

AZIMPUR-BDR GATE LINK ROAD

Construction inside graveyard sparks controversy

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Construction, amidst much controversy, of a road across the Azimpur graveyard is going on despite a verbal order by the City Mayor forbidding the work.

Asha Enterprise, a construction company owned by ruling party MP Nasiruddin Pintu, began constructing the road early this month. At first a 20-foot wide road was to be built, but now the road has been widened to 23 feet. This will leave no trace of at least 4,000 graves instead of previously noted 200.

Pintu told the Star City that he did not receive any official letter from the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to stop the construction.

"I got a written work order. So

why should I stop the construction on a verbal order?" asked Pintu.

DCC's zonal office at Azimpur issued a work order to construct a link road between BDR gate on New Market side and Azimpur Road in December, last year.

The company that was awarded the order started construction of the 1.5 km long road inside one of the oldest graveyards in the city.

Locals and relatives of those buried in this graveyard got agitated when they came to know about the construction of the road.

Consequent to a report published in a national daily on the issue, the mayor last Wednesday verbally ordered his officials to stop construction. But the work

continued the following day defying the mayor's order.

It is alleged that though the work was stopped during the day on Thursday, it started again in full swing late at night.

Workers have already felled seven trees planted specially by the kith and kin of those buried with many more to follow.

DCC's chief town planner, Mohammad Sirajul Islam said that he knew nothing about such construction, said to be worth Tk 1.17 crore.

When asked about the feelings of the relatives of those buried in the graveyard, Pintu said: "Constructing the road has been a long pending demand by the locals and as the representative of this area, I want to construct this road to ease people's

communication problems."

Sadeque Hossain Khoka, DCC mayor told the Star City that he would take action against the DCC officials who had defied his verbal order.

"I had ordered the concerned officials of DCC, including the chief engineer and executive officer to suspend the work. I will issue a cancellation order tomorrow (Sunday)," said the mayor.

When asked what action will be taken against the construction firm that disobeyed his order, he said: "We will take action against them as per rules."

To a question how the DCC could allow such a sensitive project, the mayor said that they had planned to build a link road between Azimpur and

Newmarket.

"After the Azimpur Road was made off-limit to rickshaws, the local people were suffering and to give them some relief we initiated the construction of a link road but had no intention of doing away with any of the graves," the mayor said.

Local commissioner Mir Ashraf Ali Azam said this problem could be solved easily if the link road is constructed inside the Azimpur colony.

"As I opposed the construction, the MP abused me verbally when I met him at a funeral programme today (Saturday)," said Azam, who is also a leader of ruling BNP. "He blamed me for bringing this issue to the knowledge of the authority," he added.



Relatives of those buried exchange angry views at the decision to build a road across the graveyard obliterating graves of their loved ones.



Rickshaws were placed in neat colourful rows in a garage during the 36-hour hartal that ended on Wednesday.

Nirob – a silent caterer since 1956

DURDANA GHIA

"Many customers ask me why the name of the restaurant is 'nirob' (silent' in Bangla). My answer is this place becomes 'shorob' (lively' in Bangla) only for two hours at lunch time -- from 1:30 to 3:30pm. The rest of the time it remains silent," said Jamil Master, manager of Nirob Restaurant, affectionately known as 'Master' by neighbours and customers.

For last 50 years Nirob has been providing catering services in the same old manner in an Old Dhaka alley.

Most customers of Nirob are students of BUET, Dhaka Medical College (DMC), Dhaka University (DU), local businessmen and office workers. On days of general strikes called by political parties, the restaurant becomes deserted because offices and universities are kept closed.

Rainy season is another setback as the street in front of the restaurant goes three feet under water.

"We come to Nirob whenever we feel like eating out and also on special occasions like celebrating a friend's birthday. This is a place where we can

find good food at a reasonable price," said Rashid, a DU student.

"Although I am very busy with my work, I come here with my family whenever I find the time. I enjoy the scrumptious *bhortas* of Nirob," said Rana, a businessman.

for lunch and dinner and opens at 12 noon. These two floors were built 17 years ago.

Sometimes a few foreigners venture into Nirob to taste some true *deshi* dishes like the legendary *bhorta*, *bhaji* and a variety of

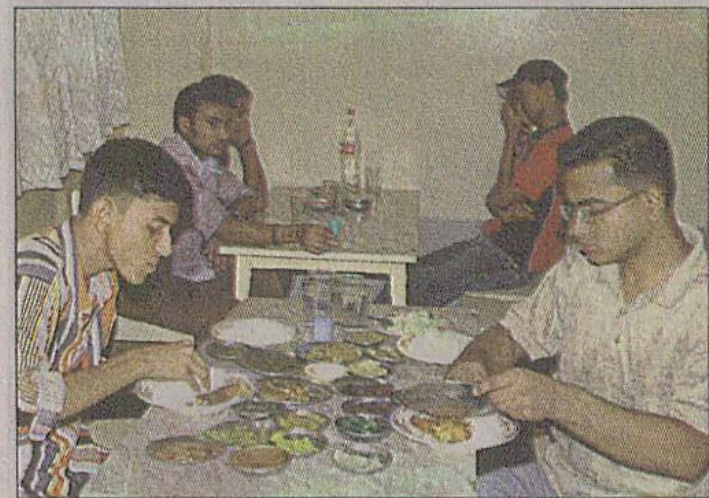
"These are poor people who come from rural areas looking for work in the city. When they come to me I cannot say 'no'. I give them food and shelter for five days to assimilate and then if they like to stay I take them on," said Master.

Nirob had to drop many delicious items from menu as those became too expensive and scarce in the market. These are the various kinds of 'fish' dishes -- *peti* of *chitol*, *dopeyaja* of *shol*, *kopta* of *folly*, *pabda*, and *koi*.

"We cannot increase the price of food items in spite of spiraling price of essentials because 75 percent of our customers are DU, DMC, and BUET students," said Master.

"Many of them stay in the residential halls where the quality of food is very bad. If we try to increase price the students complain," he added.

"Nirob is like my baby. I have been working here since I was a child. I spent almost my entire life here. I saw it growing from a tiny snacks outlet to a three-storey restaurant. I always try hard to save Nirob in the face of political unrest, spiraling prices, scarcity of drinking water and persisting load shedding," he further said.



Vegetable items are Nirob's main attractions. The menu offers at least 60 items here. The ground floor of the restaurant is for breakfast and snacks which opens at 6:30 in the morning.

The first and second floors are

vegetable items, said Master. Taking this fact into consideration the second floor was made air conditioned but is open to all.

Around 40 people work here as waiters and they get free meals and a place to sleep.

New shelters to reduce commuter-sufferings

IMRUL HASAN

Rehana Sultana, a service holder, had been waiting for a bus for over an hour at an electronics shop in Farmgate for the incessant rain to stop. When a bus arrived, she could not board it, as it was already full, before she could get anywhere near the vehicle.

"I face this hazard during rush hours everyday and very often get drenched trying to board the bus or hire a CNG auto-rickshaw as there is no shelter to protect myself from the heavy rains," she said.

"If Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) had built passenger sheds on the road divider at Farmgate, it would have been convenient for pedestrians during the rainy season," she added.

On June 14, Shanta, a student of Higher Secondary Certificate was waiting for a bus at the Mohakhali bus stop to go to the examinations centre in Motijheel.

It was raining heavily and she could not find any shelter to protect herself from the rain. She

too was drenched and wondered if she would be able to reach the centre in time.

Like Rehana and Shanta, many commuters face a tough time during the rains, especially in monsoon, as there are no shelters from the rain and they have no choice but to stand under the open sky at bus stops and other crowded places.

Lack of ticket counters and passenger sheds are adding to their misery.

"For the last two months we stood in the blazing sun and now we have to get wet in the rain because there are no sheds," said Hanan, a regular bus passenger from Banani.

DCC officials say they have plans to construct 130 new passenger sheds by the end of June.

When informed about DCC's decision to build 130 new passenger sheds, Mizanur Rahman, a retired government officer, said: "We have heard about such plans before too. We need action."

"This rainy season would also go by, but nothing will happen," said Mizanur adding that the



Commuters jostle to board a bus in the rain as there is no shed to protect them.

authorities have their own vehicles and they would not understand the people's sufferings during the rains.

There are only 220 sheds along the 3,000 kilometre stretch of city roads, but it requires at least 1,000 to protect commuters from rain or shine, said Aminul Islam, convener of Manusher Janya Rasta, a non-governmental organisation.

He said the shed crisis is acute in busy areas like Motijheel, Purana Paltan, Gulistan, Phulbaria, Mohakhali, Banani, Malibagh, Mouchak, Rampura, Gulshan, Mirpur, Shahbagh and Maghbazar.

"The existing sheds also have little or no use to the commuters as they have been constructed in an unplanned manner, and are mostly occupied by shopkeepers, hawkers and floating sex workers," he added.

Commuters in different parts of the city echoed Aminul's views.

"Sheds must be constructed at bus stands, railway stations and in front of educational institutions," Aminul further said.

Lack of coordination between

DCC authorities, communications ministry and the bus owners' associations has created sufferings of commuters and caused delay in constructing passenger sheds, sources said.

However, a high official of DCC's estate department denied the allegation and said that they had asked for opinions of concerned experts -- the Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) and DCC's traffic engineering division -- to establish passengers sheds, but did not receive any response.

When contacted, DTCB and DCC's traffic engineering division officials said that they sent their recommendation to the estate department.

Asked, about the present situation, Abu Taleb, chief estate officer said: "We signed an agreement recently with the Standard Chartered Bank, Basundhara Group, Mukti Art and ASL Media allowing them to construct sheds with shops."

"I think the proposed number of new passengers sheds will reduce the sufferings of city commuters," added Taleb.