Star city

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thecitythatwas

White Mesta was once used to make paper by the paper makers of Dhaka. Later, paper was made of jute. Bamboo palm was introduced to produce paper at the end of the 18th century. The paper producers were called Kagoji and the place where the paper was produced known as Kagojitola. According to James Wise the Muslims in Dhaka dominated the production of paper at that time.

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STAR PHOTO

Bakusha Market : One of several markets in Nilkhet enjoying unlimited usage of electricity for fixed charges.

DESA ELECTRICITY USAGE

Blank cheque for Nilkhet markets

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Thousands of shops are deliberately operating without any electricity reading meters at Bakusha Hawker's Market, Nurjahan Market, Dhanmondi Hawkers' market and in the adjacent areas.

These shops are defying the tariff policies of Power Development Board (PDB) and paying fixed and undocumented electricity bills to the market authorities.

According to shop owners, shops in these markets operate under a sole electricity-reading meter installed at the office of the owners' association and pay a fixed amount of electricity bill to the market authorities regardless of the amount of electricity being consumed.

"We figured a way to divide the average total sum of monthly electricity bill amongst our members (shop owners) who pay a fixed amount," said Mostafizur Rahman, member of the Bakusha Hawker's Market Samabay Samity.

These markets list thousands of commercial and auxiliary services providing establishments including the likes of small garment industries, tailors, photocopy stores, word-processing, book binding shops and hundreds of small publication houses operating in and about their proximity.

According to PDB tariff rates, shops and businesses using electricity for commercial purposes have to pay Tk 5.04 to 7.82 for each kilowatt, while for residential use it costs Tk 2.50 to 5.00 per kilowatt. However, these shops are paying fixed electricity bills and utterly defying the different tariff policies of the authorities.

Number of these shops are using sub-lines through sloppy connections of wires from other shops and haphazardly operating hundreds of electrical equipments without the scrutiny of electricity meters each and everyday.

On a visit deep inside the narrow murky alleys of the Nilkhet Bakusha Market, this correspondent found numerous small printing presses and publication houses operating with big outworn printing equipments.

A shopkeeper, who was operating three big printing machines in his press at Nilkhet, told the correspondent that he have applied for an electric meter but yet to acquire it. "We have requested for one (electric meter) but going through all the formalities and paper works takes time,"

However, Jashim, another storekeeper of a photocopy stall, told the correspondent that none of the shops in the market have any electric meters installed in them. "You won't find any meters in any of the shops in the whole market, the only meter available is in the Samity's office," said Jashim.

Jashim added that he along with 2 more adjacent shops jointly pays an amount of Tk 2,500 for electric bills monthly. However, according to experts, under normal billing system each shop that operate photocopy machines during working hours would have to pay around Tk 2,000 to 4,000 for electricity charges.

When asked, the owners' associations blamed the shop owners for not installing electricity-reading meters.

"We told them that they can set up meters if they want to, the fact that the meters have not been installed is their concern -- not ours," said Mostafizur Rahman of the Samity.

"We claim a fixed amount of electricity bill from them each month which pretty much covers up the whole sum of the electricity bill," said Rahman.

This correspondent also found small printing presses and publication houses along with small garment industries operating with illegally attached electrical connections through sub-lines from nearby stores and electric hubs in an old

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Beware of sloppy CNG conversion!

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

A section of unscrupulous CNG conversion workshop owners in the city are using substandard and faulty cylinders putting lives of the commuters at risk.

Due to the increasing fuel price in recent years, car owners are rushing to the conversion workshops to change their vehicles into CNG-run. On average more than 23,500 vehicles are being converted into CNG system annually.

Technically unequipped workshops are often providing home service for conversion. There are allegations that even oxygen cylinders are being used as CNG (compressed natural gas) cylinders. This raises the possibilities of fatal accidents

Due to this rush the number of conversion workshops, both licensed and illegal, has increased in the city in recent years. They are taking advantage of the vehicle owners' unawareness and are using unfit cylinders during conversion.

Except for a few, the conversion workshops are ill-equipped and mechanics are not trained according to the conditions set by the licensing authority.

Technically unequipped workshops are often providing home service for conversion. There are allegations that even oxygen cylinders are being used as CNG (compressed natural gas) cylinders. This raises the possibilities of fatal accidents.

"A CNG cylinder should be stronger than other gas cylinders. It must be able to withstand 4000psi pressure during refuelling. If it explodes it will be fatal. It is like a bomb," said Meshkat Ahmed Chowdhury, chief inspector, Department of Explosives.

Earlier this month the gas cylinder of a CNG-run microbus exploded while refuelling in a filling station at Rayerbagh in Jatrabari area. The owner of the microbus was injured in the explosion. The explosion completely destroyed the vehicle and damaged several buses and windowpanes of the filling station.

According to the Department of Explosives, there have been 12 similar accidents in and around Dhaka since the year 2000.

"Most accidents occurred at CNG stations during refuelling. According to our investigation the vehicles involved in recent accidents had faulty cylinders. Conversion of these vehicles were done by illegal workshops," said Shafiul Azam, director (Operations) Rupantorito Prakritik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL).

RPGCL is the government body responsible for licensing CNG conversion workshops. Financed by the Asian Development Bank, the first conversion workshop was established by RPGCL in 1998 as a model at Joarsahara in the capital.

Now there are 89 licensed workshops in the country. The number of refuelling stations is 139. There are many other workshops operating without licence.

There is allegation of a very little monitoring of the CNG conversion workshops after they get licence. Azam said, "If we get specific information of malpractice we visit the workshop. We have recently seized several faulty cylinders."

According to RPGCL, by December 2006 an estimated number of 61, 238 vehicles were converted into CNG system. The number however is more than that because conversion performed by the illegal workshops are not included in this figure.

Besides, some imported natural gas-run vehicles are also in operation.

There is confusion about who will be responsible for examining CNG vehicles already on the road for faulty system or cylinders.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is responsible for fitness of the vehicle. It works following the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983, which has not been updated to deal with the current situation involving CNG vehicles.

Meshkat Ahmed Chowdhury however said, "There is no reason to be alarmed. It is time to be cautious about CNG conversion."

He explained that during conversion, owners of vehicles must enquire if the workshop has valid licence. They must check for test certificate of the cylinder provided by the manufacturers. This certificate

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STAR PHOTO

A mechanic at a CNG conversion centre checks a vehicle.

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.

"The problem here is not the law but [lack of] courage"

-- Mainul Hosein
Law Adviser
Told reporters about the work of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"You'd better ask him [law adviser] how he could say this"

-- Mahfuzur Rahman
Acting Chief Election Commissioner
Told reporters as the law adviser suggested that he and the other Election Commissioners resign voluntarily, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I stay from 10am to 5pm and sign about 50 files"

-- Justice Sultan Hossain
Chairman, ACC
Told reporters as the law adviser said ACC should be made 'free of clowns', on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"This is not an occupation rather a missionary kind of job"

-- Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury
Election Commissioner
Told reporters while talking about resigning from the post, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"What can I do if outsiders come here and create this situation?"

-- Abdur Rob Hawlader
Director General, Passport Office
Told a reporter when asked about the activities of brokers outside the office, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"I could not go for work leaving all my things on the street. We spent last night on the cot under the open sky"

-- Ratan Mia
A fisherman and a slum dweller who lost his shelter due to the ongoing eviction drive
Told a reporter, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"No one writes in school essays that she wants to be a nurse"

-- Dr Abu Sayeed MM Rahman
Consultant, Surgery, United Hospital
Told a reporter about the negative attitude existing in the society towards nursing profession that adds to the problem to shortage of skilled nurses, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"After passing masters everybody wants to maintain 'status' and wants to be called 'sir' at his workplace"

-- Lilyma Khanom
Owner of a garment factory who started from the job of a quality controller
Told a reporter when asked about the reason of educated people shying away from technical jobs in garment sector, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by: Durdana Ghias

STAR PHOTO

A child seen yesterday with his catch of dead fishes in old airport lake.

Fishes poisoned in Airport Lake

STAR REPORT

The immediate past lessee of the Tejgaon old airport lake poisoned to death thousands of fishes before parting from the area.

Local people were seen yesterday collecting the dead fishes in bags and buckets. They said that they first noticed thousands of dead fishes floating on the lake's surface on Thursday, following the eviction of a slum and several shops along the Rokeya Swarani.

Just when the eviction drive was over people had access into the lake. People from nearby areas started collecting the fishes and selling those in the market nearby. Fishes as tiny as one centimeter long were seen being picked up by the men, women and children.

Sources said that the Bangladesh Air Force had leased out the old airport lake to one Hasibul Huda, who "in accordance with the guidelines of fish farming administered doses of poison to clear the lake of all fishes".

Dozens of men, women and children nearby were yesterday using one corner of the lake for washing. A guard on the spot who identified himself to be an employee of the BAF said that during the first two days tons of dead fishes were floating on the surface of the water.

"I have been told that the lease holder poured the poison when his lease was over," the guard said.

Fisheries experts of the

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LOOK, WHAT IT EMITS!

STAR PHOTO

Thousands of diesel-run buses, trucks and vans with faulty engines are adding to the massive pollution already caused by about 6,000 brick kilns around the city. In winter, pollution in the city air is at its peak. Despite clear rulings in the environment protection law these vehicles continue to foul the city air.