

When forgetting amounts to forgiving

Most killing fields of 1971 in the city are either unprotected or about to be obliterated

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

It has been thirty-six long years since the Liberation War of the nation was won through the supreme sacrifice of millions, but the historic sites where atrocities and mass killings were committed by Pakistan Army and their local collaborators still remain unprotected.

Most of the killing fields where Pakistan forces dumped or buried the bodies of unarmed civilian Bangladeshers are likely to sink into oblivion unless urgent measures are taken to demarcate and preserve these.

Even in the capital city of Dhaka, the killing fields are left at the mercy of local influential crooks who have been gradually encroaching on these historic sites.

Till date, 23 killing fields have been identified in Dhaka metropolitan area, according to the Liberation War Museum. The museum authorities believe that the figure would be higher once all killing fields are discovered.

Bangladesh Army has identified a total of 193 killing fields across the country.

In Dhaka, a few of the killing fields or mass burials were found near Physical Training Institute at Adabar, northern parts of Mohammadpur, western parts of Rayer Bazar and at brick kilns of Bosila.

In Mirpur area, six large ones were identified at Mirpur Bangla Collage, Jallad Khana, Harirampur graveyard, Muslim Bazar, Raine Khola and Shial Bari.

More killing fields have been found at Tejgaon, Jagannath Hall and Rokeya Hall at Dhaka University, Machh Potti of Thattari Bazar, Dhalpur, Ramna, Kali Bari and Jagannath University.

Akku Chowdhury, a member of the trustee board of Liberation War Museum, said in 2000, their initiative to exhume the skeletons of martyrs of '71 from underneath the premises of Muslim Bazar Nurani Jame Mosque drew fierce resistance from the mosque authorities.

They finally unearthed heaps of skeletons from the site with the assistance of Bangladesh Army, he added.

The Pakistan forces during the War of Independence had dumped bodies of victims in a well pit next to the mosque. When they exhumed the skeletons, the mosque authorities were planning to extend the building upto the well. The museum authorities could not revisit the spot after the excavation, said Akku adding, "The situation was not in our favour and we could not do anything more to conserve the site."

Another trustee board member of the museum, Asaduzzaman Noor, said when they first took on the task of conserving memories of the Liberation War by identifying and recovering the killing fields, they found themselves faced with massive obstacles.

They later on felt the need for establishing a museum to conserve the memories of the Liberation War, added Noor.

The Liberation War Museum authorities said they have succeeded in conserving the Jallad Khana Killing Field at Mirpur

Section 10 and set up a museum there. The museum was made open to public on June 22 this year.

During a visit to the Shialbari Killing Field under Rupnagar of Mirpur, this correspondent came across semi permanent structures of shops on the northern portion of the killing field, constructed and rented out by a local named Sadar Ali Matbar.

Part of the wall on which martyrs' names were engraved was found to have been painted over. The details painted on the wall now read that it is an ancestral graveyard owned by Matbar.

The law enforcers or the locals -- no one dared to raise any objection to the encroachment since Sadar Ali is considered very powerful in the area.

"Lots of dead bodies, espe-

cially of women, were found in the bushes and in most of the well pits in Shial Bari area," said Zainal Abedin, a resident of the area.

In course of time, the area embedded with corpses of the martyrs has been encroached on and filled up by locals, he lamented.

In a similar way, the killing field inside the Mirpur Bangla Collage has now lost all evidence of its existence there.

More frustratingly, on top of the encroachments by individuals or private firms, a government project named Dhaka Urban Infrastructure Development Project under the National Housing Authority allotted housing plots on the Raine Khola Killing Field.

Locals said they have been putting up resistance and holding up construction work on the historic killing field -- a place that they consider a pride of the area.

Nasir Uddin Bhuiyan, whose house is next to the killing field, said the locals did not know how to safeguard the historic site and they were losing confidence as to how long they would be able to stand their ground.

Ministry of Liberation War was assigned with the task of conserving the 193 killing fields, identified by the army, by constructing monuments on them. Under this project, Tk 8.27 lakh has been allocated for each killing field.

So far, only 35 monuments including the one at Rayer Bazar in Dhaka was constructed under this project.

Humayun Kabir Khan, the project director, said the ministry has decided to establish a system of proper maintenance after each monument is constructed. Otherwise, places like these may turn into safe havens for criminals, drug addicts and sex workers.

The project has sufficient funds to build more monuments, Humayun added, but he was unable to specify any plan of action for saving more killing fields from encroachers.



Shops built by a 'local influential' inside the compound of the Shialbari killing field in Mirpur.

Playgrounds treated as plaything

Govt retreats from one in Dhanmondi but rents out another in Uttara

TAWFIQUE ALI

While the government has retreated from holding a fair at Dhanmondi playground, a similar ground in Uttara Sector 4 has been rented out to a commercial amusement set-up.

Uttara Kalyan Samity, sector-4, which is entrusted with maintenance of the open space, has rented out the field to an amusement company called Nepland Fantasy Park for two months in exchange of what they said "service charge."

The playground has been fenced. The organisers have set up some mechanised rides for use in exchange for money. The price of ticket per person is Tk 20. Arrangements are there to sell snacks and soft drinks. It remains open from 3:00pm to 9:00pm.

Residents in the field's adjoining areas alleged that renting out the playground for commercial use is a denial of the local inhabitants' right to use it as an open space.

An elderly resident, who came to the field for a stroll in the morning on December 2, said preferring anonymity, "We don't need such installations occupying the playground."

Khondker Neaz Rahman, an urban planner and architect, said such commercial arrangements are not an alternative to usual sports of the youth and children.

There is a need for a playground or park, where adults can walk and children can play, in any residential area to ensure physical fitness of the residents, he said.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury,

noted activist for playgrounds and open spaces, said commercial use of a playground is an anti-social move and a "criminal offence."

The city dwellers are already suffering from severe scarcity of open spaces, he said.

"Those responsible for protection are devouring open spaces and playgrounds in a systematic manner," said Prof Choudhury.

A signboard at the entrance to the playground reads that

according to a contract signed between Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) and Uttara Kalyan Samity, the latter is entrusted with maintenance and development of the playground, park and the pond there.

President of Uttara Kalyan Samity, Sector 4, Dr MA Samad said they have given the company temporary permission to run the amusement park.

Initially, the Samity gave permission for one month and later extended it for another

month for the park, Samad said.

"It is true that our contract with Rajuk has no specific provision allowing such use," he said. "We take service charge from the Nepland Fantasy Park."

Samad said that the Samity needs money for development and maintenance of the field.

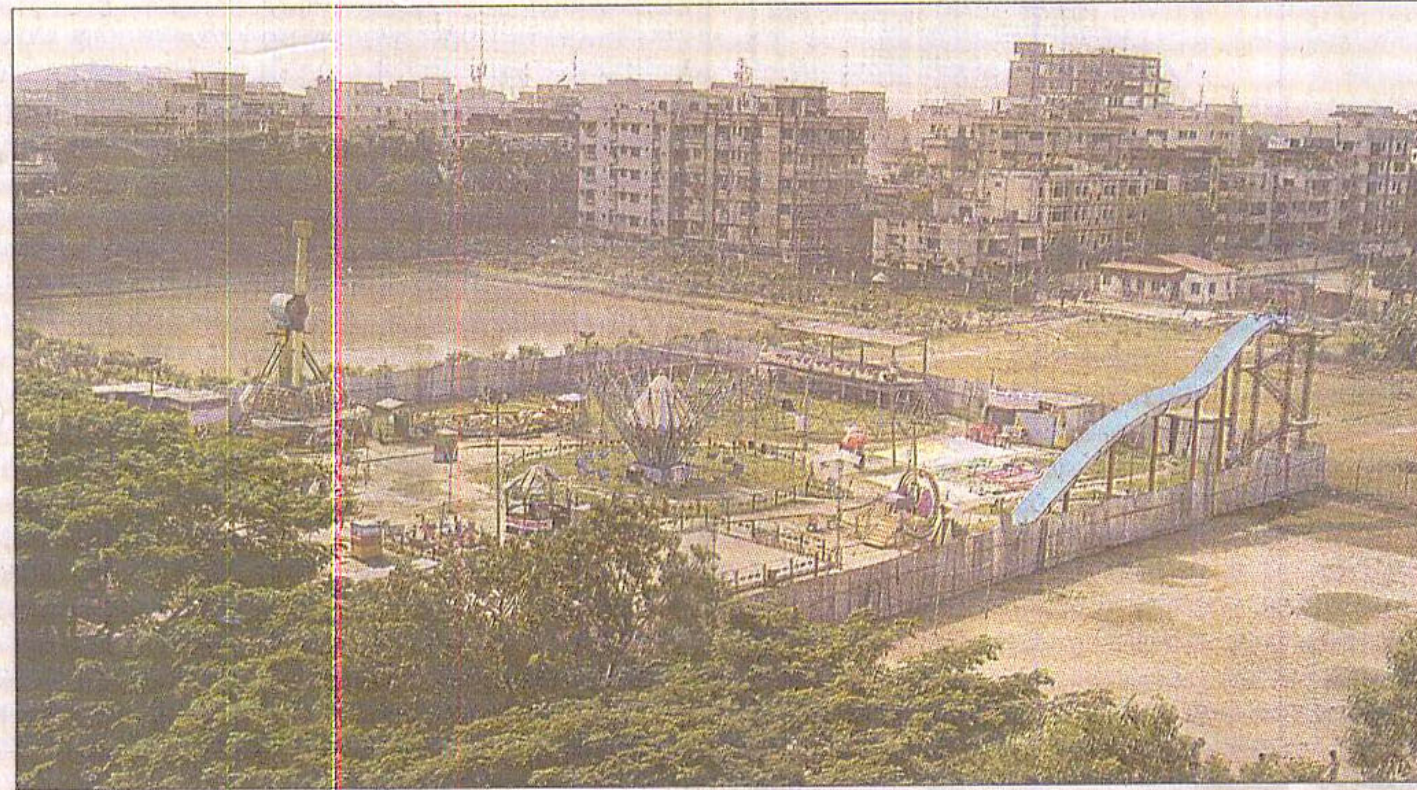
The Samity charges money (around Tk 1000 or so) for every single use by any institutions like schools, clubs and group that intend to use the field for sports.

Replying to a question, Samad

said the Kalyan Samity has recently got a sanction of Tk 20 lakh from the district council for beautification and development of the field.

Rajuk Secretary Md Faruque Jalil said that the authorities normally do not allow such use of public playgrounds and parks for monetary benefit.

"But in this case, we have to look into the terms and conditions of the contract and whether Kalyan Samity can rent out the field to earn money," he said.



An aerial view of the amusement set-up occupying more than half of the Uttara playground.

The warranty of hassles and tussles

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

When Mahfuzur Rahman purchased his brand new microwave oven in 2005, it came with a shiny three-year warranty card and smiles of assurances from the beaming sales officials. Only if he knew how much hassle awaited him!

The microwave hiccupped to a breakdown about two years later. Rahman was about to hand it over to a servicing centre for repairs when he remembered the warranty that came with it.

Doubtful about the validity of the warranty, Rahman pulled out the warranty card that he had saved up for a time like this. He thought he hit the jackpot as he found out that the warranty on the microwave was valid till 2008.

Rahman took the microwave back to the retailer in Gulshan. The warm smiles that greeted Rahman two years ago were replaced with irritated scowls.

The cynical eyes of the store attendants studied him from head to toe after Rahman handed over the warranty card to one of them. After examining the card for a while, the attendants told Rahman that the warranty period was invalid.

"They said that there must have been a mistake since the expiration date written on the card was 2008. They claimed that their microwave oven is sold with a one-year warranty only. My microwave is not under warranty since the sales clerk had incorrectly put down 2008 instead of 2006 on the card as the year of expiration of the warranty," said Rahman.

Rahman tried to reason with the clerk. "I tried to convince them that I shouldn't have to pay for a mistake they had made," said Rahman. But soon he realised that there is no point in arguing with them. He reluctantly agreed to pay for the repair charges.

"I was absolutely offended by their display of unprofessional attitude and disrespect toward me. They treated me as if I was trying to con them or something. It didn't seem that they had any concern whatsoever for their customers," he said.

What Mahfuzur Rahman had to go through is not an isolated incident. Hundreds, if not thousands of consumers have been going through similar ordeal. The retailers of various products take a complete U-turn from their "valued consumers" as soon as the customers bring back an out of order product and demand warranty coverage for the repair.

Retailers are using warranty offers only as a tool to lure customers, said a number of harassed customers. The products usually go out of order before the warranty period is over and the retailers refuse to fix the product free of charge as stated on the warranty card. It seems that warranties and after sales services exist only on paper, alleged the customers.

The retailers are in fact doing more business by making the customers pay for repair costs, complained a few customers who went through such ordeal.

Furthermore, there is no proper set up to provide after sales service at the retail outlets and if a customer is lucky enough to be able to use the product trouble-free during the warranty period, the products usually breaks down right after the warranty gets expired, they added.

Warranty is an obligation legally pronounced by the seller that specific services such as repair service or cost of parts would be provided at no additional cost to the buyer, in the event the particular product or article fails to meet the assured guarantee.

In the case of Mahfuzur Rahman, the retailer took two weeks to fix the microwave oven and the process did not go as smoothly as it should have been.

"They kept all my original documents -- receipt, challan, warranty card, etc., but the repair slip they handed me did not mention any tentative date of delivery of the product. Neither did it have any phone number on it. I collected a phone number from one of their stores and called to enquire about my microwave oven quite a few times and their responses were unprofessional to say the least," said Rahman.

"They kept giving me ridiculous excuses like their delivery van did not come or they have their hands full to start work on my oven," he said.

Rahman was so aggravated at the ordeal that he finally denied paying for the repair cost. The attendant handed over his microwave to him

"You can't expect a free replacement if you smash the appliance on the floor or burn the power adapter through faulty electric connections," said Dey.

Many consumers alleged that although many products start to malfunction right after the purchase due to defective parts or poor workmanship, the retailers refuse to provide warranty coverage showing various excuses.

Ahsan, a resident of Uttara bought a CD player with a tag of 6-month warranty from a retailer at Dhanmondi. A couple weeks later, the CD player went out of order. After he took it back to the retailer he found himself paying for a damaged laser reader in the CD player.

"They told me that I didn't have to pay any service

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Most of these goods have the 'warranty of deception'.

saying that the expenses would be "taken out of the pocket of the sales clerk who had originally made the sale".

Free warranties, fancily tagged along with numerous ranges of products, give consumers the confidence about their purchase. However, the consumers realise later on that strings are attached to the warranties with a number of obscure and lengthy conditions in fine print.

In most cases, retailers sell their products without properly explaining the terms of the warranty being offered with the purchase, alleged customers.

"It's a common misconception among general people that a warranty would cover all kinds of mishaps, which is not entirely true," said Manab Kanti Dey, deputy service manager of Rangs Electronics Ltd.

According to Manab Kumar Dey, warranties usually cover workmanship or the failure of the product if used as instructed. However, damages caused due to negligence on part of the user and operating the product in a way it was not designed to be operated, would not be covered by the warranty.

charge, but I would have to pay for the replacement laser reader since it was not included in the warranty," said Ahsan. "They should have explained me about the conditions of the warranty during the sale, but they were just too busy making the sale," added a frustrated Ahsan.

"Not everything in a product falls under warranty, you won't get any warranties for remote controls of a television or a reading head of a CD player according to our policies," said Hiralal, a sales official at MK Electronics at Gulshan.

Kazi Faruq, general secretary of consumers association of Bangladesh (CAB), said since every retailer has different warranty policies for different products and their policies also vary from other retailers, it is their ethical responsibility to clearly explain those policies to their customers before making a sale.

"The length of warranty shouldn't be the only concern when shopping for a product. Consumers should thoroughly read the warranty documents and be clear about any confusing conditions before purchasing anything," he added.