

Dhaka Zoo plagued with lack of funds, mismanagement

CITY CORRESPONDENT

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Dhaka Zoo, the biggest zoo in the country, is now facing a serious lack of fund that has almost halted the process of its renovation and procurement of new animals.

The zoo authorities cannot replace the animals, which died in the last few years. Now the zoo does not have any gorilla, camel or giraffe.

The zoo officials said they cannot bring these animals for two reasons -- lack of fund and the restriction under wild animal preservation act.

The visitors complain about mismanagement and dirty environment at the zoo which the officials admitted but said they do not have necessary manpower to solve the problems.

According to zoo officials, on average 6,000 visitors come to the zoo in 2004 and the number rose to 7,000 in 2005 despite the dismal state of the zoo.

"We have been asking for Tk 5 crore to buy some animals for the last two or three years but the finance ministry have not responded to our proposal for such a long time," said Mafizur

Rahman, curator of Dhaka Zoo.

The zoo authorities also applied for Tk 13 crore to the government for a renovation and development project for the zoo. But the government is yet to release the fund.

The project includes setting up of natural shades for animals like tigers and lions, constructing shades for visitors, modernisation of the children's park and museum inside the zoo, installation of vending machines for the visitors and introducing battery cars for the convenience of children and elderly people.

The government has however recently shown interest in the development of the zoo and wanted to know the prices of animals the zoo authorities want to procure, the curator said.

When contacted, Abdul Karim, secretary of fisheries and livestock ministry said, "We are aware of the requirements of the zoo and we have sent proposals to the Planning Commission." He said the ministry will try to get the funds released.

Shortage of staff is another problem facing the zoo for the last four years. The government rules suggest that the zoo must have at least 212 staff to run it smoothly but the zoo officials said they need more staff. At present there are 156 staff at the zoo.

Officials said every year the number of staff is decreasing due to retirement

but the government has not been appointing any staff for the last three years.

"People always complain that the zoo environment is untidy and dirty. Lack of manpower is responsible for this situation. To clean the zoo area I need six sweepers but I have only three who are too old to perform their work perfectly," said the curator.

Once there were four restaurants for the zoo visitors and those were run by lessees. But the zoo authorities had to close them down six years ago as they used to charge high prices for food items. Now there is not a single restaurant inside the zoo.

Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) is interested in opening a restaurant for the zoo visitors but the project is yet to be implemented, sources said.

The lack of restaurants is contributing to the pollution on the zoo premises as visitors bring food and drinks from outside and the zoo compound is littered with packets of food and leftovers, said Dr NC Banik, deputy curator, Dhaka Zoo.

The zoo is open from Monday to Saturday from 7:00am to 5:00pm and remain closed on Sundays and government holidays.



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