

Khilgaon flyover without lights for over 2 months

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Darkness has taken over Khilgaon flyover as around 150 streetlights on this busiest overpass of the city have remained turned off for over two months now.

According to sources at Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), the lights were put out in November last year when an electric transformer of the flyover went out of order.

"The transformer for the flyover was malfunctioning. Both Desa [Dhaka Electric Supply Authority] and LGED [Local Government Engineering Department] refused to help us repair the transformer. So we floated tender for a new transformer," said an official concerned at the electricity engineering division of DCC.

"In the meantime, we managed to turn on some of the lights near Shahjahanpur by diverting another line from DESA," he said.

However, majority of the streetlights on the flyover still remain switched off.

With the absence of streetlights, antisocial activities on the flyover have risen alarm-

ingly, local residents complained.

The locals said the flyover has become a hotspot for muggers, sex workers, vagrants and drug addicts. A number of people who regularly use the flyover reported of being victims of muggings or physical assaults.

Goran resident Mahmuda Khatun's purse was snatched on the flyover earlier this month.

"It was late in the evening. Because there was a huge traffic jam, I got off the 'human hauler' at Shahjahanpur and decided to walk home over the flyover," said Mahmuda.

"It happened after I passed the intersection. A hand sticking out of a passing CNG autorickshaw grabbed my purse. It happened really fast and I could not hold onto my purse. Before I could do anything, the autorickshaw sped off," she added.

Local residents said Mahmuda's ordeal was not an isolated incident. Antisocial and criminal activities on the flyover have increased with a rising number of people flocking to the flyover everyday. Absence of streetlights has made the situation only worse.

Golam Hossain, DCC com-

missioner for Ward 27 covering Basabo, Madartek and west Nandipara, said, "Foot traffic on the Khilgaon flyover has risen over the years, and so has the number of antisocial activities."

"Most of the muggings and assaults [on the flyover] go unnoticed and unreported. In addition, many of the couples hanging out on the flyover make things quite discomforting for the neighbouring residents," he added.

When the Khilgaon flyover was made open to public in 2005, local residents heaved a sigh of relief hoping that the ubiquitous traffic jam in the surrounding areas would finally be a thing of the past. But instead, the flyover has turned out to be some sort of criminals' den at certain hours of the night, alleged the locals.

Frightened of potential mugging or assault, drivers of many motor vehicles often speed through the flyover, leading to accidents and casualties, the locals added.

Despite all the negative aspects, the flyover has become a 'recreational spot' for the locals and they throng the place, especially after dark, fancying to breathe fresh air while munching on snacks sold by street vendors.

"All of this is inappropriate," snapped Mozaffar Hossain, a Sayedabad resident who frequents the flyover. "A flyover should be used for the purpose it was built. I do not see anyone ensuring that traffic rules are obeyed on the flyover. No one seems to care that converging on it in large numbers can cause fatal accidents," he said.

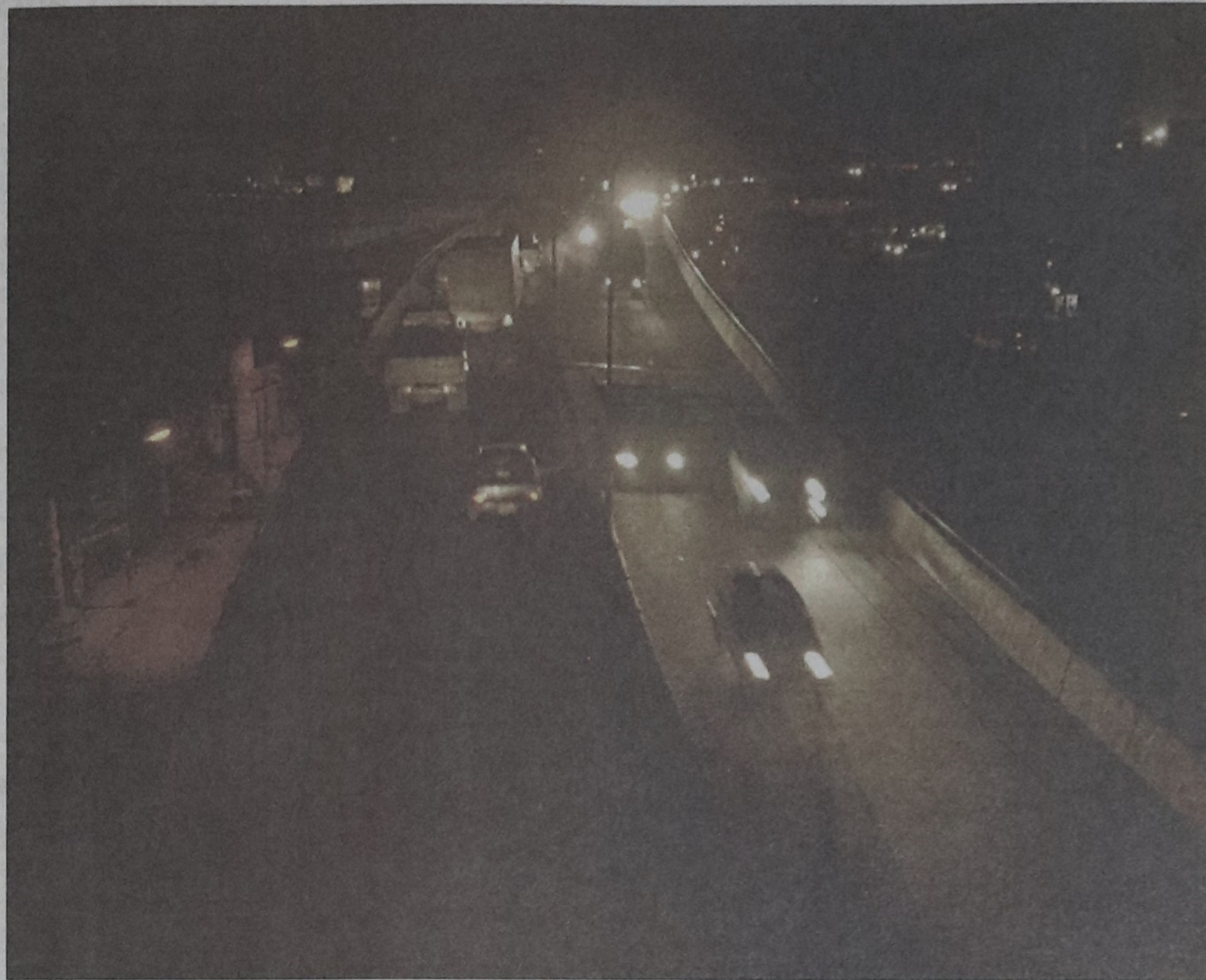
"Chances of accidents are more likely these days as the entire flyover is in a state of blackout," he added.

Sources at DCC's electricity engineering division said the lights would be switched on soon as the tender process for the new transformer has been completed.

"All that is left is the mayor's approval," said Zafar Ahmed, executive engineer of the DCC electricity engineering division.

"Once all the formalities and the paperwork are finished, it will be a matter of a day before we switch the lights on -- which will be soon," he assured.

The DCC officials, however, failed to mention any specific timeframe when the formalities would be finished and the streetlights on the flyover would be turned on.



Power blackout has gripped Khilgaon flyover for more than two months.

SK ENAMUL HAQ

DHANMONDI PLAYGROUND

DCC yet to remove unauthorised structures

TAWFIQUE ALI

Dhanmondi playground has been occupied by Dhanmondi Club illegally for more than four decades in the name of maintenance without any contract or authorisation from the authorities concerned, according to officials.

The club has been using the playground beside Dhanmondi road-8, in an exclusive manner and making money out of it though it is a designated public space, the locals alleged.

The club office at the playground is also unauthorised as it has been built without permission from the authorities concerned, according to sources.

Any aspiring sports team or clubs have to pay the Dhanmondi Club authorities to use the ground for practice. Besides, the club earns a huge amount of money renting it out for holding fairs and cattle market before Eid-ul-Azha.

Public access to the playground is restricted. One has to pay the club to use the field if one intends to organise any sports match or tournament.

General secretary (in-charge) of Dhanmondi Club Ilyasur Rahman Babul said the club takes donation from those who use the field. The money is used for its maintenance. "But the



The Dhanmondi playground and, inset, an unauthorised structure on it.

STAR PHOTO

amount is very meagre and is not adequate to run the activities of the club."

"We have no other source of income to run the club," Babul said. "Whatever income we can

generate from the playground is the only earning of Dhanmondi Club."

The club has been operating from this field since 1962, he said.

"We have no contract with the DCC to possess and maintain Dhanmondi playground but we have a verbal approbation," Babul said.

Abu Mohammad Yusuf, DCC

chief estate officer, said, "To my knowledge, DCC has not authorised any club or organisations to use any public playgrounds exclusively and make money out of them in the name of maintenance."

Replying to a question, he said that DCC at present has no executive magistrates, following judicial separation, to carry out eviction drives.

"Once we get executive magistrates, we will go for eviction of any unauthorised clubs or organisations occupying public playgrounds," he said.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said some of the clubs like Dhanmondi Club have long been in occupancy of city's playgrounds. "But I have no idea that they rent out these public spaces and make money. Generating money out of playgrounds in the name of maintenance is unauthorised," he added.

A high official of an organisation working with the disabled said that they had paid Dhanmondi Club Tk 6 lakh for holding fairs in 2004, 2005 and 2007.

A former captain of the national cricket team said requesting anonymity that public use of a playground becomes restricted if it is occupied by a certain club or organisation.

Mubasshar Hussain, a resident of Dhanmondi and president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), said Public Works Department (PWD) while handing over the playground to DCC, mentioned that the Dhanmondi Club house is unauthorised.

Following a writ petition jointly filed by IAB and Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) on April 24, 2004, the High Court directed the DCC not to use Dhanmondi playground for any purposes other than sports and to submit a report on what steps DCC has taken to maintain and preserve it. The court further asked DCC to report what actions have been taken for removal of unauthorised structures thereon.

However, Dhanmondi Club authorities rented out the playground to Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) in March 2006 to hold a two-day council meeting beginning on April 3, in defiance to the High Court (HC) order.

The then high officials of DCC at that time said Dhanmondi Club has no authority to rent the field out to anyone. The playground belongs to the DCC. Dhanmondi Club office situated on this playground is illegal, they said.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"This government started its journey through a state of emergency in the political arena. But in the later time for different reasons a state of emergency has emerged in the economic arena."

-- Dr Akbar Ali Khan

Former adviser and chairman, Regulatory Reforms Commission
Said at a seminar arranged by the Institute of Chartered Accountants Bangladesh, on Wednesday. Source: Prothom Alo

"There is no information that prices soared due to the state of emergency."

-- AF Hassan Ariff

Law Adviser

Told reporters replying to a question, on Thursday. Source: Jugantor.

"I never took a taka from Titas Gas illegally."

-- Md Emdadul Haque

Former deputy manager of Titas Gas
Told a reporter after a task force investigation found that he owns wealth worth over Tk 100 crore through corruption during his eight-year service at Titas Gas, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghilas



Encroachment on Rupnagar canal in Mirpur continues due to delay in restoration work.

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Water logging in Mirpur to persist as seven canals not restored

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Water logging in Mirpur area will persist unless the seven canals -- earmarked by canal restoration and implementation committee under home ministry -- are restored to maintain uninterrupted water flow before this rainy season, said the chief of drainage wing at Dhaka Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority).

During a field visit to the canals -- Rupnagar-Duaripara main sewerage canal with its three branches, Housing canal, Journalist Colony canal and Baishaki canal, this correspondent did not witness any restoration work.

In stark contrast, the correspondent came across a number of land grabbers who were busy filling up the Rupnagar-Duaripara main sewerage canal near the end of Road 27, 28 and 29 of Rupnagar residential area.

Zahirul Alam, chief of Dhaka Wasa drainage wing, told this

correspondent, "Preparing these canals by cleaning, digging and repairing the banks for a smoother water flow would need some more time during the dry season."

The entire Mirpur area, especially Shewrapa, Kazipara, Senpara, Paikpara Monipur, Section 11, and Journalist Colony, experience massive water logging during the rainy season, he said adding, "Thousands of people suffer here due to the water logging even after a brief rain."

The canal restoration and implementation committee last October decided that the seven canals would be restored on urgent basis so that these can help improve the water logging situation in Mirpur area by the current year, said Zahir.

He however hoped that the restoration work of the canals would be completed before January next year.

Asked why the work did not start yet, he said, "We haven't yet

got the official authority to maintain the seven canals. How can we restore the canals without that?"

First of all the National Housing Authority (NHA) will have to evict land grabbers from the banks of the canals and hand the canals over to the Wasa, Zahir explained saying that the Wasa will then clean up and excavate the canals to connect these with other canals in the city.

"We would be able to at least prepare the canals for rain water disposal within a short time if we even get the maintenance charge of the canals by this month," he said.

Until blockages the canals are cleared and these are connected with the city's network of canals, water logging in Mirpur will continue, he cautioned.

The NHA will handover the maintenance charge of the canals to Dhaka Wasa after demarcating the canals and evicting the unauthorised occupants, said chief of NHA's Mirpur zone office.

Nurul Islam, executive engineer of NHA Mirpur zone, said a lawsuit had been stalling the land grabber eviction work, but NHA won the legal battle recently.

Pointing to legal disputes as one of the main obstacles, he said the NHA plans to evict all the land grabbers including the ones on Road 27, 28 and 29 in Rupnagar residential area and demarcate the canals within next four weeks.

Mokhlesur Rahman, a homeowner on Road 28 in Rupnagar residential area, said a group of influential people illegally occupied the canals and disturbed the sewerage system in the area.

Due to the illegal filling up of the canal at the end of the road, the drainage system in the residential area gets clogged up regularly, he complained. "During the rainy season, it gets very difficult to use the roads in the residential area as most roads become flooded with sewage overflowing from drainage junctions."