

A lake plundered

200 acres of Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake area grabbed with Rajuk 'clearance'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

City dwellers wonder whether the Rajuk can save the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake from the new breed of land-hungry developers and influential persons who have claimed ownership of acres of the water body.

Chilling is the truth. Equipped with documents, obtained through administrative and legal loopholes, many of these influential men have already plundered the lake and many more are waiting to take it over. Every now and then, truckloads of earth descend on the water body, only to be protested by conscious citizens and sometimes stopped by some helpless officials of the Rajuk. But these people are not always able to hold ground in the face of official influence and money power of the grabbers.

According to official sources, a vast area of the 200-acre Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake has fallen into the hands of such claimants. Moreover, surveyors said the fast-shrinking lakeside land now available measures only about 25 acres. Under an uncertain development project undertaken by the Rajuk, about 93

acres of land would be required to make a decent walkway with green space along the lake.

Engineers, architects, city planners of different government and non-government organisations believe that the Rajuk is enmeshed in its own misdeeds. Its corrupt officials are to be blamed, and nobody else, for the sorry sight of the lake, they said.

Over the years, Rajuk planners have satisfied the lust of military brass, political leaders, bureaucrats and influential persons, and kept revising official maps to allocate residential plots in the lake. They have filled the lake in the name of building a walkway and protecting the lake but in a short while, allocated plots there virtually "deceiving" residents, who built their homes overlooking the lake.

They have issued numerous "no objection certificates" to the gangs of land grabbers who have leverage upon various government offices to de-requisition a state-owned property. In the process, hundreds of acres of public land -- some specified as ecologically important -- have been turned into concrete jungles.

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PM asks ministers to stop entertaining party men at Secretariat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has instructed ministers to immediately restore working atmosphere at their offices and avoid entertaining party leaders and activists during office hours at the Secretariat.

Sources said she noticed that party MPs along with large number of local leaders and activists gather every day at the chambers of ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers for various purposes, apparently hampering official activities.

Besides the MPs, central and local leaders of the party also visit the offices of ministers and spend long time for lobbying, discussing local problems and also for gossip. There are also disturbances by professional lobbyists who go there for various purposes such as business contracts, jobs and postings.

BNP sources said yesterday the prime minister also asked party MPs during iftar with them recently not to visit ministers at the Secretariat along with party men. She advised them to meet ministers on prior

appointment and submit programmes and projects for their respective constituencies in writing so that ministers can take appropriate steps.

The PM also advised ministers to sit in party central office and front organisations' offices by rotation so that activists can tell their problems and seek solution.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior minister said it has become very difficult for him to work in his office due to gathering of party men.

He mentioned that he has asked party men to meet him at his official residence but it is not working because they think that meeting ministers at the Secretariat is the best way to get things done instantly.

He apprehended that it would be difficult to "complete the 100 days' tasks" due to frequent disturbances by party men.

Secretariat sources said those who had emerged powerful lobbyists during Awami League rule are now having a bad time, but they are trying to continue their work with the help of a section of influential BNP men.

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Bill placed in JS to scrap spl security for Hasina, Rehana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bill seeking repeal of the special law providing lifelong security to Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana, the two daughters of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, was introduced in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed tabled the bill.

The law, enacted in June last year, also provided them with other state

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Bonn talks tougher on day two

US troops dig in near Kandahar, hit "Taliban compound"

AFP, Bonn

Anti-Taliban Afghan factions tried to hammer out a power-sharing deal on the second day yesterday of a historic conference in Germany, as US Marines consolidated their position in southern Afghanistan.

After an upbeat start to the talks Tuesday at a hilltop hotel outside Bonn, some 30 anti-Taliban Afghan delegates from four separate groups Wednesday began what delegates and UN officials warned would be a tough round of negotiations.

"An entire, full agreement on every single issue may not be possible in this meeting," the UN deputy special representative for Afghanistan, Francesco Vendrell, told a press conference.

He said one of the major difficulties was the proposal for a UN-mandated multinational security force, an idea rejected by the powerful Northern Alliance, whose troops hold Kabul.

Sultan Boniad, the Alliance-affiliated Afghan consul in Berlin, also warned that progress could be slow.

The four groups at the UN-organised conference are:

- the Northern Alliance, a loose coalition of factions mainly drawn from the Uzbek, Tajik and Hazara minorities;

- the Rome-based group of former king Mohammed Zahir Shah, seen as a rallying point for Pashtun tribes of the south;

- the so-called Peshawar group of

mainly Pashtun exiled leaders, considered close to Pakistan;

- and the Cyprus group, backed by Iran.

Another potential sticking point is expected to be the sharing between the groups of key cabinet posts such as defence, interior and finance.

In Berlin, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder warned in a speech before parliament against taking the war on terrorism to countries beyond Afghanistan, in particular against "new targets in the Middle East."

On Monday, US President George W Bush delivered a blunt warning to Iraqi President Saddam Hussein "to let (UN) inspectors back in his country to show us that he is not developing weapons of mass

destruction".

Asked what he would do if Saddam refused, Bush replied: "He'll find out."

It was the latest in a series of US barbs at Iraq, which remains on a US list of countries accused of sponsoring terrorism.

Other US officials, including Secretary of State Colin Powell, have refused to discount the possibility of targeting other countries, including Iraq, in the global war on terrorism once the Afghan campaign is over.

Washington's European allies, including Britain, its closest backer, have strongly opposed such a move, which could anger Arab states and weaken the UN-built anti-terrorism

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Govt revises import target for urea fertiliser

RAFIQ HASAN

The Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) will float fresh international tenders for import of 1.50 lakh tons of urea fertiliser, as the previous tender schedules in the second and third phases have been cancelled.

The fresh tenders will be invited in two phases with 75,000 tons in each. The government also lowered the import target by 20,000 tons, sources in the BCIC said.

Earlier, the government had put out the import of 1.70 lakh tons of urea to international tenders in the second and third phases.

The BCIC took an initiative to import 3.20 lakh tons of fertiliser in four phases -- one lakh in the first

phase, one lakh in the second, 70,000 tons in the third and 50,000 tons in the fourth.

The tender process of the first

and fourth phases remained valid, but the tender schedules of second and third phases were cancelled

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PM tells JS Power tariff to be raised

UNB, Dhaka

The government would increase the power tariff in the country, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia informed parliament yesterday.

The past Awami League government took the decision in last March to raise power tariff, but did not implement it due to the election, she said during the PM's question time.

Replying to a supplementary question from Shahidul Islam (BNP), Khaleda said: "The government is now implementing the decision of the previous Awami League government to raise the power tariff."

The Awami League government thought that they would win the election and then raise the power tariff, she observed.

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Arrest of Shahriar Kabir Police get nod to file revision case against stay on remand

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The District Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday gave permission to the Deputy Commissioner (Detective) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police to file a revision case with higher court for cancellation of the stay order on remand of noted writer and columnist Shahriar Kabir.

This followed a prayer seeking

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HC rule on DU VC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday issued a rule on Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof. Anwarullah Chowdhury asking him to explain under which authority he is holding the office of the Vice Chancellor.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Winter is a fashionable month that allows men to don jackets, blazers and scarves and look sophisticated. This week's cover story of the SWM takes a look at trends this winter and options available for the stylish Bangladeshi male.

Toxic fumes from motor vehicles and mud particles sent out of the excavated roads in front of the New Market spread a smoky blanket in the area.

AL calls hartal Dec 2 Series of agitation programmes to protest move to scrap spl law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) yesterday announced a series of agitation programmes including a hartal in the city on December 2 to protest the government move to repeal the Father of the Nation's Family Members Security Act, 2001.

Once the act is scrapped in the Jatiya Sangsad, AL President Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana, the two surviving daughters of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, would no longer be under a lifelong special security cover.

The eight-hour general strike would be enforced from 6am to 2pm in the capital next Sunday. The move represents a complete reversal of previous AL stance. While in

power, the Awami League had promised not to call hartal even if it was in opposition.

Just a day after the cabinet approved a bill seeking scrapping of the act, the AL finalised the agitation programmes at a joint emergency meeting of the party's Central Working Committee, Presidium and Advisory Council held in the city yesterday.

Abdus Samad Azad, a Presidium member, chaired the more-than-an-hour-long meeting held at the AL Election Office at Dhanmondi.

The agitation programmes include daily demonstrations in front of the party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue by different front organisations of the party and

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Stuck with only the form of democracy, its substance eluding us
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Pakistan should recast its Afghan policy