

PAINS IN MITFORD LABOUR WARD - 1

Filthy, suffocating and crowded all the time

DURDANA GHILAS

Filthy, unhygienic and congested atmosphere, scarce water supply, insufficient number of bathrooms, poor ventilation and male visitors crowding the area -- this should be enough to illustrate the state of the Labour Ward at Mitford Hospital.

This correspondent during a visit to the hospital, second largest in the city, witnessed the

difficulties faced by patients as well as doctors and nurses.

Despite all the drawbacks, to many people living alongside the bank of the River Buriganga and on the southwestern edge of the city, Mitford Hospital is the nearest facility they can look up to in the time of medical emergency.

According to the medical staff working at the Labour Ward, among the main problems they face are lack of free space,

unclean atmosphere and frequent outage of water supply.

Anyone entering the antenatal section of the ward would be considerably disgusted to take notice of the thick coat of filth collected on the walls and the ceiling of the room.

This correspondent found over 25 antenatal patients suffocating in the small and windowless congested room that only had a 1 square foot opening for

air ventilation and insufficient lighting.

An intern doctor said, "When the power goes out, we have to work in the dark."

The only bathroom for the antenatal patients remains dirty for most of the time. The nurses working there do not even have any designated bathroom.

"Since there is no bathroom for us in this ward, we have to wander around from one ward to the other when we need to go to the bathroom," said a senior nurse.

There is only one washbasin for the antenatal section while the postnatal section does not have any washbasin for the staff to wash hands after doing dressing. "This is the only basin we have for washing our hands," said a nurse showing the lone basin located in a room adjacent to the delivery room.

"As there is no basin in the postnatal section, sometimes we have to wipe our hands on rags," said a nurse at the postnatal section.

The total of 50 beds allotted equally for both antenatal postnatal sections are hardly adequate.

"Most of the time there are around 80 to 100 patients. We are then compelled to keep some of them on the floor and this is risky for caesarean patients because they run the risk of infection from the dust on the floor. But what can we do?" said the nurse helplessly.

Admitting the problems, Dr Belayet Hossain, deputy director of the hospital, said that they will send a letter to the chief engineer of Medical College Building Division of the Public Works Department (PWD) shortly to solve the problems of all the wards.

Mostafa Kamal, executive engineer of Medical College Building Division of PWD, said the plan to renovate and repair the wards of Mitford Hospital including the labour ward had been passed in December.

"We are going to start the work in the third week of January. Hopefully the work will be over in June this year," he said adding, "We are holding meetings with the representatives of the wards. The problems of the wards are being discussed in the meetings. We are trying to solve the problems according to their complaints."



Mothers with newborns forced to stay on floors for shortage of beds at the postnatal section of the Mitford Hospital's Labour Ward.



MINDLESS EXTENSION: New structures springing up in front of the towering building of Kamalapur Railway Station defacing the magnificent architectural edifice built in 1969.

BASABO-NANDIPARA ROAD

Uneven width and woeful ballad of over one lakh commuters

ERSHAD KAMOL

Inconsistent width of Basabo-Nandipara Road, the main thoroughfare for over one lakh inhabitants of Basabo, Madartek, Nandipara, Dakkhingon and Trimohoni areas, is seriously affecting vehicular movement.

The road is over 40 feet wide upto Basabo playground, but 200 metres away, near Basabo tempo stand, it shrunk to less than 20 feet. Moving 200 metres further down towards Madartek, the stretch of the road from Basabo Cinema Hall to Patwari Building is nearly 40 foot-wide again. Almost 300 metres away, the road again narrowed down to less than 25 feet at Madartek tempo stand.

"I've never seen such an awkwardly-shaped road in Dhaka City," said Mahbubul Hamid, a resident of Madartek.

Human haulers and rickshaws are the two major modes of transportation on this road for the inhabitants of four municipal wards -- 25, 26, 27 and 28 of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) -- as the inconsistent width of the road is not suitable for the movement of public transportation.

Only a few bus services operate on portions of the road -- from Khilgaon Tilpapara Market via Motijheel, Gulistan, a link road from Malibagh rail gate to Sayedabad, to board a bus.

Commuters, especially women and the elderly, suffer immensely as they first have to get to Atish Dipankar Sarani, a link road from Malibagh rail gate to Sayedabad, to board a bus. Nusrat Jahan, another Madartek resident, said, "It is almost impossible for women and elderly people to get on a human hauler. The drivers of CNG three-wheelers and taxicabs refuse to go to short distances and the rickshawpullers even demand almost double the regular fair during rush hours."

"Having no other alternative, most of the time we have to walk for about two kilometres to Atish Dipankar Sarani to get on a bus during office hours," added Nusrat. Abdul Mannan, a senior citizen from Patwari Building, Basabo, said, "A few banks provide bus transportation for their employees on this road, but whenever a bus or truck enters the link road, it causes a gridlock. For this reason, emergency services such as ambulance and emergency water supply trucks of Wasa refuse to come to this area."

People living the area appealed several times to the

DCC to solve their problem by widening the narrow portions of the road, but it fell on deaf ears, said Tanvir Ahmed from Madartek.

However, Kazi Mohammad Borhanuddin, executive engineer of DCC Zone 4, said, "We will not take any such action this year except repairing the road."

Electric poles are also obstructing traffic movement on the narrow segments of the road. "It's such an unplanned road that DCC electric poles, standing 3 to 4 feet inside both sides of the road, turn the road even narrower," said Shahidul Islam, a resident of Banosri, Madartek.

When asked for his comments over the issue, Abul Kalam Azad, executive officer of DCC Zone 4, said the road was developed in an unplanned manner. "We will take immediate action to move the electric poles closer to the edge of the road. We will also include the Basabo-Nandipara Road in the next development project."

The estate officer of DCC, Khalil Ahmed, however expressed his ignorance over the issue of the road's inconsistent width and said, "We will take steps if residents of the area complain to us."

Rejecting the DCC estate officer's claim, Golam Hossain, commissioner of DCC Ward 27, said he had presented the DCC with a petition for widening the road and he even sent petitions to the offices of the Army chief and the chief adviser.

"For several years, I've been trying to have the road widened for the development of trans-

portation. I have the copies of the application that I submitted to the DCC, the Army chief and the chief adviser," he added.

Locals believe traffic congestion in the area will be reduced significantly if the road is widened.

They said a 60-foot-wide road was built recently from

Konapara, Demra to Nandipara. If the Basabo-Madartek link road is also expanded to 60 feet, bus services could be introduced from Demra to Gulistan, bypassing the Jatrabari-Sayedabad intersection. This would help reduce the extra pressure of vehicles at those busy points.



The Basabo-Nandipara Road narrowed down (1) and widened up (2) at different points discouraging introduction of major transport system in the area.

Viability of metro for mass transport still questioned

TAWFIQUE ALI

Government decision to go for underground railway for Dhaka's mass transport system is not based on any feasibility study, said leading transport experts.

A comprehensive feasibility study should have been carried out first to ascertain the types of transport suitable for the city and affordable for the people, they said.

Dr Rahmatullah, policy advisor of Transport Sector Management Reform of the Planning Commission, said feasibility study is required to determine suitable types of transport and make it available at affordable cost. "It all depends on study where to construct underground rail and where elevated rail," he said.

Dr Mahabubul Bari, senior assistant manager, Transport for London, UK, said that mass rapid transit (MRT) system is designed anywhere in the world to suit the needs of the mass people and made affordable for them.

"It will go just futile if left as a mere profit-making enterprise in the hands of private entrepreneurs," said Bari, who has reviewed the STP. "This is why government subsidy in metro system is a general practice all over the world."

"Metro transport system must be integrated properly and designed in harmony with other

modes of transport like pedestrians, bicycles and rickshaws," he said, "Otherwise, it will not serve

the purpose of carrying the mass people."

But the way government has taken the decision for underground railway clearly shows that these factors have not been taken into considerations, he said.

The government on November 4 decided to go for underground railway network on a priority basis to resolve transport need and mitigate traffic congestion in the capital city.

The 12-member committee, formed on October 25, 2007 and headed by the then Communications Adviser MA Matin, decided to implement the project with private entrepreneurs on build-own-operate basis.

The committee prioritised underground railway out of three proposed options underground rail, elevated expressway and monorail. The Board of Investment (BoI) has been asked to solicit private sector investors for the job.

But according to Bangladesh Private Sector Infrastructure Guidelines of 2004, in case of projects involving solicitation, the government "will identify suitable project, carry out feasibility studies, prepare commercial and contractual framework, prepare tender documents and seek tenders from investors..."

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DHAKA METRO

