



the city that was

The great influenza epidemic of 1918-19 hit Dhaka just as it along with the rest of the country was recovering from the first World War. As many as 1,632 people were reported to have died of the illness. To make matters worse, small pox and cholera broke out at the same time, also taking a heavy toll of lives.

Rare decision against commercial activities in residential areas



Dhaka Ahsania Mission was running its College of Science and Business at a residential plot in Dhanmondi.

SOHEL ISLAM

In a rare decision, an Appellate Board of RAJUK on Monday ordered the dismantling of an unauthorised commercial building on a residential plot in Dhanmondi by August 15 this year, or the owner would face cancellation of RAJUK's approval.

A five-member board headed by RAJUK Chairman Iqbaluddin Chowdhury gave the verdict in the presence of the owner's representatives and the plaintiff (Dhanmondi Poribesh Unnoyon Jote).

Sultana Alam argued in the hearing, on behalf of Dhanmondi Poribesh Unnoyon Jote, that the building was a purpose-built commercial structure, which had destroyed the residential character of Dhanmondi.

The building is located at the heart of the Dhanmondi residential area. After an inspection of the construction-in-progress, in August 2002, RAJUK asked the owner of the house, Shahera Begum, to show cause why the

unauthorised structure should not be cancelled and dismantled respectively.

The owner's justification was rejected, and RAJUK gave six months to demolish the structure. But the owner paid no heed to

In January this year, the Public Works Department recommended cancellation of Shahera Begum's lease of the Dhanmondi plot owing to violation of the lease agreement, as she had not taken any permission for using the plot for commercial activities.

stop all academic activities of Ahsania Mission on the Dhanmondi plot, but the Appellate Board could not give any directive on this account as, "the Public Works Department is the owner of the plot and only it can take such steps."

"We cannot take this decision because both the Ministry of Education and the Public Works Department are associated with it," said the RAJUK chairman.

Meanwhile, talking to Star City, Sultana Alam said, "This is just our first initiative against the illegal commercial activities in the Dhanmondi area. Very soon, we are going to file law suits against the mushrooming growth of unauthorised commercial activities in the Dhanmondi area."

"They have no right to destroy our residential area and convert it into a commercial centre, creating all kinds of pollution in the area," said Sultana.

It may be mentioned that there are more than a dozen buildings in Dhanmondi residential area causing similar violations.

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RAJUK's order; rather she continued the construction of a private educational institution.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission is now running its College of Science and Business Studies at the rented property without permission from the authorities concerned, sources said.

Moreover, according to the Ministry of Education, universities and colleges must be built on their own land. Dhaka Ahsania Mission has permission from the Ministry of Education to run an educational institution provided it does so on its own land.

Sultana Alam urged the board to

DCC-market rent goes up after 19 years

Although DCC market rules say rent should be raised every three years

SULTANA RAHMAN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has increased the monthly rent on all its 105 markets for the first time in nineteen years.

Though this was supposed to be implemented on July 1, this year, DCC have not yet been able to complete all necessary proceedings, sources said.

DCC owns 105 markets throughout the city that include 36 supermarkets as well as kitchen markets and departmental shops. DCC earns an average Tk 65 crore per month in rent from these markets.

Compared to rental prices in private markets, DCC would still charge less than one-fifth the amount, at Tk 7.50 per square foot. But the beneficiaries hinted that they might move against the DCC's

decision.

The last time DCC raised the monthly rent in its markets was 1984. But according to municipal rules, the rent is supposed to increase every three years. Over the last nineteen years, therefore this rule has been violated. DCC sources allege that the rule was not implemented due to lack of cooperation from the elected decision-makers, who were feared becoming unpopular by increasing the rent.

Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka approved the increase in monthly rent on July 1, this year, and this date was also fixed as the start of implementation.

Sources claimed, the decision was a result of recent fund crises faced by DCC. To increase their existing funds was the main objective of the decision.

However, Md Mokbul Hossain Sarder, joint secretary of Dhaka New Market

Babosai Samiti -- a registered union of New Market -- claimed that they yet not received formal notice of increased rent from DCC. He along with organizing secretary, Alamgir Khokon, suggested that the market associations might move against the decision saying, "the increase in rent is more than twice the existing rent."

"DCC should not increase the rent to such an extent at one time," they added.

At present, the rent is Tk 3.50 per square foot, which DCC has decided to increase to Tk 7.50. This is less than one-fifth of existing market price.

"Some owners rent their shops to others for between Tk 1000-1500 per square foot," DCC's senior officials alleged, saying that the shop owners do not want to improve DCC's earnings at the cost of their own's.



Karwan Bazar is just one of the 105 markets owned by DCC throughout the city.

Competition killing cyber-cafe business



The cyber-cafe business is hanging by a thin line waiting for better times.

SYED TASHFIN

When the whole world is cashing in on the worldwide web and the Internet phenomenon, this sector is still in its infancy in Bangladesh, with Internet Service Providers in Bangladesh facing extreme difficulties surviving in such an expensive yet competitive field.

The usual complaints of most Internet users of the city are that the download speed is too slow and the server is all too often 'down'. The entire country has a total of about 350 cyber-cafes, with most of them around 260 found in Dhaka. About 77 per cent of the city's internet users are to be found on-line at these cyber cafes.

Recently, however, most cyber-cafes have run into financial trouble due to competition and other factors. The Cyber-Cafe Owners Association of Bangladesh (CCOAB) is therefore, organising seminars, functions, fairs and so on, in order to promote the cyber-cafe business and also to inform the government and public about their problems.

The cyber-cafe boom in Bangladesh started with the

British Council's cafe and The Blue Planet, in 1998. The third in this line was CNS Online, whose operation started in 1999. At the start, the hourly rate for Internet browsing was Tk 60. But in the past three years, this rate has dropped down to Tk 20 an hour.

This considerable reduction in cost was made possible by a venture of CGS Communications, who were allotted a considerable bandwidth by the Bangladesh Computer Council. Lately however the download speed of CGS Communication has dropped significantly due to the massive increase in customers.

Download speed is such an essential feature in attracting Internet browsers that Cyber-cafes have closed down over the last year due to this problem.

Cyber-cafes such as CNS Online and many others, therefore, have started to provide unlimited home connections so their businesses can survive.

"We are trying to win a lost cause with the hope that someday we can actually overcome the problems and provide city users with the kind of Internet speed they

desire," said Mr. Masudur Rahman, the member secretary of the CCOAB, when asked about the problems.

"We have tried to let our customers and our government know that we are actually lagging way behind as far as the communication highway is concerned. At the low rates that we are providing Internet connections at the cyber cafes and to people's homes, we are only able to buy a download speed of 64 kilobits per second, which most people usually mistake as 64 kilobytes per second."

The monthly rate for 1 megabyte per second is US\$ 5,000 and that is too expensive considering the economic problems that the cyber-cafe owners are usually facing.

"On the other hand, there have been some articles in the press about how broadband speed is not really what the cyber-cafe owners have guaranteed it to be. And this is due to the fact that broadband connections usually have a download speed of 1 kilobits per second, whereas, the broadband connections of foreign countries deal in terabytes. At Tk 1200 per month, most Internet users still want to enjoy terabyte

speed," said Masud.

But for terabyte speed, the monthly rate to be paid by any user is reported to be around Tk 20,000.

On other problems such as rumors about most cyber-cafes misusing their services, Mr Masud said, "We are trying to take actions over these cyber-cafes who are basically using their cafes as 'dating places' for couples. But due to a few owners, the entire cyber cafe community is being pointed to as miscreants which is very unfair."

Currently, computers are being provided to the schools of most districts in the country and the government is actually pondering about setting up cyber zones in such schools. The Bangladesh Computer Council will be working with the CCOAB, on this project.

"We have also asked for a VSAT installation, which would improve the speed of connection that we are providing to our browsers. Hopefully we will survive till these plans finally come to fruition; otherwise the Internet browsers of the country might have to get used to dial-up connections once again!" said Masud.

Shop-owners harassed by police

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Around two-lakh shop-owners in the city have been facing harassment by dishonest police inspectors, who receive Tk 10 crore in bribes annually, alleged the National Association of Shop Owners in Bangladesh, at a meeting in the city yesterday.

Billal Hossain, owner of Hossain Store, a departmental and grocery shop at Purana Paltan, received a summons from the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) which was issued on June 20, following a case against Hossain on violating the rule of 'The Shops and Establishment Act 1965' (SE Act 1965).

"An inspector of shops filed two cases against me to the CMM, but they have indicated me as two different persons in the summons using the separate parts of my name as the owner Md Billal Hossain and the manager Md Hossain," Billal Hossain

alleged.

National Association of Shop Owners in Bangladesh (NASOB) yesterday in a discussion meeting at the FBCCI auditorium alleged that about two-lakh shop-owners in the city have been facing harassment more or less like Billal Hossain. Some dishonest police inspectors intentionally harass the shop owners if they refuse to bribe the inspectors who then file cases citing the SE Act.

Amir Hossain Khan, Chairman of NASOB said that the owners, including supermarkets and departmental stores, pay some Tk 10 crore as bribes annually to the inspectors. Moreover, the SE Act is outdated as well as ineffective in the present day socio-economic condition.

In the discussion meeting FBCCI president Yousuf Abdullah Harun was present as chief guest. A sub-committee was formed in order to modernise the SE Act 1965.