

“Getting a seat on a bus during office hours is nothing less than a dream!” exclaims 25-year-old Sabiha Akhter, who works at a private company, and travels from Mirpur 10 to Farmgate everyday for work. As buses are the cheapest medium of transport in Bangladesh and Dhaka, being the most densely populated city, problems in public transport are inevitable. But, especially when it comes to the issue of women commuters, it is an everyday battle to move from one place to another during rush hours.

“Instead of thinking about getting a seat, I just contemplate whether the conductors would let me get on the bus or not; or sometimes, how I can get onto the bus, pushing the huge crowd of male commuters,” adds Akhter.

According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the number of economically active women is increasing rapidly. The statistics showed that the total number of economically active population is 61.4 million in 2015, where 18.3 million are women. Of them, a large

these women have also raised accordingly. For example, on our traditional buses, basically, nine seats are allotted for women, disabled, and children commuters. But in reality, most of the times, these seats are occupied by the male commuters and if anyone argues about this, they don't pay any heed, and rather use offensive comebacks.

22-year-old banker Asmaul Husna says that she prefers to stand most of the time. Travelling from Azimpur to Motijheel every day, she says, “It is horrible when male passengers sometimes intentionally push me from the back and give a very general excuse-- ‘hard break!’”

During busy and rush hours, the drivers avoid students with uniforms on and the conductors shout saying the words ‘no half pass.’ “When we, female students claim to keep half the fare, they argue with us, but when it's the issue of male students, they don't argue much since boys go to the extent of fighting!” says 24-year-old Fatimatuj Johra, a student of University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB), who travels from Jatrabari to



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# EVERYDAY BATTLE OF WOMEN COMMUTERS

NILIMA JAHAN

PHOTOS: KAZI TAHSIN AGAZ APURBO



number of working women are working in the capital. But, compared to the high-income working women, the low-income women face more troubles in terms of transportation and they have to depend mostly on the public transport system.

Though the mobility of women has increased to a great extent, the woes of

Dhanmondi.

Apart from the buses, many women are bound to depend on more expensive private modes of transportation or spend more time walking to their destinations. But walking is also close to impossible, since these women have to face obstacles such as footpaths encroached with small

shops, broken walk areas, construction works, man holes and worse of all, cat calls and molestation.

A report titled ‘Women and the City’ by AcionAid, an international non-governmental organisation, also reflects the experiences of over 3,000 women and girls living in urban communities in Brazil, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Liberia, Nepal, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Along with multiple challenges shared by the interviewees, the issues of gender-responsive public services get significance in the context of Bangladesh.

However, according to the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC), there are 17 woman friendly bus services which exist both in Dhaka (15) and Chittagong (2) and these are operated with a minimal number of commuters, without any profit. Contrary to that, the women commuters claim that women from first or second stops can enjoy the service, but commuters from the rest of the stops get no benefit from it. Many of them don't even know that BRTC has such services for them!

“If the demand is huge during office hours, we will try to introduce more women buses”, assured Md Mizanur

Rahman, the chairman of BRTC.

On the other hand, the transport experts believe that introducing more women-only buses by BRTC cannot be the solution of such problems. “If everything goes in a systematic, structural and organised way just like the developed countries, all problems regarding transports can be eliminated”, says Prof Md Shamsul Haque, transportation consultant and road safety expert, who also teaches civil engineering at BUET.

“For example, if only five corporate companies are appointed for the whole transportation sector, with five distinct colours and all the staff members are paid a salary, the problems would decrease,” he adds. “If we can do this, the staff members need not depend on the number of passengers they take and they will never show negative attitude towards the so called ‘slow female passengers!’”

The female commuters are still hopeful for a better transport system. As always, they are expecting the government to understand their plight, and eventually, introduce an organised transport system, so that they can travel without any kind of trouble. ■



# DONALD DUCK: THE DUCK IN CHARGE OF THE FREE CARTOON WORLD

Amidst an overwhelming outpour of support for former First Lady and the Loser, Shillary Clinton, the failed democrat nominee is now gearing up once again for the third biggest fight of her life, after the latest election debacle and what went down between her and Bill you know when. On the 1st of December, Shillary will kick-start her second campaign, with her running for the post of President of Disney World. While her



stellar experience and background may once again seem appealing to the voters of Disney World, she's running against Donald Duck, whose jingoistic rhetoric (what?) has won him many supporters as detractors. While Shillary promises to unite Disney World once again, Donald Duck has pledged to bring back the jobs that the voters of Disney have lost to Universal Studios.

Shillary's campaign banks not only her experience and gender but also hasn't shied away from flinging whatever they can at Donald and seeing what sticks.

Donald Duck, to his credit, has been unfazed. “She's a loser. Maybe I'm just a duck, but I'm still human,” Donald Duck told a packed rally at the Magic Kingdom. “We are the largest single-site employer in the entire country and we plan to go bigger. I'm flying high, up in the sky, watching the world go by,” Donald Duck explained, putting together random words to generate a buzz among an educated, yet crass group of people who have been hiding in the middle of the park. When Shillary was asked how she planned on countering Donald Duck's growing

influence, she once again resorted to cheap attacks. “As a woman, it offends me that Donald Duck doesn't even wear pants. All women who want to see Donald Duck wearing pants should vote for me. What do I plan to do differently? I plan on wearing pants,” Shillary said.

“Shillary is an idiot. She plans to bring people from different worlds to our world and we cannot allow that. Look around you; isn't Alladin white? Aren't most of our princesses white? All Shillary will do is once again steal our jobs and give them to non-white people,” The Duck said during a debate to a riled up crowd all singing the famous lines of “White Man's Burden” penned by mega white imperialist Rudyard Kipling. “Disney should not be a place where we promote racism. Of course, lead actors can't be cast as anything other than white, because let's face it, we have made sure the Blacks and Latinos don't have enough money to come here and the tourists who do want to see white people. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't have diversity. As a woman, I promote diversity and wearing pants,” Shillary commented.

The BBG and CNNN, two of the top media houses to cover these elections, have both put Shillary on the forefront of the race, although they are obviously both lying as per the usual. A lot of criticism from Shillary has focused on Donald Duck's Job Creation Programme (JCB) by which he promises to boost employment by even more, promising four dollars an hour to all employees, much below the minimum wage. “Donald will create jobs, but at what cost? Four dollars isn't enough and as a WOMAN, I know that.” When told, Donald had a reply ready. “Four dollars is very little money when you got 'em; but a heck of a lot of money when you ain't got 'em,” he said, his response once again met with deafening roars.

For Shillary though, the greatest obstacle is yet to be surpassed. The Great Mouse Detective has opened investigation into immense corruption by Shillary who may have sold Disney's new resort plans to Universal studios. “They are only emails. I'd rather have a President who secretly sells state secrets than one who will deport me,” Alladin, who many claim is a Muslim, said. ■

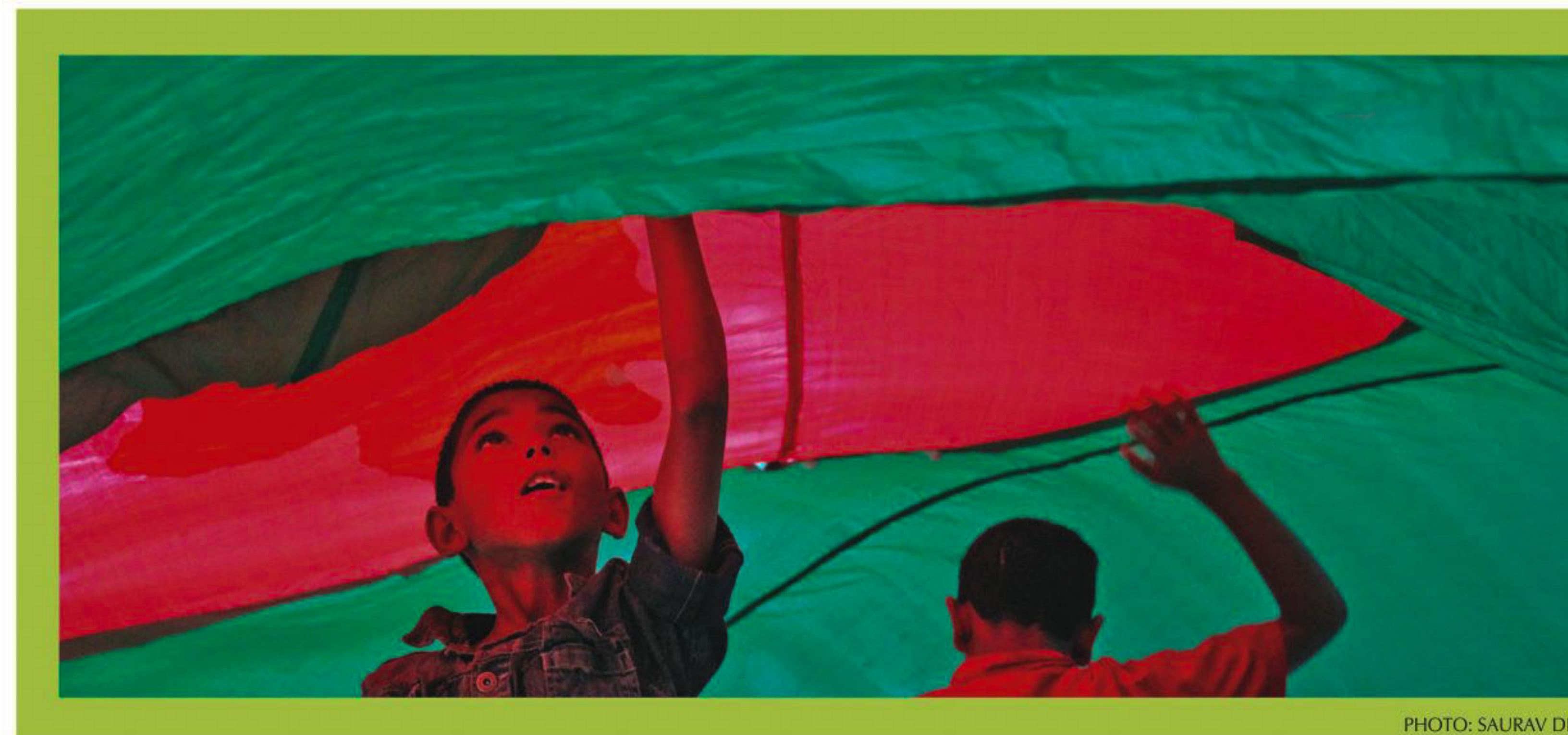


PHOTO: SAURAV DEY

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# 13

The minimum age of freedom fighter that has been fixed by the government for being recognised as a freedom fighter on the basis of recommendations of the Jatiya Muktijoddha Council to prepare an acceptable list of the freedom fighters. According to the gazette people who were 13 on March 26 in 1971 would be deemed eligible to apply for the status.