

## After page 4

been given in relocating these hawkers to a permanent place either.

But does everyone feel safe in walking in the first place? Many opt for the rickshaw across short distances because the relative speed of the rickshaw and the relative safety of the rickshaw hood against prying eyes is a deterrent to snide remarks and casual harassment. Many women in the city feel safer on a rickshaw than on the pavement or even the reserved seats on public buses. CNG driven auto-rickshaws, while seemingly safer and faster, are also prohibitively expensive compared to rickshaws over small distances.

"I have to use a rickshaw every day to get to class, and considering the areas I have to pass through, walking is not an option. There are *tongs* every few feet, and the stares and indecent remarks when I'm walking past is not something I want to deal with every day," says Humaira Selim, a third-year private university student from Green Road.

"What happens when it rains? During the monsoon season the roads are impossible to walk on and buses rush past with their doors closed, refusing to take on short-distance passengers due to overcrowding," she continues.

The DSAC and Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority have plans of bringing in a large quantity of ticketed buses under BRTC supervision, including circular routes, passenger sheds, bus depots and other related infrastructure. Their vision of a city doesn't discount the rickshaw entirely—they see it as a feeder service that will help commuters reach the

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bus counters effectively.

But how far along are these plans?

"We're working closely with the Dhaka South City Corporation as well as Dhaka North City Corporation, but the new bus route is still in the study phase. There are a lot of factors to work out—finding space for and building the infrastructure being number one," says Khandaker Rakibur Rahman, executive director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority.

"The walkability project is still being worked on and will focus on fixing the sidewalks so that they are fit for pedestrian use. It will not just focus on eviction of hawkers alone," he adds.

This essentially means that while the DTCA's plan is still in its study phase, DSAC has gone ahead and banned the rickshaws.

Independent urban experts consider the rickshaw ban to be a step back for Dhaka, when the most advanced cities in the world are moving towards zero emission vehicles and promoting non-motorised forms of transport.

"If we focus on a campaign de-incentivising private transport and bring



Graphic: Shaer Reaz

## DHAKA'S ILLEGAL RICKSHAW PROBLEM

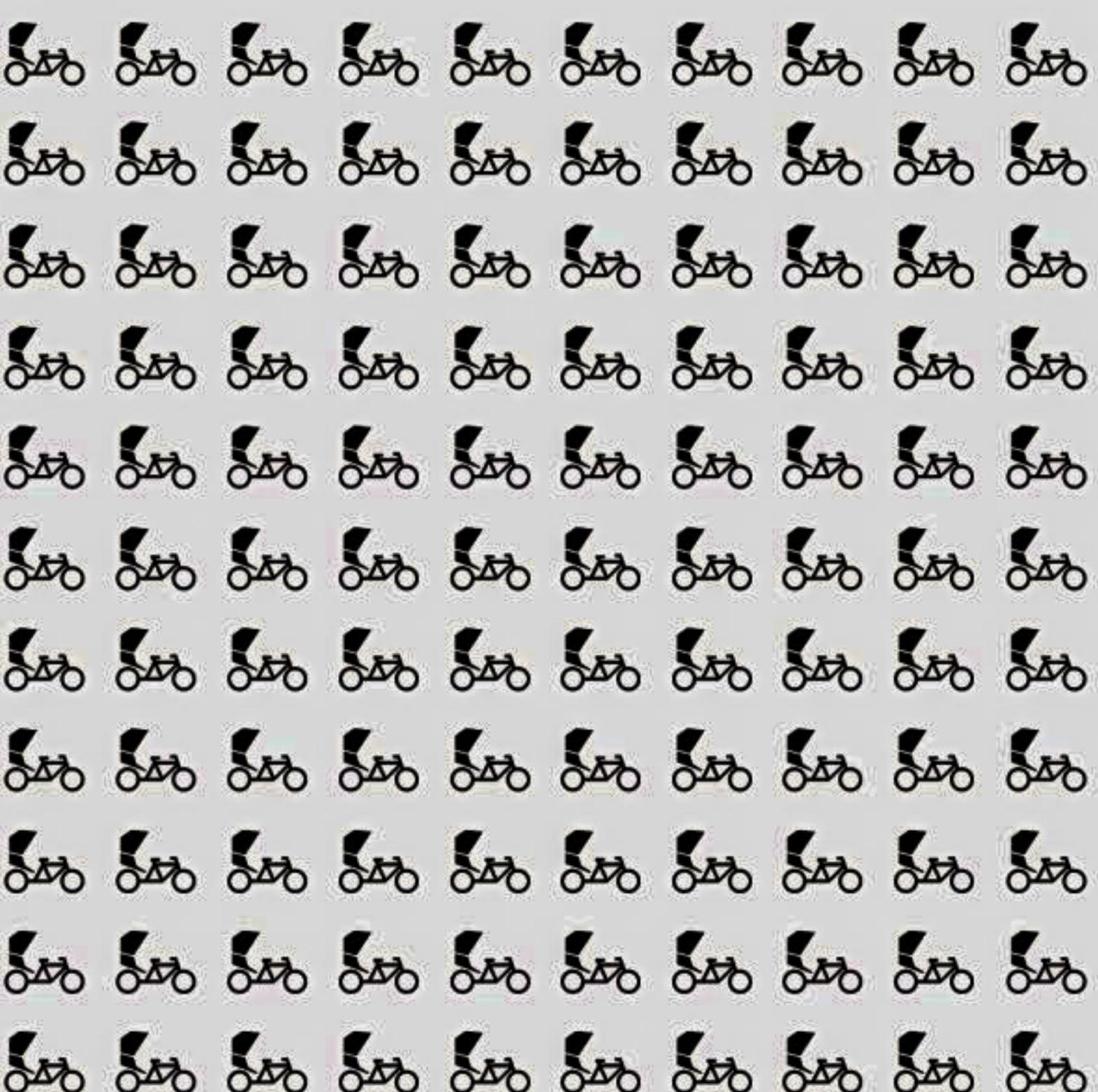
 = approx. 10,000 rickshaws

### Legal (licensed) rickshaws (1986):



79,854

### Illegal (un-licensed) rickshaws (2019 est.):



11,00,000



rickshaws into a regulatory framework where they are licensed and limited to certain capacity as the feeder transport to bus services, the metro-rail and other forms of mass-transport, we will see Dhaka represented in a unique way that leapfrogs the developed cities of the West in some ways," says Adnan Morshed, an architectural historian and urbanist, currently serving as chairperson of the Department of Architecture at BRAC University.



"At present, the banning of rickshaws is a very monolithic approach to solving Dhaka's traffic woes, as it has been in the past—policy-makers are seeing the rickshaw-pullers as easy scapegoats. This is a form of social injustice that takes the weakest part of Dhaka's transport infrastructure and places the blame squarely on their shoulders. We need to be less reactionary in our planning and start predicting the issues that may pop up in the future. It's also unacceptable to compel commuters to walk when there are no alternatives readily available," he continues.

If we were to truly break the cycle of blaming the rickshaw for our troubles, Dhaka would need a more comprehensive plan of traffic reduction that is not as top-down as simply banning the most widely available (and perhaps the most popular) mode of transport. It may require a more inclusive, localised approach that does not cast aside the rickshaw, but makes space for it and values it, including the people that operate them.