

City beggars: Not so disorganised!

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

An estimated 50,000 beggars in the capital city have several 'associations' to manage and oversee their activities, beggars from different parts of the city told Star City.

The beggars call the association leaders "mahajans" who 'appoint' them and allow them to beg in a particular area and for a particular time.

"The mahajans provide us with all kinds of support including food and shelter. They also protect us from the police and extortionists and even give us legal support," said Moazzem

leader. These leaders also appoint 'assistants' for the different neighbourhoods within that zone.

According to several beggars, it is mandatory for them to be members of the associations by paying a registration fee of around Tk 200 to Tk 300.

Those who beg on the streets without paying the fee are ousted by other beggars and the association leaders.

Moazzem Ali said the association provides them with loan from its fund and they have to repay it along with 'daily deposit' to the association.

"We have to pay Tk 30-50

the daily deposits. "The on-duty police officers and local hooligans also get a portion of the collected money," he said.

These associations also provide the beggars with necessary 'begging gears' including torn cloths and even helping hands for the handicapped.

"The handicapped beggars are provided with vehicles and pullers while the visually impaired ones are given white canes and helpers to assist them," said Golam Munshi, a beggar from Bangla Motor area.

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Ali, a 67-year old beggar from Mohammadpur.

This correspondent interviewed several beggars who claimed themselves as members of the associations. They said they have their central organisation at Fakirerpul.

The beggars said a man who runs a travel agency at Fakirerpul is the 'central leader' of the associations, but they could not provide his address or any other information about him.

The associations operate throughout the city by splitting Dhaka into different zones with each zone overseen by a

spondent that Badsha Mia, who once was a beggar, now manages hundreds of beggars in Mohammadpur area.

The beggar 'leaders' fix schedules for the beggars and appoint them to beg in specific areas. "The mahajans decide who will beg when and where," said Moazzem Ali.

The beggars said their leaders claim a portion of their daily earnings in return for their service to protect them and manage the begging 'profession'.

According Siddique, several groups of collectors from the associations visit all the beggars in the evening and collect



STAR PHOTO

and other political programmes in exchange for money," said Mohsin.

Jahangir, a 72-year-old beggar from Goran told this correspondent that the beggars even have their own lawyer in the judge court to take care of legal matters for the beggars. "Our associations pay him a monthly amount of around Tk 1,600," said Kabir.

Taxicabs

FROM PAGE 21
The government policy framed in 1998 allows only registered companies having at least 20 cars to run the business. The companies must have Tk 10 lakh as paid up capital. Any individual willing to get involved in taxicab business has to become a member of a company.

"As there was no guideline regarding what will happen to the cabs that are more than 8 years old, the present policy of BRTA will help us to run our business properly," said Mohammad Faruq Talukder of

Cab Salida, a leading cab company in the city.

At present among 800 yellow cabs under his possession more than 100 cabs are totally dilapidated.

BRTA director also said that a team of BRTA inspectors will examine the cabs and scrap those on the basis of fitness. On the other hand if the team members find the cabs in better condition and more than 8 years old then any individual can buy the vehicles subject to paying tax with the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

Traffic policemen

FROM PAGE 21
"I always sell off my ration (on open market) and buy the essentials I need from there because my children cannot to eat the low quality food I get as ration," said a constable on Bijay Sarani. "It is really hard to be an honest constable in this city under such a conditions. I get some allowances for living outside government provided accommodations, but it is too little to be mentioned. I am so poor that I have to live at a tin shed slum at Adabar with my family of five."

He too complained about unplanned and mismanaged transportation. Because of this, they cannot handover the shifts to the incoming constable on time and are stuck working longer hours. DMP does not even have enough workforce to designate more than one constable on each point of duty. As such, a constable working alone does not even have the option to leave the point in the time when nature calls.

He agreed with his co-workers that private vehicles -- especially those carrying VIP passengers -- break traffic rules more often than other vehicles. "The situation is getting better under this caretaker government as political VIPs or their family members do not dare to harass the constables after they are stopped for traffic violations."

About higher officials in the department, he said, "You can not expect a sector with gentlemen everywhere. There are a few officers who do not respect the constables as their co-workers and often treat them as their servants or as inferior beings."

Another constable said after he was seen receiving bribe from a truck at Technical crossing on Mirpur road, "I am not doing this for myself, but only because this money will go to the 'zone' and everyone will receive his or her share from the cashier."

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