

Beauty spoiled by miscreants

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

The Botanical Garden adjacent to the Dhaka Zoo in Mirpur has become infested with criminals and drug peddlers, complain visitors.

There are gangs of muggers, illegal toll collectors and drug peddlers who are reportedly based inside the garden's premises. Romantically involved couples, who seek privacy in the supposed serenity of the place are common victims of harassment of these groups.

Many believe that the mere five Taka entry ticket per person to the vast 205-acre facility of rare plants and eye-soothing greenery is one of the main reasons for uncontrolled access of undesired elements.

Even in the eighties after the garden was opened, eve-teasers and sex-workers had found their way inside. Over the last decade, drug dealers and robbers have turned it into a safe haven for them.

Locals say that the tendency of some young men and women to overstay in the garden even after sunset, exposes them to the possibility of serious

harassment and physical harm.

Often, hoodlums extort money from couples taking advantage of their secret relationship in the name of 'toll'. The toll is collected on the basis of their duration of stay inside the garden.

"If someone does not pay, the individual and his female partner are assaulted beyond imagination," described one visitor who spoke from his own experience.

There have been instances of heinous crimes like rape and murder also inside the garden.

During the summer, which is usually the off season, the number of daily visitors go down to around 300 on an average. But in the winter and spring, some 2,000 to 3,000 people come to the garden every day. However, the vulnerable groups like women and children are more likely to become targets of miscreants.

The drug peddlers and the hijackers operate in the dense parts of the garden and prefer solitary visitors to pounce upon.

Drug traders often pressurise their targets into tasting their items. Once that person becomes addicted to a particu-

lar drug, he becomes a regular customer. Long-time addicts also come to the garden to buy drugs.

The muggers usually pick on defenceless people.

"A man robbed me off 50 Taka around 1:30pm a few days ago. Before he left, he threatened me of dire consequences if I reported the incident," said Russell, a thirteen-year-old schoolboy who comes to the garden regularly.

Most such cases are never reported to the police apparently because of the influence of these criminal gangs in the locality. But the Pallabi police station still receives four or five complaints every week. However, police officials claimed that the vastness of the garden and its thick forestry makes it difficult for the law enforcers to nab the criminals.

"We can do little other than sending personnel to investigate the matter. But most of the time, the miscreants vanish before police get there," said sub-inspector Siddique of Pallabi police station.

Police teams have begun patrolling the garden's premises recently and because of

that the activities of prostitutes and pimps, who allegedly enter the garden disguising themselves as visitors, has become less noticeable.

But incidents still occur despite the presence of these patrols.

"When we take a break or go for lunch, the hoodlums take the opportunity to conduct crime. Besides, it is impossible to keep watch everywhere," said an on-duty policeman inside the garden.

Its tarnished image and sense of insecurity is discouraging families, schools, and large scale visiting groups from coming to the botanical garden.

"The last time we took our students to the zoo, we wanted to them to visit the botanical garden also. But we had to drop the idea after hearing the news that just the previous evening, a young man was found slaughtered there," said a teacher of an English medium school.

Surprisingly, the garden's authorities claim that they do not hear people complaining about anything.

"We have not yet received any complaints from visitors," said Mohammad Nur Biswas,

the Director of the Botanical Garden. "If people came to us to report incidents, we would surely have found grounds to send a written application to the higher authorities informing them about criminal activities," he added while acknowledging that problems existed.

"We do not have adequate logistics to take on the criminals," said Biswas.

The garden has security guards who are only armed with batons whereas miscreants who roam inside often carry firearms, said senior officials of the garden.

Some other officials of the director's office alleged that families and even relatives of the zoo's staff have built houses inside the Botanical Garden. Many young men of these families were at the forefront of criminal activities inside the garden, they claimed.

"With commercialisation of a research and academic institution like the Botanical Garden, problems are bound to arise. We only hope that the higher authorities take some drastic measures soon before things get worse," said Biswas.



PHOTO STAR

Plan to ease traffic jam in progress

SULTANA RAHMAN

Around 60 percent of the work on the Strategic Transport Planning Project (STPP) drawn to smoothen the city's traffic system for the next 20 years has been completed. The plan is being implemented to ease the increasing traffic congestion and ensure smooth traffic flow and proper public transportation.

Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) initiated the STPP as an extensive study to the 20-year plan that started March 30 this year. An American company Louis Berger in cooperation with Bangladesh Consultants Limited is conducting the study at a cost of Tk 10 crore.

The World Bank provides the fund for the eight-month survey. The team has compiled a set of recommendations to solve the city's present problems and how to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to minimise traffic congestion for the next two decades.

A mid-term seminar on STPP will be held on September 14 where the progress of the study will be presented.

"STPP is considered in three categories -- short, mid and long term -- where implementation of the identified factors will get priority according to urgency, necessity and total improvement of traffic system and public transportation," said Quamrul Islam Siddiqui, executive director of DTCCB.

DTCCB sources said, the comprehensive strategic plan has considered the factors of urbanisation, expansion of city's road network and its sustainability, total population and growth rate of the population, trend of increasing number of vehicles and mode of transportation and other factors.

Siddiqui said, the comprehensive plan will consider the expansion of alternative road networking including circular waterways around Dhaka, sub-ways, rapid bus transits and elevated express way.

"Comprehensive transport networking will minimise traffic congestion as it is offering

different types of transport network to the city commuters. If we can offer better waterways, many commuters will have alternative ways to reach their destination and can be a probable solution to save time commuting in the city," Siddiqui explained.

Aiming at the 20-year plan which will give priority to introducing more public transportation including buses, a paper will be presented on description of existing land uses, while a discussion of a trend forecast of population using densities and historic data to guide population will also take place. It will also include a paper describing the key features leading to the current situation regarding congestion, constraints and opportunities.

Siddiqui told the Star City: "We would be able to minimise the traffic congestion if we implement a comprehensive strategic plan to solve the traffic problem on the basis of findings and recommendations of the survey."

Persian Studies Institute awaits site allocation

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The construction of the Persian Studies Institute building is in limbo for the last 12 years because a suitable site has not been located on the Dhaka University (DU) campus.

Former president of Iran Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani laid the foundation stone for the building beside the Institute of Food and Nutrition Science when he visited Dhaka in the 1990's.

The Iranian government had taken the responsibility of constructing the building according to its plan. Long after Rafsanjani's visit Iranian embassy officials along with the university authorities surveyed the area and proposed a change of site.

Based on the proposal the site was changed to the eastern corner of the Institute of Modern Languages and later shifted to the eastern side of the Dhaka University Central Student Union (DUCSU). When the authorities took the initiative to commence work, students objected to the idea of felling the trees to start construction.

The students' demand was ignored and the trees -- some of which were very old -- were felled. A movement emerged and construction work stopped.

"It was quite unnecessary to cut trees and block the space in front of the central library. The Institute of Persian Studies could be built on any part of the open campus," said Maruf Ahmed, a student of

political science department.

Later a new site was chosen at the southern corner of the central library behind the Nijhum Spattya -- Miloner Protabadi Mukh (the monument of Dr. Shamsul Alam

Milon).

But DU Chief Engineer Amir Hossain, talking to the Starcity, said he was not sure of the construction of the Persian Studies Institute.

"When contacted, the Iranian Embassy told us that the funds allocated for this project had been returned, but would request for funds this year," said DU Treasurer Professor Syed Rashidul

Hassan.

"We are now ready to start construction to house the Institute of Persian Studies. The progress depends on the cooperation of the Iranian officials," he said.



A probable site on the Dhaka University campus for the Persian Studies Institute building.

PHOTO STAR

useful telephonenumber

COURIER SERVICES

International

Air Borne Express- 9561371, 9561372, 9550724
Air Couriers Intl (BD) Ltd.- 8815970
Aramex International Courier- 9558003, 9559582, 9565075
Airspeed Express- 9563494
Asian Courier Services Ltd.- 8313543
Baishakhi Courier Service- 9558606
Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
Bangladesh Courier Service- 9563989
Bengal Express- 9560642, 9552666
Bangladesh Intl Courier- 953636
Continental Service Ltd.- 9552948, 9558425
DHL Worldwide Express- 9881703-7, 9886305-9, 9882057
Enem Express- 9330699
Fedex Bangladesh Express Co. Ltd.- 9565114
Modhuban Courier Service-

National

Overseas Courier Service- 9352431, 8321169
Pacific Courier- 9568446
Reliance Express Service- 9558515, 7110249
Sky International Service- 9660442
Skynet world Wide Express- 9558062, 9560258, 7114787, 7113184
TNT Express- 9566662, 9558239, 8618155
Union Courier Service- 9341722
United Parcel Service Air Alliance Ltd.- 8826429, 8810223
Asian Courier Service Ltd.- 8313543
BAE- 9884851
Central Courier Service- 9881118
Confidence Courier Service Ltd. 9567036
Chisty Courier- 7110177-9,
Cosmopol Services- 9552793, 9557975
Dhaka Courier Services- 7236222

Dolphin Courier- 9558802
Dreamland Courier Service- 9550326, 9566975
Pioneer Courier Services- 9561727, 9569759
Probashi Courier Services- 9346359
Rainbow Express Parcel Services Ltd.- 8322773, 8315703
Reliance Express Services- 9558515, 7110249
Sundarban Courier Services- 9551984, 9556189, 9551656
Sunrise Courier Services- 9568751
World Runner Express Ltd. 9112068, Fax - 880-2-9112068

TIPS

Do you know according to Dhaka City Corporation, you must deposit your waste at the collection site between 4pm and 10pm

LIBRARY & INFO-

Libraries, Cultural and Information Centers

Central Public Library- 8626001-4, 8614673
Shilpakala Academy- 8614673
Bangla Academy- 8619550
Islamic Foundation- 9550280, 955640
The American Centre (IRC)- 8813440-4, 9886395
The Nazrul Institute- 9114602
Ford Foundation- 8116133
Alliance Francaise- 8611557
British Council- 8618867-8, 8618905-7
Community Development Library- 8113769, 8113604
Goethe Institute Int'l- Dhaka- 9126525-6
Indian Information Centre & Cultural Library- 8615096
The Russian Cultural Centre- 9116314, 9118531, 9118314
Drik Photo Gallery- 9120125, 8112954, 8123412

OUTING

Museum and Zoo

National Museum- 8619396-9
Open: 10 am - 5 pm, Friday 3 pm - 8 pm, Thursday closed
Muktijuddha Jadugarh- 9559091
Open: 10:30 am - 6:30 pm, Sunday Closed
Bangabandhu Smiti Jadugarh- 8110046
Open: 10 am - 5 pm, Wednesday closed
Ahsan Manzil
Open: 10 am - 5 pm, Friday: 3 pm - 7 pm, Thursday Closed
Shishu Jadugarh- 9666466
Open: 10 am - 6 pm, Sunday Closed

CITY BUS ROUTE

Bus No. Route

1 Gulistan-Shahbagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 10, 11, 12
2 Gulistan-Shahbagh-Banglamotor-Farmgate-Mirpur 1, 2
3 Gulistan-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Mahakhali-Airport-Azamapur
4 Shyampur-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Airport-Tongi
5 Sayedabad-Kamalapur-Motijheel-Airport-Joydebpur-Gazipur
6A Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Gulshan 1, 2
6B Kamalapur-Motijheel-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 1, 2
6C Motijheel Shapla chattr- Malibagh- Farmgate- Gulshan 2
7 Sadarghat-Gulistan-Maghbazar-Nabisco-Gulshan 2
8 Chittagong-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Asad Gate-Kalyanpur-Gabtoil
9 Demra Rani mahal-Motijheel-Kalbagan-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 10, 11, 12
10 Sadarghat-Gulistan-Kakrail-Malibagh-Rampura-Biswa Road-Tongi Bridge
11 Sayedabad-Motijheel-Fakirapool-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Tongi Bridge
11/A Sayedabad-Khilgoan-Malibagh-Rampura-Airport-Tongi Bridge
12 Shanir Akhra-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Asadgate-Mohammadpur
13 Motijheel-Shahbagh-New Market-Jhigatola-Shangkar-Mohammedpur
14 Signboard - Motijheel-Shahbagh-New Market-Shyamoli-Mirpur 1, 12
15 Chittagong Road-Motijheel-Shahbagh-Farmgate-Mirpur 12
24 Gulistan-Maghbazar-Mohakhali-Airport-Uttara-Bipile

Starts from

Golap Shah Mazar
Phoolbaria bus station
Phoolbaria bus station
Shyampur
Sayedabad
Kamalapur
Kamalapur
Motijheel Shaplachattr
Sadarghat
Chittagong Road
Demra Ranimahar
Sadarghat
Sayedabad
Sayedabad
Shanir Akhra
Motijheel
Signboard (Chittagong Road)
Chittagong Road
Gulistan