

Passenger shades occupied by traders

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

City commuters are forced to stand under the open sky while waiting for bus as 90 percent of the 278 passenger shades in the city are occupied by traders and in shabby condition because of lack of maintenance.

Most of the shades have become a place for business leaving no space for passengers to take shelter. Permanent shops and floating vendors have kept the shades occupied.

The four shades in front of Tejgaon College at Farmgate are now used for many purposes. There are four fast food shops and two newspaper stalls in these shades.

"These have been turned into bazaar. There is no place to sit or stand under the shades," said Abdul Rahman, a regular passenger of Farmgate-Mirpur route.

Fazlul Haque, the lessee of a snacks shop under one of the shades, said he pays regularly to police to run his business occupying some unauthorised space under the shade. He uses a part of the shade as a store.

"Whenever passengers stand under the shades, the shopkeepers ask them to leave the place," said Kamruzzaman Khan, a passenger pointing to the shade beside Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

During 1985-1989, Dhaka City

Corporation (DCC) leased out 240 spots to construct sheds. Rangs Group, Blue Star Group and the daily Janata constructed the shade. Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) also built 38 shades.

DCC also handed over the responsibility of maintenance of these shades to these three companies for 25 years.

City Corporation did not build any passenger shade since 1989 but gave permission to The Daily Star and Standard Chartered Bank to set up six shades, which were built by 2003. Moreover, DCC has bulldozed nearly 50 shades for various reasons.

"We have pulled down few shades as they have violated some terms and conditions of the agreement and a few others for the expansion work of roads," said Khandhaker Ruhul Amin, estate officer of DCC.

He said they have allowed the assigned organisations to set up one or two shops under each shade but they have built two to four shops.

According to the agreement, the companies pay Tk 100 a month for each shade. "But they stopped paying the rent after six to 10 months of the contract. DCC owes them around Tk 45 lakh as rent for the last 15 years," said Amin.

The lease holders however said there was no such deal with the DCC. "We had no agreement



This passenger shade beside the Ananda Cinema Hall at Farmgate is occupied by a sugar-cane juice vendor, vegetable and trinket sellers.

of paying rent to DCC. So there is no question of becoming defaulter," said Prodiip Bhaumik, executive of Rangs Group.

Another reason for pulling down the shades was giving sub-contract of these shades to other

organisations, said Abu Taleb Chief Estate Officer, DCC.

Blue Star and the Daily Janata have handed over the maintenance work of about 30 shades to Neptune Advertising, Bashar & Companies and some other

organisations, according to a source at the corporation.

However, DCC does not have any plan to construct any new shades now.

"DCC has received few offers from three to four companies who

are interested to construct shades but we don't have any plan to give them permission. We are planning to renovate the existing ones and evict the illegal occupants," said Abu Taleb.

Farmgate: A bribe heaven for traffic police

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

It was 8:30am when Jahangir Alam boarded a public bus near the Farmgate over-bridge for Banani. He was already running late and had to be in his office near Gulshan 2 within half an hour.

As more passengers were getting on the bus, something excited the conductor and he shouted at the driver to drive off as fast as possible.

"The sergeant is coming our way. We did not pay his toll yesterday," exclaimed the conductor. The driver tried to respond to the urgency in his helper's tone but two other buses, also picking up passengers during the busy hour,

blocked his way.

The traffic sergeant walked up to the driver and asked for his license and other necessary documents. As he walked away from the bus, the driver told the conductor to pay the sergeant 200 Taka.

Anxious passengers, most of whom had to reach office on time, waited for the conductor to return. When inquired, the driver replied that there were no problems with the documents of the vehicle.

"Then why is the delay?" asked a passenger.

They got their answer when the conductor came back. "He (the sergeant) is asking for 500 Taka," he said. The driver pulled out three hundred Taka notes from his pocket and gave

it to the conductor.

As soon as the amount was paid off, the conductor ran back with a smile on his face and the bus was on its way again. But 20-25 minutes were lost in the incident and the prime sufferers were people like Alam who were taking the bus to work.

Commuters traveling in buses and human-haulers from Farmgate intersection often complain about such situations caused by on-duty traffic sergeants in that area.

"For the last five years, the Farmgate intersection has become a popular source of income for traffic policemen," said Moinul Karim, a resident of Nakhalpara who regularly takes buses from Farmgate.

At least 20 policemen remain on duty each day in two shifts. The first shift begins from 7am and ends at 2:30pm. 10 policemen patrol three important points of Farmgate -- Farmgate East (towards Tejgunipara and Karwan Bazar), Farmgate West (towards Mohammadpur and Agargaon and Farmgate North (towards Green Road).

As the eastern side is the busiest, corrupt policemen prefer that area. At least three police sergeants can be spotted there during rush hours.

"They catch us for even the slightest crime, mistakes and problems in documents. We have to pay minimum 100 Taka to get away," said Tutul, a conductor of a bus.

Most bus drivers allegedly

pay a fixed monthly amount to the policemen on the western side. In return the traffic police allows them to keep buses by the road side indefinitely to pick up passengers. This often leads to traffic congestion.

Some bus conductors said there were bribe-collectors who collected 'daily toll' for policemen according to a fixed rate depending on the type of a vehicle.

Human-haulers pay 40 Taka while for normal buses and minibuses, the rate was between 20-50 Taka per day.

"Double-decker buses have to pay at least 80 Taka," said Bashar, a conductor of a double-decker.

Bashar also said that if a

vehicle refuses to pay the bribe-collector, the number on its license plate is noted down and the conductor of that vehicle has to answer to the sergeant the next day.

Four 'toll collectors' reportedly operate in the area and the police sergeants let them keep a 35 percent commission for their 'trouble'.

When asked, sergeant Alam, an on-duty policeman at Farmgate East, denied the allegations. But recently, this correspondent while standing near Farmgate-East for half an hour from 6:30pm, witnessed two double-decker buses, four buses and three human haulers pass the point. Four out of those nine vehicles were approached by the toll-collectors.

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 don't care of anyone's browbeating and dictation"

-- Khaleda Zia

Prime Minister

Told Jatiya Sangsad warning donor agencies and foreign nations against interfering in the country's domestic affairs on March 15. Source: The Daily Star

"If they cannot adjust to our internal policy and economic programmes, they can leave! We too are not interested in their programmes"



-- M Saifur Rahman

Finance and Planning Minister

Told at a discussion with the Economic Reporters Forum in the city on March 16. Source: The Daily Star

"The BNP-Jamaat-led coalition has realised that their days are numbered. So, the government high-ups are making provocative comments to make Bangladesh friendless in a bid to put the next elected government in trouble"

Abdul Jalil

General Secretary, Awami League

Told journalists reacting on the prime minister's speech at Jatiya Sangsad, on March 18. Source: The Daily Star

"You should not always pick the chief justice as the chief of the caretaker government. It would be better to choose the chief from a wide range of professionals"

-- Professor Shamsul Huda Haroon

Dhaka University

Told at a round table styled, 'Democracy and Election: necessity of reforming the caretaker government system' organised by the main opposition Awami League on March 14 at a city hotel. Source: Prothom Alo

"Hartal is a good idea for the past era but today it is a bad habit. It is counterproductive"

-- Jorgen Lissner

Resident Representative, UNDP

Told a news agency on March 8 before launching an extensive research report on implications of hartal on Bangladesh economy and society. Source: The Daily Star

"According to the present situation BNP will win in all elections from now on if they are free and fair"

-- Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan

LGED Minister

Told the Jatiya Sangsad on March 15 reacting to Awami League's demand to reform caretaker government. Source: Prothom Alo

Muktijoddha Kalyan Trust Hospital reopening uncertain



Vehicles of the Muktijoddha Kalyan Trust hospital lie unused at the hospital premises for years.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The Muktijoddha Kalyan (Welfare) Trust Hospital in Mirpur has a slim chance of reopening any time soon as the concerned ministry was yet to receive any response even after floating tender thrice to lease it out to private operators.

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs is now contemplating alternative ways to reopen the hospital, said sources.

Founded in 1979, the four-storeyed hospital was designed to provide freedom fighters with healthcare and also treatment for their families at a subsidised rate.

The Muktijoddha Complex Fund Committee ran it from 1981-1993 before it was leased out to a non-governmental organisation on January 15, 1994 for ten years

four years later and the Muktijoddha Kalyan Trust took over the hospital again on December 29, 1998. But the hospital had remained closed since.

State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim had told Star City last December that the ministry had invited tender to lease out the hospital to a private organisation. But no suitable candidates apparently came forward and sources said all the bidders were reportedly inexperienced in hospi-

tal management.

The ministry then floated tender three times but with little result. A ministry official said one of the reasons why it has not worked out could be that the tender notice got published in dailies that had limited circulation.

"I personally felt that there would have been proper response if the tender was published in leading dailies," he said.

The ministry had formed a committee headed by the cabinet

secretary to look into the issue. The committee is considering the possibility of operating the hospital under a trust board and has created another committee headed by a professor of Dhaka Medical College Hospital to do the feasibility study.

Sources said a report submitted by the second committee in February this year lacked clarification and it was asked to provide a fresh report by March 3. That deadline was later extended.

Ministry insiders said that it has not yet been decided whether the hospital will be operated under a trust board or leased out to the private sector. "Muktijoddha Complex Fund Committee headed by the minister for Liberation War Affairs is the authority of the hospital and any decision has to be approved by it," said a senior official in the ministry.