

Plan to privatise Shishu Park for more fun, more revenue

SYED TASHFİN CHOWDHURY

In order to improve the condition of Shaheed Zia Shishu Park, formerly known as Dhaka Shishu Park, Dhaka City Corporation is planning to hand it over to private operators.

DCC officials said almost all the rides in the children's park are now outdated. "These rides need extensive renovation. Some of the rides are running since the establishment of the park in 1979," said a senior official at DCC's Engineering Department.

"We feel the park should be renovated and modernised immediately," he added.

The children's park currently has 12 rides -- including merry-go-round, wonder wheel, benkino train, roller skating, trampoline, battery car, chair tower and flower cup ride which were installed by Japanese technicians back in 1979.

Regular visitors, however, complained that the rides have been in a run-down condition for the last few years. "Some of the rides are too dangerous for children," said Omi, a teenager who frequently visits the park.

Despite the fact that most of these rides have an overall life span of 10 years, the park authorities have been operating and maintaining them properly over the past 26 years, the DCC officials explained.

"It's true that most of these rides are rusty, but no accident took

place so far. As such we feel that privatising the park would make it more attractive," said a DCC official.

Last year a proposal to expand the park was submitted to the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. The proposal included

Adults who accompany children to the park complained that the rides have been in a run-down condition for the last few years, posing danger to users

installation of 16 more rides in the 15-acre children's park.

As the ministry is yet to respond to the proposal, the DCC is planning to improve the overall condition of the park by handing it over to the private sector.

But some city-dwellers are quite sceptic about the DCC plan.

"Privatisation may lead to higher prices of tickets and charges of rides," said Amirul Haq, a visitor.

Haq, a public servant, pointed out that already the ticket prices have been raised to Tk 8 from Tk 5 while the charge for each ride has been raised from Tk 4 to Tk 6.

"A further increase in ticket prices and ride charges may cause the park to lose most of its visitors from the lower and middle income groups," said Haq.

The DCC official however predicted that such problems may not occur.

A source said 5,000 to 6,000 people still visit the park daily. "If our visitors were that sensitive to prices, then we would have experienced a major decline in this number since the price hike that occurred in June last year," he said.

The official explained that the increase in prices were actually VAT (value-added tax). "Currently the park's annual income is Tk 2 crore," he said.

The official further pointed out that due to the popularity and location of the park, more revenue will be generated from the venue if privatised.

"We are currently concentrating on improving the overall condition of the park and transforming it into a well-equipped entertainment park for the children," said Sadek Hossain Khoka, the mayor of DCC.

DCC sources said the improvements may be made by October, 2006.



Children enjoying themselves on the merry-go-round in the park.



Vehicles parked on the walkway in front of Meena Bazar.

Meena Bazar paying fines for customers

IMRUL HASAN

To facilitate the customers and to promote goodwill, the authorities at Meena Bazar shopping complex pay the illegal parking fines of around 12 cars every day to the traffic police.

As Meena Bazar does not have any parking facility, customers have to keep their vehicles on the pavement. For this illegal parking, TIs (Traffic

Inspectors) or traffic sergeants fine them. The customers however, get the amount back from the Meena Bazar authorities on showing the fine receipt.

"The fine is fixed and the car owners are bound to pay despite possessing legal documents" said Kazi Jamil Islam, executive director of Meena Bazar. "We pay the penalty to the traffic police on behalf of our customers under our

extra facilities programme," he added.

Usually vehicles are fined between Tk100 to Tk 200 by traffic sergeants. However, the amount may go up to Tk 500 if a TI is on the spot.

"Sometimes the fine increases if the owner of a car argues with the police," said a salesman at Meena Bazar.

Meena Bazar customers felt that other shopping malls should also offer such facilities

as parking space in the city, especially at shopping centres, is not always available.

When asked why they did not arrange a parking facility or basement parking, Jamil said they could not provide the required area for car parking as space in the city was limited.

Meena Bazar was established in November 1, 2002. It receives some 4,000 customers every day, said sources.

Beautification project struggling

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The beautification project in the city has hit a snag reportedly due to a lack of seriousness on part of the chief supervising authority, the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

The beautification project was launched with the 13th summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) in mind. But the Dhaka City Beautification Cell (DCBC) has failed to take the necessary steps to revitalise the project which has remained idle for the last four months. The largest regional conference is scheduled for November. The DCBC was formed to supervise the project but its officials are unable to provide any

authentic information.

One official of the Cell told this correspondent that they have not added anything new under the beautification project. But in many places in the city, new projects have been undertaken targeting the upcoming SAARC summit.

The in-charge of DCBC was asked about the beautification work at Bijoy Sarani which is currently underway. But he expressed his ignorance about it.

"There is no such project to my knowledge. If anything is going on that is not part of our programme," said Haque.

Workers at the spot in question at Bijoy Sarani meanwhile informed that they were constructing a fountain under the

current beautification project.

The implementing authority of the fountain Advanced Add officials also contradicted the DCBC.

"We are working here with the approval from the DCC and DCBC. There is no scope for confusion. We have beautified the entire Bijoy Sarani and as a part of that we are now establishing the fountain," said Mizanur Rahman, director of Advanced Add.

The in-charge of DCBC claimed that there was no shortage of cooperation regarding the beautification work in the city. He said that all the organisations were working according to the deed agreement with the DCC.

"I regularly visit the sites and I have not seen any problem anywhere."

But the reality is that in many places the beautification work has become hideous or has been completely destroyed due to lack of maintenance and care. The stretches from Banglamotor intersection to Moghbazar, from Moghbazar to Sastrasta and Gulistan to Golapshah Mazar bear testimony to that.

The DCBC had handed over the Pantha Kunja Park to a private organisation for beautification about a year ago. The park was scheduled to re-open in January this year but the DCBC is yet to retake the charge of the park from that organisation.



Construction work on a fountain in progress at Bijoy Sarani ahead of the Saarc Summit.