



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



## Surviving Dhaka: One commute at a time

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Dhaka is full of stories and opportunities. However, living in the capital city comes with a price. Mostly in the form of time, physical and mental stress, and last but not least, stress on your pockets. But perhaps nothing annoys the residents more than the toll of its traffic.

Call me melodramatic, but I find commuting in Dhaka is an odyssey itself. Even if it's a short distance such as Karwan Bazar to Mirpur-10, it's challenging all the same.

### EENY, MEENY, MINY, MOE; ON THE PACKED BUS I GO

Every morning, while setting out for work, I have a number of choices. I can take a bus, or get on the Metro, or hire something from a ridesharing company, or get on a human hauler known as leguna. Each choice comes with its disadvantages since only the most optimistic person can find advantages of Dhaka commute, and I am not one of them.

Buses are the cheapest option in Dhaka, but finding a seat on a local bus during office hours is like winning a lottery. If you are a skinny person like me, whose only defence is his sarcasm, you will have a hard time on the bus.

### THE ULTRA-FAST PRESSURE COOKER

Or as the average Dhaka office goes calls it – Metro Rail.

It's an amazingly helpful transportation system and people are thankful for it. It has reduced hours of commutes into literally minutes, and it's been a blessing for office goers. But calling it crowded is an understatement.

Getting off the metro is easy because the wave of crowd will take you with them, but getting on it is an entirely different story. You have to get in the line. There are the entitled ones who think they are above getting in a queue and tries to bump in. Engaging in an argument with one of them is as much part of the commute as toiling your way into the compartment.

The compartments are usually so

tightly packed that you cannot even stand properly, and if you are anything like I am, you will come out with joint pains because of all the pushing and shoving. So perhaps, calling this commute a pressure ride won't be an injustice.

### HAULED ACROSS TOWN

Without the larger transportations, life in Dhaka will become very difficult. The rickshaws are too expensive and not a good choice for longer commutes. CNGs are hard to find during peak hours and will leave a mark on your wallet. The only other choice is smaller public transports like a leguna.

The reckless driving, the poorly maintained vehicle that feels like it will fall apart at the next speed breaker, and the tightly packed seats where they force one extra person than the seats are made for; it's another terrible experience.

### THERE'S MORE

Then there are the common issues such as the vehicles delaying on purpose

in hopes of getting more passengers. The terrible seats that will readjust your spine at every bump, and last but not least, the average Dhaka residents who are rude for no reason. They will hog more than their fair share of the seat and most frequently, they will be silently hostile. The average Dhaka resident is just as terrible as the daily Dhaka commute. But, after living in the city for a few years, you will feel sorry for them. Because if you had to go through such struggles twice every day, you will become irritable too.

Amongst all these terrible experiences, the good news is a new ticket counter-based bus service has been launched. Approximately, 2,610 pink buses operated by 21 different companies are expected to bring some solace to commuters. With strict adherence to designated stops for entry and exit, one can expect the buses to bring respite to Dhaka residents. Whether they have any positive effect or not, remains to be seen but as another Dhaka resident, I sincerely hope that they do.

## Polls could be held by year end 'at the earliest'

Yunus tells NHK

STAR REPORT

The next general election in Bangladesh could be held at the end of this year at the earliest, said Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus.

In an interview with Japanese public broadcaster NHK on Wednesday, Yunus also discussed his plans to rebuild Bangladesh.

Yunus became the chief adviser of the interim government following a mass uprising that toppled the Awami League government, led by Sheikh Hasina, after 15 years in power.

He told NHK that he had taken charge of a country that was "devastated" in every aspect by the Awami League and vowed to ensure that Bangladesh "lands on its feet and becomes stronger."

"Given the circumstances when we took over, I believe we have come a long way. It was a completely devastated society—its economy, political system, and judiciary were all in disarray," he said.

Acknowledging the importance of elections in a democratic system, he expressed his commitment to creating a "safe and sound" environment before holding elections, ensuring that the next elected government can build upon his administration's efforts.

Regarding the election timeline, he reiterated that voting could take place at the end of this year at the earliest.

"When the election is held, the newly elected government will inherit a stable and secure foundation to work with," Yunus told NHK.

The Nobel Peace Prize laureate expressed hope that young people, who played a key role in last year's uprising, would continue to have an "influential" role in shaping the country's future.

"What young people want is to showcase their creative power and share it with the rest of the world. That is the ambition we have in mind," Yunus said.

The chief adviser also conveyed his gratitude to Japan, Bangladesh's largest development partner, acknowledging that Japanese technology and investment have helped create jobs for young Bangladeshis.

## Reform now at crucial stage

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The overwhelming and unanimous support that Prof Yunus enjoyed when he was sworn in to helm this interim government, which included representatives from among the students who had spearheaded the uprising, may wane with the launch of a new party led by the protest leaders. Left it be seen as partial, the interim government will have to clinically evaluate its neutrality having three cabinet members who are tipped to join the new political party and run in the upcoming election.

A professor of economics and globally acknowledged as the father of social business, Prof Yunus, along with his team of advisers, has not been able to bring down the rising costs of food and essentials. The closure of large factories (especially those linked with the Awami League leaders or beneficiaries of the previous regime) leading to job losses has only compounded the employment situation. Economic forecasts for the year remain dismal and show little signs of improving soon. Despite some of the reforms in the financial sector, the economy has remained almost stagnant.

To make matters even more complicated, the Muslim month of fasting, Ramadan is set to start in March when food prices typically peak. This will coincide with the scorching summer months when

power demand is set to peak as well. However, efforts or measures to cater to power demand during the summer may prove to be insufficient. Projections on this front remain dismal as well.

The perceptibly deteriorating law and order situation has been another cause of concern for the citizens. There have been numerous incidents of petty crimes and mugging in broad daylight with rather insignificant efforts to bring that under control. The morale of the police force remains low even after six months of this government's tenure.

The debilitating series of protests and demonstrations that characterised the first few weeks of the incumbent's tenure continues even now. These protests and demonstrations, whether by jobseekers or students or deprived madrasa teachers, continue to plague the government and gridlock Dhaka almost every week, causing immense suffering to the citizens.

The incumbent's reputation for flip-flopping on decisions has only been reaffirmed with the recent, rather embarrassing, announcement and cancellation of the Bangla Academy awards.

While the lacklustre measures to contain the outbreak of dengue might be overlooked, the health ministry's lack of sincerity in dealing with the wounded protesters of the

July uprising cannot certainly not be waved off. A full month gone in the new year, students are yet to get their textbooks, and it might be another few months still before young pupils get their books.

Relation with Bangladesh's most important neighbour, India, remains a work in progress and leaves much to be desired. Bangladesh has yet to send a clear message about its vision, which should be based on a win-win scenario.

Meanwhile, the issue of Rohingya repatriation has become ever more complicated as the Arakan Army has seized control of most of Rakhine State, making it rather uncertain at best, and almost impossible at worst.

With Donald Trump back in office, there is bound to be a shift in global order. But the effects are being felt quite directly as he has shut down funding for all USAID projects, which heightens apprehension regarding Rohingya expenditure besides another round of job losses due to this fund crunch.

It is unlikely that the incumbent will be able to meet all these expectations and deal with all these challenges. But it will at least have to get to the lowest hanging fruit and meet the bare minimum, which is what the chief adviser has been saying from the beginning. Necessary reforms, followed by election.

## Stop attacks on assets linked to

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"Despite this understanding, the Government appeals to the citizens to abide by the law to show the world we are a nation that respects the rule of law. Respecting the rule of law is what differentiates the new Bangladesh we are working together to build from the old Bangladesh under the fascist regime. Let us not undermine Bangladeshis' sense of security and stability; any disregard for the law endangers the lives and property of citizens," reads the statement.

"For the citizens who rose up and overthrew the Hasina regime in July and August to realise their dreams for the country, it is imperative to prove to ourselves and our friends around the world that our commitment to our principles – respecting one another's civil and human rights and acting

under the law – is unshakable."

Champions of a new Bangladesh must never act in ways that could support any perceived equivalence, however unjust, between the behaviour of today's institutions and those of the ousted autocrats.

"Our security forces are aware of this imperative. The Government is working with the country's security forces to preserve law and order and to protect the lives and property of all Bangladeshis."

If any attempt is made to destabilise the country through any kind of provocative activities, law enforcement agencies will immediately take strict action against anyone acting to create chaos and anarchy, which includes the destruction of property. The government will bring the responsible

individuals and groups to justice.

The leaders of the fascist regime have left the country in complete ruins.

They have no chance that they can come back as long as "we remain alert" and retain the moral high ground. Any attacks to their properties give them an excuse to draw international attention to themselves and dish out their fabricated stories.

"We are in the process of trying them for their crimes against humanity. The whole world is with us. Any deterioration of law and order will give a wrong message to the world."

The chief adviser calls on all citizens to materialise "our dream of building a country where all Bangladeshis can live in security and dignity to act with self-discipline and to channel their energy into productive, peaceful efforts to support positive changes".

## Dhanmondi 32 now lies in ruins

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income people, like them. They will sell their finds to recyclers.

Excavators and a crane had torn down the building between 8 at night on Wednesday and 11 in the morning the next day.

Yesterday morning, a crowd of curious spectators gathered: Some peered inside and around the demolished structure, others took selfies, and motorists slowed down to take a look.

A few individuals were breaking parts of the pillars with hammers to collect bricks.

A few young people went to the basement.

The protest began after an announcement that prime minister Sheikh Hasina would deliver a speech online.

The protesters created a Facebook event titled "Bulldozer March", urging people to gather on Dhanmondi 32 at 7:30pm on Wednesday.

Large crowds gathered, and by 9:30pm, the building was set ablaze. Shortly before midnight, a crane and an excavator were at the scene. In the following couple of hours, parts of the building were razed to the ground. The heavy equipment left the scene by 11:00am on Thursday.

The protesters also demolished parts of an adjacent building which housed an art gallery and an extension of the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum.

Last night, 15 people were injured in Gazipur city as locals assaulted a group

of young men who tried to vandalise the ancestral home of former Liberation War affairs minister AKM Mozammel Haque, reports our correspondent from the city.

Witnesses said dozens of men gathered near the house of the Gazipur AL president in the Dhirashram when locals stopped them. As the men tried to run away, locals caught 15 of them and assaulted them, said Arifur Rahman, officer in charge of Gazipur Sadar Police Station, adding that two of them were in critical condition.

The injured men were sent to the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital.

### ARSON ON THURSDAY NIGHT

Protesters set fire to the house of Awami League Presidium Member Sheikh Selim in the capital's Banani around 1:30am yesterday. Firefighters said they didn't dare go to the scene because there were not enough law enforcers to protect them.

In Noakhali's Begumganj and Hatiya, the houses of former army chief Moeen U Ahmed and former MPs Mohammad Ali and Ayesha Ferdous were vandalised and set on fire on Thursday night.

The incidents occurred between 8:00pm and 2:30am. Upon receiving reports, separate teams of the army and police visited the sites.

Liton Dewan, officer in-charge of Begumganj Police Station, told The Daily Star that a group of over 100 men wearing masks and helmets stormed the house of Moeen in Chaumuhani around 8:00pm.

## BNP worried over law and order

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meeting virtually from London.

Talking to The Daily Star, Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed said, "The BNP urged the government to strictly control law and order situation to prevent chaos in the country. We have also urged the people not to engage in any provocative activities and to remain calm. If the situation worsens, it could create a scope for fascists to return to politics."

In the meeting, BNP leaders criticised the interim government for its failure to stabilise law and order over the six months, which they claim has led to spreading a "mob culture" across the country.

They also questioned the government's silence and delayed response to the recent vandalism and arson attacks, including those on the Dhanmondi 32 residence and the homes of Awami League leaders and activists.

On Wednesday and Thursday, a group of protesters vandalised and set fire to the Dhanmondi-32 house. Parts of the building were razed to the ground. Homes of AL leaders were also knocked down and torched, while murals and busts of Sheikh Mujib were damaged in nearly two dozen districts.

A BNP leader, who attended the meeting but wished to remain anonymous, raised serious concerns about the government's preparedness.

"Did the government not anticipate

that such incidents could occur? With its intelligence agencies and extensive network, how could it be unaware of such widespread unrest? If the government was truly unaware, those responsible must be held accountable," he told this newspaper.

At the meeting, the party leaders also pointed fingers at the AL, accusing it of fuelling public anger through its recent programmes, such as leaflet distribution, strikes, and blockades.

They added that if the interim government could take legal action against AL leaders for their anti-state activities, the country might not have faced such a situation.

The BNP leaders expressed concern that the ongoing situation has not only damaged the credibility of the chief adviser but also tarnished the country's image.

Several Standing Committee members discussed whether any gap between student leaders and the government has created over the last two days' incidents.

The party hopes that the government will take immediate and effective measures to restore stability and ensure a peaceful environment for the upcoming national polls.

During the 90-minute meeting, BNP leaders discussed various issues, including reports of reform commissions and the current political situation. They also talked about

their divisional and district-level programmes, which are going to take place this month.

Meeting insiders also said that a three-member BNP delegation of Standing Committee members Nazrul Islam Khan, Salahuddin Ahmed, and Selima Rahman may visit the Election Commission office tomorrow to discuss the commission's preparations and related issues regarding the national polls.

Before the meeting, the BNP, in a statement early yesterday, said that failure to control situations has encouraged people to take the law into their own hands and engage in "illegal activities".

If the government cannot effectively manage the ongoing situation, the stability of both the state and the government will face serious threats. The current situation could lead to the resurgence of defeated fascists alongside extremists, anarchists, anti-democratic evil forces, both domestic and foreign, said the statement.

Apart from Fakhru, other Standing Committee members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Jamir Uddin Sircar, Mirza Abbas, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Abdul Moyeen Khan, Nazrul Islam Khan, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Salahuddin Ahmed, Selima Rahman, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, Hafizuddin Ahmed, and AZM Zahid Hossain joined the meeting.

## Trump sanctions ICC

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of innocent victims of atrocities across the world, in all situations before it," it said in a statement.

The United Nations yesterday called for Trump to reverse his decision to slap sanctions on the ICC.

Dozens of countries warned that Trump's targeting of the ICC with sanctions could "increase the risk of impunity for the most serious crimes and threaten to erode the international

rule of law."

"Sanctions would severely undermine all situations currently under investigation as the Court may have to close its field offices," the 79 countries - who make up about two-thirds of the court's members - said in a statement.

Trump's move coincided with a visit to Washington by Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who - along with his former defence minister

and a leader of Palestinian group Hamas - is wanted by the ICC over the offensive in the Gaza Strip.

It was unclear how quickly the US would announce names of people sanctioned. During the first Trump administration in 2020, Washington imposed sanctions on then-prosecutor Fatou Bensouda and one of her top aides over the ICC's investigation into alleged war crimes by American troops in Afghanistan.