

# From craze to addiction

Video games, one of the few forms of recreation for street children, are becoming an addiction.

BISHAWJIT DAS

Since fields and playgrounds are diminishing fast from the cityscape and the real estate business is swallowing all empty spaces, video games have fast become a craze for many city kids. Kids, especially those on the street, will do anything to play these games day and night.

Video games have spread and become popular with kids in almost every mahalla in the inner city and even in suburb areas. "I open my shop early in the morning and the tokais (street boys) as well as some school going kids rush here first thing," says Malek, an owner of a video game shop at Kawran Bazar. "I am forced to keep it open till midnight for adults even love to play these games at night."

Video games came to the city in the nineties, and fast became a craze for teenagers. Nowadays younger kids are joining them. School-going middle class children were originally attracted to the games. After computers entered the homes of middle-class families these children began to play computer games at home. The gap was soon filled by street boys. "Most of my customers are tokais and child-labourers," said Malek.

"I do not let the school boys play during their school hours since I myself was once a student

and I know the value of education," boasts Malek. "The school-goers come here with their school bags right after their classes end. Besides, there is always a crowd of street kids in my shop."

Shipon, a class-V student at Tejgaon, confesses "I get the money from my mum; actually I save it from my tiffin-money. She doesn't know I come here to play." His family would not allow him to come every day if they knew, he adds.

"I earn my own money," announces Ratan, a 7-year old street kid. "I work in the kalar aarat (the whole-sale banana market) and play video games whenever I get the money. I used to beg my mother for 2 taka, but she cannot afford that. So, I have to make my own money."

"Not all the kids earn money honestly to play games. They have become so hooked to the games that some, I know, even steal things from houses or market places. They act like the addicts do when they run out of drugs," regrets Khalilullah, an elderly shopkeeper in the Tejgunipara area. "We caught some red handed while stealing and they confessed that they were doing so to play games only."

"Some of my school friends swindle money from their parents to come to play here," admits Shipon.



Some young children are resorting to theft to fund their video-game habit.

# Telephone service swindle

SULTANA RAHMAN

Few people are aware that the Bangladesh Telephone Shilpa Shangstha (BTSS) has its own telephone service and complaint centre where the city's residents are supposed to get proper help with their telephone sets. The centre was set up in response to the unnecessary harassment and deception commonly practised by private telephone service centres.

But, sad to say, if you do need your phone fixed, you would be wasting your time by taking it to BTSS, or Telephone Bhaban as it is commonly known. A group of con men have reportedly made a mockery of the public initiative by setting up their own scheme.

"We can provide a private service if you want your phone set repaired quickly and cheaply. We also have the BTSS service but it is not only expensive but time consuming too," said an employee of the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Telephone Sales, Service and Complaint Centre under BTSS, when approached by a potential customer whose set was out of order.

This is a common occurrence at the centre, which should be assisting customers with sales of phone sets and phone cards, repairs and other relevant services as well as receiving com-

plaints.

But a section of middlemen with the support of some BTSS employees have started their own private business directly in front of the premises. Allegations have been made that a number of employees of the Telephone Bhaban are involved in this illegal business and some private technicians have occupied the centre taking advantage of the inadequate manpower of the BTSS.

But, when asked, Abul Hashem, in-charge of the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Centre, denied any involvement of BTSS employees. However, he did concede that some rather 'powerful' outsiders were doing private business using the centre's facilities.

"We are living with insecurity. That's why we are unable to solve the problem," said Hashem who didn't want to elaborate.

Senior officials of the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) claimed, on condition of anonymity, that fourth class employees of the organisation were chiefly responsible for these unlawful activities.

The BTSS sends faulty sets to its factory in Tongi for repairs. The servicing charge is Tk 100, while rates vary for parts. Apart from the one at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, the BTSS has another public service centre at Gulistan.

# Multitude of multi-stories Meridian trees a mistake

As high-rises continue to go up, and the economy goes down, many shops and offices are becoming hard to fill.



Many new high-rise buildings remain empty.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka, once known as a city of mosques, has turned into a city of concrete where commercial structures dominate the skyline. City dwellers are witnessing commercial buildings mushrooming in every nook and cranny of the city.

Many of these structures are high rise buildings that have changed the skyline of the capital. They are built as shopping complexes or office space by major construction firms or individual developers, who then sell or lease the shops and offices.

However, many of the new multi-storied buildings are being left empty or unused. A towering building with a few shops or offices on the lower floors with the upper floors abandoned is a very common sight in the city these days.

Business people are offering various opinions on the problem. Nevertheless, the slump in the economy is the common reason mentioned by most. "The economy of the country is confronting a bad phase," said Mohammed Shaheen of Primon Fashion. "Who would dare to buy or rent a shop in a market and run a business when there is a lack of customers?" asked Shaheen. He added that customers are simply not showing up since their pockets are empty.

Moreover, the number of shopping complexes being built is far in excess of the city's requirement to meet the demand of shoppers. "There are too many markets in the

city compared to its population," said the proprietor of a multi storied building in Dhanmondi, wishing not to be named. He feels that almost 80 per cent of markets being built in the city are unnecessary. "Now I realise I made a mistake by constructing this building," he added. "How will I repay the bank loan I have taken if business does not pick up," he asks anxiously.

Moazzem Hossain, a shop owner, points out that it needs time for shops or office spaces to be rented out and to attract customers. "It takes time for a new building complex to attract people," he said. "Initially people can not depend on a newly built market to generate business and they hesitate to hire a space there," he clarified. Hossain noted that a shop he bought three years back at a market in Dhanmondi is still to be rented out. However, he believes it will be rented once the market begins its business in full swing.

Sometimes shops or office spaces are left abandoned since the owners are expatriates and they demand high rent, said Abdul Khalek (not his real name), an employee of Concord Arcadia. "Those spaces remain unused," he added.

"Decline in the country's economy is the major reason behind the problem," said Mahmudul Hasan, General Secretary of REHAB (Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh). He added the number of markets is more than necessary, which has increased the problem.

SHIMU RANI DAS

If you've travelled on a double-decker bus, you may have had to duck to avoid them! Especially along Elephant Road.

Tree branches, that is. Nowadays, it has become a common phenomenon for the passengers of double-deckers to be hit and injured through open windows by overhanging branches. The planting of trees on road-meridians has created, rather than solved, a problem.

Mr. Nur-a-Alam, a double-decker passenger said, "The windows of the buses are jammed open or broken and it's disturbing when the branches of trees hit us. We may easily be injured by them."

Pedestrians are also finding the trees a nuisance. A shopper on Elephant Road said, "Sometimes we can't see rickshaws, cars or buses when crossing the road due to the shade of these trees, particularly in the evening, which is very dangerous."

The irony is that the trees were originally planted by Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to beautify the city for the benefit of pedestrians and road-users.

According to Md. Abdus Salam, project director of the Infrastructure Development and Environmental Improvement Project of Metropolitan Dhaka, part of DCC, the first trees were planted along the city's road dividers in 1990. There are ten areas now covered

by the project, including Dhanmondi-Lalmatia, Mirpur, Paikpara-Agargaon, Rampura-Khilaon, Gulshan-Banani, and Uttara.

Iqbal Habib, an architect and director of Vitti Sthapathi Brinda Ltd., an architectural firm in Dhanmondi, criticised the project, saying, "It's a mistaken concept to plant such large trees in Dhaka's meridians. There needs to be a minimum 10-15 feet of space around such trees both for the trees' benefit as well as for road users. Even to put flowering shrubs or bushes in meridians requires a minimum width of five feet. But in our city, we don't maintain any regulations in this context. Our meridians are only two or two-and-a-half feet wide at most."

The 'mistaken concept' has caused some people to take matters into their own hands.

"In Mirpur, many people have become so fed-up that they are going out at night to cut down the troublesome trees," said Habib. "This form of vandalism is a worrying matter," he added.

Meanwhile, those travelling atop double-decker buses face the greatest danger, with eye- and face-injuries caused by large branches increasingly being reported by passengers.

The issue was raised at a recent board meeting of Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCB), by Dr. Salaudin, director of Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC).

The mayor of Dhaka City



Double-decker buses have become a dangerous mode of transport.

Corporation assured the meeting that the matter will be resolved and has already instructed BRTC to identify the areas where double-deckers encounter the problem. Until then, keep ducking!

# marketprice&crisistelephonenumber

## MARKET PRICE

### Seasonal Fruits

- Mango - 40/70/kg
- Green Mango-15/20/kg
- Jackfruit- 60-100/piece
- Lichi-80/100piece
- Watermelon- 30/50-60/piece
- Pineapple- 25-35/piece,
- Papaya- 25-30/piece
- Fuli- 30-40/piece
- Bel- 15-20/piece
- Grapes- 70/80/kg
- Apple- 80/kg
- Orange- 80-90/dozen
- Banana-30/dozen
- Ata-50-55/kg
- Jamrul-25-30/hundred
- Guava-35/40/dozen

### Vegetables (Tk Per Kg)

- Potato- 20/25
- Brinjal- 12
- Bean- 12/14
- Okra- 14
- Chichinga- 14/15
- Jali Lau- 25/Piece
- Patol- 14
- Lemon- 5/Piece
- Peas- 10/14(450 gm packet)
- Sajna-25

### Salad

- Cucumber- 16
- Tomato- 16
- Lettuce- 2/Piece
- Carrot- 12
- Onion Leaf- 30
- Capsicum- 180

### Spices

- Green Chili- 8/10
- Onion- 16
- Garlic- 36
- Ginger- 30
- Jira- 120
- Dhania- 30
- Daruchini- 140
- Salt- 11
- Soyabean- 46-49/Litre
- Butter oil- 210
- Ghee- 280
- Mustard oil- 70
- Daida- 50
- Tea- 120-160
- Sugar- 28
- Wheat- 15
- Masur Dal- 42

## HEALTH

### Hospitals

- Heart**  
National Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases (NICVD), - 9130800, 9122560-59
- Burn**  
Dhaka Medical College Hospital  
Burn Unit-8626812-6
- Cancer**  
National Cancer Institute-8014914, 8826561-65  
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University-8612550-4, 861455-9
- Diabetes**  
Diabetes Research Hospital (BIREM)- 9661551-5, 8616641-50
- Mother & Child Care**  
Shishu Hospital- 9119119, 8116061-82

### Eye

- Islamia Eye Hospital-9110794, 9119315
- National Eye Hospital- 8117202, 8114807

### Dental

- Dental College -9002035

### Orthopaedics

- National Orthopaedics (Pangu) Hospital- 9114075, 9112150

### General

- Dhaka Medical College Hospital- 8626812-6
- Holy Family Hospital- 83111731-25
- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital- 8612550-4, 8614545-9
- Bangladesh Medical College & Hospital- 8115443, 9118202,

### Blood Bank

- Red Crescent Centre- 9116563
- Sandhani (DMCH)- 8624040
- Sandhani (SMCH)- 7310061, 7310061,7319022
- Dhaka Medical Collage Hospital- 8626812-9

### Eye Bank

- Sandhani International Eye Bank- 8614040

### Ambulance Service-

- Fire Service & Civil Defence Ambulance 9555555, 9556666-7, 9567734, Fire Services Siddique Bazar (HQ) 9556667,

### Mohammadpur 9112078, Khilgaon

- 7218329, Mirpur 9001055, Tongi 9801070, Demra 7400111,
- Postagola 7410771, Narayanganj 9715644, Sadarghat 7119759,
- Mirpur 10 Circle 9002269,
- 9001055, Mirpur TVG Complex 9001189, Narayanganj Port 9715365,
- Hajiganj (N Ganj) 9715531,
- Mondalpara (N. Ganj River) 9712015, N. Gan Bander 9712095,
- Dhaka EPZ (Savar) 7701444, Markajul Al Islami 9127867, Holy Family Hospital 8311721-5.
- Ambulances For Dead Body**  
Anzuman Mafidul Islam (Kakrail) 9336611, Gandaria 7319808, 7318166,
- AI-Markajul Islam 9127867,

## UTILITY

### Electricity

- Electricity Complex- PDB- 9566061-5, 9560170-9
- Electricity Complex (DESA)- 8616737-43, 8617626
- DESCO- 8123138-40
- Complaints (Rural Electrification Board, Dhaka)- 8916424-8

### Gas

- Titas Gas Exchange (Emergency)- 9563667-8
- Kawranbazar-8112135-42
- Mirpur- 8014132-3
- Mohammadpur- 9117215,9113903
- Mohakhali- 9884741, 9885922, 8824993
- Molijheel-9667612

### WASA

- WASA (PABX)- 8117829-31
- Mirpur- 9000519
- Mohammadpur- 8120192
- Fakirapool-9115343
- Asad Gate- 8917492
- Uttara- 9559142,
- Segunbagicha- 7316348
- Pagla- 8113900-39
- Fire Services**

## DO YOU KNOW?

999 is the helpline in Dhaka just in case you need to reach police