

HATIR JHEEL PROJECT

Govt brushes aside elevated roadway for link road

Having spent nearly one crore taka for studies, the government now decides to drop the elevated roadway component and initiate a new scheme for a peripheral ring road on this last remaining water retention pond of the city

TAWFIQUE ALI

The Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives has all of a sudden cancelled the much-hyped project to construct an elevated roadway connecting Panthapath with Pragati Sarani and Gulshan.

To the surprise of all concerned, the government has undertaken an at-grade four-lane peripheral ring road project under the Hatirjheel-Begunbari development scheme shelving the plan for the elevated roadway.

LGRD Adviser Anwarul Iqbal at an inter-ministerial meeting on April 5 said the government has decided to cancel the elevated roadway project.

Earlier on February 12, a meeting of the same ministry with Anwarul Iqbal in the chair decided to take measures to get the elevated roadway project approved by the ECNEC.

The Planning Commission at a meeting on March 4 decided to carry out a study on four areas including traffic, technical, environmental and socio-economic aspects for implementation of the project.

According to sources, the World Bank-funded Strategic Transport Plan (STP) for Dhaka too recommended the elevated roadway on the Hatirjheel wetland.

The LGRD adviser told Star City that only a small number of users of Panthapath, Pragati Sarani and Gulshan areas would benefit from the elevated road while commuters would get much more benefit from the proposed peripheral road.

"Principal consideration behind undertaking the ring road project was that it would act as a demarcation of Hatirjheel and Begunbari retention basin area," he said. "Ring road will be constructed on the existing land and the wetland will not suffer any shrinkage."

The elevated road project alone would cost Tk 600 crore and Hatirjheel development scheme would cost an additional Tk 300 crore, said the adviser. But it will cost only Tk 500 crore for the



Hatir Jheel, the last remaining water retention pond of the city.

ring road and development of the entire water body.

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

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

A number of experts concerned with the elevated roadway project said that justification of the elevated roadway was based on two major considerations. The

first was to avoid reduction of the wetland with at-grade structure proposed earlier and the second was to ease the capital city's traffic load with an east-west road link.

The ring road project is not going to address any of the two considerations.

One major reason behind perennial traffic congestion in the capital city is the absence of east-west link road.

There is nothing called 'existing land' in the periphery of the Hatirjheel area, said an engineer seeking anonymity. "If land exists, why have the land grabbers encroached upon the Sonargaon and Hatirjheel areas?"

Rajuk had made a proposal for a similar at-grade roadway and commer-

cial development of Hatirjheel area ten years back.

The officials concerned said there is no rationale for going back to that old concept after carrying out feasibility studies spending a huge amount of public money.

The government approved the elevated roadway project on April 5, 2003 as part of the Begunbari canal and Hatirjheel development project.

The Japan government had granted Tk 300 crore for the project under debt payment resource of the Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC).

The project was included in the Annual Development Programme and



the city that was

Baitul Mukarram Mosque, situated at Purana Paltan, east of the Secretariat and north of the Stadium is the largest in the city. Three storied and designed like the Kaba Sharif, it has been built on a high platform. Beautiful costly decorations adorn the interior and the flight of stairs with a long lawn, garden and rows of fountains to the south and east.

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DMCH mortuary refrigerator out of order for months

WAHIDA MITU

The sole refrigerator at the mortuary of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) has been out of order for over the last couple of months, affecting dead body identification as well as autopsies.

The refrigerator went out of order numerous times before. After dallying, the DMCH authorities also repaired it many times spending a large amount of money. But it went out of order again within a few days after the repair was done.

"So it is very urgent to replace it with a new one. Otherwise, the repair cost will be nothing but a waste of money," said Sekandar Ali, in charge of DMCH morgue.

When

contacted, Prof Dr M Mizanul Haque, head of DMCH Forensic Medicine and Toxicology department, said, "We do not have any plan to buy a new one this fiscal year. We are trying to repair the refrigerator at the earliest."

On an average, 10 bodies are kept in the corridor of the morgue every day. Besides polluting the air with foul odour, the decomposed bodies are turning unidentifiable without a working refrigerator.

Unidentified bodies are usually kept in the refrigerator for 48 to 72 hours for the relatives to identify and claim. But since the refrigerator is out of order now the authori-

ties are compelled to give the bodies away after waiting only a day to Anjuman Mofidul Islam, a charity that arranges burial for unclaimed dead bodies.

On Tuesday morning, this correspondent found two bodies, emitting an unbearable stench, laying on the floor of DMCH morgue for autopsies. The bodies arrived at the morgue Monday evening and had already swollen up as those were not kept inside any cooler.

A physician who conducts autopsies, said it is very difficult to conduct autopsies on swollen up bodies.

Sekandar Ali said, "It becomes difficult even for relatives to identify the bodies of their loved ones 24 hours after the death as they get deformed fast unless they are preserved in a refrigerator."

"It also happened before that the bodies had already been handed over to Anjuman Mofidul Islam for burial before the relatives reached the morgue," he added.

In that case, most of the bodies are buried as unidentified. The relatives do not get justice as they cannot find out if their near and dear ones died or were killed.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) donated the eight-drawer refrigerator valued at around Tk 28 lakh to the DMCH in 1992.

DMCH has another refrigerator in its Emergency department.



STAR PHOTO
The refrigerator at the DMCH has been out of order for over two and half months.

Fuel price hike triggers rush for CNG conversion

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Due to the recent fuel price hike, automobile owners are rushing to CNG conversion workshops. CNG conversion workshops are seriously overbooked while some of these workshops continue to ignore following any safety stan-

after the recent fuel price hike. Those who hesitated earlier considering the conversion cost have changed their attitude because CNG saves money in the end," added Kabir.

To convert a 1300cc EFI car with a 60-litre cylinder, conversion centres are charging around Tk 52,000 while for a carburettor

end of May," said Sharif Masud, Corporate Sales of Rahimafroz. "Our workers are working overtime to meet the recent demand", said Swapan Sarkar, Senior Executive of Sanji Automobiles Ltd.

According to Rupantorit Prakritik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL), currently there are 26

Conversion of a vehicle takes about six hours. With the extreme hot weather at this time of the year, conversion workers are stressed to handle the extra work. Some workshops are working beyond their capacity. This raises question of precision and safety.

"Before converting the vehicle, the owners must check a few things. First of all, whether the conversion workshop has licence from RPGCL," said Shaiful Azam, director (operations) at RPGCL.

"There should be a metallic sticker attached on the engine compartment wall with the cylinder number engraved on it," he added.

He also mentioned that the vehicle owner should check the status of the cylinder whether it can withstand the pressure and a safety valve was installed on it.

"After the conversion is complete, the owner must obtain a certificate from the workshop containing information such as when and from where the conversion was done. They must carry the certificate with the 'Blue Book' of the car. This will help the law enforcers in case of any emergency," he said.

The customer should make sure whether the conversion workshop has backup or after sales service in case of any defect.

"If we find any workshop operating without complying with the RPGCL standard, we send letters asking them to improve the situation. Most of the time they comply. But we cannot do anything regarding practices of unauthorised workshops," said Azam.



Workers installing gas cylinder on a vehicle.

dards.

"The situation is similar to the last fuel price hike in 2005. We had a mad rush of automobile owners at that time. After that we experienced a slack period," said SM Jahangir Kabir, General Manager of Intraco CNG.

"But our workshops are going through heavy workload again

car the cost would be Tk 44,000. Cost varies depending on the vehicle.

Most workshops are overbooked because of the sudden pressure.

"We used to convert maximum 15 vehicles per day. Now we are working on around 25 vehicles every day. We are booked till the

licensed CNG conversion workshops in Dhaka city. The total number of conversion workshops in the country is 96.

Except for a few, a large number of conversion workshops are under equipped and their mechanics are not trained according to the conditions set by the licensing authorities.

WOES OF RICKSHAW PULLERS

Thousands left out of DCC licensing

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is about to reach the target of providing driving licences to the rickshaw-pullers while thousands of pullers are still rushing to DCC for licence.

"DCC has decided to provide 1,76,000 licences. We hope to achieve the target within a week," Syed Jahangir, chief of the Wheel Tax Department of DCC, said.

He said that DCC has 79,006 authorised rickshaws and about 10,000 rickshaw vans. Until first week of April, DCC provided 1,08,000 rickshaw driving licences to the pullers.

DCC is still providing driving licences to the rickshaw-pullers

three days a week.

After completing the licence providing programme, DCC would go for a drive against the rickshaw-pullers without licence, Jahangir said. "None will be allowed to pull rickshaws in the city without driving licence," he said.

About the protection against forgery of licences, he admitted that the licences do not have any security feature. These are printed papers with DCC seal only, he said.

Jahangir said DCC collected only Tk 30 for each licence and the city corporation does not have any additional fund for arranging costly, highly-secured licence.

Mizanur Rahman, a rickshaw

garage owner at Kalapani in Mirpur, said around 3.5 lakh rickshaws are plying in Dhaka city and there are about 5 to 6 lakh rickshaw-pullers.

He said the number of rickshaws remains the same despite the regular drive against unauthorised rickshaws as more and more new rickshaws are being manufactured.

He complained that the licences can easily be forged. "It will be very easy for the forgers to duplicate it. The forgers will start producing fake licences after the end of DCC's licensing programme for those who failed to collect the same."

Ainal, a rickshaw-puller who came to Dhaka a month ago, told Star City that he has got a driving

licence. "I want another for my brother who will come to the city next month."

He said that his garage owner assured him that it would be much difficult to get (fake) licences even after the DCC licensing programme.

Saidul Islam, another garage owner at Mohammadpur, alleged that DCC has created scope for forgers to make money through the business of fake licence as the city corporation's licence does not have any protective features.

About the consequence of removing all the unauthorised rickshaws from the city, a transport economist said removal of those would create transport crisis in the city.



Hundreds of rickshaw pullers queue up at DCC's zone-1 office for pullers' licences.

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