

Grave situation grave

"People want to pay in advance for graves the way flats or plots are bought, but it's not that easy to get space," said Abdul Mannan, a 67-year-old pensioner

MIZANUR KHAN

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It will be a tedious task for people to buy in advance permanent graves for themselves in Dhaka, the overpopulated city of about 10 million dwellers, with inadequate space for burial of the dead.

"People want to pay in advance for graves the way flats or plots are bought, but it's not that easy to get space," Abdul Mannan, a 67-year-old pensioner, said of the heady rush for purchase of grave space in the city that has five burial grounds.

To space out the crisis, Azimpur graveyard, the city's oldest and second largest graveyard, will now be expanded with the end of nine-year-old red tape. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has recently handed over 2.13 acres to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for the expansion.

"It took a long time to take the decision as the DCC and the food ministry were at loggerheads over a land dispute," a DCC source said.

The number of permanent graves -- old and new -- in Azimpur graveyard, built in 1850 on 32 acres, has exceeded 3,900 and DCC's social welfare department stopped space allocation for new permanent graves.

"A couple of years ago, a grave was reused two years after the first burial, but now it has come down to a year or less," said Amirul Islam, a gravedigger.

At least 50 or more burials are made in Azimpur every day, according to DCC officials.

Mirpur graveyard on 65 acres is the largest among the DCC-maintained graveyards, followed by Azimpur on 32 acres, Jurain on 10.1 acres, Banani on 4.5 acres and Uttara on 0.5 acres.

The DCC officials say the then mayor Mohammad Hanif



Azimpur graveyard, the city's oldest and second largest graveyard, will now be expanded with the end of nine-year-old red tape.

took an initiative in 1994 to expand Azimpur graveyard. It was decided that authorities would hand over 2.13 acres -- close to the graveyard and owned by the food directorate under the food ministry -- to the DCC in a plan that ran into

red tape snags.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka issued a letter to the food minister, requesting the handover of land to the DCC on May 15, 2002 and also spoke to the prime minister about the

expansion.

"The city's population is growing, so is the number of the dead by the year. To cope with the growing pressure, the DCC is drawing up plans for more burial grounds," said a

DCC official, who would not give his name.

"Long preservation of graves in Azimpur and Banani burial grounds can no longer be allowed as space is unavailable. Nor is advance purchase of

space accepted at this moment," he added.

The DCC planned to build four new graveyards in Hazaribagh, Mirpur, Aftabnagar and Sayedabad under a project of Tk 224 crore.



Chhobir Haat getting goers

On Fridays, 'Mollah's tea stall' opposite to Institution of Fine Arts turns into a open-air art gallery where one can enjoy paintings and buy them at 'reasonable' prices

CITY CORRESPONDENT

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The nondescript tea stall owned by Mollah just opposite to the Institution of Fine Arts of Dhaka University is one of the most happening places.

Students, young writers, journalists, art lovers, art critics and people from almost every corner of the society throng the stall for idle gossip or the apparently never-ending chat everyday.

Now, Mollah's tea stall has a new attraction. On Fridays it turns into a *Chhobir Haat* (an

open-air art gallery) where people can come and enjoy the paintings and buy them at 'reasonable' prices. Aspiring painters bring their creations in the morning of the weekly holiday and keep them there for the whole day.

"We bring the framed paintings here and hang them on the trees by ourselves. We talk to the curious visitors and sell our works and take back the unsold paintings when the sun sets," said Shahid Ahmed Mithu, a student of the Institute of Fine Arts and one of the organisers of the *Haat*. "It's almost like the *haats*

you find at villages," added Mithu.

Around 20 young painters visit the weekly market but already the *Haat* boasts 50 plus members. To be a member, one has to pay Tk 100 as entry fee. To put a painting on display, a Tk. 20 fee has to be paid.

Chhobir Haat was inaugurated on December 16 last year.

"There are some rules and regulations like maintaining a certain standard, keeping the price of the painting within the reach of all income groups etc. We welcome everybody here, not only

the certified painters," said Mithu.

Tania Bulbul Kity, a final year student of Shikder Medical College came to the market last Friday with a metal sculpture called 'Medical Sign' priced at Tk 1000.

"Painting is my hobby. I love to do sculptures. In the early days of *Chhobir Hat* only the passers by used to come to have a look. Now people from different parts of the city are aware of its existence. One day this will be the largest market for paintings in the country," said Kity.

Painters usually bring regular

works like still life, landscape, pencil sketch and experimental stuff. "Academic works are mostly displayed here. We don't bring paintings for commercial purposes," informed Mithu.

Participants bring their framed paintings straight to the organisers. Approximately 16 square feet space is allocated for every artist.

On an average, five to six paintings are sold every week. The prices vary from Tk. 100 to Tk 5,000.

Internationally known and prize winning artists like Tarun

Ghosh, Mahbubur Rahman, Toyeba Begum Lipi also come to the *Haat* with their works.

"If you go to a gallery, the price of the same painting will be ten to 15 times higher," said Milon Rob, a participating artist.

Asked how long they will be able to run *Chhobir Hat* while competing with the famed galleries of the city, Mithu said that they were trying to find an alternative, as the overall price of a painting can become very expensive when the galleries add commission to it.



city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"It's better not to give importance to reports by irresponsible reporters."

-- Nazrul Huda

Communications Minister

Expressing his views to staff during a visit to Airport Road area, on January 22
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"When you win you think that you won yourself. But when you lose you say that it is a defeat for all."

-- Mamunur Rashid

Dramatist

Pointing to Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina, at a discussion meeting on January 18
Source: Prothom Alo

"Badruddoza Chowdhury had all along opposed my views in the party (BNP) politics."

-- Abdur Rahman Biswas

Former President

Talking to journalists in Barisal, on January 19
Source: Bhorer Kagoj



"Public opinion is gaining momentum against the politics of deception."

-- Ataus Samad

Journalist and columnist

Commenting on government indifference to its pledge to nationalise the jobs of private school teachers, on January 22
Source: Prothom Alo

"Jubo Dal men themselves are beating their drums. It will fizzle out soon."

-- Nazrul Islam, Kotwali Thana OC

Chittagong

On the recent chaos at a meeting of Chittagong Jubo Dal, on January 21
Source: Prothom Alo

"They eat rivers, ponds and waterbodies, tenders, even the corrugated tins for a mosque."

-- Monzurul Ahsan Khan

CPB central leader

Criticising the ruling alliance at a rally at Paltan Maidan, on January 20
Source: Prothom Alo

"Shibir has captured the campus. But the weak administration has also to share the blame."

-- Dr. Saiful Islam

Professor, RU

Tells Prothom Alo after fleeing Rajshahi University campus for fear of life following a Shibir threat, on January 17