



Unplanned renovation is allegedly going on at the food and drink kiosk at Dhanmondi Lake.

Keeping DCC in the dark

Renovation of kiosk feared to distort Dhanmondi Lake master plan

SOHEL ISLAM

The food and drink kiosk at the Dhanmondi Lake, a favourite haunt of city dwellers, has been undergoing unplanned renovations over the past few days, but its leaseholder kept Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in the dark all along.

The master plan of the lake prohibits any attempt to distort the 85.6-acre project, with almost 31 acres as land and 54.6 acres as water body.

Under the lake restoration work carried out in 2001, a number of facilities including a food and drink kiosk, restaurants, a boat club, an amphitheatre and a health club were built for the visitors to the lake.

But the leaseholder of the food and drink kiosk in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum has fenced off the area with bamboo poles and large gunnies to carry out decoration inside.

"I don't understand why they have hidden it from view. It's a public place," said Mamun, a Dhanmondi resident.

"I don't know what the leaseholder is doing at the kiosk," said a high official at

the DCC Planning and Design Department, tasked with looking after the Dhanmondi Lake.

"I will send DCC officials to see for themselves what is going on over there and ask them to report to me. If the leaseholder violates any rule, I will ask him to demolish the structures, if any," the DCC official said seeking anonymity.

But Abul Hossain Kabir, the leaseholder, said, "We are not doing anything that goes against the master plan of the lake. I will have to pay the DCC about Tk 1.5 lakh in rent a month. If the kiosk is not well-decorated, I will lose customers. I have to get returns from my investment."

"It's not my responsibility to inform the DCC. If the DCC officials think about rent, they have to think about renovations and decoration as well."

"We will remove bamboo fences and gunnies after we finish our decoration. We don't want to let people see our decoration before we restart the kiosk," Kabir said.

Dhanmondi Lake Consultant Iqbal Habib said, "What I know is that no

leaseholder can do any concrete work. What they can do is build bamboo or wooden structures to accommodate more customers, which will not distort the master plan."

"The leaseholder promised me that he is not going to do any concrete work," Habib said.

Development of the Dhanmondi Lake was completed at a cost of Tk 2.5 crore after two years of work.

Two committees – the management committee and the advisory committee – were formed to review development, if any, of the lake after its restoration was done.

"But the committees are not working properly. Only two meetings have been held since the full restoration of the lake," Habib said.

The management committee headed by the DCC chief executive officer and the advisory committee headed by the local government secretary were to hold a meeting each month.

None of them could be reached by phone for comments.

Handloom fair yet to perk up

Weavers lament that number of visitors decreasing every year. Visitors observe number of items offered is limited and prices also not fair

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Weavers participating in the annual handloom fair at Karwan Bazar have expressed their frustration over the slide in the number of visitors every year.

Spending Tk 12,000 as rent on a stall for a month is not worth it as sales in the fair is not encouraging, they commented.

The fair, which was organised by the Bangladesh Tant Board, was inaugurated on October 25. Weavers are hoping against hope to see an increase in visitors and sales.

The reason for the poor number of visitors, could be, as some of the city dwellers said, is the increasing number of shops that has a wide variety of items to choose from. Another reason, they added is the lack of facilities to exchange or return the goods when purchased at the fair, which the shops provide.

We do not find anything new at the fair, commented Tahmina Shahid, who had been visiting such fairs frequently. Most women commented too, that the prices at the fair were almost the same as in the shops. "Why do we have to shop

uncomfortably when we can do so in comfort at the shops," they asked.

Yet, the 52 stall owners are looking forward for more customers not only to come and feast their eyes but also to purchase their goods. Though there are few stalls selling shirts and dress materials, Saris are the main attraction at the fair.

Handloom products of Dhaka were well known to the world in old days. Dhakai Muslin was acknowledged widely for its texture and colour. Though it became extinct a long time ago, its revival took place under the name of "Tissue" claimed some of the weavers in the fair. Weavers from Mirpur said the "Tissue Benarasi" sari they are producing can be termed the modern form of former Muslin.

However, some weavers as well as buyers believe that it is Jamdani sari that brought back the tradition that was lost with Muslin.

Benarasi is a sari irresistibly tempting for Bangladeshi women. It is Benarasi produced in Mirpur that reigns over the range of saris at the fair. This product has turned the whole fair into a carnival of colour. Most of the stalls are seen adorned with Benarasi saris. Some of saris look more charming being stone studded along with

minute and delicate designs.

Bangladesh Tant Board has been organising handloom fairs since 1973, said some of the senior entrepreneurs. "It was then organised at the garage of present BGMEA building since very few weavers participated," recalled Khondoker Abid Hossain of Ashik Silk Industry. The fair did not take place for some years in between and then resumed a few years ago.

The stall owners hailed the arrangement of the fair by Tant Board saying it will bring a positive impact on the weavers having less capital. It will inspire them to weave better quality cloth since the fair works as a good advertisement for them, they said. However, they lamented that the make shift stalls were not convenient for the display of their goods as there was no shelter against rain which in turn would damage the expensive items put on for sale.

The participants also commented the fair gives them opportunity to get some money in cash. "Usually the weavers supply saris to showrooms in different markets but receive half the money for it," said Mizanur Rahman. "Our capital remains stuck in their hands, but at the fair we can get hard cash buy selling directly to customers."



The handloom fair being held at Karwan Bazar is empty of visitors even on its third day yesterday.

THE PURPLE MOORHEN



What is the going rate for a pair of purple moorhens these days? Moorhens, once common around wetlands, are today endangered by habitat loss and poaching. This bird, is most likely from Sunamganj haor. Noticing the bird at Stadium Market in Dhaka, our photographer asked for the price and trader Alauddin Mia wanted Tk12000 for a pair. Wild birds are increasingly sought as delicacies and fowl traders willingly comply. This goes on despite the forest and environment ministry prohibiting poaching of these birds. Hopefully the plans of a nationwide campaign against killing of wild birds will save some from ending up as 'roast chicken' on Dhaka's dinner tables.

Parents prepare for admission ordeal

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

With time ticking towards the beginning of a new academic year, parents stop at nothing to smooth their kids' way into good schools.

Preparing kids for admission test, recruiting tutors, taking them to coaching centres and collecting application forms have become an essential part of success-oriented urban life.

This year, school admission began a bit earlier than before. Some schools including Vigarunnisa Noon School and College have already started the admission process, although most, including 24 government schools, will begin it in December.

Vigarunnisa School will be selling application forms from November 1-5. Lalmatia and Udayan schools will also begin the process in the first week of November. South Point School in Gulshan, founded by Hamida Ali, former principal of Vigarunnisa Noon School and College, has already started selling application forms. One can apply until the last day of November and the admission test will be held in the

first week of December.

Ideal School, Residential Model School, BUET School and Manipur High School, among others, will start admission after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Sometimes, money and manipulation tend to outshine merit of students. Only the extraordinary students get easy admission, but many others are left to struggle their way up. Since there are a few good schools, compared with the number of students in the city, the fight for admission is intensifying by the year.

More than one lakh fresh students are enrolled every year, according to the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education. Around 400 government and non-governmental schools and thousands of English medium schools and kindergartens exist in the city. But a few of them maintain the high standards of teaching and provide efficient teachers.

The result is that the schools of good repute receive eight to ten times more admission seekers than they can offer admission to. A fourth of them cannot enrol in good schools, leading their

guardians to adopt controversial means to ensure their wards' chance.

"Those who can influence the school management with money or political power are among the lucky few," alleged Altaf Hossain, father of a school-age son.

"No matter the students are meritorious or not, admission is not guaranteed unless their guardians can offer hefty donations," he added.

"Some students enrol in our school even in the middle of the year, as their parents offer good donations," admitted a teacher of a government high school, not wanting to be named.

"The school management yields to money, as the fund provided by the government is not enough," he defended the practice that is blamed for lowering the standards of education.

"I came back home from abroad and wanted to put my son in a missionary English medium school. The management said no seat was available in the middle of the year. Later, I learned from different sources that only a donation of Tk 50,000 will do," said Almas Khan of Mirpur.