



DURDANA GHIAS

She was lurking behind the iron grill of an old house and with keen eyes looking at a banana at a child's hand. As the little girl became unmindful for a single moment she snatched the banana like an eagle.

As the little girl realised that the banana was stolen, she started crying. In the meantime, the 'culprit' jumped to the verandah of a nearby house and finished her 'lunch' with the booty.

Such an incident is quite common on the Basanta Kumar Das Lane of Farashganj in old Dhaka where scores of monkeys ramble at large. Residents of many other parts of old Dhaka are quite used to living with monkeys.

One may think why they are seen only in old Dhaka.

"Monkeys are mainly seen in and around old spacious houses. It may be the reason because here in old Dhaka they can play and sleep and stroll to their heart's content," said Urmia Saha, a student of Jagannath University, who has been seeing the monkeys since her childhood.

"Sometimes it is annoying because they take away food and clothes in a swoop. But sometimes when I sit in the verandah in the late afternoon it is nice to see them play innocently," she said.

Even though many residents expressed annoyance, most of them said they give bread, biscuits and bananas to the monkeys.

"If we don't give them food or if they can't steal from us then from where will they find it?" said Urmia. "I cannot even think of driving them away. Where will they go?"

Loving to live amid monkey business

Despite all, the number of the cute primates in old Dhaka decreasing fast

cannot think them living the life of a homeless."

Many residents give away food to the monkeys just to see them eating innocently. "When I give them bread or biscuit sometimes they eat it with small bites sitting in front of me. It fills me with a strong feeling of compassion for the cute little monkeys. If we don't care for them then who will?" said Afroza Sheuli, a student of JNU.

It is almost impossible for a mother to leave the baby if dies. If a baby dies the mother does not leave the body and roams with the body until it is lost.

During summer the monkeys like to be near the floor and in winter they like to stay upstairs.

Md Firoz, a grocery shop owner in the area, said it is almost a daily routine to lose two or three bananas. "Sometimes I get angry but what if I lose a few bananas each day for the poor creatures?"

"It is a pleasure for me to see the little monkeys play hanging from ropes," said Md Tawhidur Rahman, a staff at Farashganj Jam-e-Masjid.

In spite of the residents' empathy for one of the last remnants of the urban wildlife their number has decreased in the last few years.

"Previously there were lots of monkeys in the area. But the number went down in the last few years when people started to demolish spacious old buildings and build congested apartments instead," said Urmia.

Showing respect to the dead is one significant feature of the monkey society.

"May be because they lost the spacious courtyards of old houses in which they used to stroll and play," she said.

Prof Anwarul Islam, a professor of zoology at Dhaka University and chief executive, Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh, said habitat loss and habitat alteration are the main reasons for the decreasing number of monkeys.

"With increasing urbanisation the conflict between human and monkey has increased and tolerance decreased. As a result, their habitat has shrunk if not destroyed," said the professor.

"They are seen in old Dhaka because the residents are tolerant," he said.

"When a group gets bigger it splits into several small groups but in their case it is not happening because they have no other place to go, resulting in infertility due to inbreeding," said Prof Islam.

Maintaining territory is one reason for their attraction to old Dhaka.

"Animals, especially primates, maintain territory very strictly. They hardly go outside the territory. Old Dhaka is their territory so it is unlikely for them to move from the place unless the conflict increases," he said.

Plot claimants start fresh encroachment on Gulshan-Baridhara lake

Latest move for earth-filling stopped but makeshift structures are still there on the wetland

TAWFIQUE ALI

A number of private plot claimants have again started encroaching on the Gulshan-Baridhara Lake at Shahjadpur 'jheelpar' point in violation of the Wetland Protection Act and a High Court ban.

The site, between Mariam Tower-1 and Gulshan-Shahjadpur link road, is part of a lake development project undertaken by Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk).

The plot claimants who had started earth-filling stopped it after Rajuk on March 11 filed a case with the Gulshan police under Wetland Protection Act in this connection, said Rajuk's Deputy Town Planner Abu Hasan Mortuza.

At least 10 of such claimants have occupied plots with makeshift structures, encroaching on the wetland along the lake bank opposite to Gulshan road no-103 and

105.

Advocate Syeda Rizwana Hasan, director of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), said character of a wetland cannot be altered without prior approval of the government as per Wetland Protection Act of 2000.

The government, on the other hand, cannot approve changes in character of such land without making alternative arrangements in public interest, she said.

Rashed Chowdhury, a resident at Gulshan road-105 and convenor of Gulshan Society zone-4, said the plot claimants took a move to earth-fill the lake at the same point two to three years back, but stopped the work following media reports and Rajuk intervention.

A temporary road was built a couple of months back along the lake's Shahjadpur fringe by earth-filling the lake. After construction of the road, the

plot claimants started earth filling into the lake to the west of the road to develop their plots.

Rajuk intervention stopped them this time too, but they resumed earth filling a week back, said Chowdhury.

On a visit to the site, several plots were found earmarked there in the names of different claimants with fresh earth filling.

One Haji Abu Sayed has demarcated and occupied one such plot with a semi-pucca structure.

Mohammad Abdul Gani and Mohammad Abdur Rob jointly claim a 36-katha chunk of the wetland, erecting a makeshift structure.

One Haji Haider Hossain

who claims a 10-katha plot opposite to Gulshan road-105 was constructing a makeshift structure, with fresh signs of earth filling there.

All the plot claimants have

employed their 'representatives' to take care of the 'plots'.

But the 'representatives'

declined to talk to this correspondent.

However, one of the plot claimants, Haider Hossain, could be contacted. Though he claimed that he had bought the 10-katha plot in 1986 and that the site is not a part of the lake, he admitted that it goes under water during rainy season.

According to him, there are at least 15 plot claimants at the site.

The High Court on May 25, 2006, upon a public interest litigation (PIL) petition, passed an order restraining earth filling in the Gulshan Lake. The original allottee of Gulshan plot no-13 at road-32 filed the PIL petition.

Rajuk has undertaken a Tk 327.15 crore comprehensive project for development of the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake to protect it from encroachment. Tk 297.42 crore has been earmarked for land acquisition under the project.



Plot claimants have erected makeshift structures to occupy Gulshan-Baridhara lake at Shahjadpur point.

Quest for a better outlook on human rights

Rab men share experience with British Police

CITY CORRESPONDENT

"I am now more conscious about human rights of our citizens including the criminals," said a Rab official, who had just participated in a training course on human rights.

"As an officer from police I had training on human rights before but this time I had the opportunity to interact with members of the British police. I came to know many new things on how they arrest, interrogate and treat the criminals," said the official.

An interactive training course on human rights for the members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) concluded Thursday. Starting from March 2, the 12-day training was held at the Rab headquarters in Dhaka.

The British High Commission and Rab Forces

Headquarters jointly arranged the training where 54 Rab officials participated. Experts from British police gave training to the Rab members, said sources at the Rab headquarters.

According to participants the course was quite motivating as they were able to interact with the members of British police and share their experiences with them.

Asked if any new point of view came along during the training the official said that the perception of human rights is mostly similar in the British and Bangladeshi standards.

"Some of their ways and techniques are different from us. They interrogate a criminal in the presence of a defense lawyer. One doctor is posted to each police station to attend criminal in case she/he falls sick. These are fresh things for us in treating a criminal or a

suspect," said an official.

"Besides, they can detain a crime suspect up to 96 hours whereas we have to produce him in court in 24 hours," he added.

While interrogating a criminal British police depend more on physical evidence like the weapon with which the crime was committed. Collecting physical evidence is easier for them because they are more technologically advanced in forensic analysis and crime scene investigation (CSI). They are also apt at collecting footprints and fingerprints.

"When the weapon is displayed to the suspect during interrogation she/he recognises it and becomes mentally weak and gives confession. Depending on physical evidence is a bit tough for us since we are not technologically capable like them to conduct a CSI," he said.

"We depend more on psychological factors and circumstantial evidence, for an example, we try to find whether anyone has seen the crime suspect while or after committing the crime. Bangladesh is a densely populated country and so if you do something even at the dead of night, it is very likely that a beggar or a homeless would see you," said the official.

While arresting an accused the British police can use pepper spray and stun gun in case the person does not cooperate. "But here we at first tell the accused to come with us and if he does not then we touch the suspect. If he still fights then we are asked to apply force as much as he does. But we do not use pepper spray or stun gun," he said.

"We are looking forward to giving further training on human rights," he added.

Besides comparative study on arrest and detention the participants also went through the draft of the human rights doctrine prepared for Asia, the International standard of

human rights, HR policies, right to life and structure and policing in Britain.

During the training the participants were briefed also by Army Legal Service (ALS) and National Police Improvements Agency (NPLA) personnel.

"You are now well aware of human rights. Disseminate your knowledge to your colleagues and follow it while performing duties," said Rab Additional Director General Col Gulzar Uddin Ahmed at the concluding session of the training on Thursday.

"This is the first time I am hearing that Rab is doing training on the codes of human rights. This is a very positive approach because most people are afraid of them. If this kind of training is taken by Rab on a regular basis then it may help dispel their fearful image," said a university student.



COURTESY: RAB

Duncan Brown, SCO, British High Commission, giving away certificate to a participant of the training on Thursday.