

Pvt varsity students face severe accommodation problem

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

As private universities in the city do not have dormitories, their students, especially who come from outside Dhaka, are compelled to reside in expensive private hostels or rented houses in an environment where it is difficult to study.

Of the total 52 private universities, 44 are situated in Dhaka with around 50,000 students. Sources say that nearly 15,000 students come from outside the capital.

The lack of hostels at private universities worries the parents who send their children to Dhaka. They say many of the students living in rented houses are indulging in anti-social activities which are hampering their studies.

Momena Khatun lives in Sylhet and her son studying in a private university resides in a flat in city's Lalmatia area along with other students. After visiting the flat she became worried about her son's study in such an environment.

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Shipul Mahmud from North South University (NSU) said, "As there is no hostel for us, we have to look for rented houses. The biggest problem is the owners are reluctant to rent out their house to bachelors or students. If they

another student.

Most students rent a small flat of three rooms where 9 to 10 students live in a congested environment. They use only one or two toilets.

"Smoking, doping and drinking is a commonplace in these flats. If anyone protests, the others will

GA Siddiqi said building hostels for students along side academic buildings require a lot of space which is not available in Dhaka.

"We do not have any plan to build dorms but we will take buildings through outsourcing near the campus and ask our students to rent them," he added.

Both Prof Siddiqi and Vice Chancellor of BRAC University Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said in public universities student politics and movement for exam postponement start from hostels and these are the main reasons for session jam.

The students of NSU and Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB) living in Banani said they hardly receive any help from the authorities regarding accommodations.

IUB Vice Chancellor Dr Bazul M Chowdhury said, "Right now it is quite impossible for us to build a hostel as construction of our main campus is going on. There is scarcity of land with no support from the state".

"We are aware of the problems faced by students from out of Dhaka especially the female students," he added.

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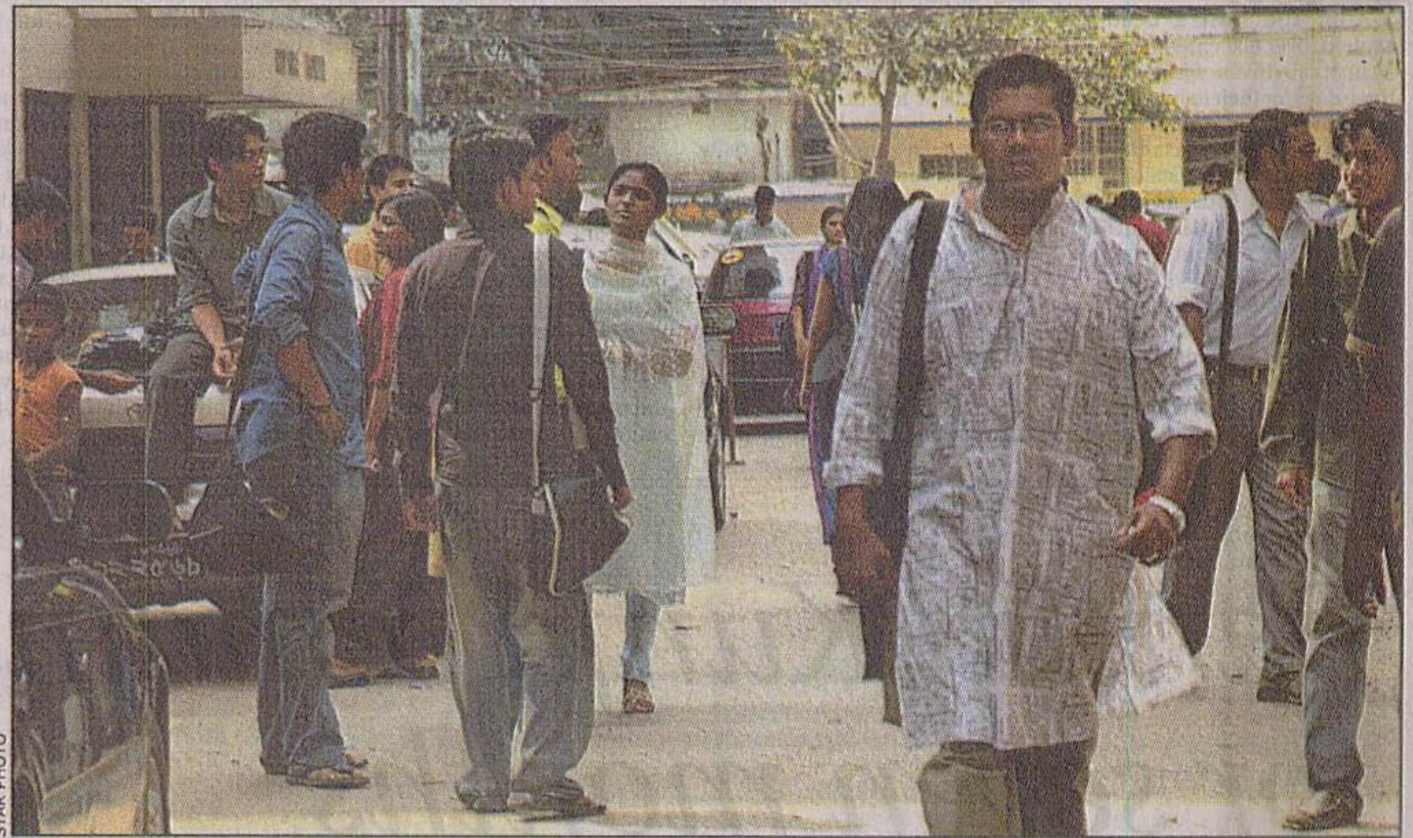
agree, they charge higher rent."

"Even many of the owners impose restrictions such as returning home by 9:00pm otherwise main gate will be closed. But it is not easy for the students to maintain the rule everyday due to traffic congestion in the city," said

oust him," said another private university student.

Ehsanul Islam who came from Comilla was bound to stay illegally at a hall of Dhaka University because his private university does not have any hostel.

NSU Vice chancellor Dr Hafiz



Students spend their free time sitting on bonnets of cars and on the roads near the universities.

Child labour common in tanneries



Children of all ages are subject to heavy labour at tanneries in Hazaribagh.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Ten-year-old Mohammed Faroque looked surprised when asked why he works in a tannery factory.

"To earn money obviously," said Faroque who has been getting Tk 400 per month since walking into a tannery factory in Hazaribagh eight months ago. Like Faroque, a good number of child workers work in different tannery factories of Hazaribagh despite the law prohibiting them from doing so.

According to official statistics of Hazaribagh Tannery Workers Union (HTWU), at least 267 children work in the tannery factories. However, those numbers pale in comparison to the number of unregistered child workers.

"Everybody knows that The Factory Law of 1965 prohibits child employment. No child under the age of 14 can be employed in a factory," said Abul Kalam Azad, president of HTWU. "Still child labourers are being appointed to serve their own

financial needs and the interest of the factory owners. Sometimes the children are sent to work by their parents and guardians," added Azad.

"I know that someone under the age of 18 should not work here. But what else can I do?" asked 14-year-old Iqbal Hossain who has been working in a tannery factory for two years. He earns Tk 700 per month and contributes the entire amount to his six-member family. "At least that covers half of our house rent," said Iqbal.

Most of the child workers were unaware of the health hazards like chest pain, respiratory problem, nausea, headache and skin diseases caused by working in a tannery.

"I have never experienced any health problem," said Mohammed Rubel, a 12-year-old worker.

"My uncle worked here for Tk 200 per month but never complained about health. I can not afford to think about health when I am getting Tk 700 a month," said Iqbal.

Sources said that although the

owners claim that child workers seek job in factories to fulfill their own need, the children are in reality, employed because they work at a low wage. A child is paid Tk 25 to 30 per day while for an adult worker, it could go up to Tk 60 to 70.

"They (owners) can get their work done at less than half the cost with a child worker," said a member of HTWU.

The large and medium factories, which are more or less export oriented, were free of child labourers, said a HTWU personnel. Among the 120 registered tannery factories in Hazaribagh, 20 were large and medium ones and most of them did not have child workers.

But the small factories and small tanners, who trade with skin extracted from animal waste unused by large factories, employ child workers.

"Small factories and small tanners work to meet the local demand for leather and they do not have much investment. Moreover, their leather products com-

pete with synthetic products in the local market. They have to maintain a low production cost which prompts them to employ child workers," said Akbar Hossain, vice chairman of Tannery Owners Association. He claimed that none of the member factories of the association employs children.

The HTWU president said that they were trying to eliminate child labour from the sector by creating awareness. Their effort was already yielding results as no child has been appointed during the Eid-ul-Azha this year. "Eid-ul-Azha is the peak season in tannery business and child workers stream in during that time. Fortunately that has not happened this year," he said.

Azad added that it was difficult to abolish child labour due to the socio-economic condition of the country. "Whenever we insist on stopping a child from working in a tannery, parents ask us to rehabilitate them somewhere else which we are unable to do."

Filling souls with dance and song

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Pushan, an 8-year old was beaming as her eyes scanned the words of the song she had just taken down. "I really enjoy the singing lesson," she said after a while.

A few children like her are enjoying singing and dance lessons conducted by the Dhaka City Corporation Sangit Shikha Kendra at a nominal cost under the purview of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

The Kendra (centre) has five branches at Mahanagar Mahila College in Laxmibazar, Paltan Community Centre in Naya Paltan, Afiruddin Sarder Community Centre in Mugdapara, Mirpur Town Hall in Mirpur Section 10 and at Haji Jumman Community centre in Haji Rashid Lane, Old Dhaka. The DCC hopes to open up more ten branches said its sources.

Inaugurated in April 2004, the music school attracted a good number of students. "The

Mahanagar Mahila College branch enrolled the highest number so far," said an officer of DCC's social welfare department, adding the at least 250 children were enrolled in the last session.

Tiny tots between six and 12 are allowed in the school that offers dance and music lessons twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday afternoons. "The school was designed to create a continuing interest in music among them," said Mafizur Rahman, one of the two music teachers of the Mirpur Branch. He said at present the school offers a two years course in singing only to teach the *do-re-me* of music. "They can always move to other schools to continue if the interest grows," he said.

Rahman's students, however, exuded much passion in his singing. "I will become a singer like Asif," said eight-year-old Shuvo. "My cassettes and CDs will be sold in all music stores," he dreamed.

The Sangit Shikha Kendra gained popularity among guardians because of the nominal fee it charged. The monthly fee a student is only Tk 10 with an enrollment fee of Tk 50.

DCC's charity goes further said another official. "We waive the tuition fee of anyone is unable to pay," he said.

"It is free tuition, I should say," commented Nasrin Rahman, mother of Sabrina Nasrin Suzana, who outshone the others in the dance class exams. "It would never have been possible for people like us to enroll our children as most performing art schools are beyond our reach," she said.

"DCC's initiative to open up such schools will help to spread the art of song and dance among children from all social levels," said Olive Islam, the dance teacher of Mirpur branch. She explained that children are taught both *Kathak* and folk dance, giving them an opportunity to pursue any one kind of dance in the

future. The Kendra has two music and dance teachers each, along with two *tabla* players in each branch. There is no other staff and the teachers do the administrative work like collecting fees or enrolling students.

Yet, inconveniences remain, as most students, guardians and teachers mentioned. The schools are set up inside the DCC's community halls and are often found to be dirty and toilets unusable.

"We are left with a single *dugi* as its other part -- *tabla* -- was ruined when rainwater streamed in," said a music teacher. The guardians also requested a proper waiting area.

However, an official of the social welfare department said they are trying best to solve these problems. "The school is entirely funded by DCC. Solving all these problems takes time because of fund constraints," This why it is taking a little time," he said.

Little feet synchronize to the rhythm of the beating drum at the school of music at Mirpur Section 10. They seem so engrossed in getting their steps and movement right and forget how tedious the task is.



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