

Endless sufferings of commuters

People from lower income group in city's eastern part, wards 25, 26, 27, 28, deprived of adequate bus services

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

areas," said Moinul Hossain, a resident of Goran.

The few bus services available in these regions connect Sayedabad with Tongi via Rampura, Mouchak rail gate, Khilgaon rail gate and Atish Dipankar Road, leaving a void for the commuters.

Although a bus service named 'My Line' was introduced a few years ago, that covers a few points of the important routes, it is not enough to cater to the needs of ever-increasing number of passengers in the region, said

hours, a large number of commuters end up walking a fair amount of distance just to reach the bus stops.

"Things get uglier during the office hours when everyone rushes toward a few human haulers and scuffle for every inch of space available," said Ahsan Reza, an employee of a private living at Bashabo.

According to local residents, it has been six years since human haulers were introduced in the area. However, although the human haulers have somewhat

area, making their passengers dig deep inside their wallets to cope with the exorbitant fares.

Jahangir Hossain, a salesman from Paltan told this correspondent that he has to pay human haulers Tk 9 for a trip from Bashabo to Press Club, which he claims too high for the distance.

"I don't think they really follow any particular policy for setting the fares," he said.

The situation is worse for women and children.

"Since three-wheelers and taxicabs don't agree to take

now accepted it as a part of their lives," said an official at ward commissioner's office of DCC ward 26.

"We are very much aware of the transportation problem, but it would be virtually impossible to introduce buses or more human haulers as the streets here are too narrow," he added.

According to Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) sources, it is practically impossible to introduce bus services within the inner regions of this part of the city.

"Introducing bus services in the inner areas would be virtually impossible as the streets are too narrow to accommodate buses," said Jahangir Alam, general manager (admin) of BRTC.

Asked if the BRTC has any plans to introduce new routes to the inner parts of the city, Alam said such process is time-consuming and require long courses of planning and forecasting.

"We have to plan and map the routes for the convenience of the majority and also make sure that it would be cost effective. This usually takes time," said Jahangir Alam.

"We have been planning on introducing BRTC buses to cover routes from Motijheel to Abdullapur via Kamalapur, Bashabo and Rampura. If things go according to the plans, we should be able to commence this service within the next few months," he added.

The huge segment of the populace residing in the areas of Khilgaon, Bashabo, Madartek, Sipahibagh, Mugda, Manda, Kadamtala, Nandipara, Goran, Tilpapara, Meradia and in the adjacent areas include service providers, private job holders, students and businesspeople who have to travel to the centre of the city every day

local residents.

"Buses like My Line only run along the main roads. People living further away from the main roads still have to pay an additional Tk 15 to 20 to reach the bus stops," said Ashiqur Rahman, resident of Madartek.

With an apparent dearth in bus services, bulk of these people has to rely on rickshaws and human haulers and scuffle through switching different modes of transportation several times before they actually reach their destinations. During rush

managed to ease the overwhelming demand for public transportation in the area, these have done little to remedy the overall situation.

"Although human haulers have made things somewhat better than what it used to be in the past, they tend to demand fares that are absolutely outrageous considering the routes they are covering," said Ahsan Reza from Bashabo.

Local residents alleged that the human haulers have been doing cutthroat business in the

passengers to short distances, women and children have a hard time boarding the human haulers during rush hours," said Romana Akhter, a student from Madartek.

When asked about the high fares, Shihab, a human hauler driver pointed at high fuel prices and increasing maintenance cost of the vehicles. He however failed to elaborate on the official fare policies prescribed by the authorities concerned.

"Residents of these areas have been suffering from this problem for decades and have

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the city that was

City dwellers believe that Indira Road beside Farm Gate was named after former Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. However, a recently published autobiography of Zobaida Mirza reveals the history of the name. The road was named after Indira, whose tomb was in a large house situated on that road. Indira was the eldest daughter of Dij Das Babu who owned the Manipur Farm.

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SYED ZAKIR HOSSAN

Workers in a roadside shop in Shegunbagicha are busy dismantling parts of expired car batteries. They open the batteries in their shops while different types of toxic liquid, acid and gaseous element spill here and there exposing residents and pedestrians to environmental and health hazards. In a circular in July, 2006 the Department of Environment said that while buying a new car battery the old one should be returned to the company. But many are still selling expired car batteries to these shops violating the law.

DHAKA'S HIDDEN PEARLS-3

Shankhanidhi House: An elegant building losing its glory



Decorative arches and ornamental columns of Shankhanidhi House.

DURDANA GHIAS

The Shankhanidhi House, a building with significant architectural features on Tipu Sultan Road in the city now houses an automobile workshop and lube shops, two families and the office of a workshop owners' association.

A pedestrian will be taken by surprise discovering this elegant two-storey building with quaint features in the midst of a row of modern buildings.

Defying the law, the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) Office has leased out this listed archaeological heritage building, sources said.

According to an inscription, white-washed at present, it was built in 1921 by two merchant brothers Lal Mohan Saha and Gaur Nitai Saha.

The courtyard of the building originally flagged with imported white marble is now under the thick coating of soot and lubricants as the whole yard is now turned into an automobile workshop.

The rare artwork of 'Pancha Nag' in the columns is slowly decaying away while the original cast iron grills of the parapet and banisters of the staircase are gradually being replaced by new grills.

Signboards of electrical and automobile shops now adorn the main entrance while brick walls are erected at places covering parts of the veranda.

There was a time when this house was full of festivity during Durga Puja, Kali Puja and other religious festivals. During the kite festivals the roof of this house was full with children and adults flying colourful kites.

The temple, for which the house was once known as 'Mandir' by the residents, now remains under lock and key.

The street, Tipu Sultan Road, previously Madan Mohan Bashak Lane, once represented the true multi-cultural facet of Dhaka. But now that beautiful past is lost into oblivion.

"When I was a child I visited this house with other children to take Prasad during Puja. We used to fly kites on the roof of this house," said an elderly local resident recalling his childhood.

The ground floor has several shops and the first floor has been partitioned by the occupants according to their convenience.

A large hall in the house flanked by eight apartments has decorated wooden ceiling and tiled walls. The entire floor was flagged with imported white marble

and the facade has bands of floral plaster decoration.

The most conspicuous element of surface embellishment is a series of prominently drawn conch-shell motifs in plasterwork, which evidently seems to be associated with the name Shankhanidhi, said Dr Nazimuddin Ahmed, former director, Department of Archaeology (DA).

There are two octagonal projecting wings at either end with two octagonal fluted domes on top. Highly ornate arches, Corinthian columns, floral fretwork or ornamental woodwork, parapet, trefoil arches or arches with shapes of cloverleaves are other prominent features, he added.

One-third of the house is now being used by Bangladesh Engineering Shilpo Malik Samity, an association of the owners of small engineering workshops. The association has built a modern conference room on the roof marring the original feature of the house.

Abdur Razzak, president of the association, said they pay rents to the government from last year according to a High Court order of 1994.

Two-thirds of the house was leased out to Sujon Sattar, ASM Khaled, and

Kanchan Kumar Dey, according to Deputy Commissioner's (DC) Office, Dhaka. The lessees rented the ground floor to a workshop. The lease was given on February 2, 2000 by the then ADC (Revenue) of Dhaka.

Kanchan said that his Azad Hossain Suman's family inhabit the place.

Md Khalequzzaman, deputy director, DA, said that Shankhanidhi House was listed as a protected site on November 25, 1989 and the district administration should not have leased out any building listed by DA.

"The DC office should have contacted us before issuing the lease," he said.

When contacted, Shamima Yasmin, additional deputy commissioner (revenue), Dhaka, said, "We are not aware of any gazette from the Department of Archaeology so leased out the place lawfully."

"If DA sends us a letter now that the house is listed, then we will cancel the lease," she said. "But the lessees cannot rent out the place."

Asked whether any letter was sent by the DA to the DC office stating that the house was listed, Khalequzzaman admitted a 'communication gap' and said that the letter should have been sent.

"But when we declare any place protected, a gazette is sent to all government offices. So they should have known this," he said.

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