

3 lakh in drug trap

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Drug peddlers sell at least nine brands of hard drugs in 50 spots in the city in clandestine dealings with the police, narcotics officials and local political leaders, trapping an estimated three lakh addicts in a vicious circle.

Senior officials of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) said drug abuse has become a dangerous national problem and the number of addicts is rising by the day because of easy access to drugs.

The officials said heroin or brown sugar, Phensidyl, cannabis, Tidigesic injections, pathidine, diazepam, clobazam, seduxen and unocin tablets flooded the capital.

Among all, brown sugar, Phensidyl and cannabis are the most sought-after drugs. Many brown sugar and Phensidyl hauls come from India and a raft of shipments was reported to have come from Pakistan, Myanmar, Thailand and Nigeria. City clinics and hospitals are the prime sources for pathidine injections for addicts.

The DNC officials claimed they could do little to stop the "immensely lucrative trade" that generates a black economy worth crores of taka. The policy on narcotics control is the main obstacle to fighting drug abuse, DNC officials said, asking not to be named.

The officials blamed the spread of the illegal trade on the Prohibition Rule 1950 that is still

Young men come to Mohammadpur Sweepers Colony to buy heroin, Phensidyl and cannabis every day. Luxury cars line up the main road where peddlers sell drugs under cover of dark

in force banning Muslims from taking alcohol unless certified by a doctor.

Almost every locality in the city has a spot where drugs are sold unchecked. This correspondent found a dozen young men at the City Polli in Demra selling brown sugar and Phensidyl. Dozens of other young men lined up along the drain, puffing heroin.

"I receive about 100 small packets of heroin every day

from a big brother who comes on a motorbike to deliver. I sell each packet at Tk 30," said Liton, adding he gets Tk 200 and the 'big brother' gets the remainder of the money a day. "Every week we pay Demra police and narcotics officers to run our trade."

Like Liton, several other young men and women, working at the City Polli, sell heroin and Phensidyl.

Young men come to



An artificial arm does not stop him from continuing the habit of taking drugs (left) as others sit along the wayside waiting for a chance to inject themselves with their preference (right), a common sight in Nayabazar.

Mohammadpur Sweepers Colony to buy heroin, Phensidyl and cannabis every day. Luxury cars line up the main road where peddlers sell drugs under cover of dark.

A bottle of the banned cough syrup Phensidyl, containing codeine, costs Tk 200. Drug peddlers said the police, narcotics officers and local political leaders are taking 'thousands of taka' a week from the Sweepers Colony, allowing the peddlers to

run the trade.

"If there are raids, we get to know about it earlier and take all precautions," said a drug peddler, who would not give his name.

A DNC official said Phensidyl in the market is manufactured only for Bangladesh and detrimental to health.

Along the border in the Indian territory, many small pharmaceuticals have been set up to supply the cough syrup to

the growing market in Bangladesh.

"We wrote to the Indian authorities through Interpol to give us an idea about how many Phensidyl-producing pharmaceuticals have been set up on the Indian side, but they did not respond," another DNC official said.

As many as 53,975 people have been arrested and 52,540 cases filed under the Narcotics Control Act since the law came

into force in 1990, but police officials said they could not arrest any 'god father'.

A former police official who had served in Dhaka Metropolitan area for 15 years said some police investigations stalled as the drug lords came from higher echelons of society.

"The peddlers are poor people and sell substances to make a living, but actual suppliers are influential working from backstage," the retired police official

said.

The Border Security Force in India, Bangladesh Rifles, coast-guard, customs and police all are beneficiaries of this trade in Bangladesh," he said.

The supply of drugs goes higher, so does the demand for drugs, helping so-called drug rehabilitation clinics cash in on the vicious circle of addiction that trapped hundreds from the middle class.

Old Dhaka women: Safe yet sorry



A woman walks in veil down the street of Bangshal in Old Dhaka, in keeping with age-old traditions.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

"A women's place is in the home, an age-old custom, where many women sometimes wish to revolt against with a yearning to live according to their own will."

Yet, most women in the old quarter of the city belonging to families well-known as *Dhakaites* do not find it too difficult to live up to traditions like early marriage, extended family, restricted movement or even old superstitions.

"I always dreamed of continuing my studies," said Shabana Begum, a housewife from Bangshal, who got married while a student of class IX.

"My parents did not want me to continue my education and married me off," she said. "Later I consoled myself with the thought that this is what happens to every girl in the family and surrounding. We are expected to give priority to getting married and bringing forth children," she added.

Shabana along with other women in Old Dhaka believe they are hamstrung by the lack of education, as

they could barely complete higher secondary schooling.

"Our parents could never understand the necessity of education. We were fated to rush into early marriage," said Masuda Parvez. Her husband M.E.H. Parvez sided with his wife and said: "Not only women but we too are lagging behind because of lack of education."

"Most Old Dhaka families are business-oriented and did not give importance to education," Parvez said. "They never realised even running a business needs education."

The couple believes the situation is gradually changing. The elders of Old Dhaka now want the present generation to get the best of education.

"Parents with little or no educational background at all are now enrolling their children in English medium schools," said Masuda, with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Well, we are not totally confined to the four walls. We see day and night as it comes," said Ainoon Nahar, a housewife when asked if there were any restriction on going

out.

"We get out of home whenever necessary but always wear a veil," she said.

Not only Ainoon Nahar but also most women in her locality said wearing *burkah* (loose all-enveloping garb) is a must.

"No matter whether we go to school to pick our children up or shopping, we are always covered in veil," said Parveen, another housewife.

Women of extreme conservative families are hardly seen out of their homes. "My husband is a Quran-e-Hafez and does not want me to go out much," said another housewife in Bangshal.

"He does not mind me watching television or even dancing at a family function in my own house but does not permit me go out often," she said.

"Yet, there are times I long to live like women of the other parts of the city. I get tired of following other's directions for nitty-gritty in life," she said.

When in her father's house in a rebellious mood, she does not wear

the veil.

"There are some girls in my class who set off from home wearing it but takes it off when they reach college," said Lamia, a college student.

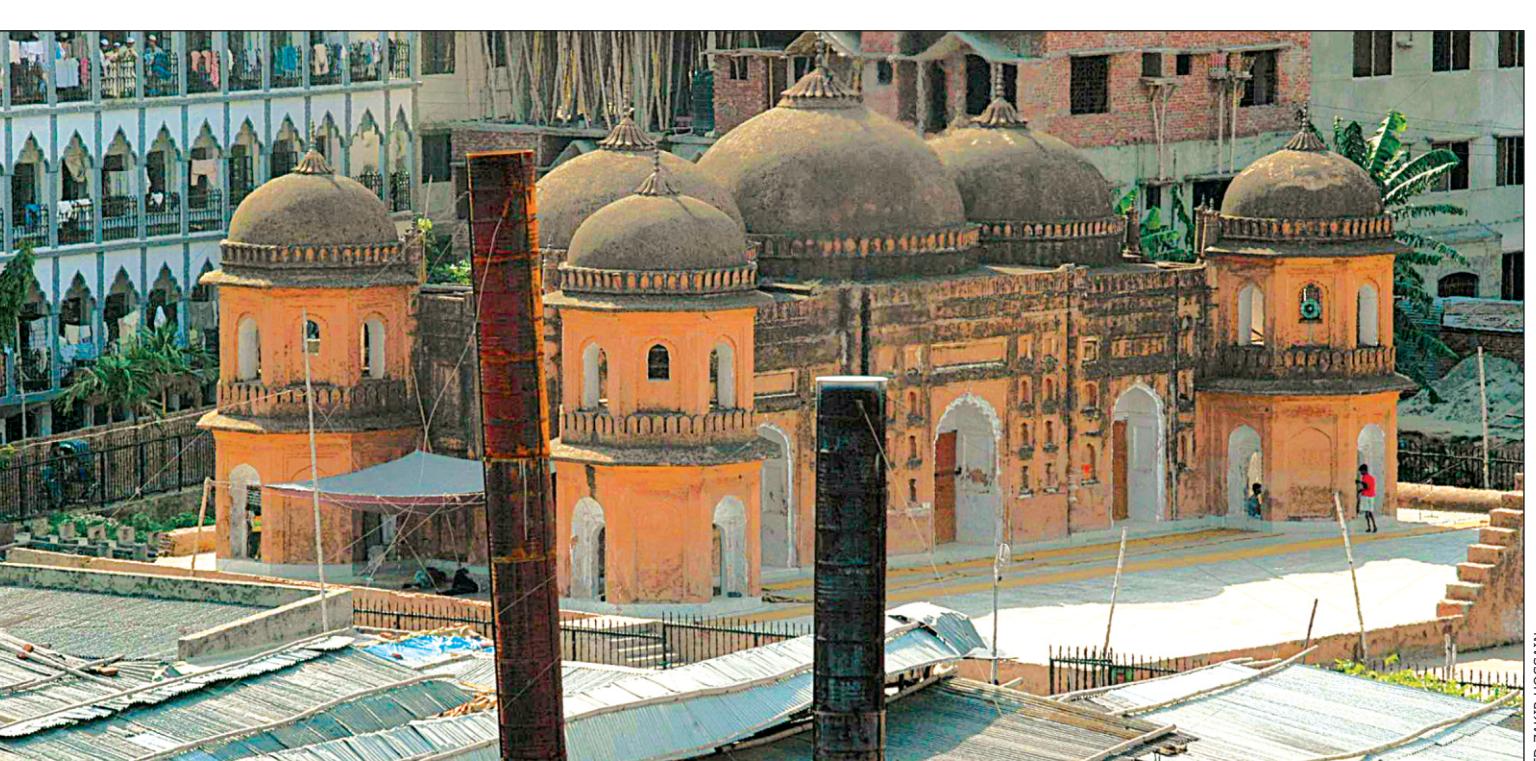
A few women who follow a different lifestyle in the area find it difficult to mingle with conventional people.

"I don't wear a veil and go out frequently that singles me out of the women in my locality," Masuda said. "I feel uncomfortable mixing with them and they too never seemed interested in making friends with me. I hear intuitions from them about my lifestyle," she said.

She said even her mother scolds her for not wearing a veil. "Decency depends on me and I can look decent even without covering myself top down."

Most people said women are more secure in Old Dhaka than in other parts of the city. They said that there are hardly any incidents of teasing or violence against women in the locality.

"I have been living here since I was born but never was confronted with or saw such incidents," Masuda said.



INDUSTRY DESTROYS HERITAGE

The roof of one of the oldest mosques -- the Sat Masjid -- in the city that stood tall in all its splendour in days of the Mughals, is now covered black because of the smoke sent out by the glass making industries beside the site destroying its beauty and heritage.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN