

Seizure drive fails to cut number of rickshaws

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

The recent drive to seize illegal rickshaws drove some rickshaw-pullers out of the city for some time but most of them have already come back as the owners managed to keep the forged and duplicated licence plates and blue-books intact.

The city has 79,616 licenced rickshaws but the actual number is not less than three lakh. Most of the rickshaws ply without licence or with duplicated licence plates and other documents, thanks to the absence of proper monitoring.

Rickshaw-pullers allege that many rickshaws with valid licences were also seized during the drive against unlicensed rickshaws.

Thousands of rickshaws have licences, which were not renewed in the last five years. "A lot of time is wasted while standing in queue to get the licence renewed," said Idris, who pulls a rickshaw with an out-dated licence plate.

According to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) rules, the rickshaw owners must renew their licence every year at a fee of Tk 482.

The efforts to reduce the number of rickshaws went in vain as rickshaws continue to swarm the city streets with the emergence of some illegal rickshaw associations who provide the pullers with duplicated licence numbers and blue-books.

A number of such associations are actively backed by influential people including the ruling party leaders, sources said.

Among them, 'Muktijoddha Rickshaw Samabaya Samiti' and 'Dhaka Mohanagar Rickshaw Samabaya Samiti' are engaged in 'legalising' rickshaws through a simple procedure and in exchange for nominal charges.

A rickshaw owner can easily procure a licence along with the blue-book from these associations at Tk 250 to Tk 450. On the other hand, procuring a legal licence from the city corporation costs Tk 4,000 to Tk 6,000.

These associations gave 'licence' to about 2 lakh rickshaws in the city, sources added.

DCC officials however said they would not allow any rickshaw to ply without DCC-approved licence.

"Such illegal rickshaws would be seized and confiscated wherever they are found," said Moynul Haque Khan, deputy chief revenue officer, DCC.

The so-called rickshaw co-operative associations also provide easy loans to poor pullers to buy a rickshaw, some rickshaw-pullers said.

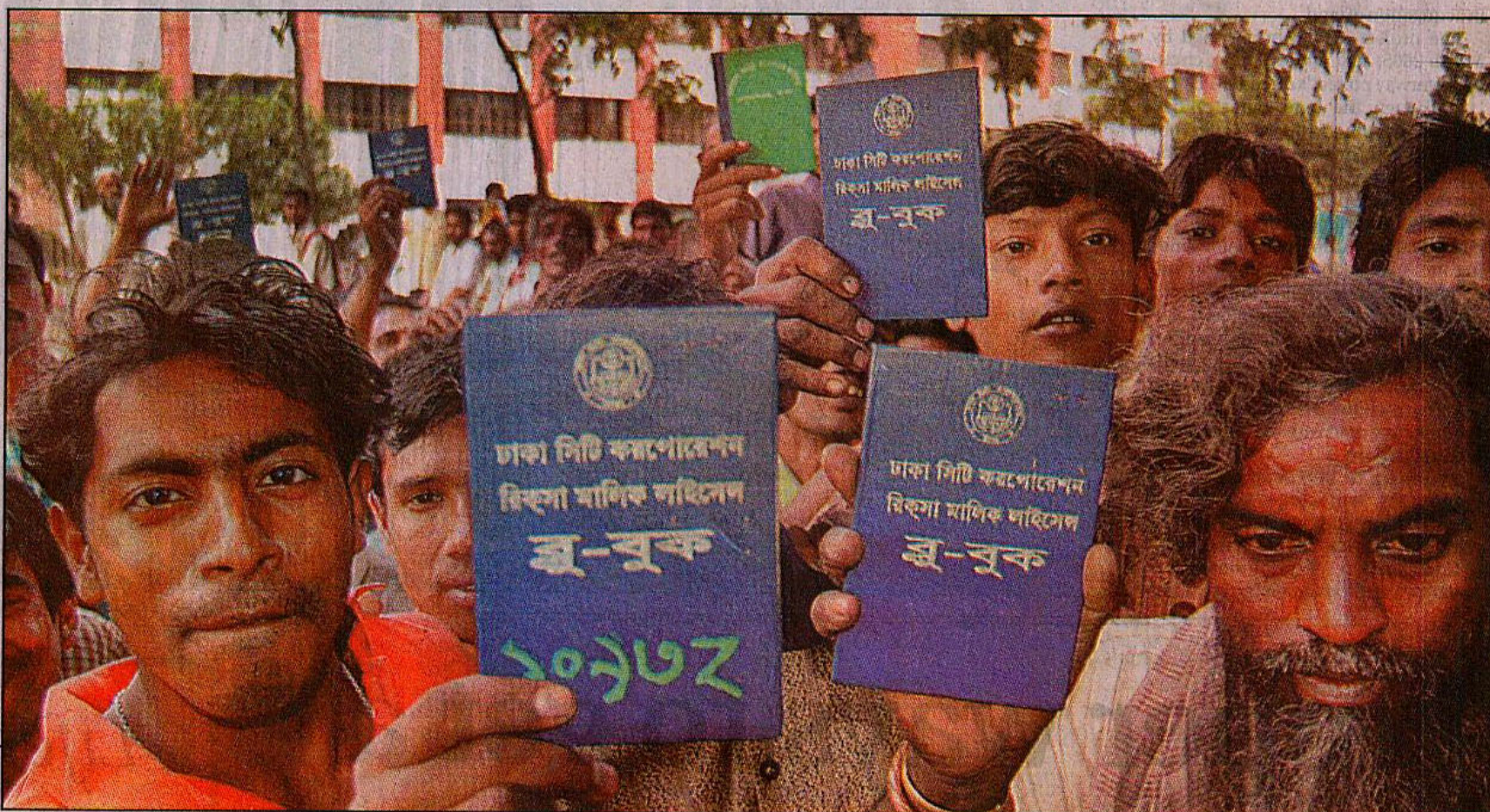
"I bought this rickshaw two months back," said a rickshaw-puller operating with a Muktijoddha Rickshaw Samabaya Samiti licence plate.

"If my rickshaw is seized, I would lose the money, the rickshaw and the collateral," he said, hoping that he would not fall a victim of the rickshaw seizure drive.

There are allegations that a section of rickshaw owners run several rickshaws with same licence. They just duplicate the numbers and other documents.

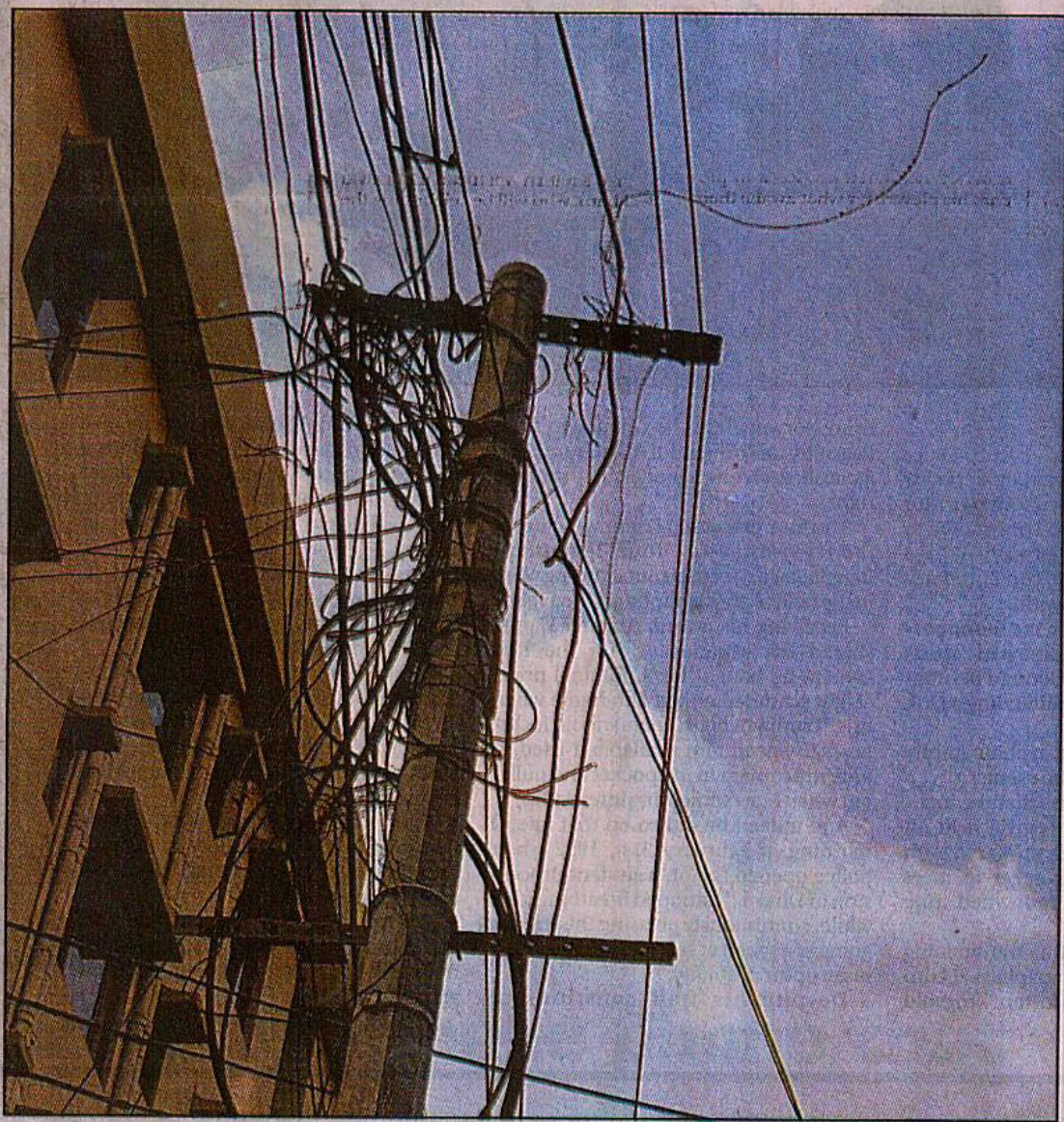
"At least five rickshaws can be found operating with the same licence number," said another puller on condition of anonymity.

He said the DCC should give valid licence to the rickshaws distributed from these associations to protect the poor rickshaw-pullers.



STAR PHOTO

Rickshaw-pullers allege that many rickshaws with valid licences were also seized during the drive against unlicensed vehicles. Showing their blue-books they demonstrated in front of the Dhanmondi Police Station recently.



An electric pole of Desa at Mohammadpur tangled with wires and cables of different utility service providers.

Desa to free electric poles from tangles

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) has not yet received any positive response from the utility service providers about the removal of telephone, internet and cable television lines from Desa's electric poles by December 15.

As part of a beautification project of the city, Desa took the initiative to free its electric poles from the tangles of various wires and cables.

"We expected that the utility service providers concerned will talk to us, but we have not yet seen any positive sign," AAMA Rab, chairman of Desa, told Star City.

Desa would cut off the unauthorised cables and wires on electric poles if the utility service providers do not remove them or negotiate with Desa within the deadline.

"We have no other way but to cut the satellite TV cables, internet and telephone lines that have created a mess. We have tried to negotiate with the providers for years but failed. Now Desa has decided to cut all these lines," the Desa chairman said.

The city is criss-crossed with untidy cables of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB), internet service providers, cable TV operators and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), mostly hanging from the electric poles.

Desa has long been trying to organise the cables in a systematic way for giving the poles a decent look. "We have asked the service providers to build structure for their cables or pay Desa to build and organise the cables," said Rab.

However, Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh (Coab) said the cable TV lines are not

responsible for the tangles on electric poles.

"We use fibre optics and we are able to provide many connections through a single cable. But for internet and telephone lines, the operators need one cable for each connection," said Anwar Parvez, president of Coab.

"We had a meeting with Desa chairman and Desco managing director and showed them what we have done to organise the cables."

Desa wants every service provider who uses the electric poles should pay charges for using the poles and have registration with Desa.

"At the beginning we asked the cable operators and others to build structures for organising cables but they failed. Then we decided to do it on our own. The providers have to pay Desa the service charges," said the Desa chairman.

DUCSU museum struggling to breathe

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

You are bound to be attracted to it the moment you step into the room. Inside a glass box with history written all over it, stands the remains of a mango tree trying to enlighten the new generation with messages from the past.

The log is a part of the historical mango tree of Dhaka University where the Language Movement of 1952 was initiated. The first protest meeting was held beneath it and the movement that followed, ended with the Bengalis securing their own mother tongue through the blood of language martyrs.

Not only the log but a good number of relics, including documents and rare photographs are kept at the small museum of Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) building known as DUCSU Shongroshala. It houses different mementos of the language movement in 1952, mass upsurge of 1969 and of course the Liberation War of 1971. Some items are related to the University's own history like the first certificate issued by it.

However, the museum is struggling to exhibit all its items due to paucity of space and lack of funds.

It was founded in 1991 after the mass upsurge against autocracy in a bid to safe-keep the traces of freedom struggles at different times. But since the beginning, the museum has not expanded from its single room area of 20 x 15 square feet.

"There are so many items, especially some rare pictures that the museum can not exhibit," said a student of Islamic History department.

"The photograph of human remnants found at the field of Jagannath College on December 16, 1971 tells of the genocide during the War of Liberation. History becomes alive when one sees such a picture," he said adding that apart from space crisis, political reasons might be responsible for some

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relics not being on display.

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At present the ceiling and some other parts of the room are in a partially dilapidated state and in urgent need of repair work. A portrait of Asad, martyr of the mass upsurge of

1969 is almost ruined and some other items have also met similar fates.

Any repair work needs money but there is no regular fund for the museum.

"The museum would not have been in such condition had the DUCSU been active," said Sheikh Shamim, a leader of the Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal (JSD), student wing of the ruling party. He said the stu-

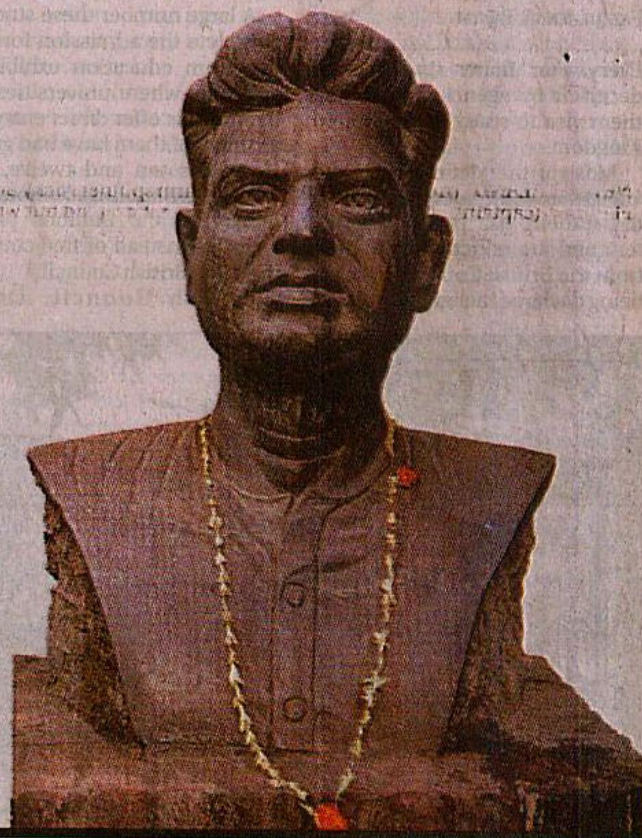
dents sometimes try to provide money from their own sources for the museum.

Gopal Chandra Das, assistant cameraman and collector, who happens to be the lone staff of the museum said the University authority has assured providing more space for the museum.

Proctor Aka Firowz Ahmad admitted that the current space is too small for a

museum.

"Even three or four people can not stand inside together," he said. He informed that there was no specific proposal for providing space for the museum but added that a proposal for a University Central Museum was submitted to the ministry of cultural affairs last year which has unfortunately not seen any progress.



IT DESERVES BETTER... A view from the inside of the cramped DUCSU Shongroshala where precious items of freedom struggles over the years have been stored.

STAR PHOTO