

# Trouble in their twilight years

Pensions lessen the plight of the elderly, but it is not so easy for pensioners to encash the bills

**SABRINA KARIM MURSHED**

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The first day of every month comes as a relief to Shamsher Ali, yet it is all too exhausting for him for other reasons. It brings relief as he gets a small amount of money that lessens his plight, but his tired look depicts his weariness that has been common for the last 28 years.

A retired employee of the government press security branch, Ali has been drawing his pension from the Divisional Controller of Accounts (DCA) office at Dhaka Treasury building since 1975.

Ali is among 20,000 to 25,000 people who collect their pensions from the same office. The building constructed during the British rule has become run-down and stands as a witness to their joys and sorrows.

"My wife and children died a few years back leaving me with three grandchildren behind," said Mohammed Habibullah. "This pension is my only source of financial help these days," he sighed. Habibullah takes a long bus ride from Savar to the office at the beginning of each month to collect pension.

Most pensioners revealed the inconveniences they suffer during the collection of pension bills. Come rain or shine, these people wait in the open outside the DCA premises since there is no waiting room for them. "Think of sitting with the sun blazing overhead," said Momtaz Begum who came with her husband.

Well, not only the females, but their male counterparts believe there should be a separate booth for women. "It becomes a place of bustle and jostle, as all pensioners gather in the same place," said Khodeja Khatun, wife of a late retired employee. "It is not the matter of equal rights but of convenience for both men and women," said Mubarak Hossain, another pensioner.

The bill collection booth is a stuffy room filled with stacks of files and documents -- almost claustrophobic for people. Most of the time, the pensioners do not stand in the queue. Even if it is maintained, it moves at a slow pace. The understaffed office finds it hard to deal with all the bills by 2.30pm.

"After I collect the bill prepared by the DCA office, I rush to the bank to get the cash," said Khoda Boksh, a pensioner for last fif-

teen years. "Transaction at the bank closes by three in the afternoon. If I don't get the bill from DCA by 2.30pm, I won't get the money for that day and have to come next morning," he added.

"Most pensioners submit their pass books the day before and come next day to avoid the lengthy procedure," said Jahannara Begum, a widow collecting her husband's pension for last 15 years. "Even after we give them (DCA staff) Tk 20 in bribes or more so, they misbehave with us," she added. "They give me a feeling as if I am a stray dog," she snarled. Others also aired almost the same view -- the more someone bribes the staff, the more quickly he gets his bill.

However, the officials denied the allegation. "We deal with the elderly, most of whom are already in their 70s or 80s," said Mohammed Azharuddin, superintendent of the DCA pension branch. "These old people hardly understand any process and become very irritated over trivial things. They always comment like that," he said. It is an arduous task to offer a proper service to so many people with less manpower, he said.



Pensioners complain of difficulties in getting their pensions cashed.

## Blackmarket of tickets at Kamalapur

**CITY CORRESPONDENT**

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Over the last few decades, the Bangladesh Railway (BR) has been the major transport and communication link between different areas -- with its services good or bad.

Since its initiation, the BR has experienced a raft of problems, some of which were solved with time but others tend to persist. One such problem is black marketeering of tickets at the Kamalapur Railway Station, with an organised racket at the helm.

Usually, the rates for tickets are Tk 150 for *shovon* class, Tk 180 for a *shovon* chair and Tk 400 for a first-class seat. Trains running on the Dhaka-Sylhet-Dhaka route, *Eguro Sindhur* from Dhaka to Kishoreganj and the weekend train *Shubono* on the Dhaka-Chittagong-Dhaka route are usually in high demand.

Seats are rarely available for these trips -- usually not more than four seats a trip. But the moment one steps out of the ticket counter without any ticket, the black marketeer is sure to hound him.

Star City talked to such a person and this was the rate he was given for the otherwise inexpensive but rare tickets: Tk 200 for *shovon* class, Tk 250 for a *shovon* chair and Tk 450+ for a first class seat.

The price is set on a wholesale basis: if more than 10 tickets are purchased, the price is lowered per ticket.

The man said the payment is to be made to the black marketeer at the booking counter, where he will keep his share of the money and the booking master will be given commission.

A senior official of the railway department said the authorities concerned looked into such "undesirable" practice many a time, but all attempts proved futile.

"The railway security force and railway police are trying all out to stop the racket, but they have never been successful."

"The people should come forward and complain rather than pay an additional Tk 50 to black marketeers. But they always want to stay out of all hassles and don't understand that they are assisting corruption," said the official.

## Once upon a type...

Document typists face losing their jobs as computerisation encroaches on their profession

**CITY CORRESPONDENT**

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Abul Bashar is waiting beneath a tin-roofed shelter near Nagar Bhaban for a customer. He says these are the peak hours, yet he is sitting idle.

He is not vending puffed rice, cold drinks or cigarettes. His ware is not produced in a kitchen or a factory. It is produced from a typewriter. He sells his quick fingers, which can type 32 words a minute, to anyone who needs a court document duplicated.

People with court business come to one of the 200 document typists like Abul, since the courts require a typed copy on special 'court paper' of all submitted papers. He charges a minimum five taka per page, and up to Tk 15 "if the customer looks like he is rich," earning on average Tk 100 a day. Even on the street, it is a nine-to-five workday for the typists, much like any office worker.

Forty-two year-old Abul lives in Jatrabari while his family of five live in his village home in Comilla district. He came to Dhaka five years ago from his village where he operated a stationery business. After it failed, he moved to the city in order to support his wife and four children.

"I only return to my village every fortnight," he says.

He may have to return there permanently, however, if his work here can no longer sustain him and his family. And this end seems to be approaching quickly.

The increasing use of computers in recent years means jobs such as Abul's rae fast disappearing.

While Abul could easily operate a keyboard, his tin-roof shelter is obviously not the place for a computer even if he could afford one! Exposed to nature, it would soon break down. Exposed to men, it would quickly be stolen. But, away and safely indoors, this technology is stealing the work of these once industrious workers.

Customers may be far and few

between now, but when Delwar Hossain first started, nineteen years ago, the job was much more lucrative, pulling in around Tk 500 each day -- a good wage in those times.

"I paid Tk 300 to be trained while I was in college," he recalls how it was a respected profession in the good old days. But there is nothing respectable about unemployment. If he is out of the only work he knows, he might find himself with few choices - hawk or

rickshaw-puller.

The government has not begun computerising the notoriously antiquated court record system, but it plans to. Ultimately typewriters will be replaced with computers, says an official at the Ministry of Law. He adds, that while computers will undoubtedly force the typists from their profession, there are plans to rehabilitate and find suitable new jobs for people like Abul and Delwar, who are part of a once great but dying tradition..



Document typists are becoming a victim of technology.

## It's not all fairytales at kinder garten

**AKBAR HOSSAIN**

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The mushrooming of private kindergartens across Dhaka over past years poses serious questions about the quality and management of this growing sector.

The government gives no supervision regarding registration, tuition fees and teachers recruitment.

Taking advantage of the absence of any monitoring system, some kindergartens across the city are doing a brisk trade in the name of providing 'quality education.'

Education is becoming a commodity in these kindergartens, which is being sold at a much higher rate compared to government schools.

Moreover, parents and guardians are routinely being deceived as many of these institutions fail to live up to the lavish but often quite fictitious descriptions found in their prospectuses -- such as 'computer rooms', 'semester system' and so on.

Wanting to give their children a good head start in education, parents and guardians are nevertheless increasingly applying to these private establishments to avoid the hassle of admission tests and the scarcity of seats in government schools.

The tuition fees of kindergartens range from Tk 100 to thousands of taka for the same class or age-group. Rates also greatly vary from area to area.

"My son is a student of class two. I have to pay Tk 250 tuition fee every month," said Rhana Akter whose son is studying at a kindergarten in Kalabagan.

Whereas, Jahangir Alam, principal and owner of 'Child Basic Homes' kindergarten in Mirpur, said, "We charge Tk 120 per month for a class two student."

Tuition fees vary from school to school

Moreover, parents and guardians are routinely being deceived as many of these institutions fail to live up to the lavish but often quite fictitious descriptions found in their prospectuses -- such as 'computer rooms', 'semester system' and so on.

even within a small area. "To my knowledge there are at least five kindergartens in this area each charging different tuition fees for the same class," said another principal in the Mirpur area.

Moreover, some schools are accused of forcing students to buy textbooks and stationery at increased prices for further profits.

With no direct government policy to check such practices, kindergartens are free to do what they wish with no reprisals.

"My school has no legal registration because I think it is not mandatory to be registered by the government," said an owner of a kindergarten in Mohammedpur who did not want to be named.

It is also a common complaint that many kindergarten owners are running their academic activities with sub standard or totally unqualified teachers as there are no guidelines from the government for appointing teachers.

"My daughter is a student of class four. I had to change her school twice because the cost of education most the time just does not match with the quality," said Ainul Haque, of Mohammedpur.

A principal of a kindergarten in Farmgate countered that there were many kindergartens where teachers are appointed on merit through an impartial written test.

"But there are kindergartens where they don't ensure quality of teachers. They run the school on a purely commercial basis," he admitted.

There is a national association of kindergartens. This association receives Tk 200 per year as membership fee. When contacted by telephone, Nuruzaman Kies, secretary of the association, he declined to make any comment regarding what they did with the money they received from members.

### essential numbers & city bus route

UTILITY	OUTING	COURIER SERVICES	LIBRARY & INFO	CITY BUS ROUTE																																																													
<p><b>Electricity</b> Electricity Complex- PDB- 9566061-5, 9560170-9 Electricity Complex (DESA)- 8616737-43, 8617626 DESCO- 8123138-40 Complaints (Rural Electrification Board, Dhaka)- 8916424-8</p> <p><b>Gas</b> Titas Gas Exchange (Emergency)- 9563667-8 Kawrnbar-8112135-42 Mirpur- 8014132-3 Mohammadpur- 9117215, 9113903 Mohakhali- 9884741, 9885922, 8824993 Motijheel-9667612</p> <p><b>WASA</b> WASA (PABX)- 8117829-31 Mirpur- 9000519 Mohammadpur- 8120192 Fakirapool-9115343</p>	<p>Asad Gate- 8917492 Uttara- 9559142, Segunbagicha- 7316348 Pagla- 8113900-39</p> <p><b>Fire Services</b> Siddique Bazar (HQ)- 9556667 Mohammadpur- 9112078 Khilgaon- 7218329 Mirpur- 9001055 Tongi- 9801070 Demra- 7400111 Postagola- 7410771 Sadarghat- 7119759 Mirpur 10 Circle- 9002269, 9001055 Mirpur TVG Complex- 9001189</p>	<p><b>Museum and Zoo</b> National Museum- 8619396-9 Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday 3 pm- 8 pm, Thursday closed Muktijuddha Jadugar- 9559091 Open: 10:30 am 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed Bangabandhu Smiti Jadugar- 8110046 Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday closed Ahsan Manzil Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed Shishu Jadugar- 9666466 Open: 10 am- 6 pm, Sunday Closed Sonargoan Jadugha</p>	<p><b>International</b> Air Borne Express- 9561371, 9561372, 9550724 Air Couriers Int'l (BD) Ltd.-8815970 Aramex International Courier- 9558003, 9559582, 9565075 Airspeed Express- 9563494 Asian Courier Services Ltd.- 8313543 Closed Baishakhi Courier Service- 9558606 Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114 Bangladesh Courier Service- 9563989 Bengal Express- 9560642, 9552666 Bangladesh Int'l Courier- 953636 Continental Service Ltd.- 9552948, 9558425 DHL Worldwide Express- 9881703-7, 9886305-9, 9882057 Enem Express- 9330699 Fedex Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd- 9565114</p>	<p><b>Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers</b> Central Public Library- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128 Shilpakala Academy- 8614673 Bangla Academy- 8619550 Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407 Nazrul Institute- 9114602 Ford Foundation- 8116133 Alliance Francaise- 8611557 British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7 Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604 Goethe Institute Int'l Dhaka- 9126525-6 Indian Information Centre &amp; Cultural Library- 8615096 The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314 Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412</p>	<p><b>Bus No.</b></p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th>Route</th> <th>Starts from</th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>1</td><td>Gulistan-Shahabagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 10, 11, 12</td><td>Golap Shah Mazar</td></tr> <tr><td>2</td><td>Gulistan-Shahabagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 1, 2</td><td>Phoolbaria bus station</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>Gulistan-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Mahakhali-Airport-Azamapur</td><td>Phoolbaria bus station</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>Shyampur-Motijheel-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Airport-Tongi</td><td>Shyampur</td></tr> <tr><td>5</td><td>Sayedabad-Kamalapur-Motijheel-Airport-Joydebpur-Gazipur</td><td>Sayedabad</td></tr> <tr><td>6 A</td><td>Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Gulistan 1, 2</td><td>Kamalapur</td></tr> <tr><td>6 B</td><td>Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 1, 2</td><td>Kamalapur</td></tr> <tr><td>6 C</td><td>Motijheel Shapla chattar- Mailbagh- Farmgate- Gulshan 2</td><td>Motijheel Shaplachattar</td></tr> <tr><td>7</td><td>Sadarghat-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 2</td><td>Sadarghat</td></tr> <tr><td>8</td><td>Chittagong-Motijheel-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Asad Gate-Kalyanpur-Gabtohi</td><td>Chittagong Road</td></tr> <tr><td>9</td><td>Demra Rani mahal-Motijheel-Kalbagan-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 10, 11, 12</td><td>Demra Ranimahall</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>Sadarghat-Gulistan-Kakrail-Mailbagh-Rampura-Biwa Road-Tongi Bridge</td><td>Sadarghat</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>Sayedabad-Motijheel-Fakirapool-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Tongi Bridge</td><td>Sayedabad</td></tr> <tr><td>11/A</td><td>Sayedabad-Khilgaon-Mailbagh-Rampura-Airport-Tongi Bridge</td><td>Sayedabad</td></tr> <tr><td>12</td><td>Shanir Akhra-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Asadgate-Mohammadpur</td><td>Shanir Akhra</td></tr> <tr><td>13</td><td>Motijheel-Shahabagh-New Market-Jigatola-Shangkar-Mohammadpur</td><td>Motijheel</td></tr> <tr><td>14</td><td>Signboard -Motijheel-Shahabagh-New Market-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 12</td><td>Signboard (Chittagong Road)</td></tr> <tr><td>15</td><td>Chittagong Road-Motijheel-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Mirpur 12</td><td>Chittagong Road</td></tr> <tr><td>24</td><td>Gulistan-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Airport-Uttara-Bipile</td><td>Gulistan</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Route	Starts from		1	Gulistan-Shahabagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 10, 11, 12	Golap Shah Mazar	2	Gulistan-Shahabagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 1, 2	Phoolbaria bus station	3	Gulistan-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Mahakhali-Airport-Azamapur	Phoolbaria bus station	4	Shyampur-Motijheel-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Airport-Tongi	Shyampur	5	Sayedabad-Kamalapur-Motijheel-Airport-Joydebpur-Gazipur	Sayedabad	6 A	Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Gulistan 1, 2	Kamalapur	6 B	Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 1, 2	Kamalapur	6 C	Motijheel Shapla chattar- Mailbagh- Farmgate- Gulshan 2	Motijheel Shaplachattar	7	Sadarghat-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 2	Sadarghat	8	Chittagong-Motijheel-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Asad Gate-Kalyanpur-Gabtohi	Chittagong Road	9	Demra Rani mahal-Motijheel-Kalbagan-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 10, 11, 12	Demra Ranimahall	10	Sadarghat-Gulistan-Kakrail-Mailbagh-Rampura-Biwa Road-Tongi Bridge	Sadarghat	11	Sayedabad-Motijheel-Fakirapool-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Tongi Bridge	Sayedabad	11/A	Sayedabad-Khilgaon-Mailbagh-Rampura-Airport-Tongi Bridge	Sayedabad	12	Shanir Akhra-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Asadgate-Mohammadpur	Shanir Akhra	13	Motijheel-Shahabagh-New Market-Jigatola-Shangkar-Mohammadpur	Motijheel	14	Signboard -Motijheel-Shahabagh-New Market-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 12	Signboard (Chittagong Road)	15	Chittagong Road-Motijheel-Shahabagh-Farmgate-Mirpur 12	Chittagong Road	24	Gulistan-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Airport-Uttara-Bipile	Gulistan
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**TIPS**

Do not use mobile phones while