

NATIONAL TREE FAIR

Prospectus for a green revolution

SHAHZNAZ PARVEEN

The National Tree Fair (NTF) is slowly gaining momentum with streams of tree lovers starting to turn up at the old airport premises after heavy monsoon rains of the last few days slightly dampened the mood of the fair.

One of the largest and most successful annual tree fairs in South Asia, the NTF attracts thousands of tree lovers every year and sells millions of plants. Considering huge crowds gathered in the past few years, the duration of the fair was extended to three months this time.

"We came all the way from Brahmanbaria to visit my cousin's family. We just wanted to check out the tree fair. When we entered, it felt amazing," said Sabina Akter, one of the visitors visiting the fair on Saturday.

Sabina and her three companions -- all family members -- were having a hard time fitting themselves and the plants they had purchased in an auto rickshaw. The plants they bought from the fair are two guava, one choco, a few ornamental plants and a mango sapling.

"Although we have to go through the hassle of carrying these [plants] all the way to our home district, we couldn't help but resist buying the plants after seeing so many assortment of attractive plants at the fair," she added.

Even though Dhaka city lacks sufficient open spaces for gardening, the tree fair is also drawing a good number of urban crowds as they are gradually adopting rooftop gardening.

Abu Bakar Siddiky, a Dhanmondi resident, said, "The sight of colourful fruits in varieties dangling from small plants is a wonderful sight. I am interested in rooftop gardening and this is the right place to find suitable fruit plants that grow in pots."

"When the tree fair first started, we had to request nursery owners to participate [in



A nursery worker carrying a pair of coconut plants at the fair yesterday.

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this fair]. In the beginning, they were reluctant because they did not think people would visit such a fair," said M Tarek Rahman, president of National Nursery

Consortium.

"Today, the scenario has totally changed. Now we have severe competition among the participants to get a stall in

the fair. The fair also raised awareness among city dwellers on tree plantation," he added.

The goal of the fair is to promote tree plantation and find a platform for nursery owners to help them market their products. "Nursery is no longer a street side business for low income people. Educated young people are joining the business. Plants in pots and floriculture are now a popular trade," said Tarek.

This year's attraction is various species of fruit plants, medicinal plants, flower seeds and ornamental plants, Tarek said adding that around 2 crore plants were sold last year and the participants hope that the sale would exceed this year.

Tarek observed that ornamental plants are gaining popularity in the city because of open space shortage. Besides, "ornamental plants can play a very important role in neutralising indoor air pollution."

Indoor plants such as Bamboo Palm, Chinese Evergreen, Warneckii, Peace Lily, Corn Plant, Marginata are a few of the many plants available in the fair that help reduce indoor air pollution.

Tarek however warned that some booths are deceiving customers with wrong information and plants.

Arif Ahmed, a resident of Mirpur 6, said, "I came here to buy some ornamental plants for the staircase in my apartment building. These plants are a big hit these days. However, after this fair ends, we would not know where to go to find plants because all the nurseries have been evacuated from the side of the streets."

Tarek, also expressed his concern over the disappearance of open spaces in the city and said, "The goal of this fair cannot be achieved if we do not have a regular supply of plants for the city all throughout the year. We need nurseries in every neighbourhood."

He added that Dhaka City Corporation has promised to allot the open spaces of the city to nurseries.

KAMRANGIRCHAR

Sick child in growing pain

DURDANA GHIAS

Kamrangirchar, an island over the river Buriganga, encompassing an area of around 10 square kilometres, could have become a jewel in the crown in terms of modern urbanisation. But today the island, deprived of the most basic facilities, represents years of negligence and lack of planning in the city's periphery.

The geographical character of Kamrangirchar as an island is being rapidly wiped out with land grabbers, in connivance with

building. Instead the laid out sand bore the telltale signs of violation of our wetland protection laws.

Haji Lokman Hossain Khan, a trader and resident of the area for 45 years said about the endless sufferings of the residents of the Kamrangirchar. "Many urban poor are living in this area but there is no municipality facility here. There is no sewerage system of Wasa [Water and Sewerage Authority] or no DCC [Dhaka City Corporation] activities," he said.

Most residents of the area use the water of deep tube wells for cooking, drinking and other

nessmen and residents.

"To move our trucks through the bridge in section 5 of Nawabganj we have to wait till it is 12 in the morning because if one truck moves through the bridge then other vehicles have to wait on the other side," said Khan.

Belayet Hossain, executive engineer, zone 2, Wasa, said that Kamrangirchar is not under their jurisdiction and at present there is no plan from the government to include the area under Wasa.

Sources at Desa said that Kamrangirchar is under their jurisdiction but electricity genera-



A foundation stone for a hospital in Kamrangirchar: Mere eyewash for a neglected city suburb.

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different government organisations, filling up the second Buriganga channel.

The second channel of Buriganga, flowing by the char, is now a pitiful site of dotted water bodies. The rest has been brutally filled up and grabbed, what could have been a city's pride in terms of its location.

Kamrangirchar now represents a deformed and sick town-ship. Despite being one of the most neglected suburbs the island has a great contribution towards the city where nearly a million toiling families find cheap accommodations in crammed rooms and continue to fill up the severe labour vacuum in the city.

On Wednesday morning children and boys of the area were playing in the open grounds created by indiscriminate land filling of the river Buriganga.

A few carts were parked haphazardly beside a plaque reading 'Kamrangirchar 31-bed hospital's foundation stone by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on May 4, 2006'. However, there was no sign of any construction of any

household work.

"The main problem of the area is the absence of sewerage and water supply system. Due to this problem the residents have to live in a smelly environment and it is spreading disease too," said Khan.

"Traders in the area are sustaining loss regularly for carrying extra cost of generator oil incurred due to long hours of Load shedding. Desa [Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority] is yet to do anything about it," he said.

The power outage in Kamrangirchar is so frequent that angry residents often take to the streets demanding more electricity. Sometimes they besiege the Desa local office.

The roads are narrow and unfit for motor vehicle movement. Often people fill up the potholes on their own so that the cars can move.

There are three complete and two incomplete (for pedestrians and non-motorised vehicles) bridges in the area, which are not enough to transport people and vehicles according to the busi-

tion in the area is lower than the requirement.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, said that Kamrangirchar is a union council and not under DCC but it should be brought under the master plan as it is inhabited by millions of people.

"Once DCC took the initiative to increase the ward number from 90 to 100. At that time Kamrangirchar along with Uttor Khan, Dokkhinkhan and Matuail, was also selected. But some residents of these areas filed a case in high court that these areas are not developed enough so they are not ready to give holding taxes of DCC. Later we refrained from contesting these cases as we were not sure what the high court rule would be," said Khoka.

At present Kamrangirchar is virtually without any local government stalling its entire development works as its chairman Monir Hossain is in jail facing corruption charges.

GULSHAN LAKE AREA DEREQUISITION

Greatest threat to lake's existence

TAWFIQUE ALI

said, "Derequisition of LA case 10 has been the foremost obstacle to the recovery of the lake area. A number of land dispute cases are now stalled by court directives."

According to Uzzal, Gulshan-Baridhara stretch of the lake seems easier to recover but the task is very difficult in case of Gulshan-Banani stretch. Many of the plot claimants have filed cases and injunctions by court have been a major bar to reclaiming the lake.

Fear of facing contempt of court charge is another thing that worries Rajuk. Rajuk Magistrate ASM Erdadum Dastagir said that until last year, at least five show cause notices were served upon

Rajuk regarding contempt of court.

"Out of the five notices, one is a direct contempt charge and now we have to appear before court and explain our position," said Dastagir.

A well-organised syndicate of land grabbers in connivance with government officials have long been active in the business of grabbing prime lands in the city exploiting advantage of the deregulation, said sources.

The land grabbers have over the years defiantly grabbed the lake on some pretext or other with earth filling and/or by making illegal structures.

The grabbers have

encroached upon the lake filling earth into the water body and resorting to various dirty tricks so that public eye cannot instantly detect the illegal act.

Urban experts and city dwellers have alleged that powerful lake grabbers in collusion with Rajuk officials have foisted time and again the attempt to demarcate, develop and conserve the water body, crucial for the city's environment and storm water drainage.

Member Secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok (Bapa), architect Iqbal Habib, said, "Land grabbers have so far grabbed the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake at least in three to four layers infringing upon the lake's periphery set by Rajuk, with the Rajuk itself accommodating the lake grabbing in legal documents each time."

Rajuk has consistently changed alignment of the lake area to facilitate its trade of housing plots reducing the lake substantially time and again, said architect Iqbal Habib, who has extensively worked on the Gulshan Lake.

Actually, he said, Rajuk has no specifically defined layout of the lake and lakeside area, and the situation has expedited rampant encroachment into the water body.

Iqbal said: There are many instances that Rajuk once set the fringe of the lake but accommodated new plots in documents each time a lake grabber claimed one beyond the fringe, during more than one decade."

Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon admitted earlier that the Gulshan Lake development project did not progress due to the vested interests of the influential land grabbers.

Rajuk has meanwhile undertaken construction of walkway along the lake at its own cost.

But it is facing serious obstruction in building the walkway along the lake properly maintaining the alignment, as outlined in the layout certified by the High Court.

Rajuk placed a layout of the lake to the High Court making it with super imposition of drawings on the old map of 1996 with an ulterior motive to legalise hundreds of plots created illegally encroaching upon the lake, sources said.

Frequent infringements by land grabbers into the lake are forcing the under-construction pathway to go in an extremely irregular course.

Almost all the plot owners on the lake bank have encroached upon the lake grabbing extra land in addition to their original allotment of 5 kathas with each plot owner presently possessing up to 10 to 12 kathas, said sources at Rajuk.

Interestingly, Rajuk itself issued allotment of extra land encroaching on the lake on demand from powerful plot owners on different occasions, according to sources.

Wetland Protection Act of 2000 provides for protection of canals and wetlands in flood retention ponds and basins earmarked in the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (MDP).

The interim government launched demolition drive against illegal structures encroaching upon the lake on January 17 and started removing land filled in the lake area from April 30.



A derequisitioned part of the Gulshan Lake at Shahzadpur.

KHOKA'S CORNER



Dhaka City Corporation has permitted WASA to dig up half of the main road near Palassi intersection for installation of a sewerage line. The excavation in the monsoon season is causing suffering to motorists and pedestrians. The picture was taken on Wednesday.

source: accuweather.com

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