

Dhaka's high-rises to get own building code

Professionals and experts are now going through the draft of RAJUK's Dhaka High-rise Building Code 2003, but not all of them are happy with what they are reading

SOHEL ISLAM

Experts are finding anomalies in RAJUK's draft of the Dhaka Metropolitan High-rise Building Construction Code 2003. Many of the clauses may not be applicable in the context of our country, according to the experts who also claim that they have not been given enough time to come up with effective suggestions and revisions for the draft.

Professionals and experts are now going through the draft of the Dhaka Metropolitan High-rise Building Construction Code 2003, which RAJUK submitted to the Ministry of Housing and Public Works in August 2002, sources said.

The Ministry of Housing and Public Works last month sent a letter to the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB), the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB), the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh (IEB), attaching the draft of the code.

The ministry also asked them to come up with suggestions and revisions for the draft of the code, 'if any', by the end of last month. However, it was learnt that the ministry has extended the date to August 11 to finalise the draft of the code with the participation of all the above stakeholders.

"We didn't think that the time the

ministry gave us was sufficient at all, because the code is expansive and highly detailed. That's why we wanted 15 more days to scrutinise the entire code and recommend necessary changes," said general secretary of IAB, Sanaul Haque.

"We are proposing an independent commission comprising professionals, experts and members of civil society which may be empowered to approve the high-rise building plans and also have a say in issuance of clearance certificates. We think that the approval authority should not be at the hand of one organisation or authority," continued Haque.

"At present we are analysing the building codes of neighbouring and other countries. We are working hard to present a few useful suggestions in the meeting," said Sanaul Haque.

"We requested the ministry for an extension up to August 31 because this is a serious task. An internal committee of REHAB will sit on August 7 to finalise how many alterations we will propose to the ministry," said president of REHAB, Dr Towfiq M Siraj.

"In our preliminary examination, we have found a lot of anomalies in the draft. If we had more time we could have come up with many more practical suggestions for the draft. Many of the clauses are not applicable in the context of our country," noted Dr Siraj.

The IEB has also formed a committee comprising mechanical, electrical and civil engineers. "We are also working hard on the draft of the guideline, and have detected some irregularities in it. We will certainly want to put forward some suggestions for the August 11 meeting," said a member of the IEB committee.

Within the last decade authorities have silently witnessed mushroom growth of high-rise buildings in the city. According to Rajuk chairman, more than eighty per cent of these buildings have been constructed 'illegally' without much consideration to the environment and the people. With high density of population, experts believe, the city needs to grow vertically but that should happen in a healthy manner, they said.

Lack of inspection during construction, absence of phase-wise monitoring have encouraged developers to defy construction rules and build tall buildings, which are causing hazards rather than comfort of the city dwellers. There are hundreds of commercial buildings in the city without provision for any parking. Rajuk officials usually say that while approving the plans these developers usually use a decent plan. "But as soon as they leave the Rajuk building, they forget about the approved plan and build as they wish," said an official.



ALISDAIR MACDONALD



Dhaka's high-rises need their own building code, but is RAJUK giving experts and professionals enough time to scrutinise the draft for an effective code.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

The PWD built bamboo fences around the memorial as an instant measure to protect it from further erosion

Monsoon erodes memorial

Concern for the memorial came to a head as it began slipping into the Buriganga River

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The liberation war affairs ministry has been tasked with supervising the martyred intellectual memorial at Rayerbazar and the public works department (PWD) will implement its development works, according to a decision.

The decision came at a meeting yesterday, precisely defining the roles of the ministry and the PWD in supervision, protection and development of the memorial.

"We have also decided that the ministry will be in charge of submitting project proposals for the memorial," said a high official at the ministry.

The concern for protection of the memorial came to a head, as it

was slipping into ruin because of Buriganga river erosion.

The situation went from bad to worse because there was no clearly defined role of the ministry or the department before in protection of the memorial.

The PWD built bamboo fences around the memorial as an instant measure to protect it from further erosion triggered by monsoon rain. "We had to fence off the area with bamboo poles as we had no adequate funds for anything else," said a source in the PWD.

According to the decision, the ministry will be controlling the funds for development works and maintenance from now on.

The roller-compacted concrete blocks built around part of the memorial for protection from erosion are falling apart due to

lack of maintenance.

"The budget for maintenance is with the PWD. We will request the finance ministry to transfer the funds to the liberation war affairs ministry," said the high official.

The PWD submitted a Tk 3.18 crore project for development and preservation of the area to the planning commission in 2001.

"The proposal was not accepted by the commission since it was not submitted through the liberation war affairs ministry," he said.

The project proposes dumping of soil for making slopes beside the memorial and concrete blocks for protection from erosion, barbed-wire fences and iron grille for security, a walkway for tourists, a seminar room, a library on

liberation war and a museum.

Frustrated by the setbacks facing the project, the PWD submitted another proposal of Tk 84 lakh to the liberation war affairs ministry a month ago as an emergency measure to save the memorial.

"Tk 28 lakh will be required for soil dumping, Tk 54 lakh for concrete blocks and Tk 2 lakh for barbed-wire fences," said a PWD source.

An official of the ministry said, "We have received the proposal from the PWD a few days ago."

"We are taking emergency measures for protection of the memorial," said State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Mohammad Rezaul Karim.

Disappearing khas land

SULTANA RAHMAN

The public khas land of Dhaka city is shrinking day by day due to the lack of scientific preservation of the land ministry's Records Of Rights (ROR).

The land ministry took initiatives to computerise the ROR as a pilot project in 1995. But only one assistant commissioner (AC) land office out of five, under Dhaka district, took up the initiative to preserve the records, sources said.

It has been alleged that many opportunists, including dishonest officials from the land ministry as well as AC land offices, have taken the chance to occupy the khas land illegally. Knowing the exact location and status of the public land such officials are in a perfect position to make use of such knowledge.

The ROR were published with limited copies for five affiliated offices to keep one copy per office. The offices are the settlement department, assistant commissioner's (AC land) office, district commissioner's office, lower court and tahashil office. Of the five copies, the master-print was

allocated for the settlement department.

The original land survey report, named the Cadastral Survey (CS), was produced in 1916 under the British regime in which public and private land was classified for the first time in Dhaka city.

The second survey, the State Acquisition (SA) report, was produced in the period between 1956 and 1962 just after the elimination of landlords and the feudal system. At present, the land ministry usually follows the SA report that was penned by hand.

However, some pages of this record book, especially the records of khas land, have disappeared over the years, which causes a major dilemma in identifying the landowners of both the private and public land.

The final survey, the Revisional Settlement (RS) record, was carried out between 1969 and 1983. Land ministry sources claimed that some differences between the State Acquisition and Revisional Settlement records were found, particularly in relation to public khas land which were occupied by grabbers during that survey period.

It has been alleged that many opportunists, including dishonest officials from the land ministry as well as AC land offices, have taken the chance to occupy the khas land illegally.



With land records being affected by lack of preservation, many opportunists are grabbing the city's ever-shrinking khas land.

ALISDAIR MACDONALD