

ELEVATED ROADWAY

Land for link road on Hatirjheel given to police for commercial complex

TAWFIQUE ALI

The public works ministry and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) have been caught in a tussle over linking Gulshan with the proposed Elevated Roadway (ER) stretching between Panthapath and Rampura.

A priority development project of the prime minister, the scheme has faced a setback with the public works ministry handing over one acre of prime government land at a token price of Tk 1001 to the Bangladesh Police Welfare Trust for construction of commercial establishments.

The ER project, to be implemented by the DCC, is aimed at easing heavy traffic movement in the east-west directions and the surrounding areas.

But the land the ministry has handed over to the police welfare trust was where the Gulshan Avenue was supposed to be built and linked with the proposed elevated road.

Commenting on the allocation of the project land to other ventures, the DCC Mayor Sadeq Hossain Khoka said it would not be proper to cause setback to a project of national priority since there is no east-

west road network in the capital city, a situation that contributes significantly to the city's traffic disarray.

"We have formally sent a letter to the works minister demanding the land back for link road between Gulshan Avenue and the elevated expressway," Khoka said.

The Bangladesh Police Welfare Trust is planning to build a multi-purpose

the component to link the Gulshan Avenue.

"Such infringement becomes inevitable when a development work is initiated without consultation with the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk)" said Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury.

The Elevated Panthapath-Pragati Sarani/Gulshan Link Road project was approved on April 5, 2003 as part of the

and development components.

"It is not true that the DCC did not consult with the Rajuk authorities and they (Rajuk) do not know about the project," said the project director of the elevated road project, Ashiqur Rahman. "We apprised Rajuk of the project from time to time specifically on October 17, 18 and 30, 2004."

Rajuk asked the DCC in a letter on November 27 to imple-

nance committee meetings did not mean he would be aware of every component of the project, as the DCC has yet to submit any design of the project," said the secretary.

The project director of ER Ashiqur Rahman insisted that he had explained every detail of the project in a presentation at the PMO meeting.

The prime minister said the government would implement the project with its own resource, if need be, within two years, said a meeting source. But meanwhile the Japan government has granted Tk 300 crore for the project under debt payment resource of the Japan Bank of International Cooperation.

The project has been included in the current Annual Development Programme (ADP) and has already got an allocation of Tk 150 crore. It is awaiting final approval of the executive committee on the national economic council (Ecneec), said Ashiqur Rahman.

"We have drawn up detailed alignment of the road, land acquisition plan and soil investigation by an expert team of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology

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commercial complex at the site.

Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury, secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works blamed the DCC for taking up an important project without any consultation with the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk). Moreover the secretary claimed that the ER project that the PMO approved did not have

Begunbari canal and Hatirjheel development project at the good governance committee of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) with the PM in the chair.

The good governance committee assigned the DCC to build the elevated road of the Begunbari-Hatirjheel development scheme while Rajuk was assigned with the beautification

ment the project as per the approved recommendations, said Rahman. It also gave no objection to the project in another letter on August 8, 2004.

Rajuk's chief engineer and works secretary attended at least 14 meetings on the elevated roadway project, he said.

But the works secretary said that attending good gover-



The housing ministry has handed over this Gulshan plot to police, where DCC is planning to construct a link road.

(Buet)," he said.

A Buet team, led by Prof. Mujibur Rahman, during a feasibility study of the Begunbari-Hatirjheel development scheme recommended the 3.5 km elevated expressway from Panthapath to

Rampura connecting the Gulshan Avenue in the middle, as the DCC proposed it.

"We recommended the elevated roadway keeping 265 acres of flood retention plain free from any structures in Begunbari-Hatirjheel area,"

said Mujibur Rahman.

According to sources, Rajuk and works ministry officials have recently asked the Buet study group to alter the Gulshan link road segment from the project. But the team refused to do so.

Facing the vicious cycle of street life

Sex workers unite for their rights

WAHIDA MITU

Their stories are strikingly similar. Abducted, or lured at a very tender age, they were gagged, drugged and then thrown into isolation and imprisonment till they reached puberty. They had no or little formal or informal education. As soon as they stepped on their teens, they were thrown into a vicious cycle of sex trade. As long as places like Tanbazar in Narayanganj or English Road in Dhaka existed, these destitute sex workers had some sort of shelter and security over their heads. The mistresses, who bought these teenagers took charge of their subjects and ensured their food and safety.

But with the eviction of these brothels in 1999 they were thrown into the streets, often intimidated by hoodlums and assaulted by police.



Sex workers performing a cultural ritual during a recent conference.

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Thousands of these teenage sex workers then never found a proper shelter so drifted from slum to slum continuing to conduct mankind's oldest trade in city parks, pavements and cheap residential hotels.

But soon things started to change with positive interventions by some big NGOs. The country's estimated 60,000 or more sex workers started to unite against the persecution and social prejudices against them. The formation of a confederation called Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh (SWNB) in 2000 changed their outlooks. They organized the third national conference in the city in last week attended by representatives from 22 sex workers' organisations and talked freely about their rights.

Kajal, 26, now working for Akhoy Nari Shonghoton, narrated how she was forced

into prostitution. At her very childhood her father died and her mother chose to remarry and settle in Narshindhi. The tragedy of her life took place at the age of 9 when she alone from Sylhet went to meet her mother in Narshindhi. After the meeting when the child Rahima, as she was called then, was returning to Sylhet, was under the grip of a trafficker.

That was the start of Rahima or today's Kajal's long ordeal starting at the age of nine. She was drugged and bundled across the river Sitalakkhya in Narayanganj, where the gang put her in a house under lock and key for three years until she reached puberty. Rahima became known as Kajal at the Tanbazar brothel house.

Sitting at the CARE office in Mohammadpur Kajal recalled her past but confidently said all sex workers had great respon-

sibilities in the society.

"All our members now know that one of our first tasks is to have and inspire or teach others to have safe sexual behaviour, to avoid dangerous diseases," she said smilingly.

"We did not know anything about such responsibilities until we became united under a banner, where we were taught the right behaviour," she added.

However, most of the sex workers cherished to return to normal life. In doing so some were successful while others were not. Sex workers like Razia and Phulon were able to get back to normal life. Razia is now working as field coordinator in Durjoy Nari Songoton, while Phulon is now earning a living by rickshaw pulling in the Jatrabari area of the city.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

No parking for trucks in the city

Thousands of trucks entering the city have little facility for parking

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Thousands of trucks queuing up at the three entrances to enter the city in the evening hours are regularly causing heavy traffic jams, disrupting inter-district communications.

With the number of trucks rapidly growing, the problem is set to worsen throughout the city and its entrances if the authorities do not create proper parking spaces for these heavy goods vehicles bringing in arrays of daily commodities to keep the city dwellers fed and supplied with various other items.

There are only two truck terminals authorised by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), which can accommodate 750 trucks altogether, but according to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), the number of trucks plying in and out of the city could be as a

many as 10,000 every day. The BRTA data shows that there were 22,605 trucks registered within the city until 2004 and the number has grown fast ever since. The problem is not only trucks blocking the entrances of the city, it is even worse within the city area where it is forbidden for the heavy vehicles to ply between 8am and 8pm.

The two authorised terminals are at Doyaganj on the road to eastern and northwestern parts of the country and Amin Bazar, linking up the northern, southern and southwestern regions. Unable to ensure proper discipline in parking facilities of these huge fleets of heavy vehicles, authorities have encouraged at least 10 truck terminals to set up at the entry points without any planning whatsoever, a top DCC official told Star City.

"Being an industrial area, a truck terminal is very essential at Tejaon but there is no

authorised terminal there," the official said. But the truck drivers have not waited for the authorities to decide. For the last twenty years several major thoroughfares running through Tejaon have been converted into truck terminal where at any given time over 1000 trucks are parked. Although the terminal has almost cut off link between Satrasta crossing and Farmgate, successive governments have failed to address the problem and relocate the terminal elsewhere.

Azgor Ali, a truck driver who parks his vehicle on such a link road between Satrasta crossing and Farmgate, told Star City that absence of development of a proper terminal is a big hassle for drivers as there is no toilet or a place to take bath at the unauthorised terminal where hundreds of transport workers have to stay for several days at a stretch.

He also expressed frustra-

tion at the absence of any good hotels in the area, which poses a big security problem for the transport workers. The traffic wing authority of the DCC told Star City that under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project the corporation had planned a suitable truck management system in the city.

The corporation planned for establishing two more truck terminals at Hasnabad near Buriganga Bridge and Basila at Mohammadpur.

"But somehow the initiative did not materialise for shortage of funds," a DCC official said.

When asked about the Tejaon terminal, the traffic wing official said: "Under the DUTP we tried to establish a truck terminal on a 5-acre area of Bangladesh Railway, but it could not be done because of ownership dispute between the railway and the city corporation."

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

A major thoroughfare in Tejaon being used as a truck terminal.



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