

Paper for People

## Traffic congestion remains a perennial problem in the capital city, causing waste of hundreds of hours in the streets. How to address the terrible problem?

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DHAKA, the capital city of Bangladesh, is the tenth most populated city in the world, with a population of more than 18 million people within an area of 815.8 square kilometres. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, censuses of 1991, 2001 and 2011



demonstrated the population of Dhaka metropolitan area within a neighbourhood of 1,600 square kilometres to be 6.50 million, 9.70 million and 14.50 million respectively. The censuses show sharp increases in the population of Dhaka city which has now become one of the fastest growing cities in the world in terms of population. In Dhaka, around half the city dwellers go to work on foot, while the rest does so using private cars, busses, taxies, motorcycles, rickshaws or other means of transports. Traffic jams can be defined in various ways, such as, (i) A line or lines of stationary or very slow moving traffic, caused by roadwork, an accident, or heavy congestion (ii) A number of vehicles so obstructed that they can scarcely move. Traffic congestion in Dhaka city remains a perennial problem which causes hundreds of hours to be wasted on the streets. It is

now high time to address the issue by identifying the reasons behind it and finding out proper solutions to them.

The reasons behind traffic congestion of Dhaka city are multifarious. The main reasons identified are the layout of the city and its master plan, over population, excessive traffic density, inadequate and unplanned road construction, heterogeneous vehicles and inadequate public transports, incremental trends of vehicles on the road, manual haulers and rickshaws, railway crossings, insufficient parking arrangements, illegal constructions on pavements and footpaths, construction materials dumped on the streets, poor traffic management system, a tendency of violating traffic laws, unplanned development works by authorities such as road repairmen at inconvenient times, poor drainage systems and water logging during rainy seasons, special occasions and events, schedules of VIPs stopping ongoing traffic and using the wrong side of the roads and the anthropological inheritances of the people.

Dhaka only uses 7.5 per cent of its total area for its roads against the standard requirement of 25 per cent for a modern city. Construction of roads associated with the above mentioned reasons with various others such as the flow of intercity busses and lorries right through the heart of the city, daily entrance and exits by thousands of other people from outside the city, unauthorised crossing by pedestrians across the streets, lack of adequate facilities for pedestrians, lack of law enforcement for freeing up the space meant for pedestrians, inadequate footbridges and underpasses, eagerness of using shortcuts and the unwillingness of citizens to use footbridges and underpasses and poor traffic signalling as well as poor trafficking by traffic police are a few well known problems.

All of these reasons contribute to terrible traffic jams which make the life of every citizen incredibly difficult, wasting precious working hours on a regular basis and causing havoc for their daily schedules. It causes various other problems as well such as the suffering of being stuck in traffic for hours on end, environmental pollutions to increase, inhalation of obnoxious smell and polluted air which causes various respiratory diseases, delays in official duties of government and non- governmental staffs, hindrance in emergency transportation of patients from hospitals, delays in trans-shipment of goods and services, delays in national and international business and so on and so forth.

The terrible traffic conditions in the capital city of Bangladesh have already sent shockwaves throughout the world to foreign nationals and have reduced foreign investments drastically. Do we not need to get rid of such a serious and recurrent problem? I think, yes. And for that to happen, we need to take various initiatives together and right now.

We need to classify the issues according to the nature of the problem and treat them accordingly based on the right strategies of addressing them. This might require several strategies to be combined such as: increasing the number of lanes on roads wherever it may be possible, replacing the horrid public transports with standard city buses with fixed stoppages and routes, alternative transports like metro rails, maximising pedestrian networks, developing bypass highways peripherally encircling the city with divisional mains and others.

Along with the above, the efficiency of the existing systems should be improved drastically. Traffic laws should be enforced properly with no exceptions for VIPs or anyone else, number of mobile courts and checkpoints needs to be increased, signal posts should be modernised, overpasses must be constructed at each and every railway crossings, speed tracking and monitoring arrangement should be installed when convenient, awareness campaigns should be launched, rickshaws to be banned strategically from certain roads, rickshaw pullers should receive training and for this rickshaw pulling institutes should be set up, citizens should be

motivated for slowly giving up bad habits such as crossing streets just about on every location, even the development strategy for the entire country should be taken up properly and implemented correctly and without bias, decentralisation of the government is an absolute must and proper training for traffic management should be considered seriously.

For us to find a permanent solution to the multifaceted problems, the government, NGOs and the citizens must work together on a common platform sharing the same view, that is, to find long lasting solutions to this burning crisis of traffic congestion. Otherwise, more valuable time will be lost on the streets. If the correct initiatives are taken right now, in the near future, the glow of success will enlighten all our cities, and eventually, the entire country. This is the only way to develop the important pillars required for the sustainable development of Bangladesh.

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EVERYTIME we travel, the only thing that comes to mind is the time that would be wasted while we are stuck in traffic. Although our country is moving forward in terms of development, our transport system is being neglected and is being left behind. Three words that can be used to sum up the Bangladesh public transport facilities are cheap, uncomfortable and scary. If someone wished to do so, they could travel straight across the country for a little more than a few hundred taka using rickety old buses or second class trains. However, the journey will not be too pleasant, particularly for those in cheaper seats on any form of transport in Bangladesh.

Buses are the worst offenders — drivers show no regards whatsoever for the safety of their passengers or other pedestrians as well as vehicles. Some of the reasons behind the rise in chaos are the poor public transport systems, limited roads and road space and the rapid rate at which vehicles on the streets of Dhaka are increasing. Our country has very limited road space along with very few alternative road connections. It lacks effective maintenance and management of the roadways and most of it is arranged in such a way that it makes accessibility for buses very difficult.

With non-motorised transport as a significant mode of transport there are no effective bicycle lanes or safe walkways, and the footpath available for pedestrians are occupied in great proportion by vendors and others. Most of the traffic is managed and controlled manually by police that has to control traffic without the aid of properly coordinated automated systems. With policy formation and control shared between various government agencies that are poorly coordinated, there has been a lack of any organised effort of handling the problematic situation. In 2010, prime minister Sheikh Hasina admitted that Dhaka needs roads to occupy 25 per cent of its total space, however, only 7 per cent currently is being used for roadways. One of the major problems is that Dhaka is one of the most densely populated cities in the world and there is almost no available land space. And it is because of this limited road space in Dhaka that traffic jam arises everyday, creating massive disturbances along the roadways. People tend to be late on a regular basis for their appointments, as a result, we see disputes arise among passengers and drivers.

Motorised traffic is rapidly increasing in Bangladesh and so is the number of privately owned cars. Due to the uncontrolled growth in population it is indeed quite difficult for the government to tackle the issue. As population increases, number of vehicles in the country is also increasing. In contrast to all of these, there has been no expansion of roadways or improvement in the public transportation system. Experts say, that the transport business is now making losses particularly due to its inefficiencies as well as inefficient government interventions.

Owners are also losing interest in the transport business due to many reasons including high fuel prices and spare parts. In addition to that, due to the traffic congestions, the number of trips buses and minibuses can make goes down. This makes cost go up even more. Lack of usable public transport is leading people to use privately owned cars even more. This rapid increase in the number of vehicles on the road contributes greatly to the great increase of pollutants that are being emitted from the different types of vehicles. Air pollution in urban areas mainly occur due to smoke emission from automobiles, burning of fossil fuel, high sulphur in diesel and the increasing number of two stroke engines.

The lack of an organised traffic system is creating chaos which is now becoming a daily part of our lives. Having a population of 12.25 million sometimes life in Dhaka city comes to near standstill. This leads to people being late for work while they inhale toxic particles that are being emitted from the vehicles all around them. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Dhaka's pedestrians, rickshaw pullers, CNG drivers, van pullers and truck drivers all vie for the tiny spaces in between vehicles with noticeable aggression and utter disregard for others in their way. This obviously creates serious problems such as unnecessary traffic holdup and arguments. Nonetheless, there should be a price tag for such behaviour.

To reduce traffic jams we can take certain steps. We need to improve our public transport system so that people can use them. We should also ban rickshaws where applicable. Good traffic system and proper training for traffic police is essential. All pedestrians should use zebra crossings and foot bridges to get across roads. Lastly, everyone should start respecting the laws that are in place without exceptions.

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Bangladesh can advance rapidly while maintaining peace with the developed world. Can we materialise the vision 2021 programme? Unfortunately, some evils are pulling us back and causing hindrance for us in achieving such goals. Among them is the problem of traffic jam. It is a remarkable problem for us. It has become a burning issue for city dwellers. Among the cities affected by traffic jam, Dhaka city is arguably the worst. It remains a perennial problem in the capital city of Bangladesh. Therefore, it is high time to think about this problem and implement a remedy.

The causes of traffic jam are many, among these the following are the most remarkable: Increase number of urban populace, increasing number of unlicensed vehicle, corruption of BRTC and traffic police, illiterate and unskilled drivers, unconsciousness to traffic rules when it comes to the majority of people, lack of foot over bridges, tendency of overtaking, slow and fast vehicles driving on the same road, holding of public meetings and processions on the major roads, dumping garbage and building materials on the road, narrow and damaged roads, occupying large portions of roads by hawkers and peddlers, unplanned road construction by WASA, DESA and other utility providers and others.

The cost of traffic jam are quite heavy and their implications dangerous. A city or a country is seriously affected by traffic jam. People are prevented from reaching their desired destination on time because of the heavy traffic jam in Dhaka city. Patients suffer on their way to the hospital and sometimes die. Students cannot attend their classes or exams on time. Drivers tend to drive recklessly as they try to make up for the lost time which results in frequent accidents and loss of lives. Traffic is usually at its worst during the time when people go to or return from work. It is

also bad during public examination periods. This causes people to be late for both work and examinations.

One of the worst outcomes of the bad traffic is the inability to estimate travel time and its associated problems. The constant stopping and starting while stuck in traffic causes higher fuel consumption than normal. This is an extra burden for consumers and the nation as a whole. It causes wastage of money and resources and also contributes to pollution emission by vehicles. Eliminating traffic jam in Dhaka city is a mammoth task. Perhaps, we cannot compete with the advanced countries, but, at least, we can live a better life by removing this problem. Something has to be done to solve this problem. Over bridges should be built. Underground train service should be considered and bus services must be improved. Roads must be made much more suitable for smoother movement of vehicles. Some roads should only allow one way travelling. Certain vehicles should only be allowed to travel during certain times. Everyone should have to abide by proper traffic rules including traffic police. Awareness of proper rules and regulations should be promoted. Furthermore, security on footpaths, foot over bridges and underground passes needs to be increased to encourage people to stop jaywalking.

Hawkers and others should be removed from the roadsides and rehabilitated somewhere else. Otherwise, their removal would only be temporary. Slow moving vehicles should either be removed from the main roads, or, forced to maintain their separate lanes. To get rid of the problem of traffic jams we have to work together. The government must play a vital role to address this issue. The authorities concerned must take charge of their duties properly and with sincerity immediately.

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When too many vehicles try to move along a narrow street or roads at a time, it is called traffic jam. Traffic jam is a long line of vehicles that cannot move or that can only move very slowly. Traffic jam is a common affair in Dhaka and other divisional towns. It is one of the major problems of modern time. People have to wait for a long time on the roads, sometimes, for several hours. The traffic situation in Dhaka city is worsening over the month of Ramadan, especially due to indiscipline in the movement of transportation, traffic mismanagement, unplanned road reconstruction and the rush of shoppers defying traffic rules, jaywalking and road digging various utility services, unplanned bus stops, occupation of footpaths and roads by hawkers and shortage of flyovers at intersections contribute to the severe traffic jam. Alongside other reasons, digging of major roads during the rainy season is one of the main causes for the chaotic traffic situation. The city dwellers have been facing such miseries all year round. In proportion to our population roads have not increased. Our existing roads and streets are slender and narrow. Huge numbers of rickshaws on the roads is another reason for it. As most rickshaw pullers are illiterate and ignorant of traffic rules they break traffic rules and create severe traffic jam. Illegal parking of vehicles and unnecessary overtaking are also responsible for traffic jam. There are many unlicensed vehicles which should be brought under control. The drivers are not willing to obey the traffic rules. They want to drive as they will. The number of traffic police is insufficient. Traffic police do not maintain proper signalling. During office hours the traffic jam gets intolerable. Sometimes, traffic jam is so heavy that it blocks half a kilometre. It kills our valuable time and our work is hampered. It causes great suffering to ambulances carrying dying patients and the fire brigade. However, the problem can be solved by adopting some measures. Well planned spacious roads should be constructed. One way movement of vehicles should be

introduced. Traffic rules should be imposed strictly so that drivers are bound to obey them. Sufficient traffic police should be posted at important points. Unlicensed vehicles should be removed. Dhaka city should be decentralised. It is seen that people from all over the country are ultimately bound to come to Dhaka for various purposes. According to a census a minimum of sixty to eighty thousand people comes to Dhaka everyday for their own needs. These people are also another cause for traffic jam. If they meet-up their demands in their own town, surely they would not come to Dhaka. This should be stopped by giving sufficient facilities to their own places. After doing all these things we can hope to have a good traffic system for easy and comfortable movement.

**Marshal**