

Not beautification, but survival

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be thought of at the time of planning. For example, when Gulshan was planned, there was the DIT Market I and DIT Market II. There was enough parking space which is now gradually decreasing. There has to be a basis for this. It is not just Kemal Attaturk Avenue. Banani Road 11 is also commercial now.

Professor Khairul Anam, Department of Architecture, BUET: I have a question for RAJUK experts. ARAJUK planner has just said how everyone is out to grab land in Gulshan area. My question is, isn't the lake area under RAJUK jurisdiction? Is it still public property? How can we say it is not being used? There is the lake, the road, the greenery. How can we say we're not using it? It is passive recreation for those living in the urban setting. We are using it. How can we say that since it is not being used it is being returned to the original owner? RAJUK has taken the entire area. The owners were paid off. How can the land go back to them?

Chairman, RAJUK: I first want to thank the students for their presentation. They have thought and studied very deeply.

Those who we have called land-grabbers so long have now turned into land pirates. They used to use the law before, but now they use muscle power, hoodlums. They are endeavouring to take over government land.

RAJUK did acquire this land, but later many owners filed cases with the court and got their land back from RAJUK. They are now randomly constructing, encroaching upon Gulshan Lake.

Does that mean even after that, won't RAJUK or the government try to preserve these lakes? Of course they will. But it is also true that we weren't as conscious previously as we are now. Had we all been conscious, Dholai Khal wouldn't have vanished today. Many things have been thus damaged, but whatever is left should be preserved. However, the rules and regulations we have in place today render the government helpless at times.

In China, in Singapore, urban land is government land. Nothing can be done without permission. In Beijing I saw a 30-ft. road which is now being made 300 ft. There were hundreds of houses on either side, but these are being removed. The people are being rehabilitated in flats and other lands. They are going away. But in Dhaka, if I make a seven-foot road, three feet more, I will have to face 10 court cases which will include three injunctions.

Anyway, a law has now been passed for the preservation of these lakes and their surrounding areas. You will have read in the newspapers that when a man recently tried to use his muscle-men to take over land in the lake forcefully, RAJUK prevented him and a case was filed against him. Arrest warrants were issued and RAJUK even removed the mud from the lake, but they too have filed a case against us saying that RAJUK has robbed them of their land. So this is the situation.

Architect Lailun Nahar Ikram: My knowledge was that the river belongs to nobody. It is administered by another organisation. So all of the four lakes that we have seen are khals having taken off from the Balu river at a place called Gazaria Khan. The culvert to Dhanmondi Lake is no longer seen as a connection.

We know the problems of the lake, but looking into the prospects for the livability of Dhaka City is more important for us.

I had the opportunity to look at the water bodies of Dhaka City as a study for integrating inland water for Dhaka's urban transport. We found 15 lakes, four of which are here. The question of water taxi has come up in the presentation of the students.

As for Sonargaon Lake, my friend from Sonargaon Hotel has said there is in fact no lake at all because the lake belonged to someone else. But then again, there was a proposition to have a river terminal, a terminal at Maghbazar at the Badda Lake to ease the traffic.

So we were looking at these water bodies from the point of utilising or having utility for the water bodies, for Dhaka's livability. We were looking into the problems of these water bodies from a remedial point of view. At that time we spoke of multi-modal transport system of which water bodies in Dhaka are very important in the sense that the whole of Dhaka City is surrounded by rivers including these lakes, these four lakes which are, in fact, khals.

In looking into pollution, the point of retention of these lakes is important. We have to look how we can retain water throughout the seasons. There is the question of how we can have aeration in these water bodies so we can reduce pollution. There will be manmade pollution and also atmospheric pollution.

We have to think about conservation of these lakes. In other countries there is something called lake heritage. How can we enlist these lakes as part of lake heritage and water heritage for Dhaka City?

I have been part of what is called the Bangladesh Water Vision. We are a very river-focussed country where we always talk about the floods and rivers. There are the watersheds which are equally important. So the relation of the lake with the city is very important which I found missing in the presentation.

Syed Azizul Haque, Executive Engineer, Public Works Department: From today's discussion we have come to know that Sonargaon Hotel dumps its waste water into the lake. What steps will WASA take?

Imtiaz Ahmed Siddiqui, Sonargaon Hotel isn't dumping its waste into the lake, only part of its washing water is going into the lake. The total waste goes through the WASA line.

Engineer Sheesh: It is the responsibility of DoE to see to the waste being disposed of by Sonargaon. Of course, looking at things in that manner won't solve the problem. There is a civil society. They can file a court case.

Dr. Abdus Sattar Syed, consultant for UNICEF: When there is a big hotel, there will be washing water from there. That is okay. Every city will have such things. The point here is this, whether the waste water that is going into wherever it is going, is going to a treatment plant and bringing out effluent according to environmental standards. If not, why not?

Imtiaz Ahmed Siddiqui: I don't know if it is treated or not, but our laundry plant is shifting from here in June and it will be connected to the main WASA line. And anyway, the place where the washing water is going now is hardly a lake. It can be called an open sewer of WASA.

Mahmud Shahrir, student of Architecture, BUET: We had a solution to the water treatment problem in these lakes. We can solve this problem though a water treatment plant. But the problem here is that it is very expensive. It's about 20 million dollars for a single plant which can work up till 50 years. If it is implemented, we can ensure the water which is treated will be clean and pure.

Masrifa, Student of Architecture, BUET: What is the justification of the swimming pond made at new Road 27(old), breaking the continuity of Dhanmondi Lake?

Iqbal Habib: Any development, especially lake development and management, is a very complex procedure. There are a lot of stories we don't know behind this complexity. This particular swimming pond and health club was supposed to be besides the mosque at Road No. 7. But there were a lot of objections from the mosque committee and others. So it has been shifted to Road 27. That is the reason why it is there. But the termination was not made. It was naturally terminated at that point of the road.

Zahid, student of Architecture, BUET: Being an architect, how could you accept this, blocking the view? We are compromising with the situation. We are not considering the architecture or the broader aspect of the planning.

Architect Abdul Mohaymen, Director, Urban Development Directorate: I raise the issue about the prospect of water taxi which was proposed much earlier. Can the students propose how this water taxi system can be developed by linking the lakes together and re-excavating the link between the Dhanmondi Lake and the Begunbari Khal which has been termed as the Sonargaon Lake? How can that be developed?

If this water taxi system is developed, RAJUK can also propose some sort of building height regulations on these lakefronts so that the view can be enjoyed.

It is just like the building height regulation in front of the roads, in relation to the width of the road and in relation to the width of the lakes when these lakes would be properly maintained.

Dr Nizam: It is a very interesting suggestion to link the four lakes.

Student: Banani Lake goes by the side of BRAC Center to Gulshan Lake and then on to Badda Lake. Then you can go to another river under the Rampura Bridge. And from that side it is connected to the Begunbari Lake. These are mainly blocked by some dams and roads, so if these are opened, then perhaps a water taxi route can be made and the water will be flowing instead of being stagnant.

Kazi Golam Hafiz: Due to certain mistakes in the past, all the roads have box culverts, not bridges. What happens by making box culverts, is that the water channel closes. If we made bridges instead, then perhaps there could be water taxis and this linkage. These lakes get connected in the rainy season, but due to these box culverts, the water cannot go.

Professor Shamimuzzaman Basunia, Department of Civil Engineering, BUET: Today I feel proud that a group of BUET architecture students conducted such a study. I am in doubt whether from our department where I have been teaching for about 35 years, whether any group of students can carry out such a task with such responsibility. I want to personally thank you all for this.

What are the prospects of the lakes? We all know what the prospects are, what the problems are. I find that there is only one problem. If all the Dhaka residents had feelings for one another, if they had a bonding, the problem would be solved. The lake involves with everyone.

There is a saying, whatever is to be done, will be done by the tiger. The tiger here is the government. We look to the government to do everything. But we can't just blame the government for everything. We have to have the will. Unless we, the public, participate, all these studies and such will lead to nothing. What happens here? If one person raises an objection, the other challenges him, "What's it to you?" With out public participation, nothing can

be done, be it fixing the traffic congestion or any other problem.

This government has some sort of consciousness concerning Dhanmondi Lake. The fact that we have this feeling now is a beginning. In the future if we continue in such efforts, I see a positive future ahead.

Culverts and bridges are both drainage structures. Culvert is a pure drainage structure. Bridges are for providing navigational facilities. This is the difference. It is not that bridges have to be big and culverts small. On the way to Savar the bridges have been improved, but before they were a bit hump shaped. These were bridges with canals flowing below on which big boats would sail. If we want, culverts can be changed into bridges in a very short time without much expenditure.

Mohammed Kamal Hossain, an engineer from BSC: My questions are about water extraction. We often find our lakes become waterlogged which leads to bad smell and pollution. What water extraction is being done? Or, what steps are we taking in this regard?

Professor Dr. Golam Rahman, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, BUET: I am proud that our students and teachers have done this three-week study.

Someone a little while ago said, a lake doesn't belong to anybody. Individual land does belong to individuals. Then, there are the government bodies which own various plots of land and occupy them. The Ministry of Land holds the power of the land. It can't be said that any land has no owner.



PHOTO: STAR

Two students of the Department of Architecture, BUET make a presentation at the workshop.

It was also said that if any land is acquired for some specific purpose and remains utilised, the land will go back to its owner. Once a piece of land is bought for a specific purpose, it has to be used for the designated purpose. If not, a case can be filed and the land will go back to its owner.

In our development philosophy, what we do when we like a certain site, we just remove the trees and fill in all the canals and water bodies there. This is an old philosophy which prevailed in our sub-continent for some time. Now there is a change somewhat, that we won't simply cut down all the trees and fill up everything.

Dhanmondi Lake has been excavated and paths constructed around it, forming a very beautiful environment. Who will manage the lake now? In other countries of the world, there are lake management authorities, there are heritage authorities, but we don't have any such body. I see that the Anglers' Society in Dhanmondi is very strong. They monitor where polluted water is coming from and other details and send this information to various places. I think there is an Anglers' Society in Gulshan too. We have to think of a strategy to adopt in order to save the lakes.

Dr. Nizam: The architects of Dhanmondi Lake development have a proposal of a two-tier management body.

Mamunur Rahman: Why is the encroachment and wastage management problem not strictly dealt with by the concerned agencies, and what effective ways are considered to make up the deficiencies of the violators and concerned agencies?

Zahurul Haque, Deputy Town Planner, RAJUK: Actually development control is down in two parts. Where there is leased property, the development control is done in accordance to the terms and conditions of the lease. Where the ownership of certain land in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara is with RAJUK or the government, if anyone violates the terms of the lease in these plots, they are dealt with in accordance to the terms of the lease.

Then there are the Building Construction or BC rules which have come through the BC Act. That is used too to control particular buildings.

RAJUK gives the planning permission based on the land use in the master-plan. So there are three parts in the control.

It is not that there is no control. It is sometimes that perhaps the enforcement is not so strong. That is why these problems crop up.

Enforcement lies on the shoulders of many. DoE is responsible for pollution. Building Act enforcement is with RAJUK. When there is violation, RAJUK demolishes the building. RAJUK is doing so, demolishing unauthorised buildings.

Professor Rahman: RAJUK is the guardian of Dhaka City. Unless a view is set as to how these lakes will be developed and maintained, these will gradually be ruined. We can request RAJUK to see how it can quickly prepare and adopt such plans for implementation.

Kazi Golam Hafiz: In the past we had many setbacks, but we have to take steps from today to ensure that we don't have any setbacks in the future. This public awareness will play a very positive role.

About six or seven months ago, we had a consulting architectural firm, Vitti, to which we gave responsibility regarding the two lakes at Gulshan and Baridhara and also another lake which hasn't been mentioned here. That is the large one at Uttara. We have already assigned Vitti to the job of developing these three lakes. Considerable groundwork has been done in this regard. We have received preliminary results too.

Emadul Islam, Superintendent Engineer, RAJUK: I want to talk about encroachment. We dealt with encroachment at Dhanmondi Lake vehemently. Our bulldozers even knocked down part of Sher-e-Khwaja's house. Then we saw that encroachment was at a height in Gulshan and Banani and so the government formed a committee with myself as the Convenor. The committee's responsibility is to recover land encroached along the lake at Gulshan and Banani. I started work accordingly with my committee about eight or ten months ago only to see that most of those houses on the sides of the lake belong to renowned elite who encroached about four to five kathas of extra land each. They simply added to their too their own land. I took my forces and gave notices to these gentlemen, telling them they would have to leave the encroached land. They wondered who this guy was. Some of them didn't even allow us on their premises. We managed to recover some of the land and this is under our protection. Our consultants are planning there.

In some houses there were foreigners and they didn't allow us in. This included persons of the German Embassy and the Japan Embassy. We told them that we weren't there to evict them. We explained their landlord had illegally encroached on additional land which didn't belong to him. We wanted to recover that land. The landlords wouldn't come to the open. They used the foreigners against me, bringing accusations that I was violating the Geneva Convention in trying to evict foreign embassies from the country. They complained to the Prime Minister, the President, brought the issue to Internet. It was as if foreign aid to Bangladesh would stop unless I was stopped. I approached the Foreign Ministry. We had allotted land to the foreign diplomatic missions, but these plots by the lake were allocated to individuals.

The government has imposed a law to stop encroachment, Natural Water Bodies Preservation Act. When we ruthlessly enacted this law, excavating the land filled by a certain man, the question was raised, where did the soil go? One of my officers filed a case in this regard. When he went to the court, he was accused by a group of armed gangsters who said they would kill him then and there. We filed a GD in this regard with the police station. So there is a law, but it has its shortcomings. I request that these laws be strengthened.

Professor Ameen: I am alarmed at the picture placed by RAJUK before us. We have seen what is happening to the lakes. What is a lake? It is not a road. It is not just a water body. A lake is nature. If we have to deal with a lake, we have to deal with the components of nature. This includes trees, birds, the

sky, water, etc. It should be by the nature, of the nature, for the nature. We see in studies of lakes, they study the variety of trees around the lake, the species, the species of birds, which bird likes to sit on which tree, etc. We perhaps can do this. We don't want to do anything to upset the balance of nature of the lake.

The RAJUK officials have said how certain roads and structures are constructed for one purpose, the force of demand and need often changes the purpose of these roads and structures. Even now we see beautiful water on two sides of the road from Tongi to Ashulia. There is a beautiful road too. RAJUK has reportedly taken initiative to preserve this, to maintain the natural environment. But today we see a floating restaurant there. If tomorrow five more fast food places are set up in the water there, will RAJUK say we succumbed to the pressure, the demand of the people? The next year we will 50 more fast food shops there. The next year it will be Elephant Road. The next year it will be Panthapath. So what do we want from RAJUK? Can't RAJUK give us this security? We know RAJUK has its problems, but unless we get this guideline today, the assurance that these will be protected, then why are we discussing this? Is this just a discussion for the sake of discussion? It will only be meaningful planning if we can go ahead with this farsightedness. We don't want another Panthapath, we don't want another Elephant Road which are commercial areas with no parking lot. The road in front of some shops is only 23 feet wide.

many others that are involved so we shouldn't just concentrate on RAJUK. You can plan something and start off something beautifully, but if it is not well maintained, then it will not work.

Community participation is very important. The people of Gulshan, Banani and around the other lakes, they themselves have to be aware of all the problems. They have to be proud of their city. They have to be proud of their environment to make it work. They have to feel that something wrong is happening, then create pressure groups and make it right.

The authorities are very important. It is not only RAJUK. There is DESA, WASA, Department of Environment, Public Works Department and other service organisations. All these departments should work in coordination with each other. Unless that is done, I don't think it is possible to make these lakes work. So if we think of Dhanmondi Lake as a pilot project because it's the first of its kind, the people who are attached to this project should give more thought to how to maintain it. It is implemented. It might be a good design, it might be a bad design. That's not important. Now that it's built and it's going to start working soon, I think a lot of thought has to be given on to how these departments are going to be working together.

Dr. Nizam: This question of coordination among those who run the city has been raised in every seminar and we are hopefully ultimately going to make a dent. Mayor Hanif has been talking about a governance. Now RAJUK is doing something, WASA is doing something, DESA is doing something. There is no coordinating authority. So if six children of a mother behave in six different ways, the mother will lose all her hair. And that is what is happening to the city of Dhaka.

Dr. Abdus Sattar Syed: There is a body I think about the environment of Dhaka City. There is a committee, I suppose.

Engr Emdad: The Minister of Local Government is the Convenor of the committee for the coordination of Dhaka City. Dhaka's Mayor is the Vice Convenor. RAJUK and others involved in the urban bodies are all involved in this.

From the point of view of RAJUK, the main responsibility of Dhaka City development lies with the Public Works Department. Yet the Local Government Minister has been made the coordinator. Naturally that leads to a problem there. Since the main tasks are under the Public Works Department, then the Public Works Ministry could be given responsibility of the committee or either the Prime Minister or the President could look directly into it as in several other countries.

Dr. Nizam: We can clearly see a lack of coordination among the different cells. No one is listening to the other. This is a fact. So we have to sort this out.

Kishwar Habib, Level 4 Student of Architecture: How acceptable is Sonargaon Lake as a lake because there are plans for high rise buildings there?

Dr Yasuo Obikane, JICA expert: I am assigned from JICA. You are talking about linkage between different organisations. In fact, I am assigned by IFCDR to make a linkage of RHD and BWDB. How do we implement it? How do we make it effective? I am interested in the matter and that is why I came here after seeing the notice for this in the newspaper.

Dr. Nizam: We have some common grounds, now that we have recommendations of the four groups now. All the groups want the lake to be demarcated. So this is one major issue that we have agreed on. We have agreed on the issue of stopping environment pollution. If sewerage is at all allowed to be emptied in the lake, it should be treated. If there is development, it should be controlled and managed by a management committee. Another area we have agreed on is to ensure the life of the lake, even during dry season. These are the four areas we have agreed on.

The fifth area another group mentioned, I think the students have done an excellent work. This will be one resource area RAJUK or private developers or whoever can fall back on.

The objective of this seminar was to create awareness. I think we have created a good degree of awareness among those who are not directly involved with lake development. Number two was to provide a common platform for different professions. I think we have done that very well. We have had architects, we have had engineers from RAJUK, from other areas, we have had private citizens who have general interest in the topic, we have had scouts, planners. I think this is the type of thing we ought to do more and more.

One problem we face in this country is that every sector is working on its own. Then we have either duplication of work or we have conflict with each other. So if we can have more platforms like this where we can discuss, then even if the architect is designing the whole thing, let him take the opinion of the planners, of the engineers, of the sociologists, of the environmentalists. Then he can get a more effective and better result in his design. Thank you all for being here.

