

# Where has all the green gone?

Lack of trees and plants in the metro rail project sites are increasing the health risks for people



NAZNIN TITHI

AS I pass the planning commission office in Agargaon on a rickshaw, on a jam-packed road in the evening, I cannot help noticing the big advertisements that have been put on the metro rail site stating how the project would bring blessings to this godforsaken city, once it is complete. The metro rail authorities are saying that it will ease the city's perennial traffic congestion, improve the city's environment by reducing the emission of greenhouse gas, and provide a faster, comfortable, reliable and environment-friendly means of public transportation.

According to Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the metro line-6, from the north end of Uttara to Motijheel, would carry 60,000 passengers every hour in both directions. One would be able to travel this 20km distance in just 35 minutes, which sounds really amazing. However, for the time being, the project seems to be causing more damage than good to the city's environment. The people of Mirpur particularly are the victims of this ongoing mega project. In September this year, a report of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the Ministry of Planning has stated that the metro rail project sites are producing a huge amount of dust and creating noise pollution, posing a risk to public health. It has also said that Dhaka Mass Transport Company Ltd had failed to adequately implement the Environment Management Plan (EMP) of the metro rail project.

According to the report, many areas, including Kazipara, Shewrapara, Mirpur 10, Mirpur 11, where metro rail stations will be built, have witnessed waterlogging. Concerns were also raised about an increase in the waterlogging situation after the opening of the metro rail because the drainage and sewerage lines in these areas are inadequate.

Although the much-hyped metro rail project, which started some seven years ago, was supposed to end in December, 2020, the work has been delayed by a year and would need one more year to end, according to the authorities. The IMED report estimated that 45.6 percent of the construction from Uttara to Agargaon has been completed, and 23.12 percent work has been completed from Agargaon to Motijheel. And a total of 30 percent work of the project has been completed so far. So, the question is, will it be possible to complete the remaining 70 percent within the next two years?

Meanwhile, my travel time to and from work (from Mirpur to Farmgate) has increased significantly because of

the traffic congestion resulting from the ongoing construction work of the project. According to the latest evaluation report of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED), it now takes 15 minutes for every passenger bus to pass every one kilometre of road whereas it should not take more than 10 minutes to reach Agargaon from Mirpur 10 roundabout, a distance of around 3.7 kilometres. This happened because the roads have been narrowed down to make space for the mega project.

However, what has been affecting people more than the traffic jam is the deteriorating air quality in the

I can't get enough air into my lungs. Although I have always been using a mask to save myself from the toxic dusty air of Dhaka, it doesn't seem to help much these days. In this part of the city, travelling by public transport has become really difficult for people with dust, sound pollution and black smoke from vehicles taking a toll on their health every day.

But it's not just the dust and smoke from vehicles that have ruined the city's air, the fast vanishing trees and plants along the metro rail sites definitely have a big role to play here. The rows of big trees on both sides of the Begum Rokeya Sarani was a sight to behold only a few years

ago. Even the road dividers from Farmgate to the Mirpur 10 roundabout had big trees such as mahogany, *shishu*, *akashmoni*, etc. But now very few such trees are seen on the road from Agargaon to Mirpur 10, because most of them were cut down to make room for the metro rail.



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Traffic trudges along Begum Rokeya Sarani, which has been narrowed down to make space for the metro rail project.

surrounding areas of the metro rail sites. Reportedly, because of this project, air pollution has reached an alarming level. Thus, further delay in completing the project would mean Dhaka's air quality would deteriorate even more. Earlier this month, a study report on air quality revealed that Dhaka's air remained "very unhealthy" and "extremely unhealthy" for 197 days of the last year. And the duration of the "unhealthy air" level is increasing day by day. The situation seems to have aggravated in the last one month alone. With reduced rainfall, the amount of dust from the construction sites has increased, making the air unsuitable for breathing.

Being a regular commuter from Mirpur to Farmgate, I can literally feel the difference in the air between now and, say, five years ago. Nowadays, while travelling on this road, I often feel that

ago. Even the road dividers from Farmgate to the Mirpur 10 roundabout had big trees such as mahogany, *shishu*, *akashmoni*, etc. But now very few such trees are seen on the road from Agargaon to Mirpur 10, because most of them were cut down to make room for the metro rail.

The open spaces in front of the Agargaon colony beside Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University were taken up by the metro authorities; the nurseries in the area were evicted. One by one, all the breathing spaces in the area were gone and I have been a witness to all these unfortunate events.

I was particularly shocked to see the fate of Shaheed Anwara Park, the lone public park in the city's Farmgate area. I do not know exactly when the park was built, but ever since I became familiar with Farmgate area, I have seen that park. The total area of the park was 5.21 acre,

station. It is true that the benefits of the soon-to-be completed first ever MRT project of the country would be many. According to transport experts, when all five metro rail systems are complete, it will reduce the city's traffic problem significantly, and provide a modern, comfortable transport service to city residents.

But sadly, we have not yet heard of any plan to green the project sites by the government or the metro rail authorities. In order to compensate for the trees that had to be cut down for this mega project, the metro rail authorities should take a massive plan of planting trees in the project areas. Because, at the end of the day, being able to breathe matters more than a fast and modern public transport system.

Naznin Tithi is a member of the editorial team at The Daily Star.

## Stop sending our female workers to Saudi Arabia

Take action against the unruly recruiting agencies

THE unbelievably high number of deaths of our female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia begs the very basic question: why are we still sending our women workers to the country where their basic human rights are not ensured? According to the Brac Migration Programme, between 2016 and June this year, dead bodies of 311 women workers were sent to Bangladesh from the Gulf countries, mostly from Saudi Arabia. And 119 dead bodies of women workers have arrived home this year alone. Also, over the past few years, thousands of our female workers returned home after being subjected to physical torture and sexual harassment by their Saudi employers. More than 900 female migrant workers returned from the Middle East till October this year, most of them from Saudi Arabia.

It is most unfortunate to note the silent role of our Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Ministry while our workers have been languishing in pain in a foreign land. Our embassy in Saudi Arabia also could not play the desired role in safeguarding the interests of the female migrant workers. It did not take any action against recruiting agencies for sending female workers without ensuring their safety and salary.

Reportedly, hundreds of recruiting agencies are working in Bangladesh to send women migrant workers to Saudi Arabia. These agencies do not follow any rules and regulations set by the government and send mostly unskilled women workers from remote areas to Saudi Arabia. When these women face torture and abuse at the hands of their employers, they do not find any way to seek redress or report to any agency concerned because of the obnoxious "kafala" system—their passports are taken away by their employers.

Under the circumstances, the government should stop sending our female workers to the country as domestic help. It should also take action against the recruiting agencies involved in this "slave trade". Moreover, we would like our government to take a strong stance on the issue in bilateral meetings. We have learnt that a joint technical group of Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia will discuss the issues at a meeting on November 26. We hope that in the meeting Bangladesh will make its position clear that it will not tolerate any more rights abuse of its workers in Saudi Arabia.

## Irregularities in Ctg port exposed

Now take steps to put a stop to them

A public hearing was jointly organised by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Corruption Prevention Committee (CPA) on November 13 to hear complaints against port officials, employees and equipment operators who are allegedly taking bribes from clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents and subjecting them to various forms of harassment and delaying tactics in cargo handling. This is the first hearing of its kind, and although only 16 of the 52 complainants turned up at the event, what they had to say, speaks volumes about the irregularities occurring on a routine basis at the most important international sea port of the country.

Apparently, a section of crane operators and staffers cause unnecessary delay in finding containers at the yards and transporting those inside the port. Complainants, in their written statements, have said that all these activities are supposed to be normal functions of port authority personnel. In reality, they require speed money to be paid for each container at various stages of cargo handling. A failure to come up with unlawful demands can result in delay and even wilful damage to commodities being shipped via containers. These issues, and others, were presented by the Bangladesh Shipping Agents' Association at the hearing to the ACC official present as chief guest. The C&F agents' association's bold step to communicate a lot of the complaints to the ACC, we believe, is a step in the right direction. The Chittagong port is the principal port of entry and exit for the bulk of our imports and exports. If organised crime is allowed to flourish there, we cannot expect to score well in international business indices that prospective foreign investors look at. Nor can we expect a reduction in the cost of doing business and these added "extra" costs bode ill for both outbound and inbound cargo. Now that the ACC has been made aware of the situation, we hope the investigation is done thoroughly and corrupt officials are taken to task as per law in line with the government's stance of taking a "zero tolerance" policy on corruption wherever it exists.

# Plagiarism: A symptom of a much larger problem in our culture

NAMIA AKHTAR

PLAGIARISM is a global problem, but the occurrences of academic fraud take place in epic proportions in Bangladesh as this obnoxious practice is infused in our national psyche. Starting from copying music to copying homework and buying readymade thesis, creativity is a rather rare phenomenon and not a mainstream occurrence.

The recent incident of an MP hiring eight lookalikes to sit for her exams emphasises that even our political elites participate in contract cheating, a practice that is illegal in many countries and a criminal offence in the UK. The phenomena of outsourcing homework, assignments or other forms of assessment to third parties to partially or completely fulfil the requirements of an educational degree is defined as "contract cheating", a term coined by Thomas Lancaster. Plagiarism on the other hand, is an academic offense that constitutes of citing ideas or quoting without proper acknowledgement.

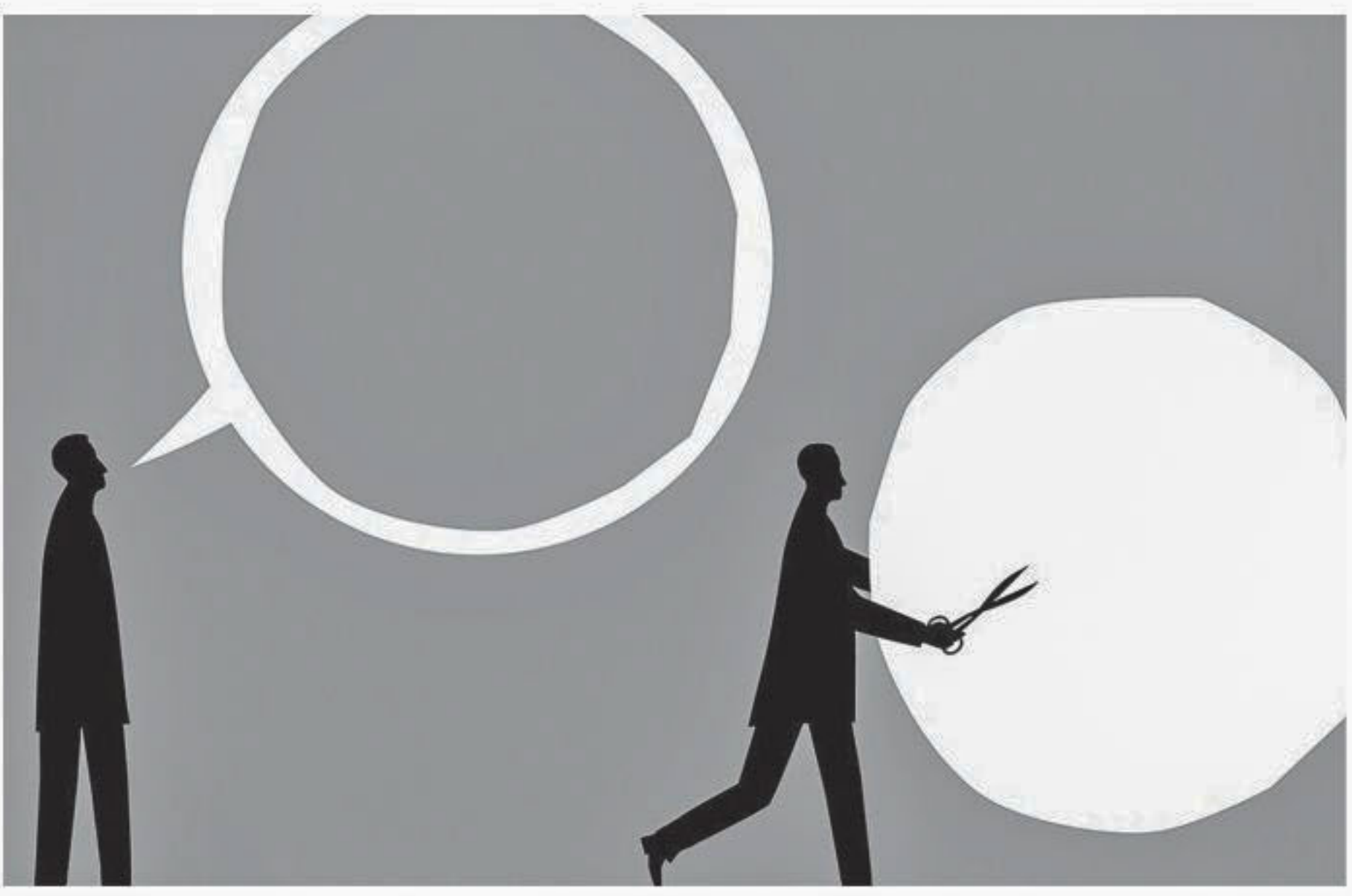
Generally, these dishonest mechanisms to pass exams or to fulfil the requirements of a coursework is a symptom of a much larger problem in our culture—tolerance of fraudulent mechanisms to attain one's achievement. When tolerance and accommodation of amoral practices such as bribing educational institutions for admission or paying bribes to get a respectable job exist, how can we tackle our culture of rampant plagiarism? Academic honesty is, after all, a reflection of our moral parameters.

Contract cheating and plagiarism are not only widespread among students, but it is also practiced by some faculty members. A few years back, the nation witnessed the incident of several faculty members of Dhaka University, who were accused by the University of Chicago Press for plagiarising Foucault. Taking into consideration the embeddedness of academic dishonesty, it is not surprising that Bangladesh ranks globally at the bottom of the competitive rank index. Plagiarism and contract cheating

are rampant as our universities do not harness a research culture. The research culture is often centred around publishing in low-quality local journals which are sufficient for promotion. Research in the advanced countries is centred on the production of original knowledge. But Bangladesh lacks production of original knowledge, and some engage in intellectual theft. There is no research on the topic of intellectual theft, however, based on anecdotal evidence it becomes apparent that ideas from junior faculty members are sometimes stolen by their

a culture of honesty. In an environment where honesty persists, few engage in such activities. If individuals engage by any means, the repercussion for plagiarising is severe. When Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, the former Defence Minister of Germany, was found guilty of plagiarising in his doctoral dissertation, he was forced to step down from Angela Merkel's government. The plagiarism scandal shocked the German nation and led to a public outcry.

What about in Bangladesh? The MP, who got other people to take exam, was



senior colleagues. In addition, junior academics/colleagues are often trapped into becoming the second authors even though the junior academic initiated the project idea. Often, university administration gets threatened by the intelligence of junior faculty as has been the case of Farhan Uddin Ahmed who was assaulted by the Brac university registrar two years ago. This practice needs to stop! Individuals should receive their due credit and recognition both in universities and also in research institutes.

The best defence against plagiarism and academic dishonesty is to harness

not expelled from her position. She continues to hold her position of power, which reflects that contract cheating is taken rather lightly in our political culture.

In addition, there are numerous incidents of the student wing of political parties forcing professors to pass them in an exam having submitted a poor answer script or without even appearing for it. State inaction against episodes of contract cheating clearly sends a wrong message.

Fraudulent academic practices are not acceptable in any form, and those guilty of committing the act should be harshly

penalised. Academic misconduct is taken rather as a serious offence in European, North American, or in Australian universities. In Germany, if a student is caught plagiarising once, s/he is failed in the course and gets issued a warning letter. Subsequent plagiarism will expel the student from the university, and the student will not be able to take admission in another German university. However, most students do not engage in cheating as they are ingrained with strong morals. Families and schools act as powerful institutions in instilling righteousness. As a consequence, incidences of plagiarism are very rare due to upright values and the profound love for learning.

On the contrary, our universities are lenient on plagiarism and some academics passively encourage the practice. It is not uncommon to hear students passing their university courses by submitting the homework of former students. The instructor is aware of the copied homework, but instead of failing his/her student—the students pass with respectable grades. In addition, a certain portion of students pass their examinations by purchasing assignments and thesis from Nilkhet. Far from being a criminal offence, the buyers and sellers of essays continue to thrive as law enforcement agencies turn a blind eye to these illegal businesses. The government needs to enact tougher stance against these businesses that sell such essays.

Currently, the government of Bangladesh does not have a policy on plagiarism and contract cheating. A policy on contract cheating and its implementation mechanism is an urgent need to protect the young minds of this country. However, for any policy to be effectively implemented, strong political will and bureaucratic readiness are essential. Plagiarism and contract cheating will continue to thrive unless the state deals with the issue with an iron fist.

Namia Akhtar is a postgraduate student currently writing her master's thesis at the political science department of the South Asia Institute at Heidelberg University, Germany. Email: namiaakhtar11@gmail.com

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedailystar.net

### In fear of train wreck

The recent news surrounding the train accident is nothing short of horrifying. Even more so, if you are amongst those who tend to commute regularly on trains. Travelling by bus tends to be claustrophobic, especially during long journeys. Comparatively, train journeys are convenient as you can walk around if needed, order snacks when hungry, or even use the toilet as required.

However, over the years, we have witnessed multiple train accidents many of which were fatal. In many cases we have seen that the accidents could have been avoided had there been more attentiveness. Despite similar accidents, I do not understand why the authorities don't take severe measures to tackle the situation.

Many lives have been lost to accidents as a result of carelessness, whether it be on the roads or on the tracks. As a frequent commuter of trains, I am shocked and somewhat scared at this moment and I am sure many others who travel like me feel insecure too.

Perhaps it will pass in due time, but I earnestly hope that security is ensured by the authorities before more lives are lost in the name of transportation.  
Saadi, By email