today, was “terrestrial or cosmic”. Their conclusion is the latter.

Specifically, the researchers propose the idea that alien viruses crashed to Earth in a meteor, infected a population of primitive squid and caused them to evolve into octopuses.

Another theory they suggest is that fertilised squid or octopus eggs were delivered to Earth by a meteor.

The idea is essentially a reimagining of the “panspermia” hypothesis, which suggests that life on Earth was “seeded” by space dust or asteroids crashing into Earth. One of its first proponents, Chandra Wickramasinghe, is one of the authors of the new paper.

Octopuses are weird. They are molluscs, meaning they are closely related to snails, and yet they are incredibly intelligent.

On top of their large brains and sophisticated nervous systems, the authors of the new paper list camera-like eyes, flexible bodies and ability to camouflage themselves by changing colour and shape as evidence of their

extra-terrestrial origins.

So suddenly did these features appear in the octopus family tree that “it is plausible then to suggest they seem to be borrowed from a far distant ‘future’ in terms of terrestrial evolution, or more realistically from the cosmos at large,” the authors write.

“Such an extraterrestrial origin as an explanation of emergence of course runs counter to the prevailing dominant paradigm,” they continue. This is a strong contender for understatement of the century.

But scientists have plenty of reasons to discard findings. First off, as Mark Carnall from the Oxford University Museum of Natural History pointed out in a series of tweets, not one of the paper's authors is a zoologist.

Much of the authors' speculation rests on the idea that the genetics of octopuses and their relatives are mysterious -- yet a 2015 paper published in Nature revealed the octopus genome, so this is rather disingenuous.

In fact, octopus genes suggest they fit into the generally understood theory of the evolution of life on Earth, and require no alien invasion. They are thought to have split from the squid lineage around 135 million years ago.

Molecular geneticist Professor Karin Moelling of the Max Planck Institute Molecular Genetics, who was asked to review the report, concluded that it “cannot be taken seriously”.

The primary reason for doubt given by Professor Moelling is that there is “no evidence at all”.

Haven't I heard something about octopuses being aliens before?

Writers are fond of comparing octopuses to aliens due to their unusual appearance and great intelligence. Philosopher Peter Godfrey-Smith, who has written a book about octopus intelligence titled Other Minds, has described them as “the closest we will come to meeting an intelligent alien”.

On top of that, this is not the first time octopuses have been mistakenly labelled aliens by the press.

An unfortunately worded press release concerning the Nature paper describing the octopus genome led to a slew of online news pieces in 2015 about researchers finding “alien DNA” in these creatures.