

Court order gives billboards a new lease of life

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Authorities' move to clear billboards off the cityscape ran into legal roadblocks, as the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on January 12 extended for six months an injunction on the demolition drive launched to cut vision pollution.

The order prevented Dhaka City Corporation DCC demolishing advertisement boards of 19 members of the Outdoor Advertising Owners Association (OAOA) that filed a petition with the Appellate Division to stay a High Court (HC) order on the raise in advertising rates by the DCC last May.

In the petition against the HC order that went against the advertisers, the association also sought an injunction from the Appellate Division, directing the DCC not to demolish the billboards.

The Appellate Division granted the petition, making the demolition drive

seemingly uncertain.

City dwellers feel billboards or neon signs, put up indiscriminately at vital crossroads, add to vision pollution. "Commercial or residential, billboards fill every nook and cranny, distorting the beauty of the city," said Dhaka University student Syed Ashraf.

Huge advertising boards are a risk for drivers too, as they divert attention and blur road vision. "Billboards should have been installed in designated places and in fewer numbers to minimise the strain to the eye," said Bipasha Haque, a school teacher, in a city where the DCC allowed at least 6,949 billboards until 2002, far outnumbered by unauthorised ones.

The DCC began dismantling the billboards on July 19, 2003, as it decided not to renew contracts with advertisers, which expired on June 30 -- a move that came to a halt on a stay order the Appellate Division issued on November 17.

The hearing scheduled for January 14 was deferred because of the new stay order issued on January 12.

Asked why the boards of other firms were not removed, as only 19 firms filed petitions with the court, a DCC official said petitioners staked a claim to the ownership of every billboard.

By contrast, OAOA Secretary Mohammed Rashed accused the DCC of removing the billboards defying the court order.

"We took DCC employees to Ramna Police Station and they could not show a valid proof of their permission to demolish the boards. Still, police refused to file any case," he said.

WRIT AGAINST INCREASED RATES

The advertising firms filed a writ with the HC against the DCC for raising advertisement rates that seemed to them quite unreasonable.

"The DCC increased the flat rent of Tk

30 to Tk 150 a square foot," Rashed said, adding that most advertising agencies had earlier rented a 10ft by 30ft board at up to Tk 22,000 a year.

"We have to charge our clients more than Tk 1 lakh, as the DCC will take Tk 45,000 for such a board if new rates are implemented," he said.

Later, the DCC changed its mind and decided not to renew contracts with the advertisers, as outdoor advertisement yielded much less revenue than expected in the fiscal 2002-03.

"We are willing to come to an out-of-court settlement, if the DCC requests so," Rashed said.

He said neither the DCC nor the advertising firms benefit from the legal tangles and more illegal billboards sprouted as the matter was pending with court.

DCC's Deputy Chief Revenue Officer Mohammad Helaluddin declined to comment on the issue.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Notebooks flood Banglabazar book market

Ghost printers of illegal notebooks

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Unscrupulous traders in connivance with a section of law enforcers, control illegal trade of notebooks worth at least Tk 100 crore a year, according to printing industry sources.

Using fake names and addresses of printing press, dishonest traders print and distribute notebooks through an organised network across the country.

The government has banned notebooks up to class eight as they harm the standard of education. Anyone violating the ban faces imprisonment up to seven years and a fine of Tk 30,000 or both.

But dishonest traders now print notebooks naming those 'guidebooks' to escape punishment. A section of law enforcing agency people get substantial amounts from the traders in the process of printing and distribution of the books.

Two types of notebook trad-

ers are in the field -- one group is active only during the first few months of an academic year and another round the year.

At least 50 so-called publishing houses through a syndicate bring out notebooks or guidebooks for class two and upwards. The books are printed in such a way that those could be used as 'copy chit' in public examinations.

A partner of Lucky Star Publishing House at the capital's Bangla Bazar said, "We don't print notebooks, which is illegal. But we publish guidebooks as those are helpful to students."

About the notebooks, a senior teacher of Dhanmondi Government High School said there is no necessity of these books if students follow their textbooks.

Moreover, the contents of the notebooks or guidebooks claimed to be written by 'an expert headmaster' or 'a group of experts' are far from being up to mark as those are actually

written by incompetent people, industry insiders said.

Publishing houses get the books written mostly by students, unemployed youths or other hired people.

One Mohammad Abdus Salam, whose name appears on guidebooks as MA Salam, has written many such books for secondary level to higher secondary level.

An employed graduate, Salam took to writing notebooks or guidebooks on a host of subjects ranging from Bengali to history for different publishing houses, one source pointed out.

"There are many other authors like Salam engaged in writing these books for publishers," sources at Bangla Bazar book market said.

Even some publishers just change portions of old notebooks and reprint those, they mentioned.

Booksellers sometimes compel students and guardians to buy notebooks with the textbooks, it is alleged.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

No step yet to set up Vat intelligence directorate

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The decision to introduce a Value Added Tax (Vat) Intelligence Directorate has not been implemented even after six months of its declaration by the finance minister in the last budget session.

The plan to create a Vat intelligence directorate was prompted by a High Court ruling that stated that customs intelligence had no jurisdiction in investigat-

ing cases regarding Vat.

Following the ruling, the decision was taken to convert the existing office of the Inspection Directorate at Maghbazar to Vat Audit, Intelligence and Investigation Directorate. However, no progress has been made till date.

"The customs intelligence investigated complaints regarding Vat prior to the ruling, now it has become necessary to form a Vat intelligence department. We do not have the authority to

investigate any Vat irregularities," said Hafizul Kabir, member (Vat) of National Board of Revenue (NBR).

"In Dhaka city we have posted one superintendent and three inspectors for each thana. If each thana has one thousand shops and restaurants the three inspectors need one year to cover each area. To collect such a huge volume of Vat, the number of officials must be increased," said a high official of NBR.

The condition of Dhaka is relatively better than in other districts. There is only one superintendent and three inspectors for Vat collection in every two districts. Non availability of vehicles to move freely is a handicap though.

If the intelligence directorate does see light, there will be no new recruits. The superintendents and staff of customs intelligence will be working for the new directorate and gradually manpower would be increased.

It is hoped that the Vat intelligence team will be able to investigate corruption be it in the NBR, government or private sector.

It has been observed in the past that businessmen increased the prices of their products as soon as Vat had been imposed and collected the added amount from the customers. But often they do not want to pay money to the government. Allegations are that some corrupt tax officials are also aiding them in this malpractice.

Flats for the expatriates

UNB, Dhaka

The government is going to construct 500 flats for expatriate Bangladeshis on 151 kathas of land beside a lake in between the city's Gulshan and Baridhara area.

The flats will be built on the land of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and distributed among expatriates on "no loss no profit" and country quota basis.

Announcing this, Joint Secretary of the Ministry Syed Md Nurul

Islam yesterday said, "the housing area will also have various civic amenities including schools, mosques, community centres."

He informed that the size of the flats would be around 1000, 1200, 1500 and 1800 square feet each and price of one square foot would be Tk 2,100-2,200.

He said, "already we have selected three low-bidder housing companies including Eastern Housing and Concord Real State and now we are waiting for work order." He also said that the work order is likely to be issued by this

month.

Earlier, the government allocated 3,300 plots to expatriate Bangladeshis in Purbachal project.

There are allegations that the expatriates are deceived when purchasing plots and face complications in taking possession of the land. This project will help the expatriates avert these problems, he said.

"It will also fulfil the desire of expatriate Bangladeshis who want to be an owner of a flat in the capital city," he added.

useful telephone numbers

COURIER SERVICES

International
Air Borne Express- 9561371, 9561372, 9550724
Air Couriers Int'l (BD) Ltd.- 8815970
Aramex International Courier- 9558003, 9559582, 9565075
Airspeed Express- 9563494
Asian Courier Services Ltd.- 8313543
Baishakhi Courier Service- 9558606
Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
Bangladesh Courier Service- 9563989
Bengal Express- 9560642, 9552666
Bangladesh Int'l Courier- 953636
Continental Service Ltd.- 9552948, 9558425
DHL Worldwide Express- 9881703-7, 9886305-9, 9882057
Enem Express- 9330699
Fedex Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
Modhuban Courier Service-

9550884
Overseas Courier Service- 9352431, 8321169
Pacific Courier- 9568446
Reliance Express Service- 9558515, 7110249
Sky International Service- 9660442
Skynet world Wide Express- 9558062, 9560258, 7114787, 7113184
TNT Express- 9566662, 9558239, 8618155
Union Courier Service- 9341722
United Parcel Service Air alliance Ltd- 8826429, 8810223
National
Asian courier Service Ltd.- 8313543
BAE- 9884851
Central Courier Service- 9881118
Confidence Courier Service Ltd. 9567036
Chisty Courier- 7110177-9,
Cosmopol Services- 9552793, 9557975
Dhaka Courier Services- 7236222

Dolphin Courier- 9558802
Dreamland Courier Service- 9550326, 9566975
Pioneer Courier Services- 9561727, 9569759
Probashi Courier Services- 9346359
Rainbow Express Parcel Services Ltd.- 8322773, 8315703
Reliance Express Services- 9558515, 7110249
Sundarban Courier Services- 9551984, 9556189, 9551656
Sunrise Courier Services- 9568751
World Runner Express Ltd. 9112068, Fax - 880-2-9112068

TIPS

Do you know according to Dhaka City Corporation, you must deposit your waste at the collection site between 4pm and 10pm

LIBRARY & INFO-

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers

Central Public Library- 8626001-4,
Shishu Academy- 9564128
Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
Bangla Academy- 8619550
Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407
Nazrul Institute- 9114602
Ford Foundation- 8116133
Alliance Francaise- 8611557
British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6
Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096
The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314
Drk Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412

OUTING

Museum and Zoo

National Museum- 8619396-9
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday 3 pm- 8 pm, Thursday closed
Muktijuddha Jadughar- 9559091
Open: 10:30 am 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed
Bangabandhu Smiti Jadughar- 8110046
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Wednesday closed
Ahsan Manzil
Open: 10 am 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed
Shishu Jadughar- 9666466
Open: 10 am- 6 pm, Sunday Closed

CITY BUS ROUTE

Bus No.	Route	Starts from
1	Gulistan-Shahbagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 10, 11, 12	Golap Shah Mazar
2	Gulistan-Shahbagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 1, 2	Phoolbaria bus station
3	Gulistan-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Mahakhali-Airport-Azampur	Phoolbaria bus station
4	Shyampur-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Airport-Tongi	Shyampur
5	Sayedabad-Kamalapur-Motijheel-Airport-Joydebpur-Gazipur	Sayedabad
6 A	Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Gulistan 1, 2	Kamalapur
6 B	Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 1, 2	Kamalapur
6 C	Motijheel Shapla chattr- Malibagh- Farmgate- Gulshan 2	Motijheel Shaplachattr
7	Sadarghat-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 2	Sadarghat
8	Chittagong-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Asad Gate-Kalyanpur-Gabtoi	Chittagong Road
9	Demra Rani mahal-Motijheel-Kalbagan-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 10, 11, 12	Demra Ranimahat
10	Sadarghat-Gulistan-Kakrail-Malibagh-Rampura-Biwa Road-Tongi Bridge	Sadarghat
11	Sayedabad-Motijheel-Fakirapool-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Tongi Bridge	Sayedabad
11/A	Sayedabad-Khilgoan-Malibagh-Rampura-Airport-Tongi Bridge	Syedabad
12	Shanir Akhra-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Asadgate-Mohammadpur	Shanir Akhra
13	Motijheel-Shahbagh-New Market-Jhigatola-Shangkar-Mohammedpur	Motijheel
14	Signboard - Motijheel-Shahbagh-New Market-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 12	Signboard (Chittagong Road)
15	Chittagong Road-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Mirpur 12	Chittagong Road
24	Gulistan-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Airport-Uttara-Bipile	Gulistan