



SK ENAMUL HAQ

The site of Krishnachura on the roadside brings a soothing effect on city birds. The photo was taken from the Crescent Lake Road yesterday.

Blazing bloom in concrete jungle

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Emerald green grasses embellished with Krishnachura petals, an image straight out of paradise. During the Bangla months of Baisakh, Jaistha and Ashar the city skyline sizzle with its scarlet flames, creating a momentary bliss for the jaded

change and the wonders of nature is missing from the city life. We have sent all the greeneries, the vibrant flowering trees to exile", said architect Saiful Haque.

"Urban planners in recent times have totally ignored the idea of having trees in the street side, strolling along under its shed or sitting in the car, gazing

exult in its grandeur.

Commuters relish the sunny sight of Radhachura at the Shangshad Avenue. Off limits to public, buoyant Shonalu adorns the tunnel road inside the Shangshad bhaban premise. The yellow landscape however, peeps through the fence giving much delight to pedestrians.

Jarul blossoms with a little sprinkle of shower during the late summer. Its lavender shades soothe the weary eyes of the city dwellers.

Haque gives details of Dhaka's tradition. Ramna has a long tradition of flowering trees that takes us back to Mughal era. Ramna was once called the "Badshahi bagh" during the 17th century.

The tradition of tree plantation continued till the British era. During the Bengal partition in 1905 to 1911 there was a plan to make the city more attractive. Landscape architects planned the entire area of Ramna back then.

Later when Dhaka University was established in 1921 lands from Ramna area was allotted to the institute.

Shangshad Bhaban owes all its magnificence to the romantic visionary Luis Kahn, the architect. During 1960s he designed today's Shangshad Bhaban and its surroundings.

Dhanmondi residential area was also planned during the 60s. One thing is common in all of these areas, the charming flowering trees.

"Most of these planning ended during the 80s. Development works increased. We began to utilise every inch possible for commercial purpose. With the construction of high-rises the city skyline began to change", said Haque.

"Today it is all hard concrete. I don't know how long we will admire the flowering trees that still pleases our eyes".

Often the clutches of cruel civilisation takes its toll on these trees. In the name of beautification and modernisation, true beauty is devoured by builders, creating a city devoid of any colour and life.

at the colourful flowering trees. These are all simple pleasures of life", he added.

There is however a few patches of flowering trees still left in the city Haque mentioned.

Krishnachura branches sway with the southern summer breeze while visitors at the crescent lake road mostly couples

city dwellers.

Radhachura, Shonalu, Jarul blooms almost at the same time of the year. These flowers have no sweet fragrance to offer but they cheer up the ambience of the lifeless landscape of concrete jungle surrounded by the hustle bustle of city life.

"The miracles of season's

Railway's delay tactics frustrate government order

Bangladesh Railway chooses the sluggish way to abide by the government's directive to cancel all land allocations on the Begunbari canal and recover the last remaining flood flow zone of the city

TAWFIQUE ALI

Despite government instructions to cancel all the anomalous allotment of plots in the city's Begunbari canal, the authorities concerned appear to have resorted to delaying tactics in accomplishing the job.

A high official of Bangladesh Railway, seeking anonymity, said, "The allotments can be cancelled just on the ground that the leases were not made through open bidding."

Sources said the director general (DG) of railway sent separate proposals case by case to the communications ministry around two months back for cancellation of plot allotment in the Begunbari canal.

But the railway authorities did not produce all the relevant and required documents like copies of agreements along with proposals. As a result, law adviser to the communications ministry sent the file back to railway.

Joint Secretary (Rail) of the ministry Shafique Alam Mehdi said he is unaware of the case. "I have just joined the position and the matter is not in my knowledge."

Law adviser to the ministry Mujibur Rahman said, "We sent the files back to the railway authorities, as they did not send the agreements along with the proposals."

According to sources, it took around two months to reach the files to the law adviser through

assistant secretary and joint secretary concerned. Evidently, it will take long time in forwarding and receiving the file.

DG of Bangladesh Railway Belayet Hossain said they sent separate proposals on allotment of eight plots including four of CNG filling stations clarifying on what terms and conditions the plots were allotted and the legal status of the lease.

"We, in the proposals, explained the content of the agreements," he said.

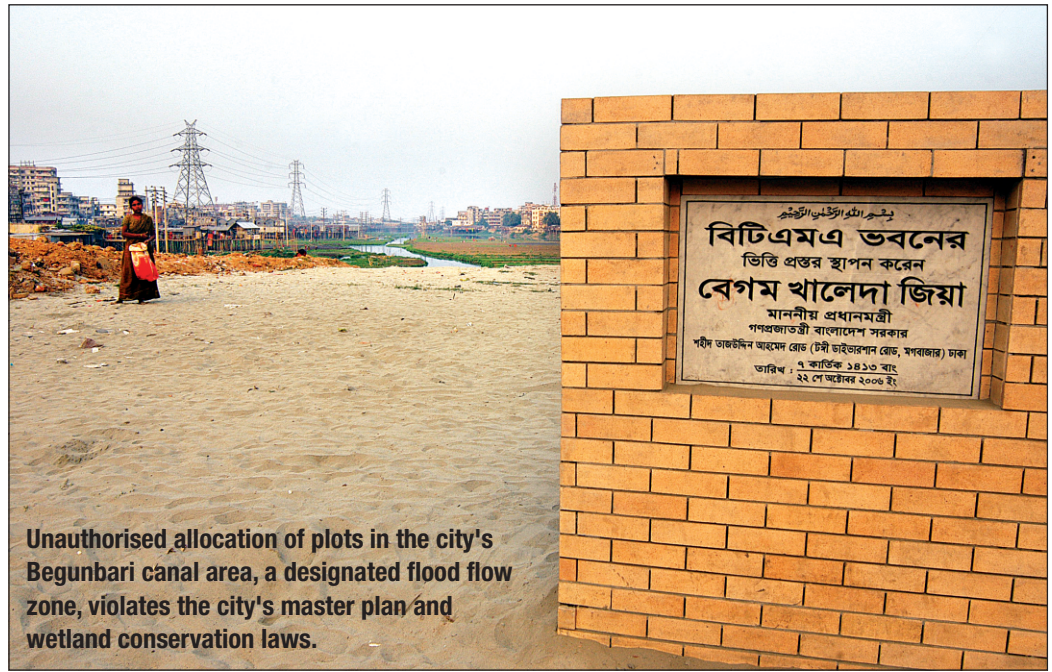
Replying to a question on why relevant documents were not placed, the DG said, "We will provide the copies of agreements if the ministry asks for; it's not a problem."

LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser of the caretaker government Anwarul Iqbal had categorically said earlier that all the illegal structures in the Begunbari canal area would be removed and anomalous and controversial allotment of plots would be cancelled.

Iqbal apprised an inter-ministerial meeting on April 5 that the government has decided to cancel all the recent allotment of the plots in the Begunbari and Hatirjheel areas.

When leaders of influential trade bodies met the adviser, he firmly said that any anomalous allotment of plots in the Begunbari canal would have to be cancelled.

The adviser told The Daily Star, "We requested the communications ministry to cancel



Unauthorised allocation of plots in the city's Begunbari canal area, a designated flood flow zone, violates the city's master plan and wetland conservation laws.

STAR PHOTO

the allotments and it is they who have to do the job."

The BNP government leased out four large plots in the Begunbari canal area, a designated flood flow zone, to three influential trade organisations not only in violation of the city's master plan but also bending the railway's land management rules of 2006. Another plot was allotted to International Arbitration Centre.

The allocations made violating environment and wetland conservation related laws deprived the government of a huge amount of revenue, as the

prime public lands under the disposal of Bangladesh Railway were leased out at a token price.

Communications ministry sold 0.66 decimals of railway land to Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) and leased out 4.16 acres to Millennium Holding Limited (Hotel Hilton) in the canal along the Tongi Diversion Road.

One acre of land in the canal was leased out to the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry at a token price Tk1 lakh. At present market price, this land should cost more than Tk 150 crore,

according to sources in the railway.

Though it is a vital precondition to arrange public tendering in such cases of leasing out land as per the land management rules, the then communications minister made these anomalous deals applying his 'discretionary' authority in clear disregard to the obligations of the rules. There was no public bidding for sale or lease of railway land.

Influential trade bodies that got lease of huge chunks of railway lands started mounting tremendous pressure on the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

Unauthorised CNG autorickshaws flood city

Policemen and BRTA officials are puzzled over the number of unauthorised three-wheelers plying in the city

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

When the authorities are planning to increase the number of CNG autorickshaws in the city, the latest official traffic survey revealed that the actual number of autorickshaws could be two and half times higher than the number of authorised vehicles.

According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) there are 13,000 registered CNG-run autorickshaws in the city. But the survey claims that about 32,500 autorickshaws are currently in operation in the metropolitan area.

The survey was conducted under the Strategic Transport

Plan for Dhaka, a 20-year transport project of the government funded by the World Bank.

The unauthorised autorickshaws are plying with the same number plate and documents of the authorised autorickshaws. Sources at BRTA said that unscrupulous owners of the unauthorised autorickshaws often collect duplicate documents of the authorised autorickshaws from BRTA saying that the original documents are lost.

The traffic survey conducted through screen line tests indicates that autorickshaws account for 30 per cent of all motorised vehicles in the city. About the unauthorised

CNG autorickshaws, a traffic sergeant said, "Usually we do not check the chassis and engine numbers of an autorickshaw. We just check papers. If the papers are duplicate, then how can we assume that the vehicle is unauthorised?"

However, Humayan Rashid, director (operations) of BRTA told Star City that no duplicate documents for autorickshaws was provided to the owners within last 6 months.

Admitting the presence of unauthorised autorickshaws in the city, he said BRTA provided a special tri-colour sticker to the authorised autorickshaws, but unscrupulous owners have already forged the special sticker for unauthorised vehicles.

cles.

BRTA is regularly conducting drive of mobile courts that found some unauthorised autorickshaws and dumped them instantly, Humayan said.

Meanwhile, the authorities have planned to increase the number of CNG autorickshaws in the city considering its increasing demand.

Sources said BRTA on May 17 send recommendations to the communications ministry to increase the number of CNG-run autorickshaws in the capital.

Humayun said, "With the increasing population the demand for autorickshaws has increased, but BRTA did not recommend any specific num-

ber for the increase."

He however said the new vehicles will be distributed through lottery among the owners.

In 2002, the government introduced 12,000 CNG-run autorickshaws after phasing out around 40,000 petrol-run two-stroke autorickshaws largely blamed for air pollution. At that time the government put a limit on the number of autorickshaws at 13,000.

The government added 1,000 more autorickshaws in 2004. Uttara Motors alone sold more than 10,000 autorickshaws.

Amit Bhattacharjee, general

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



To the suffering of thousands of road users part of the Biswa Road near Dhalpur in the city remains potholed for months. Recent rains have further worsened the situation.

STAR PHOTO