

Is 37-storey car parking building an eye-wash?

SULTANA RAHMAN

Experts doubt whether the 37-storey car parking cum commercial building in Motijheel will really contribute to easing traffic congestion in the busy commercial hub, as only nine floors of the building will be used for parking.

The nine floors will have space for keeping 500 cars at a time and 1,500 a day, but the commercial offices of the building will need space for about 300 cars, the experts say.

Twenty-seven floors of the building, City Centre, will house multipurpose commercial offices, modern restaurants and a conference hall.

"The building does not have parking place for the large number of vehicles of the commercial offices in the building," said a senior government official.

A study of the Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) stated that around 2,000 vehicles come daily to Motijheel and nearly 800 vehicles are parked on the main road due to absence of parking facilities in the area.

The construction work of City Centre will finish by 2007. It will have three basement floors and nine floors for vehicle parking. The total floor area will be 4.795 lakh square feet.



The proposed under-construction 37-storey car parking building in Motijheel.

ASM Ismail, deputy chief, Department of Architecture, said such as huge commercial building with restaurants and conference hall requires space for parking around 300 cars as per the National Building Code 1996.

According to the code, every 2,000 square feet of commercial ground requires parking place for one car, and every 1,000 square feet of restaurant, requires parking space for one vehicle.

Project Director Ashiqur Rahman however said around 2,000 vehicles can be parked "easily and safely" in the building. "There is no need for a separate parking place for the vehicles coming to the commercial offices in this building," he said.

Due to the absence of car parking facilities in Motijheel and adjoining areas, cars are parked haphazardly along the roads creating traffic congestion in the area.

The project director believes the multi-storeyed car parking will help reduce traffic jam in the commercial area.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) with the assistance of Belhasa-Accom JV, a multinational company, is constructing the building, which will have a helipad on the rooftop.

Traffic Division's huge fine collection

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The Traffic Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) realises at least 60 lakh Taka every month on an average in fines for violation of traffic rules.

Only last month, DMP Traffic's north zone reportedly collected 42 lakh Taka in fines while the south zone received 36 lakh Taka.

"People in our country have an innate tendency of disobeying rules. They do not follow safety precautions like wearing helmets while riding motorbikes even though it is for their own good," said Md. Feroz Al Mujahid Khan, deputy commissioner (DC), Traffic (North).

"Our traffic sergeants abide by the order to wear helmets, but the general public pay no heed to such instructions," said Khan adding that at least 12,000 cases had been lodged for disobeying traffic rules in March and April this year and a large number of the violators were charged for not wearing helmets.

In most of the cases, drivers are disciplined for violating the red signal or for parking in no-parking zones. Also, cases are lodged for not having necessary documents like route permit, registration, tax token and fitness certificate.

The fine ranges from Tk 50 to Tk 500.

Usually, fines are paid at offices of DC Traffic. In some cases a warrant is issued against the defaulter if he does not pay up even after a long time. The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court then collects the penalty. The DMP's 'warrant tamil' (execution) group' keeps watch on the roads to nab the defaulting vehicles and when sends them to the court.

High officials of DMP Traffic attributed the large collection of fines to strict enforcement of traffic rules. "The enforcement could be tougher but it becomes hard to apprehend violators during rush hours as that could cause traffic congestion. Already, some drivers avoid the Gabtoli to Azimpur corridor as rules are followed

very strictly on that route," said Mujahid Khan.

Despite the DMP's claims residents have complained that often traffic officials harass them unnecessarily and even files cases or fines the driver despite finding the documents up to date. And those who are really guilty also manage to get out of trouble by bribing the police.

"I have been stopped more than three times in front of the Motijheel police station for traffic violation. On some occasions, the on-duty traffic official said that he could 'fix up' everything if I gave him Tk 1,000," said Hamid Ansary who works at a private company. Many others like Ansary also claim that they bribe traffic officials just to avoid harassment.

The DC Traffic (North) however said that the authorities take stern actions against corrupt law enforcers if specific complaints are lodged.

"People can come to me directly with names of such traffic policemen with evidence," he said.

DMP Traffic submits the entire amount of fines collected to the government as revenue. "We deposit the collected money in banks everyday," said Khan.

A highly placed source in the DMP said that recently a proposal has been submitted to the government to give 50 percent of the total amount of collected fines to the Traffic

Division. "According to the proposal 40 percent of it will go to the staff and officials as incentive and 10 percent will be used as equipment cost of the division," the source said.



Follow the rules or pay the penalty, is what this taxi cab driver is made to do on Manik Mia Avenue.

Rickshaw-pullers plan strong protest



Illegal rickshaws seized by law enforcers being transported to the 'rickshaw graveyard' at Agargaon.

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Over 3,00,000 rickshaw-pullers of the city have planned a daylong strike on May 31 in protest the seizure and ban on their vehicles, harassment from police and other issues.

Leaders of the Rickshaw Van Malik Sramik Shangram Parishad (RVMSSP), a forum of rickshaw-pullers and owners have vowed to continue their agitation until their 10-point demands are met. The list of demands include return of the estimated 40,000 rickshaws that have been seized, issuance of fresh license to genuine rickshaw-pullers and separate lanes for rickshaws on roads that have been made off-limit to non-motorised vehicles.

The leaders of RVMSSP said

that despite repeated appeals to the government, no steps have been taken to address the issues.

"The government can fine us for the illegal rickshaws but they should give us back our property.

We can recover some of our losses by selling those rickshaws outside the metropolitan areas," said Insur Ali, member secretary of RVMSSP.

He also complained that without paying heed to their pleas, the government had already started donating the seized rickshaws to people in rural areas.

"The government is now allotting the seized rickshaws to the ministers and MPs and they are giving those to their party men in their respective constitutions. They are trying to buy votes by giving away our rickshaws," complained Ali.

Local Government officials in Dhaka admitted that they were allotting the rickshaws according to recommendations from ministers and MPs who are not from Dhaka.

"Most of the rickshaws have been distributed according to the recommendations from the ministers and MPs in their respective areas. But we are allotting the rickshaws only in favour of District Commissioners (DC) as per the government's decision," said Sabirul Islam, senior assistant commissioner, Dhaka Division.

He said that they have already handed over 32,000 rickshaws in this way.

RVMSSP members said they had submitted a memorandum to the state minister to the Ministry of Home Affairs in April last year. No measures have been taken on the basis of the memo.

"We gave the government a May 2005 deadline to address our demands. But they have sat on it. So now that the ultimatum is about to expire, we have decided to go for strong action," said Insur Ali.

He also demanded that the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) establishes a welfare trust for the rickshaw-van drivers and stop issuing fake licenses.

"The DCC issues fake licenses and then they instruct the police to seize the rickshaws," claimed Ali.

"In a meeting with the DCC in 2001, they had promised to issue 43,000 new licenses. But they did not keep that promise. At least they should issue licenses to the existing unlicensed rickshaws," said Ali who added that they have filed a case regarding the license problem.

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.



"If the election commission is not allowed an independent secretariat with financial autonomy, it would not be possible to conduct elections freely and fairly in future"

-- MA Syed
Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

Told journalists at his office before placing a six-point reform proposal to the president on May 21, the last working day of his five-year tenure.
Source: The Daily Star

"If Bangladesh believes that it does not have international terrorists, it is lucky. If it believes that it is immune from international terrorism, it must be the only country in the world that it is so"

-- Anwar Choudhury
British High Commissioner in Dhaka

Told a 'D'ACAB-Diplomat Talk' organised by the Diplomatic Correspondents Association Bangladesh (DCAB) in the city, on May 19.
Source: The Daily Star

"The Supreme Court Bar Association resorted to this move to get cheap publicity for political purposes"



-- Moudud Ahmed
Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister

Told journalists reacting on the cancellation of Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar's and his own memberships of the Supreme Court Bar Association, on May 18.
Source: The Daily Star

"Our movement has no relation with any political party. Do not try to scare us. Do not threaten us with jail or repression. You have nobody by your side. I have 27,000 lawyers at my side"

-- Advocate Mahbubey Alam

President, Supreme Court Bar Association

Told journalists reacting on the comments from Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, on May 18.
Source: The Daily Star

"After the last launch capsized in Aricha we have learnt that even the dead body does not have any security"

-- Rabiul Islam

A relative of two victims of the MV Raipura disaster

Told journalists while he was looking for his missing uncle and brother-in-law, on the fourth day of the search, on May 20.
Source: Prothom Alo