



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 Zuraia or Jatrabari. "We are here for the students, and only for them," he says with 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

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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

First phase of Biswa Ijtema begins

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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 Nurur Rahman. Around 10:00am, "Talim" (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.

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

mechanisms.

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.]

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

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