



Star city

e-mail: starcity@thedailystar.net

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the city that was

In 1905, Dhaka became the capital of East Bengal and Assam. In order to build the government offices and courts, the government leased out permanently the southern side of the Company Garden and Dilkusha Garden of the Nawab.

Crime hangout at the heart

With darkness creeping up on Motijheel, streetwalkers stalk the area; criminals and drug addicts perk up for a shady night; and office rooms become links of gamblers and boozers. The anti-social activities have given way to informal business in the area.

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Sub-inspector Mokarram of the Motijheel Police Station was going about his job of doing usual morning patrol on April 23 when the officer-in-charge got him on the walkie-talkie.

He was told to check what was happening on the 18th floor of a 24-storey under-construction building in Motijheel.

Mokarram and his men took the workmen's lift to the 18th floor. They were aghast to see two bodies lie beside each other in a pool of blood. The two men were beaten savagely with a bamboo stick, which lay nearby. The assailants had left both the men to bleed to death.

"None of the labourers could give us any clue as to when and how those people had climbed up the stairs," said Mokarram, adding that the police had arrested a union leader of the Rupali Bank, where the victims were working.

A double murder in Motijheel may seem like an isolated incident but everyday as soon as the office hours are over and people rush back home, the commercial district of the city

plunges into criminal and anti-social activities.

Syed Jahangir, an executive at a private organisation in Motijheel, said the people who take over the Motijheel commercial area after office hours are mostly CBA leaders, office guards, bachelor workers and gangsters from Gopibagh and Kamalapur areas. Police are aware of everything that goes on in the area but instead of clamping down, they keep their eyes closed to the frenzy of hushed activities until something goes wrong.

As darkness sets in, the first thing a visitor fails to overlook in Motijheel is the presence of kerb-crawlers. Many offices in the area, where guards and staff have small quarters to live, become work places for the prostitutes. The anti-social activities generate informal business, which gangs of youths capitalise on quickly.

According to sources who have been in Motijheel for work for over thirty years, there are office premises in the area which get converted into 'bars' and 'mini casinos' where customers keep coming and leaving throughout the night.

A night guard at a reputed office said that there are prostitutes offering

services to both the rich and poor. He said that inside some offices there are decent accommodations, which are used for prostitution.

"There are hang-outs for businessmen, top criminals, petty thieves, and all sorts of drug addicts," said a businessman who has an office in Motijheel.

Sub-inspector Mokarram said he was yet to get "acclimatised" with the city areas since he had just been posted to the station from Rajshahi.

After darkness the narrow lanes and roads become ghostly where strangers do not dare to venture. Drug peddlers are mostly active in such places to sell anything from Phensidyl to heroine, ganja and even imported drugs such as the amphetamine based "yaba".

"One just has to know the right people who are offering the services and the crowd is growing every day," a cigarette vendor said.

There are roads without streetlights and gangs of muggers operate in these areas of Motijheel. "This area also accommodates hundreds of unemployed youths, who do not have a place to live in," he added.



After office hours, people head back home and traffic wears thin, but a new set of people crowd the sprawling Motijheel area.

Awake for water

Hundreds of residents of an Old Dhaka area spend sleepless nights for weeks on end to collect water

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Neither a festivity nor any religious ritual keeps them awake and on their toes all night. Most of the residents of Maneshwar at Hazaribagh stay sleepless at night for one simple thing -- water.

Water compels Maneshwar, especially its womenfolk, to change their daily lifestyle.

"We don't go to bed, we wait for water supplied at night, usually after midnight," said Hamida Begum, a housewife. "We do some of our household chores at that time," she added.

"Only those who are fortunate not to fall asleep can get the water," Hamida noted. She said most of the time the water supplied at night goes wasted.



Residents in the area frequently suffer acute scarcity of water. Supply of water during daytime is never sufficient for the

huge number of inhabitants in the area. "Daytime water supply by WASA begins around 12 in the noon and continues till quarter

to one, that is for 45 minutes only," grumbled Marium, a maidservant staying with a big family in the area. "It is impossible for anyone to complete the household jobs," she added.

Summer is the season that increases the plight of the inhabitants since water becomes more unavailable. "The whole area turns into a 'Karbala' and we long for a drop of water," said Rokhsana Akter.

She said she has fixed a tube-well with the reservoir where they try to save the small quantity of water. "We go on pumping the tube-well throughout night causing disturbance to our neighbour," she added.

Even 10 years back there were a few water taps in the streets which eased the water crisis in the area to some extent, said most of the people. "Some taps

were blocked by WASA since water was being wasted as it flew down continuously," mentioned Md. Abdur Rahim.

"Nowadays getting water from the houses of our relatives staying in different areas is a part of our life," said Hamida Begum. "We can be termed as water beggars these days," she grumbled.

"The fact that most of the houses in the area do not have any reservoir and motor pump to store water intensified the problem," said Shukur Salek, president of Dhakabashi, an organisation working for the people of old Dhaka.

"Moreover, few apartment houses that have been built in the area store almost all the water using jet pump," he added.

A healer across time

Aloe Vera or ghririkumari works miracles on curing diseases and disorders

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

You may not have to carry herbal extracts to battlefields to treat wounded soldiers these days, as Alexander the Great did in ancient times. But herbal medicine still works wonders on patients.

Aloe Vera with at least 140 substances is a time-tested disease fighter among many herbal plants handed down to humans by nature.

Mohammad Hanif came to the Karwan Bazar last Thursday to buy Aloe Vera leaves for his son suffering from headache. Nothing was detected despite several tests, nor could physicians cure his illness.

The 12-year-old Kanchan is unable to carry on with school because of severe headache. "A faqir (medicine man) advised me to apply ghririkumari juice," says Hanif. Amir Hossain of Karwan Bazar sells ghririkumari leaves, internationally known as Aloe Vera, to many city dwellers like Hanif.

Aloe Vera extract is made by pulverising the whole leaves of the plant. Aloe juice is made from the inner leaf. For bitter taste and sticky character, Aloe Vera juice is served by mixing with sweet syrup and other ingredients.

"The demand of Aloe Vera juice increases in summer. I opened my shop twice a day -- in the early morning and in the afternoon. I earned Tk 1,000 to 1,500 a day last summer," says Amir Hossain.

Many heard of Aloe Vera because of its popularity as cosmetic ingredient. But a few can identify it with ghririkumari sold by the roadside. "I didn't know that juice is



Aloe Vera," says Shamim Ahsan of Tikatuli.

Aloe, native to Africa, is also known as "lily of the desert", the "plant of immortality", and the "medicine plant". The name was derived from the Arabic 'aloe' meaning "bitter" because of the bitter liquid found in the leaves. In 1500 BC, Egyptians recorded use of the herbal plant in treating burns, infections and parasites. Alexander carried the Aloe Vera plant to battlefields to cure wounds of soldiers.

Extensive research since the 1930s has shown that the clear gel has a dramatic ability to heal wounds, ulcers and burns by putting a protective coating on the affected areas and speeding up the healing rate.

As a food supplement, Aloe is said to facilitate digestion, aid in blood and lymphatic circulation, as well as kidney, liver and gall bladder functions.

The United States Food and Drug Administration approves Aloe for human testing against the human immune-deficiency virus (HIV), the virus causing AIDS.

According to a report, Aloe controls cell growth and division, reduces inflammation, stimulates the growth of white cells and other immune-function cells and works as wound healer and infection fighter.

Most major brands of cosmetics and toiletries contain less than two per cent Aloe. Experts

agree that a concentration of 25 to 40 per cent is necessary for a cosmetic product to have any benefits.

Lay persons and physicians alike have proclaimed that Aloe has the ability to heal, alleviate, eliminate, or even cure a monumental list of human diseases and disorders.

Many prefer not to drink way-side ghririkumari juice, as vendors sell it in unhygienic condition.

Ghririkumari is cultivated in Nature in the northern part of Bangladesh. C

Roadmap for no rickshaw

Commuters run short of transport choices

SULTANA RAHMAN

The road between Russel Square and Azimpur will be off-limits to rickshaws from December, say officials of the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP).

But the DUTP officials don't know for sure how thousands of rickshaw users will commute then. However, an official says an additional 20 buses will be introduced to the Mirpur-Azimpur route to "reduce suffering" of ordinary people. Private investors will also be encouraged to launch transport services, he added.

The urban transport plan has completed only six per cent of construction between Russel Square and Azimpur, which started on March 20 this year as the second phase of the "demonstration project corridor".

About Tk 13 crore out of Tk 25 crore was allocated for the second phase. The work includes road carpeting, footpath improvement, railing, street lighting and

road dividers.

In the first phase of the pilot project, the stretch between the Mirpur Technical College to Russel Square was made off-limits to rickshaws. The second phase over, 11.5 kilometres of the important thoroughfare will be rickshaw-free.

The entire stretch will be adorned with overhead footbridges, better street lights, road and lane markings and proper railing along the sidewalks.

Mega cities like Dhaka should have only cars and better public transports, says Engineer ATM Helaluddin Nagari, advisor of the Dhaka Transport Coordination Board.

The under-construction road will have only two rickshaw crossings in the east-west corner of Dhanmondi Road-6 and Nikhet-New Market corner.

The plan is purely oriented for facilitating the rich people with cars, say sources. Parents of school-going children will face an enormous problem commuting to Dhanmondi home to city's most schools.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN