



The British government established two farmhouses in Bengal for the development of agriculture. One of the farms was established in Farmgate in Dhaka for agriculture and livestock research. The area was known as 'farm area' at that time. Farmgate is named after the gate of the farmhouse.

BNP's last-minute plundering of flood retention basin

Defying Master Plan, the outgoing government allotted huge chunks of land in the Bagunbari canal, earmarked as water retention basin

TAWFIQUE ALI

Violating the city's master plan, the immediate past BNP government had officially leased out three large plots in the Bagunbari canal area, a designated flood flow zone, to three influential trade organisations.

The allocations which took place at the end of the BNP government not only contravene environment and wetland related laws but has also deprived the government of a huge amount of revenue, as the prime public lands under the disposal of Bangladesh Railway have been leased out at a token price.

While the Dhaka Wasa has a drainage project in the canal, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) also has undertaken a development scheme at Bagunbari canal and Hatirjheel to restore the canal and the catchment area around it.

The government sold 0.66 decimals of land to Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) and rented out 4.16 acres to Hilton Hotel in the canal along the Tongi Diversion Road.

One acre of land in the canal towards the east of Sonargaon Hotel has been handed over to the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) at a token price Tk 1 lakh.

But there was no public bidding for sale or lease of the railway lands.

At present day market price, one acre of land in that location should cost more than Tk 150 crore, according to sources in Bangladesh Railway.

"It is Railway's property, Railway will use it as per its requirement," said Chief Estate Officer of Bangladesh Railway Mokbul Ahmed when referred to Wetland Protection Act of 2000 that prohibits earth filling in canals and wetlands.

Regarding leasing of prime

land to FBCCI at a token price, he said, "The approval came from the (immediate past) prime minister."

"In all three cases of leasing deal, we recommended that approval should be in compliance with the Railway Land Management Rules of 2006, but the rules were not followed accordingly," Ahmed said.

"One must remember that the rules empower the communications minister to exercise his authority over provisions in the rules of railway land management," he said.

But as per the preconditions in the allotment papers, the allottees have to obtain clear-

stone of the building on October 22, 2006, five days before handing over power to caretaker government.

The government treasury will get Tk 35 per square feet of 4.14 acres of land leased out to Hilton Hotel as land rent and a share of only 1.5 percent of the hotel's total annual sale.

"What can we do if the top-level authority of the government lease out public lands in this manner," said a joint director general of Bangladesh Railway requesting anonymity.

On the basis of recommendations made by a high-powered committee headed by the communications minister,

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He said that the study team repeatedly asked the Rajuk at various meetings not to allow such haphazard construction of high-rises in the Bagunbari canal area.

"Most important consideration in our study was to keep the canal flowing for drainage of rainwater. The canal must be 100 feet wide," he said, adding, "This canal must remain alive to drain out storm water of a large area of the city."

Bahreen Khan, a senior environment lawyer of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said, "Occu-

hibits any change to its status," Shiuly said.

Noted economist and President of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said, "Prime Ministerial approval is not all. Bangladesh Railway has its own responsibility to comply with laws in such cases."

He said that the then prime minister Sheikh Hasina allotted a piece of railway land for Dhaka University Alumni Association in the city's Fulbaria area but later the communications ministry refused to allot the land as per PM's desire and allotted it to Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR).

In case the Railway has lands for commercial uses, it has to arrange auction in open bidding as per government rules.

Public land may be allotted at token price only to social welfare organisations.

"But the FBCCI is one of the richest organisations, how can it get prime public land at a token price," said Prof Ahmed.

Khaleda Zia had laid the foundation plaque of the FBCCI building on October 8.

Good Governance and Development Committee of the Prime Minister's Office took a decision to retrieve 13 old-day canals in and around the capital city.

The DMDP clearly indicates that densely populated areas like Moghbazar, Tejgaon, a part of Gulshan, Badda and Rampura along the canal will face severe adverse consequences if the Bagunbari canal and its catchment areas are earth-filled, experts said.

The Good Governance at a meeting on December 18, 2005, clearly instructed Bangladesh Railway to stop earth-filling spree in the Bagunbari canal and Hatirjheel and take measures to re-excavate the portion filled-up for two CNG stations.



The two foundation stones laid by the former prime minister, Khaleda Zia only days before the government's tenure ended. The signboard shows Hilton International filling up the last remaining floodwater basin in the city (centre).

ance from Department of Environment, Rajuk, Wasa, DCC, and other agencies concerned prior to going for any constructions at the site, Ahmed said.

Regarding lease deed registration by the chief estate officer keeping the Railway's Divisional Estate Department in the dark, Ahmed said, "I am supposed to sign the lease deed registration, as I sign the contracts on behalf of the Railway."

According to the foundation plaque laid by BTMA, that has already earth filled the canal area, the immediate past prime minister laid the foundation

stone of the building on October 22, 2006, five days before handing over power to caretaker government.

According to the joint DG of Railway, Hilton Hotel has already taken possession of the land constructing a boundary wall at the site. "Though we have not yet handed over the possession," Prof Md Mujibur Rahman, who led the study group of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) on the Bagunbari canal, said, "Constructions of BGMEA building, Sonargaon Hotel extension and proposed FBCCI building in Bagunbari canal are not compatible with the recom-

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Policing the city with dogs

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) dog squad has become a token of trust as its members continue to play an integral role in the city's security management, challenging the wits of drug vendors and illegal weapon holders.

The canine potential has been rationalised as dogs that used to guard houses or track criminals are now effectively helping RAB authorities in various security operations including search missions and raids.

"Special training and their very own abilities grant these

dogs remarkable efficiency in locating objects, making them vitally useful in our operations and an essential part in our security arrangements," said Mizanur Rahman, assistant director of the RAB dog squad.

Trained to detect explosives, arms and narcotics, these dogs are taught to guard their handler, and to find, chase, intimidate, and hold suspects who attempt to elude the police. RAB officials told this correspondent that the dogs take part in various search and raid missions conducted by the RAB authorities everyday.

"Apart from routine search

operations in VIP premises, the squad is also taken to raid missions at various locations including the slums areas to retrieve illegal or hazardous objects like explosives, weapons and narcotics," said an official.

"Earlier last year the dogs helped seize 6,000 bottles of phensidyl from a slum -- one of the biggest seizures of drugs in the country's history," said Mizanur Rahman. "During their routine raids they frequently retrieve large number of explosives, firearms and drugs," he added.

The present 44-member dog squad comprises of Labradors

and German Shepherds of both genders. The Labradors are of British origin while the German Shepherds are imported from Germany.

Officials also said that these species have the ability to detect objects by smell from a distance of 10 to 15 metres and a depth of more than two feet, making them far superior and more resourceful than the local species.

"We used the dog squad to search for victims in the debris of the recently collapsed buildings, like the one in Tejgaon earlier this year," said another official. "They managed to locate a number of people from beneath the pile of debris," he added.

"We imported 10 German shepherds and we intend to bring in more Labradors to produce pure breeds," said Rahman. "We stick to pure breeding practices as crossbreeds tend to reduce canine efficiency," Rahman added.

He further told Star City that the breeding season is between March-April and September-October. The life span of a dog is around 12-15 years, and a female litters 6-8 puppies at a time.

"The dogs have individual names which are engraved on their collars," said an official. "Boxy, a German Shepherd that is just seven months old, has started his training," he added. "The oldest member of the squad is Spunky," said the official. "Although he is about 10 years old, he does his share of the job quite efficiently," he said.

Dogs on the verge of death or suffering from incurable diseases are disposed through euthanasia and are later buried with proper honours in a graveyard within the premises.

Spunky along with Boxy and the others are an effective deterrent to potential terrorists. These firebrand animals, who travel in police coaches and enjoy a special diet, instil fear simply by their presence.

Officials told Star City that a dog's day begins at 5:30 am when they are served breakfast. They are taken to refreshment exercises between 6:00 and 6:40 before they are groomed and rested. By 8:00 am, the adult dogs are deployed in duties at various locations.

"Contrary to general belief, police dogs are not vicious animals; they are just trained to enjoy their work," said a trainer. "Detecting, chasing and grabbing are only introduced to them as tricks or games that can be played only when the handler (a police officer) gives the appropriate command," he added.

Local nutritionists devise the canine diet that comprise of bread, eggs, cod liver oil, boiled meat and vegetables. Every dog is fed according to age, weight and height. Puppies with no access to the mother's milk are fed with formulated canine milk.

"They do not attack anyone unless we ask them to do so," said a Rab officer and explained a gesture at a targeted individual and uttering 'attack' would make the creature attack the individual in question.

"Training begins when the dogs are six months or older; initially they are familiarised with the smell of food and gradually to explosives, arms and narcotics," said a trainer. "Individual dogs specialise in a single type of smell. Scratching a specific location indicates that something has been detected," he added.



Rab's canine mates patrolling the Central Shaheed Minar.



The signboard shows how the Begunbari canal and its adjacent areas that help drainage of floodwater have been allocated.

INTRA UNIVERSITY PHOTOGRAPHY EXHIBITION

Creating through lenses

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A single picture can speak a million words. A photography exhibition 'Focus' at Drik Gallery speaks of the spirited young minds through 40 pictures depicting different angles of human life and heritage.

A single picture can leave the mind in a whirlwind in its quest to understand the inner meaning of the photo. It was an aim of this exhibition on abstract photography organised by East West Cine and Photography Club (EWUPC).

The photos did not contain any description but only a one or two-word caption. The intention was to let the viewers understand the meaning in their own ways.

For an instance, in the photo 'Shimana' (the limit), a child is craning his neck in an attempt to come out of a window.

Md Fazle Rabbi, photographer of 'Shimana' said: "I noticed him near a mosque in Kalabagan. He was the imam's child. When I saw him I felt that every human being faces two contrasts in his life -- a limit and the urge to cross it. Those who can cross it are the winners."

In another picture 'O', Rabbi took snaps of a beach covered with dead stingrays killed by fishermen. He tried to

describe a stark reality of life on earth and that is -- human livelihood is dependent on killing endangered wild life.

"The question is should we ask the fishermen to stop killing that rare species on which they live? Can we choose between saving humans and saving wild life?" he said.

"In my photos I try to catch the expression, nature and surrealism. I love abstract photography. I like working on texture and night photography is my favourite. In future, I want to work as a professional photo director," said Easel Mortuza, a participant.

"In the 'Touch of Golden Linen' I took the photo at three in the morning and I waited for two hours to take the perfect snap," he said.

In 'Azan', M M Kaushik, shows two sampans which were calling him. In 'Ray' he depicts that time moves on but leaves its mark behind.

In 'Jibon Goti' (speed of life) Raihan Quadir depicts the front wheel of a rickshaw, which is the only way of life of the rickshaw-puller. In 'Ekakitto' (loneliness) Sajid took snap of a tiny fruit lying in grass.

"It is difficult for a girl to be photographer but if her family gives support then she can overcome the hurdles. The environment in our country is not that supportive. A girl cannot go out doing photography only if she wishes. But I'm hopeful," said Nafisa Haque, a participant.

"This exhibition is very creative. Lighting of the photos is very nice. The view is good for art photography. The composition is exceptional and the framing and printing quality of the photos is very nice," said Srabon Reza, a student of Dhaka College and a contributor photographer in the daily Jugantor, who came to see the exhibition.

"Unspoken Truth" and 'Searching for Winding Road' by Easel Mortuza got the first and third prize respectively. Aradhana (worship) by Nafisa Haque got the second prize. Renowned photographer Shankar Sawjal was the chief guest and Prof Mohammad Musa, vice chancellor (acting) chaired the opening ceremony on December 2.

This exhibition is based on a workshop held from May to July, where the participants were taught basic ideas and concepts of photography and camera functions.

EWUPC organised the five-day Intra University Photography Exhibition 2006 'Focus' with the aim to create ways for the amateur photographers and develop creativity. It is open from 3:00 to 8:00pm.