

Too close to fire hazard

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SHARIFUL ISLAM
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Structures built dangerously close to transformers in violation of safety codes have cropped up at different parts of the city posing serious accident hazards.
As per existing rules, no structure should be built within a 10-foot radius of transformers, but these rules are hardly followed, resulting in numerous fatalities in fire-related accidents.
Seven female garment workers were killed and 50 others injured in a stampede on May 3 when hundreds of workers tried to rush out of their workplace at Mirpur as fire broke out at a nearby transformer.
The fire originated from a nearby shop of flammable garment by-products located just below the transformer and burnt an electric cable causing

the transformer to explode. During a visit to different areas in Mirpur, this correspondent found shops selling highly flammable mosquito nets and cotton products have been set up under these transformers. At Mirpur-11, an electric pole stands just two to three feet from a kitchen market.
"I live in anxiety as there are frequent sparks in the cables connecting the high-voltage transformer," said Mintu, the owner of an electronics shop just two feet from the transformer at Mirpur's New Society Market.
Owners of two other shops in the market echoed the same apprehension. "We do not know whether the market is illegally built, but we know it has approval from Dhaka City Corporation (DCC)," said one of the owners.
"You'll hardly find any transformer in Mirpur area that has a free space of eight to 10

feet around it. As per Rajuk (Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha)'s requirement, people should build at least five feet inside their boundary, but no-one follows the rule," said Md. Shahjahan Miah, manager (sales and distribution) of Kafur division of Dhaka Electric Supply Company (Desco).
He said Desco, which is responsible for distribution of electricity in parts of the city, can only issue notices but has no authority to order removal of structures that are too close to transformers.
He stressed better co-ordination between Rajuk, DCC and the ministry of housing to enforce proper compliance of building codes.
Shafiqul Islam, manager (sales and distribution) of Kalyanpur division of Desco, said the company finds it increasingly difficult to install transformers as no-one wants to leave an inch of land.



Three transformers dangerously close to buildings at Topkhana (left top), Lalbagh (bottom) and Rahamatganj (right).



AMRAN HOSSAIN

INTO THE FOURTH YEAR



Banglar Mela, a fashion house that began its journey in 2001 with a promise to promote local fabrics, celebrated its third anniversary in Banani. Besides exhibition of regional fabrics and fashion show, Mela organised a night of Baul songs and honoured a weaver from Arahazar. The two-day event concluded yesterday.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Panidalals cashing in on water crisis

MINAZUR KHAN
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Field workers of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) are allegedly taking illegal tolls from local residents during the sale of water, cashing in on an acute water crisis.
"When we buy water in drums or pitchers from Wasa, the workers demand extra money from us," said Tahera Khatun, a housewife of Lalbagh in Old Dhaka.
Tahera is not alone. Some other residents of crisis-prone city areas, talking to Star City, have also complained of toll-taking against the Wasa staff.
As people cannot manage to bring water home from zonal offices by van, they contact middlemen, known as panidalals, who collect water for them with the help of pump workers.
"It has become a source of additional income for local Wasa workers," an official said.
Aminur Rahman of Lalbagh in Old Dhaka said: "It is much easier to collect water if we seek help from the middlemen. They take extra money and help us bring water home."
"The Wasa staff supplies water not only to residences but to businesses like hotels, restaurants, shops and offices," said Amirul Islam who runs a small hotel in Mirpur.
Sources said, van drivers demand Tk 200 from hoteliers and Tk 100-150 from residents as 'tips' for a van of water.
The water crisis goes unchecked in the city, as demand has increased 10 percent this summer and the ground water level has dipped further.
Wasa that depends on groundwater for 85 percent of the demand and surface water for the rest supplies 150 crore litres of water to 1.25 crore residents who need about 200 crore litres a day.
After mapping last month, Wasa identified Mirpur, Kuril Badda, Goran, Sabujbagh, Mugda, Lalbagh, Nawabganj, Dhanmondi and Rayer Bazar as crisis-prone areas, with some hardest-hit.
Residents of Rayer Bazar, Sultanganj, Manipuripara, Ahmadnagar, Sipaibagh, Niketan, Mollartek and Rampura are also bracing for a serious water crisis.
Wasa has 20 vans to supply water to the residents. "The crisis has deepened further as Wasa now runs only six water vans," a source said, adding: "Other vans went out of order. We need at least 150 vans to meet demand in the city."
Wasa officials said water production is hampered by routine power failures and

technical glitches of rundown pumps. "We are short of 60 crore litres of water a day, but water shortage goes higher when pumps remain inoperative because of power cuts," said a Wasa official who did not want to be named.
A top Wasa official said he is aware of the situation and planned to solve the crisis by installing more tube-wells and pumps in crisis-hit areas.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN