

Cashing in on patients' woes

As DMCH reels from acute bed crisis some dishonest employees allegedly provide beds for patients on bribe

MIZANUR KHAN

Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) is reeling from an accommodation crisis, as the authorities of the biggest hospital in Bangladesh did not take any initiative to ease the problem for long.

More than 1,700 patients stay in hospital for treatment round the clock whereas the DMCH has 1,400 beds.

On average, more than 100 patients are admitted to hospital a day and about 2,200 visit the outpatient and emergency departments, ward master Abul Hossain said.

Many patients with serious illness and injuries lie on the floor because of the bed shortage. Eighty-year-old Abdus Salam from Noakhali managed a tiny space under the stairs to sleep after his younger brother and wife took him to hospital five days ago.

"We did not get a bed but some people who came after us were surprisingly given beds. A staffer was trying to lure me into an underhand dealing, but I refused," Salam's brother said.

On-duty doctors told Star City that some dishonest employees provide beds for the patients on bribe. A group of workers aided by high officials has become strong and takes patients' 'hostage'. A source says a patient will have to pay the group Tk 200 to Tk 1,000 in bribe for a bed. "They are so organised that the authorities are afraid of telling them anything," a

doctor said, asking not to be named.

Most hospital wards remain overburdened with patients, while some wait their turns to go inside. A visit to some wards made it evident that there was no room to take a patient in.

The situation in and around the ward No. 30 is the worst. Thirty-year-old Mohammad Masum, a bus helper with serious injuries, has been lying on the floor in front of the ward for the last two months. "One day he was given a bed and he was moved out another day. It depends on the nurses," said his mother Asma Khatun with tears in her eyes.

Nurses claimed that they take old patients out of bed to allow the serious patients in to offer them a little comfort. "We look into the condition of the patients and provide beds," said Masuma, a nurse at the ward No. 30.

Some patients said the nurses demand money for beds in an allegation that the leaders of the nurses association and the high officials brushed aside.

"We have never heard such allegation from the patients. If it happens we will take action against the guilty," said DMCH Deputy Director Dr Kazi Kamaluddin Ahmed.

On the annual figure of patients, the DMCH authorities said they do not have any mechanism to calculate the number of total patients admitted a year. "We can only say how many patients are under treatment today," said Deputy Nursing

Superintendent Khairun Nahar.

"We have increased the number of beds by 300 only on paper in September last year as we were facing a lot of problems," Dr Ahmed said.

Sohrabuddin Khan, DMCH administrative officer, said the hospital controls the admission to keep the number of inpatients low.

Khairun Nahar denied the bed shortage and said: "If the hospital does not have enough beds, how can we give accommodate every patient?"

The DMCH has 234 doctors and 648 nurses to provide treatment for patients in 41 wards. "The patient-nurse ratio in our hospital does not meet the international standards. Fewer than 200 nurses work a shift for a large number of inpatients, which is difficult," she added.

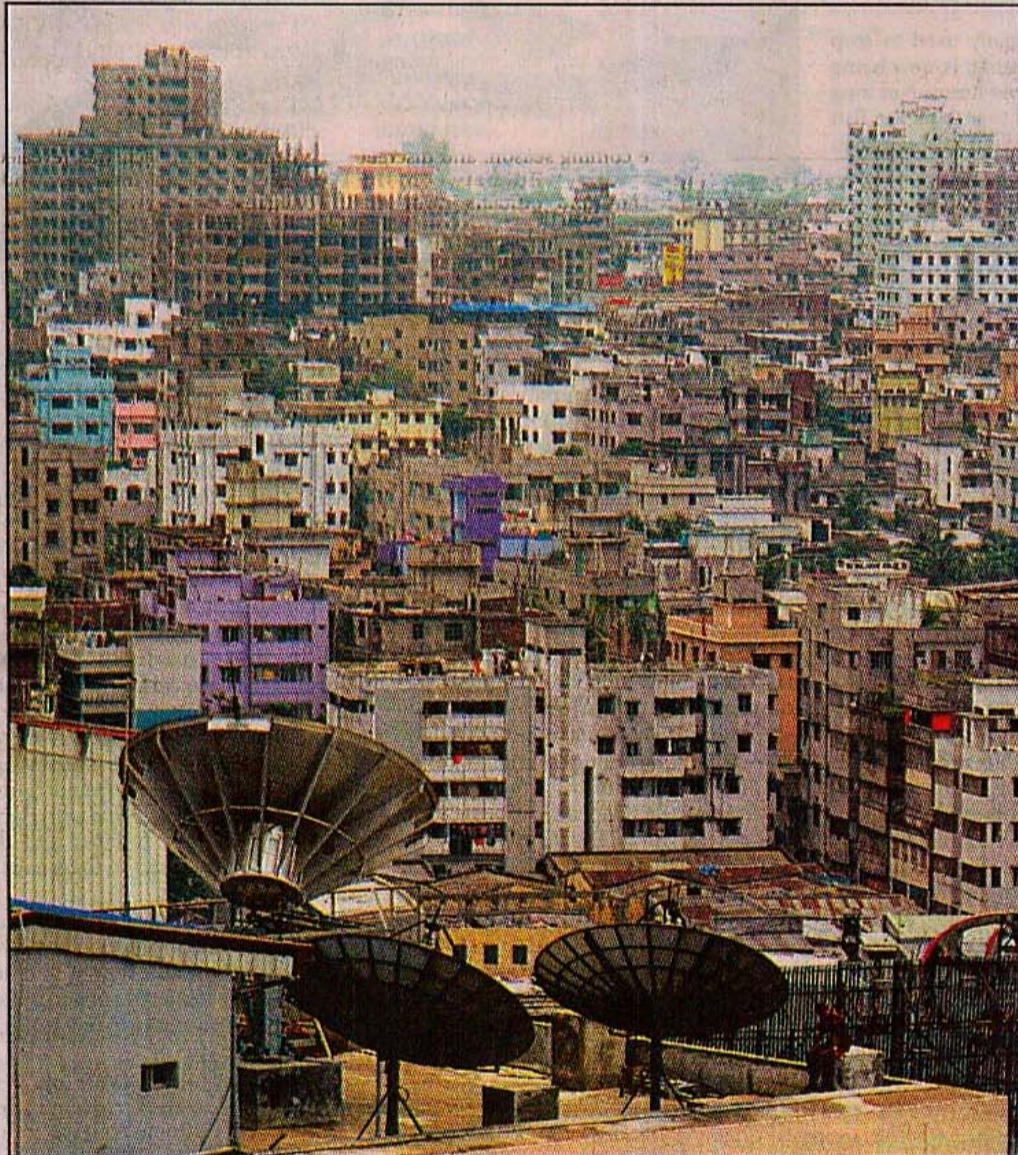
The hospital, launched in 1946 with only 250 beds, has now been overstretched with patients. "We have asked the health ministry several times to increase the number of beds and we are trying to do so in different departments," Dr Ahmed said.

"If the hospital provides 17,000 beds, it will still remain crowded. We have extra beds in our storeroom but the hospital lacks space to house them. The hospital set up almost 60 years ago only for 250 beds now houses 1,400 in the same space," he said.

The DMCH authorities said they do not have any immediate plan to increase the number of beds or expand the hospital.



Patients lie on the floor of Ward 30 of DMCH because of bed shortage.



Thousands of new houses and high-rises built in the last 14 years are still out of holding tax net.

HOLDING TAX SELF-ASSESSMENT

DCC aims to list new holdings, not to raise tax, says mayor

REZAUL KARIM

The recent move of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for self-assessment of holding tax was aimed mainly at bringing the newly constructed houses into its net, which has not been updated for the last 14 years, Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka explained on Friday.

"Thousands of new houses, numerous commercial and residential high-rises were built in that period, more than 80 percent of which remain outside the city corporation's holding tax net. So, re-assessment is a must," he told The Daily Star.

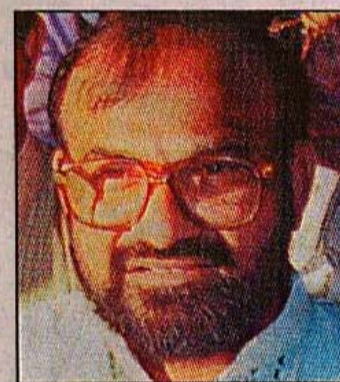
Khoka said at present only the owners of the houses constructed before 1990 are paying holding tax. "But, why should it be so? Though the new buildings including the skyscrapers are generally expensive and luxurious, a large majority of their owners don't pay the tax due to the lack of assessment. It is not fair

and we have decided to add the new holders to the taxpayers' list," he elaborated.

The DCC mayor said house-owners in the past were afraid of the DCC inspectors, who usually made the tax assessment for their establishments right on the spot, and there were many instances of injustice and corruption. "But, from now on, the self-assessment system will keep the landlords free of tension," Khoka maintained. "It will eliminate corruption and injustice, as the owners themselves will make the assessment."

On the self-assessment forms distributed among the city corporation holders, the mayor said it has been in use for long, but previously the inspectors would fill in the form after visiting the holdings.

The mayor said, "We have simplified the format and translated its English text into Bangla to make it easy for the holding owners to fill in."



Sadeque Hossain Khoka

On the speculation about a tax-hike, the DCC mayor said there is no reason for such worries. "Rather, by this, the owners will get rid of harassment and corruption."

He said the DCC earned around Tk 125 crore as holding tax in the last fiscal year. According to his estimates, the amount might exceed Tk 200 crore when the holdings created

in the last 14 years get included in the taxpayers' list.

"The corporation can earn as much as Tk 1,000 crore from holding tax alone if we go for a thorough and tight assessment. But, our attitude in this case is liberal and we don't want to increase the tax burden," Khoka said with emphasis.

"We also know that if we collect holding tax strictly or increase the tax amount, the landlords in their turn will raise the house rents.

Thus ultimately the tenants would bear the brunt," he explained. He said, considering the tenants' cause, the city fathers did not raise the tax rate from 12 percent, though the landlords have made multiple increases in house rents during the last 14 years.

Referring to Awami League's protests and criticism of the DCC initiative, the mayor said former mayor Mohammad Hanif and his party are agitating against "the scientific self-assessment sys-

tem" just to create a political issue.

"It can't be an issue for movement, because self-assessments are being made not to enhance the tax. He [Hanif] was the mayor of Dhaka for more than eight years, but did nothing to improve the civic amenities in the city and now is trying to stir up trouble just to impress his party chief," Khoka, who is also a frontline BNP leader, observed.

He said: "I don't understand why the longest serving mayor of Dhaka speaks so irrationally and propagandises. But his [Hanif's] mindless campaign will never succeed, as the holders have responded to the self-assessment system most positively and started depositing the self-assessed forms."

The mayor said he would soon launch a campaign in favour of the self-assessment procedure in the old part of the city.

A TALE OF TWO PARKS



Yes, once they were parks. Two parks were built on both sides of the approach road of the Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge-1. A few yards from Shyampur police station, now they have turned into two dirty and swampy open spaces. Steel-made fences are missing while locals use them for their herds of cattle. Bus stands and illegal structures have mushroomed around to add to the messy situation.