



In old days, the present Shahidullah Hall area of Dhaka University was known as "Baag-e-Musa Kha". According to Hakim Habibur Rahman, the area was a garden and was famous as garden of Muslims. It was named after Musa Kha, who was the son of Isa Kha, one of the famous Baro Bhuiyan. Musa Kha was captured when he lost a war with Subader Islam Kha. However, Subader Islam Kha was very kind to him.

 e-mail: starcity@thecitythatwas.net

DCC: Dhaka Crippling Corporation?

Custodian of most public parks in the city, the Dhaka City Corporation has miserably failed to maintain open spaces the city residents so badly need

TAWFIQUE ALI

Even though city dwellers are in desperate need of more breathing spaces in the city, most of the public parks and playgrounds, supposedly maintained by Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), are in a terrible state -- thanks to poor governance by city fathers, managers, and its leaders.

Many DCC parks and playgrounds only exist on paper while a number of children's parks do not even have any necessary features for those to be called children's parks. The rest are simply abandoned, according to recent findings.

It is ironic and a pity that the DCC authorities have allocated Tk 8 crore in the budget of 2007-08 fiscal year for the development of parks when they are not even aware of how many parks and grounds they are supposed to maintain.

According to the DCC information guide, DCC looks after 47 public parks, but its estate department records show that it oversees 41 parks. A recent DCC survey however found 61 parks under its authority!

Chief Estate Officer of DCC, Kamruzzaman Chowdhury, said he was not aware that Rajuk had handed over 42 parks to the DCC for maintenance.

"I have just joined at this position," he said expressing his ignorance over various other queries about parks.

In another survey conducted by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolan (Bapa), Swamibagh Park is in fact a truck stand, Karwan Bazar Children's Park is a kitchen market, Kalyanpur Children's Park is occupied by floating stalls and public toilets. Gulshan Taltala Park -- used to be occupied by a slum for 25 years -- now faces Mahanagar Natyamancha, vagrants and drug addicts as its encroachers.

Drug addicts and transport workers control Siraz-ud-Doula Park. English Road Park has turned into a transport vehicle



Khilgaon Taltola park.



A child drug peddler at Motijheel Park.



English Road park.



Panthakunjo park.



Karwan Bazar children's park.

stand as well as a safe haven for drug addicts and anti-socials. Khilgaon Children's Park does not exist any more and Khilgaon Taltola playground at Chowdhurypara, also known as Pachar Maath, is now in possession of Ansar and VDP.

The main entrance of Nabojug Sharircharcha Park adjacent to Sadar ghat is always found closed. Encroachers and vagrants loiter in and around the park and cause nuisance. There is a health club inside the park, but its instruments and installations are being rusted without maintenance.

In Motijheel Park, a public toilet and a bus stand is found where drug peddlers roam freely. Nayatola Children's Park in Moghbazar is encroached on to build the local ward commissioner's office and a Wasa water

pump. Lalmatia playground is occupied by makeshift vending stalls, shops and various factories. Khilgaon Taltola playground in Mohammadpur is has been taken over to be used as a waste dump and car parking for a school adjacent to it.

Neighbourhood businesses have turned the Amligola Balu Maith into a junkyard. Locals alleged that their ward commissioner has been making money by setting up a slum on a portion of the ground. Moreover, the first floor of the health club located on the playground is being used for residential purposes. Half of Shikkatuli Park is encroached on by local influential people.

Interestingly, various government agencies have encroached on most of the parks and playgrounds with public toilets, Dhaka Wasa's water pumps and

DCC ward commissioners' offices.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, noted educator and head of a high-level advisory committee on park development and beautification in the city, said the DCC has obviously failed miserably to live up to its expectations in maintaining and conserving the parks and playgrounds.

"It's a deliberate failure that involves corruption," said Prof Choudhury.

Land grabbing has been a common practice since the independence of the country and it also has been a general political attitude to turn public and social properties into private ones illegally, he said.

"What is most crucial is that the capital is already a ruined city without open spaces and parks," said Choudhury, adding, "The

situation is going to be disastrous for the city dwellers unless the lost parks are reclaimed and new ones are created."

He stressed on social awareness for the protection of open and green spaces.

Sharif Jamil, member secretary of parks and grounds programme committee of Bapa, said the ward commissioners' offices, public toilets and Wasa water pumps encroaching onto the children's parks is a common phenomenon.

A huge amount of public money is wasted in the name of maintaining these parks and playgrounds whereas various recreational equipment are being destroyed due to lack of maintenance.

According to private housing and land development rules of 2004, the ratio of built-up area

and open space has to be 70 and 30 percent. Earlier, it was 60 and 40 percent.

Ideally, a city should have at least 10 to 25 percent open and green spaces, according to experts. As per Dhaka master plan, in 1995, the city's old part had only 5 percent open spaces while the new part had 12 percent.

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk) handed over 42 city public parks to DCC for maintenance in the early '80s.

Among those, there were two such parks in Gulshan -- one in front of shooting federation and the other one near Azad Mosque.

DCC abused its authority in case of both of these parks. It leased out a large chunk of the central park of the area to a private commercial amusement

park named Wonderland in 1990 at a token price. In the case of the other park known as Gulshan Taltala (South) Park, DCC allowed a 25-year settlement on the park for its sweepers.

Though the Gulshan South Park was freed from a 25-year long illegal occupancy in October 2005, DCC remained mysteriously dubious on developing greenery on the site.

"While Rajuk is guilty of handing over the public parks to wrong hands, the DCC should be made liable for not maintaining the parks," Hussain said.

DCC chief town planner and architect M Sirajul Islam, an expert in parks and beautification, said nowhere in the world parks, open spaces, canals and lakes of a city are destroyed in this manner.

almost three months, the zone officer said in the last week of June that DCC should get the job done by its urban planning cell.

Mubasshar Hussain, president of Institute of Architects Bangladesh, said nobody is supposed to occupy or destroy parks and playgrounds for any purposes, says the open space and wetland conservation act of 2000.

"While Rajuk is guilty of handing over the public parks to wrong hands, the DCC should be made liable for not maintaining the parks," Hussain said.

DCC chief town planner and architect M Sirajul Islam, an expert in parks and beautification, said nowhere in the world parks, open spaces, canals and lakes of a city are destroyed in this manner.

Ray of light for Sangshad Bhaban pavement

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A Decade after the lights on the pavements in front of the Sangshad Bhaban went off, the Public Works Department (PWD) yesterday launched a project to install lights from Khamarbari intersection to Asad Gate.

In a latest incident the Tejgaon police on July 1 arrested a young cricketer named Abdul Majid when he and his friends protested the move to set up the fair. "I have been playing cricket in the T & T playground since I was a young boy. All the young boys in my neighbourhood love the playground. But recently there has been one fair after another", said Abdul Majid who happened to be the Assistant Manager of Indoor and Gym Facilities, Bangladesh Cricket Board.

Majid was released only after he signed a bond promising not to go near the fair during the period of the fair.

Another fair organised by the Bangladesh Taant Board just ended on May 30. Before that Jatiyatabdhi Taant Dal used to organise Bejoy Mela every year. Public Works Department (PWD) regularly leases the playground for holding fairs throughout the year.

Locals say that they don't understand why the authority is eyeing the only playground in their locality.

tion and drug peddling on the dark pavement covered with trees in front of the Sangshad Bhaban," said another PWD official.

"With lights fitted to 28 high poles the entire area would be illuminated and the security control room inside

the parliament would be able to monitor the area," said the official.

PWD's Arbour Culture Department has also taken up the painstaking job of manually cutting the overgrown lawn in front of the parliament building.



PWD workers doing the rewiring for pavement lights in front of Sangshad Bhaban yesterday.

SHAHZNAZ PARVEEN

A team of People's Commission formed by the Save Environment Movement yesterday visited the T & T playground in Sher-e-Banglanagar where Bangladesh National Weavers Association (BNWA) is holding a month long fair, depriving thousands of local children from sporting activities.

"Dhaka city is gradually losing all its playgrounds and open spaces. The purpose of the visit is to protest the destruction of our playgrounds", said Naser Khan, Convenor, Save Environment Movement.

"We have an ongoing project to inspect the playgrounds of the city mainly to find out about their general condition and what the locals have to say about it. We chose T & T playground because of the latest

incident", he added.

"After the inspection is completed we will submit reports to the concerned ministry with a plan to protect them in the long run", said Khan.

Headed by Justice Golam Rabbani the people's commission comprised lawyers, engineers, journalists and members of the civil society.

While on the inspection Rafiqul

Islam Babu, Joint Secretary, Bangladesh Cricket Board said, "We have very little space available for sports in Dhaka city. Most of these spaces are regularly being used for holding various commercial activities."

"Due to lack of sports facilities our youths are more inclined towards unsocial activities such as drugs. In a way we are encouraging such acts by devolving play-

grounds", he added.

"There should be separate space for fairs and other commercial activities. We demand that playground should be used for sports activities only", he said.

Among others Mashur Rahman Tutul, Member Secretary, Bangladesh Cricket Board, Architect Mustasin Khan, Advocate Nusrat Jahan were present during the inspection.

In a latest incident the Tejgaon police on July 1 arrested a young cricketer named Abdul Majid when he and his friends protested the move to set up the fair.

"I have been playing cricket in the T & T playground since I was a young boy. All the young boys in my neighbourhood love the playground. But recently there has been one fair after another", said Abdul Majid who happened to be the Assistant Manager of Indoor and Gym Facilities, Bangladesh Cricket Board.

Majid was released only after he signed a bond promising not to go near the fair during the period of the fair.

Another fair organised by the Bangladesh Taant Board just ended on May 30. Before that Jatiyatabdhi Taant Dal used to organise Bejoy Mela every year. Public Works Department (PWD) regularly leases the playground for holding fairs throughout the year.

Locals say that they don't understand why the authority is eyeing the only playground in their locality.

Announcement

Do not miss our 3-part story on the city's informal recycling sector from Sunday, July 8.



BNWA is constructing shops for holding a month-long fair on T&T playground.