

Protectors turn predators



While the Dhaka City Corporation fights a losing battle against illegal structures and encroachment, some of its own people have erected shops on government land without permission

BISHAWJIT DAS

Some employees of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) have taken over a plot of government land at Sayedabad and built 10 shops on the footpath in front of the DCC Central Garage near the corporation's Zonal Office.

The employees of Zone One's Central Garage have built these shops and have taken possession of them 'for maintenance of a mosque nearby'.

"The DCC Central Garage did not seek any permission from my office. I noticed it when they were constructing the shops and reported it to the Zonal Officer on September 29, 2003," says Mafizuddin Ahmed, executive engineer of Zone One.

"I forwarded a note to the DCC chief estate officer who has the

authority to allocate any land," says Hemayet Hossain, zonal officer of the zone one. "The Estate Office has the power to give permission after inquiring on their own or through my office. But they did not keep me informed."

Chief Estate Officer Fazlul Zoha said he did not give any permission for construction of shops at Sayedabad. He said it is the Zonal Officer who has to take action since he has the magisterial power. The zonal officer has not taken any initiatives to clear the encroachment.

Asked whether he had obtained permission from the DCC before constructing the shops, Khandakar Milladul Islam, manager of the Transport Division of the DCC, said, "We dropped off an application to the Mayor's office."

They are yet to have the valid

papers although the construction of 10 shops is already complete.

"We have constructed the shops to meet the expenses of the Imam and other costs related to the mosque adjacent to the garage," said Milladul Islam. "It is by no means meant for any individual's profit."

"Some 500 workers in the garage work day and night and those shops are just there to refresh them with tea and biscuits," says Md. Abdul Karim, driver of the garage.

However, one of the shops is has been given to trashed metal collectors.

A resident at the spot wondered how long the footpaths and sidewalks will continue to be encroached upon in the name of mosque maintenance.

Fitting into life's grooves

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Poverty forced Ali at 11 to leave school and join his father's trade. His father was a lock and key fitter living on a meager income.

Ali's father became his guru at his childhood. When his father honed a key, cut grooves along its edge and inserted it into a lock to click it open, Ali followed him with unblinking attention. He knew he was destined to follow in his father's footsteps for a living.

Today, Ali is 29. His father died several years ago. Ali runs a makeshift lock and key repairing shop on the sidewalk of Karwan Bazar, near the Ambar Shah mosque. He is one of the 30 repairers in

the area -- all toiling and struggling for survival. Like his father, Ali trains his son in the same repair work.

"We buy brass or iron dummy keys from Gulistan, Sutrapur, Chalk Bazar and Dholai Khal at Tk 24 a dozen. I then fit keys for locks and take Tk 10 a key from a customer," Ali said.

Ali doubles up as a repairer of gas lighters and umbrellas only to keep afloat with some extra money.

Setting-up of a small shop cost Ali Tk 2,500, with which he bought tools like screwdrivers, scissors, pliers, hammers and blades.

The Karwan Bazar repairers

also fit keys for vehicles. Their work is not without hazards. Sometimes thieves bring stolen suitcases and iron safes to open. They have no option but to do what the pilferers want them to do because they have to earn money for their families.

Ali's co-workers at Karwan Bazar have come from Faridpur and Munshiganj.

Competition is keen. The part-time repairers roam the city, making their arrival known to people with jingles of metal keys in hand.

"Sometimes, police try to evict us from footpaths, but they don't understand that we depend on it for a living," said Ali.

Playing second fiddle

SOHEL ISLAM

"Baey plastic", the man screams at the driver. Plastic? "Well, the car is fragile. It breaks down like plastic just in case we hit it," quips Monir, one of the bus helpers.

It's a common sight where a 'helper' (conductor) clings to the handles of the bus. In a busy road, they try to alert the driver about any possible danger and ensure the safety of the passengers. That's how drivers and helpers of the city buses get about their job on the road.

"Barai ja barai ja (Move ahead, move ahead)," the helper would scream at the driver. And if another bus comes too close on its right, "Baey lo baey lo (take left)," he blurts out to any rickshaw-pullers in the way. Once in a while, the screaming marks the beginning of a fierce exchange of words.

A concerned rickshaw-puller would shout back, "Tor baper

rasta nihi (Does this road belong to your father?)". And, most of the times, they end up having a fish fight.

They do sound really funny. Mamadpur (Mohammadpur), Faram Geye (Farmgate), Gulisteye (Gulistan), Sadabad (Sayedabad) and

scores of such bizarre words are spoken out to woo the passengers so that they do not get on a wrong bus. The way they pronounce these words, strangers in Dhaka may face a bit of difficulty to get them and may end up slipping into another bus.

Life is not that easy for them. The helpers have to remain literally on their toes all the while they are on duty. They cannot work more than 20 days a month owing to excessive stress.

But, something is there that gets them going.

"Even as a boy I wanted to be a driver. And for that I thought I better start as helper. That's how I landed into this job. It is strenuous but it won't take long before I am at the wheel," Monir says confidently.

Museum in a mess

BISHAWJIT DAS

Priceless artefacts at the Dhaka City Corporation's Mahanagar Museum are getting damaged due to a lack of knowledge on how to preserve them.

Since its inception in 1996, the museum housed inside the Nagar Bhaban has regularly received its share of government funds for maintenance and other purposes. But indifference by the authorities has seen it neither get enriched nor its treasures taken care of.

The museum was a brainchild of some prominent academics of the country. It was founded amidst a lot of excitement and enthusiasm. However, once the

initial euphoria passed, it just became another government office.

The museum has a good collection of paintings and photographs related to significant historical events and local heritage. Artefacts, curios and furniture belonging to the Nawabs of Dhaka as well as other dynasties are also major attractions.

But most of these invaluable assortments are rusting or fading beyond recognition.

"We do not have anyone with specialised training to properly protect the delicate stuff here," said Museum-in-charge Upendra Mohon Bosak.

Bosak could not say whether the badly worn out photographs of historical significance can be

reproduced. The captions narrating the events are either torn or have become unreadable. Metal objects, such as the brass hukkas (smoking pipe) of royalties or the old press machines of Dhaka, are rusting in the open.

He is unaware that things made of metal need to be kept inside a glass box or something similar for preservation.

There is little revenue from the museum as most city dwellers do not know that such a museum is there.

The museum is open from 9:00am to 3:30pm on weekdays except on Thursdays when it closes at 1:30pm. Entrance fee is Tk2.



flight timing & market price

MARKET PRICE	OUTING	LIBRARY & INFO	FLIGHT TIMING
Vegetables (Tk Per Kg) Tomato- 16 Potato- 10 Borboti, Beans- 20 Dherash, Okra-16 Jhinga- 20 Chichinga- 16 Jali Lau- 25/Piece Lau- 25/30 (Midium/Big) Patol- 16 Lemon- 5/Piece Peas- 10/(450 gm packet) Sajna-25 Eggplant-16(Black), 20 (White) Koralla- 20 Pudina Leaf- 120 Cabbage- 15 Green banana- 10 (Hall) Green papaya- 10 Lati- 16 Salad Cucumber- 16 Tomato- 16 Lettuce- 2/Piece Carrot- 12 Onion Leaf- 30 Capsicum- 180 Spices Green Chili- 20	Museum and Zoo National Museum- 8619396-9 Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday 3 pm- 8 pm, Thursday closed Muktiyuddha Jadughar- 9559091 Open: 10:30 am 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed Bangabandhu Smiti Jadughar- 8110046 Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday closed Ahsan Manzil Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed Shishu Jadughar- 9666466 Open: 10 am- 6 pm, Sunday Closed Sonargoan Jadughar Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday Closed Dhaka Zoo- 9002954, 9002020 Open: 9am 5 pm, Sunday Closed	Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers Central Public Library- 8626001-4, Shishu Academy- 9564128 Shilpakala Academy- 8614673 Bangla Academy- 8619550 Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407 Nazrul Institute- 9114602 Ford Foundation- 8116133 Alliance Francaise- 8611557 British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7 Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604 Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6 Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096 The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314 Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412	Wednesday BG-015 DEP 0615 DAC-DXB-LHR GF-258 ARR 0615 BAH-DAC KG-032 ARR 0630 KHI-DAC GF-259 DEP 0730 DAC-BAH BG-002 ARR 0745 LHR-DXB-DAC BG-040 ARR 0830 RUH-DAC EK-582 ARR 0840 DXB-DAC BG-036 ARR 0850 JED-DAC BG-084 DEP 0900 DAC-BKK-SIN KB-127 ARR 0920 BKK-RGN-DAC EK-336 ARR 0935 DXB-DAC BG-091 DEP 0950 DAC-CCU SV-810 ARR 1000 MED-RUH-DAC KB-127 DEP 1000 DAC-PBH EK-583 DEP 1015 DAC-DXB EK-336 DEP 1050 DAC-KUL BG-060 DEP 1100 DAC-RGN-DAC SV-805 DEP 1200 DAC-JED BG-092 ARR 1210 CCU-DAC TG-321 ARR 1250 BKK-DAC BG-701 DEP 1345 DAC-KTM TG-322 DEP 1400 DAC-BKK HY-463 ARR 1445 TAS-DAC BG-703 DEP 1530 DAC-KTM MH-6196 ARR 1630 KUL-DAC BG-702 ARR 1700 KTM-DAC BG-029 DEP 1800 DAC-BOM-DXB BG-704 ARR 1900 KTM-DAC BG-021 DEP 1900 DAC-CGP-MCT MH-6197 DEP 1930 DAC-KUL BG-061 ARR 1930 BKK-RGN-DAC

TIPS
 Do not use mobile phones while you drive