



Once a comfort zone for pedestrians and locals, Pantha Kunja Park has now turned into an abandoned broken space. It all started when renovations were initiated back in 2018 and halted right after. For three years, the park has been in such condition. DSCC has finally taken another initiative to renovate the park with changes in the original design. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Once a place of comfort, now lies abandoned

Renovation work of Pantha Kunja Park remains halted for three years

DIPAN NANDY

On hot summer days, when the scorching heat would leave pedestrians exhausted, the park would serve as a resting place. Mornings would see clusters of people belonging to different age groups flocking for routine workouts. In the golden hours of the afternoons, the triangular park became a place for light chats.

However, the scenes drastically changed for Pantha Kunja Park at Karwan Bazar intersection when Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) took the initiative to revamp it in 2018.

The initiative was taken to beautify the park under the "Various Infrastructure Development of Dhaka South City Corporation" project. The allocation for this was about Tk

19.20 crore.

In September that year, renovation works started by covering the entire periphery with tin. A few days later, it was found that two to three pillars of the Dhaka Elevated Expressway project are expected to stand in the areas of the park.



The renovation works were halted immediately. The entire scenery changed, turning the once calm and peaceful park into an abandoned spot.

Even after three years since the halt, works on the expressway have not yet started in the area. On the other hand, DSCC has barred public entrance to the park.

Pantha Kunja is not what it used to be. It has turned into a criminal den, with hijackers and drug dealers taking over the area, according to locals.

When this correspondent visited the park recently, it was observed that the tin fence around the park was being removed.

Some cleaning inside the park also took place, but it's still too little.

This has been made possible under DSCC's recent initiative to renovate the park again. However, many changes are expected to be made to the previous design, considering the elevated expressway's construction.

First things first, the park is being cleaned to make it suitable once again for the residents of the city.

A DSCC source said as per the earlier plan, several components of modernisation are expected to be introduced, including the construction of multi-storied buildings. However, the new plan has reduced the use of brick and concrete in the park, which will also have a walking path, seating and lights.

In this regard, DSCC superintendent engineer Munsir Md Abul Hasem told this correspondent that since the expressway would go through the park, the renovation work was halted. "We are planning to create a new design and make this park open to the public once again," he said.

When asked when the work will be completed, he said the architectural firm is expected to make the designs as they made them previously.

"After the designs are done, works will ensue. The park is expected to be open for all by June 2023."

US envoy meets info minister

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas has met Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud and discussed the importance of a free and independent media as the bedrock of democracy.

The ambassador and the information minister also discussed international concerns about provisions of the Digital Security Act and the proposed regulations for digital, social media, and streaming platforms, said the US Embassy in Dhaka on Thursday.

In the next 50 years and beyond, the United States looks forward to working with Bangladesh to advance common interests in freedom, prosperity, peace, and dignity, according to a message shared on the verified Facebook page of the embassy.

Subway not viable

Experts tell virtual dialogue, criticise govt move to construct underground railway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

City planners and transport experts in a virtual dialogue yesterday termed the move to construct subways a disaster as it will not bring any positive changes in the capital's traffic situation.

Rather, it would prove to be a burden considering its physical, socio-economic and environmental impact, they said.

They suggested that the government cancel the move and take low-cost projects such as improving footpaths and ensuring public transport for all.

The dialogue was organised by Institute for Planning and Development (IPD).

Though Dhaka has enough population for a subway, the project is not viable for its high construction and maintenance cost, said IPD Executive Director Dr Adil Mohammad Khan, while presenting the keynote speech.

The government has already carried out a feasibility study for a 238km subway network and made a preliminary design for 90km at the cost of Tk 321 crore under a 35-month project.

In the draft feasibility study, submitted on March 15 last year, they proposed a 258km subway network consisting of 11 routes.

REASONS

- High construction, maintenance cost
- Socio-economic, environmental impact
- Not included in Strategic Transport Plan

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus more on low-cost projects
- Improve footpaths, make them pedestrian-friendly
- Ensure public transport for all

Adil said for Dhaka's sustainable development, the Strategic Transport Plan (STP) was prepared in 2005.

Following the transport plan, several projects, including the metro rail, expressway, and the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT), are now being implemented in the capital.

New routes of the metro rail are being constructed following the STP's revision in 2016.

"But the government has taken the plan to construct the subway or underground railway, which was not included in the STP or RSTP," said Adil.

IPD executive director also mentioned that the feasibility study ignored the socio-economic and environmental impact of the project.

"Underground railways were constructed in a limited number of cities in high-income countries. But the wealthiest countries of the world are not willing to construct subways nowadays due to its high cost," added Adil.

Sheikh Muhammad Mehedi Ahsan,

general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said this can be a burden on the country considering its development budget.

"The government did not take any expert's opinion in this regard," he further said.

Transport expert Dr SM Salehuddin said the government should have spent the budget allocated for the feasibility study on purchasing 1,000 quality buses for the city.

This would prove more effective in reducing traffic congestion, he added.

He emphasised the implementation of the bus route rationalisation system as early as possible and making the city pedestrian-friendly.

"If the government fully implement all the 70 policies in the STP, no new studies would be required in this regard," he added.

Md Maruf Hossain, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), termed the underground railway project a "white elephant".

"If we fail to make a coordination among different government organisations and fail to assign certain responsibilities to certain organisations, such devoid-of-coordination initiative and wastage of funds will continue," the Bapa joint secretary said.

Md Ashrafur Islam, project director of Rajuk's "Detailed Area Plan", said the soil condition of central Dhaka is suitable for the underground railway.

However, its peripheral areas are not appropriate, which will increase the costs further, the project director added.

"To make the transport system sustainable, it is necessary to make footpaths more pedestrian-friendly, constructing ring roads, radial roads, circular railways and ensuring public buses," he said.

PRAYER TIMING

APRIL 23

Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 4:11	12:45	4:45	6:27	8:00
JAMAAT 4:21	1:15	5:00	6:37	8:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

SEHRI, IFTAR TIMING

RAMADAN	APRIL	SEHRI	IFTAR
21	23		6:27
22	24	4:05	6:28
23	25	4:05	6:28

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DR SM SALEHUDDIN
Transport Expert

MOSQUITO MENACE

Rain brings fresh concerns

UNB, Dhaka

The density of Aedes mosquitoes in the capital is more than the previous year, which may increase further during the upcoming monsoon, leading to a spread of dengue.

Researchers at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) feared that rainfall in the city may be followed by an alarming rise in mosquito-borne diseases like dengue and malaria.

An outbreak of dengue fever last year claimed 105 lives and sent 28,429 patients to hospitals, most of them in the capital, according to DGHS.

National Malaria Elimination and Aedes Transmission Disease Control Programme of DGHS, has found the dire situation in a recent survey. The 10-day entomological survey was conducted at

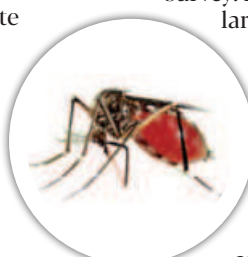
100 sites of 98 wards under Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC).

According to the DGHS, a 21-member team visited around 3,000 houses under the city corporations to complete the survey. It found Aedes mosquito's larvae in 150 houses, which is 4.25 percent of the total figure.

The DGHS said it will complete Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping by the density of mosquitoes after conducting research by the Institute of Epidemiology Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) to know the region-based density of the insect in Dhaka.

DGHS suggested that two city corporations in Dhaka should operate special drives right now to control mosquitoes and curb the menace. City

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Ignoring a "no parking" sign, motorcycles park illegally on Ring Road in the capital's Mohammadpur area. These vehicles not only obstruct traffic flow but also cause gridlocks. This photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS