

GULSHAN AVENUE

Lack of parking is the culprit behind

TAWFIQUE ALI

Lack of provision for car parking was what eventually resulted in police brutality maiming the country's gold medallist shooter Asif on October 2 in the city.

Scuffles over parking space between the visitors and owners of big commercial establishments along the Gulshan Avenue are a daily phenomenon as these establishments earmark footpaths and main avenue as their car parking lot.

Brawl over car parking in front of the National Shooting Federation (NSF) complex on the Gulshan Avenue and subsequent police atrocities on the national shooters has made the career of gold medallist Asif Hossain Khan uncertain.

Asif, who won gold medal for the country in 2002 Commonwealth Games in Manchester, may not be able to take part in the Asian Games to be held in December in Doha, as he may not be fit before the event.

Police severely beat up Asif, national shooting coach Shoaibuzzaman, a young shooter Ali Hossain Shipu, cook Jahangir and Ansar member Jannatul Ferdous storming into the NSF complex following an altercation over parking of a car.

The five are now under

treatment at Metropolitan Hospital in the city.

"This is certainly not the way gold medallists should be treated in a country that recurrently suffers from image crisis internationally," said a noted sports organiser.

The federation rents out its four-storey 50-metre-range building for various commercial uses like wedding and social parties, get-togethers and exhibitions.

The building, with 14,200 square feet commercial floor space on the Gulshan Avenue, has no provision for a single car parking though it has accommodation for 800 guests.

The federation authorities earn Tk 35,000 to 55,000 daily as rent of the hall. But they direct the visitors to park their vehicles on the adjoining footpath and main avenue.

The authorities have even developed the footpath in front of the complex for car parking at their convenience.

On the day of police brutality, a trade fair of women's garments was going on at the hall.

The fiasco started when a security guard of the federation asked the driver of a car of Deputy Inspector General (Special Branch) Dr Sadiqur Rahman not to park the vehicle in front of the complex's main gate, as the footpath and road were already full



Lack of parking on Gulshan Avenue frequently leads to brawls.

of cars.

The police themselves violated the law by parking a vehicle at a place not designated for this purpose, said a source.

Honorary chairman of the Centre for Urban Studies Prof Nazrul Islam said that according to the building rules, any commercial buildings, auditorium or plaza must have parking provision in proportion with the floor area.

"Occupying footpath denying smooth passage of the pedestrian is just illegal," he said.

Now the question is how the commercial establishment was built without keeping parking provision, said Prof Islam, adding that either the Shooting Federation violated the approved construction design or Rajuk had underhand dealings in approving the plan.

Shooting Federation Chairman Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury said, "There is adequate parking space along both sides of the road in front of the federation office."

None of the convention halls and community centres in the city has provision for car parking except for Senakunja and Darbar Hall, he said.

"Parking cars in single file (line) on the road is not illegal," he added.

When his attention was drawn about two to three lines of cars parked in front of the federation, he said police are responsible to take legal action in this situation.

"Now we are thinking of basement parking lot," he said.

Chief Executive Officer of DCC Saifuddin Ahmed said, "We have not granted permission to the Shooting Federation to use the road for car parking in single file."

Regarding illegal occupancy of footpath, he said, it is the duty of the police to keep the footpaths and roads free from any illegal obstruction.

"The poorly manned Estate Department of DCC is unable to ensure footpaths free from illegal use in such a big city," said Saifuddin.

Interestingly, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) play the role of mere onlookers leaving the city dwellers in perennial suffering from congestion and illegal parking on roads.

Traffic congestion due to illegal parking on the public thoroughfares and footpaths in front of various commercial set-ups along the Gulshan Avenue, Kemal Ataturk Avenue, Mohakhali and Dhanmondi areas is a daily phenomenon.

DCC CEO Saifuddin Ahmed said as per decision of the Good Governance and Development Committee of the Prime Minister's Office, the DMP has to keep city streets and footpaths free of illegal occupancy.

DMP Commissioner SM Mizanur Rahman recently told Star City: "People will definitely park their vehicles on the street if the shopping malls and other commercial establishments do not have parking space."

Asked why Rajuk does not take legal action against those builders who do not keep car-parking provision, its Chairman KAM Harun said: "Errant builders go to court and obtain stay orders as soon as we go for any legal action."

Eid shopping starts

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"Why would people buy a saree paying Tk 300 more than last year's price, when he has to buy one kg of korola for Tk 80?" said Abul Hossain, a shopkeeper at Hawkers Market, venting his frustration over high price of imported sarees.

The import tax increased to Tk 450 from Tk 125 a saree just before Ramadan commenced, he said.

"The price of local sarees increased up to 25 percent because of the high price of cotton and chemical dyes," said Manjurul Haq Chowdhury, owner of a shop in the same market for 35 years.

The price of local punjabi has also increased up to 25 percent because of the increase in

labour, washing and transport costs, said Abdul Halim, manager of a local punjabi shop at Elephant Road.

"The prices are exorbitant this year, and I have to continuously bargain with the shopkeepers, as I have a limited budget for Eid," said a shopper at the same place.

Shopkeepers in the city shopping malls said that they have no plans pre-Eid sales like those in the developed countries though some posh shops in the city are having a 'buy one get one free' offer.

Both shoppers and shopkeepers think that traffic jams and electricity are not any additional problems because these are just the ways of lives for those living in Dhaka city.

In spite of the increase in prices those from the upper or upper middle class are continuing purchases. The brunt is mainly borne by the people of middle and lower middle class, which is visible in the shopping areas of Gawsia, New Market, Badruddoza Market and the footpath markets which caters to the lower income group.

"I have fewer customers this year because the price has increased between Tk 20 to Tk 30. Earlier I used to buy a punjabi at Tk 80 but now it costs Tk 110. To my customers the difference of Tk 10 is enough not to buy any for Eid," said Ratan, a footpath punjabi seller for the last 20 years.

Rural push chokes city

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A famine-like situation prevails in the northern region during this period due to want of job. This year it coincides with the month of Ramadan. "The poor are coming to the city in thousands with the hope of more earning before Eid," Mozibor said.

Mozibor has 45 rickshaws including authorised and unauthorised. Usually 15 to 20 rickshaws remain idle for lack of pullers but now not a single rickshaw remains idle.

Ajgar Ali, a rickshawpuller at Kochukhet, said cashing in on the demand for rickshaws, the garage owners has increased the amount of daily deposit.

The owners usually take Tk 50-70 a day for an authorised

rickshaw just one month ago, but now they are collecting Tk 70-85 in different areas of the city. For the unauthorised rickshaws, the owners used to collect Tk 40, but now the rate is above Tk 60.

About the sudden increase in rickshaws in the city, a rickshaw garage owner said pulling rickshaw is the best choice for poor people who come to the city from villages. "It is very easy to manage a rickshaw and the daily earning is not bad," he said.

Mofazzal Hossain arrived in Dhaka for the first time on Friday from Nilphamari and started pulling rickshaw in Pallabi area. His brother Mizan who has been pulling rickshaw in the city for the last three years helped him

get a rickshaw for one shift.

About rickshaw pulling in the capital, he said, "It is dangerous for new ones like me. Since I'm not a skilled rickshawpuller, I drive rickshaw between Pallabi and Mirpur-10 crossing. I don't even know the other places."

Mofazzal said that he needs Tk 40 for paying daily deposit and Tk 50 for three meals a day but it is difficult for him to collect Tk 100 within a shift.

He said there is no work at present in his district as the harvesting of Aman paddy will start at least one month later.

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