

Legal tangle puts brakes on billboard removal drive



STAR PHOTO

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Dismantling of billboards from rooftops of city buildings is facing setbacks as Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is caught up in a legal tangle with Outdoor Advertisement Owners Association.

In the first week of August, Outdoor Advertising Owners' Association filed a writ petition with the High Court against DCC challenging the corporation's move to remove billboards from building rooftops.

High court issued a stay order on the DCC action for three months and the billboard removal campaign came to a halt.

Sources at DCC said around 60 percent billboards in the city are installed on top of the roofs of privately owned buildings.

On July 20, DCC through advertisements in various newspapers asked building owners to remove hazardous rooftop billboards.

DCC later launched a drive to remove billboards that are running the risk of accidents during rainstorms due to their proximity to electrical wires as well as the ones that are spoiling the beauty of the city skyline.

During the drive, DCC only removed 14 such billboards

from buildings owned by DCC itself—New Market, Chandrima Super Market, Mahanagar Natyamancha and Sundarban Bhavan, Sources said.

The Outdoor Advertising Owners' Association, however, sharply criticised the DCC move, saying that it would destroy the outdoor advertise-

involves thousands of people and their livelihood will be at stake if the industry receives such a blow.

"The billboards in the city did not just appear overnight. DCC itself gave us permission to set up the billboards and we even pay taxes for those," said Rashed.

"DCC don't have any right to pull down billboards without giving us time. We have contracts with DCC for one year and we have agreements with advertisers as well. Agreements with the advertisers [for duration of advertisement] are being breached due to the DCC move," he added.

"There should have been dialogues beforehand over the issue so that we could make a decision together," said Rashed.

There are around 1,500 billboards positioned on top of numerous private buildings. Around 500 more are located on DCC-owned properties all over the city.

Furthermore, there are thousands of illegal hoardings in the city, gravely narrowing the city skyline and causing vision pollution.

According to the outdoor advertisement guidelines set by the DCC, it is illegal to set up billboards in front of hospitals, government offices, educational institutions, mosques, temples, churches, museums, parks, historical sites and the Central Shaheed Minar.

Advertisement agencies flout the rule frequently. Even the DCC often ignores the guidelines

ment industry. Before filing the writ petition, on July 25, the association members in an open letter requested the chief adviser to intervene and save the industry.

Haji Mohammad Rashed, general secretary of the association, told Star City that the billboard-advertising sector

To set up billboards with neon lights on private buildings, DCC charges Tk 75 per square foot (sft) yearly and for billboards without lighting, the rate is Tk 50 per sft a year.

For DCC owned buildings, the rate for billboards with lights is Tk 170 per sft while Tk 150 per sft for the ones without

Advertisement agencies flout the rule frequently. Even the DCC often ignores the guidelines.

Unfair bus fares

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On the contrary, on Gulistan-Dhaka Zoo route, local services were found to be collecting even more than "sitting services". Samay Niyontran, a "sitting" bus service, collects Tk 12 for the entire distance while the local services charge Tk 14 for the same distance.

Although the "sitting service" bus operators assure the passengers of vacant seats, most of their passengers later find themselves standing in the bus despite paying higher fares. Especially during peak hours, these buses are seen crammed with passengers, exceeding their capacity.

"To entice the passengers into buying tickets, the ticket sellers at counters yell out to passengers announcing that an 'empty' bus is about to arrive. But later, the passengers have little option but to get on the bus since it might be a while before the next bus will hit the stop," said Kayes Chowdhury from Green Road.

Since the greater majority of the population in the city come from moderate to lower income groups, they have to rely on public transport facilities for their day-to-day activities. It seems that commuting within this city is getting increasingly difficult day by day for this helpless population.

Many students, housewives, office goers say that

Police Open Day

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AKM Daulat Akbar, officer in charge of Ramma PS, said a cross-section of people including doctors, engineers, writers, journalists, businessmen and the local ward commissioner took part in the discussion. One of the main problems of the area was that the community security guards were having problems in performing their duties.

Reaz Ahmed, managing director of Jatri Cab, said it was a unique opportunity for him to talk with the police face to face.

"Previously, we could not even think of talking with the police in such an easy manner. We had to make appointments to talk to them. But on the open day, we talked with them freely about our problems," he said.

NBK Tripura, additional inspector general of police, said the police open day is aimed at creating a people-friendly environment in police stations in the city.

"We are trying to create a people-friendly environment in police stations. We are working on community policing, involvement of people from all walks of life in crime prevention and dispelling people's distrust towards the police," he said.

"At regular intervals, community leaders will sit with police officers in police stations and talk about existing problems of the area. For example, they [locals] can propose increased police patrol in their area to prevent petty crime," said Tripura.

"We will apply for extending the November deadline by the DoE. If they do not give us time then we know other ways to get the job done," he added.

Uttara PS in June this year with the slogan "Thanar duar kholo aji, Asheite aji nahi mana" — meaning the police station is open for all today without any obstruction.

A service delivery centre named 'Sawmitra Dev Service Delivery Centre' has also been opened there. It is named after Sawmitra Kumar Dev, project officer of PRP, killed recently in a bus robbery.

Nakhalpara

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"We heard that they have installed the machine. But still we were smelling the poisonous fumes after 12 noon. Probably they keep the machine switched off for several hours to save cost," said Afsar.

Contacted, DoE officials said they had issued a warning to the factory last year and set a deadline to shift the factory by November this year.

"We will cancel their certificate [from DoE] if they do not leave the place by November this year," said Sukumar Biswas, deputy director, DoE.

Iftekhar Hossain said that they have bought an 18-bigha plot at Savar for the factory and been working on shifting since 1993.

"The factory was set up in 1960 when it was not a densely populated area. In 2003 we shifted 70 percent of the production of automatic battery. We need one more year to shift the factory," he said.

"We will apply for extending the November deadline by the DoE. If they do not give us time then we know other ways to get the job done," he added.

CROSSING THE LINE OF LAW



STAR PHOTO

Taking advantage of laxity of law enforcers, rickshaw pullers are back on the Tongi Diversion Road, which was made off limits to non-motorised vehicles years ago.

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Parabat Express
Leaves Dhaka at 6:40 am

Joyantika Express
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Upaban Express
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Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am

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