



STAR PHOTO

Businesspeople of Katabon formed a committee recently to unite against local extortionists.

Stick and whistle force makes Katabon businesses secure

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

The businessmen of Katabon Road have formed a security force armed with sticks and whistles. The whistle is blown to alert locals against extortionists and criminals and members of the force assemble at the signal.

The *lathi-bashi bahini* (stick and whistle force) was formed apparently as a show of unity among the two business associations in the area the Dhaka University markets business association and Aqua and Pets Association -- after three alleged extortionists Ripon Chakma, Khokon and Noor Alam rampaged one of the shops at the pet animal market on July 16.

Chairman of Dhaka University markets business association Suja Uddin Ahmed said the extortionists had been harassing one of the shop owners for a long time and on July 16 they ransacked the shop after being refused toll. They also injured the owner's brother.

"After that incident, we immediately called a meeting and formed our own stick and whistle force. This is a show of our unity and the initiative would help every member of the market and the local business community. The police have helped us greatly also and law enforcers from Ramna and New Market police stations have taken firm actions against the extortionists," added Suja Uddin.

Azmail, the shop owner who had his shop damaged narrated the incident.

"Those goons had been troubling us for a long time. On July 7 last year, they came and beat me up and took away my cell phone. When I filed a case with the police, the extortionists were put behind the bars. But they managed to come out after serving only two months and started threatening me even more.

"They wanted Tk 70,000 from me as that was supposedly the amount they had paid for bail. When they attacked the shop, they injured my brother who is still in the hospital and needed several stitches on the head," said Azmail.

Azmail echoed Suja Uddin's

statement that the police was behind them all the way. Officials from Ramna and New Market police stations have ensured regular patrol in that area. They also visit the shops often to inquire about problems.

The owners informed that every shop now had one stick at least and whistles have been provided to market officials. If extortionists are spotted then blowing the whistling have been made mandatory. All the shops would then bring their shutters down and shopkeepers and attendants have been instructed to come out with sticks to tackle the miscreants.

Another shop owner Rasul Miah said that things have become much better following the formation of the stick and whistle force. A similar initiative has proved successful in Panthapath area also.

After years of suffering due to extortion and criminal activities and police inaction, the West Panthapath Business Association formed their stick and whistle force. After that, the police also decided to lend a helping hand and the number of extortion cases dropped significantly, said sources.

DCC's road development that never happens

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) allegedly misuses crores of Taka every fiscal year in the name of developing and improving roads which tend to go back to their previous states in no time.

Most lanes and alleys across the capital are in a poor condition and improvements often only remain on paper despite road improvement and development receiving the highest allocation of funds in DCC budgets.

The DCC in the current fiscal year sanctioned Tk 120 crore from its Tk 970 crore budget for development programme for the improvement and maintenance of road infrastructure. In the last fiscal, the maintenance and improvement of roads, lanes and by-lanes had also received the highest allocation (Tk 103.65 crore). It was the same case in the DCC budget for the 2003-2004 fiscal.

"The DCC has continuously allocated funds for road development and this process has been going on for the last 15 to 20 years," said a senior engineer of DCC.

"Unfortunately this large amount is simply going down the drain because money is not used properly and there is nobody there to monitor the misuse."

In most cases, sub-standard material is used in carpeting the roads and re-carpeting takes place without the removal of the old layer.

Most lanes and alleys across the capital are in a poor condition and improvements often only remain on paper despite road improvement and development receiving the highest allocation of funds in DCC budgets. And in most cases, sub-standard material is used in carpeting the roads and re-carpeting takes place without the removal of the old layer.

"Usually roads have to be repaired after every three years. But we are repairing roads every year so there must be something wrong with the construction or there is corruption," said DCC's additional chief engineer Mohammad Mehdi Ali Khan.

"As the DCC lacks scientific planning and designing of construction and repair work, the height of the roads across the city have risen to a disconcerting level and that is why even the slightest rain often submerges areas that are below the road level," Khan added.

Engineers said that to construct a new road, the quality of mud must be tested

beforehand and the result would decide what type of carpeting and layers are needed. On the other hand, the existing roads need to go through the milling process to ascertain what kind of reconstruction and development was required.

"The DCC has no milling machine or re-mixing plant to clear the worn out carpeting when repair work is performed. So we are left with no choice but to carpet the road over an existing one. But that leaves roads prone to cracks and potholes," said Khan. "We had tried to buy a re-mixing plant to recycle the existing carpeting materials. But the plant proved too costly for us."



STAR PHOTO

Workers of Dhaka City Corporation busy repairing a road in the Dhaka University area.

7x3

5x2

5x3