



## Illegal tolls collected by mystery man

KAUSAR ISLAM

Gold traders in Tantibazar claim that they have become hostage to an 'invisible' extortionist to whom they pay regular tolls, but law enforcement agencies said the claim was baseless.

Tantibazar is traditionally famous for gold trade where around 200 gold shops are located. The traders said they are paying the toll to one Shaheed, popularly known as "dacoit Shaheed."

Last November they claim to have collectively paid more than Tk 50 lakh to Shaheed.

"We have not seen him so far. Two shop owners collect the money from the rest and hand it over to Shaheed's men," said one businessman.

These businessmen were reluctant to talk to the press, nor do they want to complain to the law enforcement agencies.

"Shaheed gives his directions on the phone. He demands a specific amount and sets deadline for payment," said a busi-

nessman. He added that the usual time-frame is two or three months for the payment.

Mysteriously none in the business community revealed the names of the two persons nominated to collect the money and hand the collected amount to Shaheed's henchmen.

"The police will not take any action even if we lodge complaint. We tried informing the local ward commissioner, but it did not serve any purpose," added the businessmen.

The law enforcement authori-

ties had a different story to tell. They said that the allegation was 'mysterious' and the businesses were complicating the situation rather than helping the authority solve the problem.

"We have been trying to arrest Shaheed since the murder of a local commissioner and the information we have says that he is in India at the moment. So how can a man in India collect toll from here?" said Omar Faruque, officer-in-charge (OC), Kotwali Police Station.

The OC said that the businessmen remained mum during investigations made, which did not help the police carry out their work.

"I offered help to form community police but they are not interested," he said.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) sources also tagged this toll collecting process by Shaheed as a 'fairy tale.'

A Rab member told Star City that they heard about the matter but did not find any authenticity in this regard.

Some locals said that Shaheed was last seen in the area about seven months back.

Shaheed is accused in several cases including the murder of local ward commissioner Binoy Sarkar, who was killed in front of his office in May 2002.

"If people working for Shaheed could be arrested, the truth about the matter would come out," said the businessmen.

"More than 90 percent businessmen here belong to the minority community facing various problems. We do not want additional trouble," he said.



Gold traders in Tantibazar have been paying tolls to an 'invisible' extortionist.

## Ekushey Book Fair yet to gain momentum

NOVERA DEEPIA

The much-awaited Ekushey Book Fair at the Bangla Academy premises is yet to gain momentum in terms of ambiance.

Stall owners, publishers and readers expect the fair will see large crowds of readers, writers as well as a collection of new books after February 15.

Rashedul Hassan, a student of Geology Department of Dhaka University (DU), said: "I came only to get information on new book and make any purchases only after the 15th."

Visitors to the fair, although small in number, are checked with metal detectors at the entrance, while some security personnel search bags they carry. Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police hover around the groups of young people.

Yet the fair remains the only place that attracts all types of readers across the country.

Azizur Rahman visited the fair with his family all the way from Kishoregonj. "I will buy some ghost story books along with fairytales and rhymes," said his son Dipto.

The organising committee, on February 6, started a drive to check if the stall owners were following the rules.

"We want everything to run smoothly and decided that if the stall owners violate the rules, they would be blacklisted. No allocation will be given to any blacklisted stall-owner next year," said Abul Kalam Manjur Morshed, director general of Bangla Academy.



Ekushey Book Fair bearing a deserted look, a week after inauguration.

Around 10 stalls that were found violating the rules were severely warned.

Some readers were not satisfied with the books available.

"Most publications were collections of fictions and poetry. I hardly found any book related to environment," said Masuma Akhtar, a student of Soil, Water and Environment Department, DU.

"The announcements of the highest ever discount of 30 percent had no value as the original prices indicated were much higher than the books on sale in the previous fairs," said Kibria Hassan of the same university.

"The reason for higher prices is the price hike of paper. Aream of paper which was Tk 700 now costs Tk 1,200," said Sajjadur Rahman, representative of University Press Limited (UPL).

Farzana Firoz, salesgirl of the stall, Shikor, said: "We are selling books to the value of Tk 6,000 daily, which is quite satisfactory. We expect more visitors on weekly holidays; Fridays and Saturdays."

Jalal Ahmed, Deputy Director of the academy, said that more than 300 stalls were set up at the fair premises.

"We had information of more than 350 new books in the fair.

We believe that the numbers are higher as publishers do not want to give out information of new books to the fair information center," he said.

According to several stall owners and publishers the bestseller so far is celebrated author Humayun Ahmed's new novel Lilua Batash.

Among other programmes, recitation and discussion sessions among young writers and poets in the Lekhok Kunja (writer's corner) are one of the main attractions of the fair. Discussion sessions followed by cultural programmes are staged within the academy premises regularly.

## Begunbari canal falls into grabbers' grip

TAWFIQUE ALI

Though earmarked as a floodplain in the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, land grabbers are occupying the city's Begunbari canal taking advantage of legal tangle and the government's reluctance to fight illegal occupation.

The plan indicates that densely-populated areas like Maghbazar, Tejgaon, a part of Gulshan, Badda and Rampura along the canal will face severe adverse consequences if the canal and its catchment areas are earth-filled.

According to the plan, Begunbari canal is to be preserved as a water body, said Prof. Nazrul Islam, honorary chairman of the Centre for Urban Studies. "Government is well-aware of the encroachments but it is not taking effective measures to save it."

Environmentalists have long been demanding preservation of the canal as a floodwater retention plain, he said.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk) itself has contravened the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) through development works on the canal, Prof Islam said.

"The Rajuk has drawn a plan, as part of its 13-acre Sonargaon-Hatirjheel development project, to restore the canal as a strong natural sewage discharge system stretching up to Rampura Bridge," said Md Shahid Alam, the immediate past chairman of Rajuk.

"Rajuk could have gone for legal action against encroachments on the Begunbari canal as per wetland conservation law but it has not yet done so," said Alam.

As per recommendations in the DMDP, detailed area plan is required for Begunbari canal "to preserve open space and recre-

ation areas together with its main drainage and transportation functions and proposed water transport terminal."

The low-lying areas along the Begunbari and Hatirjheel canals constitute a major flood retention plain in the heart of the city, according to environmentalists.

As a consequence of filling up the canal, Maghbazar in particular will be the worst affected by waterlogging with slight rainfall.

Influential land grabbers and developers have always been eyeing on this open space as potential source of money making.

Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, who heads the good governance committee at the PMO, expressed his resentment at the ongoing earth-filling in the Begunbari and Hatirjheel canals at a meeting on December 10 last.

"The committee in a resolution clearly instructed Bangladesh Railway to take measures to stop earth filling in the Begunbari canal, re-excavate the portion filled up for setting up two CNG stations and evict other illegal occupants," said a member of the committee.

The canal has suffered the latest encroachment by one Badrul Alam and Company which has occupied approximately one acre area at the corner of Panthapath and Tongi Diversion Road with the canal flowing across, by dint of a lower court order in the name of his company Chowdhury Group in December last.

Chairman of the company, Badrul Alam Chowdhury said, "We have purchased the land from the son of one Sobhan Bepari, who has legal documents from the settlement office." But railway officials said the land acquired in 1953 belongs to railway.

In December 2005, railway served an eviction notice but the land claimant filed a writ petition at the High Court which issued an order to maintain status quo on the matter.

Railway's Divisional Estate Officer Kabir Siddiqui said, "I have instructed our legal officer to contest the High Court stay order."

"We are trying to file an affidavit to vacate the stay order obtained by the encroacher," said Litigation Inspector of Bangladesh Railway Md Salahuddin. "Claim on the land by Badrul Alam and Company is false," he said.

Various parties including Railway and PDB claim ownership of land in the canal, said Chowdhury, adding that even government agencies are divided over its ownership.

"Sobhan Bepari is not the owner of the land at all as he lost three times in legal battle with the railway," said Salahuddin.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association said the land grabbers take advantage of the government's reluctance to take action against those who grab lands and water bodies with forged documents.

She said the grabbers manage to tamper with the land records before they embark on a public land and produce forged documents when challenged.

Grabbers easily gobble up open spaces and wetlands in absence of demarcation, she added.

"Even if there is any demarcation, Rajuk does not make it public," she said.

## The creative world of ad agencies

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

With flashy ads on billboards and attracting messages and slogans in newspapers and television channels becoming part of contemporary lifestyle, more and more young men and women are coming to the world of advertisements.

The induction of the young and enthusiastic individuals in this profession has changed the face of advertising as a whole. Unique concepts, crisp taglines and innovative slogans are coming from these young professionals that enrich the field of ads.

Most executives of the advertising agencies said they more or less face the same pattern of questions in the interviews for entry. They are asked about their career plan, which ad the applicant liked the most and what should be the strategy of communication for an advertisement campaign for a specific product.

Rashed, a student of North South University (NSU) completing his bachelor's degree in business, has recently joined an ad agency. He said: "That was my first interview for a job. The friendly behaviour of all in the interview board increased my confidence."

"My first day of work was amazing. One thing which drew my attention is -- in an advertising firm everyone's creative idea is considered, be it an idea from a sweeper or an accounts officer or any other mid or lower level staff," he added.

Another ad executive said the individual executives are the



The young team of Beginning Production, an ad agency, in a meeting.

parents of the brands. Therefore, detailed knowledge on the particular brand is a must.

"An ad agency can be the happiest and most creative place to work. One gets a chance to handle many brands and has to deal with different types of interesting people," said Arafat Kazi who works for Bitopi Advertising as a copywriter.

"The working environment is excellent. If someone works sincerely, he or she can excel in his field of work with handsome salaries and deserved promotions," Arafat added.

Neelia Sharmeen of Interspeed Advertising Ltd

described the working environment as very cosy. She said they have picnics and other social gatherings regularly.

Some executives said working hours can sometimes be long. Clients like multinational companies and local business giants sometimes want multiple creative ideas about a product's campaign in a very short time. "We always need to be careful and think about what changes are being made by clients in a particular ad," said an intern executive.

Most of the ad agency executives interviewed by this correspondent said their office starts at 9:00am and they sometimes

work until 10:00 or 11:00pm. But all of them enjoy the work and they want to build their career in the field of advertising.

"Anyone from any background can choose this profession, provided they have the knack for advertisements and are able to produce creative ideas," said Salahuddin Shaded, strategic planning manager of G3 Communications Ltd.

"You have to be a good team player with good communication and analytical skill. You must convince your client before persuading people to buy a product," he said.

"Basic knowledge of market-

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ing principles and related concepts are becoming crucial as the whole industry is becoming more mature and demanding day by day," he added.

Most of the agency executives said that the advertising industry is growing and has very good prospect for career development.

AZM Saifuddin, member, chief executive officer (CEO)'s office of Grey Global Group, said: "We are doing very well along with the agencies working in neighbouring countries in terms of providing quality service."

"Agencies from Bangladesh has made huge impact by winning the Srijan Samman, a creative excellence award introduced by the Dainik Sangbad Pratidin, a Bengali daily, for excellence in Bangla advertisement, in Kolkata."

He said the ad industry is developing and he believes within the next few years, the industry will contribute immensely to the national economy.