

# Money made thru' sale of footpath space

SYED TASHFİN CHOWDHURY

A section of 'linemen' are making millions out of the sale of 'possession', maintenance and security of spots on the city's footpaths for the use of hawkers ahead of Eid.

Aided by policemen who receive commission from this illegal business, the toll-takers have set their own laws to control and maintain their respective areas, although the authorities often make an eyewash of evicting hawkers from the walkways.

The hawkers have to pay toll regularly at a fixed rate to the linemen. If any of them refuses to pay, the police evict him from the footpath. In some cases the hawkers are arrested or harassed until they agree to pay the toll.

"A hawker needs to be brave and resourceful to fend off the harassment," said Rahim (not his real name), a hawker, with a shop at New Elephant Road.

"I have not paid toll over the last few years as I am a resident of this area and have my own group of friends, who would come to protect me from the linemen."

But others are not as lucky as Rahim. They have to fulfil the demand of the linemen who control different hawker lines or floating vendors on the city walk-

ways.

Most of these linemen started off as hawkers themselves and over time built up rapport with the policemen and local hoodlums.

In some areas there are dummy hawkers' committees, which are

size of the space and the volume of crowd that daily passes a certain footpath.

The rates in Baitul Mukarram, Farmgate, Gulistan, Sadarghat, Motijheel and Gausia areas range from Tk 8,000 to Tk 10,000 for each

varies from Tk 60 to Tk 100, while in the less crowded areas, the toll ranges from Tk 20 to Tk 50.

Most of these busy areas are divided into zones controlled by each linemen. For example, five linemen control Gausia while one controls the New Elephant Road.

"During Ramadan and the Eid season, the toll rate doubles as our sales increase," said another hawker near Gausia Market. "This is for Eid bonus for the linemen and police."

The names and locations of some of these linemen were published in a national daily recently but the authorities concerned did not take any step against them.

The Dhaka City Corporation and Dhaka Metropolitan Police sometimes launch hawker eviction drive to clear the footpaths but in most cases they return in a few hours.

"We have received such complaints but there was never any substantial evidence or information about the linemen," said DMP Commissioner Ashraf Huda.

He said the police department would take lawful measures against such criminals and the dishonest policemen, if they were caught red-handed.

**In some areas there are dummy hawkers' committees, which are actually comprised of toll-takers, instead of hawkers. The committees collect the toll on daily or seasonal basis and distribute the amount among the police and local hoodlums**

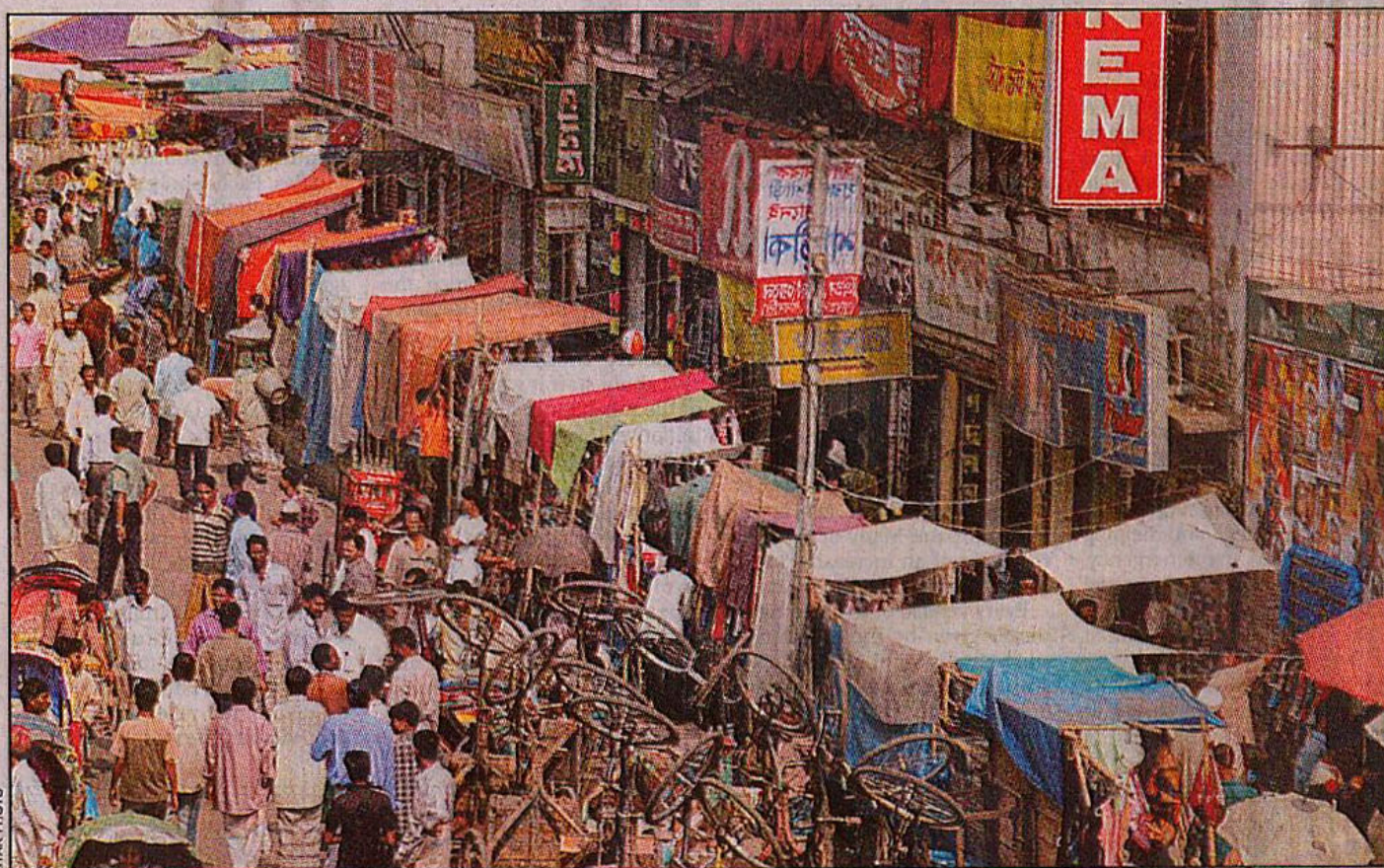
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The possession rates for space on footpaths vary according to the

season while it is Tk 5,000 to Tk 7,000 in the areas like Malibagh, Shantinagar, Shahbagh, and Rampura areas.

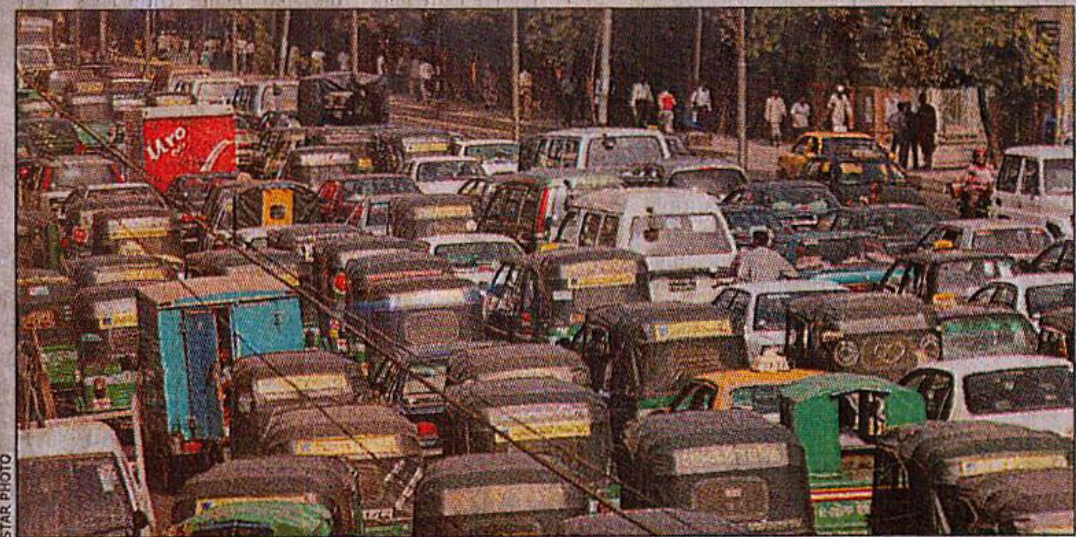
Besides the seasonal payment, a daily toll is also collected from the footpath hawkers.

In the busy areas, the daily toll



The footpath opposite New Market near Balaka cinema has always been encroached by hawkers and the forthcoming Eid has added more makeshift shops to the footpath.

## Thousands shut out of cantonment roads



Many residents in and around Dhaka Cantonment area are in trouble as authorities cancelled transit through the area after the opening of Mohakhali flyover.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Thousands are shut out of four major cantonment roads as authorities made them off-limits to commuters for what the army said were security reasons after the launch of Mohakhali flyover on November 4.

Residents from Ibrahimpur, Kafrul, Kochukhet and Mirpur have to use an alternative route which is not only time-consuming but also costly.

"We could easily go to Farmgate through Jahangir Gate, but now we have to travel via Banani or

Mirpur in a long detour," said Mohammad Ali, a Kafrul resident.

The cantonment authorities have recently circulated a notice that no civil transports are allowed to use the cantonment roads and told the residents that all transit passes through the cantonment roads would be cancelled after the inauguration of Mohakhali flyover.

Only the people residing inside the cantonment, who were given special stickers, will be allowed to use the roads.

Mirpur residents, especially those who need to go to Banani, Mohakhali, Gulshan and Uttara,

have to drive a long way, as they have no alternative routes except for Agargaon Road, the route that takes 30 minutes extra in rush hours.

"I used to go to office in Banani through the cantonment that took me 35 minutes from home, but the restriction on the cantonment roads costs me another 20 to 30 minutes," said Dipankar Chowdhury, a Mirpur resident.

Another resident in Ibrahimpur complained that before the opening of the flyover he drove only 2km from home to Banani via the cantonment, but now as he has been detoured he has to drive

almost 10km to get there.

"It's a matter of security. Free use of cantonment roads may hamper security," said an army official, asking not to be named. "The road from Kachukhet to the Banani MP checkpoint is open to residents with stickers issued by the army," the official added.

The Prime Minister's Office last year decided to open the cantonment road to small civilian vehicles until the construction of Mohakhali flyover ends. In line with the decision, small non-military vehicles plied through Jahangir Gate to Banani Gate from 7:00am until 11:00pm.

Army Headquarters sources said the cantonment authorities took a series of measures to handle a large volume of traffic and the decision to open up the cantonment thoroughfare helped ease gridlock in Mohakhali and Banani vicinities.

Experts fear the opening of Mohakhali flyover will increase traffic jam instead of easing it and blamed it on the lack of a link road in the flyover area.

"The closure of Jahangir Gate will make the Airport Road congested as a huge volume of traffic will have no other alternative route to ply which will be more unsafe not only for the cantonment but for the Prime Minister's office," a senior official with the communications ministry said, asking not to be named.

## Wholesale markets returning to life

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Wholesale markets of Dhaka have returned to normalcy in the month of Ramadan.

Wholesale markets in Moulvi Bazar, Naya Bazar, Islampur, Babu Bazar and Chawk Bazar had suffered tremendous setbacks during the recent devastating flood and incessant rain that had affected the communication network across the country and cut off supplies to and from the city.

"During the flood and rain, business went down by 40 percent compared to the normal market situation as retailers from all over the country could not make their way to the wholesale markets. Now it has climbed back to close to 80 percent and will become normal as the Eid-ul-Fitr is drawing near," said Golam Mowla, general secretary of Moulvi Bazar Businessmen Association.

"Everyday there is a transaction of over Tk. 200 crore in the wholesale markets and the entire country is dependant on the supplies from the wholesale markets of old Dhaka," said Mowla.

There are more than five thousand businessmen in Moulvi Bazar area of whom around two thousands are wholesalers and three thousands retailers.

The Moulvi Bazar wholesale market has virtual monopoly over the supply of essential commodities to the city and other parts of the country.

"The situation of the whole-

sale market has improved somewhat from the crisis stage during the flood as people are now able to come to Moulvi Bazar," said Chandan, a wholesaler of chemical products.

Although the market has become vibrant in terms of sales, other wholesalers of essential commodities said the market has suffered due to changes in government policy.

"There were 2000 wholesale dealers of edible oil across the country in 2001. But the present government changed policies

and stopped import by TCB. The policy of the government has actually caused abnormal price hike as the market has become a monopoly of a syndicate of five to six importers of edible oil," said Abul Hashem, general secretary of Bangladesh wholesale edible oil merchants' association.

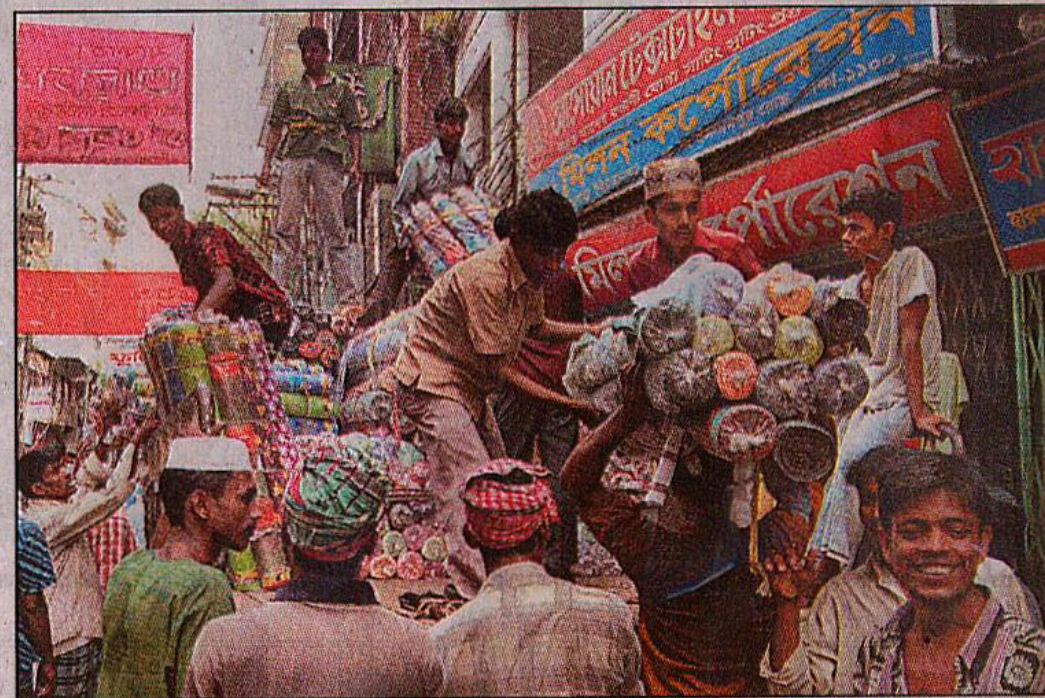
"We had to raise price of essentials when importers raised theirs," added Hashem.

"It is essential that the government controls at least 30 percent of essentials to stop the import-

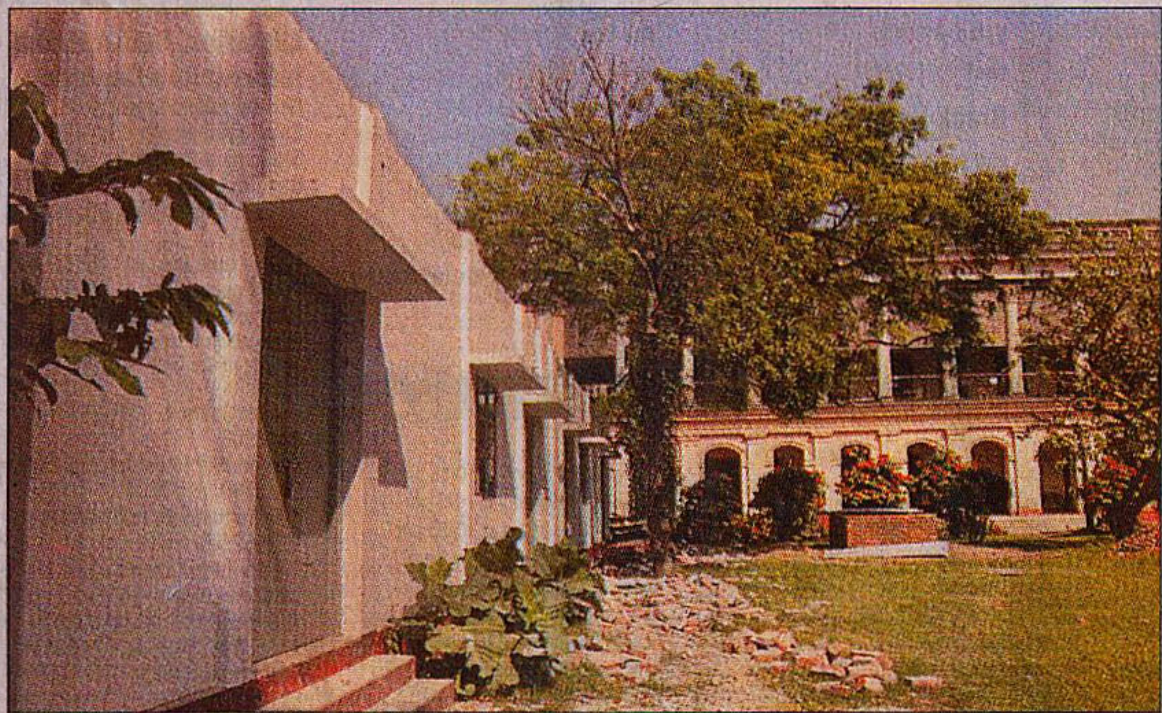
ers' monopoly," said Mowla.

The wholesale local fabric market of Islampur also suffered due to the impact of flood and supply of Indian cloths.

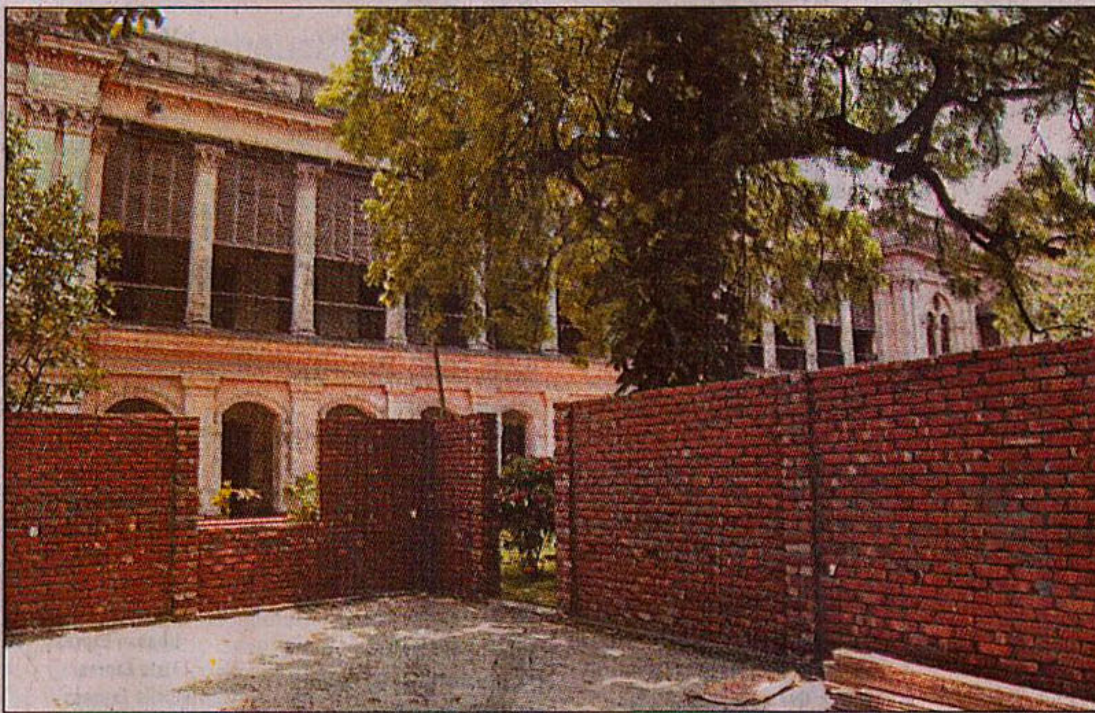
"Every year sale of fabrics in Islampur wholesale market is in full flow from the Shab-e-Barat to the 10th of Ramadan. But this year sales have come down to 65 percent because of the flood and the influx of Indian fabrics," said Abu Taher, a member of Islampur wholesale fabric businessmen's association.



The wholesale traders in Old Dhaka are still reeling from the losses caused by short supplies of goods because of this year's devastating floods.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



## WAREHOUSE ON MANZIL GROUNDS

The museum authorities have illegally constructed a warehouse on the Ahsan Manzil premises that has drawn flak from various conservation groups fighting to protect the Manzil. Construction of the warehouse despite criticism started four months back and was just completed. Rightist groups say this construction, which causes visual pollution and disturbs the Manzil's archeological beauty, has violated the Conservation Act.