

hello dhaka

Weekly weather forecast for the city	Today	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	Low: 17 °C High: 27 °C Sunny and pleasant	Low: 18 °C High: 26 °C Sunny and pleasant	Low: 18 °C High: 26 °C Nice with plenty of sunshine	Low: 18 °C High: 26 °C Sunny and pleasant	Low: 18 °C High: 25 °C Sunny and nice	Low: 18 °C High: 24 °C Sunny and pleasant	Low: 18 °C High: 27 °C Plenty of sun

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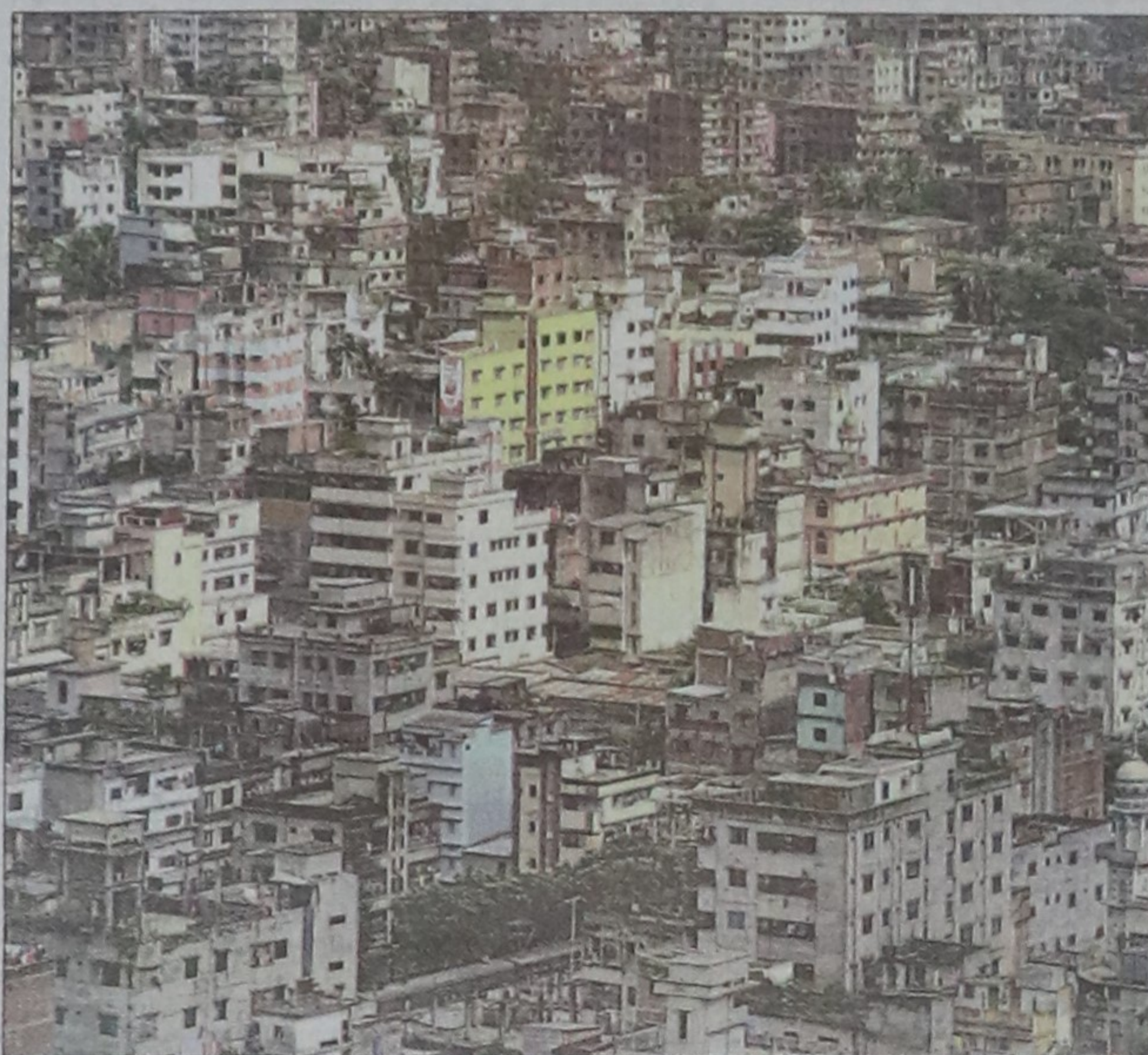
Rectifying deviant buildings Rajuk's major challenge

TAWFIQUE ALI
Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) appears helpless in rectifying building construction deviations in the face of widespread anomalies. Dhaka is a city of around 1.20 crore people and 20 lakh of them own houses. At least 70 percent of the house owners resort to violation of building rules, Rajuk sources said.

The immediate past caretaker government launched a vigorous drive against influential building rules violators in the capital. But it soon proved futile with the rules violators coming back to their earlier state applying various tricks. Rajuk carried out a number of eviction and demolition drives in Gulshan and Dhanmondi to rectify deviation from building rules and retrieve car parking space. But the move did not make any difference. Building design deviation is common practice in the entire city including in the

planned areas like Gulshan, Banani and Dhanmondi. There are still innumerable buildings in Gulshan, Banani and Dhanmondi and other areas that turned commercial though the approved design is for residential use. Rajuk carried out similar drives in Dhanmondi on February 24 in areas including Dhanmondi road-27, 5, 14 and Mirpur Road only to see their comeback soon. First-ever in history, Rajuk served a notice in mid 2007 to the illegal commercial occupants of residential buildings in the city's designated residential areas asking them to vacate illegal occupancy within two months. The move was stalled as Rajuk was reluctant to go ahead due to reasons unknown. The notice was served to four categories of unauthorised non-residential and commercial usages of residential buildings including restaurants, colleges and universities, hospitals and garment factories. With the deadline over, Rajuk was supposed to go for eviction of the unauthorised commercial set-ups in the residential areas. Unauthorised offices, shops, restaurants, private universities, hospitals, shopping malls and other non-residential set-ups at residential buildings have destroyed the very residential character of Gulshan, Dhanmondi, Banani, Uttara and other areas. Dhaka City Corporation is responsible for trade licences, education ministry for educational institutions and health ministry for hospitals and clinics. So the agencies concerned must play their respective role to address the menace, experts said. Rajuk itself allowed commercial and non-residential use of residential buildings along main avenues and roads changing the original zoning plan of the residential areas. According to Prof Nazrul Islam, a noted urban expert and honorary chairman of Centre for Urban Studies (CUS), the situation has assumed an uncontrollable proportion just because the authorities concerned did not play their due role right in the beginning.

"This is a major challenge for Rajuk to rectify such huge anomalies," he added. Noted environmentalist and chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said Rajuk has to concentrate more on regulatory and planning functions than its preoccupation with development activities.



CONCRETE JUNGLE: Just eviction and demolition are not enough to stop violation of building rules.

"Rajuk is so preoccupied with developmental activities that it hardly can perform its regulatory role in the growth of the capital city," he said. Prof Ahmad said Rajuk board has to be of participatory nature in the form of a trust. In case of a building constructed deviating from rules, Rajuk is required to serve notice upon the building owner and arrange a hearing and rectify the deviation. In developed countries, there is provision for Neighbourhood Council comprising mainly local residents to settle such anomalies in a particular area, he said.

ELECTRONIC CASH REGISTER INTRODUCED Small stores to slip out of taxman

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR
Next time you visit the local department store, keep your ears open for curious jingles of typing noises coming from the cash counter. That is the noise of an electronic cash register at work. And that is a noise city dwellers should get acquainted with because the tax department hopes every store in the city will introduce these registers gradually. "This is probably one of the biggest changes in the retail scene of the city," said Hamidur Rahman, a clerk at the counter of a bookstore in Dhanmondi. "A large number of businessmen can now enjoy the ease of using an electronic cash register to keep track of

daily transactions. But I doubt a lot of the small stores out there would be able to afford an electronic cash register," he said. After around two years of procrastination, the use of cash register was made mandatory from January 1 this year at restaurants, sweetmeat stores, fast food outlets, grocery shops, beauty salons, furniture shops, community centres, departmental and general stores to keep track of all their transactions. It all started a couple years back when the authorities were trying to find a way to net the huge amount of taxes and VAT many businesses were not paying. And they came up with the idea of introducing electronic cash registers to

streamline the recording of the flow of transactions. "Many shop owners tend to deceive VAT officers by using different logbooks with the manual bookkeeping system," said an official from the National Board of Revenue (NBR). "When VAT inspectors go to inspect the VAT information, they present a logbook that has the least amount of sales. This way they dodge taxes," he said. Originally scheduled to go into effect from July 2008, enforcement of the policy was delayed to give the shop owners an extra six months to comply to ensure collection of value added tax (VAT) from the retailers, NBR sources said. "The shop owners complained that the new policy

is being enforced without considering their inconveniences," an NBR official said. Over two thousand businesses have already started using electronic cash registers in the city, unofficial sources said. According to sources at NBR, gradually all businesses will be brought under the use of electronic cash registers. While many stores seem to have electronic cash registers, this correspondent found many stores using manual bookkeeping methods as their cash registers stay idle at the counter. "The technology is quite new to us. We need time to get used to it. That is why we are still using papers to record our sales," said

Golam Hossain, counter clerk at a popular kebab place on Bailey Road. Some retailers are not even aware of the new scheme. Most of them do not have the slightest knowledge about electronic cash registers. "Could you give me any idea on where to get a cash register, or which one would be more cost effective?" asked a visibly baffled Shankar Chandra Dash, proprietor of a stationary in Banani after this correspondent informed him about the new scheme. "I think it would be more convenient to use an electronic cash register rather than the manual bookkeeping system. However, I really do not know about the functions of a cash register or where to get one," said Shankar. Many storeowners believe a good number of businessmen still may not be able to afford electronic cash registers. "A decent cash register comes at a price of around Tk 40,000 to Tk 50,000. We have to cough up at least Tk 20,000 for even a lower quality register. So they authorities should consider that there are a huge number of small businessmen who can not afford it," said Abul Hasnat, owner of a restaurant in Uttara. "It should not be made mandatory for small retail outlets," he suggested. However, NBR officials believe that the retailers had sufficient time to get hold of a cash register. "I do not see how they cannot spend Tk 20,000 on it. It sounds reasonable in terms of the money they make," said an NBR official.



Gradually all businesses will have to use electronic cash registers.

HELPER MAKES HIM HELPLESS



Helper of a private bus discourages a physically challenged person from getting on to the bus at a stoppage. Although it is mandatory to keep reserve seats most private buses defy the rule and deprive the disabled of their rights.

BATTERY FACTORY AT WEST NAKHALPARA Days of deadly fumes pass off at long last

CITY CORRESPONDENT
At long last, forty-six years after its founding, the Lucas battery factory at West Nakhhalpara, has turned off its machines emitting deadly fumes in the area. The factory, run by RahimAfrooz Bangladesh Ltd, was shut down on December 31, 2008. For a long time the people of the area were living with a pungent smell in the air and the grumbling noise of the generator. After the relentless effort of the residents, finally the owner of the factory, founded in 1960, decided to shut down its cogs. The machine was formally switched off by Abdul Wadud, a senior resident of the area. "Though we have been fighting with the factory authorities for a long time the end was quite amicable. They ended the whole matter in a cordial way," he said. Officials of the factory said that they had been trying their best to relocate the factory since they got notice from the Department

of Environment (DoE). "We were trying to relocate the factory since 2000 when the DoE gave us notice to do so. We also had a letter from the works ministry for buying plots. From 2005 we were trying to buy a plot and bought one at Ashulia next year. But when we started the construction we came to know that it was a disputed plot. We started looking again. Then we selected a plot in Jirani Bazar of Gazipur. The space was insufficient for relocating because we bought the plot for other purposes but in spite of that we are shifting the factory there because we have given our word to DoE," said Sayeed Hassan, chief operating officer, RahimAfrooz Batteries Ltd. Earlier the DoE set a deadline for shifting the factory by November last year. Locals submitted an application to the DoE in June 1995 to shift the factory following enactment of the Environment Conservation Act in February of the same year, giving a full account of the environmental hazards and public sufferings due to

the presence of the factory in the area. Following the application, DoE sent an inspection team to the area in July 1995, which found that the fume from the battery factory's furnace of liquid lead was directly mixing with the air. DoE sent a letter to the managing director of RahimAfrooz Bangladesh Ltd on July 25, 1995 requesting them to use, if possible, a 'wet scrubber' for lead fumes and keep the noise pollution level under 45 decibels. The letter did not mention any specific timeframe or any step the DoE would take in case the factory did not comply with the measures. The locals submitted three more applications in October 1997, August 1998 and in May 2007 to the DoE requesting them to take steps to shift the factory but to no effect. "Whatever has happened now we are all happy that the factory is shut down at last. All I can say is better late than never," said an elderly resident of the area living there since 1959.



A banner on the Lucas battery factory reads 'Thanks for cooperation for the last 50 years'. The unit that emitted deadly fumes, was shifted from West Nakhhalpara on January 1.