

Finally, the good sense prevails

Unfair plan to hold fair at Dhanmondi playground cancelled

TAFIQUH ALI

In the wake of criticism from environmentalists, the decision to hold the third national fair of the disabled at Dhanmondi playground has been cancelled.

The Department of Social Services under the social welfare ministry, National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD) and National Forum for Development of the Disabled were preparing to hold the fair from tomorrow (December 3) on the occasion of the 16th International Day of Disabled Persons.

The organisers had taken over the playground allegedly without permission from the DCC, custodian of the ground, and started setting up hundreds of makeshift structures. But they stopped the work yesterday following public outcry.

"We have cancelled the decision to hold the fair at the venue," Dr Nafisur Rahman, director of NFOWD, told Star City.

Earlier, Chief Executive Officer of DCC Md Alauddin said the organisers did not have permission from DCC for using the playground. "It has been an unauthorised move."

"We received a request from

the social welfare ministry on November 29 but we have not yet given any permission to use the playground for holding a fair," he added.

Environmental group Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) on November 27 protested the move in a letter to the CEO of DCC, demanding steps to stop the move.

Sharif Jamil, member secretary, Bapa's parks and grounds committee, said Dhanmondi playground should have been an example in protecting other parks and open spaces. "If unauthorised activities go on at this playground, it will surely set a bad precedent."

Advocate Syeda Rizwana Hasan of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (Bela) said the organisers should have chosen alternative sites to hold the event.

According to the Open Space, Playground and Wetland Protection Act of 2000, adverse use and change in character of such spaces should be prevented, she said.

Mubasshar Hussain, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said anyone has to obtain permission from DCC for use of any playground.

But DCC is neither doing its

duty of maintaining the playground nor it is protecting the ground from abuse and unauthorised use, he said.

Mubasshar mentioned that there is a High Court order concerning this very playground.

Following a writ petition jointly filed by Bapa and IAB, the High Court on April 24, 2004 directed the DCC to submit a report on what steps it (DCC) has taken to maintain and preserve Dhanmondi playground. The court also asked DCC to report what actions have been taken for removal of unauthorised structures thereon.

Asked, Dr Khondker Shawkat Hossain, joint secretary to the social welfare ministry, said they had rented the playground from Dhanmondi Club and paid Tk 3.5 lakh as fees.

"We were not aware of the status of the playground," he said.

Secretary general of NFOWD AHM Noman Khan said, "In fact, we had no idea about the problem involving the playground."

General Secretary (in-charge) of Dhanmondi Club Illasur Rahman Babul said that they just said they had no objection to using the playground for the fair. "It was up to the fair organisers to obtain permission from DCC," he said.

Babul however said the club has no formal contract with DCC for maintenance of the playground.

Leaders of Bapa and IAB at a press conference yesterday thanked the government for retracting from the move.

They demanded that the authorities must stop and remove arrangements for fair at Dhanmondi playground, remove golf course from Suhrawardy Udyan, demarcate and protect Osmani Udyan and conserve all the parks and playgrounds across the country.

They also demanded for an end to commercial uses of the parks and playgrounds.



Star file photo shows the preparations for holding fair on the Dhanmondi playground. The authorities have cancelled the decision yesterday.

A brave stance on life

I did not like begging. It was insulting, says Nur Ullah

DURDANA GHAS

"After I lost my limbs I was at a loss. Though I had to resort to begging for a period, I always thought of standing on my own feet again," said Nur Ullah who pulls rickshaw with one hand and one leg after he lost the other two limbs in a train accident five years ago.

When the accident took place in Jamalpur, Nur was 12 years old. But the tragedy could not stop him from moving ahead braving the adversity. For the last five years, he has been supporting his family with his earnings from rickshaw-pulling.

Nur studied up to class five in a madrasa. "After I lost my limbs the huzurs (teacher) said one cannot be an Imam if he loses a limb. I had to hear many derogatory words about my lost limbs. So I decided not to continue my studies in the madrasa," he said.

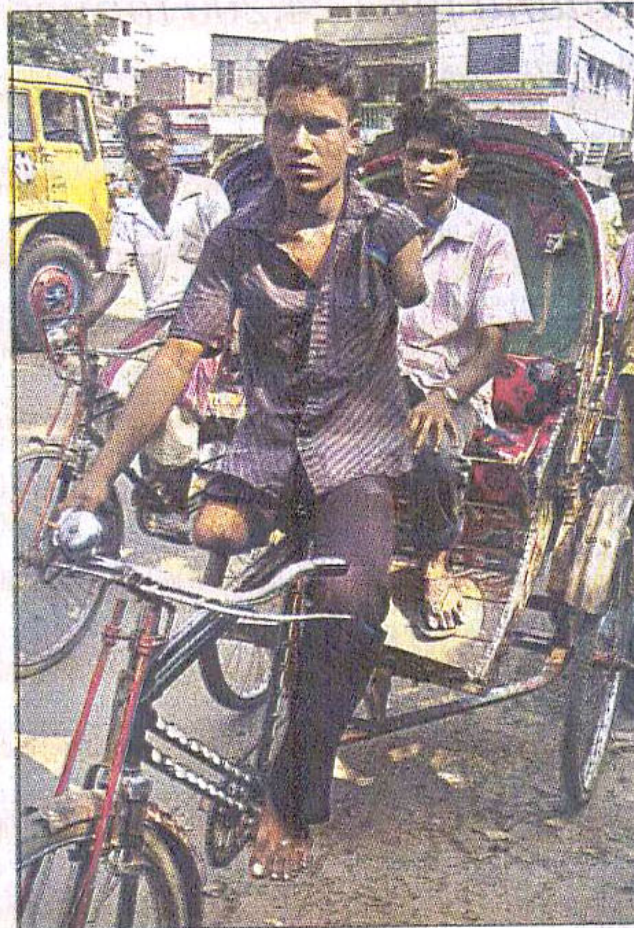
"My father is a vegetable vendor and I have two brothers studying in madrasa. My father did not have enough money to send me to a school. Therefore, I stopped my studies," Nur said.

"For some time I did not do anything. Then a murubbi (a senior relative) who lived in Dhaka, told my father that he wants to bring me to the city. He said if I come to Dhaka then I could earn lots of money," he said.

That man, a beggar, brought Nur to the city. By taking disabled Nur with him, he started earning more money than before and shared half of the money with Nur, which he sent home to his father.

"But I did not like begging. It was insulting. Every night when I said my prayers I cried to Allah and requested him to show me a better way," said Nur.

"After two months my murubbi died. He had told me to continue begging. At first I tried. I used to sit on the footpath and took whatever people gave me but I could not make myself ask for alms from anyone. So I decided to



quit begging," he said.

"When I came back home, the villagers told my father that people with disability earn a good amount from begging, so I should continue it. But I couldn't," he said.

Nur thought of doing something new. He went to Jamir's garage in Begunbari in the capital and requested him to let him pull a rickshaw.

Seeing Nur's physical impairment, Jamir laughed. He did not agree to Nur's proposal. Then he told Jamir to give him a rickshaw for a few hours to let him prove himself.

"I told Jamir bhai that I will pray for him if he gives me a rickshaw," he said.

He agreed and Nur pulled a rickshaw from evening to 11pm that night. He earned Tk 70 and Jamir was quite impressed. The security money for taking a rickshaw was Tk 80 but Jamir did not charge that money from him.

"That 70 taka was my first earning with which I started my life anew," said Nur.

"However, I cannot take more than one passenger and cannot drive on bumpy roads. People often do not want to ride my rickshaw because of my physical impairment," he said.

"When I went to my village, people did not believe that I earned money by pulling rickshaw. They said that the money came from begging. The huzur also did not believe me. I hope that if you write about me then people will believe that I really earn money by pulling rickshaw and not by begging," he said with eyes brimming with tears.

"Now I'm helping my father to repay his loans and supporting him in continuing my brothers' studies. At the same time I'm saving a little amount for starting a shop on my own and live close to my parents," said Nur.

Putting a stop to strolling on flyover

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The Khilgaon Flyover will soon be made off limits to pedestrians to avert accidents and antisocial activities, said sources.

The decision was taken last month during an Open House discussion at Sabujbagh Police Station.

Discussion on security and traffic management in the areas adjacent to the flyover took over most of the discussion time and most speakers spoke in favour of the idea of restricting pedestrians on the flyover, added the sources.

Sabujbagh police officials said most speakers during the discussion expressed their serious concern over antisocial activities taking place on the Khilgaon Flyover.

"A few of them opposed the idea of enforcing a complete ban on pedestrians on the flyover. However, the majority agreed that the flyover has been a hotspot for antisocial activities. So it was decided that steps would be taken to restrict pedestrian traffic on the flyover," said a Sabujbagh police official.

According to sources, the proposal to restrict pedestrians on the flyover would soon be forwarded to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) -- the custodian of the flyover.

Since its inauguration, the flyover has been off limits to non-motorised vehicles. Once the new proposal to restrict pedestrians on it is adopted, 'No Pedestrian' and 'No Non-motorised Vehicles' signs would be placed on the flyover as well as on its entryways with law enforcers on guard, said ward commissioners present at the Open House.

Apart from improvement in law and order, these new mea-

sures would help safer vehicular movements on and around the flyover, believe the police officials.

"Pedestrian traffic on the Khilgaon Flyover has multiplied over the years, and so has antisocial activities on it," said Golam Hossain, DCC commissioner for Ward 27 consisting Bashabo, Madartek and West Nandipara.

Muggings, that mostly go unnoticed and unreported, are rampant on the flyover. Apart from that, couples are often seen engaged in objectionable situations on the flyover, causing discomfort to the locals, he

added.

When the Khilgaon flyover was made open to public in 2005, residents of surrounding areas had heaved a sigh of relief hoping that the ubiquitous traffic jam in the area would finally be a thing of the past. But to their frustration, the locals noticed that the flyover has turned into a crime spot during certain hours of night.

People who regularly use the flyover have been falling victim to muggings and other criminals. Moreover, an alarming trend of speeding on the flyover has increased, leading to frequent

accidents, complained locals.

Adding to that, lack of recreational facilities in the city has been drawing a huge crowd of refreshment seekers along with snack vendors on the flyover, posing hazard to vehicular traffic, they added.

"All of this is unacceptable," snapped Mozaffar Hossain, a Sayedabad resident who has to use the flyover everyday to and from his office in Motijheel. "A flyover should be used for the purpose it was built for. I do not see anyone enforcing traffic rules on it. No one seems to care that crowds hanging out on it

can cause fatal accidents," he added.

Nevertheless, quite a few locals opposed the idea of restricting pedestrians on the flyover.

"Since there are no recreational parks in the entire area, I often go for a walk on the flyover with my friends and family," said Mohammad Abu Hena from East Goran.

Critics of the restriction believe that the authorities should address the real security concerns, rather than worrying only about the pedestrian traffic on the flyover.

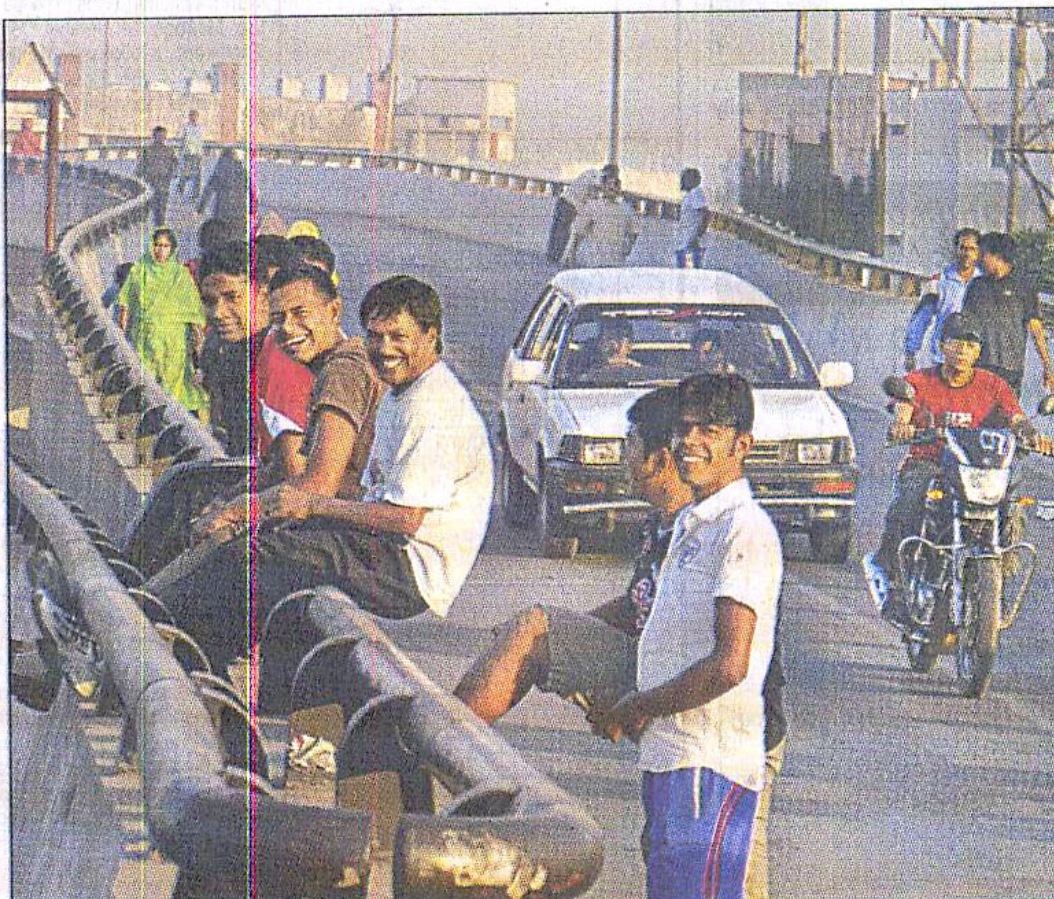
"Although I understand the reason behind the scheme, I would surely miss the joy of walks [on the flyover]. I would suggest the authorities enforce strict security patrolling on the flyover instead of putting a ban on foot traffic," he said.

Another issue that deserves urgent attention of the authorities is that the predicament of reporting any mugging or accident that take place on the flyover, said locals.

"It might sound hard to believe, but the fact is at least three entry and exit points of the flyover fall under the jurisdiction of three different police stations. No one knows for sure who is responsible for patrolling which part of the flyover," said Mohammad Hannan from East Goran.

"In a bizarre situation like this, the criminals seem to have a field day on the flyover," he added.

Local residents strongly urged the authorities to introduce a designated and a well-coordinated police patrol force just for the flyover. Alternatively, a police station could be set up in the closest proximity of the flyover.



COMMON SCENE: Youths from the locality chat away on the railings of the Khilgaon Flyover.



December brings with it the passion for celebrating the Victory Day. Sale of flags goes on in full swing as people tend to use those to decorate homes and vehicles. This little boy is buying flag from a street-side hawker at Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday.