

PARKING SPACE

Rules are for the breaking

TAWFIQUE ALI

Influential building owners in the capital have long been enjoying an 'unofficial immunity' over legal action for violating building laws.

Powerful quarters in residential areas of Gulshan and Banani and Mohakhali commercial area have been openly violating construction laws and stayed 'above the law'.

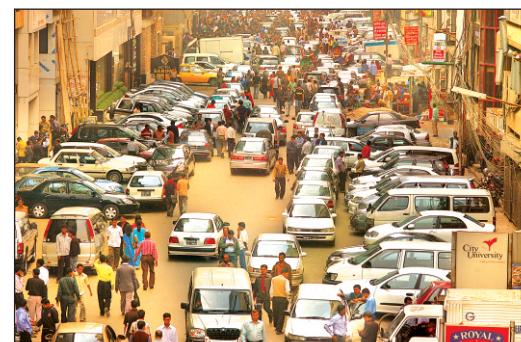
Rajuk's building inspectors and other officials have long been cashing in on gross irregularities and fattening their wallets by overlooking hundreds of high-rise commercial buildings violate car parking provisions within their premises as specified by building construction rules.

Public movement, especially during peak work hours, are obstructed on most of the city's main thoroughfares and pedestrian sidewalks as these are occupied by three to four rows of cars parked illegally on them. Besides, developers keep them occupied with construction materials and equipment while roadside workshops and stores consider the public roads and sidewalks extensions of their businesses.

Both sides of a short stretch of Road 17 in Banani is crammed with dozens of high-rise buildings including Iqbal Centre, Bulu Ocean Housing, City University, SMC Tower, Delta Dahlia, BTA Tower, Hotel Sarina, Rupayan Tower and Awal Centre.

Road 17 and other adjoining roads and sidewalks including Kemal Ataturk Avenue appear to be a parking lot for all these commercial establishments -- not public thoroughfares.

The main reason this avenue connecting and its adjacent streets turn into a parking lot is



that the high-rise buildings there that house scores of private universities, restaurants, residential hotels and commercial establishments do not provide sufficient parking on their premises.

All of these buildings are 15 to 20 stories high, but only a few

have minimal parking spaces. An executive engineer of Rajuk said requesting anonymity, "Role of Rajuk's authorised officer concerned should have been strict, vigorous and comprehensive in preventing the massive irregularities in building construc-

tion in the area. Role of the building inspectors had also been crucial but it seems that the Rajuk officials and the authorities as a whole didn't perform their duties."

There is hardly any example that Rajuk officials have brought the offender of building laws to

justice. For decades, Rajuk officials benefited from illegal practices in building construction depriving the public of their essential civic rights to enjoy designated parking facilities and free movement along the sidewalk.

Authorised officer of Rajuk Shamsur Rahman said there are some old buildings that had their plans approved without parking provisions. Such plans were approved some time before 1995. But the buildings that have either no parking provisions or

have alerted designated parking lots to fit in more commercial establishments should be brought to book.

"I have already made a list of buildings on Kemal Ataturk Avenue that violated building laws. We will launch special

eviction drives in this area," said Rahman, "We will also launch similar drives on the Gulshan Avenue after preparing a list."

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High rise buildings without adequate parking facilities that create chaos in the area everyday. Clockwise, Banani Road 17 (top left, top middle, right), Landmark building, Sweet Dream Hotel near Banani Bazar.

CRACKS IN TEJGAON BUILDING

Employees in constant fear of collapse

TAWFIQUE ALI

Employees of an electrical company have been passing days in extreme uncertainty with several cracks on the floors and walls of their corporate office building in Tejgaon industrial area posing threats of a disaster anytime.

Besides an old crevice on the wall of the first floor, a few more have recently appeared on the top three floors and the roof of the four-storey building on Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Sarani.

However, both the owner of the building and the tenant, Energypac Power Generation Ltd, have repeatedly ignored the employees' concerns, arguing that the cracks were nothing to be worried about, said a few Energypac employees.

A four-member team of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk) inspected the building close to Nabisco bus stop on Wednesday.

Energypac Chief Executive



Energypac building in Tejgaon has developed numerous cracks on all floors.

Officer and Corporate Director Humayun Rashid claimed that

they also noticed the cracks on Wednesday and the next day was

Ashura holiday.

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Follow up

Eidgah Park: PWD's sluggish progress

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The implementation of a Public Works Department (PWD) decision to convert the western part of Dhanmondi Eidgah on Satmasjid Road into a park is moving very slowly.

According to the design of the park, there will be a grill-fenced boundary. The arboriculture wing of the PWD will plant trees in the park where the visitors can spend their leisure time.

"The process of making a

park is going on and we hope that we will soon start the work after fulfilling the formalities," said PWD Additional Chief Engineer Abdullah Al Safi. "The papers will go to the ministry through the chief engineer," he added.

On June 11 last year, the Ministry of Housing and Public Works approved the plan to convert the PWD-owned vacant land next to the historical Eidgah into a park.

But the local ward commissioner and Eidgah mosque committee are creating a plot to

grab a chunk of land, approximately one bigha, situated between the Satmasjid Road and the Eidgah. They chopped down some trees at the place for this purpose.

The mosque committee claimed that the whole area inside the boundary fences of the Eidgah Maidan including the piece of vacant land situated between Satmasjid Road and the west side boundary fence of the Eidgah is a Waqf property.

PWD officials admitted that they are aware of the tree felling

and claimed that the Eidgah belongs to the Department of Archaeology while the mosque is a Waqf estate. But the remainder of the land, an area of 2.5 acres, definitely belongs to PWD. The mosque authorities have only been using parts of their land upon receiving permission from PWD.

The residents of the area welcomed PWD's decision to convert the place into a park but feared that if the process of making a mini park lingered then the powerful mosque committee will definitely grab the land.

Where to buy the ticket?

Commuters suffer as police chase away bus ticket sellers

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Confusion arises over the eviction of the makeshift bus ticket stands from the streets as both the ticket salesmen and passengers suffer.

"Before eviction, we at least had a place to seat. Now we have to remain standing for 7/8 hours," said Badal, a ticket salesman standing on the Shahbagh footpath.

"This is a drive to free footpaths from illegal occupancy. But we didn't occupy footpaths permanently. We used to sell tickets sitting under small umbrellas. Still, we are being chased and harassed by police every day," he added.

According to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), 20 private bus companies operating in and around the city pick up passengers from 108 stops.

As part of the ongoing drive to free footpaths and streets, the law enforcers evicted the ticket salesmen who now sell tickets standing on the pavement.

"We are providing an important service for the city dwellers and we have registration, route permit and all the other legal papers to run our business," said Isaqur Rahman Zafar, manager, operations, Rajdhani Express.

He alleged that police has recently arrested one of his ticket salesmen from the street. "How can we run our business if our staff are harassed this way?"

"In the past we received a number of instructions from different government agencies such as DTCB, DCC, DUTP, BRTA. We are running our business abiding by all these regulations," said Giasuddin Chowdhury, director, operations, TansSilva BD Ltd.

"These agencies should have discussed the issue among themselves first chalk out a precise plan about what they want to do, and then they should have informed us about their move. We would definitely agree on their plan," he added.

However, sources from the DCC Traffic Engineering Division told Star City that bus operators



Bus ticket sellers on city footpaths face regular police harassment.

do not have permission to sell tickets on the street. On the other hand, BRTA officials said the operators only have permission for terminal-to-terminal operation.

"We pay road parking tax and the route permit specifies from where we will pick up passengers," Giasuddin Chowdhury said.

Commuters allege that they are suffering because of this sudden move. "I travel to Mirpur every day by bus. On Wednesday I could not find any ticket salesman at Kalabagan bus stand," said Golam Kibria, a resident of Mirpur.

"Usually I take the bus from Science Lab stoppage. I had to walk all the way from Science Lab

crossing to Russell Square on Wednesday because I could not find the ticket salesman," said Sharmin Ferdous, another commuter.

"Authorities should give us prior notice if they decide to bring any changes in the system otherwise it causes serious problem for us," added Kibria.