

MOHAMMADPUR TOWN HALL

Where drug sells like anything else

SULTANA RAHMAN

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It was a blazing hot afternoon in this summer. The Town Hall kitchen market at Mohammadpur was almost empty. A few young men and women were chatting under a Banyan tree, with three policemen patrolling close by.

A stranger appeared at the scene and the people gossiping there rushed to him. "Koy puria?" [How much], asked one of them, offering the customer "pure and original" drugs (heroin).

"One puria [a sachet] at only sixty taka, it is original," one young girl said, trying to attract this correspondent at the spot. "You do not look chi [addict]. Have you ever taken it before?" another drug trader expressed doubt.

The drug spot adjacent to Mohammadpur Town Hall kitchen market is known as "sweeper potti" or "city colony," where live around 100 sweeper families who work for the Dhaka City Corporation.

Most of the residents in this slum are either addicted or

involved in drug business, locals said. They alleged the slum has become a crime zone where drug business and sex trade are an open secret.

The slum with nearly a hundred small tin-shed shanties queuing in eight narrow lanes remains in extremely dirty condition.

On June 7, when this correspondent visited the slum, one of the dwellers offered drug. Sheuli (not her real name) lives with her mother and two sisters. All of them are involved in drug selling and sex trade.

The small room where they live is decorated with a 32-inch television, a large refrigerator and a deep fridge.

Sheuli's 50-year-old mother however advised this correspondent, who posed as an addict, not to take heroin. "My three daughters are in this hell. You better drink Bangla [locally made liquor]. Heroin will destroy you."

"I have no way to come out of this hell," she left the place crying. But she stopped when a middle aged woman came to pay her Tk 12,000. Sheuli's



The slum behind the Mohammadpur Townhall, a haven for drug traffickers and addicts.

wholesale drug business is worth about Tk 50,000.

"My mother is a sweeper of the city corporation. She started selling drug around 12/13 years ago," Sheuli said.

She said drug prices have increased recently after the arrest of some top drug smugglers. "They used to supply drugs. I do not know their real name."

At this point of conversation, one guy came to inform Sheuli about police drive. Sheuli locked her shanty and took place in front of another.

Ten 10 minuts later, a team of lead by Ahsan Habib, inspector of the Department of Narcotics Control, Mohammadpur Circle, appeared at the scene and arrested one drug peddler with three grams of heroin.

Sheuli told the anti-drug team, "Why have you come here? Do we sell drug? If you find even one drop of drug, you arrest us."

Then one of the police constables put his hand on Sheuli's head and said "You know it is our routine drive, do not worry."

Asked, Inspector Ahsan Habib told Star City, "They sell

drugs in front of policemen deployed here and leave the place just before our drive."

Mohammadpur Police Station is only half kilometer away from the drug-den. Assistant Sub Inspector (ASI) of the police station Motiar said, "We file on average five to seven cases monthly against the drug peddlers."

"About 150 cases are pending with this police station since the last one year," he added.

Sources said drug business is going on despite the law enforcement agencies including police, Detective Branch, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Cobra, Department of Narcotics Control raid the spot frequently.

They said the drug peddlers pay a huge amount of money to a section of the law enforcement agency personnel for running their business.

"Cases have been filed against almost every drug peddler in this colony. Some of them have got licence from narcotics department to sell drug. Sweepers cannot work without taking alcohol," Motiar said.

Parjatan needs funds to improve tourism sector

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

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The enhancement of the tourism sector sees a set back as the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) fails to implement most of its plans and projects because of insufficiency of funds.

BPC, the national tourism organisation does not receive a designated fund other than the small amount for the

annual development plan (ADP) as loan or grant, said an official. "Although BPC has its own earnings, the amount is so little that nothing much can be done with it," he added.

The BPC received Tk 2.30 crore as the first fund for "crash programme 1972-75", and the biggest amount of Tk 16.95 crore was granted for its fourth "five-year plan 1990-95".

However, the corporation received only Tk one crore in 2003-2004 fiscal year and no

funds in 2004-2005. The government has so far granted BPC Tk 48.83 crore from 1973 till now to promote tourism.

"We need at least Tk 100 crore to see our future plans and projects materialise," said the official. He said BPC has specific plans to enrich the tourism sector in Bangladesh by 2020.

The plan includes proper excavation and conservation of archaeological sites including Paharpur Mahasthangarh, Mayanamat, Bagerhat Shat

Gambuz Mosque and other Buddhist monasteries. It also includes enhancing ecotourism in the Sundarbans, Teknaf peninsula, Chittagong Hill Tracks, Tangar and Hakaluki Haor.

"We have a major plan to develop Kuakata Beach, especially a portion called Gangamati as an exclusive tourist area," the official said. "Cox's Bazar and offshore islands like Sonadia and St. Martin's Island need a face lift

to attract tourists," he said. He also said all the projects need major infrastructure development including accommodation and food reaching international standards.

BPC officials said that Bangladesh has not been promoted as a tourist attraction even 33 years after its independence. They said a 5-year long international promotional drive is required to put Bangladesh on the tourism market. "We require

funds for all purposes and a promotional drive will cost us at least Tk 10 crore," said an official of Planning, Training and Statistics division of BPC.

"Bangladesh has a great potential to develop as a tourist destination if proper logistics and infrastructure is made available," said Simon Kabir, an expatriate now in Dhaka.

The BPC official commented that the tourism sector never

got much importance in the government's development projects. "We understand that other sectors like education and agriculture are more important for the betterment of country but tourism can earn a large amount of foreign exchange for the country," he said.

He said the BPC submitted around Tk 100 crore in total to government treasury as income tax, value added tax (VAT), share of profit and other taxes since 1973. "The

BPC has given Tk 13.04 crore to the treasury in last five years," he said.

He added that if adequate funds are provided to enhance infrastructure and logistics, the BPC could bring in a large amount of foreign currency.

Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover close to a reality

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

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The design for the long-awaited Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover was finalised last week with construction expected to cost some Tk 430crore. Work could start by January 2006, said project officials.

The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED), which funded the expenditure for feasibility study and design, would finance the entire project also.

"We will send the design to the Kuwait government this week. All the procedures for starting the construction work may begin once they have approved the design," said Haider Ali, project director of the flyover.

The flyover will be 6.1 kilometres long with two levels having eight lanes each. Initially the plan was to construct a 2.1kilometre flyover.

"We preferred the two levels for the flyover as that can cover more areas including Satrasta

and Rampura, the two busy level crossings at Mouchak and Moghbazar and the crowded intersections there. The aim is to make the entire area free of traffic congestion," said the project director.

He however admitted that it would be difficult to create alternative roads for the traffic during construction as the existing roads around the proposed flyover site are narrow and the volume of the traffic very high. The flyover could take 36 months to be completed.

"We are planning to keep the different segments of the flyover at a distance from the main roads. We will fix them only at night," said the project director.

The flyover will start from the Satrasta end in front of BG Press and will stretch up to Syed Nazrul Islam Avenue over the Moghbazar intersection. Four lanes would take a left turn at Moghbazar and would go straight up to Wareless intersection.

From the Kakrail point, the flyover would start in front of the Karnaphuli Market and run up to

the Malibagh intersection before taking a left turn to Mouchak intersection where four lanes would head to Moghbazar intersection and another four going towards Rampura taking a right turn. At Moghbazar this stretch of the flyover one end would meet the surface road at New Eskaton.

"The flyover on the way to Satrasta from Syed Nazrul Islam Avenue two lanes would descend in front of the BFDC by turning left," said Haider Ali.

Project officials informed that there would be two electronic traffic signal posts on the flyover at Mouchak and Malibagh intersections.

"The signals will be maintained in a way so that the vehicles only have to stop at one signal at a time," said Robert E. Rickman, team leader for feasibility study, design and documents.

"We have seen in our research that much fuel is wasted in these areas only due to traffic jams. The amount is more the Tk. 100 crore per year. So we believe that in five years, some Tk.500 crore worth of fuel could be saved through this flyover," said the team leader of the project.

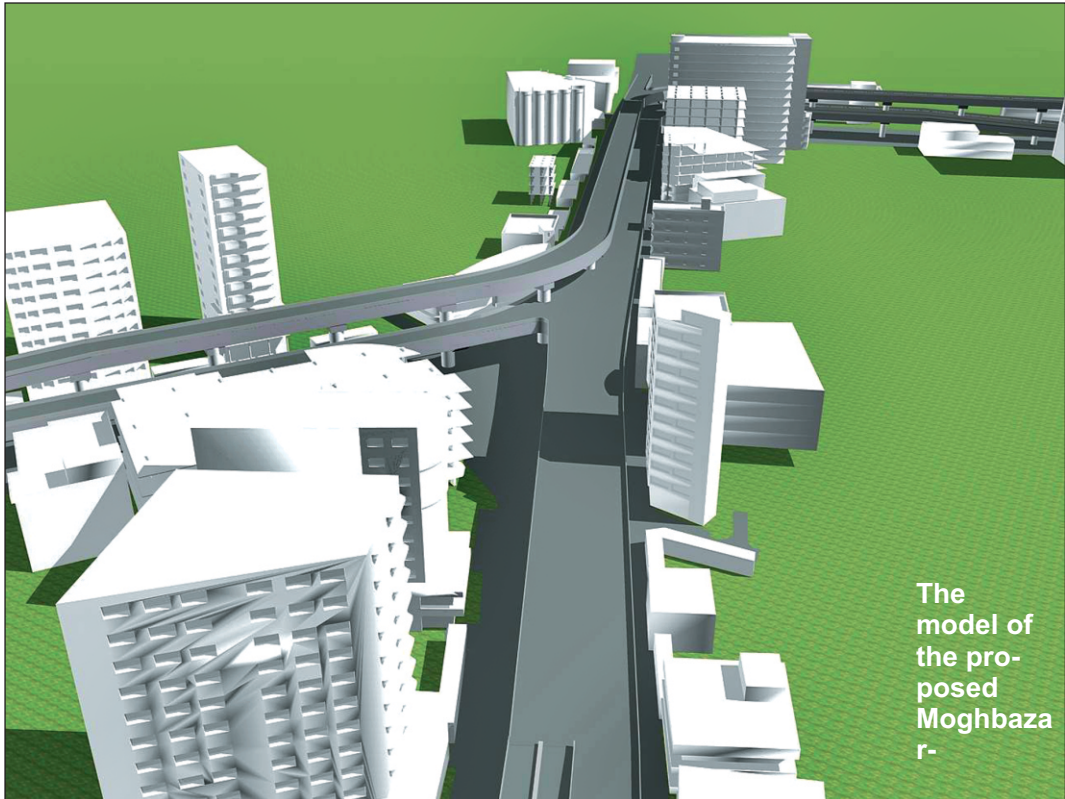
The government took the initiative to construct this flyover two years ago. The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is in charge of implementing the project.

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OPEN AIR DAY CARE



Parents from low-income groups cannot afford day-care centres, sophisticated or otherwise to leave their children when they go for work. This picture shows infants and toddlers left to fend for themselves under the open sky in Postagola in the old quarters of Dhaka as their mothers keep busy with their work of brick-breaking.



The model of the proposed Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover