

GULSHAN LAKE WALKWAY

Rajuk facing hurdles in following layout

TAWFIQUE ALI

The Rajdhani Unnyan Kartripkha (Rajuk) is facing strong obstruction in building a walkway along Gulshan-Baridhara-Banani Lake with rampant encroachments by powerful plot owners.

This is forcing the under-construction pathway into an extremely irregular course without a proper configuration.

"We cannot maintain consistency and aesthetic beauty of the proposed walkway because of such encroachment," said a highly placed source at the Rajuk's development section.

"Almost 99 percent plot owners on the lake bank have encroached the lake grabbing extra land in addition to their original allotment of 5 kathas with each plot owner possessing up to 10 to 12 kathas," he said.

Interestingly enough, Rajuk itself had issued the allotment of extra land that developed lake encroachment on demand from powerful plot owners on different occasions, according to sources.

If built under present conditions, the pathway will zigzag and look odd losing its aesthetic beauty envisaged in its very concept, permitting land grabbers to have their way.

The walkway is supposed to be consistent and parallel to protect the lake as its demarcation and enhance its beauty.

During a stroll taken along the bank from Shooting Federation end towards Shahjadpur link-road on March 22, this correspondent found that most plots have been extended encroaching the lake, leaving its edges along roads 137, 138, 139, 140 and 141 irregular.

A settlement of the Dhaka Wasa staff and their tenants at the pump no-5 site in between road no-129 and 130 is settled clearly into the lake virtually leaving no lake edge.

"We have made an arrangement with the 'authorities' to stay here," said pump operator Alamgir Hossain.

Rajuk sources said that

cancellation of allotment of extra land could address the issue.

But such move would prompt the influential quarters to go for power play and litigation entangling the entire attempt into a legal battle.

"We cannot demolish the structures impinging into the lake in fear that litigations may arise resulting in disruption in the work of pathway," said a top official of the development section.

"The government has to have

If built under present conditions, the pathway will zigzag and look odd losing its aesthetic beauty envisaged in its very concept, permitting land grabbers to have their way

honest intent and be firm in reclaiming the lake," he said.

Meanwhile, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court over a year back, in a case regarding plot development on the lake bank, certified a map of the lake and ordered the Town Planning department of the Rajuk to implement it.

The said layout of the lake marked the banks straight, according to sources.

A top official of the Town Planning section, seeking

anonymity, said that the Rajuk later on brought some changes to the layout of the lake because of its existing zigzag condition.

"Therefore we cannot maintain consistency and alignment of the bank of lake as per the layout certified by the court," said an official of development section.

When asked about land allotment into the lake, Rajuk's estate section director Shamsul Alam, referred this correspondent to the chairman.

"I have no idea of any plot allotment encroaching the lake," he said. "Plots are allotted as per rules. We place the file before Rajuk's board members for allotment of any land. We carry out the decision of the board," he added.

Admitting that there is no provision for allotment of extra land encroaching the lake, Rajuk's chairman-in-charge, KM Harun said, "There is hardly anything we can do against the allotments already made."

"One alternative is to evict the encroachers as per the law against such grabbing and occupancy, which we do in some cases," he said.

The aim of building the walkway is to prevent further encroachment, Harun said, and to protect the existing physical condition of the lake.

"As the court directed Rajuk to protect the lake in its present condition, we have not allotted any plots on the bank in the last one year," Harun added.

The walkway is not built according to the court-certified layout, but in keeping with the ground situation of the lake, said a top official of Town Planning section seeking anonymity.

Rajuk started its second phase of work on the walkway around three months back under a Tk five crore project with its own resources, although the proposal for lake development is yet to be approved by government.

Community centres see downslide in business

SHARMIN MEHRIBAN

Community centres in the city are facing a downslide in business because of the availability of alternatives like Chinese restaurants. But the centres themselves are changing trends in the range of services they offer.

Some are expanding their services to offer facilities for formal gatherings, while others are limiting their services to only the premises, crockery and cutlery.

"It is not just the Chinese restaurants but also school examinations and political activities that affect our business," said Md. Ghulam Kibria, manager of Rangdhanu community centre in Siddheswari that started last year.

Apart from occasions like weddings and birthdays, the centre also offers facilities for seminars and meetings, as business cannot rely on the former alone.

Rent for the premises of around 2,500 seats is Tk 4,500 and food per head is between Tk 100-Tk 180. Decorations, including crockery and cutlery, are undertaken at an extra charge.

Organisers have the option of either procuring the ingredients themselves or leaving it to the centre authorities. There is a single cook with five helpers and the menu has 15 items including a vegetarian dish.

Leftovers are given to the organisers. "Helpers are allowed to eat on the premises but not allowed to take the food home as this could create a false impression of food being stolen," said Kibria.

Organisers arrange the waiters that belong to a separate association," said Premal, the proprietor. When asked about incidents of waiters misbehaving with guests, he said that they are cautioned before any event.

The difference between holding a gathering at a Chinese restaurant and a community centre is that the food in the restaurants is limited, whereas the community centre arranges for an additional 30 or 40 people, including the service personnel,



STAR PHOTO

said Kibria.

In contrast to Rangdhanu, Shohag community centre renders its services to only social gatherings. It has spacious air-conditioned rooms, green rooms, pure drinking water, parking space, low cost gas kitchens and electrical generators. However the organisers must bring in their own cooks, cooking material and bearers.

It is located at New Eskaton road adjacent to two other community centres -- New Shohag and Modern Shohag, each with a separate manager but under the same private ownership.

"This community centre has been around for about 20 years," said Shahid, Shohag's manager. There are three gates for each of the centres with separate parking spaces, but there is no provision in case of fire.

The rent, including VAT, for Shohag, New Shohag and Modern Shohag are Tk 15,000, Tk 14,000 and Tk 12,000 respectively. Decorations, including crockery and cutlery have a separate charge that Shahid did not specify.

In contrast an individual, preferring anonymity, said that Shohag charged Tk 25,000 as hall rent a year back and is currently charging more. "They simply charge more because they are usually approached by people who can afford it," said the individual.

To this Shahid said it was up to the owner to charge a hall rent. "Hall rents differ between community centres," he said.

Greenway that started around four years back is located in Magbazaar is a community centre and has minimal facilities -- seating arrangements for 150 people, a single gate and no

parking spaces and kitchens.

"We cater to the poor people who cannot be expected to come in cars," said Md Abdul Latif, its proprietor.

"It is not just the restaurants but also the price hike of essentials due to which our business sees a downslide. The poor cannot afford to arrange weddings in community centres in such situations," Latif said.

He also said the location of the centre, inside an alley in a residential area, is an added disadvantage. The only provision for fire breakouts is water.

"As it is located within a residential area, people in the surrounding places are bound to come forward with water in case a fire breaks out," he said.

The above community centres have a trade license by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

Latif said that DCC officials

inspected the site before granting him the license.

"We got the license to locate inside a residential area on condition that we will not use it for meetings, use loudspeakers or play music," he said.

When contacted, Akteruzzaman Khan, the Deputy Chief Revenue Officer of DCC agreed that the site of a business enterprise is inspected before granting it a trade license.

When asked about the location of a community centre within a residential area, he said it is permitted if a No Objection Certificate (NOC) is submitted to confirm that the local residents do not have any objection to the location of a community centre within their locality.

9x6

9x2