



# Star City

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the city that was

The exhibition of agricultural and indigenous industrial products was held on the occasion of Noboborsho at Shahbagh every year from 1875. Dancers and singers entertained the audience at the expense of the Nawab. There had also been arrangements for Jatra, Putul Nach, Magic and bioscope.

## GLOWING GOLD



Summer not only brings hot weather but adds colour to nature, coating her in a mass of flowers. A sonajhuri tree in full bloom in front of the Sangsad Bhaban speaks of the season's pulse.

# Billboard blight on steady crawl

SOHEL ISLAM

Stepping out of home means exposure to ever-mushrooming illegal billboards installed on sidewalks and rooftops. Over the last few years, splendour of Dhaka has diminished largely due to a steady crawl of outdoor advertisement.

Advertisers care little to comply with guidelines of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) on outdoor advertisement. Although an instruction says no billboard or overhead advertisement is allowed in front of hospitals, government offices, educational institutions, mosques, temples, churches, museums and historic places, advertisers seem to prefer the restricted areas.

The companies are promoting their products on larger-than-approved structures, forcing the cityscape to go to ruin.

Bangla Motor, Shahbagh, Farmgate, Gulshan, Karwan Bazar, Mirpur Road, Kuril Biswa Road, Mohakhali and other major crossings and streets are epicentres of bursting billboards.

"The skyline of Dhaka is plagued with high-rises. The commanding height of billboards here and there adds to vision pollution," says Mahmud, a Dhaka University student. "Vision pollution is as bad as noise, air and water pollution -- all taking away the pride of urban life."

At least 33 overhead mega-signs have been set up, defying DCC

rules. The height of a mega sign should not be more than an overhead footbridge and there should be a space of at least two kilometres between two overhead mega-signs. The structures must not be built on major roads, according to DCC rules.

The DCC revenue department says it does not allow more than 20 billboards within two kilometres on either side of a road. But the stretch between the Sonargaon Hotel and the Banglamotor Crossing has at least 40 advertisement structures.

"An advertiser needs permission from the DCC. But if a company has permission for two billboards, it sets up ten," says a source in the DCC revenue department.

"Sadly, the rules seem to be in name only," says a resident of Dhanmondi. "Outdoor advertisement is a new-age curse for view. We alone cannot fight the proliferation of mega signs and billboards. It needs proper coordination between police and magistrates to check illegal construction of billboards. The advertising firms owe a large amount of money to us. If we clear the billboards, we may lose the money," said an official of the DCC revenue department.

This year, the DCC has raised the tax on outdoor advertisement five times the previous rate. "We are not going to renew any more mega sign or billboard along important roads. We hope the situation will improve," says a DCC high official.

## Laced with red tape

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) once again exposed its fangs of red tape and bureaucratic gridlock, when Star City went on digging out information about billboards.

The correspondent had kept going to the DCC revenue department for more than two weeks, trying to glean information from officials. But they shuttled him from one wing to

another of the DCC.

To begin with, the officer Star City first approached suggested that "proper channels should be maintained" for any information and promised to give what he needed.

Accordingly, Star City then approached the chief public relations officer, Abdur Rahman, who forwarded the inquiry to the chief revenue officer.

Although the revenue department said after eight

days that the questionnaire was prepared, the correspondent was not given it. He again talked to Abdur Rahman who said the documents were with the office of the DCC secretary.

The office of the secretary told Star City last Wednesday that the questionnaire had just been sent to the chief executive officer for approval.

Again, the effort to reach the chief executive officer yielded no result.



Overhead advertisements like these in Dhanmondi pose threat to public safety.

## Desperation of the childless

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Pradeep is a cobbler from Kamrangirchar working at Dhanmondi in the city. He and his wife Kamla Rani were married 10 years ago but have not had any child. Since the day the local priest-cum-quack told Pradeep that his wife would probably never conceive, Pradeep started looking for a baby to adopt.

He went to see a man in Hazaribagh, who had close links with 'people at the maternity section of Dhaka Medical College Hospital'.

Pradeep and Kamla made an initial payment of Tk 2,000 and promised to pay another Tk 3,000 on receipt of the baby. Two months later, Pradeep was asked to meet his source in Hazaribagh with the money.

"We could not get the money by the next morning so we were late by a day to arrive in the house of my friend. But by then the baby was sold out to another person," said Pradeep, who now has managed to adopt a baby girl from another source.

Like Pradeep hundreds of childless couples are willing to adopt children in a country that has no adoption law. The only law that allows a person to adopt a child is the Muslim Guardianship Law 1890, which gives a couple the legal right of 'custody' of a child.

Due to the difficulty of adopting children, theft of babies from public hospitals has become a thriving business. The DMCH

where everyday some 30 babies are born is notorious for baby lifters. Doctors and senior staff suspect that the "informal" midwives who are constantly present inside the wards are directly involved in stealing babies and selling them to an ever-demanding market.

The maternity section is so crowded that each bed is shared by at least three mothers and each mother has one or more attendant.

Doctors and nurses said the Directorate of Social Welfare, which has an office inside the hospital, is informed when an unclaimed baby is found. The directorate registers the baby and either sends it to its own 25-bed Baby Home in Azimpur or arranges it to be sent to one of several baby-care centres in the city.

The hospital authorities said since the DMCH is unable to offer free medicines or other things like a syringe to the patients, the patient has to have a personal attendant who can go out and buy the requirements. This situation has made all the sections of the DMCH overcrowded.

Dr Dilruba at the Centre for Training and Rehabilitation of Destitute Women (CTRDW) runs a baby home in Shyamoli. She said many parents are unaware that 'adoption' is legally possible in Bangladesh.

"We have cases where desperate families try to procure a baby at any cost," said Dr Dilruba. They are mostly unaware that they could adopt a child legally.

## Hit the road the other way round

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Imagine you driving a latest four-wheeler? But before indulging into that sort of dream you need a driving licence to hit the road.

So, there you go to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) to get a licence. Once there, you may feel a bit tangled in numerous rules and regulations.

Never mind. You will be meeting people willing to help you out. A good number of brokers will rush to you the moment you reach BRTA. You will be flooded with questions like "Need any sort of assistance, sir?" "Want to make a licence, Bhai?"

If by any chance you nod your head, they will tell you about the papers and, of course, the money you need to lay your hands on. To begin with, you will need Tk 200 for application form, Tk 50 in examination fee and Tk 100 in medical fee.

Though the official licence fee, inclusive of five examination fees, does not exceed Tk1,800, the money one has to spend for a driving licence is much higher.

"An original licence will cost Tk 5,000 while a fake one can be made for Tk 2,000," said Mohammed Selim. "It is not that we take the entire amount, but we need bribe the BRTA officials from top to bottom," he clarified. "It is a must if you want to have a driving licence," he

added.

Some of the licence seekers hanging around at the BRTA office further explained what Selim said. "Unless you pay the money, the officers will show that you failed the driving tests, no matter how skilled you are," noted a man working in a private organisation.

Moreover, once someone fails to get through any of the driving tests, the officials intentionally fix the next test date after a long period of time, added most of the brokers. "You pay the money and we will make sure that you pass the tests," Selim assured one of his clients.

There are other facilities offered by the brokers. If you want to get a driving licence at a nominal cost, they will arrange

a licence for you that is shown to have been obtained from other districts. Mostly, professional drivers opt for this type of licence and often hold three to four of them, the brokers said.

"We need to have more than one licence because most of the time police seize our licence without any reason," said Abdul Haque, a truck driver.

Though it seems profitable, the brokers revealed they can hardly make a decent earning out of the job. "I live in uncertainty since there is no fixed income," said a frustrated-looking Mohammed Moktar Hossain. "I would have never done this if I had a proper employment," he added.

## Criminals go creative

ABUL KALAM AZAD

New breeds of organised criminals have arrived on the block. Armed with sort of 'innovative' tactics, they swarm different parts of the city and prey on innocent pedestrians only.

The gangs, known as *dhakka* (push) party, operate in small groups and remain active at almost every busy street and intersection to rob walkers.

The novelty of their operating method is that they do not pounce on any passer-by with firearms straightaway. Instead, they follow a well-worked-out plan to fool pedestrian before circling him to take away whatever they could get with consummate ease.

Members of the *dhakka* party gather beside a suitable place to pick their prey, preferably a person walking alone. Once the possible victim is chosen one of them goes ahead to shoulder-butt him. He then promptly accuses the innocent pedestrian of shoving him deliberately.

Oblivious of the plot, the victim then tries to protest his innocence but he stops at a stage realising something is very wrong. By then other members of the group have the victim surrounded in such a way so that no other passers-by could have a clue to the foul play. So, they take all the time in the world to rob him at knifepoint and then just

walk away.

They also have similar tricks up their sleeves. They step on to the foot and then accuse the pedestrian of assault. Often a member of the gang spits on his own body and then blame the victim for it. Result is the same. They engage in altercation with the innocent man and ends up robbing him.

These gangs are reported to be very active in Baitul Mokarram, Motijheel, Mouchak, Maghbazar, New Market and Purana Paltan areas. These gangs used to operate in the night, but, since these tactics involve little risk and is easy to deceive people, they now dare to try their trick in broad daylight.

Street vendors and shopkeepers in Baitul Mokarram and Mouchak area alleged that such incidents are taking place regularly. Even it happens in presence of law-enforcers, they claimed.

Some vendors also alleged that these gangs maintain relationship with police and give them their share of the pie to ensure uninterrupted business.

When asked, an on-duty police constable near the Mouchak crossing denied such allegation.

He however said these gangs are very clever and not easy to identify because they approach and negotiate with a victim like a friend.



hello dhaka

Int'l Radio Timetable  
VOA, SW (m)  
0730-0800: 16.87, 19.72, 25.4  
2230-2300: 25.1, 31.3, 41.1  
MW 190.5 (m)  
Both sessions available in 97.6 MHz in FM  
BBC (All sessions available in FM 100 MHz)  
0630-0700: 49, 31, 25 mb  
1400-1410: 25, 19, 13 mb  
1930-2000: 41, 31, 25  
2230-2300: 49, 41, 31 mb