



Dhaka's love for deliveries

RBR

Once upon a time in Dhaka, telephone operators and postmen were the most revered service providers, especially for a young adult in love or an elderly parent residing in any mufassil town.

I remember bribing the telephone operators for long-distance calls to bypass the trunk call bills. And the postman was almost like a friend, we connected on a platonic level, where he knew he could make or break my day with a letter or gift.

Dhakaites have come a long way since those days and now await parcel delivery men instead.

For many in Dhaka, a social media addiction often leads to financial fatality. You keep buying things you don't need, slight variations of things you already have, or things you will never need.

Believe me when I say, that on average, I receive a minimum of two parcels a day, orders I don't remember purchasing with the cash-on-delivery option.

Hassan, my caretaker, says, "In our six storied building, there are six families. I receive almost 13 to 15 parcels daily. Food, gadgets, plants,



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

clothes; deliveries continue to drop in every couple of hours."

"If you have young boys and girls in the building, then food is all they order, the delivery sometimes comes till 2:00am. I find it difficult to manage deliveries for all six floors. Meanwhile, my friends who also work as caretakers of high-rise apartments complexes in the vicinity, need a dedicated assistant caretaker to sort these deliveries and drop them

off at the correct flat. Most of the time house guards are the ones receiving the orders, and the cash is left with them," he jokes.

Rezaul Karim, who was once a security guard, would earn around Tk 12,000 monthly. However, this was just not enough for his small family living in the village. "I started working for a reputed courier company in the city. The company only required me to have my own bicycle and mobile phone to join," he explained.

"Even though my fixed salary is only Tk 4,500, I usually earn up to Tk 17,000. The calculation is quite simple. I get to keep Tk 20 for each parcel I

deliver. If I deliver 20-25 packages every day, I can earn Tk 400-500 in just one day," says Rezaul.

He adds "Also, sometimes we get tips, but you cannot rely on that income. Sometimes people tip you, sometimes they don't. However, I am from a poor background and have family responsibilities, I keep my salary for them and live my days here in Dhaka with tips and other bonuses. I do not have the luxury to eat to my heart's content because I must share that money with my family," he adds.

The city's e-commerce and f-commerce are thriving, and courier service companies are complementing these booming businesses in Dhaka and around Bangladesh.

For anyone who has runs an online store, tagging with a reliable courier is mandatory. Nahar, an online business owner, feels that delivery persons work very hard, and they deserve a pat on their back.

"Yes, some of them are rough in manners, but some customers are uptight too. These boys cycle throughout the day, in the rain or sun, ensuring that your goods are not damaged. So, when you pay your delivery fee, please realise that they only receive a meagre portion of that Tk 120 delivery fee you pay," says Nahar sympathetically.

Quite a few local courier companies are employing the otherwise unemployed or low-paid workers, who come to Dhaka to realise their dreams, and Dhaka doesn't fail them.



Parties split over 'pluralism'

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reflect the Islamic values and cultural dynamics in Bangladesh.

The NCP also partially agreed with the commission, but said it wants the English word "pluralism" replaced with a better Bangla translation, arguing that it created confusions among some political parties.

Jamaat and NCP agreed to the proposal for a two-term cap on the prime minister's tenure. The BNP, however, proposed allowing two consecutive terms for a prime minister, with eligibility for a third term only after a break of at least one term.

The BNP and the Jamaat called for defining the PM's tenure as five years, while the NCP endorsed the proposal for a four-year tenure.

One of the other proposals suggested that the prime minister and the Leader of the House should not be the same person.

The BNP rejected this idea outright, arguing that the dual role is a long-standing tradition in Bangladesh.

The party contended that the role of the Leader of the House does not involve executive authority and hence does not conflict with the PM's responsibilities.

On the other hand, the NCP supported separating these roles, believing that such a step would foster greater checks and balances within the parliamentary framework.

The Jamaat said its position was not finalised on the issue, and the party would discuss it further with the commission.

The proposal for the formation of a National Constitutional Council (NCC) as an institutional mechanism to oversee appointments

to constitutional bodies, such as the Election Commission, met with divergent views.

The BNP opposed the idea, saying it would dilute the executive powers of the prime minister and could create bureaucratic bottlenecks.

Jamaat endorsed the formation of such a council, considering it essential for depoliticising key institutions.

The NCP also agreed with the proposal and said that the selection of the defence chief and all the constitutional posts should be done by the council.

One major area of agreement among all three parties was the introduction of a bicameral parliament.

All parties endorsed the proposal, seeing the creation of an upper house as a means to introduce broader regional and professional representation and to curb the concentration of legislative power in a single chamber.

The BNP, however, disagreed with the commission's recommendation for proportional representation in the proposed upper house, insisting that any decision on a bicameral legislature must come through open debate in an elected parliament.

Similarly, the reinstatement of the caretaker government system received unanimous approval from the three parties.

They agreed that a neutral interim government is essential to ensure free and fair elections and to restore public trust in the electoral process.

On judicial reforms, the BNP proposed that the chief justice should be selected from among the three most senior judges of the Appellate

Division of the Supreme Court, instead of the senior most judge, as proposed by the commission.

Additionally, the party supported the creation of a Judicial Appointment Commission, but emphasised that its structure and mandate should be discussed and finalised in parliament.

The Jamaat and the NCP agreed with the commission on these points.

However, divisions reemerged over the proposal for a separate secretariat for the judiciary, with the BNP warning that any move to introduce judicial reforms outside the constitutional framework would be unlawful.

Jamaat and the NCP both supported the idea, arguing that a separate secretariat would help enhance judicial independence and administrative efficiency.

Another contentious issue was the proposal to make the Election Commission accountable to a parliamentary standing committee if the election commissioners neglect their duties.

The proposal suggested that this could help oversee the EC's activities and ensure its neutrality.

The BNP opposed the idea, stating that such a move would reduce the EC's autonomy and potentially politicise it.

The NCP and the Jamaat supported this proposal, saying it would improve transparency and public confidence in the electoral process.

Speaking about the talks recently, National Consensus Commission's Vice-Chair Prof Ali Riaz said, "We are working... We hope to reach common grounds on the reform proposals, and we are currently negotiating with the parties."

Pakistan tests missile system

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troops and validating key technical parameters, including the missile's advanced navigation system and enhanced manoeuvrability features," Pakistan's military said in a statement. It did not say where the test took place.

The missile training launch comes after Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he has given his military "full operational freedom" to respond to the attack in Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir, which killed 26 people, mostly Hindu tourists.

Pakistan has denied any involvement in the attack and called for an independent probe.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday reaffirmed his country's commitment to taking firm and decisive action against the perpetrators of the Pahalgam terror attack.

"We agreed that terrorism is the biggest threat to humanity. ...We are committed to taking firm and decisive action against the terrorists and those who support them. We thank Angola for their support in our fight against cross-border terrorism," Modi said in a statement at a joint media appearance with visiting Angolan President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço at the Hyderabad House in New Delhi.

On Friday, Pakistan army's top brass

warned India of a "sure and decisive" response should it attempt to "impose war".

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Syed Asim Munir presided over the meeting of his top commanders about the "current Pakistan-India standoff", a military statement said.

Munir "underscored the critical importance of heightened vigilance and proactive readiness across all fronts", it added.

This week, Islamabad warned of an imminent air strike from its neighbour, and has repeatedly made clear it will respond with force to any aggression by India.

International pressure has been piled on both New Delhi and Islamabad – who have fought several wars over the disputed Kashmir region – to de-escalate.

Neighbouring China has urged "restraint", with the European Union warning Friday that the situation was "alarming".

In an interview with Fox News, US Vice President JD Vance called on India to respond to the attack in a way "that doesn't lead to a broader regional conflict".

He also urged Pakistan to "make sure that the terrorists sometimes operating in their territory are hunted down and dealt with".

Since the attack – the deadliest in Kashmir on civilians in years – India and Pakistan have exchanged tit-for-tat diplomatic barbs and expulsions, and shut border crossings and air spaces. India also suspended the Indus Waters Treaty.

Yesterday, India banned the import of goods coming from or transiting via Pakistan and barred Pakistani ships from visiting any Indian port.

India also suspended the exchange of all categories of mail and parcel services from Pakistan through air and surface routes, PTI reported.

India's Directorate General of Foreign Trade said in a notification that the ban would take effect immediately. "This restriction is imposed in the interest of national security and public policy," it said.

Analysts in Pakistan told AFP the missile launch was a warning shot.

"It clearly indicates that we have the resources to counter India. This is not a message only for India but the rest of the world that we are well prepared," said Hasan Askari Rizvi, a military analyst.

Meanwhile, troops from the two sides have exchanged gunfire for nine consecutive nights along the militarised Line of Control, the de facto border, according to Indian defence sources.

Disband women's reform commission

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mammoth rally in the city's Suhrawardy Udyan. The demands include dissolution of the women's reform commission, withdrawal of cases against Hefazat leaders, a ban on the AL, and justice for those killed in its 2013 programme at Shapla Chattar.

Amid slogans from thousands of its leaders and activists, Hefazat Secretary General Sazidur Rahman announced a series of divisional conferences over the next three months "to establish fair rights of women" and a nationwide demonstration after Juma prayers on May 23.

The declaration states that women's social progress should not be dictated by Western values, but instead be based on the country's religious and cultural traditions.

It called for reinstating "complete faith and trust in almighty Allah" in the constitution, urging the government to abandon what it described as the "suicidal concept" of pluralism and to protect the faith and religious practices of the devout Muslim population.

Hefazat also opposed the inclusion of terms such as "gender identity", "gender diversity", "gender equality", "gender discrimination", "third gender", and "other genders", arguing that these are used to promote LGBT and transgender inclusion under "ambiguous" slogans such as "leave no one behind" and "inclusive".

The group warned that these ideas could lead to a "destructive, anti-religious pro-homosexual society".

The group called for expediting the trial processes regarding the 2013 Shapla Chattar and July 2024 incidents. It also demanded that ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina and her "identified associates" be tried before the upcoming national election.

Labelling the Awami League as a "terrorist organisation," the declaration demanded a ban on all its activities until the judicial proceedings against it are complete.

The Qawmi madrasa-based organisation demanded that the interim government declare the "fascist" Awami League a criminal outfit, and ensure its trial for "mass killings" during the organisation's programme in 2013 and the July 2024 uprising.

The declaration includes a demand for a new law with the highest punishment for derogatory remarks about Allah and the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH). The group opposed any recommendation from the Media Reform Commission to repeal existing blasphemy-related legal provisions.

It demanded the cancellation of bail granted to Chinmoy Das in the Saiful Islam Alif murder case in Chattogram and urged the withdrawal of all "false and fabricated" cases filed against Islamic scholars, madrasa students, and religious youth during the AL regime.

The group called for exemplary punishment of those allegedly involved in the persecution and

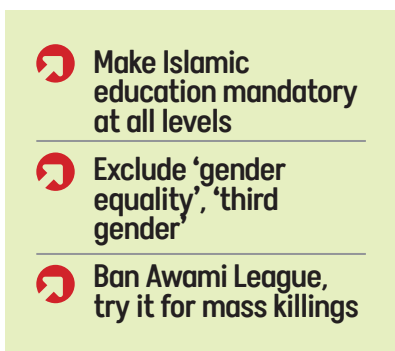
enforced disappearances of Islamic figures over the last 15 years.

Hefazat urged the government to raise its voice diplomatically against violence in Gaza and the persecution of Muslims in India. It also called for a boycott of Israeli and Indian products.

It demanded that the government make Islamic education mandatory at all levels.

The group condemned what it said was the government's "consent" to establish a "humanitarian corridor" to Myanmar's Rakhine State, terming it a "short-sighted and suicidal decision" that could compromise national security.

Regarding security issues, Hefazat demanded increased military presence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, stronger efforts to build harmony between Bengalee settlers and indigenous communities, and to ensure the safety of Islamists to preach in the hill tracts.



The platform also demanded that the "Qadianis" be declared non-Muslims at the state level and their activities be banned.

Hefazat Joint Secretary General Azizul Haque Islamabadi read out a statement from the organisation's Ameer Muhibullah Babunagari at the rally that began at 9:00am.

Muhibullah said, "Anti-Islamic forces in the country are once again raising their heads. Recently, the Women's Affairs Reform Commission submitted a report that goes against the Quran. Infamous feminists, funded by imperialist donors, have taken to the field to implement a Western agenda aimed at destroying our social and religious values, rules, traditions, and family structure."

He warned the government against making any "reckless decisions under the influence of NGO-backed groups" – decisions that contradict the Quran and Sunnah. "We will not make any compromises on this."

He said the Media Reform Commission has recommended removing the provisions related to punishment for religious defamation from the Penal Code and the Cyber Security Act, which he described as "another deep-rooted conspiracy".

"No one has the right to hurt the religious sentiments of either the majority or the minority," he said.

"Therefore, those legal provisions regarding punishment for religious defamation must remain intact, and the specific recommendations of the Media Reform Commission in this regard must be scrapped."

Cardinals meet ahead of vote for new pope

AFP, Vatican City

The cardinals of the Catholic Church held their ninth in a series of near-daily meetings at the Vatican on Saturday ahead of the election of a new pope.

The closed-door "general congregations" allow them to discuss the challenges the successor to Pope Francis will face before they are locked into the Sistine Chapel on Wednesday for the vote.

Walking through crowds of pilgrims and journalists for the morning meeting, the so-called "Princes of the Church" gave little away – not even speculating how long the conclave would last.

"We do not know, we just wait for the Lord to tell us," said Cardinal William Seng Chye Goh, Archbishop of Singapore, seen as one of the more conservative prelates.

The cardinals were called to Rome from around the world after the death on April 21 of Francis, an energetic reformer from Argentina who led the Catholic Church for 12 years.

According to Vatican press director Matteo Bruni, 177 cardinals, including 127 aged under 80 and thus eligible to vote in the conclave, attended Saturday's meeting.

On Wednesday, 133 cardinal electors will enter the Sistine Chapel and not leave until they have – after a series of secret ballots – given a two-thirds majority to Francis's successor.

"We recognise his achievement but no pope is perfect, no one is able to do everything so we will find the best person to succeed St Peter," Goh told reporters.

"Prophetic spirit"

Cardinal Jean-Paul Vesco, archbishop of Algiers, said he hoped the conclave would choose a pope to follow in Francis's progressive footsteps.

"We must discover the one the Lord has already chosen," he said.

"We could have had much more time praying together, but I am sure that at the right moment we will be ready and we will give the Church the pope that the Lord has wanted."

There will be two general congregation meetings on Monday, Bruni said.

Under Vatican tradition, the purpose of the meetings is to discuss general Church issues, not papal candidacies.

On Saturday, the cardinals gave thanks for Francis's papacy and discussed peace-building around the world and the role of the Curia – the Church administration – in supporting the pope's work.