



Bara Katra, in south Chawk, close to the river Buriganga, was a prominent building in Dhaka during the reign of Mughals. In 1822 Doylee wrote: Bara Katra was a pompous, huge and beautiful. Shah Suja wanted to build his own palace in Dhaka but Shah Suja did not like the Bara Katra after it was finished, he donated it to Abul Kasem, the chief architect.

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Acid violence marks decline in last 3 years

NOVERA DEEPIKA

The number of acid violence in Dhaka City as well as other urban areas has decreased noticeably over the last three years due to awareness programmes of different organisations and the media.

A report by Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) shows the number of incidents was the highest in 2002 and Dhaka was the leading district where 26 such attacks occurred. In 2005, only nine incidents took place in Dhaka, leaving it at the 7th position.

Mahbuba Haque Kumkum, coordinator of the research, advocacy and prevention unit of ASF, said, "The immense efforts taken by ASF, Brac, Actionaid, Naripakha, Mahila Parishad, Care, Save the Children, and many other NGOs and social organisations have been able to create an awareness among mass people against this heinous crime. This is the main reason behind the decrease in number of acid violence in the country."

Founded in May 1999, the ASF is the only organisation in Bangladesh working exclusively to combat acid violence and support the survivors of acid attacks and address this violence



Acid victims enjoying a moment of recreation.

with a holistic approach, Kumkum said.

"It is the ASF that motivated other organisations to work in this area. After ASF started working to reduce acid violence, other prominent organisations followed it and the government formulated

special laws to combat the violence," she added.

Due to the laws and awareness programmes, the availability of acid and access to it, the two main reasons behind acid violence, reduced to a great extent. In the capital, the crime remark-

ably decreased because of growing awareness-building programme and the fear of punishment.

Apart from the awareness-building programme, the ASF has a medical unit, a legal unit and a social reintegration unit in order

to give the acid victims medical services, legal advocacy. Besides, it runs rehabilitation and training programmes for the victims.

At the end of 2003, the ASF established a 40-bed hospital in Dhaka named Jibon Tara, where around 50 percent victims of acid violence from all over the country are treated. The legal unit of the ASF assists the victims seeking legal redress.

The social reintegration unit's task is to help the acid survivors reintegrate back in the community. Many survivors have permanent disabilities and disfigurements and have had long treatment at the ASF hospital.

The ASF also provides short-term financial family assistance, educational scholarships, job training and job schemes in cooperation with its partner organisations. Furthermore, the ASF has established its own income projects for the acid survivors.

The ASF established a shelter home named Thikana in 1999 to provide nursing care for the victims of acid violence. The 15-bed arrangement offers safe accommodation to female survivors, who come to Dhaka for short-term ASF services like counselling.

Jonaki, an acid victim, told Star City how she was victimised by miscreants and reintegrated to the society by the ASF. After her husband divorced her, Jonaki started working in a factory in Dhaka. Three men in the neighbourhood tried to have illicit relations with her, which she refused. The men threw acid on her while she was sleeping at home in 1999.

She was treated for her burns at a local hospital, but had to return to her village home in Mymensingh when she could no longer afford her treatment.

The poor woman was raped after returning to her old job and became pregnant. Then she was abandoned by her family after giving birth to a girl child. When she had nowhere to go, the ASF began treating her. There she learnt sewing.

A Bangladeshi couple living in Japan adopted Jonaki's daughter but in the meantime her psychological condition worsened. After a long-term treatment at the ASF, she regained her mental stability. Jonaki now works as a ward attendant at the ASF hospital.

Jonaki is one of the 373 fortunate victims rehabilitated by the ASF. She has now got the chance to live a respectable and social life.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"We shall not give votes to a candidate who is known to be corrupt, who is known to have amassed wealth by misusing his power and authority or using his power to terrorise people."

-- Professor Muhammad Yunus
Managing Director, Grameen Bank

Said at the programme organised to commemorate the 15th anniversary of The Daily Star, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"If the explosives come from a neighbouring country, we will discuss it through the appropriate agency"

-- Khaleda Zia
Prime Minister

Told parliament in response to a supplementary question of a ruling BNP MP during the prime minister's question hour, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star



"How can firing, attack and torture on common people and seizure of transports be legal if a peaceful long march is illegal?"

-- Sheikh Hasina

Leader of the Opposition
and Awami League, President

Said at a press conference, reacting to a government press note that said that provocative speeches and announcement of Dhaka siege in the name of long march would tarnish goodwill and image of the country, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star



"We have no reports of mass arrests from anywhere across the country."

-- Safar Raj Hossain

Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs

Told journalists when asked why there were mass arrests across the country in the wake of opposition's long march towards Dhaka, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"I have been with the government machinery for 13 years. I am frustrated."

-- Saifur Rahman

-- Finance and Planning Minister

Said about persistent irregularities and wastage of public money, at a programme to launch the Public Expenditure Management Manual, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I have not faced any questions yet"

-- Md Rezaul Karim Khan Chunnu

Special Judge, Dhaka Division

Said when asked whether his political statements would raise any questions

Source: Prothom Alo

GLIMPSES OF CELEBRATIONS



Eminent personalities gathered to celebrate the 15th anniversary of The Daily Star held at the Bangladesh China Friendship Conference on Saturday and made the evening a memorable one.

OVERCHARGED MOBILE BILLS

Subscribers worried as flaws go unnoticed

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

messages (SMS) to anyone, but lost Tk 34.

He immediately sent an SMS to the operators and within an hour received a reply: "Any unusual deductions from your account will be adjusted through our new auto rebate system."

"I received credit of Tk 10, but I am waiting for the rest," said Naushad.

According to other mobile phone users, five major mobile operators are currently cheating millions of subscribers in various ways in the city.

"Mobile operators are able to get away with such activities

because of the indifference of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC)," said Sayeed Ahmed, a businessman, who had been a victim of 'unusual deductions' a number of times.

"I overlook such discrepancies if it is Tk 10 or 15. But there have been times when I lost over Tk 30 or 40," he added.

He said that he had complained to the customer care centre of his respective operator the first few times.

"They assured me that the balance would be adjusted later and a part of it was adjusted," he

said.

But, some subscribers are not as lucky as Naushad or Sayeed.

"I tried to contact my operator after losing around Tk 60 from my account in the same way. But the network was too busy and I could not contact them for over two hours," said Hashif Uddin, a student.

According to some, customer care centres of some operators cannot be contacted after 5:00 pm.

Post-paid subscribers are also being grossly cheated but only a few are aware of the situation.

"This is partially due to the fact

that post paid subscribers have no way of checking their balances," said ABM Kamran, a post-paid user.

Most post-paid subscribers said that mobile operators tend to burden them with excessive bills.

"I switched off my post-paid SIM when I was out of Dhaka for two months. When I returned I found bills worth Tk 4,000 for the two months," said Sharfuddin Ahmed, a resident of Jigatola.

Ahmed contacted his respective operator and applied for an itemised bill.

"On receiving the bill I showed them that no calls were made

during those two months. I had to pay the bill though it was adjusted later," he said. He later shifted to a pre-paid SIM.

"But I still continue to lose money," he complained.

Most pre and post-paid subscribers are grossly dissatisfied with the services these operators provide.

"Operators are introducing new offers and generating millions as revenue but do not want to invest some of it to improve customer care services," said Taher Jalil, a pre-paid subscriber of one such operator.

A senior official of Grameen

complains," he said.

He said the overcharged amount is adjusted to the subscriber's account within an hour after the flaw is detected.

BTRC officials denied the allegation that they do not act against the inadequate services of the mobile phone operators.

"A dissatisfied customer can always apply to us with their complaint along with details, dates and other information. We would certainly take necessary action against the respective operator," said Rashedul Wadud, Assistant Director, Tariff, BTRC.

Phone denied these allegations.

"We did receive overcharging allegations from some of our customers over the last few months. But after verification, we found that most were invalid complaints," he said, under condition of anonymity.

He said that subscribers usually make calls or while giving 'missed calls', they fail to notice that the call had been received at the other end.

Asif Iqbal, Head of Marketing, Aktel expressed similar views.

"We have a system to monitor overcharging and identify the problem before the subscriber