

# DCC plays with yet another playground

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Dhaka City Corporation has once again violated the open space protection act 2000 by leasing out Shaheed Park in Mohammadpur to a private company, depriving local children of a playground. It is now being used as an amusement park.

Shaheed Park has been leased out for two months to Neptune Entertainment and Amusement Company, which rented the space for Tk 2.35 lakh. Abu Talib, chief estate officer of DCC, confirmed the two-month contact.

However, confusion arose a week ago when the DCC mayor himself mentioned one-month leasing contract of the park while flyers and banners at the entrance to the park read that the amusement park will be open for three months.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, director, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela), said, "According to the Open Space Protection Act 2000, DCC cannot change the basic feature of an open space situated in and around Dhaka city. Leasing out Shaheed Park has

definitely violated the provisions of the act".

"Parks and playgrounds are public property. This is supposed to be free for locals but the amusement park set up there requires a ticket for entry. This is definitely depriving local

greenery and environment of the city and the civic, environmental, recreational and aesthetic rights of the city dwellers. The court at that time directed the DCC and Rajuk to complete within six months the process of demarcation of all

parks and playgrounds.

According to the Master Plan of Dhaka City (1995-2005) known as the "Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan," open spaces have to be essentially free of structures that serves the purpose of visual relief and buffering from buildings and structural mass.

By leasing out the park, the city corporation has violated the plan.

Instead of protecting open spaces, the DCC itself is regularly encroaching on public property. More than once DCC has proven their intention of using open spaces of Dhaka for money-making schemes.

In a similar move the corporation has occupied Gulshan Park and allotted the land to DCC cleaners. Karwan Bazar children's park has been turned into a vegetable wholesale market while Sayedabad children's park is now a waste dumping spot.

Residents of Mohammadpur area fear that Shaheed Park might be occupied permanently. "I have been living here for long. Shaheed Park is the last open space left in this area. It will be a shame if we ruin it," said Mafizur Rahman, one of the residents.

children of their rights to play," she added.

Rizwana said the DCC by leasing out Shaheed Park has violated court orders of 2003.

Upon a petition filed by Bela in 2003, the High Court gave orders that the DCC cannot use open spaces including parks, gardens and playgrounds of the capital city for construction and other purposes, threatening the

open spaces, as envisaged under the Open Space Protection Act 2000. The court also directed the DCC and Rajuk to maintain and protect the parks and playgrounds under its management.

At present the DCC has under its management 10 playgrounds and 61 parks. It is responsible to improve the condition of civic amenities like



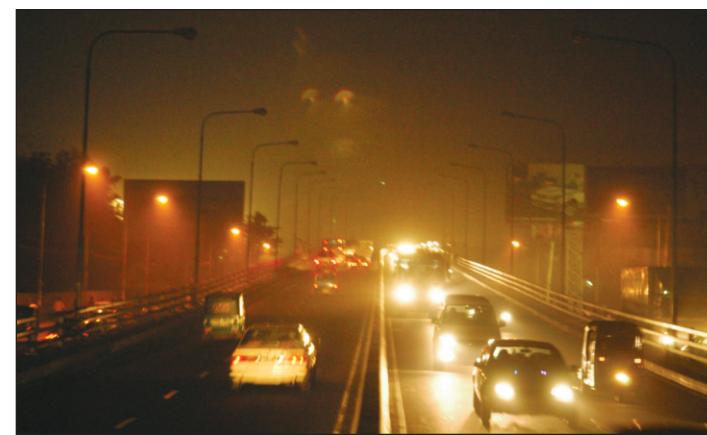
Shaheed park is now an amusement park where children have to pay their way in

STAR PHOTO

## MAHAKHALI FLYOVER

# Ghostly hands switch off lights 'for good'

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON



With the Mahakhalil flyover lights off, the area plunges into darkness. The picture was taken last night at 19 hours by our staff photographer.

Mysterious hands have taken over the responsibility of the streetlights of Mahakhalil Flyover. The lights, which had been burning for over two months day and night, have been switched off for good.

The flyover lights mysteriously went off two days before Eid after burning day and night for months. The entire stretch of the flyover now plunges into darkness at night.

The same lights burned for over two months non-stop, day and night. Star City carried six consecutive reports on this wastage of power. Over the last seven days Star City correspondents tried to find out which department of the government was in charge of the street lights on the flyover.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials

categorically denied the responsibility of the maintenance of the flyover pointing their fingers towards Roads and Highways Department (R&HD).

The DCC Chief Engineer Mehediali Khan

said on Thursday that following the reports in the Star City he wrote a letter to his counterpart in the R&HD asking him for immediate handover of the flyover to DCC.

"With reference to the incident of the continuous burning of those streetlights I wrote a letter to the chief engineer of R&HD requesting him to handover the maintenance to DCC. Unless this handover takes place such mismanagement will go on," said Mehediali Khan.

He, however, said that DCC did not switch those lights off. He just came to know from this reporter that the lights have been switched off.

When contacted the chief engineer of R&HD, ARM Anwar Hossain acknowledged receiving the letter. He said that they have already handed over the responsibility to DCC.

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# Fuel crisis continues

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Fuel shortage that began the day before Eid threatens to cripple city life, as the 129 petrol pumps virtually have run dry in the last few days affecting dwellers to a great extent.

"On Wednesday and Thursday the city's petrol pumps were literally empty. We get supplies from the government depot and for the last few days we did not receive our regular supplies," said Nazmul Hoque, President, Bangladesh Petrol Pump Owners Association.

"Dhaka consumes 600 tons of gasoline every day, but on Thursday we received only 100 tons," he said. "City pumps cannot cater to the demands with the persisting shortage," he added.

"Our total capacity is 26,000 litres, and for the last few days the supply was less than one third," said Wahiduzzaman,

Manager of Shahjahan Enterprise a Padma dealer.

"Even before Eid the supply was quite low and the Depot authorities introduced a quota system because they were not

**BPC is not revealing correct information to the media. If they did have enough stock then we would have no faced any deficit and oil containers would not have**

depot." He also blamed BPC for mismanagement -- a major reason behind the crisis.

Government depots remained closed during holidays and the weekend immediately following the holidays, worsening the situation.

"The depot is usually open the day before Eid. We collect the amount required beforehand; but this year the depot was closed the day before Eid and this added to the on going crisis," said Wahiduzzaman.

The long holidays severely affected the shortage and the situation might last for a few more days.

"I believe the situation ease from Sunday after the depot resume operations. However, the supply shortage to the pumps for this long period may affect city dwellers for the next 10 to 12 days," Hoque said.

Although repeated attempts were made the BPC chairman could not be contacted for any comments.

able to provide all pumps equally," he added.

Just beside Shahjahan Enterprise is the state owned Meghna Service Centre -- the only pump with full capacity. Its manager said: "We are not aware of any shortage; we have so far had no dry spell."

Energy Secretary AMM Nasir Uddin earlier said that the

Corporation (BPC) claimed that there is no shortage in the country.

Nazmul Hoque however said: "BPC is not revealing correct information to the media. If they did have enough stock then we would have no faced any deficit and oil containers would not have

# Mismanagement at Dhanmondi Lake

TAWFIQUE ALI

Gross mismanagement reigns supreme in maintenance of the Dhanmondi Lake despite two designated committees are in place to look after the lake.

Members of the management committee and advisory committee, the first led by the local government secretary and the second by chief executive officer of Dhaka City Corporation, themselves are unhappy over inactivity of the committees.

They alleged that the lake area has become a hotbed for misuse of public space and money in the name of development of the city's one of the last remaining lakes.

Locals said the lake and its vicinity are virtually occupied and dominated by various influential sections and groups like anglers, walkers' club, health club and gymnasium.

Local ward commissioner Md Abul Khair Bablu, who is also a member of the 11-member advisory committee, said: "Most of the lessees in the lake area are making money resorting to irregularities in connivance with the DCC

authorities."

According to Bablu, the body entrusted with maintenance and security of the lake area is not doing their job properly.

"The authorities did not spend actually more than Tk 20 lakh for a latest development work of the lake though the expenditure was shown Tk 70

lakh," he said resenting that the advisory committee does not hold its meeting.

Interestingly, there are a number of encircled patches of land within the lake area in Bablu's name like Bhorer Shathi Angon, Rafique Chatter and Shatayu Angon.

Such self-proclaimed clubs

have no permission from the management committee.

The residents apprehend that the influential people will take hold of such patches of land under their grip over the passage of time.

These earmarking clearly manifests a kind of occupancy and possession of certain

patches of land by influential locals denying access of general public.

Bablu said, "It is true that we have no permission for such enclosed spaces but we don't do any harm to anybody by doing so. We just keep the patches clean."

Another example of irregularities is that Dhaka City Corporation has leased out 76-acre stretch of the water body to an anglers' association, Dhanmondi Soukhin Matsya Shikari Bahumukhi Samabay Samity, allowing breeding of fish on commercial basis.

State Department of the DCC carried out the whole leasing and tendering process bypassing the management and advisory committees.

"No rules or policies have been followed in leasing out the water body," said Bablu.

The Samity has recently occupied a big chunk of area on the lake bank, in between the bridge on Road-8 and Panshi Restaurant, setting up an office of Bangladesh Amateur Anglers Club and a badminton court, and making sitting arrangement for the anglers.

The association has started to build a concrete storehouse

at the site recently despite authorities' warning.

Executive members of the anglers' association, Ali Akram and Delwar Hossain, said that they have a verbal permission to set up the said structures in the lake area.

General Secretary of the association Masunur Rahman Shahed said, "We have verbal permission from the DCC to set up the club office and a storehouse though the DCC demolished the office a number of times and refused to allow any sheds for our guards."

Chief Executive Officer of the DCC Saifuddin Ahmed, who is convener of the Dhanmondi lake management committee, said, "We did not permit them to construct any structure in the lake area."

Architect Iqbal Habib, a member of the lake management committee, said that minutes of the committee meeting of August 2006 clearly state that the DCC chief executive officer would just expedite the process of bid for leasing.

But the DCC Estate Department with the chief executive officer as head of the tender committee, leased out the water body keeping the

management committee in the dark.

"We are in the dark about the terms of reference (TOR) of the lease deed," said Habib.

Saifuddin Ahmed claimed that the water body has been leased out through tender bidding as per decision of the management committee.

But the management committee is entrusted with the responsibilities to examine and review the tender for lease of any sector, make recommendations and seek consent of the advisory committee.

The advisory committee will then review the lease proposal by management committee

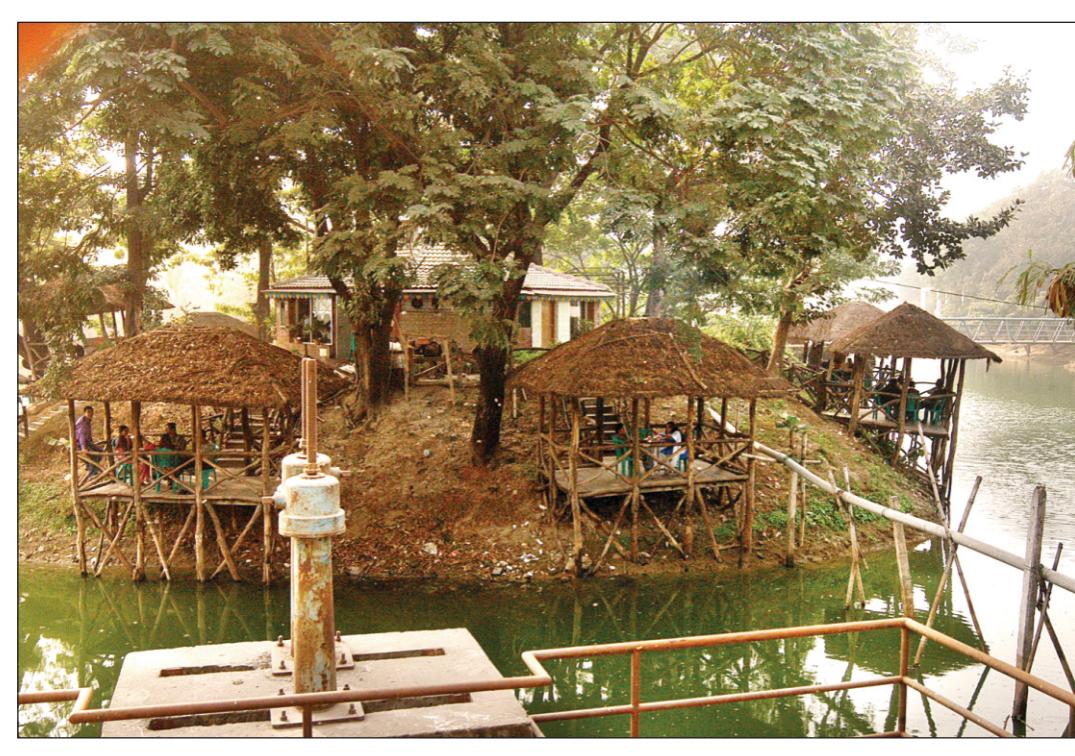
and take final decision, a process that was followed in this case.

The CEO of DCC said, "Money was our foremost concern. Anglers' association offered Tk 15 lakh for a three-year term of lease."

"Money was not our foremost concern but proper maintenance of the lake itself in leasing out the water body of the lake," said Iqbal Habib.

Mismanagement would not have reached such proportion had the management committee met regularly, said Habib, adding that the management committee is supposed to meet

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Unauthorised construction work at Dhanmondi lake area.

STAR PHOTO