

Lake development plan still shelved

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The Lake Development Project of Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara has remained pending with the Planning Commission since the submission of the project concept paper by Rajuk in 2000.

"We submitted the project concept paper to the Planning Commission in 2000 and still awaiting approval from them," said Rajuk's Chief Engineer Emdadul Islam.

"The Lake Development Project gets priority from the Prime minister's office," added the chief engineer.

The project was designed to protect water bodies of Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara under the Wetland Protection Act 2000. With land-grabbers encroaching the areas surrounding the lakes, the project has not seen the light of day. Part of the Banani Lake has been grabbed recently.

The marshy area was filled in and bamboo poles were sunk to cordon the area on Road No. 23/C. Rajuk demarcated 250 acres of the lake area in Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara and Uttara at an estimated cost of Tk 105 crore.

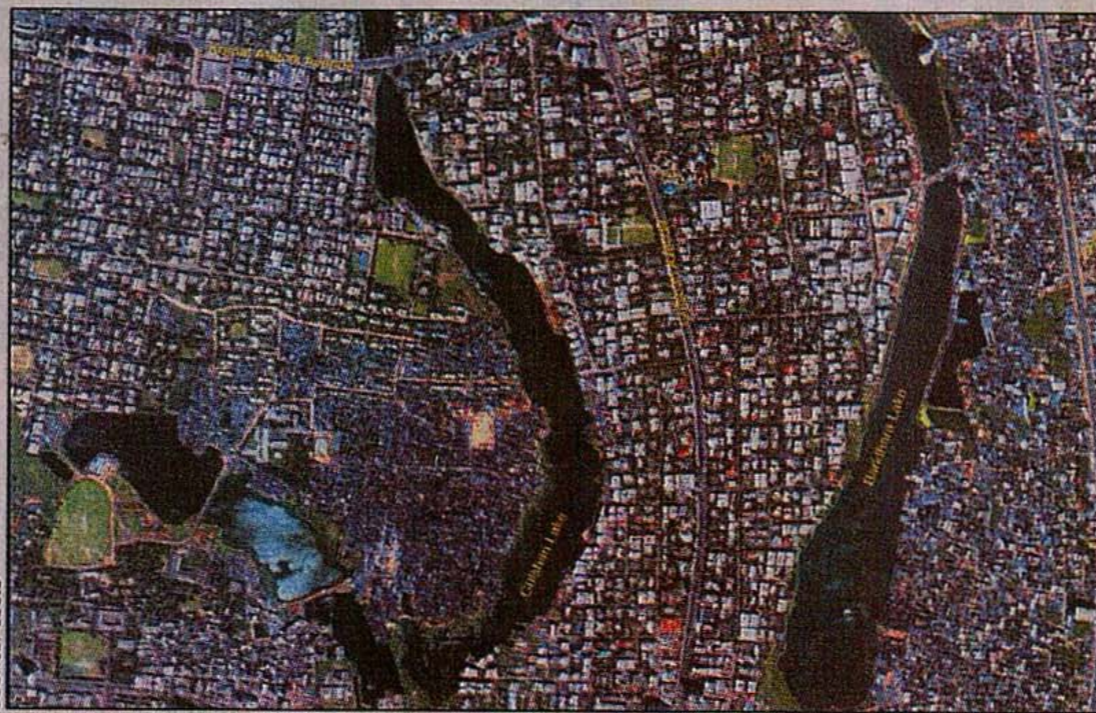
"Two hundred acres of the total lake areas are in Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara and 50 acres in Uttara," said Zahid Hassan Faruque, director of the Lake and Bridge Development Project.

According to the project concept paper, the project will help in the beautification of the city, conserve wetland, open spaces and natural environment, improve social and civic amenities, develop amusement facilities and reduce traffic jam.

"We need to widen the bridges over these lakes with the increasing traffic. As the bridges are narrow, they cause a bottle neck in traffic resulting in congestion," the project director said.

The reconstruction of bridges and culverts is estimated to cost Tk 33.68 crore. The bridges are to be constructed at six points -- Gulshan 2 to Baridhara link, Gulshan 1 to Badda link, Kemal Ataturk to Gulshan 2, Shooting Club to Badda, Mohakhali to Gulshan 1 and Manarat School to Badda.

Rajuk has to acquire land at a cost of Tk 38.74 crore to build walkways along the lake in Badda as this area does not fall under Rajuk's jurisdiction.



An aerial view of the two lakes that are threatened by encroachment due to delay in implementation of development plan (left) and waste filling up a part of the lake.



The breakdown of the estimated cost shows that Tk 28.93 crore is set aside for lake development including construction of walkways along the demarcated

lake area, lakeside protection, afforestation and amusement facilities like cruising.

The reconstruction cost includes drainage, inspection

pits, shifting of gas pipes and electrical poles and lines. The consultation fee is estimated at Tk 1.27 crore, which includes measuring water quality of the lake

and how to retain its quality and managing wastewater.

The consultant's job will include finalisation of the inventory of the ownership of lake land

and land adjacent to the lake.

The contingency cost is estimated at Tk 50 lakh. Meanwhile, Rajuk has already constructed a walkway along part of the Gulshan

and Uttara lakes from their own funds. "The implementation of this project is imperative to stop lake encroachment," the chief engineer said.

26 Dhaka Zoo inmates count their last days



Aged lions roam feebly about the moat at the zoo in Mirpur.

The animals earmarked with age are pairs each of mandrills, elephants and giri baboons; and one each of sambur, tapir, zebra, gayal, horse, chimpanzee, olive baboon, gharial, crocodile, black bear, hyena, great Indian horn bill and ostrich

SULTANA RAHMAN

At least 26 animals awaiting death due to old age at the Dhaka National Zoo in Mirpur.

"Life expectancy for those in captivity is far below than those living freely," said a zoo official. "The average age of animals in captivity ranges between 16 and 65 depending on the species," he added.

The zoo authorities have become cautious of aged animals after the death of a rhino a few months ago.

"We have already drawn the attention of the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock about these animals, if the animals die it will be natural death, we won't be responsible for it," said Mafizur Rahman, Curator of the Zoo.

The animals ear-marked with

age are pairs each of mandrills, elephants and giri baboons; and one each of sambur, tapir, zebra, gayal, horse, chimpanzee, olive baboon, gharial, crocodile, black bear, hyena, great Indian horn bill and ostrich.

Some of them have reached the average age much earlier and are not a pleasant sight to visitors at the zoo. On a visit to the zoo, it was found that these animals were looking exhausted and fatigued and looked hardly alive. Caretakers say that they sleep most of the time and very rarely move.

"When we try to feed them, they do not respond and there is nothing we can do to cheer them up," said a caretaker who is in charge of the monkey family. The only chimpanzee at 26 has reached its peak.

It was alleged that apart from

these animals deteriorating because of age, authorities are not aware if an animal is seriously ill until it dies.

With the death of some prominent animals, most cages are empty. People are less interested in visiting the zoo under these circumstances, said a zoo official.

"My children were eager to see the chimpanzee. They knew it to be an agile animal, but to their disappointment they found a sleeping chimp," said Nurullah from Jatrabari, who came to the zoo with his children.

The hospital has no provision for diagnosis or quarantine and the veterinary surgeon does not get sufficient time to treat animals properly, especially because they are sent to the hospital at the latter stages.

Community policing changes Lalmatia

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Lalmatia has become a better place to live for its 40,000 residents thanks to the introduction of community police in the area.

Deployed by the Lalmatia Co-operative Housing Society, the community police is maintaining security and also ensuring cleanliness of the area.

"The idea evolved as we wanted to improve the law and order situation of our community," said Mostafizur Rahman, president of the housing society adding that the entire community police system was established by the society along with the help of local ward commissioner Atiqul Islam Matin.

And since April 2004, when the community police swung into action, inhabitants of the area have really felt a welcome change in overall security, safety and sanctity.

Now no outsider can get into Lalmatia without convincing the guards at some 23 gates and guardrooms erected at entry points to the area.

"We spent around Tk 60,000 to set

up each gate," said Mostafizur Rahman.

There are 70 security guards, each equipped with a baton and a whistle. They are responsible for checking at the gates and also roam the entire locality in shifts. The community policemen have been given khaki uniform and green beret.

After starting their work, the community police have demolished makeshift shops that had mushroomed up everywhere in Lalmatia. The guards have also discouraged locals from scattering waste everywhere. They have issued a ban on sticking and pasting posters, leaflets, hanging of banners etc.

Nazma Huda who has been living in Lalmatia for a long time said that makeshift tea stalls were the hangouts for hoodlums and drug users in the past.

"They used to mug pedestrians and rickshaw passengers often. The incidents of mugging and snatching have reduced significantly since the arrival of the community police," she said.

"On an average there were at least two reports of mugging here every-

day before the introduction of the community police," said Mostafizur Rahman. Ward commissioner Matin also agreed that the law situation has improved and informed that the community police apprehended two muggers only the week before.

Even a few months ago, hawkers moved freely on the streets of Lalmatia. "Some of them might have been criminals in guise of hawkers. But now that fear has greatly subsided as the genuine hawkers have been given identity cards," said Saber Ahmed, a local resident.

At least 200 hawkers have been enlisted and given identity cards, informed the president of the housing society. He also said that residents have been instructed to interact with only those hawkers who are holding ID cards.

Special stickers have been issued for cars belonging to residents of the area for identification. For visiting vehicles and those without stickers, the driver has to write down his name, address and number of the car at the gate.

"This way, it has become easier for the guards to identify the vehicles.

Those of us who live in Lalmatia can enter without being checked. Minus the stickers there could have been unnecessary harassment," said a young man named Mithu.

Lalmatia was always known as a notorious place for noise pollution. "It has not disappeared totally but we have managed to reduce the level to a certain extent with the launching of community policing," said Matin.

"The number of cars as well as rickshaws entering the area freely have come down. It has given the residents a little respite from noise. Even the bells of rickshaws plying on the streets was annoying," he added.

The driving force behind this pleasant change, the Lalmatia Co-operative Housing Society Ltd. was established in 1953 to look after the well being of the community. Initially the organisation had been functioning properly but then came a prolonged spell of inactivity. However, the new committee that was elected in May 2003 has shown renewed enthusiasm in improving the living quality of the residents.

"Within a very short period of time, the success of community police in

Lalmatia has become a role model for others. At present the law and order situation here is much better compared to other parts of the city," said Shamsul Huda, a local resident.

Like him most of the residents are satisfied with the service and are happy to pay Tk 100 per month as maintenance fee for the community police system. "The money is worth it as it insures our security," Huda said.

Mostafizur Rahman acknowledged the support from the community as well as the local police administration. "We had received help from the Deputy Commissioner (West) also. He arranged a temporary police camp near the society's office. Also five policemen were employed to patrol the area with our guards."

Lalmatia-style neighbourhood-watch system has set an example for nearby communities. Recently residents of Picticulture Housing Society have planned to set up their own community police. Commissioner Matin said he was thinking of introducing the system in Iqbal road, another area of his constituency, too.

