

Illegal drugstores sprout at DMCH

MIZANUR KHAN

Workers of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) have illegally built a chain of drugstores in the DMCH area with the help of high officials and rented them out.

Bangladesh Class Four Workers Association of the DMCH has constructed eight shops in front of the emergency gate of the hospital four years ago, followed by others in the coming years, and association leaders rented them out to local businesspeople and political cadres.

A former deputy director of the DMCH set up a pharmacy allegedly without permission from authorities. A former DMCH doctor, former president, former organising secretary of the association and a working doctor of the forensic department followed suit, sources said.

"I don't know how the shops were built. We have already asked the former association president to hand over documents but he did not respond," said SM Shahjahan Kabir, association secretary.

"We have sent two letters and will send another soon. If we don't get answer, we will take legal action," he said.

"We pay the association Tk 3,500 in monthly rent," said Motiur Rahman, a drugstore staff.

Close to the emergency gate are three shops, which remain open round the clock. Later, the employees built four more shops

near the gate of the Doctors Hostel.

Shop owners say they pay Tk 1,200 each in monthly rent to the committee of 'DMCH Noor Mosque' built in 1996.

"The mosque was constructed with this money," a mosque committee member said, adding: "If you can afford Tk 5-6 lakh, you can get a shop here." The demand for shops near the biggest hospital in Bangladesh is high.

Akbar Hossain Khoka, secretary of the mosque committee, allegedly collect rents from the shops.

Visitors to the DMCH alleged that the shops sell medicines at high prices. "A strip of sleeping pill sells at Tk 20 here and we buy medicines from these shops, as we don't have alternatives," said Majeda Khatun, who has been attending to her daughter at the DMCH over the last two weeks. The normal price of a strip of sleeping pill is Tk 14.

A butterfly needle used to transfuse saline sells at Tk 15, from Tk 3.

"We buy a Ranison injection at Tk 12 from the shops here, while the price is only Tk 5 in other shops," said Abidur Rahman, who came from Basabo to take care of his son at the DMCH.

Visitors and attendants who come from other districts suffer more. The middlemen usually lead the unsuspecting relatives of patients from the wards to those shops and take commissions on sales.

"Patients and their relatives are helpless," a staff of a shop said, seeking anonymity. Shop owners also run payphone business there with illegal connections and regularly bribe the police.



whether anybody has sought official permission to run the shops.

"The rent goes to the employees' welfare association," he told Star City later.

But some workers alleged that association leaders pocketed money in the name of the welfare

association.

Pharmacy owners say running business has become tough, as extortionists and armed cadres demand tolls regularly. Most alleged extortionists are the cadres of the Dhaka University unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student wing of ruling BNP.

"If we do not please them, they beat us and take medicines or money away, brandishing firearms," a drugstore owner said, asking not to be named.

Other pharmacy owners said the police did not take action against the alleged criminals despite repeated complaints.

TAXICABS AND CNG AUTORICKSHAWS

Ministry finally goes for wholesale registration



AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The communications ministry will allow wholesale registration to as many taxicabs and CNG autorickshaws as imported until April 8 in a decision that prompted protest from an environmentalist group that said it would add to air pollution and traffic jam.

"We have issued a notice to the BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority) for implementation of the new registration plan," said Communications Minister Nazmul Huda.

The ministry at a meeting on April 7 decided to dedicate a week to the new registration process for the interest of taxicab and autorickshaw owners.

"We have received the notice and its gazette notification is underway," said BRTA Chairman Mahmud Hassan Mansur.

But the BRTA is yet to know

the number of vehicles waiting for registration -- the issue that an official said came up at the ministry's meeting on April 7 but remained unresolved.

Nor does Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) know the number of vehicles up for registration. "The DTCB should be informed about it for the future traffic control of the city," said DTCB Director (administration) Akhtar Hossain.

The move came as a contrast to a previous decision the ministry took to control traffic jam, imposing a ceiling on autorickshaw and taxicab registration. Dhaka has 13,000 autorickshaws and 10,000 taxicabs, registered officially until December last year, to ply its streets.

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) protested the ministry's revised decision and said it would not protect Dhaka from further air pollution and gridlock, as many vehicles are substandard and the capital is bursting with traffic beyond

capacity. "Substandard Indian vehicles will increase pollution," said Bapa President Abu Naser Khan, adding more vehicles mean more traffic jam.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) found many taxicabs and CNG autorickshaws plying without legal registration. "We have found many taxicabs and CNG autorickshaws without legal registration and route permits," a traffic sergeant said.

Businesspeople are now importing taxicabs by opening Letter of Credit (LC) with banks and the importers do not need permission from the commerce ministry's import division.

"Taxicabs and CNG autorickshaws should be imported with proper permission and according to the traffic capacity of the city," another BRTA official said.

A commerce ministry official said: "The importers don't need permission from the commerce ministry for importing taxicabs less than three years old."

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

"Many newspapers are not playing the right and responsible role."

--Khaleda Zia,

Prime Minister

Tells parliament while referring to a newspaper report that severely criticised government relief operations in the northern region, on May 17. Source: The Daily Star

"Like many of us, Bangladesh too has to cope with various facets of world terrorism."



--Jack Straw, British Foreign Secretary
Tells BBC Bangla Service in his reaction to bomb attack in Sylhet that injured the British envoy and killed two, on May 21. Source: The Daily Star

"Many identified criminals are now people's representatives."

--Sheikh Hasina,

Leader of the Opposition and AL president

Tells a Lions Club function at a city hotel, on May 21. Source: Prothom Alo.

"Deep and bitter rivalries between the leaderships of the two main political parties degrade democratic values and institutions; particularly parliament."

--Christina Rocca,

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia

Tells a luncheon meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh, on May 18. Source: Prothom Alo.

"Only politicians themselves can improve matters and provide the vision and framework for a prosperous, stable and strongly democratic Bangladesh."



--Anwar Chowdhury,

New British High Commissioner

Tells the press after pointing out three major worries that hinder Bangladesh from achieving its potential, on May 17. Source: Prothom Alo

"It's my lucky ground. I scored my career's first ODI century here."

--Yuvraj Singh,

Indian cricketer

Tells the Prothom Alo when asked about his feelings on Dhaka, on May 18.

NO ZEBRA CROSSING, NO FOOTBRIDGE



People cross these two busy points at Bangla Motor and Sonargaon Hotel risking their lives. There is neither a zebra crossing nor footbridge for pedestrians.