



PHOTO: STAR

The types of passengers you meet on a bus

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Dhaka is not that big of a city. But there are way too many people, and while the number of buses is not little either, it's far from enough. The daily bus commutes in Dhaka are tedious but if one is willing, there are plenty of drama and stories to find. Today, we will count the five types of passengers you meet on a bus and yes, all of these are from real experiences.

The angry one

It is difficult to determine what makes a bus go; is it the engine or is it that one fuming passenger on the third row? In every bus ride, there is that one person who is angry and screaming at the driver and the supervisor for one of a thousand reasons that we dare not list here. Without a doubt, he is the most vocal and loud one on the bus. Most often, the quarrel is about fare. The angry passenger will not listen to anyone. It doesn't matter that the quarrel is over something as little as five takas only, there is no shortage of vehemence and willingness to resort to fists here.

The businessman

The business tycoons are on the phone the whole time they are on the bus, and they are often so loud that the whole bus becomes aware of their transport business somewhere in the country. These people are so loud that any attempt to cancel them out by using a pair of earbuds falls on deaf ears (yes, pun intended). When the supervisor comes to collect the fare, they are so busy speaking over the phone that they will just wave off and ask them to come later, which if you know anything about Dhaka buses, are an ingredient for oncoming disaster.

The lovebirds

As you get on a bus, in a desperate attempt to find a seat which is rarer than a Dodo bird, you might notice a couple. They sit together and chatter the entire time. Sometimes, there will be giggles, sometimes there will be arguments and often, there will be the

pleading voice of the boy who is trying his best to convince the girl about something, what we can only assume is the theory of relativity. Sometimes, the lovebirds come in a group and these overly enthusiastic groups speak so loudly that they beat even the angry one in the bus.

The know-it-all

Mister know-it-all, not to be confused with the angry one, is that one person who usually sits in the middle of the bus and has an opinion about everything. The weather is terrible today? He knows all about it. The cricket team has put on yet another shameful display? You can count on him to have an opinion about the strategy and where it all went wrong. Something is going viral on Facebook? You guessed it, our know-it-all indeed knows about that too, and he is not used to keeping his voice down or his opinion to himself. He can be heard trying to host a talk show with anyone who will humour him in the bus.

The anxious one

You might be a regular commuter on the bus, but there are people who have no idea about the route or the fare. Some of them might be venturing in that part of Dhaka for the first time in their life. These are the anxious ones who will constantly remind the supervisor about their stoppage. But unforgiving as the Dhaka streets are, they are right to be dubious and they resort to asking other passengers about the stoppages and fares. The constant checking of Google Maps, the frequent phone calls with their relatives/friends every 10 minutes, and the uncomfortable fumbling with their bags are a dead giveaway. Unfortunately, despite their continuous effort, most of the time, they miss their stoppage and then jump out of the bus in a rather comical way that is far from safe.

Of course, there are a few honourable mentions; like the compulsive eater, the sports fan, the one with all the bags, the one who is way too stylish to be on a bus, and last but not least, the silent one with earbuds in his ears.

So, which one are you?



DU, 7 colleges part ways at last

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as affiliating the colleges with the university had only aggravated academic problems of nearly two lakh students.

They, however, said they were still uncertain over their future.

At a press briefing around 7:00pm, the students issued the government and authorities concerned a fresh 24-hour ultimatum to fulfil their two key demands, including the resignation of DU Pro-Vice-Chancellor Prof Mamun Ahmed, who they claimed misbehaved with a group of students of the seven colleges on Sunday afternoon.

The students demanded immediate withdrawal of police personnel involved in alleged assault on students.

The students warned of boycotting classes and exams if the two demands were not met within 24 hours. They also threatened to lay siege to the New Market Police Station and block DU buses from using their college areas.

The seven colleges are

Dhaka College, Eden Mohila College, Begum Badrunnesa Government College, Government Bangla College, Kabi Nazrul Government College, Government Titumir College, and Government Shaheed Suhrawardy College.

There are about 2 lakh regular and irregular students enrolled in graduate and post-graduate programmes at these colleges.

According to DU insiders, the university was not ready to deal with the extra load of administrative work since the beginning.

The lack of necessary resources and preparation at DU worsened the situation at the colleges and it got more complicated as the years ticked by.

DU insiders said the university authorities were "happy" to sever the ties.

However, it is still not clear who would be overseeing the academic and administrative activities of these seven colleges.

Sources in the education ministry said the government

is considering establishing a separate university or higher education institution for these colleges.

They said the University Grants Commission (UGC) has already held several meetings with the representatives of the college students about this.

A senior UGC official said that they were working on various "models", but none was finalised.

Dhaka College Principal Prof AKM Elias said the seven colleges would neither be with DU nor with the National University.

"A separate framework will be developed for these colleges upon consultation with teachers and educationists. However, there has been no discussion as to how this would be," he told reporters after yesterday's meeting.

Asked about the students' demand for the resignation of the DU pro-VC, the principal said, "We have presented all six demands of the students. The issues were discussed, but decisions regarding resignations or

similar matters are beyond our jurisdiction."

Yesterday's meeting between the DU VC and principals of the colleges decided that the DU administration would ensure that students currently enrolled in the university's academic programmes were not affected in any way.

On Sunday night, students of the seven colleges and DU were locked in sporadic clashes at Nilkhet intersection. The clash continued until 1:00am yesterday with police reportedly lobbing sound grenades to disperse them.

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel were also deployed.

The situation became normal around 1:30am.

The DU had to suspend all exams and classes at the university for yesterday.

Before the establishment of the National University in 1992, the seven colleges were affiliated with the DU.

After it was formed, the National University took over the responsibilities of the colleges along with other

colleges affiliated with other public universities.

In August 2014, then prime minister Sheikh Hasina asked the education ministry to reaffiliate the colleges with respective public universities.

The education ministry in November 2016 decided to start the process by handing over the responsibility for the seven colleges to DU.

On February 17, 2017, the seven colleges were affiliated with the DU. The goal was to improve the quality of education, reduce pressure on the National University, and put an end to session jams at colleges.

After the re-affiliation, delays in announcing examination schedules, conducting examinations, and publishing results became serious.

Since 2017, the college students took to the streets several times demanding an end to session jams, publication of flawless results on time, establishment of an administrative building for them, publication of academic calendar, holding

examinations on time, and fair evaluation of answer scripts.

Sources said that a "personal rivalry" between then DU VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique and National University VC Harun-or-Rashid allegedly caused a lack of coordination between the two institutions, with the two VCs blaming each other for the disruptions in academic activities.

In October last year, the college students started demanding the establishment of an independent university. To press home their demand, they blocked Nilkhet intersection on October 21 for several hours.

Abdur Rahman, a student of Dhaka College and one of the protesters, said, "An independent university for these seven colleges is the only option forward. The seven colleges should be governed by an interim administration without any involvement from the Dhaka University authorities until an independent university is established."

LAWYER SAIFUL MURDER

11 more arrested, sent to jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police have arrested 11 more suspects in connection with the killing of lawyer Saiful Islam Alif amid clashes between former ISKCON leader Chinmoy Krishna Das's supporters, police, and lawyers in Chattogram last year.



Chattogram Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, led by Kazi Shariful Islam, sent the 11 suspects to jail after they were produced before the court on Sunday night, said Abdul Karim, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station.

The arrestees are Premnandan Dash Buja, 19, Ranab Dash, 24, Bidhan Dash, 29, Bikash Dash, 24, Rumit Dash, 30, Raj Kapoor, 55, Samir Dash, 25, Shiv Kumar Dash, 23, Om Dash, 26, Ajay Dash, 30, and Debi Charan, 36.

Earlier, 10 suspects, cleaners by profession, were arrested after police reviewed CCTV footage, said law enforcement officials.

The clashes erupted on November 26 on the court premises following the rejection of Chinmoy's bail plea in a sedition case filed on allegations of insulting the national flag.

During the violence, Saiful was beaten and hacked to death outside the court premises.

Subsequently, Kotwali police registered three cases on charges of assaulting police officers, vandalism, and obstructing law enforcement duties during the clashes.

Saiful's father, Jamal Uddin, filed a murder case naming 31 individuals. Saiful's brother also lodged another case accusing 115 persons on charges related to explosives, attacks on justice-seekers and vandalism.

To date, a total of six cases have been filed with police and the courts in connection with the murder and related clashes.

BNP, IAB agree

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IAB Senior Presidium Member Syed Mosaddeq Billah Al Madani, Secretary General Maulana Yunus Ahmad, Presidium Member Ashraf Ali Akon, Senior Joint Secretary General Gazi Ataur Rahman, and Joint Secretary General Imtiaz Alam were with Rezaul Karim.

After the meeting, Fakhrul offered Zohr prayers and had lunch with the IAB leaders.

"The BNP leaders agreed that if they come to power, they will not enact any law that goes against Shariah. They also agreed not to say anything against Islam," IAB Secretary General Yunus Ahmed told The Daily Star.

Asked, he said BNP had not proposed formation of any electoral alliance at the meeting.

BNP leader Bulu told this newspaper that the issue of Shariah was raised by the IAB.

However, BNP leaders said these issues are also reflected in their party's constitution.

"This does not mean we are supporting the establishment of an Islamic state," a BNP leader told The Daily Star, highlighting that the focus remains on maintaining harmony and mutual understanding.

Jamaat chief Shafiqur Rahman met Rezaul Karim in Barishal on January 21.

After the meeting at the Charmonai Darbar, the two leaders said they would work together in the interests of the country, Islam, and humanity.

This meeting piqued public interest about the dynamics of Islamist

politics in Bangladesh.

Jamaat has long sought to forge greater unity among the Islamist parties. These efforts gained momentum after the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5 last year.

On January 22, Fakhrul and BNP Standing Committee member Nazrul Islam Khan held a meeting with a nine-member delegation of Khelafat Majlish, including its ameer and secretary general.

Khelafat Majlish was once a part of the BNP-led 20-party alliance but left in October 2021. The January 22 meeting marked their first engagement in nearly three years.

After the meeting, BNP stated that it has taken initiatives to strengthen communications with all anti-fascist political parties, particularly Islamist groups.

Ahead of the national election, efforts are underway to build an alliance between Jamaat and other Islamic parties.

On January 24, during a programme at the Engineer's Institution in Dhaka, IAB said, "Efforts are ongoing to ensure a unified ballot in favour of Islam in the upcoming national election."

BNP's recent high-level meetings with leaders of Islamist parties are seen as part of a broader strategy to draw them closer into the BNP's fold.

Political analysts view this as an effort to consolidate support among Islamic parties ahead of the next national election.

Workers bear the brunt of political fallout

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for financial assistance. We are hopeful in this regard," Fakhrul told The Daily Star.

Anwar Hossain, administrator of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said many factories were closed and some of them later reopened, but he did not have exact data on how many workers were laid off or terminated, and how many factories were shut.

Labour and Employment Secretary AHM Shafiquzzaman also could not provide accurate data on factory closures leading to joblessness of workers after the ouster of the AL government.

Amirul Haque Amin, president of the National Garment Workers Federation (NGWF), said nearly 70 factories, including those of Beximco and Gazi, have been shut since the August political changeover, leading to the

joblessness of around one lakh workers and officials.

In the case of Beximco, the government could have formed a committee involving the buyers and union leaders so these units could remain open and repay the loans of the group, he said.

After the Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza building collapse, several committees were formed with the union leaders, clothing brands, and factory owners to resolve the crises, and solutions were found after discussions.

Nazma Akter, president of Sammilito Garment Sramik Federation, said it was difficult to keep Beximco factories open because of the loans, though the RMG units were performing well.

However, the clothing retailers and brands that used to source from Beximco should come forward to support the laid-off workers.

Khalid Shahriar, head

of human resources and compliance for the Textile and Garment Division of Beximco Group, said the group sought help from the government to resume operation of the textile and garment units.

He said the group sent letters to Bangladesh Bank, the finance ministry and the labour ministry, requesting banking support for running the units.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed, chief of the interim government's Labour Reform Commission and former executive director of the BLS, said closure is never a solution to any problem.

He alleged the layoff of Beximco workers was not done lawfully. Also, the workers were being arrested on charges related to violence during protests.

The business should have been kept out of politics, he said.

Supreme Court lawyer Jafrul Hasan Sharif also said workers of some garment factories were not laid off

following the law, and the Beximco units should have continued their operations by selling the group's properties.

Labour Secretary Shafiquzzaman said the government cannot run garment factories with taxpayers' money.

He also said that the ministry has mediated the settlement of payment in at least five incidents related to garment factories which were closed and workers were laid off.

The rate of RMG workers migrating within the country is around 6 percent every month. This means that the retrenched workers would gradually be employed by the factories that are still in operation, he added.

The ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh employs around 4 million people, according to government estimates.

Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director of Centre for Policy

Dialogue, said it is not the government's job to run factories. The government can only support them for a certain period.

"Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, the companies and employees fall in trouble together in case of any problem at the top level of the enterprises," Moazzem said.

At a press conference last week, Labour Adviser Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain said that the government doesn't think it is feasible to reopen the Beximco units, considering the sheer volume of its debt.

Beximco Group's total bank loan stood at over Tk 40,000 crore, including Tk 29,925 crore taken against 32 factories in Beximco Industrial Park, where the 16 closed units were situated, he said.

"Of those 32 factories, 16 exist only on paper. But these factories were used [as collateral] to take loans."

Rail communication

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(locomasters, assistant locomasters), guards, and travelling ticket checkers have traditionally worked beyond their duty hours and received extra pay for that.

They also received pension benefits based on the pay for their extra work until 2021. But in November that year, the Awami League government declined to grant pension benefits based on the extra work.

Following a strike in April 2022, the railways ministry intervened and decided to continue the pension benefits. However, the staffers have long been demanding cancellation of the November 2021 order, saying in a changed situation their benefits could go away again.

In addition, newly recruited assistant locomasters, who were appointed in 2022, have not been receiving this benefit, as their appointment letters stated they would not receive extra pay during their service or after retirement.

In December last year, the newly recruited locomasters

went into work abstention, demanding benefits their predecessors got, while their predecessors stopped taking on additional duties for several days. They also demanded cancellation of the 2021 gazette.

They stopped their protest following an assurance by railway authorities.

The finance ministry on January 23 issued a circular saying the newly recruited assistant locomasters will get 100 percent "running allowance" instead of 75 percent. The "running allowance" would not exceed their monthly basic salary, it said.

It did not say anything about their post-retirement benefits.

But a day before, the association at a press conference in Chattogram announced the indefinite nationwide strike from today.

Over the last few days, the railway authorities had been in discussion with the association leaders, they but failed to convince them.

The association leaders also boycotted a scheduled

meeting with the rail secretary yesterday morning.

A BR team led by ADG Mahub then held a meeting yesterday evening with the association leaders at the Kamalapur Railway Station's VIP guest room.

A group led by Saidur joined the meeting. In the meeting, railway officials said one of their demands regarding newly recruited assistant locomasters was met, and they were working to meet their other demands.

A railway official told this paper that the association leaders wanted the promises in writing. "But how can we give them written assurance as the issue lies with the finance ministry? At that point, they left the meeting."

Last night, the railways ministry issued a public circular asking the railway staffers to postpone their strike as Bangladesh Railway and the railways ministry are working to meet their demands.

It also asked them to continue dialogue and consider passengers suffering.