



Lights from faraway landmarks and vehicles passing by are the only reasons Kuril looks somewhat visible from afar after dusk. Everyday commuters need to have eyes in the back of their heads to avoid getting mugged, harassed or hit by a large vehicle. Street lights, a basic component of all roads, would help solve these issues, but the flyover and road have been like this for months. This photo was taken recently.

Kuril left in the dark

Lack of lights on flyover, adjacent areas puts commuters at risk of accidents, being mugged

MATHEWS CHIRAN

Kuril flyover and its adjacent areas in the capital have been left in darkness for months, putting commuters at risk of accidents or falling victim to criminal activities.

There are lighting poles in the area, but upon closer look, it can be seen that most of those are missing bulbs. Even if there are bulbs, they either stopped working or just keep on flickering.

It is a busy area beside the ever-busy Airport road. Buses continue to stop there to pick up or drop off passengers while pedestrians walk on the footpath.

But at night the source of light would be the luxury hotel there, which barely covers anything. Other than that, headlights of vehicles whizzing by are the only other option.

Amid such a situation, criminal and antisocial activities have increased in the area, according to locals. As darkness descends, the area becomes a potential place for falling victim to muggings and road accidents, they added.

During multiple visits in the evening over the last few weeks -- from Shewra to Le Meridien Dhaka -- this correspondent saw the situation first-hand.

"This place is not safe at all after evening. There is no security here. If there was proper lighting at least, miscreants would think twice before doing anything," said Rafikul Bari, a pedestrian.

Ruma Akter, a private job holder, who got off a bus at Kuril, said, "I am afraid to walk on the footpath alone at night. If I'm late due to work, I call my husband to come and pick me up."

In 2019, artist Moshed Mishu, who was included in the Forbes Asia 30 under 30 list, was mugged at knife point on the flyover at night. He was on a bike with his friend, when a pickup cornered them.

Also near the same area, a Dhaka University student was raped while she was going to Shewra to visit her friend on January 6 last year.

Some parts of the area fall under Dhaka Cantonment, Bhatara and Khilkhet police stations.

Officer-in-Charge Munsir Sabbir Ahmed of Khilkhet Police Station said, "There's no adequate lighting in the area, which can result in accidents. Also, miscreants prefer such places for crimes."

The major part of the area is the 3.1 km Kuril flyover.

The Project Builders Ltd of Bangladesh along with China Major Bridge Engineering Corporation built the flyover at a cost of Tk 306 crore, financed by Rajuk in 2013.

Although Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) usually looks after the street lights of their areas, Banani to airport is taken care of by Road Transport and Highways Division (RTHD) while Kuril flyover by Rajuk.

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UNSUNG WOMEN HEROES

Sumi's resolve to help those with disabilities

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

Shamima Akter Sumi, popularly known as Kabya Sumi Sarkar, is a poet and prominent social worker in Mymensingh. Over the years, she has increasingly involved herself with multiple initiatives to support all who need help.

"I started supporting 32 disabled people at my village, Khaloipura, in Mymensingh's Fulbaria upazila in 2017," said Sumi.

"It was 2016, when my housemaid, Romicha Khatun, informed me that her five-year-old grandson had disabilities, but she could not manage any government allowance. Then I, with the help of a relative, started trying to manage a [government allowance] card meant for people with disabilities. But sadly, the card was managed one and a half years later, and on that same day, the child died. That shocked me so much," she said.

"Then I thought about doing something on my own and formed 'Anwara Karim Samaj Kallayan Sangstha', named after my parents Abdul Karim and Anwara Begum, at my village in 2017. After establishing the organisation, I shared the initiative with some of my friends and close relatives, and they promptly came forward with financial assistance," said the 37-year-old.

Gradually she spread the service outside the village, and now, 52 people with disabilities are under the organisation in the district, including 41 from Khaloipura village, she added.

With the help of her initiative, around 50 percent of people with disabilities are now under government allowance. "As our contribution, we monthly donate Tk 300 for each person with disability who does not get government allowance, while the rest get Tk 150 each," Sumi said.

Besides the monthly payment, they also support the people for their illnesses, and provide essentials for Eid and winter clothes. For this, they collect funds by



Shamima Akter Sumi

receiving zakat from their near and dear ones.

Primarily, Sumi, a mother of two daughters, had to manage most of the costs from her salary as a lecturer at a private college. Sumi thanked her family and locals, who always encourage her for such philanthropic activities.

With the help of the organisation's initiatives, five families are now self-reliant, and they do not need financial help, said Jahanara Rani, a member of the organisation.

Sumi, also founder president of Divisional Blood Society, a free blood-donation forum, said there are some 500 members in the forum, and they have rendered blood support to 117 critical patients, mostly the poor and helpless, in the last one and a half years.

Ali Yusuf, a prominent volunteer in the city, said Sumi and her volunteers helped some 150 families amid the pandemic so far.

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Covid-19 cases may rise in summer, experts predict

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Experts at a seminar yesterday predicted that the number of Covid-19 cases may increase in the upcoming months.

Bangladesh Health Reporters' Forum (BHRF) organised the event at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU)

At the seminar titled "One Year of Covid-19: Success and Challenges", experts cited some key factors that may contribute to this rise, such as previous infection trends in Bangladesh, emergence of new variants, increased mobility and gradual decline of hygiene practices.

However, they said they are hopeful that despite this rise, the situation will not go out of control due to improved immune response, vaccination and enhanced capacity of the country's health system.

Renowned virologist Prof Dr Nazrul Islam, former VC of BSMMU said, "We have already seen

that Covid-19 cases have increased in the first week of this month. Previously we had thought that Covid-19 may hit Bangladesh harder in winter."

"According to our observation, three types of respiratory viruses (influenza A, parainfluenza 3 and respiratory syncytial virus) become very active in winter and infect a large number of our population and in summer, the infection rate declines. Our hypothesis is due to these predominant types of respiratory viruses, the novel coronavirus could not make significant interference among this population," he said.

"In absence of the predominant respiratory viruses, the novel coronavirus may get a stronger grip. So, this summer we may experience a new and mild wave of coronavirus infection," he added.

Prof Dr Nasima Sultana, additional director general, directorate general of health services; Prof Dr Kanak Kanti Barua, vice-chancellor of BSMMRU;

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Nine sentenced to death for '03 murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A court in Chattogram yesterday handed death penalty to nine persons for killing a man in Fatikchhari 17 years ago.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Begum Farzana Akhtar gave the verdict.

The convicts are -- Leda Nasir, Babul, Shahin, Nurul Islam, Jobayer, Didar, Abu Bakar, Jangu and Ismail. "Shahin is behind bar while the rest are absconding," said public prosecutor Md Nasir. The court also fined them Tk 20,000 each, he added.

According to the case statement, expatriate Nesar Ahmed was hacked to death over a feud on November 1, 2003.

They then dumped the body in a marshland. The following morning, locals spotted the body and informed police.

The victim's wife filed a murder case. Police pressed charges on May 14, 2004 while a court framed charges against the nine on March 20, 2007.

Miles to go for gender equality

Speakers discuss at events marking Int'l Women's Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh celebrated International Women's Day with the theme "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a Covid-19 world".

The United Nations held a programme at the capital's BICC auditorium on Sunday on this occasion.

UN Bangladesh Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo presided over the programme and said effects of the pandemic are compounding existing obstacles for women's participation in decision-making processes of public life, although, their drive to progress is unparalleled. Women in leadership roles centring health-care response, security and keeping Bangladesh safe during the shutdown showed that they can be in charge despite the challenges they face in terms of the management structure.

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'Bangabandhu a towering figure of 20th century'

Says top US official; March 7 observed across globe

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangabandhu is a "towering figure of the twentieth century" who shaped modern Bangladesh and continues to inspire the people to further develop their country, said a top US official.

Dean Thompson, acting assistant secretary of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs of the US Department of State, said this at a webinar on Sunday night, marking the historic March 7 speech.

He said under the Biden Administration, the US wants to strengthen bilateral relationship with Bangladesh that offers so many opportunities in diverse areas, from renewable energy, port infrastructure to artificial intelligence.

"One of the areas we are most excited

to work on is expanding our economic partnership," he added.

At the event hosted by Bangladesh embassy in Washington, Thompson applauded the generosity of Bangladesh in protecting the Rohingyas and said the US is a steadfast partner of Bangladesh in finding a durable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

US Ambassador to Bangladesh, Earl Miller quoted Senator Edward Kennedy that the American people were with the people of Bangladesh during the Liberation War, although the government was not.

Renowned South Asia Analyst Seth Oldmixon said the March 7 speech is a culmination of incredible historical events that led to the independence of Bangladesh.

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'ESCAPE' OF INMATE FROM CTG JAIL Two committees begin investigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A three-member probe committee, formed by the prison authorities, has started investigation inside the Chattogram Central Jail from yesterday morning to find out how a murder accused inmate "escaped" from jail.

The committee also engaged firefighters to conduct a search to find out the possible hiding places on jail premises. "Three units of firefighters have been conducting the operation," said Jane Alam, deputy director of Chattogram fire service headquarters.

The probe committee headed by Deputy Inspector General Sagir Mia (Khulna prisons) reached the Chattogram jail at 9:30am.

They spoke to prison officials and visited ward-15 of Karnaphuli Bhaban in the prison from where inmate Farhad Hossain Rubel "escaped" on Saturday morning.

"Firefighters are searching sewerage and water lines, septic tanks and other places inside the prison. Following their findings, we will be able to get a more conclusive report," said Sagir Mia, head of the committee.

"We are also checking the CCTV footage. [In the footage] we saw Rubel coming out of the building in the morning. After scrutinising all the footage, we will be able to understand the situation better," he added.

The DIG said they will also quiz the four prison staffers including the jailer -- who were withdrawn and suspended after the incident.

Another three-member probe committee formed by Chattogram District Administration visited the jail yesterday.

Speaking with journalists at jail gate, additional district magistrate Sumoni Akhter, who is leading the committee, said, they will try to submit findings by three working days.

On February 5, a businessman was stabbed to death by criminals in SRB Gate area of the city. Rubel was arrested in this connection on February 9 after the victim's mother filed a case.

Ensure environment for women's empowerment

TIB urges govt on Women's Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) has called for ensuring a conducive environment for women's empowerment, gender equality and women's leadership in all areas to ensure sustainable development and good governance in Bangladesh.

The organisation made the call yesterday on the occasion of International Women's Day.

In a statement, TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said, "About half of the total population of Bangladesh is women. Therefore, just as sustainable development is impossible without the active participation of women, it is also impossible to ensure gender equality and good governance without the effective participation of women in leadership."

He said gender inequality and corruption are interrelated. Gender inequality hinders good governance, sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Various studies have also shown that women's empowerment is hampered due to corruption.

Even in the context of Bangladesh, poor governance and corruption is hampering achievements brought on by women's empowerment, he said.

Referring to the ongoing Covid-19 situation, the executive director further said women as well as men are taking the lead in Bangladesh and all over the world to transition from the pandemic. Especially in the government's decision-making

processes, women have contributed a lot in various fields, including health care for tackling Covid-19.

The recent recognition of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as one of the top inspiring women leaders among Commonwealth countries is proof of that, he said, adding that, "But even at such times, the process of violence against women or oppression of women has not stopped."

A recent study found that 30.54 percent of women were physically abused, 22.99 percent were sexually harassed, 76.53 percent had their daily lives controlled, 35.4 percent were financially abused during the pandemic, and 43.75 percent have been victims of both physical and sexual abuse.

In addition, due to closure of educational institutions and decline in family income, the rates of child marriage and female students dropping out are increasing. But for sustainable development, development and empowerment of women by preventing violence against them is essential, Dr Iftekharuzzaman said.

TIB placed eight demands on the occasion of International Women's Day, as a step towards achieving sustainable development by ensuring good governance and empowerment of women.

The demands include appropriate and specific steps to ensure women's participation and leadership in earning, education, healthcare, justice and decision-making processes during the Covid-19.

Leadership of women must for protection of tea workers

Speakers tell roundtable

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Women must have leadership positions at all levels of tea workers' unions and all executive committees to enhance social protection of female workers at tea gardens, said speakers at a roundtable discussion held in Sylhet marking International Women's Day yesterday.

The roundtable discussion, titled 'Women in Leadership: Achieving an Equal Future in a Covid-19 World', was jointly organised by four stakeholders of Joint SDG Fund -- United Nations (UN) Women, United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and International Labour Organization (ILO).

"Besides women in leadership, gender-based data of workers involved in tea industry; ensuring female tea workers' and their families' special needs

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ALLEGED GRAFT BY RUHUL AMIN 27-year-old case against former state minister to resume

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday cleared way for a lower court to resume trial proceedings of a 27-year-old corruption case filed against Jatiya Party leader and former state minister ABM Ruhul Amin Howlader.

The then bureau of anti-corruption (BAC) filed the case with Dumki Police Station in Barishal on October 2, 1994 against Howlader on charge of embezzling Tk 1.23 crore, which had been allocated to prevent river erosion and rehabilitate victims of erosion.

The reported embezzlement took place during the regime of HM Ershad's Jatiya Party government, when Howlader was state minister for agriculture, Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told The Daily Star.

Yesterday, the Appellate Division upheld a High Court verdict that, on March 29, 2017, cleared way for the Divisional Special Judge's Court of Barishal to run trial proceedings of the case.

A three-member bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, dismissed a leave to appeal petition filed by Howlader, challenging the HC verdict.

After the HC delivered the verdict, the trial court did not run proceedings, as the leave to appeal petition was pending with the apex court, Khurshid said.

Now, there is no legal bar for Divisional Special Judge's Court of Barishal to resume the trial, he said.

The ACC lawyer said the SC dismissed the leave to appeal petition, as there are specific allegations against him of misappropriating state money.

Lawyer Munshi Moniruzzaman appeared for Howlader during the virtual hearing of his petition.