

Fair for housing at fair price

Four-day Rehab exhibition at Sheraton Hotel concludes



Visitors crowd Rehab fair venue at Sheraton Hotel on the concluding day Saturday. (More pictures on page 18)

A ploy to pocket money?

DCC to build 18 shopping malls demolishing 'structurally flawed' kitchen markets

SULTANA RAHMAN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) plans to build at least 18 shopping malls demolishing structurally flawed kitchen markets in what shopkeepers say is a shady mechanism for windfall gains.

"The old markets may collapse anytime and the buildings, built in the 1960s, were declared abandoned," a DCC official said.

But shop owners at the markets said the buildings would not collapse and described the project as a ploy to pocket money.

The marked sites include Gulshan-1 and -2 markets, Mohammadpur Town Hall Complex, Mirpur Town Hall Market, Sadarghat Ladies' Supermarket, Sutrapur Market, Kaptan Bazaar roadside market and Mirpur Shah Ali Market,

Sakura DCC Market, Gulistan Trade Centre.

Only the markets in Gulshan will be 20-storeyed with construction likely to start in February under supervision of leading engineers, according to the DCC engineering department. Others will be 18-storeyed.

Businessmen accused the DCC of planning to demolish the structures without thinking about temporary relocation of the shopkeepers during construction.

But Syed Mozaffar Hossain, executive engineer of DCC Bazaar Circle, told Star City: "We are thinking of relocating kitchen market shopkeepers and hawkers in Gulshan to DCC's open space near the Shooting Complex."

"It is true that the DCC-owned markets are less modern compared to private markets. If the

DCC wants to modernise the markets, it should first ensure public convenience without favouring any individual," said a DCC market division official.

The DCC owns 105 markets, including 36 supermarkets, most of them built without planning or approval over the last decade.

The DCC has in effect lost control of rent collection from at least 12 supermarkets and loses Tk 7 lakh in revenue a month, as about 50 court injunctions prevented the DCC collecting rents from the markets, with some rulings in force since 1984.

"I don't understand why the DCC is interested in building more markets when they are unable to collect revenue from most of the existing ones," said a Newmarket Committee member.



New Year greetings cards on sale at a shop in the city.

the city that was

According to a local legend, there were graves of four fakirs (religious preachers) in the area of Fakirapool. A pool (small bridge) suddenly emerged over them one night and the place was named after it. However, historians believe there were graves and a small bridge was built on it afterwards that evolved the name of Fakirapool.

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CITY CORRESPONDENT

It was a fair for those who dream of buying flats, plots, shops and commercial spaces in the city and December is the time for them to congregate at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

The Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) came up with its housing fair, making the venue buzz with visitors for four days.

Sleek brochures, eloquent marketing executives, display stalls and hundreds of visitors marked the Rehab Housing Fair 2003 on December 24-27. The first housing fair was organised in 2001 at the same venue.

"Middle class people who earn over Tk 20,000 a month can afford to buy our flats. Although we have so far sold five flats here, the sale will peak in the months to come, as most buyers are now only comparing the offers from different companies," said Senior Assistant Manager of Suvasu Development Limited Golam Mostafa.

The companies of good repute under Rehab offered special discounts and lucrative gifts for the buyers of flats and plots.

Electronic items like colour television, microwave oven and car dominated the list of gifts.

"We are offering 5 to 12 percent discounts on our flats depending on projects. We gave a buyer of a flat a 21-inch colour television. The objective of our participation in the fair is to promote business," said Senior Sales Executive of RANGS Properties Masud Sajjad, who sounded upbeat about the sales.

As many as 71 participants -- 58 housing and real estate firms, 10 building material

providers and three financial institutions -- took part in the fair.

Most visitors to the fair checked with stalls before they opted for flats matching their incomes.

"I have been living in a rented house for the last 12 years. It costs me Tk 5,000 in rent a month. I talked to a housing firm who has assured me of providing an apartment, as I have Tk 5 lakh in savings," said Mustak Hossain, a merchandiser.

"I have also talked to a financial institution that provides housing loans. I am seriously thinking of buying a flat," Mustak added.

National Housing Finance and Investment Limited, Delta Brac Housing (DBH) Finance Corporation Limited and National Industrial Development Leasing Company of Bangladesh Limited (IDLC) offered housing loans at 14.25 percent interest rate, down from 15.7 percent.

"We have lowered the interest rate especially for the fair. I am happy with the way the visitors have checked our offers," said DBH Executive Officer Masud Ibne Mahbub.

"We have business interest, of course. But we are meeting people's demand and contributing to the economy as well," Rehab General Secretary Mahmudul Hassan said.

"The neglect of governments has pushed Dhaka towards unplanned urbanisation over the last 32 years. It is frustrating that the authorities, supposed to look after the housing sector, did not play their due role. We should now develop the city to keep pace with the contemporary world and correct the past mistakes," said Rehab President Towfiq M Seraj.

ON THE SIDELINES



Devotees at the Biswa Ijtema at Tongi preparing their food by the river Turag. The three-day congregation, the second biggest after Hajj, will conclude today with Ankeri Munajat (final prayer) seeking divine blessings for unity and prosperity of the Muslim Ummah.

New Year knocking at the door

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

For Dhaka dwellers, New Year's celebrations can never be complete without exchanging greetings cards.

A quaint greetings card with a message from the heart is sure to brighten up the day of the one receiving it, believes most people.

"Greeting cards convey the good wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year in a better way and in more appropriate words," said Rezwan Ahmed, a student of Dhaka University.

"Sending greetings cards from afar gives your near and dear ones the feeling that they are not forgotten," said Kabir Ahmed, a private service holder who was buying cards for cousins living abroad.

Sending official New Year's greeting cards is a traditional practice in private offices. It apparently strengthens busi-

ness or official relationship.

The card culture has seen a revolutionary upswing over the last decade or so. A few years ago card stores were limited in numbers across the city with the New Market being the most popular destination for different varieties

Now almost every neighbourhood has a Hallmark or an Archies outlet providing international standard greet-

ings material. These stores not only offer cards but also beautiful gift items suited for every occasion.

"The New Year, Friendship Day and the two Eids are the occasions when we have the best business," said Maksudur Rahman Sajib of Hallmark at Mirpur section 10. "But the New Year's eve is the time when we sell the largest number of cards," he added.

Sajib however seemed puzzled as to why the sale is unusually low this year. Dhaka residents have very few options to celebrate the New Year in a befitting way. Some attend informal parties at their friends' and relatives' places. For party addicts, it is usually a stimulating evening at a reputed club or hotel.

"Actually the New Year's eve dance parties at clubs and hotels are more fun as these are arranged within a secured environment," said Shaheen Mahteb, a housewife.

The Dhaka University campus is always filled with youngsters on the evening of December the 31st each year and another must-go attraction is the now forbidden Gulshan-Banani areas.

Heavy security presence can be expected this time too in those parts of the city as uncivilised mid-night revellers have done their best to spoil the spirit of the celebrations over the years.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"TIB (Transparency International Bangladesh) does not know how to maintain transparency in a report."

-- Jamiruddin Sircar
Speaker, Jatiya Sangsad
Criticising the TIB report at a press conference on December 20.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"The Gram Sarkars should even take steps to stop open air defecation."

-- AYBI Siddiqui
LGRD Secretary
At a briefing session of Gram Sarkars at Savar on December 23.
Source: Prothom Alo

"This kind of politics is now spreading HIV virus. You are at risk of infection, if you even shake hands with them."

-- Dr Kamal Hossain
President, Gano Forum
Criticising the culture of two ideals of politics at the function on the founding anniversary of Krishak Sramik Janata League on December 24.
Source: Prothom Alo



"There is nothing under the sun that the police cannot do. It is only a trifle drama."

-- Abdul Latif
Sub Inspector, at Nageswari thana in Kurigram District
Speaking to the journalists after forcefully stopping the staging of a drama in Kurigram on December 24.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"Even the servants at my house would not be so subservient to the influentials."

-- Lt. Col. (Rtd.) M. Akbar Hossain
Shipping Minister
Criticising the opportunist role of a section of businessmen at a tennis tournament in Narayanganj on December 25.
Source: Prothom Alo

"We are not land-grabbers"

-- Dr. Towfiq M Seraj
President, Rehab
Replying to a comment by Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas on December 23.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"That artist is discourteous."

-- Nazrul Islam
Professor, Rajshahi University
Commenting on the role of sculptor Mrinal Haque during the Golden Jubilee function of the University on December 21.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj