

New inmates to bring Dhaka zoo to life next month

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Good news for the visitors while the officials at Mirpur zoo in Dhaka are in festive mood as the 'guests' are finally arriving next month after a long wait.

All preparations have been taken to bring the new animals and we hope they will be added attractions for the visitors, said a zoo official.

In addition to the current array of species, by the end of May 38 new members from ten different species will be on display.

The new inmates include giraffe, zebra, oryx, wildebeest, impala, greater kudu, common

elan, horse, donkey and kangaroo.

Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock allotted Tk 5.5 crore for the purchase. Initially the budget was Tk 6 crore. However, the budget was cut as lemur was dropped from the list.

Other than the horses and donkeys, the rest of the animals will be brought from South Africa.

The Indian-Arabian cross breed horses and the donkeys however will arrive at the end of this month from India.

The last giraffe at the zoo died in 1995 and since then the zoo did not have the splendid long-necked animal. Four giraffe

would be bought to fulfil the long-awaited demand.

The zebra, oryx, and wildebeest will join their lone mates at the zoo. Zoo officials said that currently they have a few single animals. They will now have partners and be able to procreate.

Acting Curator of the zoo Dr AKM Nazrul Islam said, "We had plans for a long time to bring these animals. We hope that the new members will make the zoo lively and attract more visitors."

A team comprising the acting curator and three officials from the Department of Livestock Services will fly to South Africa on May 17 for a pre-shipment

inspection, Islam informed.

Hoor and Company who received the work order this March will send the new inmates in a chartered cargo plane by May 27.

It will cost around 2.5 crore to charter the plane, Islam added.

"Preparation is well underway to welcome the new inmates. Sheds are being repaired and rearranged to house them," Islam said.

The central zoo in the city currently has around 400 sheds. No new sheds have been built so far for the newcomers, he said.

The zoo made its last purchase in the year 2002. Around Tk. 50 lakh was spent to bring two

cheetahs, two zebras, three greater flamingos and two golden pheasants.

Among the new inmates, impala is a reddish African antelope noted for its leaping ability and for having ridged, curved horns in the male.

Greater kudu is a large South African woodland antelope with a brownish, bluish-gray, reddish-brown coat with narrow, white vertical stripes and, in the male, long spirally curved horns.

The oryx also belongs to the antelope family found in Eastern Africa.

Common elan belongs to the deer tribe and is found in Alaska, Canada, the United States and the northern part of Europe.

The wildebeest is a very social animal found in the Serengeti Game Reserve in Tanzania and the Masai Mara National Reserve in Kenya. This herbivorous animal is famous for its group migration. During July and August every year millions of these wildebeests cross the Mara river from the Serengeti Game Reserve to the Masai Mara. They later come back in October.

To cope with the extra expense and maintain the new species, the zoo officials have asked for increasing allocation in the budget for the next fiscal year.

The yearly budget of Dhaka Zoo is Tk 3.75 crore, said an official, out of which Tk 2.50 crore is spent for feeding the animals. A large sum of their income comes from leasing out the ticket booth. This year the ticket counter was leased out for Tk 2.7 crore.

Established in 1974, the 186-acre Dhaka Zoo is currently a home to nearly 165 species of 1,823 animals. Of them 58 are mammals including elephant, royal Bengal tiger, lion, cheetah, rhinoceros, zebras, different species of monkeys and chimpanzees, hippos and more.

There are 66 species of birds, 13 species of reptiles including snakes and crocodiles and 28 species of fish.

One of the most important recreational hotspots for Dhaka dwellers, the largest zoo of the country attracts around 10,000 visitors every day.

TAWFIQUE ALI

Although Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk) has taken back Gulshan South (Taltala) Park from Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and handed it over to Gulshan Society for maintenance, DCC still claims its possession.

DCC is now going ahead with development plan for the parkland.

KAM Haroon, chairman of Rajuk, said they have recently handed the park over to Gulshan Society for maintenance. "We have taken it back as the DCC has been unable to keep this public park in proper shape," he said.

Shirin Shila, joint general secretary of Gulshan Society, said they got the park's maintenance job around a month back through a temporary lease agreement.

"We will soon make a development plan for the park," said Shila. "We are aware of DCC's development plan but now it is not going to work."

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, however, said there is no scope for taking back a park or playground from DCC unilaterally. "It is the mandate of the city corporation to maintain city's parks and playgrounds," he said.

The park has only eight members.

Mustafa Amin Siddiqui, a horticulture consultant and nursery owner, said the business has a huge export potential as there is a big international market.

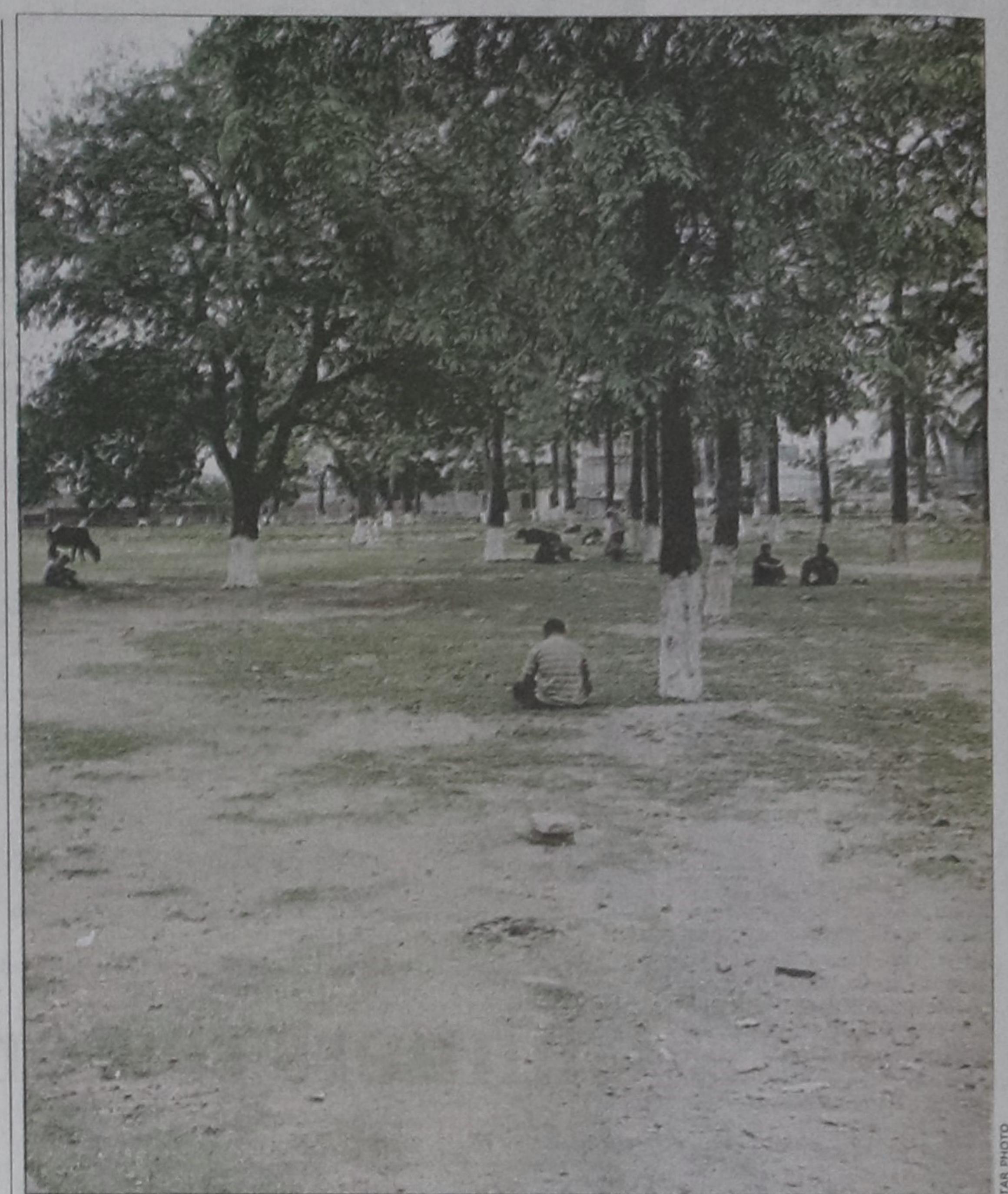
"Nursery business has come a long way without any support from the government," he said adding that with a little boost from the government nursery business can become a major contributor to economy and employment generator.

"One of the major problems is that nurseries do not have any protection against natural calamities as most nurseries are developed out in the open with a small investment. When a calamity ruins the production, owners cannot get monetary support from any side."

Safe packaging and transport of plants, seeds and flowers is another problem, he said.

"Nursery products being very fragile and fast-decaying need a modern transport and packaging system, which has to be inexpensive so that it does not increase the price in the local market," Siddiqui said.

Besides, there is no facility available for plant disease control or technical support for this newly developed farming.



Confusion over control of Taltala park

been done.

Entrusted with maintenance of around 50 public parks and playgrounds in the capital, DCC has consistently allowed encroachment and destruction of them, said experts.

Rajuk handed over around 50 public parks in the capital to DCC for maintenance by an order in the 1980s, said Rajuk officials. Taltala Park and Central Park were among them.

But the DCC leased out part of the Gulshan Central Park for commercial use at a token price and allowed settlement of a sweep colony occupying Taltala Park.

The DCC leased out a big chunk of central park in a dubious manner to Wonderland in 1990, a private sector children's amusement park, according to documents of DCC.

The Taltala Park is earmarked as a green park in the layout of Gulshan model town in the Dhaka Master Plan prepared by erstwhile DIT chairman GA Madani in 1962.

Rajuk handed over 3.99 acres of parkland to the DCC, but the latter occupied 6.33 acres of land earth filling a portion of adjoining Gulshan Banani Lake, said Rajuk officials.

The park had been illegally occupied with the settlement of 416 sweep families of DCC for long 25 years. Even after the park was freed from the 25 years' illegal occupancy in October 2005, DCC did not take any practical steps to develop it.

They instead built a six-foot high solid boundary wall defying protest of the local residents and environmentalists.

A meeting of the Good Governance Committee at the PM office on July 11, 2003 instructed the DCC to return both the parklands to Rajuk within a month.

The Rajuk in a letter November 2, 2005 to the DCC said that nothing other than a park at the south parkland would be acceptable to it.

DCC remained hell-bent on using the parklands for commercial purposes despite clear directives from the Prime Minister's Office and repeated pressures from the Ministry of Housing and Public Works.

The city mayor told The Daily Star in December 2005 that they had a plan to build a community centre on the open space along side South Park.

Following a writ petition filed by Gulshan Society and two residents, a High Court bench issued a rule on December 15, 2006 upon the DCC and its chief executive officer to explain why they should not be directed to refrain from using the Gulshan South Park for any purposes other than developing and maintaining it as a green park. The DCC at long last came up with an architectural design for development of the park. A high-level advisory committee of DCC approved the plan on January 14.

Garden centres see a business boom

Around 1200 nurseries now operating in and around Dhaka

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Nursery business is thriving in Dhaka city and elsewhere in the country amid growing demand from plant enthusiasts and environmentally conscious people.

People's thirst for visual relief from the gray cityscape is leading to a boost in nursery trade opening up potentials for export and job creation.

Around 1,200 big and small nurseries are currently operating in Dhaka, its outskirts and neighboring areas including Gazipur, Savar and Ashulia. About 500 of them are exclusively growers who sell the plants to others.

Mirpur, Dhanmondi, Gulshan, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Khamarbari, Ramna and Doel Chatter are among the city areas where nursery trade is growing. Nursery owners term the development as a silent revolution.

Md Tarek Rahman, president of National Nursery Consortium (NCC), a cooperative society of nursery owners of the country said landscaping and rooftop gardening is becoming very popular in Dhaka as city dwellers desperately seek respite from the monotonous gray cityscape devoid of greenery.

The trend started after the 13th Saarc Summit held in Dhaka in November 2005. City beautification project taken up by Dhaka City Corporation during the period inspired many people to have greener landscape in their surroundings, Tarek said.

Greener ambiances are added to corporate houses, banks, shopping malls, hotels, apartment buildings and personal residences.

"Although these are nowhere

near the requirement of the city and there are very little space here to plant trees, we see a silent revolution taking place," Tarek said.

Mostly ornamental plants, pot plants, seasonal flower plants, creepers, orchid, bonsai, cactus and shrubberies are in vogue in the city. Many people interested in rooftop gardening are opting for various fruit plants.

People outside Dhaka are choosing mostly medicinal, fruit and timber plants. Exotic and hybrid plants however are gradually outnumbering local species. There is also demand for leaves in the flower shops in the city for bouquet decoration.

The nurseries are also providing employment for a huge number of people migrating from all over the country to the city in search of livelihood. New jobs like plant suppliers and caretakers have been created in offices and apartments buildings.

Growing up on street corners, often taking over public footpaths and encroaching on city corporation spaces, nurseries have also become an avenue to profitable self-employment for a significant number of people.

The NCC president for a platform for nursery owners. He mentioned that a 'nursery village' was developed in the city's Kalabagan area on around 2 bighas of land donated by the DCC. NCC is operating the village.

"I sell Tk 800 to 3,000 per day depending on the weather condition. During special festival season people buy pot plants as

gifts," said a plant vendor at Doel Chatter.

Another vendor said the prices of various plants range between Tk 15 and Tk 250 and sometimes more depending on how rare the species is.

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Although a signboard declares it a one-way road at Dhanmondi but who cares? Vehicles often move both ways violating rules while the residents suffer from frequent traffic gridlock in the area.