



Clear pavements and clean apartment complexes in Dhanmondi are a rare sight these days.

"It is the ambition of the land owners and indifference on the part of the authorities that led us here," stresses Islam. "At one point when things got out of hand, Rajuk went for regularisation that earmarked Road No-4, Road No-27 and both Satmasjid Road and Mirpur Road for commercial development," he adds. Whatever is being built along these roads is no longer illegal and as Islam emphasises, "Whatever of commercial nature is built inside the area is illegal."

It is the DCC that issues 'trade licence' to any commercial venture, but it is Rajuk who is responsible for earmarking a plot for building that would run that commercial venture. Architect Haque thinks that the ill-co-ordinated efforts by Rajuk and DCC and other government organisations are breeding a lot of problems in urban planning as well as in execution of plans.

Islam believes that whatever regulation there is to be followed, if enforced properly, may help assuage the agony of the residents who are constantly victimised by the noise, traffic jam and other urban scourge.

"There are malls that have no parking lots. People get the permission for building a mall with a parking lot. It figures in the design but it disappears in reality," says Islam who has a phrase for this residentialisation of areas like Dhanmondi and Gulshan -- "Elite capture" -- as most installations are manipulated by the elite class. Haque thinks that any establishment that creates a nuisance should not be allowed in a residential area.

But, before we even ponder over whether commercialisation of a posh residential area is permissible to a certain extent, one should focus on the fact that Dhaka as a whole lacks a well-thought out plan. The plan that Rajuk chalked out with the help of a foreign company and with the aid of UNDP, is a face-saver. When DCC and Rajuk even fail to co-ordinate their acts, any plan is also bound to fall flat on its face. And if DCC keeps issuing trade licences and Rajuk keeps ignoring the structural faults of big commercial buildings, transformation of any residential zone to a 'mixed' one is inevitable. As Islam puts it, "The proper zoning out of areas according to functions is the key to a wholesome city."

Dhanmondi has fallen, now the last bastions like Gulshan and Baridhara are also on the line. Unless the authorities rush to rescue armed with proper plans and agendas, these enclaves are bound to meet the fate of once beautiful Dhanmondi.

Gulshan Lake



At last the fate of Gulshan Lake seems a bit on the brighter side. As Gulshan Society, comprising of representatives of Gulshan residents, recently met the Rajuk Chairman M Shahid Alam, he promised to take all-out measures to save the lake from deteriorating any further. Rajuk Chief Engineer Emdadul Islam said a project is being planned to remove all the link roads across the lake and construct six bridges in their place. Although there was a Supreme Court ruling that urged Rajuk to take immediate steps to protect the lake both from encroachment and waste dumping the implementation of the plans that Rajuk chalked out in 2000, did not receive the nod of the Planning Commission. The Rajuk concept paper includes reconstruction of bridges and culverts, drainage systems and relocation of electric poles, which is estimated to cost TK 33.68 crore, an amount, a recent newspaper report claims, will go to save the lake. The 200 acres of total lake area became a centre of attention when private encroachers threatened to fill out the lake bed. It is alleged by many that even Rajuk has developed several plots by filling parts of the lake that occupies a vast region. In the meeting with the Rajuk Chairman, civil bodies stressed the need to stick to the Dhaka Master Plan that clearly defines water bodies in and around the city as essential to its eco-system. It is a pity that even after promulgation of the Wetland Protection Act in 2000, the lake still runs the risk of being reduced. However, recently, Rajuk has taken steps to remove all the poles marking the areas encroachers were intent on grabbing. It is a positive sign to save the planned residential enclave.