

Bara Katra, in south Chawk, close to the river Buriganga, was a prominent building in Dhaka during the reign of Mughals. In 1822 Doylee wrote: Bara Katra was a pompous, huge and beautiful. Shah Suja wanted to build his own palace in Dhaka but Shah Suja did not like the Bara Katra after it was finished, he donated it to Abul Kasem, the chief architect.

Playground remains a plaything

Authorities' dubious role over removing illegal set-ups from Gulshan Central Park

TAWFIQUE ALI

Government agencies concerned have taken a dubious position on removing illegal set-ups from Gulshan Central Park to make the playground freely accessible to the public.

In the face of strong lobbying at the government's top level, the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) has backed from its earlier stance to remove all the illegal structures and unauthorised possession from the playground, according to sources.

The playground, situated at plot no-130/A by the roads no-103, 108 and 109 in central Gulshan, is locally known as Gulshan Youth Club field. The club has long been running its activities occupying the playground with unauthorised structures.

Earlier, Rajuk served notices on Gulshan Youth Club (GYC) for removal of unauthorised structures from the playground, but the move went in vain. Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon said, "We have not been able to evict them due to certain reason."

Rajuk served its first notice on March 20, 2008 asking the club to show cause within seven days why the clubhouse and other structures should not be removed from the field.

Rajuk clearly pointed out in the notice that the one-storey building, two sheds for security personnel, one toilet and one tennis court at the playground have been erected by the club without approval in violation of section 3 of the Building Construction Act of 1952.

But president of GYC wrote a letter to the adviser to public works ministry on March 30 asking for an exemption from being evicted from the playground.

Rajuk served the final notice on April 1 as the GYC failed to produce any legal documents in support of the structures they have erected at the playground. In the notice Rajuk asked the GYC to demolish all those structures within three days.

The club officials then wrote another letter to both the public works adviser and Rajuk chairman on April 3 to stop the eviction move.

In case of club's failure to comply with the final notice, Rajuk was supposed to demolish and remove all the illegal structures from the playground after April 3 and exact demolition cost from the club as provided in the Building Construction Act.



File photos of unauthorised set-ups on the Gulshan Central Park.

But Rajuk has taken no action even after expiry of the deadline.

A highly placed source at Rajuk said that a powerful quarter is now active to get a formal contract of maintenance of the playground by the GYC.

Rajuk's estate department officials conducted a spot survey on March 19, 2008 and filed a report describing that the central park has been sec-

tioned into A and B. The report says whatever structures Youth Club has erected in section B are without approval or authorisation. Section A is occupied by Wonderland and is being used commercially.

As per official records, Rajuk handed over the 7.69-acre Gulshan Central Park to the city corporation (the then Gulshan Pourashava) in November 1973 for maintenance.

Rajuk cancelled the hand-over order on August 8, 2007 on the ground that the playground has not been maintained accordingly.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka in April this year ordered the chief estate officer of DCC to remove any unauthorised entity and occupancy of Gulshan Youth Club from the playground.

The mayor told The Daily

Star on April 7 that DCC itself would take full control of maintenance of the field as per its own rules and the social welfare officer of DCC would run an office at the ground if required for better maintenance.

But now, DCC's estate department officials are mysteriously tight-lipped about the issue.

DCC Chief Estate Officer Md Khalilur Rahman said that he does not know about it.

The mayor on the other hand said that he needed to look into the estate department files to say what happened to the eviction order.

A high official of DCC said that a zone officer or a local ward commissioner has no authority to hand over a property or assign anyone to use such property exclusively. As per the city corporation ordinance, it is only the mayor who holds the authority to allow and designate anyone to maintain a public playground, he said.

A couple of GYC documents show that the club has been occupying the playground with structures without the city mayor's authorisation.

The club is neither authorised to occupy the playground with structures nor allowed to indulge in monetary transaction in any form in exchange for use of the field.

On March 25, Public Works Department (PWD) retrieved a Dhanmondi children's park, lying at the intersection of roads no-3, 4, and 5, from unauthorised occupancy.

Phoney organisations prey on job seekers

They bluff them just to rip off their money

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Some phoney organisations are preying on aspiring job seekers with empty promises of job opportunities only to rip them off their money.

These so-called job providers demand fees for arranging "well-paid jobs", and in most cases the promised jobs appear to be non-existent.

The victims, mostly from rural areas, are usually attracted by newspaper advertisements given by the bogus employment agencies.

An up-front non-refundable payment of at least Tk 200 is usually demanded from the applicants. In most cases, the victims spend their family savings to pay the arrangement fees. Many are left destitute when they discovered the jobs did not exist.

Mozammel Hossain, hailing from northern Nilphamari district, expectantly applied to such an agency located in Moghbazar. Having arrived in the city a few weeks ago, Mozammel was struggling to find a job.

"This newspaper advertisement caught my eyes. It said they have lots of job in offering regardless of the qualification," said Mozammel.

Upon making contact with the agency, Mozammel was asked to pay Tk 250 to register himself as an applicant. After Mozammel paid the money he was told that he would soon be called for an interview.

"They asked me to pay a fee to register as a job applicant, saying that they would contact me soon. But a whole month passed away and they didn't call me," he said.

"As I could not reach them by phone, I decided to drop by their office in," said Mozammel, "but I found the office under lock and key. No one could give me any directions on how I can reach them."

While most of these agencies tend to collect money in the name of membership or registration, some claim extra charges for training programmes and such.

Shafiqul Islam was made to pay Tk 8,000 for a training programme. The aspiring job seeker, however, was lucky enough to be called for an interview.

"During the interview, they asked me some basic questions about my family members, my educational qualification and my village. Later they told me that I have passed the interview and they would contact me soon," said Islam.

However, Islam was informed later that his potential employers are not happy

with his qualifications.

"I was told that with a bit of training I would surely get the job. They asked me to pay Tk 8,000 for the course," he said. "They advised me that this is a really good opportunity for me and I should not waste it."

Islam had to ask his family in village to send him over the required money so that he can receive training for his job. For the training course, Islam was made to work as a peon for an NGO for the next month or so.

After weeks of 'training', he was finally accepted as an employee of the organisation. However, his new job was to

agency a while back," said Mujibuddin, who is currently working as a security guard in a well-known security service-providing organisation.

"Although they assured me that I would have my job within a few days, they never contacted me again. Later I went to their office only to find it closed. There was no forwarding address or anything," said Mujibuddin.

"Most of the people who go to these agencies usually come from outside the city. They tend to be naive and consult these people without knowing possible consequences," said a spokesperson from Consumers



An office of a so-called job provider under lock and key at Malibagh.

collect volunteers for his employers.

"I was to recruit new volunteers for the NGO and receive commissions for each enrolment," said Shafiqul Islam. "It was really difficult job and soon I went back to my village in Munshiganj," he said.

A number of these tuition media have spawned in Uttara, Farmgate, Malibagh, Nilkhet, Fakirerpol, Kataban, Elephant Road, Purana Paltan and other places throughout the city.

Majority of these agencies do not operate in one permanent office address. They do not stay in the same office for more than six months. Even the contact numbers provided in the advertisements tend to go offline in a matter of weeks.

"I tried my luck with a secu-

Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

According to sources, the CAB has made a list of such fraud job providing agencies and informed the law enforcing authorities about that. Reportedly, the authorities are yet to take any actions against these agencies.

However, Rab sources said they have found some bogus job providing agencies during a recent raid and apprehended some of the culprits for swindling innocent people.

"We have apprehended some people who reportedly have been taking money from people in the name providing security jobs during a raid earlier in January. We have plans to conduct similar raids in the future," said a Rab official.



A notice board announcing court order against any construction work on the disputed housing plots at Pallabi.

Caught in the middle of legal battles

A thousand plot owners suffer for years as 2 ministries claim ownership of land

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

About a thousand plot owners at Pallabi in the city are caught in the middle of legal battles between two ministries over ownership of the land.

The National Housing Authority (NHA) under the housing and public works ministry and the Administrator of Waqfs under the religious affairs ministry have long been claiming the land rights in two blocks of Pallabi.

A big portion of the plot owners have been evicted recently while others are waiting for more than a decade to get the plots.

The NHA and the office of the Administrator of Waqfs leased out plots on the 85 acres of disputed land at Ka and Kha block in Mirpur Section-8 (Pallabi) to two groups of people and realised a huge amount of money.

Some legal suits on the land right are pending in different courts including Sub-Judge Court, Dhaka and the High

Court.

In one of the cases (no 1539/2008), the High Court on June 4 delivered the verdict but both the NHA and the office of the Administrator of Waqfs claim that the verdict is in their favour.

Both sides said they would take actions after getting the copy of the verdict.

Nurul Islam, executive engineer of Division-1 of NHA, said, "We are yet to receive the copy of the verdict but we have learnt that it is in our favour." He claimed that previous court orders also came in favour of NHA.

On the other hand, Abu Yousuf M Hemayet Uddin, administrator of Waqfs Bangladesh, said, "We have heard that the court has ordered the lower court to hand over 80 acres of land to us after demarcation."

At present, the whole land in the two blocks remains barren and filled with rubbles. Dozens of small signboards are announcing a court order against any construction work on the disputed land.

The plot owners of both sides are keeping vigil on the plot.

NHA officials said they are handing over plots to their clients and have sought security from the authorities to protect the possessions.

On February 14, NHA bulldozed the houses built by those who got plots from the religious affairs ministry, displacing several thousand people from their homes.

The evicted plot owners took shelter in adjacent areas and their presence make the situation insecure for the plot owners under NHA.

Abul Kalam, a plot owner, said, "I got the plot from the Waqf estate. Is it my fault? I have become a rickshaw owner from an electronic goods trader just because the NHA has demolished my property worth Tk 50 lakh."

On the other hand, Badiul Islam, lessee of an NHA plot, told Star City that he had paid all dues to the housing authority by 1996 and according to the lease deed he should have got the plot's

possession within a week. But he is yet to get the plot.

"I retired five years ago from government service. I don't know when will I get the plot," he said, adding that some of the lessees even died before plot handover.

According to the NHA office, the housing and public works ministry acquired the land at Duaripara through Land Acquisition Case no-5-1972/73. NHA developed the area for solving housing problem of the middle and lower income people and leased 474 plots to a group of people through lottery in 1994.

The housing authority realised Tk 80,000 per katha from the lessees.

Officials of NHA Dhaka division-1 said when NHA was preparing for handing over possessions to the plot allottees in 1994, Absar Uddin and Mohiuddin Hayder, as Motowalli of Ainuddin and Foyzunnisa Waqfs Estate, lodged a title suit at the Second Sub-Judge Court, Dhaka, claiming land rights.

This was the start of legal

battles between the two ministries.

In 1997, the office of the Administrator of Waqfs started long-term leasing of plots on about 30 acres of land. It collected Tk 20,000 per katha from the lessees.

According to the office of the Administrator of Waqfs, the land has been under its possession since 1950 and the government did not to acquire the property. Therefore, the eviction drives by the housing authority were illegal.

"Cases remain pending with courts, keeping the land rights of the plots unsettled. But NHA demolished the houses of our lessees even after showing court orders," said Hemayet Uddin, administrator of the Waqfs, Bangladesh.

He said for acquiring the land from Waqfs estate, the housing and public works ministry should have notified it earlier. Besides, they should have provided the evicted lessees with compensations for their losses.