



Shah Amanat Bridge over the river Karnaphuli

Siltation chokes Karnaphuli

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD

Stretching around two-kilometre area of the river Karnaphuli from Karnaphuli Shah Amanat Bridge to Sadarghat BIWTC terminal faces severe siltation that narrowed the river at Bondor channel alarmingly.

If it continues, the existence of main jetties of Chittagong port might be threatened in addition to the hindrance to free-movement of water transports.

Side by side with illegal encroachments, unplanned construction of different installations, even by the government and lack of coordination to address the menace is further worsening the situation.

At the same time, random disposal of harmful wastes and tons of garbage that ultimately find their way to the river through the city drains not only aggravated the siltation but also polluted the Karnaphuli.

With the exercise of such evil practices it now poses a threat to the existence of the Karnaphuli - the economic lifeline of the port city of Chittagong and the country as well - on which the country's premier sea port is based.

According to the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) survey and study on the siltation at that portion of the river, construction of the Shah Amanat Bridge (locally known as Karnaphuli bridge) was identified as the main reason behind it.

The four-member team conducted the survey and study as per the agreement signed between Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) and BUET on June 11 last year. The team submitted its draft report to CPA for its opinion on April 8 this year.

Prof Dr. Khorshed Alam led the team. Other members of the team are Prof MF Bari, Prof MM Hossain and Prof Mir Zahan from the Department of Water Resources of BUET.

The team identified three main reasons for the massive siltation of the river at that point.

Of them, deposition of earth through replacement by scouring from river bed at the left bank due to the construction of the Shah Amanat Bridge was attributed to around 78 per cent siltation at the

right bank of the river.

Two other main reasons were: Tons of wastes and garbage of the city carried into the river through drains and other canals with strong currents and erosion of the river bank to the upstream of Shah Amanat Bridge and scouring of the river bed soil due to lack of river training.

The report put forth two phases of recommendations as the possible ways for remedies and suggestions for river training works.

The first phase of recommendations include capital dredging, periodic maintenance, dredging and revention works of the existing erosion prone banks.

In the second phase of recommendations were: construction of jetties, wharves or training wall along the left bank of Shah Amanat Bridge, training wall at the tail end of the right channel of Bakalia char and along the alignment of old Kolagoan revention and widening of Bakalia right channel and closing of the left one.

As the first option for capital dredging, the report suggested for dredging of 21 lakh Cubic metre within an area of 1800 metre in the aforesaid stretch. The area has been marked up to 200 metre into the river from the banks where the draft is less than 4 metre.

Concerned sources in CPA said, though the report did not give any hints about the possible "indicative price" for the recommended capital dredging and revention works, the dredging of 2.1 Million (21 Lakh) Cubic Metre might cost some Tk. 46 crore (Tk. 220 for each Cubic metre of dredging).

"The area suggested for dredging in the report is now a complete shoal and immediate dredging is vital," a senior CPA official of the Hydro-graphic Department, told The Daily Star.

"Otherwise it would severely affect the main jetties of the port," the official added preferring anonymity.

Moreover, the siltation of the river at the said stretch rendered the once lively BIWTC Terminal of Sadarghat "useless" as no vessel of coastal route now anchor there, the sources said.

The passengers have to board on

the vessels using boats and the goods also need to be carried in the same means that raises the transportation costs of essential commodities, they added.

Roads and Highway (R&H) has proposed for third bridge (after Kalurghat and Shah Amanat bridges) over the river.

The ECNEC recently approved the proposal The BUET report said if R&H authority concerned for such installations takes initiative for the third bridge then it must remove all the pillars of the Shah Amanat Bridge.

Prior to that the R&H must consider all the possible impacts the proposed bridge might have on the navigational channel of the river, the report added.

And accordingly, sources said, CPA might think of requesting R&H for conducting a survey in this regard and might seek cooperation of the ministry concerned if necessary.

Around 50 kilometers of the river bank at different points has already gone under illegal occupants. In many places of Chaktai, Yeakubnagar Ghat, Bridgeghat, Jaligonj, Bangla Bazar, Sadarghat and Mazirht unscrupulous have encroached the river constructing illegal structures.

The encroachers occupy the river bank erecting bamboo fencing and then fill the river to sell the gained land at Tk. 4 lakh per Katha.

In some cases, they obtain license or take lease of foreshore land from the estate department of the concerned CPA and extend their grab inside the river increasing the area of the land.

Foreshore Land license holders construct installations and illegal structures very often violating the conditions set in the licenses.

Dozens of slipways and gangways of different industries have been constructed extending them illegally some times as far as 400 ft inside the river from the both banks choking the river near the Bondor channel.

These structures help siltation of the river hindering flow and remaining submerged during the high tide. They pose threat to the safe movement of the water transports as well.

There are over 30 firms and

industries along the banks at the Bondor channel to hinder the river flow in this way.

On the otherhand, thousands of tons of garbage and solid wastes of the city find their way to the Karnaphuli through drains of the city. There are also around 50 thousand sanitary-latrines and another 24 thousand open latrines in the city to produce around 400 tons of solid wastes to go to the river.

Besides, of the 720 industrial units along the river at Chittagong and Chandroghona, 217 units have been identified as polluters of the river releasing harmful chemical wastes.

Meanwhile, the speakers at a discussion meeting on "The present and future of the Karnaphuli" organised by Chittagong Environmental Journalists Forum (CEJF) here recently stressed the need for a comprehensive planning, mechanism to save the river Karnaphuli.

In this regard, coordination among all the concerned authorities including CPA, R&H, Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) and Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) was underscored.

The participants stressed for integrated and well-coordinated measures to help maintenance, timely dredging and training of the river and for the development and taking care of the canals of the city's drainage system that carries mud and wastes to the river causing siltation.

They also felt the necessity of strict application of the laws to check the encroachment of the river and disposal of chemical and other wastes from different factories along the river and the city canals polluting the water seriously.

To check pollution, the speakers put accent on the necessity of eviction drives and other measures to be properly implemented through integrated and sincere efforts by the authorities concerned.

They strongly criticised CPA for not taking proper measures to control the encroachment and pollution in the Karnaphuli. They also blamed CPA for leasing out lands on the river bank helping growth of factories that dispose harmful chemicals to pollute the river.

CEPZ heralds new era in economy

NURUL ALAM

Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) known as the country's first operational EPZ, heralded a new era in the economic fields while the efforts were on to woo foreign investments.

The CEPZ based at Patenga just overlooking the mighty Bay of Bengal, was commissioned in 1983. It covered 450 acres of land where a total of 428 plots were developed in phases.

CEPZ received a tremendous response from the entrepreneurs of both home and abroad.

It so far housed 111 operational industrial units drawing a cumulative investment of 328 million US dollars and generated employment opportunities for over 70,000 workforce, official reports said.

Of the total units, 69 industries are of 100 per cent foreign investment (A type), 17 joint venture (B type) and 25 of 100 per cent Bangladeshi (C type).

During the period of first 11 months from July to May of current fiscal year goods worth 550 million US dollar were exported to different foreign countries from the CEPZ, official sources said.

The exported goods included ready made garments, textiles, terry towel, footwear and leather products, knitting and electronic items, garments accessories, metal and plastic products caps, tent, paper products, fishing reel, ropes and sports items etc.

Out of total 428 plots, only four remained vacant now while works to set up industries continued in 8 plots, official sources said adding that construction might be started in 25 other plots.

The foreign countries which made investments in CEPZ included South Korea, Japan, USA, UK, Germany, Pakistan, Malaysia, Taiwan, India, Singapore, France and Italy.

Out of the total workforce, 70 per

cent are female, official sources said. A long row of thousands of female workers is seen regularly in front of the

CEPZ at the time of entry and exit both in the morning and evening.

The objectives of setting up EPZ are promotion of foreign direct investment, augmentation of local investment, promotion of export, diversification of export, development of backward and forward linkages, generation of employment, transfer of technology, upgrading of skill and development of management. The incentives provided include investment protected under foreign private investment (promotion and protection) act, 1980, 100 per cent foreign own-

ership permissible, no ceiling on foreign investment, tax holiday for 10 years followed by reduced rate for next 5 years, duty free construction materials, machinery and office equipment, duty free import and export, relief from double taxation, exemption from dividend tax, GSP facility, full repatriation of capital and dividend and foreign currency loan permissible without permission of Bangladesh bank.

The infrastructure facilities include electricity, gas, water, road, telecom, e-mail etc, fully serviced plots availability, factory building available on rental basis, enclave for workers dormitory, warehouse and godown availability, business support service and administrative

supports. After the success of CEPZ, five other EPZs were set up in the country to woo foreign investments for bolstering the national moribund economy and generation of employment facilities for the teeming millions.

Of them, EPZ was set up in Dhaka in 1993, in Mongla in 1997, in Comilla in 2000 and in Ishurdy and Uttara Nilphamari in 2001.

EPZs in Chittagong and Dhaka are fully operational while plot allotments continued in four other EPZs. Sources said that the authorities concerned were contemplating installation of more EPZs in Chittagong to accommodate investments from home and abroad.



Chittagong Export Processing Zone

Sugandha: A dream gone away

MOHT UL ALAM

Moiler Depot (a dump of refuse) was the old name. The city waste used to be dumped in it in the past. The place always stank horribly and was a threat to the city environment. The whole area behind the Prabartak Hills formed a patchy square between Panchlaish thana and Nasirabad Housing Society, and the waste dump mounted like a hill and could be seen from the road connecting Prabartak More with Panchlaish thana More.

Nobody knew to whom the idea first occurred that Moiler Depot could be turned into a modern housing society - literally speaking, sprinkling rose water on a bin of shit.

Things changed overnight, and over a period of two decades, nothing of the old stench in the air remained, and instead beautiful multi-storied buildings have cropped up in a densely thick formation. And the changed name of the place now is Sugandha (Sweet smell) - appropriately so.

There is a big corporation drain justly called English Channel - that separates Sugandha from Nasirabad Housing Society that, many consider, is the oldest post area of Chittagong. Nasirabad Housing Society is still in fact the largest and the most spacious residential area of Chittagong. Wide staircases, south-facing balconies, and spacious bedrooms characterise the houses in Nasirabad, built in the olden times, as well as wide roads. Just to compare, a three-bedroom house in Nasirabad may be as big in size as a five-bedroom house in Sugandha, though where you will never find such a big house.

Most houses at Sugandha are like pigeon cages, following an architectural pattern based on the idea of 'small house but good planning'. That is good, but not adhere to, and what the house builders have sacrificed are space and the green. Sugandha today is a conglomeration of unbelievably closed-space, claustrophobic, breath-choking buildings that manifest nothing but utter insensitive to civic sense. Will not find any width of space between two houses. Any two neighbouring buildings have risen so close to each other that a stretch hand out of a window can touch another stretched hand out of the opposite window. Most of the houses, therefore, are dark and damp on this side or that side. And, Sugandha is virtually tree-free, except for the

plants and the flowers raised by the housewives in the balconies. It looks like a concrete forest without any touch of green. People living here are most likely to have agreed to accept the unhygienic conditions as their fate.

The fact that in an over-populated urban locality what Sugandha has grown into is rather normal cannot be denied, but the point is that since its setting up people who were buying plots at Sugandha and subsequently building houses there were mainly educated professionals and businessmen, so it was thought that houses would be built within an eye to the environment.

The eye was never there so what resulted is not what a house owner would aspire to see his very building blocked by another building with no mentionable space in between. His building may be blocked on three sides save for a small passage for entrance or exit. It may be also that when he built his house he secretly took pride in having an opening on the south, but to his dismay he discovers that another house-owner has started building a house just blocking that south face permanently. So the south side of his building will remain dark and damp forever. In fact, a visitor to Sugandha will be shocked and puzzled to see such dehumanized aspect of urban housing and such disregard for the pollution factor, and this entire happening by managing the concerned authorities for permission to erect the mansions.

But the house builders are far more practical than we think. Sugandha is very favourably located away from the busy areas like Kazir Dewry and Chawk Bazar but again not so far away as Chandgaon Residential Area. Houses on rent are in great demand in Sugandha and the house-rent is often quite high. This financial motif is inducing people to build houses over every square inch of earth available.

Perhaps we cannot object to people's being profit-minded, but from the educated group of house builders we expect a certain awareness of environmental hazards and when we see that sacrificed we then go back to square one as to ask what difference is there then between people building houses at Sugandha and the Sowdagors who built houses at the old areas, say in Chawk Bazar or Kazir Dewry, with flagrant violation of the civic rules. When we see that the educated people and the non-educated people are behaving the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Defacing the public realm: Isn't there any other option?

Defacing public spaces, confining and restricting them from the citizens, have been going on systematically for years both by individuals and the government

ZARINA HOSSAIN

One might ask, whether we really have much of a public realm in our cities.

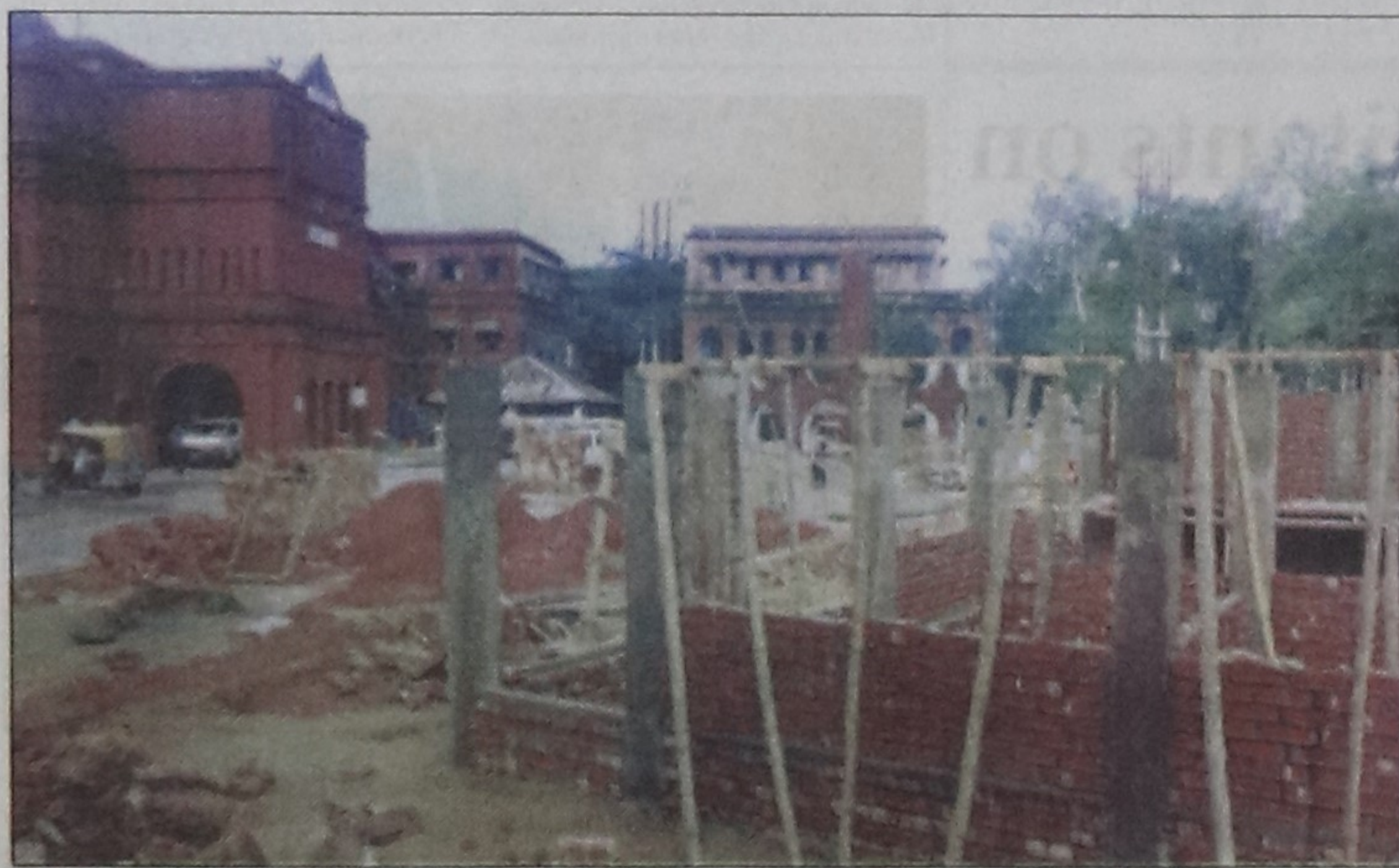
Spaces that are accessible to the citizens - not just passages and streets, but avenues, wide sidewalks, squares, parks, playgrounds and plazas. Both in its natural state with trees and greenery or as designed spaces with paved courts and plazas, these public spaces are the meeting ground of citizens of all ages. Large and small, soft or hard - they break the monotony and provide respite from buildings, and often soothe and surprise the citizen or the casual visitor.

A sense of community grows in these shared spaces. Attractive and appropriate public spaces encourage mixing of people, releases tension and create fellowship. A combination of public and semi-public spaces provides the identity of a city, provides its civic pride and reasons to live and visit.

Nature has bestowed Chittagong

city with an amazing combination of hills, valleys, plains, sea mouth with its sandy coasts, lakes and rivers. The public realm exists within these conditions naturally. With a little care and attention and with sensitive planning and government commitment, a variety of spectacular spaces in the public realm could have been created, reinforcing and enhancing the natural state, for the benefit of the residents of the city and beyond.

Most of our open spaces are bequeathed to us from our past generations, particularly from our colonial past. The open areas around the Circuit House, the playgrounds, fields and large water bodies within the Railway property including the Foy's Lake are a few examples. During Pakistan period, some additions were made. Of particular mention are the Jamboree Field at Agrabad and the large open ground at Halishahar Estate. After having won our freedom from disparity and exploitation, and furthermore in this modern age of



Construction of semi-pucca building on in front of the Chittagong Court Building

democracy one would expect many more important additions to the public realm - spaces for its citizens. But what happened in reality? Instead of expanding and enhancing them, our contribution appears to be in the erosion of these spaces either due to commercialisation, in other words greed and profit making, or inattention and neglect or total lack of commitment and care by the government for the meeting ground of citizens.

Defacing public spaces, confining and restricting them from the citizens, have been going on systematically for years both by private individuals and the government. The large area set aside as an open space and play ground at Halishahar Estate has been divided into small commercial plots, right on the edge of the high traffic port connector road.

As a consequence, not only have we diminished in size a valuable open ground, we will also now create congestion to the vital long distance traffic movement. And who

else other than the government is responsible - the Housing and Settlement Directorate of the Government, for subdividing the land in this manner, and the plot allocation committee, headed by the Deputy Commissioner for its allocation to the public.

A second example is the well known Jamboree field; a 10 acre open play ground used extensively by children and youth of all ages round the year. Hundreds played in groups throughout the day, strolled in the evenings. During flash floods it turned into a natural water sports area, much to the delight of young children. Leaving aside a small portion, this field has been subdivided and walled up for an amusement park with admission charges. That is not the end; the right to see the once open field has been denied to neighbouring residents, by the construction of high brick walls to accommodate shops all along the outer periphery.

The beautiful open space in front of the Chittagong Circuit House

(present Zia Museum) had been used by its citizens for ages. They had spent many an evening under the starry or moonlit sky, often to avoid the oppressive summer heat. This is no longer possible. The open space has been made into an amusement park, with restricted entry.

In both the above cases, the seizure of the public realm has been undertaken by the Chittagong City Corporation. Again the open site in and around the Jamiat ul Falah mosque has recently been enclosed and subdivided. The only positive aspect is that the walls now do not obstruct vision. The open spaces, west of the stadium and the Zia Museum and east of the WASA building, have been enclosed with high brick walls by government authorities. Presumably these are to go out of the public realm too! And now, the most recent attack - the hilltop open park-like grounds of the Chittagong Court Building. Some 30 trees have already been cut

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7.