



**Rotten rubbish at the Sadarghat launch terminal pollutes the river and the atmosphere of the busy terminal.**

## SADARGHAT LAUNCH TERMINAL

### BIWTA heedless of passengers, Buriganga

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The BIWTA (Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority) officials, currently active to save the river Buriganga, fail to notice the dirt under their own nose. Right beneath the BIWTA office at the Sadarghat launch terminal piles of rotten rubbish float in the near stagnant river water, spreading a stench and exposing thousands of passengers to health hazards. Officials at the BIWTA office at the terminal building claimed that time-to-time they clean the area.

"We clean the area every few weeks but the rubbish keeps accumulating as there is no flow in the river water," said the senior deputy director of the Sadarghat port.

The entire Sadarghat terminal area bears the testimony of total lack of maintenance. Filthy staircases, toilets walkways and the rubbish-strewn river water make the Sadarghat launch terminal a place to avoid until one has to avail water transport. The BIWTA charges each passenger Tk 4 for entrance into the terminal building. On an average over 50,000 people use the so-called facilities of Sadarghat launch terminal, one of the largest river ports in the world.

# Careless DCC plunders public parks

TAWFIQUE ALI

Though entrusted with maintenance of around 50 public parks and playgrounds, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has consistently facilitated encroachment and destruction of them denying the city dwellers open spaces over past two and a half decades.

State of most of the public parks is deplorable today with a good many are used commercially.

Gulshan South Park and Gulshan Central Park (Wonderland) that have long been under illegal occupancy are yet to be developed as full-fledged public parks.

Noted educationist and environmental activist Professor Serajul Islam Choudhury said that open parks have immense social and health significance. One of the objectives of his campaign for conservation of city parks is to highlight their social utility.

"A city must have some designated breathing spaces and sources of natural beauty," he said. "So authorities must reclaim the public parks from illegal possession."

Sharif Jamil, member secretary, parks and grounds programme committee of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok, said that general picture of the city parks is that they are encroached in many ways. Dhaka Wasa set up water pumps inside many of them.

Other forms of encroachment include occupying parklands by local ward commissioner of DCC either for commercial purposes or for setting up the commissioners' office. Parts of public parks are also occupied for constructing public toilets.

Swamibagh Park is now a truck stand while Karwan Bazar children's park has turned into a kitchen market. Kalyanpur children's park is occupied by floating stalls and public toilets. Another park at English Road has too turned into a truck stand. DCC does not maintain some public parks that include Sirajuddowla Park in the old town.



**Gulshan South Park left unattended for years.**

A bus stand occupies its front while anti-social elements reign inside.

Shikkatuli Park is another example, half of which is encroached.

In many cases, ward commissioners occupy public parks in the name of maintenance.

"There should be a designated authority to look after city parks and play grounds," Jamil said.

According to a recent survey, DCC has 43 out of 47 public parks under its maintenance.

During the survey aimed to ascertain the latest status of the public parks and to improve their condition, it was found that three to four parks were not on the DCC list.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartirpakkha (Rajuk) handed over 42 public parks in the city to DCC for maintenance by an order in 1982, said the then Rajuk chairman Md Shahid Alam.

Immediate past general secretary of Gulshan Society and a former Rajuk chairman Md Anwarul Alam said that both

Gulshan Central Park (Wonderland) and Gulshan South Park were clearly earmarked as open children's park in the layout of Gulshan model town in the master plan prepared in 1962 by Dhaka Improvement Trust.

Though the Rajuk gave the two pieces of land -- one in front of shooting club and another near Azad Mosque -- to DCC to maintain them as parks, but the city corporation mishandled both the parks.

The DCC leased out a big chunk of Gulshan Central Park to Wonderland in 1990, a private sector children's amusement park, for commercial use. Besides, it allowed settlement of a sweeper colony occupying the South Park.

"DCC should have no way leased out the parklands for such use," Anwarul Alam said. "It had no authority to do that, as it was entrusted to maintain the space as public parks."

Though the Gulshan South Park was freed from a 25-year illegal occupancy by settlement of

416 sweeper families of DCC in the first week of October 2005, DCC remained dubious on developing a green park at the site.

A section of officials at the DCC are pursuing a hidden plan to implement a commercial construction project at the site.

A meeting of the Good Governance Committee of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on July 11, 2003 instructed DCC to return both the parklands to Rajuk within a month.

But DCC authorities' stand had always been dubious in developing a green park at the site of Gulshan South Park with greedy quarters' clandestine attempts to grab the land.

Despite repeated directions from the PMO, campaign of the civil society and media outcry, the DCC deliberately dilly-dallyed in developing the park.

Though the Rajuk handed over 3.99 acres of Gulshan land to DCC, the city corporation

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## CHRONOLOGICAL ACCOUNTS OF TWO GULSHAN PARKS

### Gulshan South Park

\* Public Works Ministry hands over the park to DCC in 1982 for maintenance.

\* DCC's 416 sweeper families took illegal possession of it.

\* Freed from a 25-year long illegal occupancy in first week of October 2005.

\* Chief executive officer of DCC on 2nd November 2005 tells the Daily Star that they would build a three-feet see-through wall but builds a six-feet solid wall.

\* The Prime Minister's Office asks DCC in a letter no-1.16.0.2.2005/188/2 on 26 October 2005 to set up the green park immediately.

\* Environmentalists demonstrate on October 28, 2005 for the park.

\* Public works minister on 20 November 2005 expresses ministry's clear stand to retain the park in a letter no DO-2005/407.

\* Rajuk on 2nd November 2005 asserts in a letter no-1128/5 that it would not accept anything other than a park.

\* In December 2005, mayor expresses his plan for commercial use of the parkland.

\* Gulshan Society and two residents file writ petition no-9268 of 2005.

\* A High Court bench issues rule and status quo on 15th December 2005 upon the DCC authorities.

\* The PMO on March 15, 2006 instructs the DCC authorities not to go for any commercial use of the site.

\* Currently the park is left as an abandoned land regularly occupied with car parking during working days.

### Wonderland (Gulshan Central Park)

\* The DCC dubiously leases out a portion in 1990 to Messer's Bhaiya Media at a token price for Wonderland Children Park.

\* The PMO on July 11, 2003 instructs the DCC to return both central park and south park to Rajuk within a month.

\* A Gulshan resident MA Reza files a writ petition in 1995.

\* A division bench of the High Court on May 24, 2007 orders the authorities of Wonderland to remove all the establishments within six months.

## DHAKA-KOLKATA RAIL LINK

# More talks needed to sort out nitty gritty

### DURDANA GHIAS

While the Bangladesh Railway (BR) authority continues to prepare for the historic start of Dhaka-Kolkata direct train service, the scheduled date for starting the train communication is yet to be fixed.

Delay now looks inevitable over the project, as Bangladesh and India are yet to sit down and sort out nitty gritty of the whole project. In reality for millions of people in both countries the train service will open a new horizon of communication, which has remained suspended for over 40 years, since a war broke out between India and Pakistan in 1965.

Quazi Asadullah, BR's additional director general (operation), said that they are working with the target to start the project in July. They are yet to decide on the minute details of immigration, customs and security.

"Right now we have 50 compartments imported from Indonesia and we are putting broad gauge line on the existing rail line under a separate project. So there is no extra cost for the project. If we can set up the line up to the cantonment station then the passengers can board the train from cantonment," said Asadullah.

Contradicting his claim another high official of BR said that there is no possibility that the rail communication will start before March or April, 2008. Since independence several

initiatives were taken by successive governments to restore the train service but none of those had been fruitful.

The total length of the rail line would be 538 kilometers (km) of which 418 km will be in Bangladesh and 120 km will be in India. Bangladesh will get 78 percent of the revenue and India will get 22 percent as per percentage of rail lines between them.

Last time an agreement was signed in 2001 between the two countries but that agreement could not be materialised within the time limit. Therefore, a new agreement would be needed, said the officials.

Resumption of rail link will relieve thousands of people, who regularly shuttle between the two countries, of the long hours they have to wait at Benapoli and Petrapoli land ports in Bangladesh and India for immigration and customs formalities.

Frequent travellers are hopeful that the reintroduction of train service between the two countries would greatly relieve their sufferings.

Hasina, a housewife and mother of a child who recently went to Kolkata from Dhaka said that a hassle-free passage is always more than welcome for all passengers of these neighbouring countries.

"There was too much hassle in the border while checking passport and visas. It took around two and a half hours. Besides the road was potholed after Magura. It will be a great

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train communication resumes," she said.

The authority recently did a

rough calculation on the

journey time and where it would be best to set up immigration and customs check up.

Shafiqul Alam Khan, BR's

director Public Relations,

said that the Indian authority wants to set up immigration and other formalities at the borders. If the immigration is at the borders, our calculation shows that it would take eleven and half hours to make

the journey. But if the checks are done at the departure points, travel time would be reduced by at least three hours, he said.

The Bangladeshi crew will go up to the border and come back boarding the Dhaka-bound train from Kolkata. The Indian crew on their turn will return to Kolkata boarding the Kolkata-bound train from Dhaka at the border.

The fares would be \$8 for non-air conditioned (non-AC) coach Shobhona class, \$12 for AC coach Snigdha class and

\$20 for first class AC coach. The train will start at 7:45am from Dhaka and at 7am from Shild