

Rules are for the breaking

Oxfam for implementing building rules

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Immediate past president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) architect Khadem Ali said it is not correct that Rajuk could approve building design excluding provision for car parking before 1995.

"I remember we had to leave more space for car parking in the layout design before 1995 comparing to what we have to leave now under the building rules of 1996," Ali said, "If the Rajuk authorities approved any plan without parking facility, they must have violated building laws and this will come out clearly once the designs of those buildings are examined now."In many cases, buildings have some spaces for parking but the owners use them for other purposes than parking. They even rent out parking spaces for commercial purposes.

According to building rules of 1996, a commercial building (shops, office and departmental stores, etc) has to have 23 square metres of parking space for every 200 square metres of floor space. The ratio is one car parking for each 100 square metres of gross area.

While the city dwellers suffer everyday from outrageous illegal car parking on main avenues and sidewalks all around the city, the three authorities concerned -- Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) -- are either beneficiaries of this illegal practice or do not bother to curb the violation.

President of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS) Prof. Nazrul Islam said it is the duty of the DCC to keep the city sidewalks free from obstruction, the DMP to keep the thoroughfares free for smooth traffic movement and the Rajuk to punish errant builders for not having designated parking facilities, "but none of them can deliver their respective responsibilities efficiently due to corruption."

Part of thoroughfares and sidewalks all around 14-storied Landmark building, 12-storied Gulshan Tower and other tall buildings in the Gulshan north commercial area near circle 2 remain occupied in a manner as if the spaces had been designated for parking.

"None of the high-rise buildings along Gulshan Avenue have parking facilities," said Feroze Al Mujahid, the then Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) deputy commissioner (Traffic South) while talking to this correspondent a few months back.

M Mizan, an office executive of 18-storied Hotel Sweet on Kemal Ataturk Avenue said, "We have no parking space and we use both roads in front and behind the hotel for parking."

Pisa Kabez, assistant registrar of North South University, said, "In fact we do not have any designated parking space. So, we use nearby Road 17 for parking and we made it 'one-way' so that we can easily use it for parking."

MSirazul Islam, DGM Sales and Marketing of Nitol Motors at the 15-storied Nitol Centre in Mohakhali commercial area said, "We have no parking space of our own here and we park on the road."

Mukhlesur Rahman, marketing manager of 21-storied Rupayan Centre said their parking space is limited because of limited land on which the building is situated.

"We use the open spaces on roads all around our building for parking," said Belal Ahmed, a staff of Landmark building, "Our basement parking can accommodate only around 12 vehicles."

Assistant manager at Gulshan Tower M Zakir Hossain said the tower's basement parking lot can accommodate a maximum of seven cars. Visitors and shoppers of the building have to park on the road.

Shariatullah Building on

Gulshan Avenue near Wonderland that houses various shops and commercial outlets has no parking space at all. Rows of vehicles occupy the entire sidewalk in front of it and part of the street making it difficult for pedestrians to walk through.

Owner of the building Ashraf Ali, also owner of Polar brand ice-cream, said the idea of car parking did not come to his mind when the building was constructed five to seven years ago as traffic rush was not that heavy at that time.

When asked whether the construction plan passed by Rajuk required to have parking provision, He said, "I have rented out the basement to a shop meant for parking."

Standard Chartered Bank on Gulshan Avenue in between circles 1 and 2 has no designated space for parking either. It is a daily phenomenon that hundreds of its customers park their vehicles randomly in multiple rows on the road in front of the bank.

"We have no parking space," said Sabbir Ahmed, manager branches of the bank, when his attention was drawn to the huge traffic congestion on the road caused by vehicles of bank customers.

Vehicles of customers who visit Agora chain super store on the same avenue are regularly found parked in multiple rows in front of the outlet causing traffic congestion.

"We make every effort to keep the congestion to a minimum," said the outlet's head of operations TD Packir adding that its basement parking can accommodate 36 vehicles. "We made parking arrangements on nearby Masjid road and plan to direct vehicles to other adjoining side roads to ease the rush on the main thoroughfare."

Four-storied Shoppers World on Gulshan Avenue has a basement parking lot only for 10 cars, said a security guard of the shopping centre. Shoppers park scores of cars on the avenue and sidewalk leaving a narrow space for traffic movement.

Navana Shopping Tower at Gulshan circle 1 has two basement parking lots with space for 10 to 15 cars each, said its office staff Dulal. The high-rise houses commercial outlets, various offices and residential apartments from 16th floor, he said adding, "Shoppers' and visitors' cars are parked on the roads."

"We have no space for parking of our own," said M Ershad Ali, manager of Almas Departmental and Almas Super stores at the circle. "The shoppers park their vehicles wherever they find space on the road."

A scuffle over parking a car resulted in police brutality maiming the country's gold medallist shooter Asif on October 2 in the city in front of the National Shooting Federation (NSF) complex on Gulshan Avenue.

Employees

FROM PAGE 21
But an employee said, "The Energypac management hurriedly concealed with tiles a 50-60 feet long crack on the first floor, which worried the employees most, during the Ashura holiday."

Khairuzzman, building inspector of the Rajuk team, said they found similar cracks on the third and fourth floors also, but it is difficult to say about the nature and implications of such cracks without carrying out tests.

The Rajuk team asked for the approved building plan but the Energypac authority failed to produce any such document.

Rajuk team Chief Inspector Moslem Uddin told reporters at the site, "Now, we will serve the first notice with a three-day deadline asking the building's owner to produce the approved plan of the building. In case of failure, we will serve the second notice with a seven-day deadline, and then the final notice for demolition."

Rajuk's authorised officer Shamsur Rahman yesterday said, "We are going to serve the second notice in a day or two asking the building owner to show cause why the building should not be demolished as he failed to produce any approved building plan."

Following the Rajuk team's inspection, an associate professor of civil engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, Kabirul Islam, rushed to the spot to speak for the Energypac management.

"Nobody knows more about buildings than we do," Kabirul told reporters.

Asked what he thinks about the cracks, he said, "The cracks have to be tested first to ascertain what kind of cracks these are and what they might result in."

The Energypac authority is planning for a test for the cracks and has already talked with two experts, Energypac CEO Humayun Rashid claimed.

The building was originally single-storeyed and was extended with three floors about five-six years back and the Energypac has been a tenant of the building for the last 11 years, he said.

Asked why the owner has not fixed the cracks, he said, "In fact, owner of the building Z Islam wants us to vacate the building, which is why he has always ignored the problem."

Islam could not be contacted despite repeated attempts over telephone. His son Ziaul Islam said they got an approved plan for the building from the Public Works Department in 1965 and built a one-storey building.

"Cracks have not appeared only on our building in Dhaka," he said.

"My father was a construction contractor and he knows about safety better than anyone else," he said, adding, "We would have taken measures if the building were unsafe...We are confident that the building has no problem."

On February 25 last year, a five-storey factory building of Phoenix Group--very close to the building in question--collapsed, leaving 21 killed and more than 42 injured.

Experts blamed weak construction, renovation of the three-decade-old building and unauthorised use of the building for the collapse.

CITY CORRESPONDENT
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A group of NGO leaders working on disaster management and risk reduction underscored the proper implementation of the building rules of 2006 to reduce vulnerability to earthquake at a press conference on Thursday.

Oxfam GB Bangladesh in partnership with Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC) and Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB) organised the press conference at the National Press Club to launch a Community Based Disaster Risk Management Project (CBDRMP) to reduce earthquake vulnerability.

Country representative of Oxfam GB Bangladesh Anil Tambay said that adoption of the building rules is a not a choice but a must.

"Earthquake itself does not kill people but the collapsing buildings do it," he said, "We are to emphasise that the scale of possible disaster is so huge that we need to forge a concerted effort to manage it."

Among other fundamental prerequisites, any builder must comply with the minimal design requirement to prevent a strike of a moderate earthquake to reduce human casualties caused by collapsing buildings."

Again, mere survival is not all. Construction design must incorporate such mechanism that will ensure an opportunity for functioning of life even after a disaster.

The cost may rise by less than 5 percent to make the buildings earthquake proof.

Awareness at both local and national level of earthquake management is very vital.

Oxfam has been working since 1971 and working on earthquake disaster management and preparedness since 2002.

Saidur Rahman director of Bangladesh Disaster

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An aerial view of the city crammed with buildings without any protection from earthquake.

Preparedness Centre emphasized on the community awareness terming it crucial and linking of the community with the service providers.

The project is going to pioneer earthquake preparedness activities and national and community level aiming at comprehensive enforcement of The Building Construction Rules, 2006.

The project aims at supporting 16 communities living in earthquake prone wards of Dhaka city and Sylhet city to reduce vulnerability.

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The CBDRMP will be implemented under the third DIPECHO action plan for South Asia with the financial support of the European Commission Directorate general for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO).

The CBDRMP manager Tanja Berretta and director of FIVDB Jehin Ahmed also spoke on the disaster risk reduction.

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10x4