



DHAKA FROM BACKSEATS

Things you observe while commuting

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When you're on the streets of Dhaka, perhaps idly sitting in the backseat of a vehicle, if you take a minute to stop doom-scrolling and stare out through the windows, you will more than likely see drama unfolding before your eyes!

For the hasty commuter, the surroundings are typical and mundane. But for a keen and curious observer, Dhaka's roads portray a whirlwind of activities, characters, oddities and emotions which are no less than what you might watch on Netflix.

The only difference is that you cannot hit pause on those short-lived scenes, like the one where you see three friends walking in the rain sharing the same umbrella, just the way your long forgotten school trio once used to.

Observing some carefree friends chattering about, you realise that you have been in the same stage,



PHOTOS: STAR

in the same scene, but you are now the audience instead of the cast. It is an open theatre where many unknown characters roam around, but in some way or another, you can always find a slight resemblance to each of them.

Stories brew in cups of tea in "tong" shops among co-workers, whilst on the other hand, a lovely date suddenly turns

into a breakup quarrel -- all happening out of the corner of your eye!

Seeing the weary face of an office-goer in the evening, who is perhaps staring blankly out of the dusty windows of a bus, instantly puts me into the shoes of Feluda. My mind wonders of that passenger's aspirations and feelings. Is he worried about making ends meet? Is he going home where his children are waiting for him, or has he left his family behind and

lives in Dhaka in a shared flat?

One moment you see a white-collar person rushing frantically trying to catch a bus, and the very next moment, you see an auto-rickshaw casually overtaking a huge car and hurling the road into a haphazard confusion, along with the inevitable skirmish that follows.

It is quite impossible to keep up with this city where so much happens at a time!

Whether you admire the bright smile on a hawk's face when he successfully sells that yellow smiley balloon, or you get entertained by the haggling of aunties in front of roadside shops, Dhaka from the backseats is like a cinema that follows through. The only cost of watching this art performance is the unfinished stories.

And during the night, the neon lights at every nook and cranny or the series of street lights at a flyover are pleasing to the eye -- only if you pause to look at them.

So next time, instead of typing away on your phone when commuting, look out through the window and try to embrace the charm of Dhaka a little more -- maybe you will realise that the city you curse so much is not too bad after all.

He went out

FROM PAGE 1

Ramzan was the fifth among eleven siblings -- eight brothers and three sisters. Some of his brothers are day labourers, while others run small businesses to support their families.

When this correspondent visited the family home in Thanapara, Gopalganj town, around 2:00pm yesterday, a heavy silence filled the air. In the yard of the dilapidated two-storey house, a few children played quietly. Sitting beneath the wooden staircase, Ramzan's elder brother's wife, Parveen Begum, wept in grief.

"His parents died a long time ago. At one time, our family was doing well -- we owned a large shop. But everything was lost in legal disputes," she said.

"Ramzan wasn't involved in any politics. He used to work, eat, and wander around. He went out with his rickshaw and got shot."

"After he was shot, someone came and informed my husband. Then my husband, his elder brother, and his brother's wife took Ramzan to the 250-bed General Hospital in Gopalganj. As his condition deteriorated, he was transferred to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 11:00pm," Parveen added.

"When I got married almost 20 years ago, Ramzan was a child. He was a good soul, he died a premature death," she said, breaking down in tears.

Seven-year-old Mariya, daughter of one of Ramzan's brothers, said, "I saw uncle in my dream last night. He used to bring me snacks sometimes."

Ramzan's eldest brother, Jamal Munshi, said, "We heard there will be a post-mortem. After that, his body will be brought home. We'll bury him in the graveyard next to our house."

Of pellets and lost eyesight

FROM PAGE 1

admitted there, many continue to receive eye care in the outdoor unit.

AN AFTERNOON LIKE NO OTHER

The July 18 afternoon remains etched in the memories of Rejwanur Rahman Shohel, an assistant surgeon.

Rejwanur, who is involved with a pro-BNP doctors' association, received a phone call from a senior BNP leader around 3:00pm, minutes after returning home from his hospital duty.

The BNP leader told him that many party activists had been injured and were taken to the hospital. Two of the injured also called him later.

"I couldn't immediately fathom the scale of the situation... But when I arrived at the hospital, I found it overwhelming," Shohel said.

Doctors were called in from home to help manage the influx of patients.

Most of the injured arrived with retinal damage caused by pellets. "Even in the least injured eyes, we found at least five pellets. In some cases, we recovered several dozen pellets from a single eye," Shohel said.

"There was fear, but we tried our best to provide care... We were told that a complaint had been lodged with the local police station against us for treating the protesters. But we didn't pay heed and carried on with our work," said Shohel.

Neela said, "We came to the hospital even during curfew. We treated our patients without any hesitation."

A LIFE-CHANGING MOMENT

The July uprising left an indelible mark on 25-year-old Tanvir Hasan Tushar, a third-year honours student at Dhaka College.

He joined the July movement, along with his friends from various private universities. As planned, Tanvir and his friends took position in the Notun Bazar area around 10:00am on July 18.

Hearing about police action against Brac University students, they moved towards the university.

As they reached Ring Road in Badda area around 12:15pm, a chase and counter-chase ensued between law enforcers and protesters. At one point, Tanvir was struck by pellets near the ramp of a flyover.

"Pellets struck my ear and lips. I didn't immediately register that another pellet had hit my left eye. A friend alerted me that my left eye was bleeding," he recalled.

Tanvir was taken to NIOH after failing to receive treatment at three private hospitals for a lack of doctors.

Eye specialists at NIOH treated his cornea and released him the same day. Later, he underwent another surgery at the hospital but is yet to regain vision in the left eye.

"I can only sense light within half a yard but not beyond that," said Tanvir, who had to quit his part-time jobs after the incident.

"My family isn't solvent... I now have no choice but to rely on them financially again," he added.

Another injured, Shahidul Islam Sakib, a college student, was hit by metal pellets in his left eye during protests in Feni's Chhagalnaiya on August 4.

The 18-year-old was later admitted to NIOH and underwent four surgeries. "The injuries on my left eye were grievous. Doctors at NIOH recommended that I get an artificial

eye," he said.

About a month ago, he had an artificial eye implant at Islamia Eye Hospital in Farmgate.

The youngest of four siblings, Sakib has not been able to resume his studies.

"My life has changed forever. I can't imagine what the future holds for me," he told The Daily Star.

Mozammel Haque, 27, sustained injuries to both eyes after being hit by shotgun pellets fired by police in Narsingdi town on July 18 last year.

He was first taken to a local hospital and later transferred to the NIOH in Dhaka on August 8. Except for a few short breaks, he remained there until March 26 and underwent five surgeries.

"Now, my right eye has only about two percent vision, and I can't see anything with my left eye," he told The Daily Star yesterday. Mozammel is on the government's list of patients to be sent abroad for treatment. "But I don't know when I will actually be sent," he added.

A final-year BA student at Narsingdi Government College, Mozammel took his exams with his younger sister acting as a scribe. "I passed five out of seven subjects. I'm still trying my best and hope I'll regain vision in one eye if I receive treatment abroad," he said.

Tushar, Sakib and Mozammel have been recognised as July Joddha and have received financial support from the government and the July Shaheed Smriti Foundation. They are among hundreds of young people who are now bearing the scars and trauma of violent attacks during the July mass uprising.

Jamaat to press for 7-point demand at today's rally

FROM PAGE 12

of perpetrators of all incidents of genocide; necessary basic reforms; implementation of the July Charter and Declaration; rehabilitation of families of those martyred or injured in the July uprising; holding the national election under a proportional representation (PR) system; and facilitating voting rights for over one crore expatriates.

According to party leaders, organisational activities have been carried out under the direct supervision of Jamaat's ameer and other top leaders both in Dhaka and across the country, to make the rally a success.

The main event is scheduled to begin at 2:00pm, with party chief Shafiqur Rahman in the chair.

Zubair says around 10,000 buses and 2,000 minibuses have been hired to transport party activists from various parts of the country.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway has approved the operation of four pairs of special trains upon the request of Jamaat for their rally.

In addition, two to three extra coaches have been arranged on Dhaka-bound trains from Rajshahi, Syedpur, and other districts. The party will cover all related expenses, he added.

Following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5 last year, several political parties including the BNP and Islami Andolon held major rallies in the

capital.

Jamaat, however, staged only one rally at the Purana Paltan intersection, calling for the release of then-imprisoned (now freed) leader ATM Azharul Islam. It did not organise any other significant public gathering in the city until now.

Party Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar acknowledged the rally may cause some inconvenience and traffic congestion, adding, "On behalf of Jamaat-e-Islami ameer, we sincerely apologise in advance to the people and residents of Dhaka."

"To minimise public suffering, we have deliberately avoided using the city's roads for the rally," he added.

Party leaders said nearly 6,000 volunteers will be deployed across 20 points, each assigned to different divisions. They will wear uniforms identifying them as volunteers. For those coming from outside Dhaka and nearby districts, at least 15 parking areas have been arranged for their vehicles.

Fifteen medical booths will be set up inside and around Suhrawardy Udyan for first aid. Each booth will have multiple beds and two MBBS doctors, along with emergency medicines and ambulance services.

An IT team will support the event, with drone-to-drone cameras capturing high-quality video. The rally will be broadcast live on LED screens at the venue and streamed on Facebook, YouTube, and other social media platforms.

Country descends into deeper crisis

FROM PAGE 1

By the end of the day, at least 66 people had been confirmed dead -- 55 of them in the capital alone -- while over a thousand were injured across at least 16 districts. The actual toll was feared to be much higher, with many hospitals inaccessible and several wounded in critical condition.

The previous night's clashes had barely died down when fresh waves of demonstrations erupted. In defiance of a government-imposed ban on public gatherings, thousands of students and citizens flooded the streets of Dhaka, clashing with police, BGB, Rab, and ruling party cadres. Protesters shut down roads and blockaded offices and transport hubs across the capital, bringing the city to a standstill.

Dhaka's Rampura and Badda areas witnessed some of the worst violence. Protesters, many of them teenagers, constructed makeshift barricades with trees and electric poles. Roads were littered with brick chunks. Around noon, clashes escalated near the TV Centre area. BGB forces opened fire, killing at least one student on the spot. Several others succumbed to injuries later.

Mirpur turned into a warzone by afternoon. Protesters ransacked and torched the Dhaka North City Corporation office, BRTA office, and several Metro Rail stations. As black smoke covered the skies, Rab helicopters hovered above, firing sound grenades. Residents described scenes of flying pigeons dropping dead in panic.

In Mohammadpur, Bheribadi, and Dhanmondi, pitched battles raged between protesters and law enforcers aided by ruling party activists.

In the districts, the death toll kept

mounting. In Rangpur, four protesters were shot dead. In Narsingdi, at least two protesters were killed and dozens injured in a confrontation near the Madhabdi municipal office. Savar saw the death of Al Amin, a 24-year-old student of Bangladesh Open University, during a clash in Radio Colony. In Sylhet, journalist ATM Turab of Naya Diganta was killed after being hit by over a hundred shotgun pellets during a clash in Bandarbarazar.

In Bogura, 16-year-old Saim Shuvo died from pellet injuries. In Mymensingh, 17-year-old Sagor was killed during clashes between AL men and protesters. Narayanganj saw the burning of the district's PBI office, five police vehicles, and fire service trucks. In Jalkuri, at least 26 buses owned by AL MP Shamim Osman were torched, and Nagar Bhaban was vandalised. Kalihati AL office in Tangail was also burned down. In Rajshahi, 12 people were injured after AL and affiliated groups attacked a BNP rally. Similar violence flared in Chattogram, Kishoreganj, Munshiganj, Barishal, Brahmanbaria, and Cox's Bazar.

The government appeared overwhelmed. Despite a ban on political gatherings in the morning, it permitted parties to rally outside their central offices by afternoon. Awami League staged a demonstration on Bangabandhu Avenue. General Secretary Obaidul Quader blamed the BNP-Jamaat alliance for hijacking the movement and called for "united resistance." Meanwhile, BNP's rally in support of the movement was foiled, and Joint Secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi was arrested near the Jatiyo Press Club.

Protest leaders, including Hasnat Abdullah and Abdul Kader of Baishamyabirodhi Chhatra Andolan,



Protesters clash with BGB personnel in Dhaka's Purana Paltan on July 19, 2024.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

reiterated that their movement was peaceful and non-partisan. They condemned the violence, distanced themselves from arson, and issued a nine-point demand including the resignation of the home and transport ministers, public apology from the prime minister, removal of police and university officials involved in the crackdown, and compensation for victims' families. They vowed to continue the shutdown until their demands were met.

Compounding the crisis was a nationwide internet blackout. International communication broke down. The digital commerce and IT sectors suffered losses exceeding Tk 80 crore in 24 hours, according to BASIS.

As dusk fell on July 19, 2024,

Bangladesh was no longer simply a country in crisis -- it had become a battlefield of conscience. Streets once filled with the hum of daily life now echoed with sirens, gunfire, and the cries of the wounded. In the haze of teargas and the silence of a digitally paralysed nation, a generation stood unyielding. What began as a call for justice in public service recruitment had grown into a national reckoning -- one that questioned the very legitimacy of a state willing to kill its youth to preserve power. The fallen are no longer statistics; they are symbols. Symbols of a people pushed too far, of a state cracking under the weight of its own repression, and of a movement that, despite bullets and blackouts, refused to be extinguished.

Faulty speed record card caused 2024 Nepal plane crash

Says govt report

REUTERS, Kathmandu

A passenger plane crash in Nepal last year that killed 18 people was caused by faulty information about the aircraft's takeoff speed in the flight documentation, a report issued yesterday by a government-appointed investigation panel said.

A CRJ-200LR aircraft, owned by Nepal's Saurya Airlines, crashed shortly after taking off from the capital Kathmandu in July last year, killing all 17 passengers and the co-pilot. Only the captain survived.

The crash was caused by a "deep stall during take off because of abnormally rapid pitch rate commanded at a lower-than-optimal rotation speed", the report submitted to the government said.

Aviation expert Nagendra Prasad Ghimire told Reuters the aircraft made a premature takeoff before gaining the necessary speed.

The report said errors in a speed card - a document that provides important airspeed information for a specific aircraft, particularly during takeoff, climb and landing - had gone unnoticed and the airline had failed to address previous cases of a high pitch rate - the rate at which an aircraft's nose rotates up or down - during take off.

3 workers die after falling from Ctg building

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Three construction workers died yesterday after falling from the ninth floor of an under-construction building in Chattogram's Kotwali.

The victims are Md Hasan, Fakhrul Islam and Mohammad Rashed, said SI Nurul Alam, in charge of the Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) police outpost.

Quoting two witnesses who brought the injured workers to the hospital, Nurul said the incident occurred when a safety rope snapped.

Mohammad Abdul Karim, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said they are looking into the matter.