

Haque believes that the multi-storied malls that sprang up like mushrooms too could have been built according to a plan. "If you think you would turn the entire Mirpur Road that runs the length of Dhanmondi into a place where most of the city's markets would be concentrated then you would have to think of an alternative thoroughfare. You would have to take into account how many people would regularly visit the place and how they would get there," Haque contends.

Today, in Dhanmondi, as more and more land owners are handing over their plots to developers - more malls and other non-residential structures are being built around the four roads that Rajuk declared as fit for commercial use. After the declaration a few years back, the roadside plots saw a dramatic change. It was a bid to build a hefty fund by Rajuk that put the organisation in the course of 'regularisation'. Regularisation means giving permission for the plots to be used for commercial purpose. The conversion of roadside residential plots to commercial ones opened the floodgate to commercialisation of the area. And on top of that the issuance of trade licenses to schools, colleges and universities and even clinics further deteriorated the situation. Most appalling is that commercial establishments can be found deep within the Dhanmondi residential area.

"Once few roadside plots were being used for commercial purposes flouting regulations, the government had to go for 'regularisation'," explains Nazrul Islam, a professor in the Department of Geography and Environment, Dhaka University. While retracing the history, he says, "Dhanmondi was planned in the early 1950s as a purely residential area. Apart from the two high schools for girls and boys and a few playgrounds and lands for mosques, the area was divided into 800 plots with each plot measuring one *bigha*."



Pavements in Dhanmondi are for roadside shops and piling sand for construction.

The conversion of roadside residential plots to commercial ones opened the floodgate to commercialisation of the area. And on top of that the issuance of trade licenses to schools, colleges and universities and even clinics further deteriorated the situation.

"It was strange to think that the area had no commercial zone within walking distance. So the convenient retail stores became a necessity, and they began to emerge," says Islam. He observes that it is the market force that effected the final wave of change, which certainly substantially altered Dhanmondi. But he also stresses that its pure residential characteristic suffered from the very beginning when many houses were rented out to consular offices and other non-residential functions. "In the first phase, the residences of ministers and civil servants were rented out to embassies or UN offices," says Islam. He adds that it is the inaction of the concerned authorities that kept the process of commercialisation on the roll and eventually turned the residential area into 'mixed use zone'.

"Now, more than 50 per cent of the area is devoted to non-residential purposes," Islam confirms. Even the idea of having one house for one family has been toppled and now on the same one *bigha* plot a building consisting of 20 or more apartments stands. This kind of development too threatens to make the area dense, so dense that Dhanmondi would need alternative plans for roads as they are often choking with traffic.

"An apartment complex multiplies the number of family to 20, a college multiplies that to 1000 and a community centre or hospital facilitates a lot of people who would also arrive in cars--imagine how dense it makes the area," Islam tries to picturize the nightmare. He also worries over waste disposal of hospitals, as Dhanmondi is full of them.