

DCC's obsession

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Sources said that the former DCC secretary, Habibullah, had allocated hundreds of spaces for commercial hoarding in the city, which not only created a "vision pollution" but also caused obstruction to traffic at many places. Moreover, thousands of unauthorised advertisements on trees, electric poles, makeshift overhead structures contributed to the ever-worsening look of the city.

Habibullah was later transferred to the Ministry of Establishment as officer on special duty (OSD). Allegations of massive irregularities were levelled against him during his tenure as the DCC secretary.

Hundreds of such electrically illuminated advertisement boards have recently been set up on the entire stretch of Satmasjid Road. Residents of Rayer Bazar, Hazaribagh and Dhamondi said that they felt that the electric hoarding were nothing but a mockery with people constantly subjected to load shedding.

Moreover, in the last twelve months, Habibullah, who was chairman of a committee for allocation of advertisement spaces, sold hundreds of spaces to individuals

related to him. In one single meeting the Secretary awarded 65 spaces at different places of the city. Within the last one year 17 major thoroughfares in the city, demarcated as ad-free zones, have been "decorated" with massive advertisements.

The DCC has a flat annual rate of Tk 30 per square feet of advertisement space. However, advertisement firms, which benefit from the DCC allocation, increase the charge several thousand times. For instance, per square feet of advertisement space at the Sonargaon Road could cost as much as Tk 4,000 per square feet annually.

Rafiqul Alam, an official of DCC's Revenue Department, told The Daily Star they had never thought of the energy problem while allocating spaces to advertisers. He said they thought that by allocating electrically illuminated hoarding, they were contributing to the beautification of the city.

With the rapid growth of the city and its economy demand for advertisement spaces have grown manifold. However, there are only two people working in DCC's Revenue Department, who looks after allocation of spaces for advertisement.

Stirring the hornet's nest

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immediately started building markets and turned the area into a "traders' den," said a leader of a traders' association.

The gangs now feel that eviction of the illegal shops would deprive them of regular tolls. They are also fighting among themselves due to old enmity. Manik, a terrorist, was gunned down in Karwan Bazar last week after he was suspected of leaking to detectives a robbery plan by Mitford Sagor. Two armed persons including Mitford Sagor were caught by the detectives after a shootout on Thursday.

"We the tax-paying business men and traders moved to all quarters including the Mayor and the Home Minister but the situation has not improved in Karwan Bazar. Now we fear for our lives," said another leader of a traders' association.

Several sources said they have seen "some most wanted armed criminals" roaming in the market areas for the last few days. These hardcore criminals come from Tejgaon Truck Stand, Purba Rajabazar, West Rajabazar, Testuripara, Station Road, Farm

Gate, Awlad Hossain Market, Begunbari, Mughbazar and Tejkunipara.

"These people can never operate in the area without direct help of Tejgaon thana, which is also a part of the entire network for toll collection and share," said a trader.

A high official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (West) said they are in an awkward position regarding maintaining law and order in Karwan Bazar. He said the biggest problem there is illegal toll collection.

"A dishonest section of the 'genuine' traders and businessmen is also encouraging the musclemen in extortion. We are looking into the matter seriously," he said.

When contacted, acting Mayor of DCC, Ward Commissioner Moklesur Rahman, admitted that the situation in Karwan Bazar was undesirable. Mayor Mohammad Hanif is now in Brussels.

On the eviction programme of May 22, the acting mayor said, "We will try to clean the mess and ensure sustainability".

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