

# Unauthorised billboards to come under new scrutiny

TAWFIQUE ALI

The good governance committee of Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has recently entrusted a non-government organisation (NGO) to carry out a situation survey on the increase of unauthorised billboards in the city.

"We expect to submit the report after survey and evaluation of situation on billboards and recommendations on how to streamline the sector in next two months," said Prof Nazrul Islam, president of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS).

"Dhaka has been reduced to a city of signboards," said Prof Islam, who is also a geography and Environment Science teacher at Dhaka University (DU) and member of the committee.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) approves installation of various billboards flouting its own set of rules in many cases, he added.

Gigantic billboards installed at every nook and corner of DU campus has spoilt its sanctity as an educational institution, Prof Islam further said.

Billboards atop tall buildings, along major overhead thoroughfares are dangerous, as



Environmentalists say haphazardly placed billboards mar the beauty of cityscape.

they could harm the public and utility service system if they fall, he said.

Signboards should be installed at appropriate spots so that they do not mar beauty and greenery of cityscape and obstruct motorists' vision, but over 10,000 billboards, hoarding and other advertising signs in the city have become a men-

ace over the recent years, sources said.

Absence of an effective law and clandestine deals with the DCC, have given advertising agencies to go ahead with rampant installation of unapproved commercial billboards in recent years, sources said.

"When those close to the ruling party are involved in the

advertising business, how can one expect the sector to run according to rules," said noted economist and environmentalist Prof Muzaffar Ahmed.

"A comprehensive legislation is required to address the present context with the latest trend, technology, content and style of advertisements," he said.

In approving a particular

board or sign, authorities must consider the content and manner of advertisement, common people's tolerance, and its impact on the masses, he said.

The DCC guidelines on outdoor advertisements allows no overhead billboards or hoardings in front of hospitals, government offices, educational institutions, mosques, temples, churches, museums, and historical sites.

Shahbagh, Bangla Motor, Karwan Bazar, Farmgate, Mirpur Road, Mohakhali, Gulshan, Kuril, Biswa Road, DU campus and other major roads and intersections are spots plagued with wild advertising boards and signs.

"Such advertisements simply destroy the cityscape and its natural beauty, pose dangers to motorists and commuters also," said Khorshed Mahmud at Mohakhali intersection as he waited to board a bus to his office in Motijheel.

According to DCC rules, height of a mega sign cannot exceed the height of a foot-over bridge and have a gap of at least two kilometres between two such overhead signs. These mega signboards cannot be installed on major roads.

A DCC zonal executive officer and some members of

DCC's advertisement site allotment committee said requesting anonymity: "the DCC lacks in equipment to pull down huge billboards safely and has only cranes and pay-loaders."

A top official of DCC's conservancy department said: "Billboards here and there are

ent are a little over 100, he said, and approximately 250 applications are under consideration.

Though the DCC estimated around 700 unauthorised billboards he agreed that the actual number would exceed several thousands.

About the electric display

ment site allotment committee. "We just collect tax from the board owners," he said.

When his attention was drawn to risk factors posed by many huge billboards placed on tall buildings, he said: "I do not know whether they have approval or not."

All authorised billboards lost legality on July 19, 2003, as the DCC stopped renewing contracts with the advertising agencies following a court case.

Outdoor Advertising Owners Association (OAOA), an organisation of 19 advertising agencies, filed the case with the High Court over DCC move to raise rent of billboard from Tk 30 to Tk 150 per square foot.

DCC resumed receiving applications for contract renewal in May 2005, according to the chief estate officer.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court issued a stay order on November 17, 2003 preventing the DCC from demolishing billboards for three months. The Supreme Court extended the injunction for six months on January 12, 2004. The stay was extended once again until December 24, 2004. As the case could not stand any longer, the DCC went on demolition drive once again from January to March 2005.

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an onslaught to our city beautification work. But the task of checking the menace lies in the hands of allotment committee and estate department."

Chief Estate Officer Abu Taleb said that DCC has not approved the billboards installed in front of Hotel Sonargaon and nearby Panthakunja.

Authorised billboards at pres-

installed on tall buildings Taleb said that the DCC has served removal notice to the one near Asad Gate. "It is not possible to suddenly demolish such a display when we come to know it has been installed spending crores of money," he said.

"It is difficult to regulate billboards atop private buildings," said Alamgir Hossain Khan, convenor of DCC's advertise-

## Welcome to Dhaka

DCC plans to build five 'Dhaka Gates'

WAHIDA MITU

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in a bid to enhance the beauty of Dhaka proposes to build five "Dhaka Gate" at four entrances to the city utilising its own funds, said a DCC source.

"The aim of putting up the gates is to welcome inbound travellers to Dhaka and highlight the beauty of the city," said Md. Shirajul Islam, DCC's chief town planner of DCC who is also a member of the 'Dhaka Gate' jury board.

"During the last four years we have tried very hard to make the city look beautiful and attractive and setting up 'Gates' at the four entrances is another part of the project," said Syed Qudratullah, superintendent engineer and project director of Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP).

"If a visitor gets a good impression as he enters Dhaka, along with its attraction, the likelihood of interest in investments in Bangladesh could be embedded in their minds, which will in turn increase the economic growth of the country," he said, adding that 'first impressions count a lot'.

The proposal to put up new gates that will highlight the Bengali culture and tradition came from Prime Minister's office.

The first phase of the process will be the gate in Uttara near Tongi Bridge, followed by one at Aminbazar in Gabtoli. The third will be at the Dhaka entry point on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and two more near Bridges 1 and 2 of the Buriganga river.

Dr Kamal Uddin Siddique, chief secretary of Prime Minister presided over a meeting titled "Good Governance and Development" on February 7, 2005 and discussed the matter of five gates for Dhaka City. After the Prime Minister's approval to build the Dhaka Gates, a five-member jury board was formed regarding the design of the gate.

Under the recommendation of the board on January 26 this year tenders were floated for the model and design that should have been submitted by February 15. But when the board sat for review on February 27, it found only seven models and design received out of the 13 schedules sold.

Finding the model and the design of the gates not up to the mark, the board sat at another meeting on March 14, presided by Dr Idris Miah, DCC's chief engineer where it called for tenders a second time.

In the first meeting tenders were sought from only architectural institutions, but the second meeting opened tenders to architecture, architectural institutions, students of architecture and fine arts to submit their designs.

## LIBERATION WAR MUSEUM

# Celebrating decade of showcasing true history of independence

NOVERA DEEPIKA

A headline "Lively opening of Liberation War Museum soaked in rain and tears" flashed across the newspapers on March 22, 1996 as the only museum in the country dedicated to the freedom fighters, started to relate the tale of bravery and martyrdom, pain, passion, sorrow and glory, in the fight for the country's independence in 1971.

Preparatory work took over 18 months, and on a stormy evening a third generation child of martyr family inaugurated the museum igniting the eternal flame at the front of the museum.

The museum authorities along with the masses, who stood by them till it mission was accomplished, celebrated the 10th anniversary of the museum on Wednesday.

Sara Zaker, Founder Member, Board of Trustees, Liberation War Museum, said: "We began this journey with the objective of informing and enlightening young generations on the true history of the Liberation War and increase their awareness and consciousness of our nationality. We feel they should know about the violation of human rights during the time of the war."

The museum seems to have achieved this goal. A visitor from Dhaka University, Mouni Rahman, said: "The museum has portrayed the Liberation War and the brutality on Bangalees by Pakistani Army so vividly that the people who did not witness the war can feel the agony and pain the nation went through in 1971."

Dr. Sarwar Ali, Trustee and Member Secretary of the museum, said, "Initially we were a little worried about people's reaction and their cooperation when we started the museum. But their all-out support in providing memorabilia and other items to the museum was over-

whelming".

The number of the primary resources, memorabilia at the museum is 14,719 including 3,336 photographs, 7,738 newspaper clippings, 2,000 documents and 1,644 items used by the freedom fighters, martyrs -- all of which have come from the martyrs' families and common people, he added.

An outreach programme was initiated in 1997 to enlighten the new generation on the detail history of the country's independence. Under this programme, 75,281 students of 284 schools and colleges of Dhaka city visited the museum.

In 2004, through mobile museum the comprehensive project entitled "Project to educate students on history of the Liberation War and ideas of Human Rights, Peace and Harmony" was started where 11,998 students of nine towns and 61 districts participated.

There were 2,976 eyewitness accounts collected by students that were submitted to the museum's archive and will be soon available online.

"We have got to know from across the country many unknown and untold stories of bravery and heroism of freedom fighters from this project," Dr Ali said.

"The museum did not deviate from its goal to project unbiased and truthful account of the struggle that culminated in the emergence of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971," he added.

He cited some problems the museum is going through at the moment. "Because of the paucity of space in the rented premises, only 1,306 objects can be displayed at a time. We also have to take special measures to project the objects from the varying climatic conditions of the country," Sarwar said.

"We hope to buy a piece of land by this December where we can build our own museum," he added.



A freedom fighter, Muhammad Abdul Mannan Mia, from Sylhet came to visit the museum. He was overwhelmed.

"In 1971 I was a student of the engineering university. I attended the historic meeting of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at the Race Course on

March 7. I witnessed the first announcement of victory; I participated in the slogan and took an oath to fight for our freedom. Visiting the museum reminds me of the days of glory that I was a part of," said a proud Mannan.

Muhammad Ali of Sunamganj, expressed his gratitude to the museum authorities for portraying the bravery of his father. An emotional Nurul Islam said: "When the people have begun to forget the supreme sacrifices of the martyrs, the Liberation War

Museum has paid tribute to my father. It has given us the power to turn our grief into a strength."

STAR PHOTOS