

# Launch passengers held hostage by Sadarghat porters

IMRUL HASAN

Passengers are held hostage by the porters at Sadarghat launch terminal as the authorities never looked into the harassment of passengers.

Nearly 1 lakh passengers, mostly from southern districts, use this terminal every day. They are helpless as the police and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) do not take any action against the porters.

"I had Tk 100 in my pocket. A group of coolies charged Tk 200 for carrying my typewriter and forcefully took Tk 50 from me though I myself could carry it," said Munshi Alam, a Barisal-bound passenger.

The government has fixed Tk 10 for carrying goods weighing up to one quintal but they took Tk 200 for my goods weighing one and a half quintals," said Badrul Alam, a trader of Bhola.

"I was helpless because the porters intimidated me," he alleged.

A BIWTA-approved rate chart is hung at the terminal that says the porters must follow the rates and they must not force the passengers to hire a porter if they themselves carry their goods. But most passengers allege

that the porters always force the passengers to pay for their baggage, even it is a small handbag.

Besides, launch owners also complained of harassment by the porters.

"I do not want to say anything about them because they can create problems for me also," said the owner of a Chandpur-bound launch.

"They are backed by the police and administration. If anyone protests the harassment, they can assault him physically," he added.

BIWTA has requested the passengers to inform the on-duty officials of BIWTA and police about any problem or complaint. But they are reluctant to look into the problems.

"We cannot do anything without official order. We are afraid of suspension if we go against the porters to help the passengers," said an on-duty police officer at the Sadarghat outpost.

When asked, Md Enamul Haq, second officer at Kotwali Police Station said people do not file complaint identifying any porter. "If we find any specific allegation against any porter, we punish him on the spot."

However, a high official of BIWTA on condition of anonymity said the situation at Sadarghat terminal is better than any other launch terminal in the country.

"People should complain to the authority," he said.

Sources said the porters pay a handsome amount to BIWTA staff and the policemen. They also collect toll from the 150 hawkers at the terminal.

However, the ruling party-backed porter leaders denied the allegation. "We try to maintain discipline at the terminal. There is no scope for doing any illegal work by the registered porters," said Md Hira, a leader of the

porters. Some 600 porters are now active at the terminal and around 100 of them are unregistered.

When asked, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain admitted that the passengers often complain about harassment at Sadarghat terminal. "Now we control them (porters) much better than in the past," he claimed.



A group of porters rest for a moment at the Sadarghat terminal (above) while some others carry a piece of furniture for a passenger.



STAR PHOTO



Harry Potter enthusiasts at the book launch at Words 'n Pages in Gulshan.

INTERNATIONAL BOOK LAUNCH

## Fans spell-bound by latest Potter book

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

The launch of "Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince" JK Rowling's latest novel in the best-selling Harry Potter series, was not missed by kids between 9 and 15 years in Dhaka as they eagerly queued up at 6:30 in the morning to lay their hands on a copy of the publication. The launch took place simultaneously all over the world.

Harry Potter cast an amazing spell over the book industry, the little 'Potter maniacs' and grownups from all corners of the city grabbed the opportunity to be one of the owners of the hundreds of copies that were sold.

"Words 'n Pages' the recently opened bookshop in Gulshan took pride in officially launching the sale of the mega book at 7:00 am yesterday and within a span of three hours over 150 copies were sold.

The event saw a new era for bookworms as an international launch of this

magnitude took place for the first time, said Gibran Tanwir, senior manager, marketing, Words 'n Pages.

"The agreement we signed with the publisher stated that the book had to be released at the precise time around the world," said Tanwir. "To attract kids, we decorated the shop with coloured balloons, ribbons, held magic shows, contests and gave away lots prizes to encourage book sales and events of this nature. The cutting of a cake marked the launch," he added.

The children were bowled-over by the décor. "I was blown away by the ambience of the place. The shop had broomsticks, magic-wands, big black bowls brewing giving a very Harry Potterish magical feel," said 14-year old Tarek.

Another 12-year old book-enthusiast Ridwan said: "I was depressed on my return from the US with the thought that I would miss laying my hands on a 'first copy' of the latest book."

"But my grandpa did not miss the

newspaper advertisements that Words 'n Pages would officially launch the sale at the same time as other countries. Anxious and excited, I waited for the day and now I have the precious book with me, the little boy said.

Kids were only a part of the enthusiasts. Adults were seen going crazily flipping pages to find out what kids found so amazing about the novel.

Sangeeta Ramkumar who was at the launch with her son said the whole event was very exciting. She intends to have a copy for herself drawing herself into the timeless fantasy.

Meanwhile, bookshop owners from Nilkhet were eagerly awaiting the release.

"We are anticipating the sale of this book to hit the top. Not everyone can afford the original price. Of course, our price will be much less," said a Nilkhet bookshop owner.

## Plan to build memorial for 1969 Mass Upsurge

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The government has taken initiative to build a monument in the city in memory of the martyrs of the 1969 mass upsurge.

The memorial "Unoshottur" will be built at Asad Gate, the intersection named after Mohammad Asaduzzaman, a martyr of the uprising.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) last week announced the plan to build this monument cum museum when it honoured 10 leaders of the 1969 mass upsurge at a programme at Nagar Bhaban.

"Except renaming the 'Ayub Gate' to 'Asad Gate', nothing has been done to show our gratitude to the martyrs of 1969 mass upsurge," said Sadeque Hossain Khoka, the mayor of Dhaka.

The monument will be built at Asad Gate intersection without obstructing the flow of vehicles on the busy road.

"Many structures on the roads

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) last week announced the plan to build this monument cum museum when it honoured 10 leaders of the 1969 mass upsurge at a programme at Nagar Bhaban.

and intersections are there in abroad which save space and increases beauty of a city as well," said Dr Nizam Uddin Ahmed, the designer of the monument.

The 50 metres long and 50 metres wide main structure of the monument will cost Tk 3.51 crore. The DCC will start work on the monument soon. It will take 15 months to complete the construction work.

"We need some space around the intersection and we are in a process to take over some adjoining government lands for this,"

Abul Hasnat, executive engineer, DCC zone-6, told Star City.

DCC officials said the monument cum museum will display all the available documents, photographs and paper cutting of the mass upsurge and profiles of the key leaders of the then Chattra Sangram Parishad.

"The leaders and their family members who attended the DCC reception and others who have such documents in their collection have assured us of providing the documents for the purpose," said Hasnat.

"The monument will remain alive round-the-clock as the visitors will be always there," Dr Nizam said.

There will be a foot over-bridge, parking and recreation facilities at the monument site. "We have planned to set up a cafeteria and other civic facilities inside the monument to attract people," said the designer.

The nine living leaders of 1969 mass upsurge who attended reception appreciated the DCC initiative.

"We welcome this initiative. We request the authority not to put any controversial things in this museum," said Tofail Ahmed, president member of Awami League and one of the 10 key leaders of the upsurge.

The mass upsurge took place in 1969 when people of the then East Pakistan burst into protests against "Agartala conspiracy case" filed against their leaders including Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.



A model of the memorial "Unoshottur" at Asad Gate.

COURTESY: DCC