

## BEN deplures real estate developers' behavior

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Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN), the global network of non-resident Bangladeshis and their international friends, takes strong exception to and deplures strongly the way some real estate developers attacked the State Minister for Works, Mr. Abdul Mannan and Prof. Jamilur Chowdhury, the expert who was given the responsibility to review the Detail Area Plan (DAP) necessary for implementation of the Dhaka city Master Plan. They made this attack publicly, in presence of journalists, in a recent meeting held in the Secretariat. The developers are apparently upset by the proposed DAP aiming to retain 21 percent of the land as flood water retention zones.

It is well known that many unscrupulous developers are capitalizing on the housing demand by capturing wetlands in and around Dhaka city indiscriminately and promising housing construction on lands that are still under water. Yet, filling up of wetlands will leave no room for rain and flood water, aggravating the water logging problem that has already become serious in the city.

It is quite natural for these developers to oppose DAP that preserves wetlands and restricts the space for their projects. However, the audacity they displayed in attacking the minister publicly is unheard of. These people, some of whom have outstanding criminal cases against them, also had the audacity to question the integrity of Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, who is well known for his independence and honesty.

BEN hopes that the government will stand firm against the myopic demands of the developers and take strong action against those developers who violated the norms of behavior at the meeting. BEN also calls upon all the conscious citizens of the city and the country to thwart the machinations of the greedy developers.

Of course, the growing housing demand has to be met. However, this can be done by promoting decentralization and vertical growth. Decentralization will relieve the pressure on Dhaka city, and vertical growth will allow construction of dwellings while retaining space for passage of rain and flood water. The government also needs to switch from the Cordon Approach to the Open Approach to rivers, so that risk of flooding can be minimized and the problem of water logging can be avoided.

While deploring the behavior of many real estate developers, BEN however agrees with one of their demands, which is that Rajuk should quit the business of

development and instead focus only on planning and regulation. The current practice whereby Rajuk is both the regulator and developer involves conflict of interest. It is open to question whether Rajuk housing projects of Purbachal, Jhilmil, and Uttara Phase II are also not encroaching wetlands. Moreover, Rajuk projects are mostly a way of benefitting select members of the elite at the expense of taxpayers, whose money is spent on these projects, and at the cost of the poor people, whose land is acquired for these projects. Enough of such grossly socially unfair projects!

The recent tragic fire in old Dhaka shows how enormous a task of planning and regulation Rajuk has at its hand, and how poorly it is performing that task. The government should therefore take an immediate decision debarring Rajuk from further development activities and ordering it to focus fully on planning and regulation. Once this is done, Rajuk will occupy a higher moral ground to oppose the shameless developers who are willing to jeopardize the future of the entire city in order to enrich themselves.

While reformulating Rajuk's objectives, BEN hopes that the government will take immediate action against the developers who were so pompous as to threaten the Minister. The stake is very high. The government has to protect its credibility and honor. Taking this opportunity, BEN applauds the State Minister Abdul Mannan, Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, BAPA, BELA, and all other organizations and individuals who are trying to have pro-environment DAP in order to save Dhaka city from a calamity.