

Making an indecent profit

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The roadside shops vending pornographic magazines, video compact discs, story books and so on, are gradually tempting teenagers of this city into an unhealthy liking for indecent magazines. These shops are usually the newspaper stalls, the 'used book' vendors, and so on, who hand these otherwise unwanted items to school or college going kids, at a very low price. Most of the 'rickshaw fare', or lunch money that these students save are often wasted on such materials.

The prices of such items are extremely low and due to a limited supply, the demand is alarmingly high. "The low price is due to the bulk printing that is done by the group, which has this huge network all over the city," said an independent shop-owner of Nilkhet. Usually, this group acquires 'Playboy', 'Penthouse', 'Hustler' and other foreign magazines, which specialize in pornography. They then, acquire the perverted storybooks, which are brought in from Calcutta, India. They scan the obscene and graphic pictures from the foreign magazines. These are attached to the 'dummy', which contain some selected stories from the Indian Bengali magazines. And then these are printed into more than a thousand copies which are sold out to the newspaper stalls, 'used book' shops and so on.

"Usually, the expenditure for

printing out such a huge number of magazines can cost as low as Tk. 8 per copy. But then, these magazines are sold at Tk. 20 to the kids. There is unbelievable profit in such a business but very few groups dare to venture into this zone," said the shop owner.

The next line would be the foreign pornographic magazines, like Playboy, Penthouse and so on, which are sold at a higher price inside the alleys of the Nilkhet book market. These are quite rare and therefore have a higher demand.

Recently, with these existing lines of pornography storybooks and foreign magazines, video compact discs are also available at the street side shops. Any innocent bystander, at first glance, would believe that only pirated audio and video compact discs are being sold. But with a second look, he or she is sure to notice, the 'seductive' looks and the erotic gestures of scantily clad women on many of these compact video discs. Since, the primary motive is to attract customers, these shops have recently started to provide 'an improved line' of pornographic movies. These movies tend to have the images of nude or semi-nude, popular Indian actresses. Any individual with a little computer graphic knowledge would be able to tell that even though the images do contain the faces of such actresses, the body belongs to a pornographic star. But such video discs, are really 'hot' products and the price of these, are at an all time low of only Tk.40 per disc!

Such businesses are unlawful but yet somehow, they still survive while dodging the strong hand of the law. "There are laws against such material and they are quite effective," said a police officer of the Dhanmondi Police Station. "We could have caught, some shop owners in the act, even a few years back, when we were allowed to investigate as 'civilians'." Recently, however the police officers have been ordered to be in official uniform, whenever on the job, as an order from the Police Commissioner's office.

"The uniform, being quite noticeable, alerts these vendors from a distance and they are very quick to hide their products, in such situations. A maximum of six months is the punishment for selling such pornographic material. If caught, the miscreants are prosecuted in the criminal court." Said the police officer. He pointed out that there used to be raids previously when information was provided to the Police Stations by on-lookers and concerned citizens; but now, the common public seem to be rather 'accustomed' to these undesirable products.

"These are rackets which are destroying the otherwise, innocent and 'clean' reputation of our society and without the help of the common public, it would be difficult to stop them," said the police officer in conclusion.



Certain of the city's markets provide indecent material to customers of all ages for the right price.

Land grabbers occupy WASA pump house in Motijheel

Illegal occupation of 11 katha of WASA property is providing a second income for some of this utility provider's employees at the expense of proper urban management

SOHEL ISLAM

The 11-katha plot around the WASA pump at Motijheel is under the control of land grabbers. A section of WASA (Water and Sewerage Authority) employees are associated with these unauthorised structures. They have erected at least 15 shops encircling the pump and rented it out to a few individuals who are now engaged in a variety of businesses.

Despite repeated notices from WASA to clear the pump house, the occupants have not paid any attention to them.

"I know that the owner of the land is WASA. But we have got nothing to do with the ownership because we pay rent to an employee of WASA each month," said the manager of Café Motijheel, who was reluctant to reveal his name.

Apart from Café Motijheel, a number of fast food shops, small restaurants, outlets for electric appliances, hair cut saloons, shops for motor parts and others are among the various illegal structures.

The operators of the pump have built a public toilet inside the pump premises using WASA's water illegally. Usually labourers, rickshawpullers and restaurants boys use these facilities for a price.

Talking to the Star City, one of shop owners said, "An individual named Imbrahim charges from Tk 4,000 to Tk 2,000 rent depending on the size of the shop."

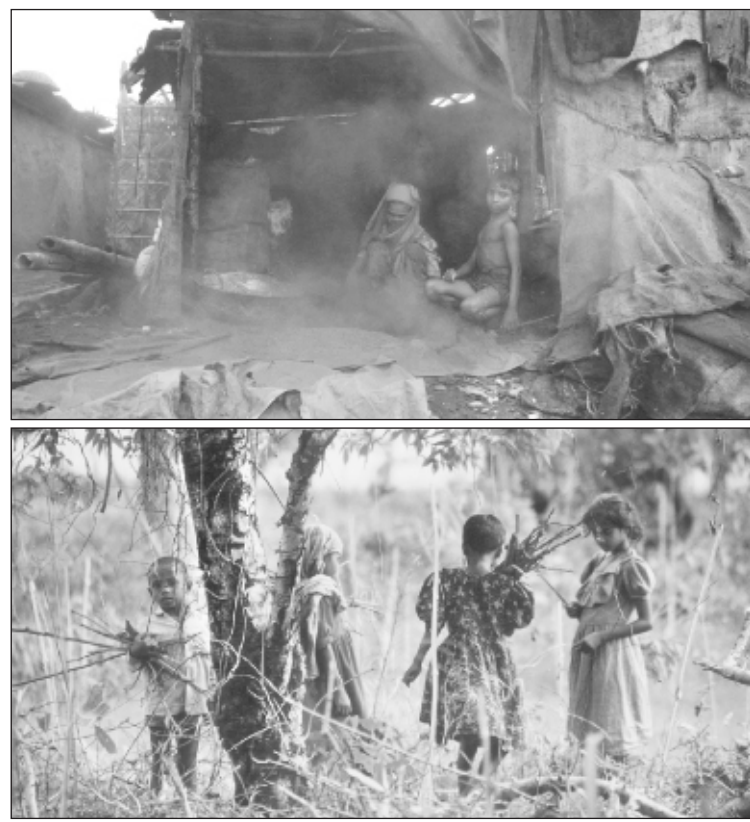
Ashrafuddin, Abul Khaer, Akhlaquey Rahman and Jamal Hossain all WASA employees are also alleged to be behind this illegal occupation.

Sources at WASA said, "The place was leased out to the Cooperative Society of the WASA in the mid nineties. But the employees who are engaged in taking rent do not contribute anything to society at all. The management of WASA canceled the lease a couple of years back. Due to some constraints, the unauthorised structures could not be dismantled."

Managing Director of the WASA T M Ataur Rahman said, "The WASA has as many as 403 pumps across the city. Apart from a few, every pump is surrounded by some unauthorised structures. I along with my magistrate evicted some of the unauthorised structures at different WASA pump houses, but could not deal with all of them owing to some limitations."

"Regarding unauthorised structures at Motijheel, I have already directed our magistrate to dismantle them immediately. They cannot carry out their business activities anymore as the cooperative society do not get anything from the pump operators," said T M Ataur Rahman.

BELA advocating a better future for all



BELA has fought to protect the natural and social environment, by tackling issues such as hazardous working conditions (above, top) and the rights of the landless (above), to name just a few.

SULTANA RAHMAN

"The government as well as the public is now aware of environmental justice which is our major achievement so far," said Rizwana Hasan, director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), in a recent interview with Star City.

In recognition of such achievements, in May this year, BELA won an international award for its outstanding contribution to the protection of the environment. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) awarded BELA and seven other individuals and organizations across the world a place on the Global 500 Roll of Honour for 2003.

The organisation has made great strides in a surprisingly short time. BELA was established less than a decade ago, in 1992, by a group of young lawyers led by Dr Mohiuddin Farook, who felt the urgent need for an advocacy group to monitor and pursue the implementation of laws and regulations to protect the country's environment.

"We fight against the system not against persons. To protect our environment is our main objective, and secondly, to provide legal aid," said Rizwana. Through BELA she has raised public awareness and advocated on numerous issues, including rights of the landless, fishermen and farmers, encroachment of public

land, air, water and soil pollution, and maintenance of urban environmental facilities.

In total, BELA has filed 42 Public Interest Litigation (PIL) cases, tackling a wide variety of problems relating not only to the natural environment but also, importantly, the social environment.

The latter have ranged from cases against partiality and propaganda on BTV, illegal construction and encroachment, contaminated drinking water and hazardous working environments to challenging Flood Action Plan 20.

"In most of the cases, the verdict has been on the side of BELA," claimed Rizwana.

The formation of BELA was a heartfelt response to the global call to protect and conserve the natural environment and ecology, which has strong justification in a rural agronomy based country like Bangladesh.

"A decade ago people were hardly conscious about the environment. Even then, only the natural environment was of concern to a few. But BELA is the first organisation who gives emphasis not only to the natural environment but also our social environment," stressed Rizwana, "which is just as important, especially with the unplanned urban growth we are witnessing and all the additional problems this creates."

Bazaars survive superstores so far

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Want some mangoes? Where to go? There are *aamuaallahs* and vendors, markets and stands almost everywhere one looks, it seems.

But this is not just the case with mangoes. Regardless of the desired item, there are usually innumerable places in the city to find what one is looking for.

However common it might be, though, one might have to search numerous stores. Yet there are only so many shops can be searched by a single shopper. But now, the franchise superstores with their bright lights and air-conditioning - seem to be on the road to eliminate the need for multi-stop shopping.

"We aim to make it easier for customers who like to shop conveniently," says Mr. Mamun, a Manager at the PQS Superstore.

Their promise of quality must be taken as truth, although not as not as real as the goats slaughtered and prepared before buying eyes at open markets, or the samples that some fruit vendors willingly cut.

If Bangladesh follows the western trend of moving from the strong odours and loud atmosphere of the open-air market to the sanitized and sound system equipped superstore, people will lose jobs.

In the UK, "44,000 food shops closed between 1976 and 1989" reports www.corporatewatch.org. It

also reports the 1998 British Retail Planning Forum's discovery that an average 276 jobs are lost every time a large supermarket opens.

If this is in store, it hasn't showed any signs yet of occurrence.

"I haven't really suffered at all. I supply the smaller needs to the household, while the large amounts of shopping are done there [at the superstore]," says Joyal Abedin. He works in a small shop near to one of the new superstores. At places like these and the *kancha bazaars*, business has not significantly

One reason, perhaps, has been the

fact that many people felt the air-conditioning, import good offering stores have been set up for the more affluent parts of the society. "When we opened our target customers were the upper-middle and upper classes," says Mr. Atab, Marketing Manager at Agora.

This can make all the difference in whether people switch over to the new shops or continue with the bazaars they are used to.

"I'd rather shop here, because there is more variety and of course because it is cheaper than there," says a customer at the *kancha bazaar*.



Despite trends abroad, open-air markets here have yet to be affected by the new superstores opening throughout the city.

eventhorizon

World Population Day

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The world population day 2003 is observed with a jubilant rally of the youth organized by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) to manifest this year's theme "the right to health, information and services for the adolescents and youths".

The rally started at 9 AM from National Press Club and end at National Museum parading different roads of the city. The rally was headed by Md. Fazlur Rahman, Director General, Directorate of Family Planning, Suneeta Mukherjee, UNFPA Representative Bangladesh and Janet E. Jackson, the Deputy Representative of UNFPA.

A discussion meeting also held at the Auditorium of Bangladesh National Museum followed by the rally. State Minister, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Md. Fazlur Rahman, Director General, Directorate of Family Planning, Major General Z A Khan (Rtd.), Chairman BDRCS, Deputy Representative of UNFPA Janet E. Jackson and UNFPA Representative Suneeta Mukherjee took part in the discussion.

The speakers said that 40 per cent of the population of Bangladesh are aged between 10 to 24 years which account for 4.8 crores young people. The adolescent and youth has a right to their health, information and services for reproductive health.

Each day, globally, over seventy thousand teenage girls are married, any against their will and nearly forty thousand becomes mother. About three hundred thousand girls in Bangladesh will be married before their 18th birthday by next year with a serious risk in morbidity and mortality.

The young population of Bangladesh need to complete at least secondary schooling and delay marriage and childbirth to break the cycle of poor health, illiteracy and poverty.

"This is the first time that the government have formulated and approved the National Youth Policy", said the state minister for Youth and Sports, Md. Fazlur Rahman.

Suneeta Mukherjee requests the minister to formulate a Reproductive Health



A youth rally in observance of World Population Day, in the city yesterday.

strategy for the adolescents. "Studies show that education, information and services does not increase promiscuity. On the contrary, it helps young people to make responsible, healthy decisions and handle the process of growing up", said eeta.

UNAIDS research studies revealed that sexual health education delayed the onset of sexual activity and rates of Sexual Transmitted Diseases (STDs) were

Medical waste a risk for city dwellers

CITY REPORT

Speakers at a seminar on Thursday stressed that private organisations the Dhaka City corporation (DCC) should take initiatives as well as soon to clean the city from medical waste that is at risk for city dweller's lives.

The seminar was organised by BRAC on 'Appropriate management options of medical waste for developing countries' while city mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka was present as chief guest.

City mayor urged all to help make Dhaka a clean city by managing its hazardous medical wastes. He said the DCC has to collect over 4000 metric tons wastes every day and an annual revenue expenditure of Tk 16 crore is allocated for the purpose. DCC has only one dumping

ground at Matuail in the city and the DCC is now looking for four more dumping grounds for better waste management.

Presided over by former adviser to the caretaker government and executive director of BRAC Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, the seminar was addressed by IUCN country director Dr Ainun Nishat, FEJB chairman Quamrul Islam Chowdhury and others.

Hartal at Pallabi

Awami League (AL) and two of its front organisations- Jubo League and Chhatra League yesterday held a half day long hartal in city's Mirpur, Pallabi and Kafrul protesting killing of AL leader Abbas Samad Khan.

Unidentified young gunmen Friday killed Khan, 50, a member of AL thana AL was shot in the head and chest.

AL activists held rally and processions against the killing and demanded punishment of the killer.