

People of 5 wards in want of bus links

Human haulers at liberty, rickshaws demand double fare

ERSHAD KAMOL

Human haulers and rickshaws are the only mode of transport for people of five wards in the eastern part of the city, as buses do not ply the roads in these areas.

The affected areas are wards no - 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29 where 80 human haulers ply along four routes -- Gulistan-Bashabo-Madartek, Gulistan- Mugda, Gulistan-Goran, and Gulistan-Sipahibagh.

Ahsan Reza Khan, a private service holder, from Bashobo said: "We face terrible problems during office hours. A few buses arrive to carry bank employees leaving room for human haulers and rikshaws to take undue advantage."

"Rickshaw pullers double the normal fare from Bashabo to Motijheel, Malibagh or Gulistan, and the 30 human haulers plying the Bashabo- Gulistan route end up in a racing competition," Ahsan said.

"The human hauler drivers do not pick up passengers from Bashaboo, but runs 20 meters ahead to Madartek, turn towards Gulistan from Bashabo Cinema Hall, and yet charge an additional taka two which is the usual fare from Madatek to Basabo," he added.

Those involved in the human hauler business on the Gulistan-Bashabo route live either at Wahab Colony at Basabo or Sarkar Para at Madartek.

This group forms part of the syndicate that controls the human hauler business on all four routes from Gulistan to the eastern part of the city.

"Political leaders do not look for any alternatives as this may go against the interest of haulers business. They don't want to dismantle the syndicate as it plays a role in the elections," said a frustrated resident of the area.

"Three wheelers and taxicabs do not go run short distances, and women find it very difficult to board a hauler during rush hours, leaving me with only a rickshaw for transportation," said Rukhsana Aktar, a student from Madartek area.

"Human haulers charge Tk seven from Gulistan to Goran for a distance of only three and half kilometres, the maximum fare to any point. Though the haulers are running on diesel, they have raised the fare on the plea of octane price hike. We demand immediate introduction of a bus service from the central the eastern part of the city," said Monirul Islam, a resident of Goran.

When asked why a bus service is

not introduced to these areas, an official of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) on condition of anonymity, said: "Buses ply along the Jatrabari-Rampura route. But because of the narrow roads in the eastern part, we are unable to introduce this service."

"The BRTA is left with no alternative but to renew licences or even issue new ones for human haulers on these routes, although BRTA discourages small vehicles in the city. From 2004, we do not issue licences for such vehicles to ply on the main city roads," he said.

But residents of Khilgaon Chowdhury Para are of a different view. They believe that the traffic congestion is reason why bus services cannot be introduced on Gulistan-Khilgaon route.

"The road that links the Khilgaon intersection to Taltola is broad enough for buses. But, Khilgaon flyover has failed to solve the traffic jam problem of the residents and commuters of wards 25 and 26, as master plan of the flyover was modified," said Shahidul Islam, a resident of this area.

When contacted, the local MP Mirza Abbas who is also the Minister for Housing and Public Works said that he agrees that the people of the eastern part of the city



Human haulers plying at the Dainik Bangla intersection are a cause for traffic congestion.

are deprived of a quality communication system.

"The Kamapur Railway Station has alienated the eastern part from the central. We have to draw up a plan to develop the roads of this area involving Rajuk, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and concerned governmental departments," said Mirza Abbas.

A large amount of funds is needed for compensation to land donors and construction. As an alternative, a link road has already been constructed from Motijheel to Mugda, while a new road will be constructed linking the Malibagh intersection and Khilgaon Chowdhury Para Community Centre," the minister added.

He also said that the ministry will sit with the leaders of the human hauler syndicates to find an immediate solution.

But he did not comment on the issue related to the modification of the original plan of the Khilgaon Flyover.

Rehab fair ends on high note

TAWFIQUE ALI

As the five-day fair organised by Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) concluded in the city yesterday, participating builders and developers witnessed a remarkable sale and booking of flats and plots.

Prospective buyers from different income groups were found busy striking deals with the developers at the fair at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel. Some were found still checking which apartments would match their income level and affordability.

Despite a rise in the volume of customers' booking for land and readymade flats in this year's fair compared to that of last year's, the customers had a general feeling that the developers are still lagging behind in addressing the housing need of the middle class urban people.

"The price of a readymade flat is really exorbitant for the fixed income group," said Jesmin Sultana, a Supreme Court advocate, who came to the fair to buy a piece

of land for a house. "A builder makes a profit of Tk 20 lakh out of sale of a flat worth Tk 50 lakh," she said.

She expressed her disappointment over the discrepancy between what the builders and developers pledge in their advertisements and what they actually do for the clients. "Many lucrative offers in the advertisements later prove false," said Jesmin.

She said it is true that builders are of great use for the people who cannot spare time and energy for construction of houses and that is why more and more people now depend on builders. "But at the same time, we think the builders should not take undue advantage of this situation. They should address people's need compassionately," she added.

She also said that a builder added an extra floor by reducing the height of each level by 10 inches on road no-12 in Dhanmondi, violating the rules.

A number of developers in the fair said that the spot sales volume



Visitors get information from a stall at the Rehab fair.

in the fair rose by 50 percent this year compared to last year.

"We have sold 40 plots and 15 units of readymade flats this year which is more than what we sold last year," said Tanvir Haider, assistant manager (marketing) of Concord Group.

He said that his company presently builds small units of flats costing Tk10 to 15 lakh to cater to the middle class customers. They will now target those of the lower income group.

"I think housing demands of the affluent class has mostly been met already," said Haider. "We will go for flats within the price range of Tk

5 to 6 lakh for the lower income group."

Senior sales executive of Sagufta Housing Limited, Md Masud Parvez said his company sold 70 plots in this year's fair while the number was 30 last year.

"Spot sales are low this year," said Hamidur Rahman, a director of Rupayan Real Estate and Housing Limited. "There are some developers who inflate their real volume of sales and booking to show a false profile of their companies."

"You will find some developers and builders that has hardly any assurance of continuity, at the fair strike deals with clients on an instalment of as low as Tk 6,000 per month. He said at least 50 percent of this kind of bookings would not continue in the long run.

Rahman added that his company sold 25 units of land and 20 units of flats worth around Tk 19 crore at the fair that matched their sales target.

Asked about the customers' allegations, Rehab Vice-president Abdul Awal said: "We are very much aware of it."

The customer's allegation is true simply because the real estate industry is not out of unethical practices by which entire society is plagued, he said.

Rehab has been trying to establish a code of conduct among the member developers, but many well-established developers are against such moves arguing that Rehab should not try to impose a so-called code of conduct.

Regarding the exorbitant prices of plots and flats and inconvenience of the middle and lower middle class people, Awal said the developers could hardly do anything in this regard as the land price is exorbitant. Besides, the prices of construction materials too, are rising.

The price of readymade flats in the past six or seven months have really gone beyond the means of limited income group, he admitted.

A total of 100 organisations including 94 Rehab member developers and four financial institutions took part in the Rehab Fair 2005.

Int'l Food Festival – a feast for the stomach

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

With celebrity chefs flying in, Tommy Miah being one, gourmet food from more than 12 countries and over 100 mouth-watering cuisines, the international food festival, at International Club in Gulshan, Dhaka on November 24, was a great event for food connoisseurs in the city.

The delicacies were laid out in individual country stalls gaily decorated with their flags flying high, colourful banners and artsy designs represented each nation.

Vietnam, Turkey, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Pakistan, the Middle East, Korea, Italy, India, Indonesia, Egypt and hosts Bangladesh displayed tempting dishes.

The alluring recipes, quite uncommon to the local taste,



The brightly coloured Indian (left) and Sri Lankan (right) food stalls that stole the limelight.

grabbed the attention of all present. From the Korean stall managed by Arirang came in beef BBQ sticks, glass noodles, kimchi: a fiery cabbage-based staple item, heavily seasoned with garlic and chilli and small sushi were placed at high esteem. A dish called namole -- traditional side dish of three greens -- cucumber, bean sprout and spinach were instant hits.

The Italian mafia menu included Penne alla Puttanesca (pasta with anchovies), capers, black olives and tomato sauce along with the traditional Italian desserts were simply amazing, both in colour and aroma.

The Sri Lankan stall handled by Royal Park was also hot with its flavoursome menu. The stall was exclusively designed with fruits and the dishes presented in clay

pots. With plenty of colours and gourmet food on the table, the stall looked exquisite. String hoppers -- light and lacy, made an exclusive meal with curry and coconut sambol. The egg hoppers, traditionally Sri Lankan was another much talked about.

In the Egyptian stall, Koshari, a combo of macaroni, spaghetti, rice, black lentils, chickpeas, garlic sauce and a spicy tomato chilli sauce was an amazing dish. The biggest attraction in the stall was the Shisha -- the water pipe with flavoured tobacco.

The Indonesian stall was simply delightful, with food and decorations made by the Indonesian Embassy. Nasi kaning (yellow rice); fried chicken, sambel goreng kentang and ati (shrimp and potato in coconut spicy chilli sauce and whole brown eggs, cooked in sweet soy sauce) were all beyond one's expectation.

Décor of the Indian stall reminded one of a platform ready for a wedding. Steaming food fried on the tawa (big saucepans) had the ambience turning the guests hungry.

Bangladesh was represented by Heritage, highlighting the famous local food including Chittagong Mezbhan Gosht made the stall interesting.

Pentagon, a local band, kept everyone's toes tapping with slow reggae and latino music making the night one to remember.

Best country stall for food was won by Egypt with Sri Lanka behind while India bagged first position for décor, once again with Sri Lanka winning second place.

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.

"Time has come now. We have to be united like in 1971 to destroy the evil forces in the country."

-- Col (Rtd) Oli Ahmed
BNP Standing Committee Member and MP
Told The Daily Star terming militancy as the burning issue of the moment, on Thursday.
Source: The Daily Star

"Wait, you will see what is going to happen."

-- Abu Hena
Recently suspended BNP MP
Told newsmen claiming that about 100 BNP MPs and leaders will speak out against the militants 'in time', on Friday.
Source: The Daily Star

"If one can easily hit the headlines by committing wrongful acts, then hundreds of Bangla Bhai will be created in the country."

-- Matiur Rahman Nizami
Ameer, Jamaat-E-Islami
Told private TV channel ATN Bangla, on Friday.
Source: The Daily Star

"The newspaper is acting against the country and is engaged in character assassination of the honest, patriotic and principled politicians."

-- Alamgir Kabir
State Minister for Housing and Public Works
Told the parliament bitterly criticising the Janakantha -- a Bangla daily, on Wednesday.
Source: The Daily Star

"The government thinks that journalists are their enemies, as the people find out about their plundering through them."

-- Advocate Abdul Hamid
Deputy Leader of main opposition, Awami League
Told reporters reacting to verbal attacks on the scribes by some ruling party MPs at parliament, on Thursday.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

Three types of bombs have made South Asia unstable. They are nuclear bomb, communal bomb and poverty bomb.

-- Reaz Rahman
Adviser, Foreign Ministry
Said at a roundtable organised by Bangladesh Enterprise Institute in Dhaka on Thursday.
Source: Prothom Alo