

Fund crisis delays proposed underpass at Shahbagh

DCC now plans to build footbridges at two points there

WASIM BIN HABIB

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has not started construction of the planned underpass at Shahbagh intersection as the project proposal is yet to get approval from the Planning Commission.

DCC pledged to construct the underpass following massive protests by the Dhaka University students after a DU student was run over by a bus on May 8, 2006.

The authorities built speed breakers at four points at Shahbagh intersection a couple of days after the accident, but construction of the underpass has still remained a far cry.

"The development project pro forma of the underpass is now under examination at the Planning Commission. The project needs to be examined thoroughly as it involves huge money," said Syed Quadrat Ullah, superintendent engineer of Traffic Engineering Department of DCC.

"We will start the construction work after getting the approval," he said.

Quadrat Ullah however said the DCC is going to construct foot-over bridges at two points at Shahbagh intersection as an interim measure.

Construction of the bridges — one between the National Museum and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) and the other between Birdem Hospital and the Police Control Room will start within three to four months, he added.

Shahbagh is one of the busiest intersections in the capital. Hundreds of pedestrians use the intersection amid a huge traffic



Pedestrians brave the busy intersection of Shahbagh while the planned underpass is yet to come into reality.

flow. Though DCC has constructed four speed-breakers at this point, risk of accidents remains due to reckless driving and violation of traffic signals.

DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz told Star City: "We have sent two letters to DCC asking for the latest development of the project. In reply they told us that they are

considering the project actively."

Anwar Hossain, a master's student of Mass Communication and Journalism Department at DU, said construction of an underpass or foot-over bridge at Shahbagh is a long-standing demand but the authorities do not pay any heed to the demand, ignoring the safety of pedestrians.

"Though one year has already passed after DCC had assured the DU students of constructing an underpass and a number of foot-over bridges at Shahbagh, we are yet to see any practical step," said Rifat Munim, a third-year student of English Department.

"It is a big risk to cross the dangerous points at Shahbagh

intersection. We won't feel safe to cross the road there until the construction of foot-over bridges or underpasses is completed," said Murad Chowdhury, a businessman at Shahbagh intersection.

Housing projects

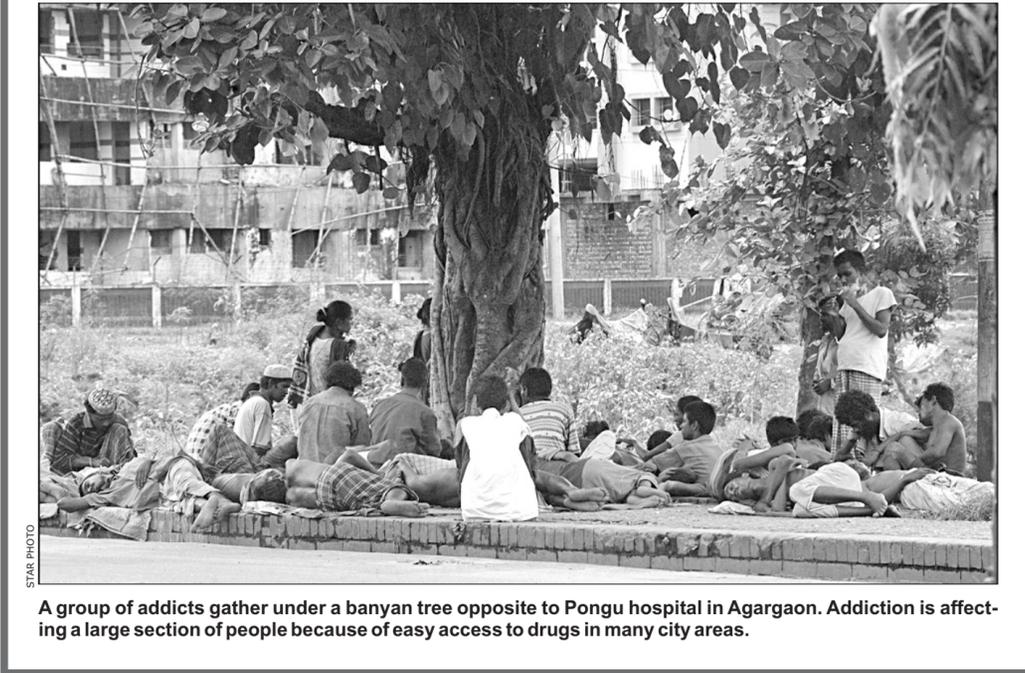
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approval, have recently embarked on massive advertisement of their projects on television, newspapers and in public places alluring people into investing huge amount of money in illegal housing.

Commercial advertisement of such unauthorised housing projects in any manner is a punishable offence, as per the Building Construction Act of 1952 and rules of 2004.

A housing developer, among other preconditions, has to obtain plan approval for any construction complying with wetland and environment conservation acts, Building Construction Act of 1952, Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) and Building Construction Rules of 2006.

A crucial precondition for implementing a housing project is that the layout plan of a proposed project must have a GPS-based (Global Positioning System) topographical survey map clearly marking cultivable and non-cultivable lands, wetlands, flood retention ponds and basins, canal, river, creek and forestation.



A group of addicts gather under a banyan tree opposite to Pongu hospital in Agargaon. Addiction is affecting a large section of people because of easy access to drugs in many city areas.

City dwellers welcome move for one-stop bill payment system

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

City dwellers may see their long-standing hassle in paying utility bills disappear under government proposals to simplify the utility bill payment system.

As an answer to the ever-present difficulties associated with paying utility bills, the proposal of a one-stop utility bill payment system was introduced at a meeting led by the chief advisor last month.

According to governmental press reports, the proposed scheme aims to secure a fair deal for consumers, to provide a more convenient utility bill payment system where all the utility bills can be paid simultaneously in an easy way.

While the anticipated scheme is still in the discussion phase, the change would definitely promise city dwellers some respite from the perpetual aggravation of waiting in long queues for hours to pay utility bills.

Ruksana Khanam, a resident of Farmgate, was waiting in a queue in the small passage of the local office of Pubali Bank in Farmgate to pay her monthly gas bill. She cast an anxious glare at the static queue in front as she was getting late to pick up her daughter from school.

It was another half an hour before Ruksana managed to reach the counter. As she stretched out the money and the bill statement, the cashier told Ruksana to come back an hour later as it was her lunchtime.

"She (the cashier) told me that she had already rinsed her hand for lunch, and asked me to come back an hour later," said Ruksana.

"After waiting for more than an hour in the queue, I was utterly annoyed with her (cashier's) behavior. However, the official who was sitting beside her agreed to accept my bill after I virtually pleaded with him," she added.

Just like Ruksana Khanam, citizens of the capital have been struggling to navigate this tortuous payment process for decades now.

"Only the sufferers know the pain involved in paying the electric bill on time in every month," said Habibur Rahman, a resident of Green Road.

Under the existing system, city dwellers have to pay the different utility service bills in different banks. The banks authorized to accept the utility bills are listed on the back of the bill statement issued by the service providers.

"While the private banks are quite efficient in handling the bill payment, it's the government banks where long queues tend to build up from early morning, thanks to the laid-back pace of the officials," said Ruksana Khanam.

"The fact that we have to go to

different banks to pay the different utility bills is an annoyance itself. The long queues starting from early morning along with the slow process of the banks make the situation only worse," added Habibur Rahman.

Rahman went on to explain how each household tends to receive several bills printed on different papers for the different meters in the whole building. During the payment of the bills, the cashier has to go through all these bills and sign each of them to record the bill statements of the same household.

"It would have been more convenient for both the customers and bank officials if all the billing information for all meters were printed on a single piece of paper. This would reduce the pressure on the bank officials," he added.

According to city dwellers, the short duration and late distribution of the bills is another major problem in the utility bill payment system.

"By the time the bills are distributed, it significantly shortens the time remaining till the deadline of payment. If the duration for utility bills were extended for one month for example, issuing the bill on 1st date of a month while the due date remains till end of the month, it would ease the

sufferings of the customers," said Badrul Hasan, from Uttara.

"If the due dates and duration of payment were incorporated among all the different utility bills, it would reduce much burden from customers as they would be able to pay all the monthly bills together on the same day, rather than paying each bill at a different time," he added.

Simplification of the existing utility bill payment system would be a welcome change for city dwellers.

"We, the sufferers know the suffering we have to go through during paying the utility bills every month. Simplification of the system would really be a great change for us," said Habibur Rahman, from Green Road.

This however, is not the first time initiatives to simplify the bill payment system have been taken by authorities. Dhaka Electric Supply Company Ltd (Desco) has been scheming to introduce an alternative hassle free bill payment system for Desco subscribers in collaboration with Grameen Phone.

However, the new system is yet to be instigated due to technical difficulties, said Desco officials.



Banks can be centres for one-stop bill payment.

health, bus services, airlines & train timing

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- Singapore Airlines**
8811504-7, 9883259
Airport Office: 8911928, Fax: 8811503
- Thai Airways**
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- Virgin Atlantic Airways**
8816324-5, Fax: 9896481

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- Shishu Academy- 9564128**
- Shilpakala Academy- 8614673**
- Bangla Academy- 8619550**
- Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 9556407**
- Nazrul Institute- 9114602**
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- British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7**
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- Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6**
- Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8850141-2**
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- Mahanagar Godhuli**
Leaves Dhaka at 3:15 pm
- Turna**
Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm
- Parabat Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 6:40 am
- Joyantika Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 12:45 pm
- Upaban Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 9:45 pm
- Tista Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 7:00 am
- Ekata Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm
- Upakul Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 8:00 pm
- Agnibeena Express**
Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm

- Reaches Chittagong at 10:35 pm
- Reaches Chittagong at 1:55 pm
- Reaches Chittagong at 10:55 pm
- Reaches Chittagong at 6:40 am
- Reaches Sylhet at 2:30 pm
- Reaches Sylhet at 9:20 pm
- Reaches Sylhet at 6:40 am
- Reaches Bahadurabad at 11:05 pm
- Reaches Bahadurabad at 11:15
- Reaches Noakhali at 5:00 am
- Reaches Jagannath at 2:30 pm