

Mirpur businesspeople held hostage by extortionists

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Businesspeople of city's Mirpur area are held hostage by a gang of extortionists as the law enforcers remain inactive despite the killing of a businessman last month.

Kazi Shahidullah, owner of Prince Group, was shot dead by extortionists on August 12 in broad daylight when he was leaving a local mosque after saying Juma prayers.

Shahidullah was killed as he declined to pay the toll the criminals had demanded from him. After the gruesome killing only two suspects were caught by the police while the rest are still at large.

According to local businesspeople, nine other businessmen were killed in similar ways over the last eight months in the city.

"The group has created panic among us by killing Shahidullah,"



Police patrol the Mirpur markets to curb extortion.

Locals said the group has made a list of the most influential businesspeople in Mirpur. They have collected information and individual profile of each of these businessperson s

said a businessman who owns a shop at Mirpur Section-1.

Over 200 businessmen in the area have received phone calls from the group after the incident. The criminals threatened to kill them if they decline to pay toll.

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"The amount they demand ranges from Tk 3 lakh to Tk 50 lakh, depending on the status of the person," said another businessman in Mirpur, requesting anonymity.

Many of the Mirpur residents are now selling their property and buying apartments in other areas. Some of them are starting new businesses to get rid of the extortionists.

"We are scared to go outdoors or even continue with our business," said a businessman. He said the group, led by

Shahadat and Khorshed, has been active in Mirpur section 1, 2, 6, 7, Paikpara, Shialbari, South Bishil, Ahmednagar and some other parts of Mirpur.

"Around 20 shops in the Mazar Cooperative Society remain closed as the group has threatened to murder the owners if they dare to open their shops without paying toll," said a businessman.

The murder of Shahidullah sparked protests among the businesspeople and residents of Mirpur. The Mazar Cooperative Society sat with the senior officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) on several occasions over the last one month and informed them about their problem.

"Police know the criminals well and are aware of their activities but due to unknown reasons they remain inactive," said a Paikpara resident.

The police officers concerned, however, denied the allegation.

"We have arrested two persons, Rajib and Tuhi, who were

suspected to be involved in the murder. We are continuing our efforts to catch the others," said the duty officer of Mirpur Police Station. The officer also claimed that a drive to stop extortion is currently underway in the area.

But businesspeople of Mirpur area believe that the drive is just an eyewash. "We no longer have confidence in the police," said a businessman who owns a confectionery in Mirpur Section-1.

The locals say the police officers are scared of the extortionists' group. They also allege that some policemen receive monthly payments from the extortionists. But the officers at the Mirpur Police Station denied these allegations.

"We have strengthened our patrol duty at some spots to ensure security to the businesspeople. Their security is one of our priorities," said the duty officer. "We need their cooperation in our drive against the criminals."

Utility agencies may delay Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover

Cost of relocation of services and lines spirals by Tk. 89 crore

SULTANA RAHMAN

Construction of the 7.5 kilometre long Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover could be delayed as the utility service providers have sought around Tk 114 crore instead of the allocated Tk 25 crore to relocate and reinstall their heavy service lines and connections.

"If the utility service providers cooperate in relocating their lines and connections on an urgent basis, then the probable delay could be avoided," said project director of the flyover Ashiqur Rahman.

The construction work was supposed to start in July this year and the contractor has already finished the soil testing.

Utility service providers including Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), Dhaka Electricity

Supply Authority (DESA), Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB) and Titas Gas have recently submitted their estimated budget to relocate the existing infrastructures. Wasa wants Tk 55 crore, DESA submitted a Tk 38.53 crore budget, BTTB has asked for Tk 15 crore while Titas Gas is demanding Tk 5.68 crore. The utility service providers also claimed that as they did not receive the final design of the proposed flyover, they could not therefore estimate the cost beforehand.

"We have a 132 KVL line underground which can not be moved without consulting foreign consultants. Besides, it is not possible to assess how much money would be needed to relocate such a huge amount of power lines and wires without looking at the design and

layout of the flyover first," said a senior DESA official.

The project director however claimed that he had provided all necessary documents to the utility agencies.

Stretching from Shanir Akhra to Gulistan the flyover would be the country's largest. Total cost of construction has been estimated at Tk 706 crore. When completed, it is expected to greatly reduce the ever increasing traffic congestion in the capital.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and Belhasa-Accom and Associates Ltd, a joint venture of the UAE, Canada will implement the project. This will be the third flyover in the country and also the first under private investment.

As per the contract agreement, Bangladeshi Orion, UAE's Belhasa

and Indian Accom will complete the project within 30 to 36 months on Built Own Operate and Transfer (BOOT) basis.

"Survey for constructing the flyover has been finalised by an Indian and Canadian team. Subsoil test under supervision of BUET and foundation work has also been done," said M Obaidul Karim, chairman of the Belhasa-Accom.

The flyover will have 13 ramps and six entrances with four lanes on either side. Starting from the junction point of Nawabpur Road and Fazle Rabbi Road, the alignment follows Saheed Fazle Rabbi Road keeping Gulistan Garden, Bangabhaban and Rajdhani Market on the left side. It crosses Hatkhola Road at Tikatuli intersection.

"The 13 ramps will be provided at

various strategic locations to ensure smooth traffic flow

Unlike the other flyovers in the city, commuters will have to pay to use the Jatrabari flyover. For a motorcycle the rate will be Tk 5, CNG autorickshaw Tk 10, car Tk 35, jeep Tk 40, microbus Tk 50, minibus Tk 100 and trailer Tk 200.

The agreement stipulates that toll rates for the vehicles will be revised after every three years in accordance with the inflation rate. The contractor of the flyover will own and operate the flyover for 24 years and afterwards the DCC will take control of it. The DCC will get a five per cent share of the profit from the income of the flyover without making any financial investment.



Model of the proposed Jatrabari flyover.

Poor now gets access to drug rehabilitation

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) with financial and technical assistance from Family Health International, Bangladesh inaugurated a drug rehabilitation centre for the poor and floating drug users on August 21, this year.

The Drug Addiction Treatment and Rehabilitation Centre (DATRC) has 50 beds is now operating from Johnson road in Old Dhaka. The centre will treat all areas of health and rehabilitate drug users free of cost.

"Drug rehabilitation is an expensive and time consuming process but as the poor are unable to get this facility, we want to give them an opportunity to recover," said Iqbal Masud, project coordinator, DATRC.

Masud said they are giving priority to those who inject drug as they are under the risk of various diseases.

"Those injecting drugs share the needle and in that manner they spread diseases like HIV, Hepatitis-V and as they frequent brothels they carry sexual diseases," said Masud. "The project



Some of those who were addicts in Old Dhaka a few months ago have now turned to centre for treatment.

has been initiated to give them a new lease in life," he added.

Centre officials pick up addicts from the different points they usually gather, and counsel them

to take treatment. When a victim arrives at the centre the authorities take a medical test and if necessary, treat the individual. This person

is then admitted to the centre to undergo a 14-day course. On recovery, the victim is sent for rehabilitation.

Besides this, the project



includes community treatment for addicts and home-based treatment for those who do not want to come to the centre.

"Many addicts are ashamed to

treat treatment publicly, so we treat them at their homes. In such cases we just counsel them and provide medicine," Masud said. "We also request the help of the

guardians," he added.

The community-based treatment includes a 14-day detoxification camp where addicts will be provided with physical treat-

ment and primary health care.

"After the 14-day camp we will regularly counsel the participants. They will then be encouraged to come over to our main centre on a regular basis, which would help them a lot," said Tajul Islam Liton, programme assistant, DATRC.

"Along with these facilities we provide them with physiological treatment to make them ready to recover and advise the use of condoms to reduce sexual diseases," said Liton.

Under this project vocational training for victims is also included.

Monir, one of the first batch victims to the centre has already completed initial stage of treatment. He will now join the rehabilitation course. He said he has been provided with all the necessary help to recover and the given the hope of a fresh start.

"Counselling and physiological treatment helped me to recover and I wish after the three-month rehabilitation course I will be able to come out of this hole completely," said Monir who had been taking pathedine for last six years.