

The Portuguese were the first among Europeans to step into Dhaka lured by its wealth aiming at only doing business. They set up many Khuthi (structures) here. However, it was the British who stayed in Dhaka for long. There was no relation between the Portuguese in Dhaka and those in Arakan and Swandip. Those in Dhaka came during Shayesta Khan's regime and set up homes at Sripur.

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DCC in shambles over public toilets

Most of the 36 public toilets built recently remain abandoned due to substandard fittings and legal tangles

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has recently constructed 36 public toilets spending crores of taka but most of them remain inoperative due to various reasons including poor condition and legal tangles between DCC and the builders.

The toilets have been built using substandard construction materials and fittings. Due to poor maintenance most of them remain unusable. "It's too dirty," said Abdul Baki, a shop-owner, showing the public toilet at Jatrabari.

There are 70 public toilets for about 12 million people in the city, meaning only one toilet for 1.75 lakh people. The site selection for

these toilets also raised questions.

The DCC constructed 36 new toilets in 2005 under Urban Primary Health Care Project (UPHCP) funded by several donor agencies and the Bangladesh government.

Under the UPHCP, the DCC had planned to construct 100 public toilets and Asian Development Bank, one of the donors, provided about Tk 6 crore.

But tender was called for constructing 56 out of 100 toilets and finally only 36 were built as the authorities failed to manage space for the other toilets.

Besides, the authorities had to postpone construction of 9 toilets due to land disputes.

About the number of toilets closed due to legal disputes,



STAR PHOTO

This public toilet was never opened to public after its completion months ago.

Kamruzzaman said, "I joined here a month ago and now the zonal offices are dealing with the toilets." But officials at the zonal offices declined to say anything about the legal disputes.

A DCC source said there was budget for some special facilities

at the toilets constructed under the UPHCP. He said the toilets were supposed to have both high and low commodes, urinals, basins, breast-feeding space and dressing room for women, and separate entrance for men and women. In reality, most of

the toilets do not have such facilities while most of them are equipped with low-standard fittings.

"All these low-quality construction work got 'no objection' from the related DCC engineers during handover of the toilets," he added.

Moder Gorob: An ornament in Ekushey Book Fair

WAHIDA MITU

A spectacular sculpture named "Moder Gorob" (our pride) has become the centre

of attraction at this year's Amar Ekushey Book Fair that began on Thursday.

Thousands of visitors are flocking to Bangla Academy premises to visit fair and have a glimpse of the sculpture

dedicated to the martyrs of the Language Movement of 1952.

Chief Adviser Dr Fakhrudin Ahmed inaugurated the sculpture while opening the month-long book fair in which 255

publishers are taking part this year.

The sculpture represents the sequences of the incidents took place on February 21, 1952, the day now observed as Shaheed Dibash as well as

International Mother Language Day.

"This is a beautiful work that will certainly help to the present generation who have no idea about the Language Movement and who are eager to learn about it," said Mesbah Uddin Khan, a student of Dhaka University who came to visit the book fair.

The sculpture has bronze-made busts of five Language Movement martyrs -- Rafiq Uddin Ahmed, Abdus Salam, Shafiqur Rahman, Abdul Jabbar and Abdul Barkat -- and terracotta mural representing the historic event. Besides, it contains several other scenes of rural Bangladesh, the face of a mother teaching her child and another mother carrying her martyred son which expresses her pain.

"I had a long-cherished dream to build a monument as a symbol to pay tribute to the language martyrs. We have the Shaheed Minar, but I thought we need a sculpture like this to tell the present generation about our glorious past," said artist Mofidul Alam Khan who designed the monument. He works as a re-toucher at Bangla Academy.

He built the 17-foot sculpture with the financial support from GrameenPhone and Bangla Academy. The total cost is Tk 13.43 lakh of which GrameenPhone provided Tk 10 lakh. The construction work started on November 6, 2006 and completed on January 31 last.



The sculpture with bronze busts of five Language Movement martyrs at the Bangla Academy premise is one of the main attractions of this year's book fair.

STAR PHOTO

Follow up

'Overhead arches to go soon'

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) begins a special drive tomorrow to remove illegal overhead signboards from the city roads.

Mohammad Kamruzzaman Chowdhury, chief estate officer of DCC, said DCC will remove all the overhead signboards from the roads by February 7.

Chowdhury earlier told Star City that the eviction drive against the illegal overhead signboards

would begin from February 1.

Asked why the drive has been delayed, Chowdhury said due to Biswa Ijtema, adequate police force was not available for the drive.

He again said the owners of the illegal overhead signboards would face criminal charges and fine for violating DCC regulations.

Hundreds of business houses, educational institutions, hospitals, clinics and pathological laboratories, real estate companies, and even some government

organisations have violated the municipal laws by digging up roads and pavements to install overhead steel arches to advertise their company.

The unmarked pillars of these signboards on the road are narrowing the road space and causing accidents. During storm or even in gusty wind, these signboards often fall on the roads and block movement of vehicles. Sometimes passers-by are injured in accidents.

Sources said around two lakh hawkers and illegal occupiers of footpaths and pavements have been paying hefty sums of money to the law enforcers for years to keep their illegal possession.

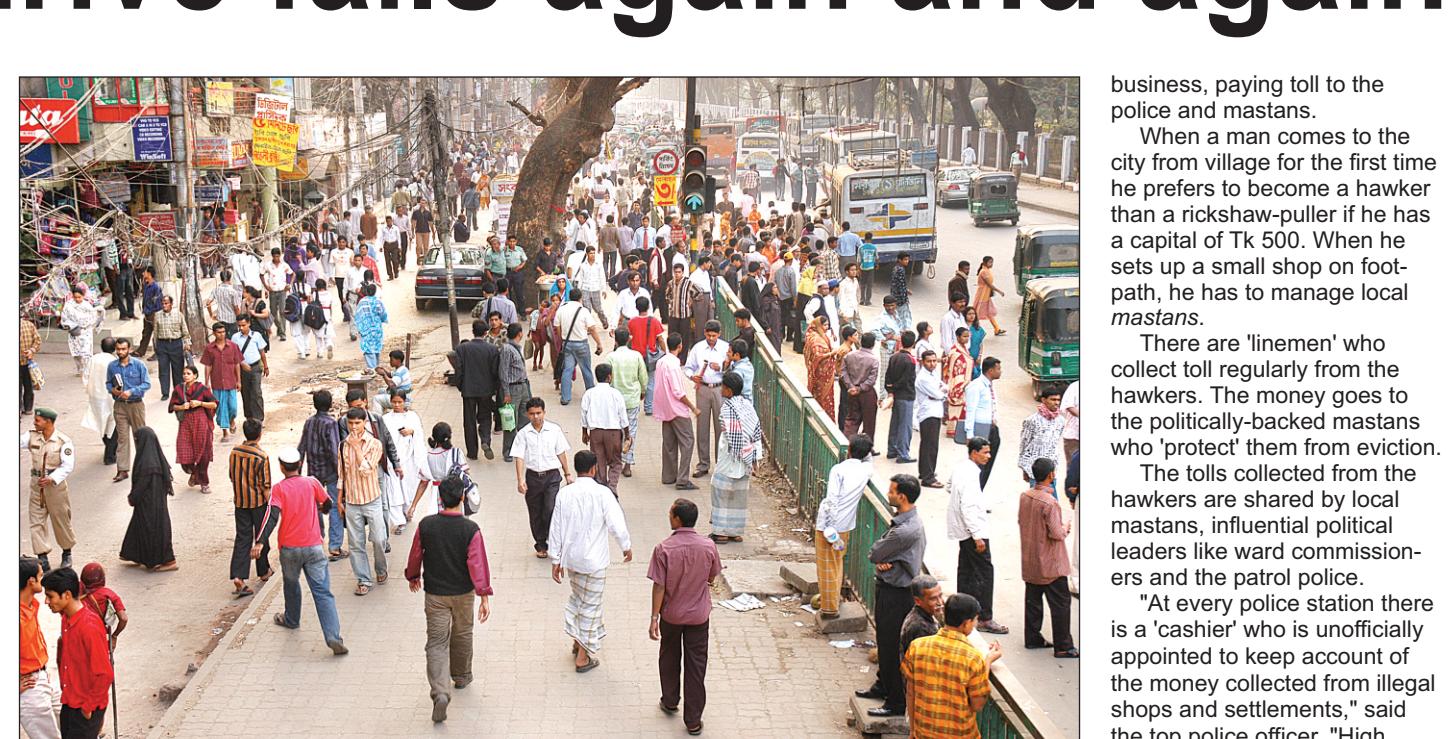
A nexus between the police and local mastans for sharing the toll collected from hawkers is a major reason behind the failure of the authorities to evict the hawkers permanently from the city footpaths.

A top police official seeking anonymity said unless the law enforcers and influential political activists stop collecting tolls or regular fees, the hawkers will come back to the footpaths and walkways.

DCC and other agencies on several occasions tried to evict hawkers from footpaths and illegally occupied lands, but it was not possible to keep them



DURDANA GHIAS



A clean footpath: How long will it remain clean?

away, said Abu Taleb, former chief estate officer, DCC.

"During each drive police were with us to evict the hawkers but later when they started

returning, police remained silent. We do not have our own force so we had to depend on the police," said Taleb.

In the past DCC evicted

business, paying toll to the police and mastans.

When a man comes to the city from village for the first time he prefers to become a hawker than a rickshaw-puller if he has a capital of Tk 500. When he sets up a small shop on footpath, he has to manage local mastans.

There are 'linemen' who collect toll regularly from the hawkers. The money goes to the politically-backed mastans who 'protect' them from eviction.

The tolls collected from the hawkers are shared by local mastans, influential political leaders like ward commissioners and the patrol police.

"At every police station there is a 'cashier' who is unofficially appointed to keep account of the money collected from illegal shops and settlements," said the top police officer. "High officials of police get shares of the money."

The thousands of hawkers also contribute to the economy. A bulk of the money generated on the pavements ends up in the remote villages. The hawkers need permanent and authorised places to run their business.