



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Woes of wading through Airport Road traffic

IRINA JAHAN

We never discuss the weather when it comes to small talk in Dhaka. Instead, we share the horrors of going through the appalling traffic that one has to tackle on a day-to-day basis. Given the current traffic conditions, it seems a bit comical that people had once romanticised the bustling liveliness of vehicle congestion in places like Old Dhaka.

In recent years, abhorrent degrees of traffic on Airport Road have become more frequent and the consequences of this have left very few inhabitants of surrounding regions unscathed. So, what exactly is causing this relatively newfound inconvenience? Apart from the usual case of the increased number of cars and vehicles on the road, the primary culprit happens to be the ongoing construction of the Bus Rapid Transit.

A government initiative taken to improve commuting service for the local people, this project has ultimately been a claustrophobia-inducing nuisance. The project's construction was inaugurated back in 2012, and it was set to be a 20-kilometre route from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Gazipur's Joydebpur that would assist the movement of the massive influx of buses through a special lane. It was meant to be completed in 2016 but rather unsurprisingly, the task is still on its way to being finished after a decade's worth of work.

While virtually none of the intended benefits of this project has been upheld since 2012, its construction has continued to make traffic congestion worse in more than just one way. Several potholes, cracks, waterlogging, and hazardous stretches of roads significantly abate daily travel. And if it happens to be raining, you are almost certainly guaranteed to find every moving vehicle along the path at a standstill. Most of the time, these small damages on the roads go unrepaired, unnoticed, or simply neglected when brought to attention.

For locals and unfortunate ones who need to travel past these routes, it can take anywhere from an hour and a half to seemingly forever in order to cover a route that should have taken no more than 30 minutes. These astonishingly quick-to-form bouts of traffic also branch into the narrower roads nearby that make going anywhere at all these days a frustrating experience.

It also does not help to know that workplace safety around the construction zone is not followed strictly, making it a hazardous route for the thousands of people who frequent it regularly. So far, there have been four accidents caused by the BRT flyover girders with the most recent one being this year when a girder fell over a moving car in the Jashimuddin Road area in Uttara.

The BRT project is estimated to be completed by June 2023. Till then, people have to hold their breaths and patiently wait for the possible resumption of bearable traveling in the capital, and fewer days with the sinking feeling one gets when they are stuck in traffic and begin to realise that it would be impossible to make it to their class or appointment on time.

Irina has discovered a newfound passion for solving crossword puzzles while she waits in traffic. Send her the toughest ones you can find at @jahanirina05@gmail.com

How privilege unfairly tips the scales for university applications

AMRIN TASNIM RAFA

"Lekhapore kore je, gari-ghora chore she"

This is an age-old Bengali saying that directly translates to, "Those who study travel in cars and on horses." Chanted by murobbis (elderly persons) to motivate kids to study, it cultivates the dream in our impressionable young minds that studying hard will undeniably earn us a life of luxury.

However, at some point in our high school journey, we realise that hard work is only ever proportional to success in the most ideal of cases. Before even considering whether your family can pay the hefty tuition fees for foreign students, fulfilling the admission criteria alone requires you to come from a position of privilege.

It is definitely possible to apply abroad after studying the NCTB curriculum, but you will have to work harder as internationally recognised school credentials tip the scales. Foreign universities also require a holistic student profile, meaning extracurricular activities (ECAs) alongside grades are very important. Therefore, it is also a point of privilege if you attend a school that has adequate resources to offer well-rounded ECA opportunities, which is more common in expensive English medium schools. The teachers of such schools are also more adept at writing impactful recommendation letters for their students.

Regardless of where you graduate from, affording the expensive standardised testing, where oftentimes repeated sittings increase the odds of a good score, is another hurdle of privilege you need to be able to pass.

Given how application fees tend to be quite hefty, a lot of us apply to fewer universities, decreasing the odds for acceptance. A lot of students end up not ap-

plying at all, as their admission depends on uncertain financial assistance to cover the expenses.

Now, if you're a 'good' student, with good grades, you'll be given scholarships, right?

Not really. Merit-based scholarships are rarer than need-based scholarships with more competition, since people who have always had access to more tutoring, better schooling, and more help are also eligible.

Many institutions don't offer financial aid for international students, and when they do, a student with a similar profile as you, but with a bit more financial security, is likely to be accepted. Therefore, if you need financial aid, you're likely to be accepted to universities you're overqualified for, having to compromise on the rank or quality for the sake of affordability.

Ultimately, in the final year of school, we witness people who had toiled and yearned less than us all along, attending our dream universities.

If you're on the flip side of the coin, please recognise the tremendous privilege you have been granted. When you're talking to your friends about your university plans, be mindful of their circumstances. Judge the things you should share, and what you should complain about, accordingly.

Spending such a large part of the youth that we can't get back working toward academic success, but being held back in key stages because of factors beyond our control, is a demoralising experience. The system is broken. It is unfair. It makes me angry, frustrated, and sad. We can only persevere, and hope that some amongst us will fix it someday.

Amrin's confusion is at its peak, she's been screaming internally for a while now. Send help at amrinrafa@gmail.com

