

DSCC takes on years of 'organised' malpractice

Drive launched to demolish thousands of illegal shops at city corporation markets; owners say they have official docs; former mayor sued

HELEMUL ALAM

Around 4,200 shops in 18 markets of Dhaka South City Corporation have been running illegally for years, depriving DSCC a good amount of revenue.

Some former DSCC officials along with a section of ruling party men, some ward councillors and market committee members are behind these unlawful activities.

Not only have they constructed shops in the markets' basements, toilets, open spaces and corridors, but also earned crores of taka by either selling or renting those out to traders, according to a recent survey of the city corporation.

DRIVE AGAINST ILLEGAL SHOPS

Amid such a situation, DSCC recently started a drive against shops, which were built violating the main design of the supermarkets.

The city corporation on December 8 and December 17 demolished several hundred illegal shops at Fulbaria Supermarket-2 and Sundarban Square Market in Gulistan.

Contacted, Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said they will continue their drive and demolish all the illegal shops from the DSCC markets gradually.

Traders and shop owners, however, protested the DSCC move, saying that they have documents from the city corporation to operate the shops.

According to sources, construction of these illegal markets started during late mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka's tenure. This illegal activity started to take a more "organised" shape during the time of administrators after the split of Dhaka City Corporation, they added.

For example, a syndicate comprising DSCC ward-20 councillor Farid Uddin Ahmed Ratan, Juba League president of DSCC (Ward-20) Haji Md Shahabuddin, former DCRO of DSCC Yusuf Ali Sardar (who lost his job this year) and former official (Kanungo) Mohammad Ali (who lost his job earlier due to the allegations) and some market samity leaders were behind construction of illegal shops in four markets -- Sundarban,



PHOTO: ANIRAN HOSSAIN

There are shops everywhere -- in the basement, open spaces, toilets, corridors and parking lots. Around 748 shops have been built at Dhaka Trade Centre on Bangabandhu Avenue, violating its main design. Inset, DSCC in a drive demolishing illegal shops at Fulbaria Supermarket-2 on December 8.



Gulistan Trade Centre (Puran Bazar Market or Pora market), Dhaka Trade Centre and Bangabazar Complex.

They constructed the shops from 2011 to 2013, sources said.

'IT WASN'T US'

Contacted, Councillor Ratan and Shahabuddin denied the allegations.

Ratan said there is no scope of interfering with any market activities outside of his ward and Sundarban market is not a part of his ward.

"I do not have any shop in any market and I am not a member of any market committee," he told The Daily Star recently.

Shahabuddin also said he was not involved with the construction or temporary allotment of shops at Dhaka Trade Centre or Bangabazar complex as he is not a member of their committees.

Though he became joint secretary of Sundarban Square Super Market in 2017, he was not involved with the temporary allotment, he said.

"The shop allotment in the basement of Sundarban market was done during the tenure of late mayor Khoka. Later, the city corporation constructed shops at the place of escalators and generators and gave temporary allotments to traders," he claimed.

He alleged that around 327 shops were constructed in the parking lot of Puran Bazar Market and the market committee's leaders were behind it.

Meanwhile, former deputy chief revenue officer Yusuf Ali also said the illegal shops were set up during mayor Khoka's tenure and the time of the administrators.

"I was not involved with those," he claimed.

He said the DSCC state department

was behind the construction and giving allotment to those shops. "The revenue section was not behind it," he added.

Yusuf said they took an initiative to collect revenue from the markets in 2018 as DSCC was being deprived of it.

HOW SHOPS WERE BUILT

Market Sources said the syndicate constructed additional shops on the fourth floor of the Sundarban market and took Tk 12 lakh from each trader for the shops.

They sold escalators worth Tk 2.83 crore and generators worth Tk 1.85 crore and constructed 64 more shops at the place, said a market committee leader.

They sold each shop for Tk 30 lakh to Tk 50 lakh in 2012-2013 fiscal. They sold at least 250 shops, the leader said wishing anonymity.

MARKETS	ILLEGAL SHOPS
Fulbaria Supermarket-2	911
Dhaka Trade Centre	748
Sundarban Super Market	669
Gulistan Trade Centre	401
Kaptaan Bazar Complex-1	451
Kaptaan Bazar Complex-2	447
Bangabandhu Avenue Hawkers Market	250
Nilkhet Roadside Market	112
New Super Market (south)	20
New Super Market (north) D-block	41
Market beside Chawkbazar public toilet	1
DMC adjoining market	9
North South Roadside market	4
Nawab Yousuf Market Bhaban 1-5	36
Nawab Yousuf extension market	7
Ahsan Manzil Super Market	38
Laxmibazar market	35
Sutrapur Community Centre Market	47

SOURCE: DSCC

This syndicate also constructed 80 illegal shops in Adarsha Market in Bangabazar Shopping Complex in 2018 and sold those for Tk three to five lakh each, according to a leader of the market samity.

Forty-three illegal shops were constructed on the second floor of Mahanagar market of Bangabazar Complex in 2013 by the same syndicate. They sold each shop for Tk 20 lakh each, said a leader of its market committee.

The same syndicate also constructed around 400 illegal shops violating the main design in Dhaka Trade Centre and 250 of them have already been sold, they said.

It rented out 500 shops to traders taking Tk 1 lakh for each shop on a yearly basis even before completion of the market.

Meanwhile at Fulbaria

Supermarket-2 in Gulistan, some 911 shops were constructed illegally in the open and parking spaces of the market's A, B, and C blocks (City Plaza, Nagar Plaza and Zaker Plaza) over the years, according to DSCC.

Sources said crores of taka were spent in underhand dealings for constructing and running the illegal shops.

Some 2,300 shops were constructed at the Fulbaria Supermarket-2 following the main design. But 911 others were built illegally at different times. Of them, 308 are in block-A, 292 in block-B, and 311 in block-C.

DSCC sources said the construction of the illegal shops in the basement started in 1997 when late Mohammad Hanif was the mayor. With some conditions, he allowed the traders association concerned to run businesses in the basement temporarily.

During the tenure of late mayor Khoka, some traders also got permission to run businesses temporarily. But since 2012, the construction of illegal shops went on on a large scale following the then administrator's permission, they said.

DSCC sources said though the owners and traders got permission from the administration to temporarily run several hundred shops for rent, they made permanent structures and increased the number of shops to 911.

Firoz Ahmed, general secretary of Zakir Market's Owners Samity, said they got the allotment of 911 shops during the tenure of the DSCC administrator.

He added that they paid rent only for two months and after that DSCC stopped taking rent. The other administrators and former mayor Sayeed Khokon did not take any rent from them.

He said in 2018, they filed a writ petition with the High Court against the DSCC move to demolish their shops.

After that, a section of DSCC officials took Tk 5 to 10 lakh from each of them as outstanding rent and gave them trade licences, he claimed.

Firoz said DSCC did not give them any trade licence.

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Everyone talks about democracy, but there is none: Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that Bangladesh is now being labelled as a country of "hybrid regime" as one-party rule has been established under the cover of democracy.

"This is the second day of the new year. We hope that it will be a wonderful year for us. We dream of a beautiful Bangladesh this year by coming out of pain and suffering caused by coronavirus," he said.

Speaking at a discussion, Fakhrul said, "But the reality is that Bangladesh is now being called a country of hybrid regime. Everyone talks about democracy but there is no democracy here. In fact, one-party governing system has been established under the cover of democracy."

Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yousuf Smriti Parishad arranged the programme at Jatiya Press Club in memory of the BNP vice-chairman who died of coronavirus on December 9 last year.

Fakhrul said the nation liberated the country in 1971 with a dream of having a democratic state and society. "But our dream has been shattered repeatedly... even after the 50 years of independence, we cannot say with pride that we live in an independent and democratic country where our rights are ensured. What can be more unfortunate than this?"

He said everything -- the government, parliament and bureaucracy -- is there in the country, but people have no rights.

The BNP leader alleged that around 300 people were subjected to extrajudicial killings last year by government agencies.

He bemoaned that the entire world, not only Bangladesh, has been going through a tough time due to Covid-19 and the dying condition of

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Return to positive politics: Quader

Says interest of people not on BNP's mind

BSS, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday called upon BNP to return to the positive trend of politics in the new year.

The minister said this while speaking at a views-exchange with officials of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) through videoconferencing from his official residence in the capital.

About BNP's announcement of ousting the government through mass-movement in the new year, Quader, also the general secretary of Awami League, said people now laugh at BNP's announcement of movement as there is no issue of waging a mass-upsurge in the country now.

The AL government has already passed 12 years, he said and expressed doubt over BNP's ability to wage a movement.

He said the interests of the country and people are not getting priority in BNP's political strategy. "So, I call upon you (BNP) to return to positive politics in the new year."

Turning to his own party, the AL general secretary said under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, the party will be made more organised by strengthening its internal discipline.

He said new committees would be formed through councils at those district and city units whose tenures have expired.

Quader urged all concerned to remain alert about

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Driver arrested for rape attempt in moving bus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The driver, prime accused in the case filed over attempt to rape in a moving bus in Sunamganj, was arrested yesterday morning.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police arrested Shahid Miah (25) from Old Bus Stand area of Sunamganj municipality, Md Mizanur Rahman, superintendent of police in the district said.

Earlier on December 27, Shahid's assistant Abdur Rashid (27) was arrested from Chhatak upazila by Police Bureau of Investigation (PBI).

A college student jumped off a moving bus at Sujanager in Sunamganj's Derai municipality on Saturday evening, to escape rape attempt by the bus driver and his helper.

With serious head injuries, she was first taken to Derai Upazila Health Complex and later referred to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The victim's father filed the case accusing three unknown persons of attempting rape -- with Derai Police Station that same night.

'Make sugar mills profitable'

Platform demands amid reports of grafts, mismanagement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A platform of sugar mill workers and employees' children yesterday demanded the government turn state-run sugar mills profitable by making planned investment and diversifying sugar products.

Instead of shutting down, it is possible to make mills profitable by modernising them for diversification, and eliminating corruption, Sugar Mills Children's Forum said in a statement.

If mills close, the country will have to rely on imported sugar products, and the market may turn unstable, the forum said.

It demanded modernising mills through apt management and urged authorities concerned to implement diversification through joint investment from home and abroad.

Graft and mismanagement are largely responsible for losses sugar mills incurred. However, thousands of workers and sugar farmers had to bear the brunt, while no effective measure was taken to eliminate graft or enhance skills, it said.

Livelihood of thousands of farmers, and workers and employees of six sugar mills are in peril, due to closure of sugar production during the ongoing season, said the forum, which consists of children of workers and

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Teenager killed, 2 hurt in attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A teenage boy was killed and two sustained stab injuries when a group attacked them in Mohakhali area of the capital on Friday.

The deceased was identified as Arif (16), a ninth-grader.

Injured -- Hasan and Sohag, both 17 -- were receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for injuries to their heads.

The boys were drinking tea at a restaurant in Mohakhali kitchen market area, when a rival group, all aged under 18, attacked them around 10pm.

The attackers indiscriminately stabbed the trio and fled, leaving them injured, said Arif's friend Robin Hossain.

They were rushed to DMCH, where the on-duty doctor declared Arif dead around 11pm, said Bachchu Mia, in-charge of DMCH Police Outpost.

All the attackers, the dead and injured are residents of Mohakhali Sat Tola slum. A drive is on to arrest the killers, police said.

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Water flow in Padma drastically fell over last year: joint survey

India-Bangladesh team begins monitoring of water levels

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Water level at one point of River Padma has drastically decreased from what it was during the same period last year, a survey conducted by experts from India and Bangladesh has found.

Water-level monitoring at different points of the Ganges and Padma kicked off yesterday. The survey, a joint effort by the countries, will be conducted under Ganges Water Sharing Treaty, 1996.

Every year, two experts' committees, one in India and one in Bangladesh, record the water level for five months, from January 1 to May 31.

According to the measurements, compared to last year's statistics, water flow has drastically fallen at the Hardinge Bridge point of Padma this year, the water board's Hydrology Department officials told The Daily Star.

As of yesterday, water flow around Hardinge Bridge area is about 80,000 cusecs. However, it stood somewhere around 1.02 lakh cusecs from January 1-10 last year.

Officials attribute this drastic fall of 22,000-23,000 cusecs to reducing water flow at the source of the river, Md Roich Uddin, acting executive engineer of Hydrology Department of Pabna confirmed. However, under the water sharing treaty, such a problem could be easily fixed, he assured.

Experts of the two-member Indian team -- Shri Venkateswarlu, deputy director of Central Water



Sada Pathor in Sylhet's Bholaganj, a new favourite for tourists, hasn't seen many souls last year due to the pandemic. But as tourism is slowly coming back to life, people are once again starting to visit this bed of white stones leading to crystal-clear water. This photo was taken over the weekend.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED