

A community hall sans parking lot annoys Gulshan community

TAWFIQUE ALI

The main road of Gulshan Avenue in front of the National Shooting Federation (NSF) and adjacent alleys remain clogged up with vehicles parked illegally by the guests of a community hall run commercially by the NSF.

The NSF community hall does not have a parking facility, forcing the visitors and renters of the hall to park their vehicles on the roads and footpaths, causing traffic bottleneck during both day and night time in the entire area, said the locals.

"This is an anarchy. The streets are blocked causing public suffering but the authorities remain silent," said Arif Hasan, a resident of Gulshan-2. "It is not understandable how the community hall is being run without car parking facility."

The federation rents out the four-storey hall, with 14,200 square feet of commercial floor space, for holding wedding ceremonies, social parties, examinations, get-together and exhibitions at least twice a day. It provides room for 800 guests at a time.

When this correspondent appeared in guise of an organiser of a wedding party, Md Monir Hossain, an office staff of NSF said that hall renters are advised to ask their guests and visitors to park vehicles on the footpaths and the Gulshan main avenue.

"You can park up to 400 vehicles at a time on the footpath, main road and alleys during the party," said Monir.

The NSF authorities have converted the sidewalk in front of the complex in their own way to suit the car-parking purpose creating obstruction to pedestrian passage.

The hall was rented out for O-

Levels examinations throughout the first week of May.

Huge crowds of parents, guardians, examination candidates and their attendants virtually brought the Gulshan Avenue to a standstill with the cars parked there on every exam day.

On a visit to the spot on May 6, the main avenue was found choked-up with illegal car parking all over on the footpath and the thoroughfare at 11:15am.

At around 10:00am the following day, an on-duty police sergeant was found struggling hard to manage the situation and free the avenue for public passage.

Traffic blockage between Gulshan circle-1 and shooting federation makes the public passage almost impassable during peak working hours.

Scuffles over parking space between the visitors and owners

of big commercial establishments along the Gulshan Avenue are a daily phenomenon as these establishments use footpaths and part of the main avenue as their car-parking place.

Lack of car parking provision resulted in police brutality on the country's gold medalist shooter Asif Hossain Khan and others on October 2, 2006 at the NSF gate. On that day, a trade fair of women's garments was going on at the hall.

Police severely beat up Asif, national shooting coach Shoaibuzzaman, and others storming into the NSF complex following an altercation over parking of a car.

The NSF charges Tk 35,000 to 55,000 as rent of the hall room for one half of a day only. Besides, there are 15 percent VAT, and charges for lighting and decorator.

According to the building

construction act and rules, any commercial buildings or auditorium must have parking provision in proportion with the floor area. The question is how the commercial establishment was built without keeping parking provision.

A Rajuk official said Rajuk was aware that NSF was building a commercial hall without parking provision but could not do anything because of undue influence.

Morshedul Alam, deputy commissioner (traffic, north) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), said that enforcement of motor vehicle act and traffic rules has a correlation with ensuring parking provisions at an establishment.

"We have asked Rajuk again and again to make sure that a building keeps parking provision," he said. "How can traffic police alone rectify traffic mess if the agencies concerned do not enforce their relevant laws?"

Alam further said, "We file around 150 cases a day on average against those who park vehicles illegally in Gulshan area."

The visitors of a commercial establishment park their cars on the road if there is no parking facilities in a building, said Alam. "We do not permit anybody to park vehicles on the main avenue in anyway," he said.

Nazimuddin Chowdhury, general secretary of NSF, said they accommodate around 15 to 20 car parking inside the federation complex. "That apart, we ask the visitors to park their vehicles on the adjoining footpaths and surrounding alleys."

Replying to a question how such a huge commercial hall was built without car parking provision, he said it was built long back when he was not an official of NSF.

He further said that they are looking for an interested bidder for an underground parking facility on build-operate-transfer basis.

Following the incident of police brutality on the gold medalist shooter in 2006, the then NSF chairman Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury said that they were thinking of a basement parking facility. But the situation remains unchanged.

Plan for 5000 more CNG-run three-wheelers in limbo

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

The government plan to add 5000 more CNG-run auto rickshaws to the current fleet in the city remains in limbo as the drivers and owners associations still dispute some terms and condition of the registration process.

The communications ministry on November 8 last year approved the plan with a view to bringing down the existing chaos in the CNG autorickshaw sector and reducing sufferings of the commuters in the capital city.

Taking advantage of dillydallying with the issue the CNG-run three-wheelers continue to charge higher than the approved fare.

According to the plan the registration process of the new three-wheelers was supposed to begin within December 2007 and the vehicles were expected to hit the city streets by January this year. The registration however, is yet to begin even 5 months after the decision.

Previously it was decided that only drivers with valid driving licence will be allowed to participate in the allotment, which will be held through lottery to prevent any malpractice.

The new addition was supposed to increase the number of CNG auto rickshaws in the city to around 18,000. Imported in private sector the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) was expected to provide registration for each three-wheeler.

The new lot of auto rickshaws will have yellow colour to make them distinctly different from the previous ones.

Md Golam Faruk, General Secretary, Dhaka District Autorickshaw, Auto-tempo, Mishuk Transport Workers Union said, "Some of the terms are unfair such as interested drivers were asked to submit a Tk. 20,000 pay order with the application. This amount in addition to the price of the auto rickshaw is a lot of money for the poor drivers."

The marked price of a CNG auto rickshaw is now Tk 2,62,500. Uttara Motors is the lone importer of the vehicle.

It was also planned that the winners of the lottery would not be allowed to sell their vehicle or hand over the registration to



someone else before operating it for three years.

The rule was introduced to prevent sell of the three-wheelers at a higher price after winning the lottery. Earlier, autorickshaws were sold at double the original price. Leasing or buying the vehicle in share is also not allowed.

"In case the new owner of the auto falls sick and needs money he should be allowed to sell the vehicle," Faruk added.

"Joint ownership should also be allowed. It will ease the money pressure on poor drivers," he said.

Owners on the other hand term the decision to register vehicles only against driving licence as unjust and a violation of the previous agreement they reached with the ministry and BRTA in 2002.

They are pressing the government to allot some of the new CNG-run three-wheelers to the owners who incurred loss due to the ban on two-stroke three-wheelers in 2001.

ATM Nazmul Hasan, general secretary, Dhaka City CNG Autorickshaw Owners' Association said, "Many owners were deprived of benefits when the government in 2001 phased out 31,500 two-stroke three-wheelers and introduced environment-friendly four-stroke ones."

"The government many times had promised that the deprived owners would be rehabilitated and the fresh lot of CNG autorickshaws would be allotted to those deprived owners, which were never carried out," he added.

BRTA authorities however, brushed aside the demand of the owners. Regarding the stand of the drivers the ministry has asked for the suggestions of BRTA.

Humayun Rashid Khalifa, director (operations) BRTA said, "We are reconsidering some of the terms and conditions of the current plan. BRTA sent its suggestions to the ministry. It now awaiting final approval."



Traffic jam is a common scene in front of the community hall of the National Shooting Federation in Gulshan.

Broad-gauge trains to run from Kamalapur

Tracks almost complete for hassle-free ride to northern, western districts

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Broad-gauge trains will soon be able to start from Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital as dual-gauge tracks are being laid up to the station that will end the hassles of passengers bound for several northern and western districts.

A train ride to Rajshahi, Khulna, Nilphamari, Natore, Joypurhat and several other districts situated at the western side of the river Jamuna has always been a hassle for city dwellers due to different types of

tracks in the east and western region.

The railway network in Dhaka was metre-gauge while most parts of Rajshahi and Khulna regions had broad-gauge rail network, making it impossible to operate broad-gauge trains from Kamalapur station directly to those regions.

For running both types of trains from Dhaka to Rajshahi and Khulna regions, the railway authorities have already converted the line into dual-gauge up to Joydevpur station. The conversion was completed up to Dhaka

Cantonment Station last year.

Passengers travelling to Khulna or Rajshahi now have to go to Joydevpur junction from Kamalapur station in a metre-gauge shuttle train and take the broad-gauge train from there to travel to the western districts.

Similarly, the passengers bound for Nilphamari, Natore and Joypurhat board a broad-gauge train that runs from Dhaka Cantonment station.

Railway sources said conversion of the 32-kilometre rail track from Joydevpur to Kamalapur into dual-gauge is almost com-

plete. Only a few kilometres of tracks are left.

"We are currently working on a stretch of tracks leading to the Kamalapur station. Once it is done, broad-gauge trains can start from Kamalapur," said an official from the engineering department of Bangladesh Railway (BR).

The work is expected to complete by December this year.

Bangladesh Railway is currently operating several broad-gauge trains from Dhaka such as Silk City (Rajshahi), Sundarban Express (Khulna) and Nilsagar

Express (Saidpur, Nilphamari). None of these trains starts from Kamalapur station.

Once the dual-gauge track is completed, these trains will be operated from Kamalapur.

"This will most certainly be big boon to our transportation system," said Rezaul Karim, a businessman who has his family living in Khulna. "Travelling to Khulna has always been a bane of my life. A direct train journey from Kamalapur will end our hassles."

Not unlike Karim, there are countless others who avoid train rides and take up other more 'convenient' means of transport just for the hassles they have to face.

"I tend to use buses. I would avoid trains as they have hold-ups and delays," said Jahangir Alam from Fakirapuri who has to travel to Joypurhat frequently.

"But I must admit that this may improve our transportation system if they can maintain the schedules properly and ensure smooth and direct journey," he said.

Irregularities and delays in train services have always caused serious disruption in supply of good to Dhaka. Direct broad-gauge link to Kamalapur station will make it easier to transport foodgrain and other goods from the western and northern districts to Dhaka.

According to railway sources, plans to replace the metre-gauge line on Dhaka-Tongi-Joydevpur rail route with dual-gauge line had been on the drawing board for a long time. After years of dillydallying, the scheme finally saw the day of light in 2006.

Under the scheme, 32 kilometres of tracks are being replaced with 5.6 feet (broad-gauge) line so that they can accommodate both types of trains.



The dual gauge tracks are only a few kilometres away from the Kamalapur Railway Station.



A rickshaw van puller is carrying used polythene materials collected from waste pickers in Shantinagar for a recycling factory in Lalbagh area. Although banned illegal use of polythene is still going on in most of the city market.