

# Hawkers bribe cops, student leaders to run business

IMRUL HASAN

Hawkers on the Indira Road beside Tejgaon College are running their business in the area bribing police and local student leaders.

Nearly 350 hawkers, occupying about a kilometre of Indira Road, pay more than Tk 40 lakh a month, sources said.

The police officers and student leaders never visit the hawkers. There are linemen who collect the money and get small share of it.

Vegetables to wristwatch -- everything is available at this place, as the sellers have occupied not only the footpath but also the rickshaw lane and the main road stretching from the foot-over bridge to Khejurbagan.

"We cannot even walk here. I do not understand how this is going on for years," wondered Samira Zaman, who comes to pick her daughter from Holy Cross School from Indira Road everyday.

According to the hawkers, the

toll rate depends on the size of the makeshift shops and the items they sell. For a big shop, the linemen take Tk 400 to Tk 500 a day. Small shops pay Tk 150 to Tk 200.

"We have to pay this to the linemen, student leaders and police officers," said a hawker requesting anonymity.

They alleged that most student leaders are the members of ruling party's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) of Tejgaon College.

"If anybody wants to have a space on this footpath, they need help from the student leaders," another hawker alleged. Even the floating hawkers of the area are not spared. They accused the policemen of collecting toll regularly from them.

When asked, the officers at Tejgaon Police Station denied the allegation. Kamrul Islam, the officer-in-charge (OC) said, "We do not talk to the press. If you have any specific allegation, you can file a complaint."

Hawkers said the linemen collect tolls after 8:00pm. In some cases hawkers go to the nearby traffic police box or police station to pay. But the duty officers at the Farmgate police box denied the allegation.

"We don't want to see any hawker selling goods on the footpath. They cause sufferings to pedestrians and vehicles," said Obaidul Haq, on-duty Traffic Inspector (TI) at the police box.

Shah Alam, a powerful lineman who runs a multi-storeyed hotel opposite to Ananda Cinema Hall allegedly takes a large share of the collected toll, hawkers said. But Shah Alam, when contacted, said, "I am not collecting tolls anymore. Some other linemen are involved in it."

He said the policemen at Tejgaon old airport outpost, police box at Farmgate and the local police station are collecting tolls.

M Kohinoor Miah, deputy commissioner, West of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said the allegation is false. "If we find any allegation against policemen, we punish them after enquiry," he added.

said.

The Indira Road footpath was made hawker-free three years back and hawkers were not allowed for about one and a half years. But they came back after making an underhand deal with the police, sources said. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials said they have abandoned their idea of evicting hawkers as the eviction drives absolutely failed. "We have tried at least five times to evict hawkers from the area this year. They come back as soon as we leave the place," said a senior DCC officer.

"The government has decided to free all footpaths from illegal occupation. We can evict hawkers but it depends on cooperation from the police department," the officer said on condition of anonymity.

"We have sent letters to the police seeking help to evict the hawkers from footpaths several times but there was no reply," he added.



Hawkers occupy the footpath along Indira Road near Tejgaon College causing inconvenience to pedestrians.

## Ineffective ban on 20-year-old buses



STAR PHOTO

Although 20-year old buses are banned along city streets, they continue to ply.

SULTANA RAHMAN

Despite the existing ban on the plying of buses that are at least 20 years old, most government offices and agencies use such date-expired vehicles to transport their officials and employees. Some private bus companies also operate with buses that have been running for over 20 years.

Communications minister Barrister Nazmul Huda acknowledged that old buses have reappeared on the streets of Dhaka due to law enforcement of the ban. He also pointed out that even the police's transport pool had vehicles that were over 20 years old.

"When law enforcing agencies break the law, you can do little to check the situation," said Huda.

Sources in the traffic division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said that there were only 1261 traffic policemen and with that manpower, it was impossible to monitor and run constant checks for old and unfit buses

besides performing other duties. Also, as only sergeants and other high police officials are empowered to take legal action, law enforcement becomes even more difficult as only 261 sergeants are available.

Assistant deputy commissioner of DMP traffic (North) Feroz Al Muzahid Khan admitted the presence of 20-year-old vehicles in government and police transport pools. But he said that without alternative arrangements, the problem would not go away. "If new vehicles are not provided, how will they travel? We can do nothing but ignore the use of outdated vehicles for the time being."

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in collaboration with the ministry had imposed the ban in 2002. The DMP also seized a good number of outdated vehicles during the first months of the ban. The DMP has also given clear instructions that all motorised vehicles that are less than 20 years old must take fitness and non-polluting clearance stickers from the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA). Vehicles without such stickers are not officially allowed to ply on city roads.

Barrister Huda was also critical of the government offices that were old buses. "When the ban came into effect the BRTA provided some buses for government use to discourage 20-year-old vehicles from coming out on the streets. It worked for a few days but now those old buses are back in operation again."

The ban was imposed so that it would have a substantial positive impact on the environment. It was supposed to reduce air pollution, traffic congestion, road accidents and commuting time.

There are gross discrepancies between the unofficial and official lists of buses operating on the roads of Dhaka. Some 917 buses and minibuses have registered with the BRTA until December 11, 2001 but the actual number at present is believed to be 2,978 according to private surveys. Officials of the Dhaka Urban Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) and the

traffic division of DMP meanwhile say that there are around 5,800 buses. Interestingly, some 2000 registered and unregistered buses and minibuses were withdrawn from the roads of Dhaka city soon after the ban had been imposed. The buses that have number plates starting with the Bangla alphabet 'Cha' are at least 20 years old.

"The number plates indicate the age of vehicles so it is easy to identify and take off old buses," said Mahtab Uddin Chowdhury, joint convener of the Association of Bus Companies, a forum of bus owners.

"Most of the 20-year-old buses have been shifted away from the capital and very few of those still remain," claimed Chowdhury.

Meanwhile, the government is planning to impose a fresh ban that would prohibit plying of buses and minibuses that are over 10 years old. The communications minister recently revealed the plan and hoped that the Dhaka Bus-Minibus Companies Association would cooperate in implementing the design.

BIRSHRESTHA MOTIUR RAHMAN

## Family wants the memorial to be outside cantonment

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Construction work on the memorial of Birshrestha Motiur Rahman is likely to begin soon on the premises of BAF Shaheen School and College in Dhaka, though wife and family members of the Liberation War hero want it to be located elsewhere in the city.

Sources at the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs said Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) has allocated space inside the school for the monument. "Hopefully the construction will begin this month," said a high official of the ministry.

But Mili Rahman, widow of Birshrestha Motiur Rahman, said, "I do not want this mausoleum to be erected in the cantonment area as common people will not have access to it. The monument should be built anywhere in Dhaka where commoners have



Motiur Rahman is a Birshrestha. People want his monument to be in such a place where they have access to visit

their access." She also reiterated her demand for bringing back Motiur Rahman's remains from Karachi, Pakistan. Motiur's monument is being built as part of a government project.

The government decided to erect monuments for the seven Birshresthas at their graves and construct school and colleges in their villages to pay homage to the country's highest gallantry awardees.

The six other mausoleums in memory of the Birshresthas will be constructed at their graves in Moulivibazar, Jessor, Khulna, Rangamati, Chapainawabganj and Brahmanbaria.

"Motiur Rahman is a Birshrestha. People want his monument to be in such a place where they have access to visit," Mili Rahman said. She said there is no need to build a grand monument. A simple grave is enough

for people who want to visit and pay respect. Most of Motiur's family members and well-wishers have the same feeling.

The project was initially aimed at constructing monuments, each at a cost of Tk 67 lakh. It was later revised bringing the estimated cost of each monument down to Tk 9.1 lakh and allocating Tk 60 lakh to construct a school or college building in their names in each of their home areas.

The Department of Architecture (DoA) will construct the monuments while Education Engineering Department will build the school/college buildings.

When asked, Chief Engineer of DoA Abdul Salam said they have not yet received any instruction for the site of Motiur Rahman's memorial. "But it is for sure that it will be built in Dhaka. We will begin the construction of Motiur Rahman's memorial as soon as we get directive," he said.

## UNWANTED DIVIDER



Workers are busy digging the centre of the long quiet wide stretch of road near the Faculty of Arts of Dhaka University to construct a median. No heavy vehicles are permitted to ply along this stretch. Would the median serve any purpose, wonder students of the faculty.

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