

Sadarghat in terminal crisis



The tragedy of last Tuesday's launch accident began with the typical overcrowding seen in the vessels leaving Sadarghat terminal.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

For thousands of launch passengers, the very approach to Sadarghat launch terminal -- one of the largest river ports in the world -- is as hazardous as the voyage they undertake on the water.

The hassle starts with the city's taxis and scooters refusing even to venture through the jam-packed roads of the old city in order to reach the terminal. Negotiating through Nawabpur or North South Road by car, scooter or rickshaw can take hours. Helpless launch passengers are sometimes seen leaving their stranded vehicles and walking to Sadarghat with their heavy luggage.

Walking through the streets of the old town is not easy either. All along the roads to Sadarghat, pavements are totally blocked by a wide range of merchandise. About ten feet of the road is also encroached by lorries, rickshaw vans and goods.

As soon as the passengers think they have overcome the obstacles of Sadarghat Road, 100 meters away from the terminal, a gang of *kulis* (porters) wearing green shirts, virtually snatch their luggage away and force them to hire one of them at an exorbitant price. According to officials at the terminal on an average 30,000 people use the terminal for departure and arrival everyday, each paying Tk 2.50 for entrance. About 200 large and small passenger launches depart and arrive at the terminal every day.

Most passengers at the Sadarghat launch terminal

belong to the poor sections of the population, and thus they are utterly at the mercy of these organised gangs of *kulis*, touts and thieves.

The most crucial decision a passenger has to make, however, is which launch to board safely. Although there are more than twelve BIWTA and Department of Shipping officials present at the terminal to ensure safety, the passenger remains as helpless as ever. There is no check on whether a vessel is leaving or arriving at the port overloaded. There are also hardly any checks on whether a launch is complying with the rules and regulations.

An official of the shipping department told The Daily Star that nothing has improved at the launch terminal for years. "If a launch is overloaded the passenger will have to decide if he or she is willing to travel on an overloaded vessel. There is hardly any official checking," said the shipping official.

Recently a very large passenger launch was introduced to Dhaka-Barisal route but to everybody's surprise the newly built vessel was found to have some serious structural problems. The vibration felt inside the vessel when it plied was so strong that passengers complained that they could not sleep," said an official source.

The vessel is still in service and experts say that the strong vibration could break it apart any time during journeys.

"Because most who die in launch accidents or suffer during their journey are poor, the government takes no notice of the problems," said the official.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"We, as a team, have agreed that we are not going to judge the success or otherwise by wins or losses on this tour... we need to improve in all areas, and that's the focus."

-- Dav Whatmore



Bangladesh Cricket Coach

Referring last Sunday to Bangladesh's first test series against Australia, beginning July 18, which has been called the greatest 'mismatch' in test cricket history

"An independent institution and a slavish mind do not go together. An independent person... in the context of Bangladesh... must be strong enough to face pressure from all quarters... Persons in authority and outside don't like independent minds."

-- Mostafa Kamal

Former Chief Justice
Speaking to The Daily Star last week, among other leading figures, after the government approved the independent anti-corruption commission act last Monday

"I am not a person to quit. If I quit, then who would work? The aim of a good minister is to work... All the vessels were not built during the BNP rule... We took action against 40 unfit launches but the previous government did nothing."

-- Colonel Akbar Hossain

Former Chief Justice
Denying any possibility of his resignation over the tragedy of last week's triple-deck launch capsized, in which over 500 passengers were feared drowned

"We [Islami Oikya Jote] don't have any regrets, because the way the Prime Minister talked with us was very encouraging. We are really optimistic that we will get control of a ministry."

-- Mufti Fazlul Haq Amini

MP and Chairman of Islami Oikya Jote, a partner of the BNP-led coalition government
Following the withdrawal of his resignation letter from parliament last Tuesday, after the PM's assurance of a ministry

"Although, geologically, Dhaka is in the second earthquake-prone zone [in the country], its vulnerability lies in its non-engineered structures."

-- Professor Jamilur Reza Choudhury

Vice Chancellor, BRAC University
Telling New Age that, according to the Earthquake Risk Index, Dhaka is one of the riskiest cities on earth, as experts warned that 60 percent (all non-engineered structures) of the city would collapse in a moderate-intensity earthquake

Sewerage system hazard for city

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Terrible mismanagement and irregularities in operation and maintenance of the city sewerage system is creating an environmental hazard for city dwellers.

Amazingly, households of the Dhaka WASA water borne sewerage system areas stated that their sanitation condition is poorer compared to that of non-system areas. Baridhara and Uttara are environmentally less polluted than Gulshan and Dhanmondi as the former do not have water borne sewerage whereas the latter have, said executive engineer of WASA Md Serajuddin and Md Delwar Hossain while presenting the keynote paper in a seminar on 'Improved Sanitation in Dhaka' on last Thursday in Alliance

Francaise Gallery, organized by the Franco-Bangladesh Association of Scholars and Trainees (FBAST).

About 30 per cent of the area of the city is covered by the conventional water borne sewerage system of Dhaka WASA and 20 per cent is connected to the separate sewerage system. About 11 per cent of people is oriented to septic tank and 18 per cent to pit sanitation system. The remaining population in Dhaka do not have any form of acceptable sanitary disposal system, said the speakers.

Overflowing of waste water, from sewerage lines and drainage systems is a chronic phenomenon seen in various parts of Dhaka. According to the feasibility study of JAICA on the sewerage system, many

points of the existing trunk sewerage lines from Tejgaon to Pagla either have leakage or broken, therefore no planning would be feasible without replacing the entire Tejgaon-Pagla trunk line.

There is only one sewerage treatment plant at Pagla which is not adequate for the sanitation of the whole city. It is estimated that the main sewerage network is losing about 60 per cent of the collected waste water and solid waste from the residential areas on its way to the treatment plant.

"There is a plan to establish three sewage treatment plants in Tongi, Rampura and Mirpur in addition to the only treatment plant at Pagla," said Nurul Islam, the superintendent engineer of WASA.

The sewerage connection number is

increasing at the rate of 1.5 per cent whereas water connection is increasing 5.65 per cent per year. In relation to water connected holdings only 27.5 per cent of holdings are connected to the sewerage network. The low sewerage connection is due to the high price for a water borne sewerage system.

A long term development plan in this sector has been drafted up to the period of 2020 by expatriate consultants comprising mostly of a water borne sewerage system with an estimated cost of about Tk 8,000 crore.

Though the speakers said the fund could be arranged from Japan or France, whether the people are capable of paying for this huge cost is doubtful. A World Bank study shows that the water borne waste disposal would

cost US\$ 300 per connection which is almost the same as the average per capita income of Bangladesh.

The speakers in the seminar said that it is not easy to single out a solution to this problem but proposing water borne sewerage system for Dhaka will not be appropriate when frequent overflowing of the street manholes, backflow in the household through sewer, costing and lack of demand driven approach is apparent.

In the world summit on water and sanitation in Japan experts observed that 2.4 billion people are not getting water and sanitation facilities and creating environmental pollution. For decades the sanitation problem of the city did not get any attention. This is the first time that

government has given sanitation a priority. The sanitation problem has been identified as the problem in itself and government is going for massive sanitation program, said AYBI Siddique, the secretary of LGRD ministry.

"The government's plan of replacing all hanging latrines with pit latrines will not be a sustainable sanitation measure as the life time of the pit latrine is one year. We need to raise awareness among the people regarding the connection of health and sanitation," said Professor Mujibur Rahman, Department of Civil Engineering, BUET.

It is essential to pursue less costly sanitation alternatives to access the urgently needed safer sanitation, expressed speakers in the seminar.



A World Bank study shows that a modern waterborne waste disposal system, to replace the current one, illustrated right and below, will cost \$300 per city dweller.



AKM MOHSIN

Debunking a myth

BISHAWJIT DAS

People sometimes pin hopes on 'all-cure' low-price rings that are sold in wayside makeshift shops. Sellers or hawkers, to be more precise, claim that the rings are made of eight metal ingredients (astadhata) and work miracles for people who wear them.

"An *astadhata* ring will save you not only from the evil omen of eight planets but from various diseases as well. If it does not work within 41 days of use, return it with the receipt and take your money back," announces a recorded voice on cassette player in one such roadside shop in bustling Gulistan.

The so-called eight-metal rings are in fact made of amalgam. "It has iron, brass, copper, lead, alu-



Even the vendors are ignorant about what these 'eight-metal rings' are made of.

minum foil, silver, mercury and other metals," Akbar, a ring seller on Shyamoli sidewalk, quoted a leaflet as saying. The company he works with provides the leaflets.

But Akbar does not know the difference between metal and amalgam, although he has been selling these much-vaunted rings for seven years in different places of Dhaka. When he was told that brass is an amalgam of iron and copper, he got embarrassed and remained silent.

There are some 125 sellers and 75 shops that sell the rings across the country of one company, Messrs Kalam Store. But no-one knows how many companies are there.

Atik in Gulistan or Shamim Osman in Tongi sells 10-30 rings a day and earns money as hoped for. The prices of rings range from Tk 10 to 20 to 30 each, depending on size and design. The shops sell rings for both sexes.

Who are the buyers? Most buyers are from the lower income bracket and of a superstitious bent. "I do believe eight-metal rings can change luck and help overcome troubles," said Shohag, a buyer who wears three other rings of different stones.

But there are some other people who do not believe in 'metal wonder'. A doubting Rafiq, another buyer, bargained with the seller hard and asked him whether the rings are made of brass or something else.

The eight-metal rings may have beneficial potential, but they need to be prepared properly. It is difficult to mix several properties in such a small mass, said Subrata Mitra of Mirpur.