

Tale of an unprotected zoo

ABDULLAH -AL MAHMUD

Poor management is the main obstacle to the expansion and development of the Chittagong zoo.

There is no initiative for collecting animals and taking proper care of the inmates of the zoo.

Located at the hillock beset area of Foy's Lake amid a superb natural beauty under Khulshi thana of the city, the zoo emerged as a great attraction for the visitors.

The zoo has started its journey on February 28, 1989. The zoo has a bright prospect as hundreds of people visit it everyday.

But the Monday's incident of tiger's escaping from its cage revealed that the zoo's remaining unprotected might put a dent on its prospect.

There is no veterinary doctor to look after the wild lives preserved there and is running without curator for over one year.

The zoo set up on ten acres of land, yet to be expanded to the whole of 16.6 acres of the land kept for it even eleven years after its inauguration in 1989.

Established completely with the help of personal donations, the zoo at present have around 100 birds of 20 different species and another 100 animals and reptiles of the same number of different species.

Founding members of the zoo or other individuals donated all the animals and birds for the zoo. All the

expenses of the zoo are met from the money earned from selling tickets. The zoo is a profit-making one.

With over 1500 visitors coming every day and ticket selling at Tk. 4 each, the zoo earns over Tk. 1.5 lakh each month. The expenditure of the zoo includes payment of salaries of all the 15 employees and an officer and food expenses that stands at around Tk. 3500 per day.

A little attention of the government could have helped the zoo flourish to a remarkable extent, concerned people said. But lack of initiative from the government put the zoo in a miserable state, they added.

Besides, the zoo has to depend on the voluntary service of the doctors of the nearby Pahartoli (govt) Veterinary College for the treatment of the ailing animals and birds, they said.

Without the voluntary service of Dr. AKM Saifuddin Chowdhury, an anaesthesia expert and geologist Dr. Bibek Chandra Sutradhar and micro-biologist Dr. Sultan Ahmed of the veterinary college, caging the escaped tiger alive might not be possible on Monday.

While talking to The Daily Star, Dr. AKM Saifuddin Chowdhury who anaesthetised the tiger on September 16, said the zoo should have a veterinarian curator. "Previously the zoo had a zoologist having some knowledge about veterinary

treatment to perform the duty of a curator. But at present there is none, neither any curator nor doctor to take care of the animals here," said Dr. Saifuddin who treated the animals of the zoo very often free of cost.

Charge of the zoo should have been vested to the Veterinary College authorities, he said. Under the Veterinary College, inmates of the zoo could have a better care, he added.

Following the September 16 incident, local people feel insecure as the zoo has no fence on the south except a drain and the other three sides are bounded by simple barbed-wires.

After transfer of Shitol Chandra Nath, acting curator, on April 27 last year, Dr. Md. Abdul Mannan, deputy director of the department of livestock, had been posted to the zoo as the "project director cum livestock officer". He joined here on deputiation.

A 30-member governing body runs the zoo. The governing body includes 12 government officials, five non-government officials and 10 founding members. The Deputy Commissioner, administration, Chittagong, is president of the body by dint of his post while an ADC and a magistrate of the administration are selected by the president as the vice-president and member secretary of the committee.

When contacted Dr. Mannan

said the zoo is insecure and unprotected. The zoo has no fund to construct boundary walls around it that might cost some Tk. 10 crore.

The governing body at a meeting in September last year discussed the matter of constructing protective walls, but it could not reach any decision because of fund crisis, he said.

He said it is run completely on its own income as the founders of the zoo stopped funding about five years back.

The government initiative could have helped the zoo overcome the crisis, he added.

He agreed that a portion of the annual grant of Tk. 3.5 crore allocated for the zoo in Dhaka would have been sufficient for Chittagong zoo.

Referring to the appointment of a curator, Dr. Mannan said, the constitution of the zoo has no provision for a curator and "Project Director and Livestock Officer" is trusted with the responsibility.

Member secretary Magistrate Quamrul Hasan told The Daily Star that the zoo should be made well protected with construction of walls all around.

He said the governing body is aware of the matter and actively thinking of working out a way in this regard.



PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

The condition of the BIT-Chittagong road at Raozan is so bad that the four-wheelers have to struggle through the potholed road at a snail's pace.



PHOTO: A K M MOHSEN

Boulders have been placed along the Patenga sea beach to protect it from erosion. The sea beach, about 22 km from Chittagong city, is gaining popularity among the tourists. Its natural beauty attracts a huge number of visitors daily.

COX's Bazar-Here's god's plenty

MOHIT UL ALAM

God must have been partial to Cox's Bazar, because it's so beautiful. You may doubt it, but it's claimed to have the longest sea beach in the world. The sea is never cruel to Cox's Bazar, but it laps on its shore adorably, day and night. The beach is sandy for miles together, and up to Himchari, about 20 km down, you can drive in a jeep. There's now a highway under construction going up to Teknaf along the beach. This will complement the one already existing on the mainland.

The Bay of Bengal arches to the horizon somberly on a cloudy day, and dazzlingly on a sunny day. The waves roll and groan, roll and groan, as the tide rises and the beach gets smaller and smaller, and as the ebb starts the waves whimper and the beach gets more spacious. The morning time is for the bathers. They come in droves, men and women, women and children, mostly families, and they dip and bob up and the waves thrash them mercilessly. Women are a queer species, our women to the foreigners, because they bathe in saris wrapped around their bodies. How do they manage?

The business on the beach was nil before. But it has got some variety now. The beach umbrellas were

a wonder a few years back. The beach wore a dry look. The mood has now changed. There's now more colour to it. The beach umbrellas are the reason why. They are too many now, of various colours, creating oasis on a hot sandy beach. Under them the wooden beach cots are laid on which our countrymen and women recline, their eyes behind a pair of binoculars sweeping across the horizon. The cameras click all around, and professional photographers are now available to thin your pocket. Their business trick is very simple. They will approach your wife for a nice digital shot of a pose amid the waves. Your wife consents and wades into knee-dip water for a memorable pose, and the photographer snaps her not one time, as agreed, but five successive times, and the bill is Tk 200.

The ponies are another addition to the beach, a very attractive deal for the children. These ponies, too few for two many children, are so short and so docile, you wonder why the children should get so excited about them!

Over the years the shell and conch jewellery shops on the beach road have become a profitable business. Before these shops were mainly kept by the Rakkhains, but

the business apparently has now passed over to the Bengalees. These beach side shops are actually not good, and for the genuine items you've to go to the Burmese market in the downtown. Bed sheets and other such textile products are good and cheap here, and most of them are from Thailand. You also get shoes and sandals all Thai and Burmese and China crockery and earthenware and lipsticks and make-up pencils and what not!

The beach at the sunset time becomes crowded like hell. Among the tourists and local visitors there may be a gang of outpurses roaming about with heinous intention. The beach is never safe after the dark, and reports of assault on tourists are frequent.

But all this is made up well if you happen to be lucky to view a clear sunset. Not everyday is the sky clear on the west. A hazy patch of cloud lingers on most days and prevents the viewers from watching a clear sunset. But if the sky luckily remains clear then you can watch the fantastic sight of the sun's clear dipping into the mass of water on the western rim of the horizon. The beauty of it is indescribable. The sun, a big yellow gold disk now, slowly touches the water level, and the length of water from the horizon

to the shore is turned into a purple passage, darkening all other objects in view. The sun's plunge into the water is now magical; it is both gradual and quick. You think it's very slowly sinking, but even before you realise it the sun has actually disappeared behind the ocean. The reddened cloud lines still stay on the horizon, but you know that your path to the grave has been shortened by another day.

The average hotels in Cox's Bazar are below your expectations. Dark and damp rooms, cheap linen, and expensive food are the features. Among the good ones, Hotel Sayeman, one of the oldest, is still the best. It has a swimming pool, shaped like a bean, on its premises, which is widely used by bathers returning from the sea.

Shaikat is the most modern and expensive motel, located at a vantage point with the sea full in view. It has a large swimming pool, which is anything but sunny. Other motels like Prabal, Laboni are also comfortable.

The road map of Cox's Bazar has changed, and now the Arakan Road enters the town by the left and reaches the beachhead before it takes a right turn to get into the downtown, known as Lal Dighi. This change has done wonders in

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Let dev in Dhaka be an eye opener

ZARINA HOSSAIN

Seeing is believing - so goes the saying. Now that there are easily demonstrable examples we, in Chittagong have an opportunity to take heed and act differently. We need not allow existing planned residential areas to slip into the abyss that all those in Dhaka have fallen into.

It is unfortunate that it has taken us this many years to realise that the more we build the worse is our residential environment. This should not have been the case, particularly now that we have architects designing and displaying their talents and skills much more widely than ever before. Previously we blamed others for trespassing into fields not their own, resulting in appalling and mundane design solutions.

Now we have more variety, more contemporary solutions interesting and appealing albeit at times gaudy. Thanks to free trade and globalisation, building products from all over the world have reached our markets, and are being exhibited and applied.

Why then are we complaining? We are complaining because of commerce, and only commerce has taken over all other considerations. With developers taking control, every square foot of built space is money earned; as it has a price attached and can be traded. Pleasant environment, open space, trees or greenery have no price attached and thus of no value!

We are complaining because very often variety stops at the building facades. Architecture should have been about an attempt to create physical order and beauty, while striving to meet people's needs. It is about placing a building within a space, giving as much

importance to the built space as to the outside environment. It is about neighbours and community of putting things together. It is about privacy. It is about trees, shrubs and grass, also about garbage, utilities and movement. Sadly these are no longer of concern. Architecture has been reduced to flashy facades, posh interiors and above all achieving the maximum amount of square foot of built saleable space.

How did we get into this malaise? First and foremost we do not impose the basic planning controls essential to create order. Planned housing estates, both government and private, subdivide and allocate plots to individuals but does not set down the ground rules. The most important of which is the density of development, which determines the number of dwellings and the population in an area. Need for services and amenities will relate to the above considerations. The only control we have is on the minimal area to be left open along plot boundaries which is generally ignored (buildings literally touch each other, occupying almost the entire plot). Owners / developers are happy more saleable square foot area. Within the height restriction (if imposed at all) the maximum number of dwelling units can be crammed into till it bursts the site boundaries.

Are residents happy? In the newly acquired apartments, people live in concrete boxes with no privacy and little comfort. Owners, who have not yet made the change or have chosen not to go along with this trend, see their comfort impinged upon. Their right to openness and privacy violated.

Should we agree to the change in character from single and double family dwelling to multi-family dwelling? Generally speaking, yes,

we should. Why? With crisis on the delivery of developed urban land, it is natural to expect more optimal use of the existing planned areas, particularly when plot sizes are large and movement is unrestricted. Densities, which ranged from ten or twenty houses per acre, in principle should be allowed to develop at higher densities for most areas with the exception of very high-income areas or in selected natural sites. But there are many factors to be considered before this transformation is made.

How much densification should be allowed? These can be worked out for different areas according to the topography, ease of accommodating additional loads on utilities and social amenities and above all with discussion with community representatives.

There are accepted density standards for various types of housing. At certain levels the problem of noise and lack of privacy emerges. At further higher levels, design of services and utilities becomes difficult and costly. Finally accommodation becomes too cramped resulting in lack of spaces for all types of social amenities including open spaces and traffic in the streets becomes too congested. This has happened in many of the planned areas in Dhaka, Dhanmandi R/A being one such case.

The individual developer whether it is the owner builder or other, only considers his own private costs and benefits. When excessive building densities are allowed, a whole range of additional costs are passed on to others including the city authorities and service providers.

What then should be done? Set planning standards for development, prior to allowing massive

changes. These standards must include density standards for dwelling units and requirement for open spaces within individual plots. The requirement for 33 per cent open spaces in individual plots have been omitted in our Building Rules lately. This has resulted in overcrowding and poor urban environment in general. This needs to be re-introduced if we are to save our planned residential areas.

Efforts must be made to determine the needs of the additional population (which becomes many times more than the original planned population). Higher building densities will create their own demand for non-residential spaces. It will thus be necessary to re-designate some areas for related uses other than residential. This needs careful consideration, so that the residential character is maintained, and at the same time essential needs are met. Some plot boundaries may have to be combined to make allowances for these uses. The character of surrounding sites also comes into consideration. Discussion and consent of community representatives and owners become imperative.

From the developers point of view, the price structure of apartments can be made to accommodate open spaces and not only built areas.

Why are there such pressures on the older planned areas? Population densities in the established areas of the city keep on rising, exerting demands for other uses. Expansion of our peripheral areas are too slow and too chaotic. New developed sites are just not available, creating more and more pressure on the existing sites.

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Deception through scales

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

Citizens in the port city frequently are subjected to cheating and deception by a section of dishonest vendors at different kutcha bazars. It seems that there exists no authority at all to look into seriously their every day's trials and tribulations.

Some regular bazaar-goers said the meat sellers are the most corrupt ones among the lots and they used to sell either adulterated or stale meat to the consumers. The misery of shoppers further heightens when they return home with the 'goods'-laden bag and found vegetables or meats weighing quite lesser from

what they negotiated earlier with the vendors.

This is an increasing practice that happens very often in the lives of a larger section of the people here in Chittagong only to embarrass them.

On the spot protests to this sort of cheating often falls on deaf ears. Sometimes, such protest rebounded with filthy verbal slur or even with gangsters' attacks, concerned people said.

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) authorities installed scales at some bazars to save the buyers from being cheated. After buying vegetables or meats or any other essentials from the bazar, one can

examine the exact weight of the goods in that scale.

The system, although aims at benefiting common people, seriously lacks regular monitoring, subsequent application of lawful action and it hardly pay heed to the allegations of consumers. Due to this laxity and indifference, the system now turns into a common object of laughter and mockery.

The bazars where these bad practices occur most are Bahaddarhat, Chawkbazar, Kazir Dewri, Reazuddin Bazar, Kamaphuli market, Fakirhat Bazar, Boxirhat, Kamal Bazar, Bou Bazar,

Miah Khan Nagar, Eidgaon Bazar, Foilatalai Hat, Baropol Bazar, Baizid Bazar, Aturar Dipot, Hashem Bazar and Pahartali CDA Market.

It is widely known that in these markets, the meat sellers deceive the buyers quite often. They not only sell impure and rotten meat but also give a lesser amount so far exact weighing is concerned.

Meat traders sometimes baffle the buyers with the origin of the meat. The ill-fated buyers, when return home, often discover that the meat they purchased is of buffalo not cow's.

Bazar sources said, the traders do this only to realise higher price from the buyers. They sell cow meat at Tk 100 to Tk 110, while buffalo meat at Tk 70 to Tk 80.

Similar tricks go with when selling of sheep and goat meat concerns. The traders used to sell per kg sheep meat at Tk 120 to Tk 130 in the name of 'goat meat'. Originally, the price of sheep meat is Tk 60 to Tk 70 per kg only.

"I do bazars regularly and fall victim to this kind of embarrassment every now and then," Shahana Begum, an elderly housewife said.

"The experience I gathered last week is worth mentioning. I bought two kgs of cow meat and returned home unworried. Later on, I found it almost 300 grams less when I, out of curiosity, weigh the meat at a shop near my residence," she added.

This 'bizarre' and 'bitter' bazaar-experience is happening almost everybody, especially to those who frequented the bazaar, in the port city of Chittagong. The authorities concerned should come forward with proper and effective measures to heal the pains of ours, some regular bazar-goers urged.



PHOTO: STAR

A meat seller weighing with a faulty scale.