

BEAUTIFICATION OF LAKE PARK IN GULSHAN

A promise falls short of expectations

TAWFIQUE ALI

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Beautification and better community maintenance of the Lake Park in Gulshan-2 has been bogged down by internal problems of the Gulshan Society which is entrusted with the job.

Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) handed over the job of development, beautification and maintenance of the 8.57-acre park to the society on a 5-year lease in August, 2005 as the society expressed its interest to take the responsibility.

But the society could not progress much due to its internal problems over decision-making, said one of the vice-presidents of the society, requesting anonymity.

"The park has seen no tangible progress in beautification and maintenance though two years time has already elapsed out of the 5-year lease term," he said.

Ruhul Matin, convenor of the society's subcommittee on the park, admitted that they have not been able to implement the development plan. "We could not take any firm initiative to resolve various issues concerning the local community."

"Whatever we have done in the last two years has been half-hearted," Matin said. "We have not been able to use a Tk 5-lakh fund due to lack of a definite decision on the park's development planning," he added.

Moushumi Hasan, a resident of Gulshan-2, said, "Beautification and maintenance of the Lake Park should have been in a much better state, as we expected."

According to Matin, the society has so far repaired the dilapidated walkways and set up a number of benches in the park. Besides, it has finished construction of two public toilets initiated by Rajuk and done some gardening.

The trouble ensued in the society with the resignation of its president a couple of months back, according to some office



A view of the Lake Park in Gulshan.

bearers.

The society is now aiming at holding a general election by December to form an executive body and bring back order in the organisation, they said.

The park's development and better maintenance suffered further hindrance because of a dispute between the society and the government's horticulture department.

The department that has been running a nursery on a portion of the park for many years, refused to leave the premises though Rajuk has leased out the entire parkland to Gulshan Society, according to the society's office bearers.

But in any case, dispute with the horticulture department should not have lingered, said Matin. "It could be resolved by now had the society been integrated and organised."

Though the lease term expired in December 2006, the department insisted on occupying the land, said Matin, adding that the question whether either the organisations or Gulshan Society alone would manage the park still remains unresolved.

Shirin Shila, joint general secretary of Gulshan Society, said that beautification and development at the Lake Park is going on but at a slow pace.

The society has hired a landscaping architect to draw up the design for the park and the work on implementing the design is now in progress.

Gulshan Society became interested in taking over the park for maintenance seeing the better state of park management with community participation at the Tank Park and Baridhara Park in the vicinity, said Shirin.

"We do not take monetary contribution from anybody for maintenance if intended to serve

'Bitter sweet taste' of meals at DU dormitories

DURDANA GHIAS

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The place most frequented by resident students of Dhaka University (DU) for their meals is the on campus cafeteria or canteen -- located either inside or outside the dormitories.

Students living in DU dorms can dine in at two types of facilities -- at the hall cafeteria or at the mess.

The mess, managed and run mainly by resident students of DU, is a concept that started by the students to save themselves from substandard meals served in the cafeterias.

Under the mess system, students have to make monthly payments for their meals and have to dine only within the hours set by the mess management. A separate room is designated in each dorm for it to be used as the mess room, said students.

Tanna Mandal, a former student of Surya Sen Hall, said in his opinion, dining at a mess is better than dining at cafeterias.

"I was a member of the mess in our hall. Its name was Nexus. We had around 600 members. I did not like to eat in the hall canteen because its environment was not good -- the plates and glasses were not properly cleaned. Whereas, in the mess, I could wash my plate myself," he said.

"We used to do the shopping [for the mess], attend the service counters and perform managerial duties by rotation. It was something worthwhile to reminisce about my student life at DU," Tanna added.

Meal payments to be collected from each mess member for the upcoming month is set by the members in a general meeting that is presided over by the house tutor of the hall.

If deemed necessary due to price hike of essentials, the meal prices are raised at the meeting. Various other issues are also discussed at the meeting and the house tutor sometimes conducts arbitration to resolve disputes.

During meal hours in the mess, a mess member checks in members and collects meal cards from them while another member serves meals behind the serving counter.

If anyone is unable to cancel his meal beforehand or fails to make it to the dining are within the fixed hours, he still has to pay for the meal.

If a member is absent for two days in a row, the meal card is suspended until the member requests the mess managers to re-activate the membership.

Two managers fix the menu and supervise the meals. It is hard work -- especially during the month of Ramadan as the mess managers have to wake up early in the morning during sehri hours and provide their services to other mess members for two hours.

The incentives the mess managers get for their work is usually free meals for two months.

Best managers also receive manager of the month award each month. These incentives, however, are apparently not attractive enough for the mess members as there is hardly anyone interested to work as a manager.

About the cost of the meal at a mess, Tanna, the former Surya Sen Hall resident, said "In my first year, I paid Tk 500 per month and during my masters year, I paid Tk 800. The meal charge was raised due to price hike [of essentials]. Mess Establishment charge and Monthly Feast charge were included in it."

"We used to get free daal [lentil] and rice and the meal charge covered fish, meat, mashed potato and other items. The canteen cooks, paid for by the mess management, prepared the meal. We paid Tk 20 each for a feast at the end of the month. It was lots of fun," he added.

"We also had a punishment system. If anyone failed to perform their duties by rotation, he had to pay fines. Moreover, the fine for not attending the monthly general meeting was Tk 10. The accumulated fines collected from the violators were later spent on the monthly feast," Tanna said.

Mamun, another DU student from Ekushey Hall, said the Ekushey Hall is much cleaner than other halls as it is relatively new and unlike most other halls, it has its own kitchen.

"Most halls do not have kitchens and the food is cooked behind the canteens," he explained.

"Although the Jagannath Hall canteen is not very clean and they use the same dirty piece of cloth to wipe all the tables, I still like to dine there because the fish and vegetables served there is very delicious," said Mamun.

"Another reason for eating at the Jagannath Hall canteen is that they do not serve free daal. I try to avoid the free daal because when it's free, it contains nothing else but water," he added.

Dining at hall canteens is very helpful for students like him as the food is usually very cheap, he said.

"Even when I'm broke, I never worry about what to eat since I know that I'll be able to eat well in a hall canteen with only Tk 12 in my pocket," said a smiling Mamun.

Babu, a resident of Mohsin Hall, said though the newcomers sometimes mistake the free daal served in the hall canteens for plain water, it is in fact very good for health.

"At one time, a new guy from the countryside came to dine at the hall canteen. There were a few bowls on the dining tables -- one of those being a bowl of daal. The kid dipped his hand into that bowl thinking that it was water to be used for hand wash," he said.

"But whatever the incident is, I read that the water of Masur daal is very good for health. It contains lots of protein," said a convinced Babu.

The same old tale of tailback

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goes to pick up her 10-year-old daughter from the Motijheel Government Girls High School. On her way she has to cross the Mouchak and Magbazar intersections where she encounters the fallout of the gridlock.

"It is a routine experience for us. Almost every time I spend around 30 minutes extra just to cross the Mouchak and Maghbazar crossing and my daughter waits for me at the school", she said

"The entire area remain blocked during noon as the authority turns a deaf ear to the problem while my daughter is forced to wait for me after closing hours", she said.

"I start 30 to 40 minutes early from home every day. What else can I do", she said.

Kamrul Islalm, a businessman from Goran, was forced to change his daily route to Farmgate because of the traffic jam. His daily route was Goran to Malibagh crossing by rickshaw then to Farmgate by bus. Now he has to change the bus twice to reach his destination.

"Because of the jam I had to change my route. Now I go by bus to Motijheel first and then by another to Farmgate. It is a detour but still faster", he said.

"Shiddheshawri lane near Mouchak and Wirellessgate are the two worst points. The jam around the areas at noon is terrible", he added.

Md Jashimuddin, Joint Commissioner for Traffic, Dhaka Metropolitan Police told Star City that the awful traffic jam near Viqarunni cannot be eased till the school authority cooperates.

"The chaos around the Viqarunnissa area has been going on for years. We have tried a lot but it has become a tough task to control the traffic in that area", he said.

"After school hours the cars coming to pick up the students park disorderly, creating a gridlock which affects a vast area for long hours", he said.

Jashimuddin added that there could be several solutions to the problem.

"The main responsibility lies with the Viqarunnissa School authority. To ease the situation they should go for a bus service for the students and establish a parking lot", Jashimuddin added.

"If they transport students by bus it means less cars parked on the streets in a haphazard manner. Buses can be lined up on one side of the streets. If there is a parking zone then the rest of the cars can go there. I think we can manage after that", he said.

Jashimuddin pointed out that earlier the traffic division approached the school authority for a training workshop for the students, their parents and drivers on the problem and traffic rules.

"We even proposed to arrange training sessions on our own. But the school authority did not show any interest", he said.

Viqarunnissa authority however said it would be unfair to blame solely the school for the traffic jam in the entire area.

"We are not the only one to be blamed for the jam. The one way system is causing a gridlock instead of easing the situation", said Tahmina Khanam, principal of the institution.

"Many vehicles use the alleys around the Baily Road as detour because of the one way system. That is one of the main reasons for the traffic jam", she pointed out.

However the school authority is thinking of setting up a parking lot to ease the situation. Tender process has already been completed said the principal adding that its construction will begin within two months.



A schoolboy is crossing a makeshift bridge on Balu River in Trimohini under Khilgaon thana. The proposed bridge on the river remains under construction for a long time.

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