

Lone high school for hearing impaired in a sorry state

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The lone high school for the hearing-impaired people at city's Bijoy Nagar has been riddled with problems since its inception about 42 years ago.

On entering the premises of Dhaka Bodhir High School, founded in 1966, one will find a run-down school building containing a number of dilapidated classrooms crammed with students.

Due to a lack of education the hearing impaired are lagging behind normal people as well as other types of the disabled.

Hearing-impaired students from all over the country come to this school as this is the only institution from where they can pass the SSC exam.

At present the school has around 250 students including 100 staying at the hostel coming from different parts of the country.

In the last 40 years the only renovation the school saw was construction of three rooms a year ago by the government and a donation by Dutch-Bangla Bank for sports facilities of the students.

The school building is so rickety that plasters have come off the ceiling at many places.

A broken basin with a loose water tap at a corner in front of the building just adds to the ramshackle look of the whole place.

"Sometimes we fear that the roof will cave in," said a teacher. To accommodate as many numbers of students as possible, ten benches are placed inside small classrooms that can hold maximum four benches.

Many of the teachers do not know sign language before they start teaching at this school. "Often we have to learn many intricate gestures from the students," said one of the teachers.

"We have to compromise because we do not find enough teachers interested in teaching the hearing impaired," said Masuda Akhtar, principal of the

school.

The situation will worsen when seven sign-language teachers will go into retirement in the next five years.

"We will be in real trouble then if we fail to find new teachers who

stand. In developed countries slide projectors are used to teach the hearing impaired," said Rehana Begum, a senior teacher of the school, teaching for the last 26 years.

Soundproof classrooms are

universities if there are sign language interpreters.

"Around 20 hearing-impaired people are working as clerks and computer operators at Roads & Highways Department, Public Works Department and BRTC. If



Two hearing impaired students are talking through sign language, left, and a student at his studies at the hostel of Dhaka Bodhir High School.

know sign language," said the principal.

The international standard of the student-teacher ratio for the hearing impaired is 5:1 but the school has only 14 teachers pushing the ratio to 30:1.

There is no course on sign languages in teachers' training institutes. So we are not getting enough trained teachers, said Aminul Islam, a hearing-impaired teacher of the school.

The school does not have a science laboratory. In the absence of visual models it is very hard to teach the students the theories of science and events of history.

"It took me three days to teach the students that the earth moves round the sun. Had there been a model showing the sun and its planets, it would have taken a few minutes to make them under-

essential in the teaching process as it helps prevent outside noise that may interfere with the lessons.

"They can hear loud noises and thuds. So when we teach them different words by touching their vocal cords they have a hard time concentrating on the lesson," said a teacher.

"We have to teach in small and run-down classrooms because we do not have the funds to provide our students with sound-proof rooms," said the principal.

"The students should sit surrounding the teacher in a half circle so that all of them can see my gestures. But here we do not have that much space," said a senior teacher.

A lack of sign language interpreters blocks their opportunities for higher studies. After passing SSC exam they can attend classes at colleges and

they can do jobs then they won't remain as a burden of the society," said Rob Howladar, vice president of the school committee and parent of a hearing-impaired child.

"We see seminars and symposiums are arranged regularly on the visually impaired, physically challenged and autistic children but deafness is almost neglected," he said.

According to sources at the Social Welfare Department, there is no statistics on how many people are hearing impaired in the country.

A study by National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) and Handicap International in July 2005 says 5.6 percent of the total population is living with some kind of disability. Of them, 18.7 percent are hearing impaired



STAR PHOTO

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.

"There is no democracy in the country, we're much behind compared to the scale of world democracy."

-- Akbar Ali Khan

Chairman, Regulatory Reforms Commission
Said at a discussion on press freedom and safety of journalists, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"The state of emergency for a long time itself is a kind of terrorism."

-- Khandaker Delwar Hossain

Pro-Khaleda BNP Secretary General
Said while addressing leaders of the party's Pabna district unit at the Nam Rat residence in the city, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"People often scold us if we ask for extra fare ... tell me what should I do when I have to waste so much time for fuel."

-- Rahim Mia

A taxi driver
Told a reporter while waiting in queue for CNG at Mohakhali for one and a half hours, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"It will be good to have dialogues with those [the army] who have been actually ruling the country instead of the dummies, as neither the chief adviser nor any other adviser can take any decision independently."

-- Hannan Shah

An adviser to the detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia
Said at BBC-Bangladesh-Sanglap in Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"Such an incident must not have been a matter of one day ... And so it is police failure that they could not gather information in time."

-- Noor Mohammad

Inspector General of Police
Told a reporter after a policeman was killed allegedly by an underground left group at Taherpur in Rajshahi, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

Purpose of an underpass undermined

Shop owners at underground Gulistan market capture the passageway to elbow out pedestrians

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The biggest underpass of the country at Bangabandhu Square (Gulistan) in the city has failed to serve its main purpose even after eleven years into its construction as pedestrians still prefer to stay away from it.

The electronic market housed in the underpass has captured most of the space gradually narrowing the passageway meant for the pedestrians.

During a visit to the lone underpass market yesterday, it was found that most of the shop owners heap up merchandise right in front of their shops blocking the walkway.

Poor security, insufficient light, dirty interior and lack of fresh air especially during the power outage have turned it into a total chaos.

The mismanagement forces the pedestrians to cross the busy road risking life instead of using the safe underground passage.

"With all the boxes lying around in front of shops there is little space to walk. Besides, I heard that muggers are quite active here. I would rather cross the road than using the underpass," said Abdul Halim an employee at the stadium market at Gulistan.

Another pedestrian said, "It is now more a market than an underpass. It is simply not pleasant for pedestrians anymore."

"During power outage, which has increased this summer because of frequent load-shedding, the place becomes suffocating and frightening", he added.

Female pedestrians fearing



Shop owners keep cartons and goods blocking the passageway at the Gulistan underpass.

unpleasant incidents often refrain from using the underpass. "I don't use the underpass at all. I went there once a few years ago and I felt extremely insecure", said a female pedestrian.

The Gulistan underpass was constructed in 1997 at a cost of Tk 3.43 crore. It is a four-way tunnel with eight entryways.

The market inside the underpass sells mostly electronic goods including television set, stereo systems, CD player, two-in-one, radio, DVD and VCD

player etc. Most of the shops are wholesalers, which rarely attract enough shoppers. It now has 104 shops in four rows and managed by the shop owners association.

Mohammad Selim a shop owner said, "We have no other option but to keep our goods on the passage because the size of the shops are very small and there is no storeroom at the underpass market"

Most shops in the market are only 100 sqft in size, he added. Meanwhile the underpass

market is facing a lot other problems unresolved since its construction. Storeowners often leave the market for lack of customers and uneasiness due to stuffy atmosphere.

"This summer the load-shedding has become extremely severe. It is not possible to sit inside the tunnel for 10 minutes without electricity. The suffocating atmosphere during power outage is seriously affecting our business", added Selim.

Shop owners complained that the generator often remains

switched off as the DCC officials try to save operating fuel. Besides, the generator lacks capacity to support the entire market.

Shop owners further said that security inside the underpass need to be beefed up. "Snatchers often take away things from the store. Just a few weeks ago they made good with two cartons from my shop," said another storeowner.

Khaleque Khan, President of Bangabandhu Square Underpass Market Shop-owners Association said, "It is not just because of the market that most pedestrians avoid the underpass."

There are several other reasons, he said.

However admitting encroachment on the walkway by shop owners he said, "We have served notice to all the owners asking them to keep the goods inside the yellow line drawn as the boundary of the shop"

"We have employed 10 security guards but they are not enough. They also do not have proper professional training. We need assistance from DCC and police department for better security," he said.

Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka said, "Steps are being taken to make the underpass more pedestrian-friendly. Hallways will be cleared so that pedestrians can move easily"

"However, nothing can be done to cut the number of the shops in the market as they are all legal tenants", he added.

About the generators he said, "No one ever complained about the generator. Actions will be taken if we get formal complaint."



A big television being installed by the Election Commission at Shahbagh to give the voters up-to-date information about preparation for the coming election.

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