



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

The sealed portion, left, of the vulnerable North Block of Fazlul Haq Hall, right, of the Dhaka University.

Living with danger at DU halls

ABID KHAN

Resident students of Jagannath and Fazlul Haque (FH) halls of Dhaka University (DU) are passing days in danger and anxiety as their dormitories have become vulnerable and risky.

The North Block of FH Hall and the East House (Purba-bari) of Jagannath Hall, housing about 500 students, are the most rundown buildings in the university, claimed sources.

"The ground floor in the central portion of this block is sinking already. Although the authorities

sealed this part three years ago, we are still tense because the entire building might collapse any time," said Habib, a fourth year student living in one of the rooms just beside the sealed portion of the North Block.

"We do not want to see a repeat of the October tragedy," Habib added. On 15 October 1985, the roof of an auditorium of Jagannath Hall collapsed killing 39 students.

"It seems that the authorities are waiting for an accident to happen. If some of us die only then they will do something," said a student of FH Hall.

About 500 students are passing days at Jagannath and Fazlul Haq halls amid fear of collapse as the authorities failed to renovate them in the last three years

The ground floor of the North Block has visibly sunk at places and there are many potentially danger-

ous cracks developing on the walls and pillars. The situation is similar at the East House of Jagannath Hall.

Cracks are for all to see in rooms on the third floor with the plasters coming off.

"Because of the slope on the floor I have placed bricks underneath my bed to keep it balanced," said Arun, a resident student of North Block.

"Although the foundation of this building was laid for three storeys, the authorities have added another floor. That is why it has become very vulnerable," said Suman Devnath who resides in the East House.

Chief engineer of DU Amir Hossain informed: "We have received the blue-print from Bangladesh University of

Engineering and Technology (BUET) for repairing the buildings. We will start our work as soon as the required funds have been sanctioned."

"A huge amount of money will be needed for the reconstruction work. So, it may take several more months before work could begin," said Dr. Md. Moazzam Haq, provost of FH hall.

When asked, SMA Faiz, the vice chancellor of DU said he was aware of the matter. "The process is going on and necessary initiatives will be taken soon," said the VC.

Surge of rickshaws suffocates streets



STAR PHOTO

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

Rickshaw-pullers in the city are making the best use of the ongoing Eid preparations, with thousands of shoppers utilising rickshaws to run errands.

The present traffic situation has made it impossible for people to use other modes of transport and rickshaws have now come to the rescue being able to move faster than motorised vehicles.

"It is during this time of the year that I could make a good profit," said Kofiluddin, a rickshaw-puller near Banani.

"I am looking forward to making around Tk 2,500 to Tk 3,000 till the day after Eid, deducting daily deposits, bribes to police and maintenance of my rickshaw," he said.

Kofil, a resident of Demra, runs a street side tea-stall, who has been pulling a rickshaw only during Ramadan for the last six years.

"My elder son looks after the stall, while I try to earn as much pulling rickshaws giving my family a chance to enjoy Eid-ul-Fitr," he added.

However, he confessed that the registration number he uses on his rickshaw is a duplicate of an original.

This is just one instance where thousands from the villages and suburbs come into the city during Ramadan, rent rickshaws from unscrupulous rickshaw owners and illegally ply the city streets till Eid.

"It is obvious that city-dwellers look for rickshaws to reach shopping malls and other markets and are also ready to pay an extra Tk 10-12 to get to their destinations," said Shankar Das, a city-dweller, expressing his disgust with the traffic congestion caused by rickshaws during Ramadan.

Das said that most rickshaw owners and their associations take advantage of this situation and rent

rickshaws to make extra money.

City dwellers complained that after the ban of rickshaws on major roads, hoards of rickshaws ply along alleys and by-lanes in major residential and commercial areas clogging the entire place.

Some affected areas are Lalmaia, Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Purana Paltan, Naya Paltan, Agargaon, Mirpur, Uttara, Badda, Rampura, Malibagh, Rajarbagh and Rayerbazar.

"It takes 20-25 minutes to reach home from road 27 Dhanmondi daily during Ramadan, which would have taken me only 5-10 minutes at other times," said Yasir Arafat, a private university student residing in Lalmaia.

Other city dwellers made similar complaints stating that concerned authorities are inept to take necessary action against this ongoing problem.

Others allege that the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is not taking any steps to curb this crisis as they earn a fat sum from these rickshaw owners.

But DCC sources denied the allegation, saying that they are trying to apprehend these criminal associations.

"The associations, four to five of them and the owners duplicate DCC licence plates and operate on the city streets," said a DCC senior officer of Revenue Circle-2.

Apart from this, the associations also issue and provide their own licences, blue-books and tokens to pullers, said the officer.

"The city should have only 80,000 rickshaws, but latest surveys show that over 3.5 lakh rickshaws ply the city streets. This number has increased further during Ramadan," he added.

Traffic department sources of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) seconded the problem.

"We have caught five rickshaws operating at different parts of the

city with the same number plate," said a traffic police officer.

He said that they are trying their best to bring the situation under control through the ongoing drive against illegal rickshaws.

"Traffic policemen are posted at special points through out the city and when caught these illegal vehicles are confiscated," said the police officer.

Despite all efforts by the authorities, the problem remains the same.

Sources from rickshaw associations allege many members of parliament and certain political activists are involved in the fake

licence plates and duplicated blue books, token and registration numbers business.

"A few politicians own 700 to 800 rickshaws, maintained by various mohajons (rickshaw owners)," said a rickshaw owner from Gandaria.

He said that most rickshaw associations break the law, frustrated with the unfair policies of the DCC and DMP.

"The problem may be solved if a free and fair policy is constantly maintained by the authorities," said the rickshaw owner.

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.

"You are provoking the bus operators by giving higher fares than the rates in the charts."



-- Nazmul Huda
Communications Minister

Tells a Dhaka Reporters Unity function on Tuesday pinning the blame on passengers for extra fares instead of taking action against the bus operators.
Source: The Daily Star

"I will not say it will be a curfew, but some specific areas and roads in the city will be closed for vehicles and the public."

-- M Morshed Khan
Foreign Minister

Tells a discussion Thursday on Saarc Summit organised by diplomatic correspondents at the Jatiya Press Club.
Source: The Daily Star

"Monga affected people in the northern districts are in fact fasting day and night due to food crisis"

-- Sheikh Hasina
Leader of the Opposition

Tells people while distributing relief on Thursday at Awami League central office on Bangabandhu Avenue
Source: The Prothom Alo



"No comments ... I don't know whether a fresh voter list is being prepared or not."

-- M A Aziz
Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)

Told the reporters on October 27 on a query whether a new voter list will be prepared or old one will be revised for the next general election.
Source: The Daily Star

"If we seize such a huge number of illegal rickshaws, there will be no space to keep them."

-- Mahbulul Hakim
DC (Traffic), Chittagong

Replies to the Prothom Alo on Friday when asked about his steps against the illegal three-wheelers



STAR PHOTO

FORCED TO FIND AN ALTERNATIVE... Gold prices witnessed several hikes over the last one year. This has pushed the middle income group more towards imitation ornaments.