

Mushrooming phone shops

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Unauthorised phone shops are mushrooming in the city without any control of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) on their call charges.

"There are only two types of customers of BTTB phones, the private sector and the government offices. We have no specific section for commercial use of phones," said Abdul Khaleque Bhuiyan, director of Public Relations and Publications, BTTB.

The commercial use of BTTB phones has become an open secret as such unofficial public call centres are available at every nook and cranny of the city. Some medicine shops, tea-stall and even betel-leaf vendors are engaged in this business.

These shops do not have any call rate chart and they charge the customers as much as they want. A three-minute local call usually cost Tk 5 but if anyone wants to make a call to a mobile phone, the charge will be Tk 8 to Tk 10 per minute.

Abul Mansur, a betel-leaf shopkeeper in Motijheel said, "It is really tough to get a phone line from T&T. But keeping it seems easier. You just need to keep the linemen happy and you will get bill with an amount lesser than the original."

Sources at the BTTB said that according to the rules for setting

up a PCC (public call centre) those who want to use a phone line for commercial purpose must fill up a registration form and take permission from the authority.

The PCC operators must have a BTTB prescribed spot-billing machine attached with the telephone, which must print out the duration of a call and the amount charged.

The PCCs should charge Tk 3 for a five-minute local call. They are entitled to get 15 percent waiver on the total bill, excluding the line-rent, value-added tax and other taxes.

The commercial phone users must pay a registration fee of Tk 1,000 and application fee of Tk 100, and show bank guarantee of Tk 10,000 to set up a PCC.

But almost all the traders opt for taking a normal phone line, which has no hassle but to pay a Tk-100 application fee and the fixed charge for issuing the demand note. Then they use the phone for commercial purpose.

As BTTB's application form for a new connection does not mention any category of the phone line, there is no statistics on phone shops and commercial users of BTTB phones. All connections are given as normal line.

"Why should I take the hassles of setting up a PCC when maintaining a normal line is so easy.



Phone and fax shops are found at every nook and cranny of the city with no control on call charges.

Setting up of a PCC costs more money," says Hanif, who operates such a call centre at his betel-leaf shop in Gulshan.

"As we regularly bribe the

linemen, my line is never disconnected. I have to pay around Tk 1,000 a month, although the monthly call charges sometimes exceed Tk 10,000. And the rest

amount is transferred to other subscribers."

When asked about such fraudulent practice of the linemen, BTTB officials denied the allegation.

They said it might be possible with analogue lines, but the digital lines, once locked from the phone set with password, cannot be misused.

40,000 FFs' names finalised, 54,000 more under process

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs has finalised 40,000 names of freedom fighters and included them in the gazette. Names of 54,000 other are under the process of inclusion.

Listing of freedom fighters is an ongoing project that began two years ago.

"There has been at least four lists of freedom fighters but all of them are in the draft stage," said a

higher official of the ministry. "We decided to make it final through gazette notification."

The first list was prepared in 1980.

A national list was prepared in 1986 that puts the number of freedom fighter at 1,024,580. But that was not a conclusive one, as there was another list in 1989 prepared by the Muktijoddha Welfare Trust.

"It was done by Brigadier Amin Ahmed Chowdhury by collecting

lists of freedom fighters trained at different training camps in India," he said. The list has names of 69,833 freedom fighters.

Another list, popularly known as 'Voter index list', was prepared in 1994 by Brigadier AJM Aminul Haque that enlisted 86,000 names of freedom fighters, the official said.

Another list was prepared between 1997 and 2001 known as Mukti Barta list named after the newspaper it was published in. It

had 186,790 freedom fighters' names on it.

State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Prof. Rejaul Karim in his statement in parliament on November 29 blamed the previous governments for preparing different sets of lists with different numbers.

He said there would not have been any confusion about the number if any of the past governments had gazetted the number of freedom fighters.

"We are compiling the names from all those lists," said the official. He claimed the ministry is not adding new names to the list.

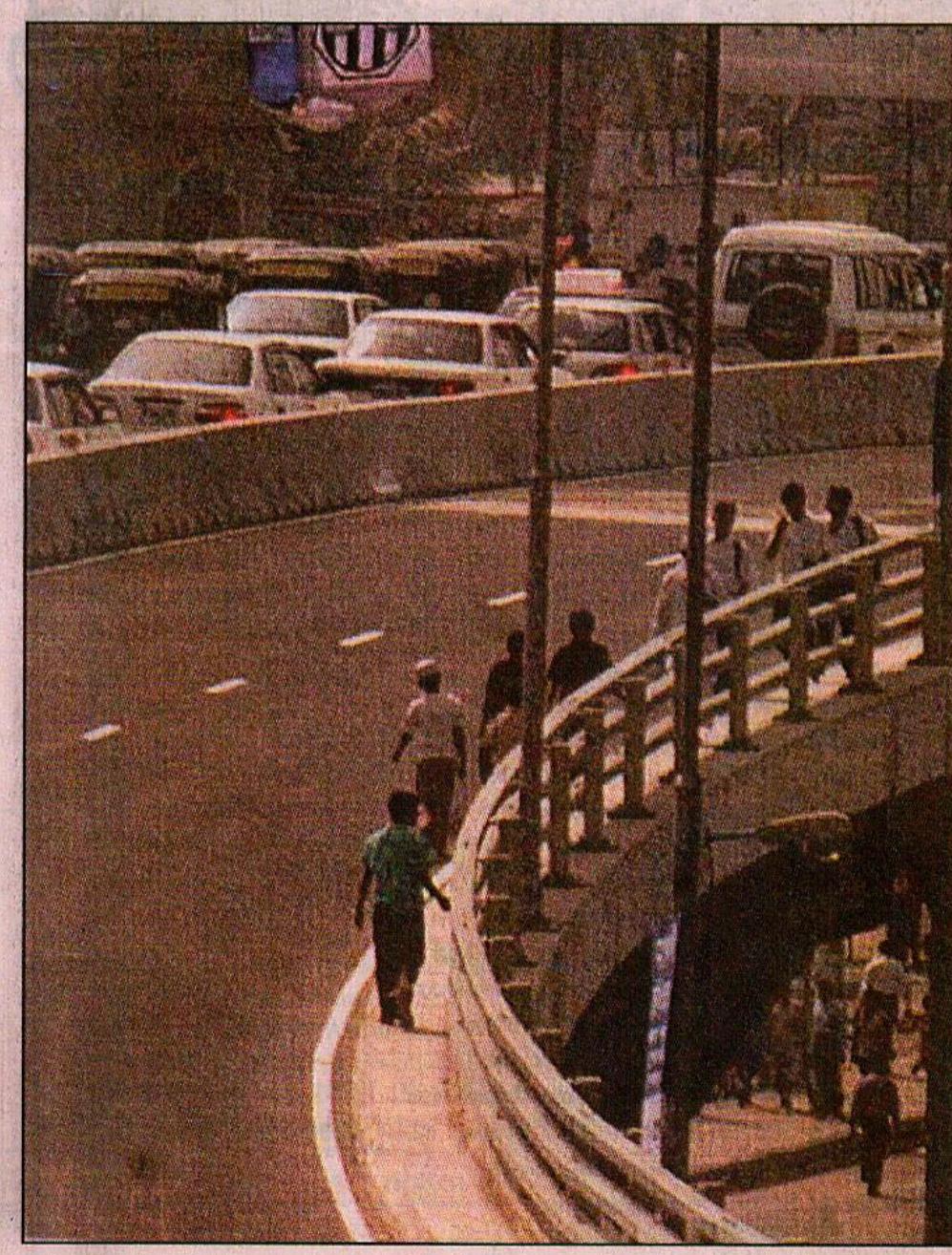
The official said those freedom fighters whose names are on all the lists, or even on two of them, are accepted as 'indisputable' by the ministry.

"But those names that exist on only one list are being investigated to ensure that not a single name of a fake freedom fighter

makes its way to the list," he added.

The official dismissed the suggestion of any favouritism in drawing up the list. "It is impossible as the ministry is not picking any new names but only finalising the old ones," he said.

When asked the official said there is no deadline for the task. "But we are trying to finish it as soon as possible," he said.



No control over flyover walkers

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The Mohakhali Flyover is supposedly out of bounds for pedestrians. However, hundreds of visitors flock there everyday hindering the free flow of traffic and also putting their own lives at risk.

The barely one foot wide strips on both sides of the 17.9 metre wide flyover are not for people to walk on but many are using them as sidewalks.

"This is not a footpath at all. It is the wheel guard, which acts as the first safety measure to prevent vehicles from skidding off the flyover. No person on foot should be allowed on it as it is risky for both people and vehicles," said Quamrul Islam Siddique, former executive director of Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCB).

Nevertheless thousands of curious people have come to the 1.12 km long flyover, the country's first, and walked on it since its opening on November 4.

"We have seen bridges on rivers but never a road on top of another. That is why we have come to visit it," was the honest admission of Nazmul who along with his friend Lokman came all the way from Narshingdi to see the flyover.

For some, the flyover has become a recreational spot. These people, who have little awareness or common sense, get on the flyover on foot, chat sitting on the railing, take photos and wander around aimlessly.

"It is a nice place especially in the evening because of its lighting. We often come here and chat. We are not aware that the flyover is prohibited for pedestrians,"

said Sumon, a university student who was hanging out with his friends on the flyover.

Some visitors tend to walk without a care in the world on lanes meant for vehicles and cross to the other side over the road divider.

"Usually everyone drives fast on the flyover. But with people walking on it, drivers have a hard time maintaining speed. An accident may happen anytime as it is also very difficult to notice pedestrians on top of the bend while getting up," said Sabir Chowdhury who regularly drives through the flyover.

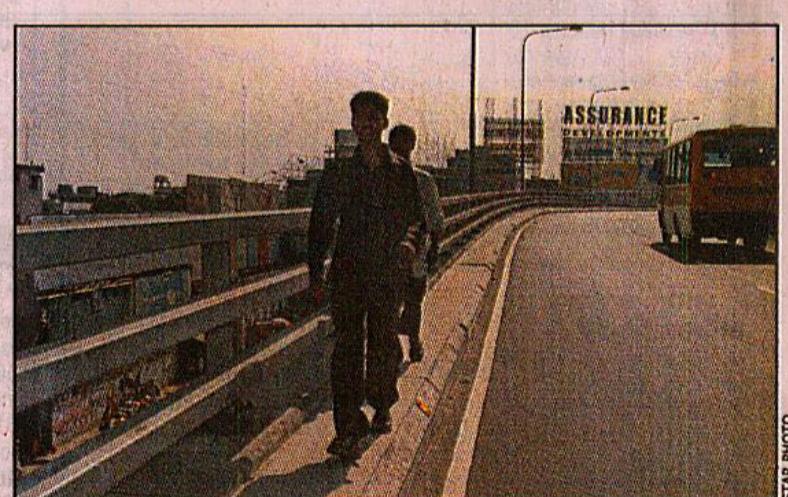
Although officials of the DTCB confirmed that there is strict restriction on the movement of pedestrians on the flyover,

you will not find any notices or signboards near it with the instructions.

"There is no notice discouraging or warning pedestrians as it has not been decided yet who will maintain the flyover. We will request the Dhaka City Corporation to set up signboards as they are most likely going to take over the responsibility of this flyover from next December," said Abdul Khaleque, general manager of DTCB's traffic survey department.

In the meantime, hawkers are also making merry on the flyover craze and can be found selling peanuts, tea, cigarettes and boiled eggs on the flyover.

Hamid, who was selling tea and cigarettes, informed that he had not faced any



obstacle from the authorities or law enforcers.

"The business is good here as many people gather in the evening every day," said Hamid.

The traffic department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has also not been instructed yet to control the pedestrians wishing to get on the flyover.

"Accidents may occur any time if the crowd is not controlled. But we can not take any initiative officially if we are not instructed to restrict movement on the flyover," said a high official of DMP.

The flyover has been constructed under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project at a cost of Tk 1.135 billion.