

A canteen plan triggers flak, fear



The construction of the canteen halted halfway in face of student agitation.

Some students said they do not need a canteen on the fine arts campus and some said a big commercial canteen would bring in more outsiders to the campus -- the reactions that prompted DU authorities to suspend reconstruction of the canteen

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Dhaka University's decision to rent out the canteen of the Institute of Fine Arts has provoked agitation among students, who fear it will harm the academic atmosphere on the campus.

Some students said they do not need a canteen on the fine arts campus and some said a big commercial canteen would bring in more outsiders to the campus -- the reactions that prompted DU Treasurer Professor Rashidul Hassan to suspend reconstruction of the canteen.

The protest against the move came after the DU syndicate decided to hand over the ownership of the canteen on

monthly rental to the highest bidder, who would they said allow outsiders into the canteen to maximise profit.

Fine arts students ran the canteen for long without paying revenues to the DU. Some mobile shops and temporary canteens in the DU area followed suit.

The DU has now homed in on increasing the revenue from all mobile and temporary canteens. But it has earned revenues from some canteens like Teachers-Students Centre (TSC) canteen and DU Central Students Union (DUCSU) cafeteria, run by the DU authorities.

"Some canteens and shops have long been doing business on the campus and we were unable to control them," Professor Rashidul Hassan said.

"We wanted to control the mushrooming mobile shops and earn revenues," the treasurer said, adding the science faculty canteen located in the annex agreed to give Tk 3 lakh in deposit and a monthly rent of Tk 3,000.

The DU says all shop owners were informed about the syndicate decision on mandatory deals, but the management of the fine arts institute's canteen did not contact the DU authorities even two months after the offer.

The DU syndicate decided to hand over the canteen to one of the DU students on the basis of Tk 2 lakh in deposit and a monthly rent of Tk 2,500.

But Joyal, who was running the canteen, said he did not get any notice from the DU, adding:

"I would have agreed on the proposal if I had been asked."

All on-campus shops and temporary canteens have to enter deals with the DU to run business and have to be uniform in design, colour and structure, the treasurer said.

A fine arts student told Star City: "There had been small shops doing business in the campus for long, but the policy to rent out the shops and temporary canteens would develop a trend in which anybody with money would come and do business on the campus."

"The DU syndicate is making a mistake damaging the academic atmosphere for limited revenue," another student said.

DUTP eyes suburbs in its second phase

SOHEL ISLAM

Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) has prepared phase two of the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) to continue the development and modernisation of traffic and transport sectors, as phase one is scheduled to end in June this year.

Under its plans for phase-two, the DTCB, apart from concentrating on Dhaka's development, will also explore ways to improve the transport system of the city's suburban areas.

The DTCB has finalised two project proposals one estimated at Tk 1281 crore for the city's development and the other at Tk 550 crore for suburban areas.

The second phase of the DUTP is a two-year plan and should start in June 2004. It is expected to be completed in June 2006.

Improvement of fifty intersections, three bus terminals, development of circular waterways and 300 km of road, con-

struction of 50 km east-west road links, 200 km sidewalks, DTCB's office building, truck terminals etc. are the main features of phase two.

While the DTCB is the lead agency for phase-two, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and Bangladesh Railway will be the sponsoring agencies.

The DTCB on January 5 submitted the two project proposals for funding to a World Bank supervisory mission that came to Bangladesh to assess the overall status of the DUTP phase-one.

Senior Urban and Transport Specialist of WB Navid Qureshi is leading the mission which will be in Bangladesh till January 14. He is being assisted by Sector Manager (Transport) of South Asia Guang Z Chen and Senior Transport Engineer of WB Bangladesh Mohi-Uz-Zaman Quazi.

"The WB mission requested the authorities of the DTCB to submit the DUTP-phase two

proposals to another mission which will be coming to Bangladesh within a few months," a source said, preferring anonymity.

"The visiting WB mission is satisfied with the progress of the projects under DUTP phase-one and asked the implementing agencies for extension proposals for projects which are lagging behind," the source added. The source also said that the WB would not consider more than two projects for extension.

It was learnt that the DTCB would request the WB to provide 80 percent of the total estimated funds for the second phase of the DUTP. The Bangladesh government may finance the rest of the amount.

The WB has mostly financed the DUTP's phase-1 at a cost of Tk 851 crore that began in 1998-99.

Mohakhali Flyover, improvement of three bus terminals, installation of 59 traffic signals, improvement of the city roads and intersections are the major projects under the DUTP.

Detectives to pick up hoarders!

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The government goes slow in deploying detectives to control the price hike of essentials, an apparently artificial crisis blamed on hoarders.

At an inter-ministerial meeting in the commerce ministry on December 20, the government decided to deploy a team of detectives to pick up hoarders, believed responsible for the price spike, but the decision has not been implemented yet.

The Detective Branch did not receive any order to take steps against hoarders of essentials, said a source.

Market analysts say the demand-supply rule of economics is not working in the market for essentials: the markets are bursting with supplies, but the prices have increased up to 30 percent depending on commodities over the last six months.

The demand for the essentials did not increase, nor did the government implement any plan for a major pay raise of its employees.

"Our wages did not increase to catch up with the price hike. We have to live within our wage limit. We are actually buying less," a consumer said.

The unemployment condition is worsening, as more industries are laid off minimising people's buying

capacity.

A cauliflower is bought at Tk 3 from the farmer but sold at Tk 15 on the kitchen market -- an example of shifting the pressure of high prices onto consumers.

Experts say kitchen-market retailers are not responsible for the price hike. A retailer pays up to Tk 13 for a cauliflower to sell it at Tk 15 to the consumer.

A near-institutionalised mechanism of extortion by police and hoodlums is at play all the way from farmers to retailers, which increases the prices.

"A business syndicate is at work, controlling the essentials market under government protection and prices are set according to their wishes," a retailer alleged.

Market experts have also observed the government's decision of waiving letter of credit (L/C) margins and lowering the import tax could not reduce the prices of essentials.

"Although the taxes were lowered by the government, the bribes were not. We pay more in bribes than import prices," said an importer who could not get import permit without bribe.

"A law against hoarding exists, but is not implemented. The condition would have been better if a consumers rights protection act had been passed, said Quazi Faruque, general secretary of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh.



Badamtali rice market: Bursting with supplies but prices on increase.

SCOUTING FOR LEADERSHIP



The seventh Bangladesh and fourth Saarc Scout Jamboree in progress at Mouchak in Gazipur. Hundreds of scouts from different schools and free teams of Bangladesh and from Saarc and Asia-Pacific countries are participating. The theme for this year's jamboree is 'Scouting for Leadership'. The week-long event will conclude tomorrow.