

SQUASH COMPLEX IN GULSHAN CENTRAL PARK

Leasing out part of playground to deprive locals of open space

TAWFIQUE ALI

Allocating a portion of Gulshan Central Park for setting up a squash complex will deprive the local community of an open space as this playground is already occupied with unauthorised structures, said noted environmentalists.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has recently handed over a 15-katha plot of the playground in favour of Bangladesh Squash Racquets Federation through the National Sports Council (NSC) to build the squash complex.

However, Golam Kibria, member (planning) and currently in-charge of chairman of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), said DCC cannot unilaterally hand over a playground, either in part or full, to another organisation.

"Such handover is illegal and we are not even aware of it," said Kibria. "We wrote a letter to DCC

recently stating that they cannot hand over any parks or playgrounds to other organisations for exclusive use."

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, noted educationist and head of a high-level advisory committee on DCC's park development and beautification, said it is improper on the part of DCC to let an open space be used exclusively.

"This is just unacceptable and objectionable," he said. "Leasing out part of a playground for an exclusive complex will deprive the public of open space and it will be harmful for the public. It must remain open," Choudhury added.

Dhaka is becoming unliveable day by day, he said adding that occupying open space is unacceptable when it has become essential to create new such spaces.

The local community of Gulshan is not either aware of the handover of the playground.

CM Shafi Sami, president of Gulshan Society and a former adviser to the government, said, "I am not even aware of it."

Rajuk, the original owner of the playground, handed over 7.69-acre Gulshan Central Park to the DCC (the then Gulshan Pourashava) on November 29, 1973 for maintenance.

But it cancelled the handover order through a letter on August 8, 2007 on the ground that the playground was not being maintained accordingly.

A Rajuk move, on the other hand, to remove all the illegal set-ups and occupancy from Gulshan Central Park to make the playground accessible to public has been foiled with strong lobbying at the government policymakers' level.

Rajuk in its notice on March 20, 2008 asked the Gulshan Youth Club for removing unauthorised structures and possession in the playground.

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

Rajuk served the final eviction notice upon Gulshan Youth Club on April 1, 2008, ordering the club to demolish all the unauthorised structures within three days.

But the eviction process has still been stalled following an unofficial directive from a government high-up, sources alleged.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said they have allotted a 15-katha space of the playground in response to an application.

"We thought we do not need such a big playground and we could spare a 15-katha space out of it. We placed the issue at our

board meeting and got approval," he said. "Squash is a sophisticated sport event and it requires a site in a posh area like Gulshan."

The city mayor however said, "I agree that addition of a squash complex to the existing unauthorised structures will spoil the character of the playground. We will not allow any structures in the playground in future."

Sharif Jamil of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) said there is hardly any open playground like this in Gulshan. "Authorities should have kept this playground open. It is still possible to find an alternative site for squash complex in Gulshan."

The playground is situated on plot no-130/A by roads no-103, 108 and 109 in Gulshan.

According to a former chairman of Rajuk, both Gulshan Central Park and Gulshan South Park (Taltala) were clearly earmarked as open children's park in the layout of Gulshan Model Town in the master plan prepared in 1962.

Official sources said the NSC had asked the DCC for a playground in Gulshan for Bangladesh Squash Racquets Federation as squash is a regular event in South Asian (SA) Games, formerly known as South Asian Federation (SAF) Games.

Bangladesh is going to host the SA Games in 2009 and is in need of a designated squash complex, said general secretary of the Federation Jahangir Hamid Sohel.

"The NSC has formally handed over a 15-katha land at Gulshan Central Park to us for setting up the squash complex," said Sohel. "We intend to build a complex of at least six squash courts and hope to start work after Eid holidays."

He further said that they would offer the schoolchildren a free training on squash and the public will have a free access to the complex to take part in the game.



PRAISEWORTHY: The Public Works department (PWD) in partnership with a private telecom company has built picturesque stretches of walkways on both sides of the Banani lake to beautify and protect the lake area from prowling grabbers.



The proposed squash complex at the playground will further reduce the open space already occupied with unauthorised structures.

Entering the era of online supermarket

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A young lady, browsing through online at her room, opens a website containing all kinds of dresses and other items. She is eagerly checking the prices at the virtual showroom and choosing some dresses for herself and her younger sister.

This is the latest way of shopping. City dwellers can now search for food, flowers, dresses, books and many other things online and choose before buying.

Chorka.com Ltd (www.chorka.com) is one of the pioneering online shopping portals that started its journey recently with an array of goodies for the city dwellers. Customers can order the products online and can have home delivery.

The online market started with 24 reputed Bangladeshi brands of various products. The products include food, furniture, books, apparel, electronics and many more. These will be sold at their normal rate with some delivery charges.

"For the last four years we have been maintaining our own website but it could not serve our sales purpose," Soumik Das, managing partner, Rang, a shop with an online outlet.

"The website merely served the purpose of disseminating information and displaying our products to the overseas customers. Besides, we had to employ extra manpower to manage the website just like a retail shop," he said.

"For payment you have to depend on an overseas bank or will have to have a joint venture with an overseas company. But

now these hassles are being taken care of by Chorka. Now we do not have to think about the payment or the delivery because they are doing all these things for us," said Soumik.

"We have lots of overseas customers, so this will be a great opportunity for us," he added.

For cake shops it will be a great opportunity since many Bangladeshis living abroad want to send cakes to parents and relatives as birthday gifts.

"My daughter, living abroad, always sends me cake and flowers on my birthday. But it

cost too high. Now I think she can do it at reasonable prices," said Masuda, a resident of Uttara.

Iftokhar, general manager, Mr Baker, said he will now be able to sell cakes at lower prices than before through the new shopping portal.

"Previously an overseas customer had to pay around \$50 (Tk 3500) for a cake while we used to get Tk 900. The rest of the amount went to the middle company. It was bad for both the customers and for us. But now we will sell the cake just at the normal rate. The

profit margin will be dealt between Chorka and us," said Iftokhar.

"Transport is a great problem in delivering goods but this problem is too taken care of by the web portal," he added.

Mohammad Moniruzzaman, director, Chorka, said the idea of starting an online super market originated from increasing use of internet among general people.

"We took the decision of launching this site after seeing the increasing use of internet. We did a market study, which revealed that a few lakhs of

people are hitting the online news services every day," said Moniruzzaman.

Right now their target customers are Bangladeshis living abroad.

"At present our target customers are non-resident Bangladeshis. We expect that they will start using the site for sending gifts to parents and relatives living in the city. But gradually we will tap into the segment of internet-savvy local customers," he said.

The charges will be reasonable as many outlets will maintain the original price of their products. But the delivery charges will be added. Orders from overseas customers will be delivered by DHL, said Chorka officials.

Moniruzzaman said success of this venture depends on some factors like including local customers, the socio-economic condition of the country and easier ways of payment.

Chorka.com operates in three payment modes -- international credit cards, mobile phones and payment on delivery for the registered customers.

K Kraft, Anjans, Deshal, Fit Elegance, Rang, Dustbin, Oboyob, Charon, Mahua, Pushpalaya, Ferns n Petals, Pushponir, Harappa, Mr Baker, Webcom, Thakral Information System, CMPL, Global Brand, Oitijjhya, Shomoy Prokashon, International Book Agency, Shop 21, Ruposhi, Rankstel and Prestige Bengal are currently operating through this site.

The site is expecting that more than 100 brand shops and distributors will join Chorka this year.



Online shopping comes at a time when department stores are gaining popularity.

Plan for new fleet of 5,000 autorickshaws hits snag

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Plan to add 5,000 more CNG-run autorickshaws to the current fleet in the city hit fresh snags as one of the owners' association filed a writ petition with the high court against the decision to allot the three-wheelers only to drivers.

Dhaka City CNG Autorickshaw Business Owners' Association filed the petition in the first week of last month. Following the petition the court issued a stay order on the government's plan to distribute the new batch.

Owners termed the decision to register vehicles against driving licences as unjust and a violation of the agreement they had with the ministry of communication and Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) in 2002.

ATM Nazmul Hasan, General Secretary, Dhaka City CNG Autorickshaw Business Owners' Association said, "Many owners were deprived when the government in 2001 phased out 31,500 two-stroke three-wheelers and introduced environment-friendly CNG run four-stroke ones."

In 2002 there was a tripartite agreement between them, the communication ministry and the BRTA that the deprived parties would be rehabilitated, he explained.

"The government many times had promised that the deprived owners would be rehabilitated and the fresh lot of CNG autorickshaws would be allotted to those deprived owners, which were never carried out," he added.

He pointed out that all the owners were not rehabilitated as only around 13,000 new three-wheelers were introduced against the number of 31,500.

"So the latest decision to allot



autorickshaws against driving licences clearly violates the government's previous agreement with the owners," he added.

It will create a new breed of middlemen doing brisk business, as most drivers cannot afford a Tk. 2.75 lakh worth autorickshaws. Eventually there will be clandestine deals between the drivers and owners with the help of middlemen. It will also increase the price of the three-wheelers, he said.

The drivers on the other hand termed the move as a form of repression of the owners.

MD. Golam Faruk, General Secretary, Dhaka District Autorickshaw Auto-tempo Mishuk Transport Workers Union said, "Allotment of autorickshaw to drivers would have freed them from the autocratic behaviour of the owners and the sufferings all these years."

"Besides, in 2001 the drivers were deprived. There were many drivers who owned three-wheelers. They were also supposed to be rehabilitated but they have always been deprived

of benefits," he added. "Since 2002 the owners have always charged us extra 200 taka deposit money. They (owners) also made us pay the garage and repair charge. We want those money back," he said.

The drivers association will resume its protest against the owners move soon, he said. The communications ministry on November 8, 2007 approved the plan to add 5000 more autorickshaws, the most popular mode of transportation in the city hoping that the new addition will bring down the existing chaos in the CNG autorickshaw sector and reduce public sufferings in the capital.

It was decided that the new batch would be allotted to genuine driving licence holders only. BRTA had already finished the submission of application process in August. The registration process was supposed to be complete by this month. The writ stalled registration process.

Currently there are 13,000 registered autorickshaws in the city.