

The Race Course ground, situated on the eastern side of Shahbagh, looked like a jungle during the company rule. The jungle was cleared up for an entertainment centre for the elite Nawabs of Dhaka who owned the area. Feasts and ball dances were organised for the Sahibs and Memsahibs who came to watch the horse races.



Risky lanes for Eid shoppers

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Market owners have identified risky spots with the introduction of new markets and shopping complexes in the city.

They said at present as many as 500 risky spots exist under the jurisdiction of 28 police stations with whopping 267 shopping malls and markets in Dhaka.

The addition of newly opened markets like Eastern Mollika with 500 shops and Multi Plan in Elephant road with nearly 1,000 shops and new shopping complexes on Gulshan Avenue has induced more shopping sprees.

Sources from the Bangladesh Dokan Malik Samity (BDMS), said the by-lanes and alleys alongside and around the shopping complexes are extremely vulnerable. After Eid shopping, while commuting along these paths, customers fall prey to muggers thus robbing them off the joy of the festive season.

A BDMS source said places like Elephant road, Dhanmondi-Mirpur road, places around Mirpur, Mouchak, Shantinagar, Purana Paltan are prime spots for such crimes.

Specific points are along the Sheraton intersection to Bangla Motor, Sonargaon intersection to Farm Gate, alleys opposite the different markets along Dhanmondi-Mirpur and Satmasjid road, the road to the west of Ramna Park and the road opposite the Fine Arts Institute (Charukala) are the most risky spots where muggers wait for their unsuspecting prey.

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Muggers wait eagerly at their hideouts for anyone who passes by both by foot or on rickshaws, hold the shoppers at ransom and loot their goods. Victims are sometimes hurt in the process.

Alleys are not the only spots identified, even busy VIP roads by the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel are prime spots.

"One never knows when he will be attacked. A few days back while I was returning after Eid shopping, three persons got into the CNG auto rickshaw I was travelling in and looted everything I had," said Abdul Momen, a resident of the Dhaka University area.

Another victim said that earlier only the dark alleys were dangerous, but now even busy streets are not safe.

"Caught in traffic jams travelling in CNG's by oneself is dangerous as muggers get into the vehicle from both sides and hold you at gunpoint or show a sharp weapon, loot and leave you staring alone by yourself," he added.

President of the BDMS, Amir Hossain Khan said they are very worried about the fragile security situation at present. The shop owners are hoping that security in the city will be beefed up so that normal business can continue.

Amir added the out of the stock of products they have in store for sales in the entire year, only one third is sold during the two Eids. The rest is distributed for sales at other times in the year.

Shop owners from different markets said during the month of Ramadan, there is a turnover of nearly Tk. 15,000 crore from only 100 markets among the 267. They

claim the lack of security as one of the main reasons in drop in sales.

Amir Hossain also said that the BDMS and shop owners demand patrol by civil police, especially along alleys and by-lanes.

An Army officer, wanting to be anonymous said a new type of mugging has begun. Even if people are inside vehicles near Karwan Bazar and Satrasta Mor, two three young kids will all of a sudden pick up a fight with the driver especially at night. Once the fight starts, the goons come and loot the passengers.

SM Mizanur Rahman, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner said: "We are aware of these 500 points in the city and have set-up check-points. A total of 3,000 from the police force will oversee these marked points and their surroundings."

"There will be about 1,100 police personnel deployed in the 267 markets. We have also arranged temporary police camps and check-points in 41 places including Elephant road, Mirpur where a force of 410 including 250 Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) men will patrol. Seventy teams from the Detective Branch (DB) civil will also work to curb any untoward incidents," Rahman said.

A meeting took place in the home ministry where the market owners handed a list of risky spots to State Minister Lutfozzaman Babar on September 26, said BDMS.

In a report submitted along with the list, they said that the markets have been divided in 24 zones in an area of 150 kilometres in Dhaka, and approximately 12 risky points or spots have been identified in each of them.

A SPELL THAT RAINED AROUND



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

A rickshaw puller rides in the heavy downpour late last afternoon as the rains that started in segments on Monday took a strong turn. The wheels cut through the accumulated water at Paltan, blurring the rider's vision and drenching him and the passengers.

Markets, footpaths swamped with porno movies

IMRUL HASAN

It was a blazing hot afternoon. The footpath in front of Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium was very busy. Some vendors selling pirated Video Compact Discs (VCD) were trying to get the attention of the passers by. When Sajib, a student of Dhaka College was passing through the footpath, the vendors were competing with each other to grab his attention even though three policemen were patrolling the area close by. "Mamu, we have some of the latest foreign and local 'triple x's' (a popular name for porno movies). Get one now, stocks are limited," they said, which made Sajib terribly embarrassed in front of an elder person who was accompanying him.

This is a scene repeated every day in various parts of the city. The sellers of x-rated VCDs are running a thriving trade through out the city, often under the very nose of the law enforcing agencies.

Nearly 300 traders, occupying the footpaths in these areas, pay more than Tk 12 lakh in bribes a month to the police to run their business, some of the vendors said.

The footpaths in front of Baitul Mukarram, Stadium Market, New Market, Elephant Road and other markets of the capital have become the hub of the porno CD business, where CDs or cassette are available for only Tk 20 to Tk 40.

Traders said their customers range from uneducated bus operators, rickshaw-pullers, grocery shop owners to even university students.

"It has greater appeal for the lower income group and teenagers as a CD costs only Tk 20 to Tk 40," said Raisul Islam, a trader at Motijheel.

"The cassette companies that know about customers' choice release CDs that match with their taste," said Badal, a CD shop owner in front of Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium.

"But it is an alarming fact that a section of students and youngsters are also buying these cassettes out of curiosity."

A wide variety of such movies are now available, whose lurid titles include "Garam Masala",

"Indian Garam Masala", "Private", "College Girls", "London-e-Konna", "Love Games", "Raat Ki Baat", "Night Games", "Big Sin", "Anandadhara", "Binodon", "Best of Poly", and "Hot Queen." Some CDs even feature vulgar pictures on the cover.

Some fear the proliferation of porno movies is unstoppable. "It is very difficult to stop the sale of such CDs and video cassettes as the business has spread all over the city. Moreover, there is no controlling on them," said Habib, a student of Dhaka University at Gulistan.

A vendor in front of Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium told this correspondent, who approached him in the guise of a customer, that they have a good collection of English, Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi porno CDs at Tk 40 to Tk 50 each.

Sources said that a syndicate group is now using the Stadium Market as the largest den of the city's illegal hard-core porno CDs and cassettes. This group, with the help of some local crime rackets, has been marketing and selling the illegal products throughout the city, under the

direct patronisation of police. Moreover, the police officers never visit the porno businessmen. There are linemen who collect the money and receive a small share of it.

"We have to pay the money to the linemen and police officers," said a CD vendor in front of Balaka Cinema Hall.

Sergeant Ahad Police box, responsible for monitoring the footpath, is located hardly half a kilometre away from the footpath in front of Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium and footpath near Golaphaz mazar.

When contacted, the officers at Sergeant Ahad Police box denied the allegation. An official expressed his ignorance of the matter. "No one is allowed to trade porno CDs on the footpath in front of Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium."

A high official of the state department of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) said, "We have always tried to evict CD businessmen at different areas of the city but they come back as soon as we leave the place."



STAR PHOTO

VCDs containing porno movies can be easily bought from the shops along the footpaths near Moulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium.

GULSHAN SOUTH PARKLAND

Fate awaiting PMO decision

TAWFIQUE ALI

Though it has been two weeks since the Gulshan south park land was freed from a two-decade long illegal occupation, authorities are yet to decide for what purpose the site will be used.

The 6.33 acres of land in front of the shooting club, earmarked for a park in the original Dhaka Master Plan, had so far been occupied by a settlement of 416 sweepers' families.

The colony was shifted to DCC land in Gabtali by a peaceful eviction two weeks ago.

The fate of the land hangs on a decision from the Prime Minister's Office, which will decide how it should be used following the recent eviction.

"Though the DCC took over the land from the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha

(Rajuk) in 1982 to develop and maintain it as a park, the site had not been a park for long," said the DCC chief estate officer Abu Taleb, "We have shifted the sweepers' colony for beautification at the place."

He added that it was a government decision to let the DCC sweepers stay there for the time being, and

that the eviction too is as per a similar decision.

"The land is very valuable and it will be used accordingly in consultation with the Prime Minister's Office," said the DCC Chief Executive Officer Saifuddin Ahmed.

Now it depends on the decision of the PMO's Good Governance and Development Committee, said Ahmed, who is also a member of the committee headed by Dr. Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, principal secretary to the Prime Minister.

"But a section at the DCC is now heading with a hidden plan to implement a commercial construc-

tion project at the site," said a highly placed source at the Rajuk, "And they have been carrying out a strong lobbying to accomplish plan."

Environmental experts cautioned that the PMO's decision should take in mind the best interests of the city. "The site must be turned into a park with adequate greenery and free access keeping in view the present pace of habitation density in Gulshan," said Syeda Rizwana Hasan of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association.

"We don't want another commercial set up like Wonderland in the place," said Rizwana, who is a Supreme Court advocate and a member of the Good Governance Committee.

But she said the matter might not be so easy, in the event the DCC comes up with a deviation proposal to use the land commercially.

The area is clearly marked for a park in the Dhaka Master Plan drawn by the erstwhile DIT, said general secretary of Gulshan Society Md. Anwarul Huq, a former chairman of Rajuk.

"The Rakuk handed the land over to the DCC two decades ago with a good intention but the later failed to make use of it," he said adding, "The DCC had a tacit approbation to the sweeper's occupation of the parkland."

He said that a man was even killed under a bulldozer during an eviction drive during the Ershad regime at the same site, contradicting the view that colony was set up



Cleaning up of the demolished houses continuing in Gulshan South Park.