

As usual, people bear the brunt

Capital witnesses severe gridlock as traders, students clash in New Market area

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixty-year-old Rabeya Begum suddenly discovered herself gripped with anxiety.

She was on her way home to Azimpur with her grandson, whom she came to pick up from his school in Dhanmondi.

"I used to accompany my grandson to his school in rickshaws. In the morning, I came without any difficulty. I don't know how we will go home with no available transport from Nilkhet to Science Lab due to clashes," said Rabeya, while walking with her 10-year-old grandson towards Science Laboratory around 2:30pm yesterday.

By then, they had already walked over a kilometre from Kalabagan. Many other school-going students were also seen walking along the Mirpur road with their guardians.

Hundreds of commuters had to suffer throughout the day as traffic movement in parts of the capital came to a standstill amid a series of clashes between traders and Dhaka College students in New Market area yesterday.

Many of them got off their vehicles and decided to walk to their destinations in the scorching summer heat.

Elephant Road, Bangla Motor, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Dhaka University, Nilkhet, Azimpur, Mirpur Road and their surrounding areas were under a gridlock from morning till afternoon.

Sumon from Mirpur was also found walking through Kalabagan around 11:00am to reach his office at Elephant Road.

He said his office starts at 9:30am to which he was already one and a half hours late due to the traffic



Commuters in Dhaka had to suffer the entire day as the roads went under an absolute gridlock due to the clash between traders and Dhaka College students in New Market area yesterday. Traffic came to an almost standstill in Bangla Motor, Elephant Road, Farmgate, Karwan Bazar, Dhaka University, Nilkhet, Azimpur, Mirpur Road and surrounding areas. These photos were taken from Sonargaon intersection and Mirpur Road.

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN, PRABIR DAS

No extra passengers on vehicles

Home minister gives directives for public transport ahead of Eid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the safety of home-bound people during Eid, authorities will take steps to prevent extra passengers boarding buses, trains and launches, as accidents often occur due to overcrowding.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan came up with the directives at the secretariat yesterday, at a meeting held to address the overall law and order situation, payment of salaries and allowances to garment workers, and keeping roads and highways safe and traffic-free during Eid.

He said if big industries go on holiday at the same time, then around six million people would leave Dhaka all at once. If the leaves are given in phases, the situation can be controlled a little bit.

On recommendation of the labour ministry, he said arrangements should be made to give leaves in phases to reduce traffic congestion.

This is not the first time such instructions were given before Eid. Over the years, the same directives have been given, but they did not bring much result, sources claimed.

According to transport experts and passenger-welfare bodies, around 1.2 crore people will leave Dhaka ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr, which will be observed on May 2 or 3.

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman estimated that on average, 30 lakh people will be leaving every day, but the entire transport system has the capacity to handle 16 lakh people daily.

In that case, people have to travel in illegal small vehicles, on rooftops of trains, and trucks and lorries to go home, he said. "We can assume that road management will possibly go into a coma," he said.

About traffic congestion, the home minister yesterday told reporters that they have taken measures to ease traffic congestion during Eid in Dhaka and across the country.

He expected the traffic will improve in the capital within the next one or two days.

The minister said many development works are ongoing in Dhaka. Works of elevated expressways,

ACTION PLAN
» Deploying traffic police at major points in rush hour
» Coordinating with shopping malls to ensure proper parking
» Not letting vehicles park in front of markets
» Disallowing long-route buses to take passengers out of terminal
DIRECTIVES
» Large industries to go on Eid vacation in phases
» During Eid rush, bus should park in single line out of terminal
» Set up check-posts at intersections, special road to ensure security
» Increasing patrolling in diplomatic zones, ports

metro rail and flyovers are reasons behind traffic jams. Besides, Eid shopping is also increasing congestion in the city.

Along with traffic police, the security forces are trying to reduce congestion, said the minister. The traffic department has also taken a work-plan in this regard.

Asked about the plan, Md Munibur Rahman, additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star that the plan includes

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Abductors in guise of transport provider

Five members of gang arrested, says DB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The gang would wait patiently with its car in a crowded spot of Dhaka or adjacent areas. It offered people to drop them off at their destination for a fare. And it worked.

Failing to find public transport, many office-goers, the main targets, would agree. Once they got in the car for their daily commute, they would realise what misfortune was in store for them.

The syndicate would take them to a relatively secluded spot, and threaten and torture them for money. The gang members would then call the victim's family and ask for ransom through mobile financial services.

Until the family sent the money, the syndicate would continue the torture while taking the victims to different areas.

Police's detective branch (DB) disclosed all this yesterday, after arresting five gang members, including the ringleader.

The arrestees are Md Hiru Mollah and Jakir Hossain, drivers by profession; Md Nijam Uddin, a day labourer; Nazrul Islam, a shopkeeper; and Abdul Barek, the ringleader.

Cyber and Special Crime Division of DB arrested the five after conducting a special drive in Dhaka and Narsingdi on Monday, said Harun-Rashid, joint commissioner (north) of DB.

Police seized two toy guns, two knives, one machete, an iron rod, pliers and six phones from their possession.

Harun said the syndicate would pretend to be a rent-a-car trader. They would even pick up people at gunpoint.

He said the arrestees primarily admitted that they have abducted and collected ransom from around 500 people so far.

The Daily Star, however, was not able to verify the police's claim independently.

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Titas asked to carry out study on gas bill discrepancies

UNB, Dhaka

The authorities concerned have instructed the Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited to conduct a comprehensive study on the allegation that non-metered consumers of gas pay almost double the amount paid by metered consumers for similar use.

The instruction has been given by the Energy and Mineral Resources Division at a monthly meeting to review the implementation of the Annual Development Programme of the ministry.

"If necessary, Titas can involve the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) in conducting the study in a perfect manner," Senior Secretary of the Energy and Mineral Resources Division Mahbub Hossain reportedly told the meeting.

A senior official who attended the meeting informed the news agency that the issue of disparity between the two categories of Titas Gas consumers was widely discussed there.

It was reported in the meeting that a pre-paid metered consumer uses 40-50 cubic meter of gas and pays around Tk 500-630 a month while a non-meter consumer has to pay almost double at Tk 975 for the same quantity of consumption.

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PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

When these falcons were found at the construction site of a road development project, workers trapped them in a cage and have been forcibly keeping the birds as pets. Falcons are predatory birds, whose survival depends on being out in nature. With their numbers starkly decreasing in Dhaka skies, incidents like this pose a severe threat to their existence. This photo was taken yesterday in Kuril area.

Policy gap to blame

Speakers tell webinar on renewable energy deployment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though Bangladesh had a strong commitment to generate 10 percent of its electricity from renewable energy sources by 2021, the current percentage stands at only three percent.

Speakers expressed their frustration over the issue at a webinar yesterday, blaming the policy gap for the failure to meet the target.

They made the remarks at the discussion titled "Models of Renewable Deployment and Policy Gaps in Bangladesh", organised by Citizen Alliance for Renewable Energy in Bangladesh (CAREB).

Hasan Mehedi, chief executive of Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network (CLEAN), said the renewable energy policy of 2008 committed to ensuring the promised 10 percent in the total energy mix by 2021.

"The country was supposed to produce at least 2,200 megawatts of electricity this year. However, the number stands now at only 787 MW," he said, citing Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (Sreda) data.

He also mentioned that in a recent commitment

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