

Ramna Park dotted with territorial markings of clubs, elite groups

TAWFIQUE ALI

Ramna Park, one of the oldest open spaces of Dhaka and apparently a well-maintained greenery of the city today, has a ridiculous story behind the curtain. Different elite groups and clubs of health conscious people occupy different patches of the parkland with separate sheds and signboards to announce their 'exclusive' presence.

Though it is a designated public park, ordinary people while wandering in Ramna need to be aware of such exclusive zones and sheds built in the area.

Retired or serving civil and military bureaucrats, diplomats and housewives of influential people who come to Ramna Park on a regular basis for a stroll and jogging have apparently turned the park, particularly its north-eastern and eastern parts, into "exclusive zones" for the members of the groups and clubs only.

According to government officials concerned, these clubs are unauthorised. The ordinary people who go to the park also think that the use of the park in the form of VIPs' group, walkers' club and health club create a situation of privileged use of a public property.

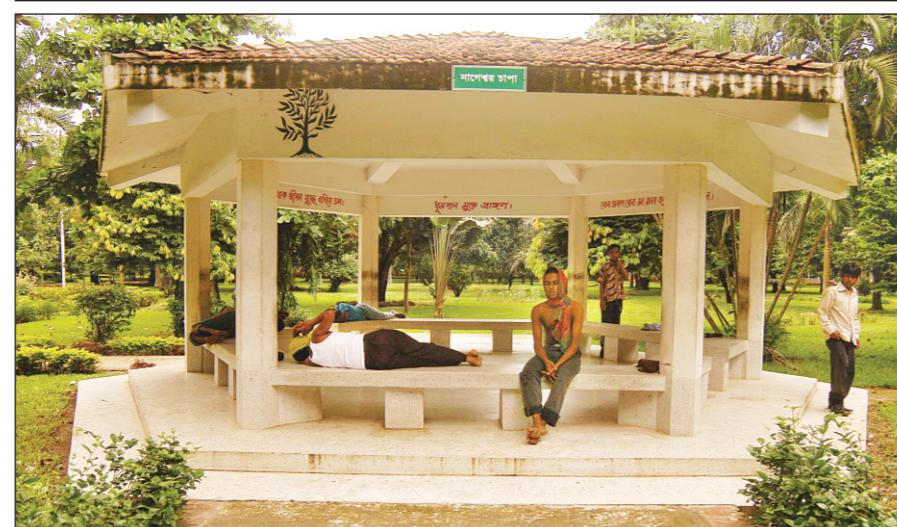
Sub-divisional officer (SDO) of the Department of Arbouriculture Md Moazzem Hossain, responsible for Ramna Park, said, "Construction of exclusive sheds is not authorised inside a public park."

Once some groups of VIPs constructed a number of sheds at their own expenses in Ramna Park. The city division of Public Works Department (PWD) demolished three to four such unauthorised sheds in 2005, according to Hossain.

While PWD owns the park, the arbouriculture department is responsible for its gardening, plantation, beautification and maintenance.

There are a number of enclosed patches within the park area in different names like 'Nageswar Champa', 'Krishnachura', and tin-roofed 'Kichhukhon' and 'Akash Moni'. Besides, the PWD itself has raised a shed in the name of PWD Inspection Centre.

According to sources concerned, the then public works minister Mirza Abbas used to



Different clubs and elite groups have built their own sheds in the Ramna Park, often denying access to public.

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take rest at 'Nageswar Champa' exclusively during his stroll in the park.

Both the minister and the then public works secretary Iqbal Uddin Chowdhury used to stroll in the Ramna Park and a number of structures

were built with their direct consent.

The tin-roofed and iron-grill fenced 'Kichhukhon' remains under lock and key and is open only to a group of secretaries. The structure, to the west of 'Mohila Aungan', is

exclusively meant for high officials, who themselves built it. The PWD has not been able to demolish this structure just because top brasses are involved in it.

'Shatayu Aungan' is another area ear-

marked for 'private use'.

Chief Engineer of PWD AFM Monjurul Islam said, "We have constructed the shelters in the park as per plan of the Department of Architecture."

But the technical committee on development of Ramna Park proposed only three park shelters that have been built in the shape of timber log, according to official sources.

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RAMNA CHILDREN'S PARK WELCOMES ALL BUT CHILDREN



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Children in the city have virtually nowhere to go for recreation unless their parents take them to some highly paid amusement parks or fast food shops. The few children's parks in the city are in reality inaccessible to children. These parks are mainly home to sex workers, vagabonds, addicts, vandals and beggars. The Ramna children's park in the city is no exception. The picture shows three young men occupy a slide at the Ramna children's park to stare at mothers who try to find a moment of recreation for their children. Many families who arrive at the park are forced to leave in the face of such nuisance.

DCC's new venture unveils passenger sheds

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Dhaka City Corporation has finally backed down from its previous stand and decided to install new passenger sheds at bus stops considering immense commuter sufferings -- especially during the monsoon.

Mayor of the city Sadeque Hossain Khoka had said earlier that the DCC had no immediate plans to build any new passenger shed as it causes 'extra hassle'.

Millions of commuters rely on public transport, but the few passenger sheds available for them are either installed on the wrong location or most of those are always occupied by shopkeepers, vendors, drug addicts and in some cases, by floating sex workers.

In 2005, DCC demolished nearly 40 such old sheds and currently, there are only around 100 passenger sheds and 163 km of sidewalks against a total road network of 2,289.69 km in the city.

The existing sheds have a little or no use for the commuters since commuter convenience was not taken into consideration while designing those.

Business hubs like Firmgate, Motijheel, Purana Paltan, Gulistan, Phulbaria, Mohakhali, Banani, Malibagh, Mouchak, Rampura, Gulshan, Mirpur, Shahbagh and Moghazar desperately need more passenger sheds where thousands of commuters suffer everyday.

"We see commuter sufferings on the streets. [That's why] we have decided to build around 200 passenger sheds. Hopefully the construction will

begin this year," said MR Chowdhury, chief conservancy officer of DCC.

"We selected a few models [of proposed sheds]. These sheds will have modern features such as restrooms and drinking water facilities," he added.

At Kakoli bus stop, following one of the proposed designs and with the help of Dhaka Bank, DCC installed a new passenger shed with a restroom. "We will go along with this design if all parties concerned approve it," said Chowdhury.

The new passenger shed installed at Kakoli is not open to public yet as it awaits formal inauguration.

Syed Qudratullah, superintendent engineer at Traffic Engineering Division of DCC, said, "A study titled Route Rationalisation to locate [suitable] spots for passenger sheds in accordance with bus stops is at its final stage."

DCC has decided to allow different corporate firms to construct the passenger sheds at different points of the city and the firms themselves will be responsible to maintain the sheds as well, he said adding, "Beautification of medians by corporate firms is working pretty well. We will follow the same method."

"The corporate houses will build the sheds according to our design and they will take care of the sheds. In return, they will post advertisements of their businesses on the sheds. They will also pay us fees," explained Qudratullah.

Over a 100 corporate firms showed interest in the passenger shed construction project. DCC's Space Allocation

Committee for Advertisement will select eligible firms for the project.

A few of the eligible firms including Standard Chartered Bank, Grameen Phone and Dhaka Bank already con-

structed several passenger sheds (without restrooms) using stainless steel pipes at Gulshan, Mohakhali, Kakoli, Kalabagan and Dhannondi with approval from the DCC.

Removable materials such as

stainless steel pipes will also be used in the new sheds with restrooms so that the sheds can be dismantled easily whenever the DCC needs to widen roads or sidewalks, Qudratullah explained.



Top: The model passenger shed at Kakoli. Below: the rear of the shed has a public toilet.

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