

# Parks becoming urban wastelands

MIZANUR KHAN

Official neglect and lack of coordination between government agencies have turned some parks in Dhaka into urban wastelands, virtual playgrounds for local youths and safe havens for drug peddlers and addicts.

Influential people aided by police and officials of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) have set up kiosks, autorickshaw-bus stands, toilets, shanties, clubs and local offices of political parties in the parks after felling down trees.

The DCC estate department is responsible for taking care of the parks, but officials say they are not aware of encroachment and just look after the parks on special days like Victory and Independence Days for lighting.

DCC Chief Estate Officer Abu Taleb says 10 zonal officers take care of the parks, but they claim they have no power but to inform the department if they find anything wrong.

"If we see irregularities, we just inform the higher authorities. It is their duty to take action," said Abdul Zaman, a local resident.

The chief estate officer said: "We did not receive any report from our zonal offices on pilfering trees from the parks. We take action when get reports."

A DCC official said, "I have been in this office for the last two years but did not receive any file on illegal logging in the parks."

Teashops have sprouted in Pantha Kunja. Chan Mian, owner of a stall, said: "I have migrated to the capital from Manikganj and set up the stall three months ago. I give police Tk 30-40 a day."

Floating people have also set up makeshift shelters in many parks to live in. They are visible at night but disappear during the day.

Kohinoor Begum, living inside Pantha Kunja for more than five years, said: "We came here after we were driven out of Bashpotti slum. If we are ousted from this place, we don't know where to go next."

Ramna, the largest park in the city, built in 1949, is also losing its beauty. "I have never been there. I saw part

of the fence missing when I was passing through the area and alerted the estate department to the pilferage. But it did not take action," said Zonal Officer Abdul Jabbar in charge of the park.

"The estate department might have filed a general diary (GD) with Tejgaon Police Station," he added.

Grabbers stripped Osmani Udyan and Pantha Kunja of trees. "People come at night, give money to the police and cut trees down," said Ahmed Zaman, a local resident.

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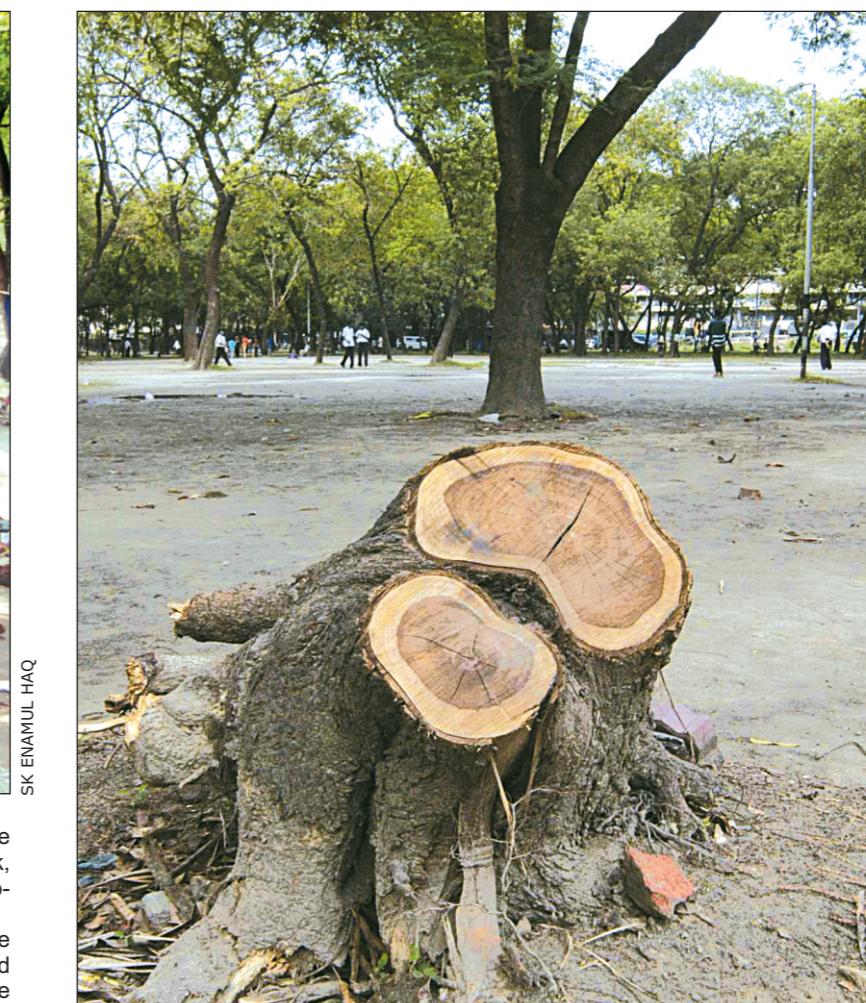
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Osmany Udyan: Two common features.

of greenery as no new trees have been planted over the years. Waste from restaurants Astachai, Boishakhi and Ramna Chinese inside the park pollutes the lake water.

Suhrawardy Udyan is becoming a barren land, as trees there are dying from lack of care. The condition of Agargaon, Karwan Bazar, Saydebad,

Farmgate, Victoria and Sirajuddowla parks are also the same.

Agargaon Park has become a safe place for dug peddling, while two parks at Karwan Bazar turned into fish and vegetable markets. Sayedebad Park is now a rickshaw stand and Osmani Udyan has turned into a bus stand.

Abdul Halim, a zonal officer and in

charge of Osmani Udyan, said: "We don't care about the trees in the park, we sell them after the storm uproots them."

The DCC has now no plan for the greening of city parks. The DCC and the Department of Social Welfare point finger at each other and shift the blame.



Buriganga: Eviction and encroachment still go together.

## Buriganga eviction turns out a farce

The recent five-day drive affected only the poor slum dwellers and not encroachers who put up concrete structures

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The five-day eviction of Buriganga encroachers by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has turned out to be a farce. The eviction that ended on April 15 affected poor slum dwellers and not encroachers who put up concrete structures.

Officials blamed the mishap on official documents produced by the encroachers to show ownership. Most documents were tax papers granted by Dhaka Zila Parishad. "Eviction could not be

done properly as encroachers produced tax papers. We also did not have proper equipment to bulldoze the concrete structures," a BIWTA official said.

It has been alleged that a dishonest officer of Zila Parishad was influential in deciding the areas of eviction. Although people tried to protect their ownership with documents, it is believed that underhand dealings made the eviction of encroachers unsuccessful.

The drive was carried out against many areas, including Kamalbagh, Nolgola, Kamrangirchar and Keraniganj. Encroachers in

Kamrangirchar moved back after the drive and filled an area of one kilometre along the river.

The BIWTA cleared the businesses off the occupied land but left a fence around it untouched and failed to dredge the filled-up land as well.

"It has been observed that encroachers return to their stations after every eviction, making the routine work of BIWTA waste of public funds," said Fazlul Karim, a Rayerbazar resident.

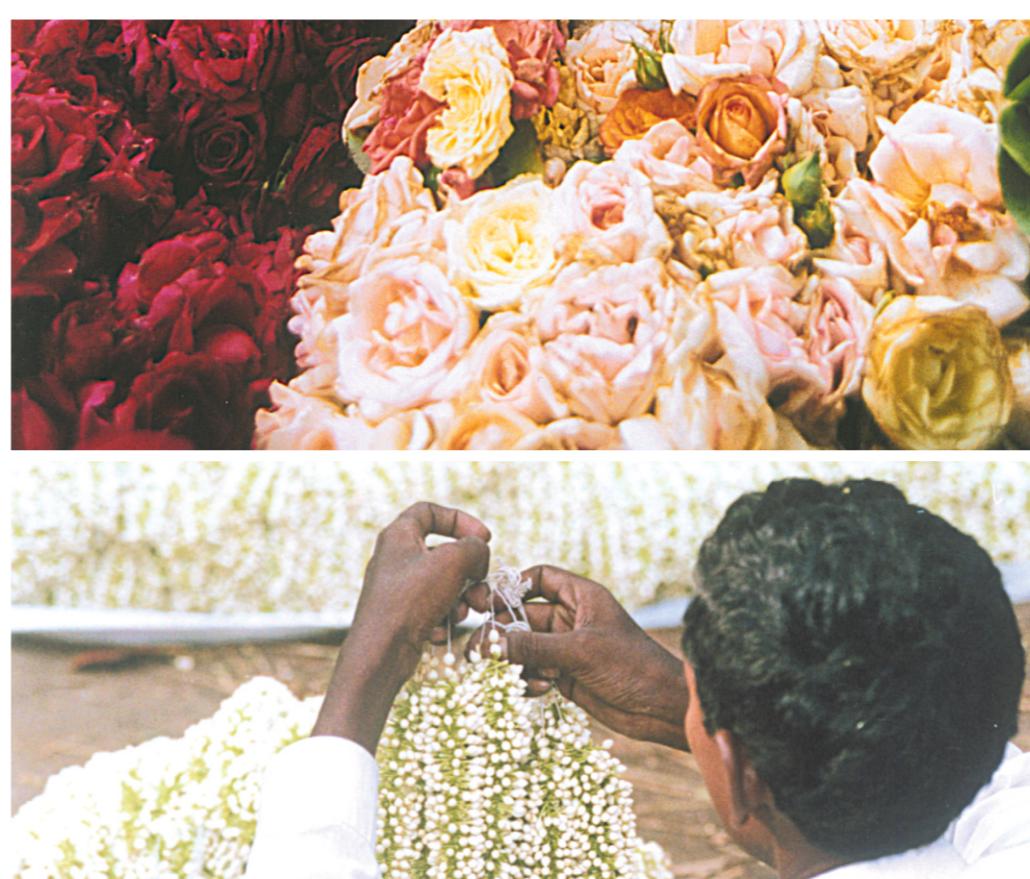
The inhabitants of occupied land complained that the BIWTA never marked the Buriganga

properly and it created confusion.

The police of Lalbagh and Keraniganj police stations and *ansar* took part in the eviction under the guidance of the magistrate. The BIWTA does not have magisterial power; they rely on the Deputy Commissioner's Office and the police for bulldozing concrete structures.

Although two ships and hundreds of BIWTA workers took part in the eviction, it appears that more eviction drives will follow soon if the BIWTA does not come up with a planned permanent solution.

## FLOWER TRADE



Flower business is booming with the demand going up every day. At Shahbagh, flower growers and wholesalers assemble every morning to sell their produce to local traders and shopkeepers.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN