



The main gate of the fire station in Sadarghat, opposite Kotwali police station remains virtually blocked. Throughout the day dozens of rickshaw vans use the access gate to the fire station as a stand.

HIGH-RISE FIRE FIGHTING

Fire service too poorly equipped

WAHIDA MITU

TTL (Turntable Ladder), a special ladder of fire service was the most effective fire fighting and rescue equipment of fire service during the inferno in the 11-storey Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) Bhaban at Karwan Bazar on Monday.

When for the first time ever choppers were called in to rescue the trapped people on the rooftop, millions watching live on TV and thousands of onlookers sighed with relief. But the aerial operation soon turned out to be a bane as the rotating blades fanned the fire into a fiercer inferno. The two snorkel fire engines and the TTL then saved valuable lives.

Country's only TTL is in the cherished possession of the Bangladesh fire brigade's Dhaka office and it can reach up to 150 feet, which is equal to 15-storey. "The TTL was bought in 1982 at the cost of Tk 1.5 crore from Japan," said the Fire Service and Civil defence source.

With hundreds of high-rise buildings popping up rapidly in the city, the job of the lifesaving TTL and snorkels is far from over.

According to fire service sources more than 300 people were able to descend to safety through the special ladder from the roof. The people finding no other way to escape the fire had rushed to the roof and waited in agony.

Fire service has a total of four snorkel fire engines. Among them 2 are in Dhaka and the remaining two snorkels are in Chittagong and in Khulna each.

On the other hand the team of Fire service and Civil defence rescued few people with the help of the two snorkel fire engines (fire engines with a crane and a nest mounted on it). But the snorkels



A TTL saved the lives of hundreds of people when a fire broke out in BSEC Bhaban on Monday.

can reach up to 88 feet, which is equal to eight-storey.

Standing on the eighth floor two men were waving a piece of cloth to draw attention of the rescuers. The rescuers tried to reach them with the help of the snorkel fire engines but were unable to reach beyond seventh floor. Later adding a bamboo ladder to the nest and stretching it to the eighth floor solved the problem.

The fire brigade sources said that with the skyline of the city changing rapidly they immediately

needed more equipment designed to tackle similar incidents on high-rise buildings.

"We deployed all our high-rise fire fighting strength on a single high-rise building and still we felt helpless and prayed for safety of human lives," said a fire fighter.

"I cannot imagine how we might be able to tackle a taller building on fire," he said requesting anonymity.

Selim Nawaz Bhuiyan, Deputy Director of fire service, who sus-

tained severe injury during Monday's fire in BSEC Bhaban, said from his hospital bed that the whole fire fighting and rescue operation would have been much quicker had the fire service possessed more TTL and snorkels.

According to another source a Tk 270 crore procurement project of the fire service is now awaiting final nod by the government. The project envisages buying six aerial platform ladders with capacity to cover up to 30 storeys

high buildings. The fire service also plans to import a water vehicle with capacity of 11,000 litres. Currently the fire service water vehicles can carry only 6,500 litres each.

"Most of the high rise buildings in the city were not built with fire escapes so the danger of casualties during a fire always prevails. New equipment and training could help save many lives in the future," said a fire fighter.

Illegal parking chokes Gulshan roads

TAWFIQUE ALI

Despite the ongoing government drive to free the illegally occupied footpaths, buildings and land, many of the city's big commercial establishments continue to create traffic congestion by allowing illegal car parking in front of their offices.

Such illegal parking on the main avenues and alleys in Gulshan is still rampant, residents of road number 1, 2 and 3 in Gulshan-1 and adjoining Niketan

residential area alleged.

They said it has become difficult for them to move from their houses as all the roads, lanes and by-lanes in the area are always crammed with illegally parked vehicles.

Hundreds of officials and customers of a mobile phone company and a private bank park their vehicles on the Gulshan Avenue and adjacent roads.

"Drivers of the cellphone company even started to park vehicles just in front of our house but they stopped doing that when

we protested it," said a housewife residing in the area.

"Traffic situation in this residential area turns worse at noon when the schools break up. Movement almost comes to a standstill," she said preferring anonymity.

Another housewife of Niketan housing complex said entry to the big housing complex through road no-1 and movement of the residents along the road 1, 2 and 3 are severely obstructed because of the car parking on roads.

"We just get stuck at the exit and entry points of our residential area because of cars parked on the roads," she said while taking her school-going son back home.

On a visit to the area, this correspondent found the car of an official of the cellphone company parked on road no-3. The driver said: "We park our vehicles on the road as we cannot accommodate the huge number of vehicles in our limited parking area."

Officials of the company admitted the building's limited car parking facility.

The head office of a private bank is housed in two buildings in the area. Locals alleged that the huge number of cars of the bank's clients create traffic congestion in the area. The bank officials also said their clients park cars on the adjoining roads.

A widespread public outcry has been going on for long across the capital city against illegal practice of occupying public thoroughfares by big commercial establishments. In most cases, these commercial houses occupy designated car parking space with business set-ups.

General Secretary of Gulshan Society Md Anwarul Alam said the business establishments located on the said roads had earlier started parking their vehicles inside the South Park.

"We filed a complaint with the Dhaka City Corporation and then they started occupying the adjoining roads with vehicles," he said. "They must have adequate parking space of their own."

DCC sleeps over arches

Eviction drive mysteriously overlooks illegal overhead arches

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The season of rainstorms and monsoon is just around the corner, but Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is yet to dismantle hundreds of illegal and hazardous arch signboards over almost every intersection in the capital.

The overhead hoardings built on flimsy iron columns not only run the risk of causing accidents, but also obstruct vehicular and pedestrian movement as their bases narrow the roads by five to ten feet altogether. Road spaces blocked by these bases also invite street vendors to set up small shops in between the bases and the adjacent boundary walls.

Moreover, vehicles sometimes run into the unmarked bases of these arch signboards leading to injuries. Every year, some of these gigantic hoardings are seen blocking the roads after being knocked over by a storm -- some times by even a gusty wind.

According to the DCC authorities, their drive against illegal signboards has slowed down due to insufficient workforce.

Star City found all illegal arch signboards intact after visiting Rokeya Sarani, Mirpur Road, Mazar Road and Sat Masjid Road.

During the last week of December 2006, estate department of DCC told Star City that they had informed the signboard owners by a circular and

they would launch drives against the arch signboards from February 1.

On February 2, as the arch signboards were still standing over the roads, this correspondent contacted the estate department again and learnt that DCC shifted the date of the drives to February 6.

When asked why the illegal arch signboards were not brought down, Kamruzzaman Chowdhury, chief estate officer

at DCC, told Star City on Monday that DCC has been removing all types of illegal signboards and billboards, but it had to slow down due to lack of sufficient workforce.

"Of course DCC will remove all illegal signboards from the roads, but we need some time," Kamruzzaman said adding DCC has been removing illegal signboards at nights to avoid injuries or damages to road users. Work

at night also slows down the pace of work.

Kamruzzaman however could not provide any specific figure of how many arch signboards DCC has removed so far. He only said, "We removed a huge number of signboards."

DCC is going to issue a new circular soon and request owners of the illegal arch signboards to remove the signboards, said the DCC chief estate officer.



Rampant parking causes traffic congestion in Gulshan roads during rush hour.

