



FURNITURE LANE

Furnishing the dreams of Dhaka's non-resident students

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Rushing from one university to another, filling out endless forms, searching for a hostel or a shared mess, and trying to keep up with a city that never hits pause – all while preparing for the entrance exams that could shape their future. This is the reality of every admission-seeking student who comes to Dhaka, carrying dreams far bigger than their suitcases.

The first big challenge? Finding a place to stay and setting it up – all within a tight budget. They somehow make it work, squeezing into whatever space they can find. And unlike the long-time residents of Dhaka, furniture isn't about prestige or social status for these students – it's purely functional. A bed, a table, a chair – each piece is chosen not for appearance, but for survival. Today, let's move the spotlight on a furniture lane that serves these students with its functionality.

If you've ever taken a rickshaw ride from Science Lab to New Market or simply walked past the Teacher's Training College, you probably have seen it already. Just outside the college boundary, along the footpath, there lie stacks of furniture, mostly single beds (choki), chairs, study tables, benches, and stools. Straightforward in design, crafted from locally sourced wood, and often lacking the polish of showroom pieces – these cheap and barely

furnished pieces have become a lifeline for students and newcomers who are trying to set up a home away from home in this big city. As someone who has been a regular user of this rickshaw lane since my college days, I couldn't help stopping by to chat with one of the familiar faces here.

Muhammad Iman Ali, for over 30 years, has been selling furniture here that he brings from Zurain or Jatrabari. "We are here for the students, and only for them," he says with a quiet sense of pride and resilience, while arranging a bunch of newly arrived chairs from Jatrabari.



The students who live in dormitories, hostels, and shared messes come to him for essentials. "Our profit is almost nothing in one word," he admits, "but we stay because we know they need us." Iman Ali gestured toward the line of other shops along the pavement. "There



PHOTO: JANNATUL BUSHRA

are at least ten more sellers here, and there were more. We have been doing this for years, supporting one another, just as we support the students."

Their prices reflect their words. A bed (choki) costs only Tk 700 here – a table Tk 800, and a chair Tk 500. So, within Tk 2,000, a student can get the essentials to start his life in Dhaka from here. "Our choki (bed) might wobble slightly, and the study table might bear the marks of hurried furnishing, but in cramped dormitories and shared rooms, these items become anchors of stability for students," Ali added with a smile.

Farhana, a former BUET student, recalls, "When I first came to Dhaka, I had nothing but a bag full of books and

eyes full of dreams." Her voice carries a mix of nostalgia and pride as she reflects on her journey. "The bed and table I bought from here were my first possessions in the city. They weren't fancy, but they kept me motivated enough to secure my position in the engineering exams. Every time I sat at that table to study, I reminded myself why I came here!"

Well, Dhaka, indeed, demands relentless patience and resilience to survive. It's a battleground for students arriving from far-off villages and districts with its unrelenting pace and soaring living costs. For generations of young people moving here to pursue education, this furniture has been a saviour.

8 mega projects cost \$7.5b more for graft, delay

FROM PAGE 1

a top-down approach, with political and external influences playing a major role.

"The project idea is conceived and dictated by the Minister, influential politicians, ministries, secretaries and donors. The project is presented to the Prime Minister for approval and to obtain her concurrence," the report said.

It is then handed over to the relevant allied ministry for undertaking target-oriented feasibility studies and preparing the development project proposal with instructions for quick implementation as it is a project committed by the prime minister.

So, the projects are mostly not aligned with the department's master plan implementation sequence and priorities while the relevant authorities have minimal input in the process.

"Feasibility studies are often undertaken merely as a formality to comply. There is a tendency to inflate project benefits and underestimate costs, especially with so-called 'crazy mega projects' committed by the Prime Minister," the report said.

Land acquisition is often initiated only during the project implementation phase, causing significant delays. The delays raise costs.

The valuation of land, identification of affected individuals and assessment of losses is a lengthy process frequently marred by corruption.

The land is often diverted to non-project activities such as constructing luxury bungalows, seven-star hotels, large-scale cantonments or facilities like ports and shipyards, which may not align with the project's objectives or intended purpose.

Conflicts with ongoing or proposed projects during project implementation lead to coordination challenges, resulting in additional time and increased costs.

For instance, the MRT-6 conflicts with Dhaka Elevated Expressway and the expressway also conflicts with RAJUK's Kuril Flyover.

Feasibility study, securing funding or negotiating loans, obtaining project approval, tender process and other steps often take 1-3 years, delaying the project considerably.

Infrastructural project funding mechanisms frequently come with stringent and unfavourable conditions, while the sluggish disbursement of the funds leads to delays in project execution.

Foreign government-funded projects are heavily criticised for high

construction costs, primarily due to the reliance on direct procurement methods or non-competitive bidding practices.

According to the report, India's lines of credit are presented to support Bangladesh's development across various sectors. However, these loans come with stringent conditions that raise concerns about sovereignty and long-term economic sustainability.

A key stipulation is that 75 percent of project content, including goods and services, must be sourced from India. This stipulation limits Bangladesh's flexibility in procurement and often results in inflated costs and compromised quality.

Despite the completion of the mega projects, it appears that these successes have come at a hefty cost in terms of both time and resources, leading to significant resource leakage, the report said.

Transport infrastructure development projects are frequently criticised for excessively high unit costs along with recurring time and cost overruns.

Quoting the World Bank's report, the committee said road construction in Bangladesh is among the most expensive, with costs ranging from \$2.5 million to \$11.9 million for constructing per kilometre of four-lane or larger roads.

The high construction costs along with other factors such as high levels of corruption, delayed project completion and a lack of competition in the bidding process lead to less-than-desirable utilisation of public resources.

The main cause of the deteriorating transport system and the costly, disjointed infrastructure development is that Bangladesh's transport infrastructure is developed through separate entities.

The ministries of road transport and bridges; local government, rural development and co-operatives; railway; shipping; and civil aviation and tourism are all involved in developing transport infrastructure.

"This division results in uncoordinated development, leading to conflicts, inefficiencies, higher costs and longer travel times."

Subsequently, the task force suggested that all four modes of transport should be under a single ministry, which could be the transport ministry.

Transport-related projects were taken without integration among line ministries and multimodal

transport master plans, so there was an overemphasis on road development and less focus on rail and inland water transport modes.

The task force also said the Planning Commission faces several inherent shortcomings: lack of expertise and strategic planning, and absence of a national project dashboard.

On the other hand, around 1,200 projects were submitted to the commission in 2024, making it difficult to verify feasibility studies, ensure alignment with national strategies and establish clear priorities.

The task force – citing China, Vietnam and Japan as examples – said the Planning Commission should have the authority to appraise, approve, coordinate and oversee all public projects.

The report also had a short assessment of four mega projects.

Despite its high cost, the Dhaka-Mawa Expressway has issues such as long queues, traffic congestion at entry points and a lack of ring roads around Dhaka city.

Instead of developing a multimodal transport system, the expressway has posed a significant threat to sustainable water transport modes.

Limited freight movement has hindered the Padma Bridge rail link project's full potential, delaying anticipated trade benefits, travel time savings and economic impacts.

Dohazari-Cox's Bazar Rail Line's operational performance has been significantly below expectations. Only two pairs of trains operate daily instead of the planned 22-passenger and six freight train pairs.

Additionally, passenger traffic and revenue projections remain unmet, undermining the project's long-term financial sustainability and limiting its intended benefits.

The costly Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel has seen its traffic fall significantly short of target, resulting in daily operating losses of more than Tk 26.50 lakh.

The tunnel's underutilisation is linked to the lack of planned industrial development in southern regions and poor integration with the existing road network.

As a result, none of the expected traffic flow, economic growth and financial returns on investment has materialised, leaving the tunnel's full potential unrealised, it added.

First phase of Biswa Ijtema begins

FROM PAGE 1

while those from other 22 districts will offer concluding prayers on February 5. The followers of Saad will have their concluding prayers on February 16.

After Fajr prayers yesterday, Pakistan's Maulana Ziaul Haque delivered sermons, translated by Maulana Nurul Rahman. Around 10:00am, "Talin" (religious education) sessions were held in different areas, while Maulana Zubair conducted the Juma prayers.

Meanwhile, two devotees died on the first day of the congregation due to age-related complications.

The deceased were Chabet Ali, 70, of Sherpur, and Abdul Quddus Gazi, 60, of Khulna's Dumuria upazila. Their funeral prayers were held at the Ijtema ground after Juma prayers, said Habibullah.

Another devotee, Mintu, 60, sustained burn injuries while cooking. Security has been heightened in and around the venue.

Habib Iskandar, officer-in-charge of Tongi West Police Station, said police and Rab control rooms, watchtowers, and CCTV cameras have been installed for monitoring the venue. Plainclothes law enforcement personnel have also

been deployed, while around 10,000 volunteers are assisting with security. Special security zones have also been set up for foreigners, he said.

Besides, free medical services are being provided at the Uttara Motors ground by Gazipur City Corporation, the health directorate, Rab, Hamdard Laboratories, Islamic Mission, Islamic Foundation, Homeopathic Welfare Foundation, Uttara Modern Medical College Hospital, Square Pharmaceuticals, Red Crescent Society, and around 20 other organisations.

[Our Gazipur correspondent contributed to this report.]

Jubo Dal man dies in custody

FROM PAGE 1

rescued him and took him to Cumilla Medical College Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead."

The inquest report says, there are dark, swollen marks that appear to be from blunt traumas on his belly, lower abdomen, the rear side of his thighs, both arms, and the big toe of his left foot.

The joint forces, which has members of the armed forces, border guards, coast guards, police, Rab, and Ansar, were yet to issue a statement about the matter as of 10:00pm.

Touhidul worked at a shipping company in Chattogram. He returned home on January 26 after his father's death. The family was supposed to

hold a qulkhwani yesterday.

But his wife, four daughters and the rest of the family had to pick up his body from the hospital instead, Azad told this correspondent.

"We were preparing for the qulkhani late at night when four men came. They said they were from the joint forces. As soon as they entered, they detained Touhidul and took away our phones. They searched the house but found nothing. They left along with my brother in a pickup. They didn't tell us why they were detaining him."

"In the afternoon, the police called us and told us to go to Cumilla Medical College Hospital. We went there and found his lifeless body. He

was tortured to death."

Hospital Director Masud Parvez said there were injury marks on Touhidul's body.

Azad said Touhidul was not accused in any case.

In a Facebook post recently, a neighbour alleged that he had a dispute over property with Touhidul. "Maybe that has something to do with it," he said.

Touhidul's wife Yasmin Nahar was seen breaking down in tears and losing consciousness at her home.

"My four daughters are still young. How will they survive? He committed no crime. Why did they kill him like this? I demand justice," she told Prothom Alo.

The first Shaheed Minar

FROM PAGE 1

The air crackled with sombre energy, a heavy cloak of grief draped over the city.

Amidst the despair, a flicker of defiance emerged.

As night fell, a group of students gathered on Rajshahi College grounds next to the New Hostel. Their hearts heavy, but their spirits unbroken.

Illuminating the dark with lanterns and torches, everyone joined hands in shaping bricks and clay into a memorial dedicated to the fallen heroes.

As the first Shaheed Minar rose from the ground, the monument was embellished by verses from Tagore's "Suprabhat," an ode to the courage and sacrifice of those who dared to dream:

"Whose words do I hear on the way to dawn,

There is no fear, he has no fear.

He who gives his life to the uttermost,

There is no decay, he has no decay."

Earlier in the day, young men in Dhaka had sacrificed their lives to have Bangla, their mother tongue, recognised as an official language.

Despite the authority's imposition of Section 144 (a ban on public gatherings), students took out a march from Dhaka University to protest the government's decision to declare Urdu as the only official state language of East Pakistan, ignoring Bangla despite it being the lingua franca.

When the students attempted to march towards the Secretariat building, police opened fire, killing several students, including Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Shafiq, and Jabbar.

CITY OF RESISTANCE

Students in Rajshahi first joined the fight to recognise their mother language in February 1948, when Dhirendranath Dutta put forth a proposal to make Bangla an official state language in the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan and it was rejected.

Rajshahi College and Bhuban Mohan Park became the epicentres of these early movements.

According to the book, "Rajshahi te Bhasha Andolon" by Dr Tasikul Islam Raja, a hartal in response to the call for a nationwide strike by the central unit of Rashtrabhasha Sangram Parishad, paralysed the city on March 11, 1948.

A protest rally, held at Bhuban Mohan Park, reverberated with the iconic slogan, "Rashtrabhasha Bangla Chai!" (We want Bangla as a state language!)

However, the peaceful demonstration was met with brutal force as police opened fire on a student procession marching towards



PHOTO: AZAHAR UDDIN

The first Shaheed Minar built by students out of clay and bricks at Rajshahi College grounds next to the New Hostel on the night of February 21, 1952.

the Barendra Museum, injuring many.

The 1948 movement saw the emergence of student leaders like Mohammad Sultan and Ekramul Haq, who, inspired by the guidance of esteemed professors like Abdul Hai, Dr Muhammad Enamul Haque, and Golam Maksud Hilali, spearheaded the resistance, writes Dr Tasikul in his book.

As the zeal of the Language Movement intensified in 1952, Rajshahi once again emerged as a city of resistance.

As per Ahmed Rafiq's book "Bhasha Andolon: Teknaf to Tetulia", in February 1952, following the

Fuel prices hiked by Tk 1 per litre

UNB, Dhaka

The government has increased the prices of all four types of petroleum fuel by Tk 1 per litre, effective tomorrow [February 1], according to a gazette notification from the Energy and Mineral Resources Division.

Under the new pricing, diesel and kerosene will now cost Tk 105 per litre, up from Tk 104. The price of octane has been set at Tk 126 per litre, up from Tk 125, while petrol will now cost Tk 122 per litre, up from Tk 121.

The price adjustment was made under the automated pricing formula, aligning local fuel prices with global market trends to ensure an uninterrupted supply of petroleum products at an economically viable rate, the Energy and Mineral Resources Division said.

Meanwhile, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) has recently said the government could reduce fuel prices by Tk 10-15 per litre by using a market-based pricing model.

Fuel prices have been reduced under the automatic pricing formula. But the government is still fixing fuel prices, which do not reflect the international market, said CPD officials at a briefing at its office on January 29 to present its assessment of the state of Bangladesh's economy for the 2024-25 fiscal year.

At the International Monetary Fund's request, the government introduced the automated fuel pricing mechanism in March 2024 to reflect international market prices monthly.

Farmer beaten to death over land dispute

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

A 70-year-old farmer was beaten to death following a clash over a land dispute in Jamalpur's Bakshiganj upazila yesterday.

The incident took place around 9:00am in Uttar Sarmara village under Bagarchar union.

The deceased was identified as Abdul Latif Dulu, a resident of the same village.

Shaker Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Bakshiganj Police Station, said Latif had a longstanding dispute with his neighbour, Sulaiman Hossain, over a piece of khas (government) land.

When Latif went to cultivate the land in the morning, Sulaiman and his associates attacked him with bamboo sticks and beat him to death.

Police detained Sulaiman in connection with the incident, the OC added.

The victim's body was sent to Jamalpur Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

An investigation is underway, and legal action will be taken once a case is filed, the police officer said.