

CU fine arts students in hellish dorm

MD ABBAS, CU

Residential students of the Fine Arts Institute of Chittagong University (CU) are struggling with daily lives in a derelict hostel that can collapse anytime and has no supply of clean drinking water.

Chittagong Government Arts College and the Department of Fine Arts of CU were merged into the Fine Arts Institute on August 2, 2010.

Since then, a few students have been "lucky" or "unlucky" to have got to live in Artist Rashid Chowdhury Hostel, the only accommodation facility for the fine arts students, which was declared abandoned in 1980 by the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

The one-storey building has seven rooms which at most can accommodate 21 students but at present 36 of the 400 students are living there in appalling conditions.

The walls and ceiling have developed large cracks, and they keep leaking and flaking, complained students, drawing this correspondent's attention to the ramshackle windows.

"We are staying here risking our lives. Concrete chunks fell several times, and we luckily averted the mishaps," said Animesh Mazumder, a third-year student.

"The situation gets worse in rainy season. A few days ago, our rooms were flooded with

rain water. Moreover, all the three toilets overflowed making our lives even more miserable," added another, Md Abdul Wahab.

Besides, there is no dining facility in the hostel, so students have to pay around Tk 40 per meal while in government-subsidised hostels each meal costs about Tk 18.

Unavailability of clean drinking water is another serious problem. There is a water tank near the hostel but the water is full of iron, making it almost red in colour and moles are also found in the tank, the students complained. "So we also have to buy water for drinking," said one.

"Still we are living here as renting rooms in the city area is not affordable for us. In the face of our demonstrations, the authorities earlier gave assurance that they would soon build a hostel but nothing happened," said Abid bin Rafiq, a fourth-year student.

When asked, Nasima Akter, director of the institute, said, "The housing and public works ministry owns the land, therefore we can't renovate it. But we already have informed the higher authorities about the students' sufferings and hope for a quick remedy."

CU Vice Chancellor Prof Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury said he would talk to the director and take immediate steps in this regard.

The institute is located on Badsha Miah Road in the port city, about 22km off the CU campus.