

How Dhaka always shows a way!

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Often, while stuck at a traffic signal in Dhaka, all it takes is a glance left or right to notice a narrow alley slipping away, quietly mocking the chaos around you.

Whether you're in a car, rickshaw, bike, or CNG, these alleys somehow manage to fit it all – buses, unfortunately, are out of luck. The main roads crawl, signal lights blink in vain, and gridlocks stretch like eternity itself. Yet, right there, between buildings and shops, these improvised lanes with no dividers, no traffic police, and no rules promise something the main roads can't: movement!

We all know how Dhaka traffic tests patience. Sometimes, it tests the soul. The signal-heavy, dutifully patrolled main roads pretend to obey every rule and yet, manage to disappoint everyone at once. Time slows, intersections freeze, and you could stare at the same billboard for half an hour, wondering how far “just five more minutes” can really stretch.

And then there are the alleys. The entirely accidental veins of the city where logic and rules are optional. These are often the roads no urban planner intentionally planned, no one designed; they simply just happened. Narrow, improvised lanes that snake through buildings and grocery shops, where every turn feels like a guess and every vehicle moves on pure instinct. No traffic police, no dividers, no signals – just people negotiating space and sanity in equal measure. These are the “chipa golis” (narrow alleys) that save us, again and again.

Take, for example, Mohakhali to



Farmgate. There's that little-known rickshaw trail through Shaheenbagh and Nakhhalpara that gets you to your destination before your friend on the main road even makes it past Bijoy Sarani Mor. It's dusty, loud, and uncomfortably tight – and thanks to the never-ending construction, your vehicle might shake hard enough to rearrange your bones – but hey, it's still effective enough to beat the inertia of the main way!

The same trick works from Farmgate to Dhanmondi. While Manik Mia Avenue crawls inch by inch, those in the know glide through Indira Road, cut

into Shukrabad, and pop out at Kalabagan bus stand without crossing a single traffic light. It's not exactly smooth, but it works!

But everything in Dhaka comes with a price, not in tolls, but somehow in temperament! You must learn the fine art of shouting. “Who parked here?” “Why are all the rickshaws coming one way?” “Move the car! Let the bikes slide!” This, ladies and gentlemen, is what we call community-driven traffic

management. Not exactly anger, more like strident negotiation. A collective roar that somehow restores order – or at least the illusion of it.

Even from Jigatola to Mohammadpur, when Satmasjid Road turns into a parking lot of despair, there's always the inner Sher-e-Bangla Road, a narrow, gritty shortcut that will drop you right in front of Allah Karim Mosque after shaking your stomach up to your brain!

Then, of course, even Dhaka's shortcuts have bad days. There are times when everyone suddenly remembers the same “secret route,” a truck driver mistakes a lane for a highway, or three rickshaws meet head-on in a space meant for one. That's when the city decides to teach us humility.

There's no escape then – no heroic shortcuts, no clever diversions. Just a shared resignation and a silent acceptance that the city has outsmarted us again. The alleys that once promised salvation can suddenly turn into claustrophobic mazes of rickshaws, cars, and more frustration! Those are the days when not even Google Maps shakes to reroute you. Dhaka wins on those days!

But most of the other days, Dhaka lets you win!

Because that's Dhaka for you: a city that might drive you mad, shake you silly, and make you shout at strangers... but somehow, it always lets you find a way! The shortcut way!

Govt looks to implement new pay scale in phases

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The interim government is examining the scope for partially implementing the new pay scale for public sector employees.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed said they will proceed with a preliminary implementation based on the Pay Commission's recommendations.

“We're expecting to receive the commission's report by December. Once we get it, we'll try to review it and make decisions by January,” he said.

In July this year, the finance ministry formed the Pay Commission for public officials and employees, led by former finance secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan. It was tasked with submitting its report within six months of its first meeting.

In the eighth pay scale introduced in the 2015-16 fiscal year, followed by allowances in the following year.

The Pay Commission for the ninth pay scale has completed its fieldwork, including a survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics to gather opinions on how much salaries and allowances should be raised.

It has been learned that the commission is considering a new salary structure which, after adjusting for inflation, does not fall below the 2015 level. If it does, salary hikes at the lower grades could be nearly double, while increases at the upper grades may be smaller.

Although inflation rose gradually after 2015, it began surging in 2022 and has remained above nine percent since March 2023. The commission is taking this into account while finalising its recommendations.

Of the country's 6.9 crore employed population, 4.7 percent – or about 32.47 lakh people – worked in government service last year, according to the Labour Force Survey 2024.

ACC may get power

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to be detailed and will be clarified once the ordinance is finalised.

The draft ordinance introduces several new amendments and definitions aimed at strengthening the ACC's capacity.

Nazrul said, “The draft ordinance defines ‘known income’ as lawful income – such matters have been clarified. It also includes provisions to establish special courts in areas where the ACC has offices. Additionally, the commission's functions and powers have been expanded – covering case filing, investigation, and inquiry.”

It also outlines the process for forming the commission, with a seven-member selection committee, headed by an Appellate Division judge, tasked with appointing the ACC chairperson and commissioners.

“The committee will select candidates through public notice and may also choose candidates at its own discretion. Interviews will be conducted with those interested in becoming commissioners,” the adviser explained.

Stressing that internal accountability mechanisms must be strengthened before the ordinance is finalised, he said allegations of corruption within the ACC were discussed with urgency at the meeting.

He expressed hope that the new law would enhance transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the anti-graft body's operations. “We want the ACC to earn public trust in combating corruption.”

In October last year, the government formed the ACC Reform Commission, led by Dr Iftekharuzzaman, which submitted its recommendation report to the chief adviser on January 15 this year.

Contacted by The Daily Star, Iftekharuzzaman, also executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh, said, “The law adviser's comments sound encouraging. But I wouldn't comment further before fully reviewing the draft ordinance, if and when it is available.

“All I'd say is that the government has approved it without involving the ACC Reform Commission. Our request to share the draft [with the commission] before the cabinet's approval was summarily denied, which is disappointing. An unofficial version of the draft shows that significant recommendations made by the commission have been arbitrarily undermined.”

He added, “It's particularly frustrating because we've no idea if, in exercising its discretion, the government took into consideration the fact that almost all commission-made recommendations related to amendment of the act had received complete consensus among political parties.

“The government was specifically informed about this. It's embarrassing that it followed the same practice of unilateralism and secrecy as the previous regime.”

Alliance candidates must use

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The government and the Election Commission should have discussed with political parties and people before amending the RPO to ensure the reflection of their opinions in the amendment, he added.

At the briefing, Asif Nazrul said those who contest elections must, through an affidavit, provide the Election Commission with a complete statement of their income and properties, both at home and abroad.

“These details will be made public on the EC website so voters can know the sources and scale of their candidates' wealth,” he said.

The amendments have empowered the Election Commission to cancel voting across an entire constituency if significant irregularities are detected. Previously, it could only cancel results at specific polling centres.

In constituencies with only one candidate, a “no vote” option will appear on the ballot. If “no vote” receives more support than the candidate, a fresh election must be held.

The option was last used in 2008 in such a way that included “no vote” on the ballots in each constituency regardless of the number of candidates. Around 3,82,000 people cast “no vote” at that time, but “no vote” did not win in any seat.

During the 2014 election, 153 lawmakers out of 300 were elected unopposed, as most of the opposition, including the BNP, boycotted the vote.

Earlier, 49 candidates nominated

by the then ruling BNP were elected uncontested in the February 15, 1996 election, boycotted by the Awami League, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and other parties.

Citing the 2014 polls, Law Adviser Asif said, “It was a staged election. This type of election should not happen again.”

As per the amendments, candidates providing false information in affidavits will face investigation even after taking oath. If found guilty, they may lose their parliamentary seat.

The new law criminalises the creation or spread of false or misleading content, including AI-generated materials, intended to harm a candidate, influence the election, or undermine electoral integrity. Offenders using bots, fake accounts, or synthetic media will face legal action.

The amendments restored a 2001 provision that defines members of the armed forces as law enforcers under the RPO. This allows their direct deployment by the EC, with the authority to arrest offenders within 400 yards of polling stations for offences related to polls or law and order.

The clause had been removed in 2009, though the army continued to serve as a striking force in subsequent elections – for 13 days in 2024 and 10 days in 2018.

Through the amendments, online submission of nomination papers has been scrapped. Candidates or their proposers or seconders must now submit papers physically to the

returning officer.

In the event of a tie, when two candidates get the same number of votes, re-polling instead of a lottery will take place.

All provisions related to Electronic Voting Machines have been abolished. Postal voting will now require digital registration for expatriates, detained individuals, and public officials on election duty.

Candidates' security deposits have been raised from Tk 20,000 to Tk 50,000.

The expenditure ceiling is set at Tk 10 per voter or Tk 25 lakh in total, whichever is higher.

Parties may now receive donations, grants, or services worth up to Tk 50 lakh per year from individuals or entities. Any contribution over Tk 50,000 must be made through banking channels and reflected in the donor's tax return.

Parties are also required to maintain transparent accounts and publish income and expenditure statements on their websites.

The EC may now suspend the registration or withhold the symbol of any political party whose activities are suspended by the government.

At the press briefing, Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Shafiqul Alam said the government is considering equipping on-duty police officers with body cameras, installing CCTV at polling centres, and deploying drones during the upcoming national election.

“The legal aspects of these measures are currently under review,” he added.

State runs on laws, not emotions

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On Wednesday, Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and the National Citizen Party said the chief adviser should issue an executive order to give the July National Charter legal and institutional recognition.

“Some people are saying that the chief adviser can now promulgate a law, or issue an order in line with the people's wishes expressed during the July uprising. That is a revolutionary and emotional statement. But a state does not run on emotions; it runs according to laws, rules and regulations,” UNB reported Salahuddin as saying.

Referring to the suggestion that the national charter can be issued through an “extra-constitutional order” and the chief adviser has the authority to do so, Salahuddin said the constitution does not allow such move.

Salahuddin explained that any law can only be issued with cabinet approval, and in the absence of parliament, the president can issue an ordinance.

“The government can only issue notifications or gazette circulars as part of its administrative powers.”

“The chief adviser, being the head of government, does not have any such right under our constitution,”

he added.

He urged political parties not to make proposals regarding the implementation of the charter that lack a legal basis, warning that such a move would give birth to controversies.

Referring to Article 152 of the Constitution, he said, “The hierarchy of laws starts with the Constitution, followed by national laws enacted by Parliament, presidential ordinances, orders, and then rules and regulations.”

Salahuddin also said a political party that earlier skipped the signing ceremony of the charter is now looking for an opportunity to sign it.

“Yesterday (Wednesday), a political party said BNP has finally agreed to hold a referendum on implementing the July National Charter under public pressure... but in reality, the proposal to hold such a referendum originally came from BNP itself,” Salahuddin said.

He also said all parties, except two, agreed to BNP's referendum proposal. “I am not mentioning the names of the two parties. But one of them attended the signing ceremony, while the other is now looking for an opportunity to sign the charter. They also have some demands.”

We'll ensure Dhaka-Delhi ties based on respect

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“We do not believe in the concept of majority and minority. We say we need unity. Using the terms majority and minority itself creates division, which sets one group against another.

“If there is evidence of unlawful occupation of property over the past 54 years, we support its rightful return. That is our position.”

Asked if he would meet any top political leaders in the US, the Jamaat ameer said, “I want to avoid answering this question for the time being in the greater interest.”

“Today, I publicly declare once again that from 1947 until this moment of October 22, 2025, it is now 8:11pm in New York, for all the suffering caused by us, to whomever, wherever... we apologise unconditionally.”

At the same event, Shafiqur said, “Today, I publicly declare once again that from 1947 until this moment of October 22, 2025, it is now 8:11pm in New York, for all the suffering caused by us, to whomever, wherever... we apologise unconditionally.”

The video clip of his statement is available on social media.

“Some people say, even if you haven't committed any specific crime, your political decision was not

acceptable. You could at least offer an apology.

“We have offered our apology at least three times. Prof Ghulam Azam apologised, Maulana Motiur Rahman apologised, and I myself offer an apology.

“How can I say that we never made any mistakes till today? We are humans. Our organisation is a human organisation. Out of 100 decisions, 99 might have been right, but one could be wrong... So, if any of my decisions caused harm to the nation, what's the problem in asking forgiveness for that?

“After seeking forgiveness, some say it should not be in this language, or it should be in that language. I sought unconditional forgiveness, without any condition. What else is left?”

He said, “For all the mistakes we have made, knowingly or unknowingly, we are grateful to those who corrected us. And to those who were harmed by our mistakes, we seek forgiveness from them. Is there anything more to say? This is very clear and loud.”

At one point, someone from the audience said some people ask Jamaat for an apology for its actions in 1971.

Shafiqur said, “Brother, have we made mistakes only in 1971? Not at other times? And those who tell us to apologise, are they angels?”