

Mobile courts run out of steam?

MIZANUR KHAN

Efforts of 20 mobile courts to head off crime and control runaway traffic in Dhaka apparently fizzled out amid scenes of law and order downslide.

The government set up the courts under 20 police stations of the 22 on January 29, four days before the Eid-ul-Azha, the time that sees crime including mugging on the rise and traffic out of control.

"To improve the situation, 20 magistrates are working under the home ministry with the back-ups of police and BDR (Bangladesh Rifles)," Shafique Anwar, a magistrate, told Star City.

But city dwellers think there is no significant change in the situation: killing is uncontrolled, faulty cars hit the streets, launches without fitness certificates ply rivers, buses and minibuses burst with passengers beyond their capacity.

"Killing, mugging and extortion have become common to the city," said Rafiq Hossain, a businessman, pointing to the brutal murder of a 25-year-old girl after rape in Pallabi on Friday.

A gang of six abducted, gangraped and burnt Fatema Khatun Kohinoor alive apparently over a row with her family, throwing security fears into sharp relief.

Statistics on killings are not avail-

able in any government agency such as the Public Relations Department, Dhaka Metropolitan Police and Detective Branch, which referred Star City to one another for information.

Businesspeople said at least five businessmen were killed in the last two months and a study reported at least 50 carjackings in Dhaka last month.

On other areas of mobile courts' work, Shafique said: "Controlling adulterated food, sale of food in unhygienic places and illegal occupation of sidewalks is also the work of the mobile courts."

The courts filed around 5,000 cases and took Tk 25 lakh in fines from January 29 to February 29. Fifteen people were jailed in seven cases.

The 20 police stations were divided into nine zones for smooth functioning of the courts: Mirpur-Pallabi-Kafrul, Uttara-Gulshan-Badda, Kotwali-Lalbagh, Tejgaon-Mohammadpur, Khilgaon-Sabujbagh, Kamrangirchar-Hazaribagh, Motijheel-Sutrapur, Dhanmondi-Ramna and Shayampur-Demra. The cantonment and airport police stations were left out of the list.

An official, seeking anonymity, said there is no office for the mobile court magistrates and they rest at police stations in their localities and cannot work on their own.

"We cannot rush to the place in time as vehicles are not available. Ille-

gal shops come back to the footpaths two days after we demolish them," said a magistrate at Farmgate.

"Violators are fined, cases are filed but the next day they drive their faulty cars back to the streets," a magistrate said.

Dhaka residents complain that dishonest vendors sell foods in unhygienic places -- unchecked by the mobile courts. Bangladesh Standards

and Testing Institution did not send representatives to the courts to take action against the criminals.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) Mohammad Ayub rearranged mobile courts under 12 police stations on February 23, as the situation did not improve.

The CMM could not be reached for comment.



A mobile court at work. No office, no vehilces for magistrates.



Soaring soyabean price to roar until April

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The prices of soyabean oil is unlikely to return to normalcy before the end of April despite the duty cut on the import of refined oils.

Sources in the vegetable oil refiners' association said that the duty cut will be of little use as prices of soyabean are still showing an increasing trend in the international markets.

The present trend may continue till the next harvest in the soya producing countries, especially America, by end of April, they said.

The price of crude soyabean oil rose to \$715 per ton from \$660 in the global market over the last few weeks.

Prices of edible oil shot up by around 50 per cent in the local market in the last few months. A five litre can of soyabean is now being sold at Tk 290-95 which was between Tk 225 and Tk 230 only a few weeks ago.

Meanwhile the price hike of soyabean oil has pushed up import of palm oil.

Market sources said, palm oil saw a record high import of 1,01,937 tons last month.

Besides, the import of edible oils increased by 69 per cent in January-February 2004. A total of about 2,18,334 tons of edible oil has been imported. Last year it was 1,00,979 tons during the same period.

According to the breakdown of import during the last two months -- there were

1,44,537 tons of crude palm oil, 54,550 tons of crude soyabean oil and 18,794 tons of mustard oil. In addition, about 453 tons of refined edible oil, butter oil etc. have been imported in consumer packs.

It has been observed that import of palm oil shot up by more than 300 per cent while import of soyabean and mustard oils fell by 17.22 and 29.14 per cent respectively.

Local refiners say that the government should cut duty on crude soyabean rather than encouraging import of refined oil.

Recently the government increased duty on crude by one per cent and at present, the oil refiners have to pay around 26 per cent duty for import, they said.

Look before you leap

Fake electronic goods flood markets

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

A gush of fake electronic goods into the local markets has deceived many unsuspecting city dwellers.

Television sets, refrigerators, VCD players, stereo music systems, audio cassette players, air conditioners, washing machines, mobile phone sets and irons are falsified under international brands.

Of the popular brand names, Sony and Panasonic are exploited the most. Items bearing identical names are displayed at shops and showrooms attempting to lure customers into purchase.

The locally produced goods sometimes carry subtly changed name brands. Changes like 'Soni' from 'Sony' or 'Panasonic' from 'Panasonic' go unnoticed by enthusiastic customers.

"Our brand is copied most as it has earned people's trust," said Shariful Islam, assistant manager of Nicole International, Panasonic's agent. He added that the name is losing its reputation because of the high rate of forgery. "It is hampering our business."

Most fake electronic items are available at the Bangabandhu National Stadium market, Baitul Mukarram super market and Nawabpur Road market. The electronic goods sales outlets attract customers mostly from the lower income group.

On the other hand, customers feel that they get their monies worth because they buy a brand-item at a lower price than the nominated sales agents.

"A fake Sony (or Soni) 14" colour television set is around Tk 9,000. The genuine one costs about Tk 14,000," said a salesperson of a shop at Baitul Mukarram.

Some salespersons at Bangabandhu National Stadium mar-

ket said that low quality parts are smuggled from India and China. They are assembled here and then a brand name gets added.

Traders buy damaged or out-of-order electronic items, repair them, camouflage the old item with a new coating of paint, ensure the brand name is conspicuous and sell them off as new items to unsuspecting customers.

The painting is generally done behind swimming pool market adjacent to the Stadium market.

No written guarantee is given to any customer. Customers are ripped off in the name of replacing damaged parts.

Sabit Khan of East Rajabazar faced such a situation having bought a refrigerator from Stadium market that went out of order within a month.

"They did not replace or repair it,"

he complained.

Apart from household items, commercially used electronic items like close circuit cameras are also being duplicated.

"Low quality close circuit cameras are brought from China and Taiwan by people known as baggage party," said Abu Saleh Siddique, Enercon International's sales officer. He said the baggage parties pose as tourists and each carry a few cameras without paying taxes.

Brand names are then added and sold at about Tk 10,000 while a genuine camera costs about Tk 16,000.

"This is how close circuit cameras are sold in every nook and cranny though only four to five genuine importers exist," Saleh said.

Some traders commented customers are gradually becoming aware of the fake goods and avoid go-

ing in for popular brands fearing the forgery. They are comfortable buying Chinese, Korean or Taiwanese brands like Konka, TCL, Walton, Hisense, Hayes & Hayer or Changhong.

"These brands are not yet copied by fake-good makers and are cheap too," said Dipu Ahmed who owns an electronic goods store at the Stadium market.

Traders and salespersons said most of the forgery would decrease if smuggling of electronic parts can be prevented.

"Some electronic goods traders continue their business just as an eye-wash," said a salesperson of Bangabandhu National Stadium market on condition of anonymity. "In fact their main business is smuggling Heroin, Phensydil and especially gold," he added.



Does anyone know the difference, which is genuine, which is fake?



THE VIGILANT APARAJEO BANGLA

Dhaka University recently saw a wave of protests following the brutal attack on DU teacher and author Dr. Humayun Azad. And every time Aparajeo Bangla the 'vigilant' sculpture on the campus was the centre of activity. The photographs represent its 'peaceful, resentful and shamefaced' states during the student agitation.