

# Rajuk starts drive to free Gulshan lake

TAWFIQUE ALI

The military-backed interim government has undertaken a comprehensive drive to free the city's Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake from the powerful wetland grabbers.

Rajuk, backed by the joint forces, launched the day's drive yesterday morning from the Gulshan South Park point. Public Works Secretary ASM Rashidul Haied the drive.

The lake would be reclaimed at the points where land grabbers have choked it by earth filling, said Chief Engineer of Rajuk Emdadul Islam. "We are removing the earth filled illegally in the lake to reclaim the crucial water body."

"We have already evicted the illegal occupancy on the fringe of the lake area and now we are excavating the earth-filled areas to restore its original expanse as per the Rajuk map."

Rajuk prepared the map of the lake in 1997 along with the lake development project.

Following a number of cases filed by plot claimants, Rajuk prepared the lake's layout and produced it to the High Court that ordered conservation of the lake as per the layout.

Appellate Division of the Supreme Court around two years back upheld a map of the lake and ordered the Town Planning section of the Rajuk to

implement it. The said layout of the lake marked the banks straight, according to sources.

A top official of the Town Planning section said Rajuk later on brought some changes to the layout of the lake because of its existing zigzag condition.

The pathway is being constructed in a bad shape as the authorities cannot maintain alignment of the lake bank as per



Workers knock down a structure by the Gulshan lake.

the layout certified by the court, said a source at Rajuk.

Rajuk started its Tk 5 crore second phase of work for walkway around a year ago while the project proposal for lake development is yet to be approved by the government.

The city development authority has meantime earth-filled

three to four kilometres of the lake bank in an extremely zigzag course, giving a very peculiar look to the lake.

Usually, the land grabbers make attempts to manipulate the LA (land acquisition) case no-10 to grab the lake and its adjoining wetlands. But the court said in its verdict that even if some land were derequisitioned, any wetlands would

cancel partially the allotments of three to four plots to facilitate the reclamation of the lake.

This time the reclamation is being carried out under the water conservation act mainly. "Later on, we will carry out further development of the lake if the government approves project proposal, already submitted in this regard," Haroon said.

Interestingly, Rajuk itself allotted extra land for encroaching into the lake on demand from powerful plot owners on different occasions, according to sources.

Admitting that there is no provision for such allotment of extra land, Haroon said earlier, "Now, there is hardly anything to do against the allotments already issued."

Regarding some high-rise buildings constructed by influential quarters encroaching upon the lake, he said they will take decision after the ongoing court cases are settled.

The land grabbers have regularly earth filled chunks of the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake and erected concrete and makeshift structures.

A well-organised syndicate of influential land grabbers in connivance with some sections of government officials, including some of the Rajuk, has been active in grabbing expensive land across the city, according to sources.



A Rajuk earth remover clearing the Gulshan lake area.

The syndicate resorts to various fake means and legal tangles to manage derequisition and transfer of land to some private owners.

Frequent infringements by land grabbers into the lake are forcing the under-construction pathway to go in an extreme irregular course without a proper configuration.

## BOTANICAL GARDEN: DHAKA'S GREEN PARADISE



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN  
Green landscape, peaceful walkway and crisp air of the Botanical Garden is a heavenly respite from the concrete jungle of the city. Established in 1961 Botanical Garden covers an area of over 207 acres of land. It houses nearly 50,000 species of trees, herbs, and shrubs including a large collection of aquatic plants. The garden also famous for its lizard population.

## DHAKA CIRCULAR WATERWAY

# BIWTA focuses on goods transportation

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Having failed to revive the Dhaka Circular Waterway Project (DCWP) the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) is now focusing on more revenue income from goods transportation on the rivers using its landing facilities.

The widely publicised Tk 35.99 DCW project with ten landing stations covering a distance of 29.5 kilometres between Sadarghat and Ashulia was abandoned soon after its inauguration in 2005. The project had envisaged to 'revolutionise' the transportation system for the city. Unfortunately poor planning took its toll and all activities of the first phase of the project came to a standstill.



A BIWTA landing station at Amin Bazar.

The second phase of the project from Ashulia to Sadarghat via

Balu and Sitalakha rivers was

never started.

At present the BIWTA is

building an additional landing facility at Jhaorchar across Kamrangirchar at a cost of about Tk 40 lakh to facilitate goods transportation. Although passenger ferrying under the DCWP stopped in 2005, the income from the eleven landing stations is set to grow, a BIWTA official said.

"Last year we earned Tk 2.5 crore from landing stations situated between Kholamora and Ashulia," said the engineer, "This year our revenue from the same stations is set to grow up to 3.5 crore."

"The landing stations with modern facilities are no longer lying idle, we are leasing them out to public, who would run transportation businesses," the engineer said.

# 40 percent city taxicabs out of order

RAIHAN SABUXTAGIN

Sufferings of commuters in the capital have mounted as around 40 percent of taxicabs plying the city streets went out of order while the condition of the remaining ones are also terrible.

Three of the key reasons why this sector reached such an unbearable state for all are -- absence of proper planning, importing vehicles that are unsuitable for heavy-duty taxicab operations and failure to set an acceptably reasonable fare as well as drivers' daily payments, pointed out experts.

In fact, most of the taxicabs were battered within the six months after the commencement of the service, observed the experts.

Both owners and drivers of the cabs pointing fingers at each other has turned the situation complex while the government is having difficulties to establish order in the sector. Under the circumstances, cab owners are losing their interest to replace the inoperative vehicles.

According to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), there are 18 taxicab

companies operating in the city with a fleet of 10,000 vehicles.

Owners and BRTA officials said about 4,000 taxicabs are non-operational currently. Taxicab company Anudeep alone has about 1,800 out of service cabs while Cab Express limited, another cab operator, has about 500 such vehicles.

Shahdat Hossain, an automobile engineer, said, "The 800cc vehicles being used for taxi service are not suitable for heavy wear and tear. The chassis of the vehicles for taxi service need to be heavy-duty with stronger engines, but most of the vehicles running as taxis in the city are only 800cc ones and the vehicles are really substandard. These vehicles have overheating problems and their bodywork are excessively weak."

G M Siraj, president of Cab Association of Bangladesh told Star City, "We did nothing wrong and went by the Taxicab Service Regulations 1998 [for importing the vehicles]. The regulation approved 800cc vehicles for the service."

When asked about the worn-out condition of the taxicabs, he blamed unavailability of skilled drivers for running the taxicabs.

"The government introduced the taxicab service with a fewer number of vehicles in 1998 in the city without working out a source of skilled taxi drivers for smooth operation of the service."

By the end of 2001, the then government withdrew some 40,000 two-stroke petrol-fuelled auto rickshaws from city roads to curb severe air pollution, Siraj said.

To fill the vacuum in the transport system, the government then introduced only 12,000 CNG-run auto rickshaws and increased the number of taxicabs to 10,000. Most of the unemployed drivers of the three-wheeled auto rickshaws then turned automobile drivers and having no other option available, the taxicab owners employed these unskilled drivers to drive their vehicles, he explained.

"It is ironic that those drivers achieved their skills by now. But in the process, they destroyed the vehicles," said Siraj.

Khandaker M Azad, managing director of Cab Express (BD) Ltd, said about 4,000 taxicabs are not operative at the moment and their owners are not interested

to replace the vehicles either.

"The fare chart that we are still going by was fixed by the BRTA in 1998 considering prices of fuel, spare parts and cost of maintenance back then," Azad said.

Abdul Hadi, a cab driver said, "Revising the fare chart alone will not help reduce the commuters' sufferings. The daily payments to the cab owners should also be fixed. I have no other way but to collect extra money from passengers since the daily payment for the vehicle is very high."

Humayun Rashid, director (operations) of BRTA, admitted that studies needed to be conducted before introducing the taxicab service in the city. However, a few of the issues in the sector could be solved if the Taxicab Service Regulations 1998 was strictly enforced.

The authorities have already banned the import of 800cc automobiles as taxicabs and the current taxicab owners, who need to replace their battered vehicles, will have to work out with the government for a solution, said Rashid.



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