



Human settlement in Dhaka city started from the 7th century, but the natural geomorphological setting began to be modified, probably from the 12th century. In the first phase, until 1850, only the higher grounds, especially the natural levee and Madhupur Clay units along the Buriganga river were selected for urbanisation.

 e-mail: starcity@thecitythatwas.net

Gulshan Lake Development Farce

TAWFIQUE ALI

After long-drawn futile attempts for over a decade to save and develop the city's Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake, the project appears as a farce today with no tangible progress of the proposed draft plan.

Urban experts and city dwellers have alleged that powerful lake grabbers in collusion with a section of Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) officials have foiled time and again the attempt to demarcate, develop and conserve the water body.

CHRONOLOGY OF ONSLAUGHT

*1977: Powerful quarters filed a petition for requisition of land acquisition (LA) case no-10 to release around 35 acres of government-acquired land along the Gulshan Lake.
*1982-1989: Up to 150 plots are extracted from the lake to be allotted to General Ershad's near and dear ones.
*1991-1993: BNP government fills up the lake to create over 100 plots for its leaders and supporters.
*1994-1995: Environmentalists raise voice against plundering of the water body.
*1996: Rajuk secretly leases out 220 acres of public land in and around Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake to Indus Valley Investment Pvt. Ltd. Following a writ petition with High Court Division in 1997, government cancels the agreement.
*1997: Rajuk prepares a project proposal to re-request the derequisitioned land, acquiring private land on the lake's eastern bank for driveway and walkway construction and uncertain.
*1998: The High Court Division directs Rajuk to take measures for suspending all construction and/or filling up of the water body and lakeside areas of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara Model Towns.
*1998-2001: Awami League government initiates a study on the project and appoints a consulting firm for study.
*2001: BNP government blacklists the project.
*June 2002: The Prime Minister directs ministries concerned to remove all illegal structures from and around the lake to construct walkways for demarcation.
*2003: The project is revised again splitting the scheme into two components: one for walkway and other for construction of six bridges.
*2005: Until October the project is put through mysterious spells of up to twelve revisions. The Planning Commission is now sitting on it.

Chief Engineer of Rajuk Emdadul Islam, who had been project director of Gulshan Lake development during 1997-2001, said that Rajuk first prepared a project proposal in 1997 to re-request the 35 acres of derequisitioned land and more land on the eastern bank for driveway, land development, walkway and road construction, beautification, water treatment and study of construction of six bridges on the lake.

The Planning Commission asked the authorities to revise

the project at least 10 to 12 times until 2005, he said. The Uttara Lake development component was excluded.

The project proposal was revised again in 2003 splitting the scheme into two components: one for walkway and other for construction of six bridges, said Emdadul.

The then prime minister on June 19, 2002, directed the housing and public works and other ministries concerned to immediately remove all illegal structures from in and around the lake to construct walkways and clearly demarcate the water

all concerned with the task of protecting the lake have been beneficiaries of encroachment on the water body. Naturally, demarcation and conservation have been all along been uncertain.

Many influential quarters have mortgaged land on the bank of the lake and taken high amount of bank loan against the land.

Rajuk has consistently been changing alignment of the lake area to facilitate its trade of housing plots reducing the lake's substantially time and again, said architect Iqbal Habib, who

body.

Repeated revision by the Planning Commission is indicative that the agency concerned is not technically capable enough to convince the commission about the project, Iqbal said.

"Land grabbers in connivance with Rajuk have grabbed the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake encroaching beyond its periphery at least in two to three layers. There are many instances that Rajuk once set the fringe of the lake but accommodated new plots in documents each time a lake grabber claimed one beyond the fringe," he said.

According to the Rajuk chairman, the present interim government has agreed that the project must be implemented and the project is soon going to be placed at the Project Evaluation Committee of the Planning Commission, Haroon said.

certified by the High Court."

"We will remove any obstructions and cancel allotment of plot within the alignment," said the chairman. "This will naturally create complications because it was Rajuk that allotted land and now the same Rajuk is cancelling the allotment."

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zigzag condition.

The High Court asked for a freshly drawn updated map of the lake but the town planning department produced a map that super-imposed drawings onto an old map of 1996 with an ulterior motive to legalise hundreds of plots created illegally encroaching on the lake.

Meanwhile, Rajuk undertook construction of walkway along the lake at its own cost.

But it is facing serious obstruction in building the walkway along the lake in properly maintaining the alignment, as outlined in the layout certified by the High Court.

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

The under-construction proposed walkway along the lake has evidently lost consistency and aesthetic beauty because of rampant encroachment.

Almost all the plot owners on the lake bank have encroached upon the lake, grabbing land in addition to their original allotment of 5 katha with each plot owner presently possessing up to 10 to 12 katha, said sources at Rajuk.

Interestingly enough, it is Rajuk that issued allotment of extra land encroaching on the lake on demand from powerful plot owners on different occasions, sources said.

The Rajuk started its second phase of work for walkway under a Tk 5 crore project with its own resources.

The incumbent project director, superintending engineer Raihanul Ferdous said that at the latest the draft project proposal was revised in October 2005, making it a Tk 58-crore project including land acquisition, walkway construction and beautification.

The interim government launched a demolition drive against illegal structures encroaching upon the lake on January 17. It launched removal of land filling in the lake area from April 30.



Eyewash? Rajuk workers remove a boundary wall to make room for a walkway.

has extensively worked on the Gulshan Lake.

"A good number of lake grabbers, politically powerful, have always had a conflict of interest against the proposed plan to protect the Gulshan-Banani Lake," he said. "As a result, approval of the development project has been postponed and uncertain."

Actually, he said, Rajuk has no specifically defined layout of the lake and lakeside area, and the situation has expedited rampant encroachment on the water

Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon admitted that the Gulshan Lake development project has not been able to progress due to the vested interests of the influential land grabbers.

"We could not implement the project because of pressure from influential quarters," he said. Responding to the point how they would rectify Rajuk's involvement in creating plots within the existing lake area, he said, "We will go as per the alignment delineated in the latest project proposal and the layout

of the lake because of its existing

The government has also agreed to allocate money for land acquisition required for the project, he said.

Following filing of a Public Interest Litigation petition by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association in 1999, the Supreme Court certified a layout map of the Gulshan Lake and directed to maintain it.

A top official of Rajuk's town planning department, seeking anonymity, said Rajuk had created some changes to the layout of the lake because of its existing



Aerial view of Madhupur forest.

Film festival offers education on trees

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

A weeklong documentary film festival and photography exhibition on the life of people living in the forests and forest destruction is taking place at city's Drik Gallery depicting the appalling state of forests and its people.

"People living in the city do not know much about trees, their impact on environment and our lives and the need for forests," said Noaresh Ahmed, renowned photographer and agriculturist during the inaugural ceremony.

"A medium size mango tree provides oxygen for a family of 5 to 6. Imagine what a forest can do," he added.

Speakers at the inaugural function said the forest landscape of Bangladesh have changed dramatically over the years. In some parts of the country forest is now a thing of the past, especially the Sal forest.

Most of the government-owned forests are devastated for commercial logging and plantation of alien species that does not

suit our environment, they said.

"Forests are not just its flora and fauna and the animal inhabitants. The forest dwelling communities, their knowledge, traditions, culture and the indigenous technology that they use every day are also part of a forest," said Ronald Halder, one of the filmmakers taking part in the festival.

"When forests are destroyed, along with it lives are destroyed, along with it a rich culture," he added.

The photo exhibition reflects the distressing condition of the forests and the magnificence a wrong choice for our nature."

Fourteen documentaries on the dying Sal forests, the magnificent Sundarbans, Tangail Haor, Baikai beel, and the painful state of Karnaphuli river, Sathkhari forest and Chokoria forest are being screened at the festival.

"We often blame the forest dwelling people for its destruction. In reality, they only collect what they need. They do not destroy forests for commercial purpose, which is one of the reasons for its destruction," he added.

"With the films and photography we want to reveal the main reason behind forest destruction to the city people," he said.

Gain blamed the mass plantation of foreign species in our nature without assessing its effect as one of the reasons for forest destruction. "We chopped down indigenous species and planted foreign species that are alien to our nature. These species namely Acacia have been proven a wrong choice for our nature."

Organised by the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), the exhibition will remain open to visitors from 3:00pm to 8:00pm every day until May 24. Documentary shows on forests, adivasi life and nature are being screened from 5:00pm to 7:00pm everyday.

WASA project brings misery to residents, commuters

Thousands of residents of Bashabo are left to struggle to reach destinations

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority's (Wasa) move to clean up the underground drainage system of Bashabo have virtually left thousands of local residents struggling with acute transportation problems every day.

In a bid to overhaul underground sewerage facilities, Wasa has excavated the main thoroughfare of the area that connects thousands of local residents with the Bishwa Road. The street, several miles long, starting from the Buddhist Temple near the Atish Deepankar Road up to the Kadamta Bridge has been thoroughly dug up and wedged with enormous sewerage tubes severely disturbing commuters' movement.

Authorities' indifference towards the haphazard transportation facilities and undertaking such a thorough project in a congested area when monsoon is round the corner has resulted into severe exasperation among the local residents.

"They excavated the streets in such a way that alternative routes are cut off and have been made off bounds to us.

Rickshaws, even bicycles cannot make their ways across all this mess," said Mahabub Ahmed, a resident from Bashabo Kadamta.

"The street is around 10-12 feet wide, now if they dug up 5 feet wide burrows and arbitrarily put huge pipes, how can we move," he said.

The lengthy burrows and the

tubes have narrowed down the streets that can barely accommodate two cross passing pedestrians, let alone vehicles.

In this situation the residents are compelled to walk long distances. Trudging through deep burrows and gigantic sewerage tubes they finally reach the main road and board transports to reach their destinations.

"If we take rickshaws they take long circuitous routes and charge outrageous fare for the extra effort," said Ziaul Huq, a

"The first few days were nightmarish as we kept running out of route options while they kept expanding their project area," said Jalal Ahmed.

"This is the street that connects all the alleys making it a hub of the whole region. Digging it up is quite agonising," said Saiful Islam, a local resident.

An official source of Wasa's drainage circle said that the entire drainage circle of Bashabo is choked with sand

said Jafrul Alam.

"Although we are facing problem as the streets are narrow and the sewerage lines choked, we are hopeful that the

work would be done within this month provided that everything goes according to the plan," he added.



SK ENAMUL HAQ

The street, several miles long, starting from the Buddhist Temple near the Atish Deepankar Road up to the Kadamta Bridge has been thoroughly dug up and wedged with enormous sewerage tubes severely disturbing commuters' movement

resident from Madartek.

The situation becomes only

more complicated for private car owners.

"I cannot bring my car out of the garage as the street in front of the house is dug up. Now it has been a couple of weeks since the car has been totally stranded," said a Jalal Ahmed, a resident from Kadamta.

Some car owners have to take a detour of several kilometres through unpaved alleyways to reach the bypass roads.

and solid wastes as all the

nearby water bodies and flood

flow zones have been filled up.

Wasa is equipping the drainage circle of Bashabo area with modern equipments to keep the underground sewerage flowing and reduce water logging in the upcoming monsoon season, said the source.

"We are aware of the sufferings of the local residents of Bashabo. We have requested them to be patient for their own convenience in the long run,"