



PHOTO: STAR

Life without metro

ASHIF AHMED RUDRO

Dhaka residents have a bitter relationship with traffic jam where one can't go one day without falling into one. The congestion on the roads is usually much worse during peak office hours. In the midst of this perpetual torment, there was a small respite in the form of metro rail.

While the metro service is new to Bangladesh and the people of Dhaka has only been introduced to it for a little over a year, a large number of the population has already gotten used to it.

The residents of Uttara and Mirpur are probably the more enthusiastic ones. However, since its halt on 18 July, life without metro has been difficult for a lot of people.

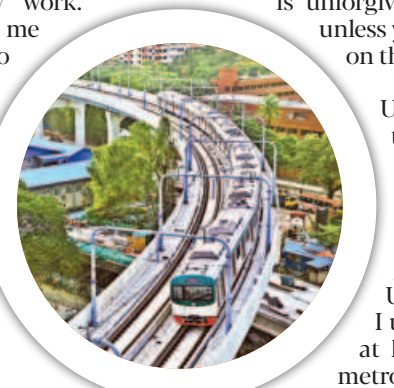
Not surprisingly, Dhaka roads were noticeably congested over the last week. Regular metro rail commuters

had to resort to other means for transportation, and it's been anything but pleasant.

"I used to leave home only 30 minutes prior to my work. Metro rail would take me about 10 minutes to reach Farmgate, where I work. Now I leave an hour early and it's still not enough", said one Ashraf Islam, who lives in Mirpur 10, within walking distance of the metro rail station. "It's been an exhausting week," he added.

The view isn't very different from the driver's seat either. Driving on the streets of Dhaka is no easy task. Whether you ride a motorbike, or drive something with

four wheels, it's challenging all the same. With its dust, noise pollution, and the unavoidable traffic signal of Bijoy Sarani that spares no one, Dhaka is unforgiving on the streets, unless you can fly overhead on the metro.



"I have to take a U-turn at Panthapath to be on route to my home at Pallabi. Sometimes, it takes me 45 minutes to one hour just to get through the U-turn. Which is why I used to leave my car at home and took the metro instead. I could be home by the time I finished taking the U-turn. Now, once again, I sit at the driver's seat and count the taillights," joked Iqbal Hossain, who works at a private bank.

"Everyone who used the metro has now turned to bus, so as you can imagine getting a place on a bus isn't exactly easy these days either, and if you are driving, you better buckle up for the same old Dhaka jam," Iqbal added.

With high pressure of commuters over the last few days, reminiscing about the metro days has become a topic of conversation at workplaces. While many complained about the metro fare for shorter distances, now it seems like a small price to pay considering the time it saved. And there's no hassle of sitting in the traffic jam, wondering when the vehicles might move just a little so you don't lose all hope.

Authorities have announced that metro rail will resume operations as soon as possible. Residents will surely exhale a sight of relief and count the days when the metro is once again a daily part of the experience that we call Dhaka.

12-yr-old girl knocked unconscious, raped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Two men have been accused of raping a 12-year-old girl after giving her and her family sweets laced with sedatives in Habiganj's Chunarughat upazila.

They are Billal Miah and Farhad Miah are from the same village, said police.

On Saturday evening, the victim's father filed the case, accusing the duo, said Hillol Roy, officer-in-charge (OC) of Chunarughat Police Station.

Police are trying to arrest the accused, who are on the run, Hillol Roy told The Daily Star yesterday.

According to the case statement, the accused were acquainted with the family members of the 12-year-old victim.

On August 12, Billal and Farhad visited the victim's home and brought them sweets laced with sedatives. They gave the sweets to the family around 10:00pm, and the entire family fell unconscious shortly after.

Then, Billal and Farhad raped the girl while she was unconscious, said the case added.

The next morning, the family woke up and found their home in disarray and their daughter in distress. Realising something was wrong, they rushed her to the Upazila Health Complex for medical attention.

Billal is reportedly involved in criminal activities in the area, which further heightened the family's fear of speaking out. However, with community support, they could file the case.

Ex-IGP, 16 others sued

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and Arifuzzaman, constable Sujan Chandra Roy, ASI Amir, university unit Chhatra League President Pomel Barua, General Secretary Shamim Mahfuz, Office Secretary Babul Hossain, and Organising Secretary Dhananjay Kumar Tagore, OC of Tajhat Police Station Rabiul Islam, in charge of the university police outpost Bibhuti Bhushan Roy, associate professors Asaduzzaman Mondol and Moshir Rahman, and Proctor's Office staffer Rabiul Hasan Russell.

Abu Sayed was killed in police firing in front of his university campus in Rangpur on July 16 when students clashed with

police, activists of BCL and Jubo League.

The victim, a student of the 12th batch of the English department of Begum Rokeya University, was a resident of Babanpur Zafarpara village in Pirganj upazila. He was a key coordinator of the quota reform protests.

The image of Abu Sayed standing with arms outstretched in the face of police firing just before he was shot went viral and strengthened the protests that eventually led to the ouster of Sheikh Hasina-led government on August 5.

Police had previously lodged a case alleging that Abu Sayed's death was caused by stones thrown by protesters.

Ex-ministers Lotus Kamal, Javed Chy

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also suspended for 30 days, said the BFIU notice to banks.

The ACC also initiated probe into allegations that former finance minister Mustafa Kamal, AKA Lotus Kamal, and three ex-MPs were involved in a racket linked to the Malaysian labour market.

Kamal and ex-MPs Nizam Uddin Hazari, Lt Gen (ret'd) Masud Uddin Chowdhury, and Benazir Ahmed, allegedly overcharged jobseekers and made over Tk 20,000 crores over a year and a half by sending 4.5 lakh people to the southeast Asian country.

The ACC will also probe the roles of Kamal's wife Kashmiri Kamal and daughter Nafisa Kamal.

A three-member committee led by Deputy Director Mohammad Nurul Huda will investigate the allegations, according to ACC sources.

They said the ACC has prepared a summary of the allegations against them.

The ACC also decided to probe allegations of amassing illegal wealth against Harun Or Rashid, who is now the additional police commissioner (crime and operations) of the DMP.

The bank accounts of Harun and his wife Shirin Akhter were also frozen by the BFIU yesterday.

The financial intelligence unit's letter to banks stated that any accounts held by Harun, his wife, and their privately-owned businesses must be frozen.

The BFIU also asked for all types of their account-related information and documents, and other relevant information within three working days.

The graft watchdog, following recommendations made in an intelligence report, launched a probe against former DMP commissioner Asaduzzaman Miah.

A complaint filed with the ACC stated that Asaduzzaman, along with his wife and three children, amassed illegal assets at home and abroad.

Meanwhile, the BFIU also instructed all banks to freeze accounts belonging to Amir Hossain Amu, a former Awami League lawmaker and industries minister, and his daughter Sumaiya Hossain.

The order was issued based on reports of suspicious transactions in their names, according to the letter issued by the BFIU.

On Thursday, the ACC decided to investigate allegations of bribery against former home minister Asaduzzaman Khan and Chowdhury Nafeez Sarafat in connection with bank takeovers and embezzlement of funds from the stock market.

Election after vital reforms

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He paid deep respect to the people who sacrificed their lives in the "Second Revolution" that led to the fall of former prime minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5.

Students of no other country in recent memory had to pay so much for expressing their democratic aspirations and dreaming of a discrimination free, equitable and environment friendly country where human rights are protected, he added.

"I took over a country which was in many ways a complete mess. In their efforts to stay in power, the Sheikh Hasina dictatorship destroyed every institution of the country.

"The judiciary was broken. Democratic rights were suppressed through a brutal one-and-a-half decade long crackdown. Elections were rigged blatantly. Generations of young people grew up without exercising their voting rights. Banks were robbed with full political patronisation. And the state coffers were plundered by abusing power."

In the new era that has dawned, he said, people, regardless of their political, religious or ethnic identity, will be able to fulfil their aspirations as the interim government will uphold democracy, justice, human rights, and

freedom of speech.

The top priority now is to establish law and order at the earliest. The armed forces will continue to assist law enforcers as long as the situation warrants, he said.

Ensuring justice and accountability for all the killings during the mass upsurge is another priority, said the Nobel laureate.

"The revolutionary students want us to carry out meaningful and deep reforms, that will turn the country into a real and thriving democracy. The task is huge, but doable with the support of all people and the international community.

"I must succeed. We don't have any other option."

Robust and far-reaching economic reforms will restore macroeconomic stability and sustained growth, with priority attached to establishing good governance and combating corruption, he said.

He promised upholding the international humanitarian and human rights law and adhering to the international, regional and bilateral instruments.

Bangladesh will continue to be a proponent of multilateralism, with the UN at the core, and look forward

to maintaining and enhancing Bangladesh's contributions to the UN peacekeeping, he said.

The interim government will continue to support the Rohingya people in Bangladesh, he said, seeking sustained support from the international community for humanitarian operations and eventual repatriation to Myanmar.

Urging the trade and investment partners to keep their trust in Bangladesh, he said, "For our part, we won't tolerate any attempt to disrupt the global clothing supply chain in which we are a key player."

He then promised to nurture friendly relations with all countries.

"Bangladesh stands at the crossroads of a new beginning. Our valiant students and people deserve a lasting transformation of our nation. It is a difficult journey and we need your help along the way. We need to fulfill their aspirations. The sooner the better. "We have to create opportunities to build a poverty-free and prosperous new Bangladesh."

Press Secretary Shafiqul said there was no question-answer session at the event, but Prof Yunus greeted and interacted with the diplomats after the speech.

CPD suggests 3 steps to fix energy sector

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"No public procurement rules were followed under this act. The faulty procurement and bidding process of the major power projects such as the Adani deal, Payra and Rampal power plants cost us an additional Tk 35,000 crore."

Moazzem also called for an international audit of all companies under the ministry of power, energy, and mineral resources to uncover anomalies and corruption from the past government.

"There was no transparency in the information available in this sector. Companies provided different information to different authorities, and all details were kept top secret during the Awami League-led government. All deal documents should be made public."

The data on power generation cost, power purchase tariff, efficiency level, plant factor, fuel cost, capacity payment, date of contract expiration, and oil and LNG import costs must be updated regularly on the respective websites.

CPD emphasised the need for all government activities to be conducted under the Public Procurement Act 2006 and Public Procurement Rules 2008.

They urged the government to review all procurement and bidding processes of power plants, phase out inefficient and quick rental power plants and prioritise the identification and assessment of renewable energy resources.

Additionally, CPD recommended

forming a probe body to identify anomalies in pre-paid meters and restructuring the power, energy and mineral resources ministry to empower the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority (SREDA) as the sole authority for implementing upcoming energy transition issues.

In the final phase, spanning 12 to 36 months, CPD suggested the

CPD'S PLANS FOR ENERGY SECTOR

Phase 2 (between 6-12 months): Research, Development and Demonstration

- Overhaul SREDA as the lead authority for renewable energy
- Bring SREDA under Prime Minister/Chief Advisor's Office
- Pilot projects and feasibility studies in selected regions to test

Phase 3 (between 12-36 months): Infrastructure Development

- Upgrade existing grid to Smart Grid by 2041
- Shift priority to domestic gas exploration
- More gas well workover projects should be undertaken
- Revise tax and incentive structure

government prioritise investment in advanced grid technologies, modernise grid infrastructure and shift focus from LNG imports to domestic gas exploration.

"The past government has made Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission a toothless authority," Moazzem said.

The laws were amended to adjust gas

incorporated hydrogen and ammonia co-firing with carbon capture and storage systems, which is a 'false solution' of energy transition.

CPD demanded the review of the market-based pricing formula saying the formula has anomalies. "We need to get rid of subsidy-based power and energy but under a transparent process."

Six banks still in shortfall

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the central bank on the condition of anonymity.

Generally, banks have to maintain a current account with the central bank for different clearing payment systems and they have to maintain a hefty balance in the account.

In theory, the central bank can restrict those banks from the clearing platforms due to their current account deficit, said the BB official.

"The shortfall means the lenders are in deep crisis," said another senior official of the central bank seeking anonymity.

The shortfall came despite the BB providing special liquidity support to the banks for more than a year, the official added.

The BB's special liquidity support was equivalent to the deficits in the lenders' current account.

As of August 7, the outstanding liquidity support to six lenders stood at Tk 14,621 crore.

Of the six banks, the highest current account deficit is of FSIBL, whose chairman is S Alam Group's chairman Mohammad Saiful Alam. The Shariah-based bank's deficit is Tk 6,693 crore, according to BB documents.

Alam's wife Farzana Parveen and four other relatives are on the board of FSIBL.

Social Islami Bank, whose chairman is Alam's son-in-law Belal Ahmed, has the next highest current account deficit: Tk 2,877 crore.

National Bank - where Ratna Dutta, wife of S Alam Group executive director Subrata Kumar Bhowmick, is a board member - came in at third spot with a deficit of Tk 2,586 crore, followed by Union Bank (Tk 2,097 crore).

Alam's siblings Halima Begum, Osman Goni and Md Rashedul Alam along with his wife Marzina Sharmin and nephew Mohammad Mostan Billah Adil are on the board of Union Bank.

Power sector's

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extended for another five years.

Thanks to this act, hefty amounts were paid as capacity charges to the power plants.

All previous activities under this act will be reviewed by the interim government, said M Fouzul Kabir Khan, the adviser to the ministry of power, energy and mineral resources, at a media briefing in the secretariat yesterday.

"It will be decided by the advisory council whether the act will be abolished or not. But from now on, the pending works under this act will remain suspended," Khan added.

Different media outlets published articles about the anomalies of the sector, especially under this act, which may raise questions among

people, said a press release from the ministry.

Under this circumstance, all the negotiations, projects and purchase activities will remain temporarily closed.

However, the contracts that were done under this act will continue.

The interim government will not take any decision regarding hiking the power or energy tariffs by bypassing the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC).

Last year, the Awami League government amended the BERC Act and incorporated a clause to set the energy prices by themselves without any public hearing.

They have increased the power price several times since this clause was rolled out.