

Construction of SSMC academic building hits the rocks



The construction of Salimullah Medical College academic building stopped midway for lack of funds.

The construction of eight-storey academic building began in 2002. But 20 percent of the work was complete before it stopped due to lack of funds. The project was scheduled to be complete by June, this year. The situation has forced the students to attend classes in the hospital building

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The construction of Sir Salimullah Medical College (SSMC) Academy Building came to a halt because of the end of a health programme, forcing students to attend classes in the hospital building in a stop-gap arrangement that adds to patients' sufferings.

The eight-storey academy building project was under the five-year Health and Population Sectorwise Programme (HSP) funded by the World Bank, but the construction hit the rocks as the HSP was over in 2003, said a superintendent engineer of the Construction Management and Maintenance Unit (CMMU) of the health ministry.

The project also features a morgue, a 700-seater auditorium

and a canteen.

The construction of the Tk 15.77 crore academic building began in June 2002 and the CMMU was able to transfer a fund of Tk 4.1 crore to the Public Works Department until 2003.

"Only 20 percent of the construction was complete before it stopped due to lack of funds. The project was scheduled to be complete by June 2004, which now seems unlikely," said a source in the construction firm.

"Although the World Bank will reimburse eight percent of the total cost, the government needs to spend its own funds first to go ahead with the work to get the reimbursement," the engineer said.

The health ministry is now trying to put the project under another WB programme -- the Health, Nutrition and Population

Sectorwise Programme.

"Authorities will send the project to the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Enec) on February 11 for review that will decide on the academic building," the engineer added.

"Salimullah Medical School was upgraded to college after independence, but its infrastructure did not develop like other medical colleges. It's necessary to have an academic building for the students" said M Abdullah, the principal of the college.

"Classes take place in the hospital which is already overcrowded with patients," a college teacher said.

"The hospital has no proper morgue, which is hampering post-mortem," said a fourth year student of the college.

Free textbooks on sale

Students and guardians say many primary schools in Dhaka did not at all distribute free books and many others did it partly, forcing them to buy the books

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Textbooks meant for distribution among primary school students free of cost are being sold in city bookstores.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has printed 6.64 crore books for free distribution among some 1.77 crore students in the current academic year and the distribution began on January 7.

Defying the government ban, traders in connivance with a section of primary school teachers and officials are engaged in

open sale of these books. Law enforcers do nothing about it as they share substantial amounts of money from the illegal trade, it is widely alleged.

Students and guardians say many primary schools in the capital did not at all distribute free books and many others did it partly, forcing them to buy the books.

"A syndicate of unscrupulous primary school teachers and officials sell out the books to traders, depriving students of their books," a bookstore owner said.

The books are available for

sale at Bangla Bazar wholesale market, Nilkhet book market and at bookstores at Maghbar, Shantinagar, Mirpur, Uttara and many other areas.

Most of the government and non-government primary schools in Uttara distributed only a few books and asked students to collect the rest on their own.

"I had to buy five books for my son, a student of Class Three, for Tk 300," said Jalal Khan, a resident of the area.

Many others made similar allegations.

Traders charge inflated prices for these books as there is no price tag on them.

"It has in fact, become a convention that new books are distributed among students of classes one, two and three and students of classes four and five receive 50 per cent new books and the other half old ones," said an aggrieved guardian.

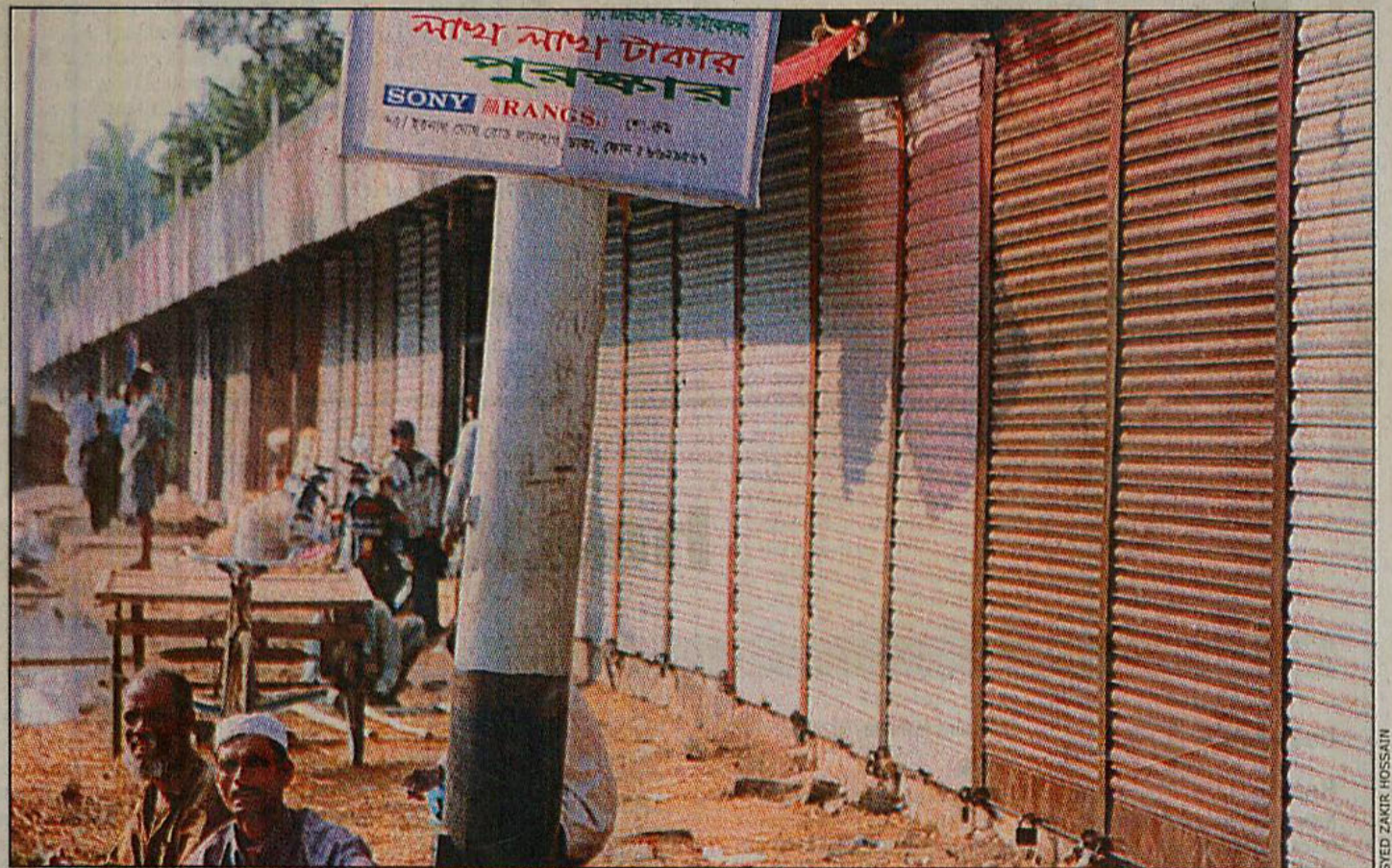
Sources pointed out that the illegal trade has been going on for years and no steps by the NCTB or the education ministry has been taken to stop this practice.

LAST DAYS OF ART BIENNALE



Yesterday was the last day of the 11th Asian Art Biennale 2003. Organised by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, works of 375 artists from as many as 45 countries of the Asia-Pacific region were on display at the three venues. But the grand show has failed to draw a good crowd during the last few days -- obviously because of Eid. Picture shows two security personnel-cum-connoisseurs at a barren gallery.

Musclemen still control 144 roadside shops



Local musclemen control these DCC shops from Bakshi Bazar bus stand to Chankharpool.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Local Musclemen still control the roadside market housing 144 shops from Bakshi Bazar bus stand to Chankharpool as Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) did not make any move to bring it under its jurisdiction despite a High Court verdict given two months ago.

About 10 to 12 hoodlums took hold of the shops along the footpath and boundary walls of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and rented them out to people who pay between Tk 1,200 and 1,500 a month. Each tenant

paid Tk 10,000 to 15,000 as booking advances depending on the size and location of the shops. A variety of shops, from construction materials, pay phone shops, fast food outlets to restaurants, are accommodated in the market.

"These criminals get support from their godfathers. This is why it is impossible to evict them," remarked a local resident.

Though the verdict was given in December 2003, DCC has not been able to take any steps to bring the market under its control as yet and it is feared that it would eventually lose authority. A DCC source on condition of anonymity

said, "To take control we have to first distribute the shops to legal tenants. As the DCC is delaying to make a decision, the takeover will be difficult later on."

The shops have now moved forward to occupy at least a half a kilometre stretch of the footpath. The DCC has been unable to take control of the market two years after completing its construction at a cost of around Tk 86 lakh.

When the DCC floated tender in 2001, the DMCH authorities complained to the former mayor that the proposed market would create environmental hazards.

"The engineering department decided to build the market prior to a feasibility survey of the area. No consultation with DCC's Market Circle division (MCD) was made though the MCD manages the DCC-owned markets," said a DCC official.

The DCC formed a 'Market Distribution Committee' in June last year led by its chief executive officer. Commissioners of the area concerned, top officials of the departments of engineering, revenue, estate and law sit on the committee while the deputy chief revenue officer (Market) is member secretary.