

High-rise buildings lack parking space

SULTANA RAHMAN

Many high-rise buildings in the city are being constructed without adequate parking space violating the Building Construction Act.

Sources said the designs approved by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) are changed during construction of the buildings.

The monitoring cell of the Rajuk does not work properly to find the lawbreakers and take action against them, the sources alleged.

"Neither Rajuk officials nor the building owners bother to comply with the rules and keep adequate parking space in the high-rises," said an official in the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

ASM Ismail, assistant chief of the Department of Architecture, said it is clearly mentioned in the law that what should be the ratio between the size of a building and its parking space.

The Building Construction Act, which was formulated in 1952 and amended in 1996, says a commercial structure built on 200 square metres land requires at least 23 square metres parking space.

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Vehicles are parked alongside the streets in Dhanmondi blocking smooth flow of traffic as high rises do not provide adequate parking facilities.

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Urban planners blame both the high-rise owners and the architects who design beautiful skyscrapers but ignore parking facilities.

"We have proposed a new building construction code to check the violation of rules under which the building owners will have to take occupancy certificate on completion of construction," Ismail said.

"Utility services will not be provided without this certificate," he added.

Silver Tower in Gulshan-1 is one of the newly built high-rises that does not have adequate parking space. The 19-storey building housing some 50 offices has basement-parking facilities for only 24 vehicles.

PBL Tower at Gulshan 2 circle houses many offices and a university. Although the university has rented out three floors, there is only one underground parking space and one more beside the building for all three floors. If more parking space is required the tenants would have to pay an extra rent for same, said an insider.

The building constructed on 5,000 square metres should have parking space for at least 50 vehicles. The customers and clients of

the shops and offices in the building too need more space for parking.

MAH Selim, a BNP lawmaker and managing director of Silver Line Group, the owner of Silver Tower, said, "We will provide space for two vehicles of each office in the building. If more space is required, we will build another parking lot to accommodate more vehicles."

"The plan of the building was approved in 1998 when the idea of enough parking facilities was not considered so important," he said admitting that the parking space of Silver Tower is inadequate.

A number of high-rise buildings and shopping malls have been constructed in the congested Gulshan-1 where the roadside spaces and sidewalks are used as parking lots due to lack of parking spaces in most high-rises.

"We face trouble moving around the area as the footpaths are always occupied by vehicles parked illegally," said a resident of Gulshan. "High-rises are being built in this area one after another without proper plans."

Rajuk Chairman Md Shahid Alam said full compliance of the existing rules regarding building construction and parking space would not be possible without greater public awareness about it.

Hawkers' markets still fire-prone

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

Even after the New Bangabazar fire tragedy in Gulistan on November 21, most hawkers' markets in the city have not yet installed proper fire extinguishing systems in place.

In most cases, fire is caused by poor electrical wiring systems resulting in short-circuits, burning cigarette butts, electric irons which have been carelessly kept switched and similar acts of negligence.

These markets do not take basic precautionary measures like keeping a water reservoir, sand bags or fire extinguishers. There is also inadequate space between shops and four to five firemen can not move through them with their equipment during emergency.

Dhaka has around 100 hawkers' markets with the majority of them situated in Gulistan area. Most of the shops at these markets are makeshift ones built with low quality wood and tin. There is also no space between shops. Therefore when a fire starts it spreads rapidly from one shop to another.

The electric wires in these shops remain entangled and bring about catastrophic consequences during

a fire. When the blaze catches the stored clothes, the low quality tin simply melts with wood becoming the catalyst for greater intensity.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) owns some of the hawkers' markets while others belong to independent entrepreneurs. A few of these markets have shops made of concrete and are less threatened by a fire accident.

"Our market has space between shops. Besides, as the walls of the shops are made of concrete, fire can not pass from one shop to the next that easily," said Joyntal Abedin Junel, office secretary of Dhanmondi hawkers' market.

He however admitted that there was no proper fire extinguishing mechanism in the market.

Asked why they let customers smoke inside the compound of the market, one of the officials replied that as nothing had happened so far, they saw no reasons to stop the customers from smoking.

There are four hawkers' markets in the same area -- Bangabazar hawkers' market, Gulistan hawkers' market, Mohanogori hawkers' market and Adorsho hawkers' market. Four of them have individual associations but for major decisions, these

associations assemble under the same roof. Recently, they have agreed on intensifying precautionary measures to combat fire so that incidents like the fire at New Bangabazar can be avoided in future.

"We have experienced such tragedies before and that is why we are more cautious now. The fire incidents are mostly seen during winter. The last time a fire shook us was when the Bangabazar was destroyed on November 1995 during dawn. This time also, it has hit in the winter. As winter is high time for storing warm clothes, they are stacked on the lanes and because of that, the fire spreads rapidly," said chairman of Gulistan municipal hawkers, market Md Mozammel Haque.

"We do not let customers smoke inside the market. We have fire extinguishers in front of each lane and in our office rooms as well. There are tanks full of water near every lane. Our guards and staff are trained regularly by the fire service department on how to put out the blaze in emergency situations," said another official.

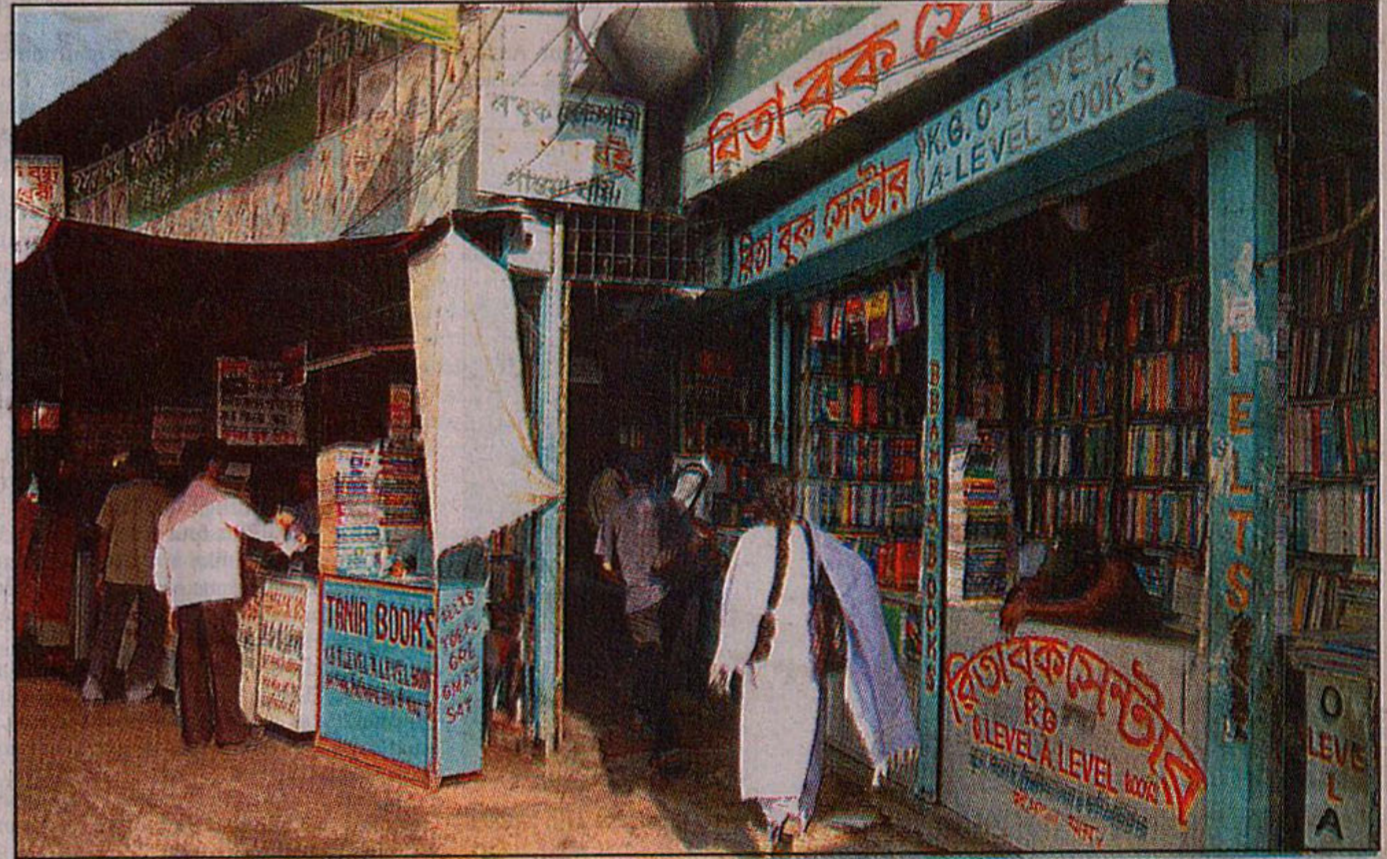
Rahman Miah, a shop owner of New Bangabazar said if they had concrete shops, maybe most shops

would have survived. The scarcity of water was pointed out as the main reason for the devastation. As most canals and ponds in the city have been filled up or encroached, fire fighters and people do not have easy access to water. In New Bangabazar's case, when the fire service personnel finally arrived with water, it was already too late.

DCC's executive engineer (bazaar circle) Syed Mozaffar Hossain said that they have plans to start visiting the markets, which are most prone to fire hazard, to warn them and will also ask the fire service department to run drills.

The passages at the back of New Bangabazar were totally blocked. That could have been a possible reason for such a large-scale devastation. Fire Service and Civil Defence officials also feel that the open gas pipes at the corner of the market were another main reason why the fire spread so quickly.

"Within one and a half months, a tender will be floated for reconstruction of the New Bangabazar according to instructions from the government. The market will be a two or three storied one with each shop getting 15 to 16 square feet space," informed Mozaffar.



Unaware of the dangers and hazards of fire, Nilkhet, Dhaka's most popular bookshop operates with no fire fighting system.

IKEBANA & BONSAI STIR INTEREST IN MANY

A three-day exhibition of famous Ikebana and Bonsai artists Maleka Khan and Sabir Sorwar Upol, members of the Bangladesh Bonsai Society started on December 10 and will conclude today at Sky-High Institute of Design, Dhanmondi. A ratio of 3:3:3 of soil, fertilizer and brick chips mingled to an interesting mixture over a flat pot, holds one of the most fascinating, engineered species and traditionally the living artwork called Bonsai. Arranging different colours of flowers in geometric order to make it look vivid is called Ikebana.

The growing interest of visitors about these species of plants, has prompted Sky-High to organise a ten-week course about these plants.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN