

"Gulshan is not a residential area anymore," is the common complaint of its inhabitants.

"It's all shopping and banking and flats and restaurants," says Naina Karim, who grew up there as a child and returns every year to visit her parents who still live there. "Which isn't all bad, because it is sort of convenient to get things done, but it's just too commercial."

"And even within Gulshan, it takes forever to get anywhere," she continues, "not to mention anywhere else in the city! It's too congested, and even rickshaws aren't allowed in many parts now when they actually helped to get around." Naina remembers being able to walk down the road in front of her house and down to the park nearby. "Now, even that's not possible," she says.



Gulshan can boast of having some of the worst traffic jams in the city.

"Gulshan is highly overrated," thinks Rayan Ahmed, a resident of a flat in the area. "It's full of slums. Security guards are always loitering around annoyingly. And the dangling wires are only the visible side of the electricity problems there."

Local clubs and private schools in Gulshan contribute to the already hectic traffic with people never following any rules while driving and parking haphazardly everywhere. Guesthouses have sprung up in many parts of both Gulshan and Banani. These, along with the big markets, rent out their lucrative ground floors as reception areas and shops, having no regard for parking spaces to ease the traffic.

There is no point in barring rickshaws, says Rayan, as people who need to get anywhere just bribe their way through. According to him, the rules are not strict enough and the traffic is no better. To add to that is the new Gulshan circles-turned-signals. While people are still waiting to see how

they have helped the traffic situation in the area, Rayan says it is the "worst decision anyone could have made".

The biggest tragedy of Gulshan is its disappearing lakes. Even in the '80s, there were lakes all around Gulshan and lake view houses were the most envied of locations. But over the years the lakes have been filled in with high rises indiscriminately encroaching the water bodies.

Gulshan also seems to have more than its share of Dhaka's mosquitoes, think many of its inhabitants. Residents moreover complain about sex workers lined up in front of their apartment buildings late at night. Another common Gulshan scenario, especially during the rainy season, are the flooded roads. Shanties are next-door neighbours to posh independent houses, and garbage lies around on every street. Rush hour traffic, besides school closing times, include the lunch hours of garment workers employed in large factory buildings throughout the area. So much for the "diplomatic zone"!

Soon-to-be Bustling Baridhara

And so the "diplomatic zone" gradually moves to Baridhara.

Baridhara is, so far, relatively more peaceful, cleaner, and more "residential". Now that is where many embassies are and where the affluent choose to have their homes. But even here is the common problem of traffic congestion.

"It takes a long time to get places," says Sonia Rahman, a resident of New DOHS Baridhara. "And you can't always get transport because empty rickshaws and CNG scooters aren't allowed in the area."

"There's not enough space to really do anything here either," says Sonia. "It's already congested. But even then, a big mall is being built."

And so it begins. Is history repeating itself?



The chaotic tangle of Gulshan 2 is another major eyesore.