

Badaam Tali Ghat (Ferry Point) was founded by Nawab Shayesta Khan during his regime between 1664 and 1677. Historians think there were some Badam (pea-nut) trees which the area was named after. There was also a wooden palace near the area that belonged to Nawab himself. However, the Nawab very often lived in a tent put up in the palace premises. The tent was then known as Katra Pakurtali.

People run for cover amidst violent demo

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

... Khaleda Islam, a teacher of a government college in Nilphamari, arrived at Gabtoli bus terminal on Tuesday morning when thousands of garment workers were staging violent demonstrations on the roads against factory owners.

She is new in the city and knows very little about the roads of Dhaka. But somehow she managed to reach a relative's house at Pallabi.

A visibly shaken up Khaleda told Star City: "God saved me from the angry workers."

She said that during her trip from the bus terminal to Pallabi, she saw thousands of workers throwing bricks on the roadside buildings, burning tires on the road, harassing passengers on the transports and blocking roads. She said that she got so frightened when some workers stopped her rickshaw and threatened her to leave the place immediately.

The violent demonstrations were continuing in nearby Mirpur area as well. Mahmuda Akhter came to Al Helal Hospital in the area with her husband Nisar Uddin for the treatment of their three-year-old son Mim.

Mahmuda was crying on the footpath under a large billboard as her husband who had left them there an hour ago did not return. Her son Mim was injured by a sharp piece of glass from the stones thrown on a building nearby. Mahmuda said to this correspondent: "I am feeling helpless. I don't know what to do now as I do not have money with me to get back home."

Reajul Karim, a landowner at Mirpur said that he bought bricks the day before and kept them on



Violent demonstrations by angry garment workers all over the city yesterday caused massive disruption in public life.

the roadside. But during the clash, the garment workers used most of those bricks as weapon, he added.

Faizur Rahman a bamboo trader at Rupnagar residential area said that the demonstration caused him a huge loss as the angry demonstrators looted his bamboo pieces. He said the demonstrators came so suddenly that he had no chance to stop them.

Orchi Bhaswati, a student of

Sher-e-Bangla Girls' School at Agargaon took shelter at the house of a friend, and was anxious to return home. She was very scared because her mother would be very angry if she was late. Orchi tried to contact her mother by cell phone but failed. She said: "I don't know how long I would have to wait here."

Rustam Ali, a knitting worker at a garment factory in Mirpur were seen throwing bricks at a gar-

ments factory. He said: "The factory owners are very cruel to the workers. Let us show them how much power we have". He said that his factory owner did not pay his salary for the last two months and on Tuesday they found the factory closed for the day due to the killing of a worker at Savar.

He said, "Can you imagine the cruelty of the owners! The owners are depriving us from all the facilities like holiday, appointment

letters, over time allowance, medicare etc, and now they have started to kill us."

"We don't need any leader as they are greedy and agents of the owners," he added. The labour leaders did nothing for the general workers instead secured their own future, he said.

"All of these owners and labour leaders should be beaten up so that they can feel the pain of the general workers," Rustam said.

UNIVERSITY GRANTS COMMISSION

Operative but ineffective

TAWFIQUE ALI

University Grants Commission (UGC), the watchdog of higher education in the country, remains ineffective as it does not have executive authority to take action against private universities most of which are plagued with irregularities.

The UGC, which does not have adequate manpower, often investigates the irregularities and makes some recommendations, which in most cases remain unexecuted.

There are 54 private universities in the country of which 47 are operating in Dhaka. Most of these universities indulge in various activities ignoring the laws and the recommendations of the UGC.

The education ministry, which has the authority to implement any lawful decision and take action against the errant universities, keeps mum, UGC sources alleged.

"The UGC has no legal mechanism to discipline the private universities for irregularities and aberrant practices," said UGC Chairman Prof M Asaduzzaman. "We neither can close down a private university nor can impose penalty for violation of laws."

In today's context, UGC must be provided with adequate manpower, logistics and above all executive authority on policy initiation, formulation and implementation, he said. "Presently, we can do nothing other than making recommendations."

"Even a monetary allocation for a university by the UGC is required to be approved by education and finance ministries," he said.

The UGC needs urgent reorganisation of its set-up, Prof Asaduzzaman said. "The UGC does not have adequate budgetary allocation for research, overhead cost and training."

"We submitted a proposal to the education ministry in March 2004 to restructure the UGC organogram but it has been caught in procrastination at the law ministry," he said.

The proposed organogram of the UGC has 402 staff members in place of present 178. Citing examples from Pakistan and India, the UGC chairman underscored the need for giving the post of UGC chairman the status of a cabinet minister so that the UGC can take decisions and implement them independently.

The UGC came into being by the President's Order of 1973 with effect from December 1972 to function as the Higher Education Funding Council in the UK model.

Roles UGC play

According to Section 5(1) of the President's Order of 1973, the UGC's functions include assessment of the needs in the field of university education and formulate plans for the development of such education; to determine financial needs of the universities; to receive funds from the government and allocate and disburse such funds and grants to the universities for their maintenance and development.

Its functions also include evaluation of the development programme of the universities, departments, institutes and other constituent organs, examining all kinds of university development plans funded with public money and collecting statistical and other information on university matters, UGC sources said.

The UGC advises the government on establishing new universities or on proposals for expansion of the existing universities, on proposals to grant the right to confer special degrees on students, and exercising such other powers and perform such other functions as may be conferred upon it by any law or by the government.

Under Section 5(2) of the order, the UGC has the right to visit the universities or to have them visited by team of experts as and when necessary to evaluate the programmes and assess their needs and requirements.

Section 8 of the order provides that the government shall make financial allocation to the UGC in each financial year as per requirement for the maintenance and the improvement of universities or for the promotion of higher education and research and for the purpose of all other functions of the commission.

It was created for efficient financial management so that the public universities do not have to deal with the government directly on financial matters.

The UGC had six public universities to deal

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Beggars, vendors, sex workers rule most footbridges

IMRUL HASAN

... Almost all the 38 footbridges in the city remain uncared for and are occupied by sex workers, vendors and beggars making it difficult for the use of pedestrians.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) hardly take any step to free these bridges from the illegal occupants.

Pedestrians alleged that these groups bar them from using the bridges while the authorities

remain silent on the issue. However, DMP and DCC officials blame each other for it.

"Our responsibility ends as soon as an over bridge is constructed and opened to public," said a top senior official of DCC seeking anonymity. He said it is the duty of the police to keep the footbridges from hawkers, beggars and sex workers.

When asked, officers at Tejgaon Police Station said they have recently evicted the hawkers and beggars from Farmgate over bridge. But shop-owners in the area dubbed it as eyewash. "This is not a permanent solution. They will return soon," said a shop-owner.

SM Mizanur Rahman, commissioner, DMP, said: "We are constantly trying to improve the situation on the foot-over bridges by frequent raids and increasing police patrol."

Asked why beggars, vendors and sex workers come back soon after eviction, he said: "What can we do if they come back as soon as our police team leaves the place."

On Sunday afternoon, this correspondent found two police constables collecting toll from the vendors and beggars on the Farmgate footbridge.

When asked, the constables refused to talk and left the scene hurriedly.

An officer at Tejgaon Police Station declined to comment on the issue. "We do not talk to journalists. If you have anything to say you can file a complaint," he said.

The vendors who run their business on the New Market and Farmgate over bridges pay toll to the police and extortionists regu-

larly. Talking to this correspondent, the hawkers said the toll rate is higher than that charged for the spots on the footpath as the vendors operating there earn more than those operating on the footpaths.

When contacted, the on-duty police officer at Ramna Police Station denied the allegation. He said they conduct raids on the over bridges to keep those free from illegal occupation.

The hawkers said they pay toll to the "line-men" of the police and extortionists. "The linemen prefer the vendors on the over bridges as they are ready to pay more money," said Mannan, a rubber band vendor beside Moghbazar footbridge.

"Some of the notorious criminals and extortionists having political backing control the linemen and hawkers doing business on Moghbazar over bridge," he said.

The extortionists also take toll from the beggars.

"I pay Tk 30 a day for begging," said Ruhul, a beggar on the Farmgate footbridge.

Hawkers occupy almost the entire walkway of Farmgate footbridge while beggars occupy the stairs. Sex workers wait for customers at the base of the bridge in the evening.

"I have to take risk of crossing the busy road along with my wife and children in the evening, as I do not want them to be exposed to such an unpleasant environment," said a pedestrian.

"This over bridge seems to

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Whimsical sales of Tk 50 prepaid mobile card

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

City dwellers allege that the Tk 50 mobile pre-paid cards are sold at a price higher than fixed price, and mobile phone service operators are yet to control or monitor such retail sales even after many complaints.

Angry users said that apart from the network problem with most service operators and extra charges made on each call contrary to the declared rate, the Tk 50 cards are sans the printed price stamp.

Local shopkeepers have taken it upon themselves to increase the Tk 50 priced prepaid cards by Tk two to eight, they complained.

When the shopkeepers were charged with the allegation, they said that they too buy these cards at a price higher than Tk 50.

They said that if they could make even a least profit of 30 paise, they would have sold the card at the set price of Tk 50, but are left

with no choice, as they too need to survive.

Mobile phone users also complained that two months back, shop owners and retailers were selling

Grameen, Citycell and Aktel Tk 50 cards at Tk 52 but recently the price shot up to Tk 55 and Tk 58 in some areas. "Shopkeepers are charging whatever amount they feel like for a Tk 50 card," said an

angry Raihan Ahmed from Gulshan.

"When we ask them why, they turn defensive stating that if we need the card, we buy

it at their price," he added.

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Violent demonstrations by garment workers at various parts of the city brought traffic at a gridlock. This picture was taken at Jatrabari yesterday afternoon.

STAR PHOTO