



The 20-year-old rooftop garden by Abul Mamun Harunur Rashid in Mohammadpur.

An oasis in the middle of concrete jungle

Rooftop gardening attracting more people

SHAHAZ PARVEEN

Green vegetables and fresh herbs are dangling from the tub. Branches of fruit trees are swaying with the light breeze. Seasonal flowers are giving away sweet fragrance with butterflies fluttering. It is like an oasis in the middle of a concrete jungle.

The creator of this garden, Abul Mamun Harunur Rashid, spends most of his time on the rooftop of his house in Baitul Aman Housing in Mohammadpur. The rooftop garden, which is around 20 years old, is a regular source of fruits and vegetables for his family.

Rashid in his 60s utilised every inch of the roof and has as many as 230 plants there. He has guava, mango, water apple, sapota, pommelo, lemon, jujube, star fruit, pomegranate, papaya, Bengal currant (karamcha) etc in his garden.

"These days we buy vegetables from the market only once or twice a week. The ones we grow on the roof are enough to meet the need of my four-member family," said Rashid.

From the garden a fresh supply of okra, eggplant, lemon, chilli, tomato, pumpkin, gourd, spinach, fresh herbs and leafy plants, beans, broccoli, cauliflower even bay-leaves goes directly to the kitchen and that is the most rewarding part, Rashid said.

These are a few species that grow well in a relatively harsh environment of the urban setting, said Rashid who also has various ornamental plants and seasonal flowers there.

For Rizia Khanom, a resident of Mohammadia Housing Limited, gardening is a childhood hobby. White fragrant flower has always been her passion.

On the rooftop of her five-storey building she has gandharaj, hasnahena, kamini, rajanigandha, beli, rare white rongan and nayantara in her precious collection.

"I have fascination for gardening since my childhood. Since we don't have any open space in the city the roof has become my garden. I even planted seasonal flowers and vegetables on my balcony when I lived in rented houses," she said.

Rizia said because of the fruit trees she sees birds at her home almost every day. The white flowers also attract butterflies, which is a rare sight in the city.

Apart from providing scented white flowers, vegetables and fruits, the garden on her roof is also a respite from monotony and solitude. Rizia has been living alone since her husband died in 1997. It is gardening that keeps her going.

Rooftop gardening is fast

becoming a popular hobby of the city dwellers who relentlessly seek out a respite from the monotonous gray cityscape devoid of greeneries.

Changes can be witnessed mostly in densely populated middle-class neighborhoods like Moghbazar, Mohammadpur, Lalmatia, Shaymoli, Mirpur, Uttara, Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi and Baridhara areas.

Horticulturists believe rooftop gardening has a huge potential of becoming a source of nutrition in Dhaka city.

Md Zahidul Amin, metropolitan agricultural officer, Dept of Agricultural Extension, said, "Given the current situation of Dhaka city that has very little open

owners is rooftop garden can be a major source of vegetables and fruits. It is a bit expensive in the beginning but once the garden takes shape it helps save money," said Amin.

However, many city dwellers were interested in rooftop gardening because it helps them consume vegetables and fruits grown without chemical fertilisers. Most importantly it is free from artificial growth regulators or ripening agents. Most growers prefer organic materials.

Apart from providing economic return and aesthetic nourishment rooftop gardens help curb environmental pollution.

The environmental benefits of rooftop gardening are proven. It helps improve air quality and reduce green-



Rezia Begum has in collection some rare white flower plants.

house gas emissions. Rooftop gardening has become a major source of greeneries in many cities around the world.

In 2001 Japan made it mandatory for Tokyo residents that they must have at least 20 percent greeneries on their roof. It has been reported that because of the practice the pollution level and temperature of the city has improved.

Still there are some barriers that hinder expansion of rooftop gardens in Dhaka. Scarcity of proper gardening materials, relevant information and technical support is a major problem. "The interested owners also need to design the building according to the need of the garden but this practice is yet to develop," Amin noted.

"One of the major reasons that is encouraging the house

DRAFT DETAILED AREA PLAN FOR DHAKA CITY

Poor public hearing to hush up flaws, coterie interests

TAWFIQUE ALI

Anomalies and flaws in the Detailed Area Plan (DAP) of Dhaka metropolitan area must be rectified through meaningful and comprehensive public consultations for a liveable capital city, said urban experts and environmentalists.

They said such flaws will better serve certain coterie interests and go in favour of the influential housing developers while it is supposed to be the most crucial planning document for the city's proper development and liveability.

The public hearing should be held for a considerable period of time, at least for three months, involving experts and professionals, said Prof Nazrul Islam, noted urban expert and honorary chairman of Centre for Urban Studies.

"The hearing must be adequate and meaningful," he said. "Individual persons and professionals need to know about proposed land use pattern of a private plot and how community interests have been protected with parks, playgrounds and open spaces."

According to a conservative estimate there are four million slum dwellers in the capital and they will be eager to know how their housing has been planned, Prof Islam said.

The DAP is supposed to portray in details every structure, lake, canal, wetland, retention pond, road, open space, place of worship and all other topographical features of the city.

It is crucial for planned urbanisation and development of the capital city and conservation of environment through proper implementation of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP), popularly known as Dhaka's master plan.

The DMDP was initiated in 1992, completed in 1995 and officially gazetted in 1997. But Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) initiated framing of DAP in November 2004.

While Rajuk took around a decade to initiate framing of DAP and extended the deadline three times, it now aims at finalising the controversially drafted document in a hurried manner within December.

Rajuk has set two months from October 5 to December 4



Many flood flow zones in the capital's eastern fringes are being earth-filled in an unplanned way.

for public discussions at four places including Rajuk central office and three zone offices in Mohakhali, Uttara and Dhanmondi. They have kept draft final reports of the DAP and invited interested persons and experts for consultation.

"Public hearing in this manner will not serve the purposes of DAP," said Prof Islam, who is also chairman of University Grants Commission (UGC).

He said it came to his notice that 0.11 acres of land has been shown for 14 private universities while minimum requirement for one private university is one acre.

There is also conflict of interest, he said adding that one of the consultants is the owner of a developer company. Another is the owner of a consulting firm and former president of Bangladesh Institute of Planners.

"Professional and expert bodies like Bangladesh Institute of Planners, Bangladesh Paribesh Abdolon (Bapa), Centre for Urban Studies should play a technical role with their criticism to rectify its flaws and anomalies," he said.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, chair-

man of environmentalist group Bangladesh Paribesh Abdolon (Bapa), said that public consultation would not be meaningful in this manner.

"Two months is a too little time for the purpose," he said. "Rajuk took many years to draw up the plan but it is trying to finalise it hurriedly."

Rajuk has not made the document available online for the public.

Many flood flow and sub-flood flow zones in Dhaka's eastern fringe, as designated in the DMDP, have been earth-filled by housing developers, said architect Iqbal Habib, member secretary of Bapa. Such acts have been endorsed in the DAP.

"Authorities must redo the planning component of DAP with its consistency with the structural and urban area plans, rectification of all the anomalies and reflection of the people's socio-economic and cultural aspirations," he said.

Allegedly, a section of corrupt officials of Rajuk have deliberately delayed the DAP to make room for private land developers to destroy city's natural environ-

ment, wetlands, flood retention basins and open spaces.

Delay in implementation of the DMDP, in absence of DAP, has resulted in the filling up of vast low-lying areas in and around the city exposing it to environmental hazards, flooding and waterlogging, said environmentalists.

Topographic landscape and natural environment, wetlands, flood retention basins and open spaces within and in the periphery of the city have been destroyed recklessly in absence of the DAP during the past decade.

The environmentalists expressed serious doubts whether DAP will contain original and detailed positions of the flood-flow zones, retention ponds, lakes, rivers, canals and Spatial Planning Zones (SPZ), as earmarked in the DMDP.

The DAP is not actually 'detailed,' said Prof Islam. "While the master plan designated 26 SPZs, DAP has reduced the number to only five," he added.

"The master plan should have already been updated with a comprehensive environmental

planning alongside Strategic Transport Plan."

As per terms of reference (ToR) of the DAP, consultants to consult with interested parties, local communities and stakeholders at all stages of preparing the DAP.

Golam Kibria, Rajuk's member (planning), said that they would try to incorporate objections and observations from the public and expert bodies to a 'reasonable extent.'

Admitting that survey and mapping of DAP done by the consultants were flawed in many ways, Kibria said, "We cannot claim that the document will be perfectly flawless. There is no denial that there are many limitations in the way of preparing the plan."

Rajuk hired four local consulting firms -- Sheltech Private Limited, Development Design Consultants Limited (DDC), Engineering and Planning Consultants Limited (EPC) and Ganibangla Limited -- for the two-year DAP project involving Tk 23.22 crore to study an area of 1,528 square kilometres.

Nostalgic look back at good old days

Digital photo-menders doing brisk business

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

When Mohiuddin Ahmed, a septuagenarian resident of Malibagh, suddenly found a damaged 1969 group picture of his family and cousins, he immediately went to a photo-mender to have prints made for other family members.

"It was wonderful, all those people with unkempt, long hairs and walrus moustaches," he said. "I'm going to look for more old photos now"

Dr. Mozammel Hossain, a 55-year-old otologist in Rampura, got hooked on the past when he found a 35-year-old photo of himself and his mother. He gave her a copy on Mother's Day, and now he plans to reprint more old photos.

"Although we focus on the current ones, but I have to admit that old photos are more interesting, often nostalgic," he said.

They are certainly interesting in other way to many digital studios, printing presses and graphic designers that have spotted a lucrative, untapped market in the millions of pieces of photographic memorabilia gathering dust in old albums. Their attraction is far from sentimental.

"Working with old photos is like printing money," said Moahammad Faruq, the owner

of N R Digital Studio, a photo processing shop in Malibagh.

Nor are the financial benefits confined to immediate sales. "People who once get hooked on old pictures are sure to come again," said Akkas Mahmud, a photo-mender at Image Digital Photography at New Eskaton.

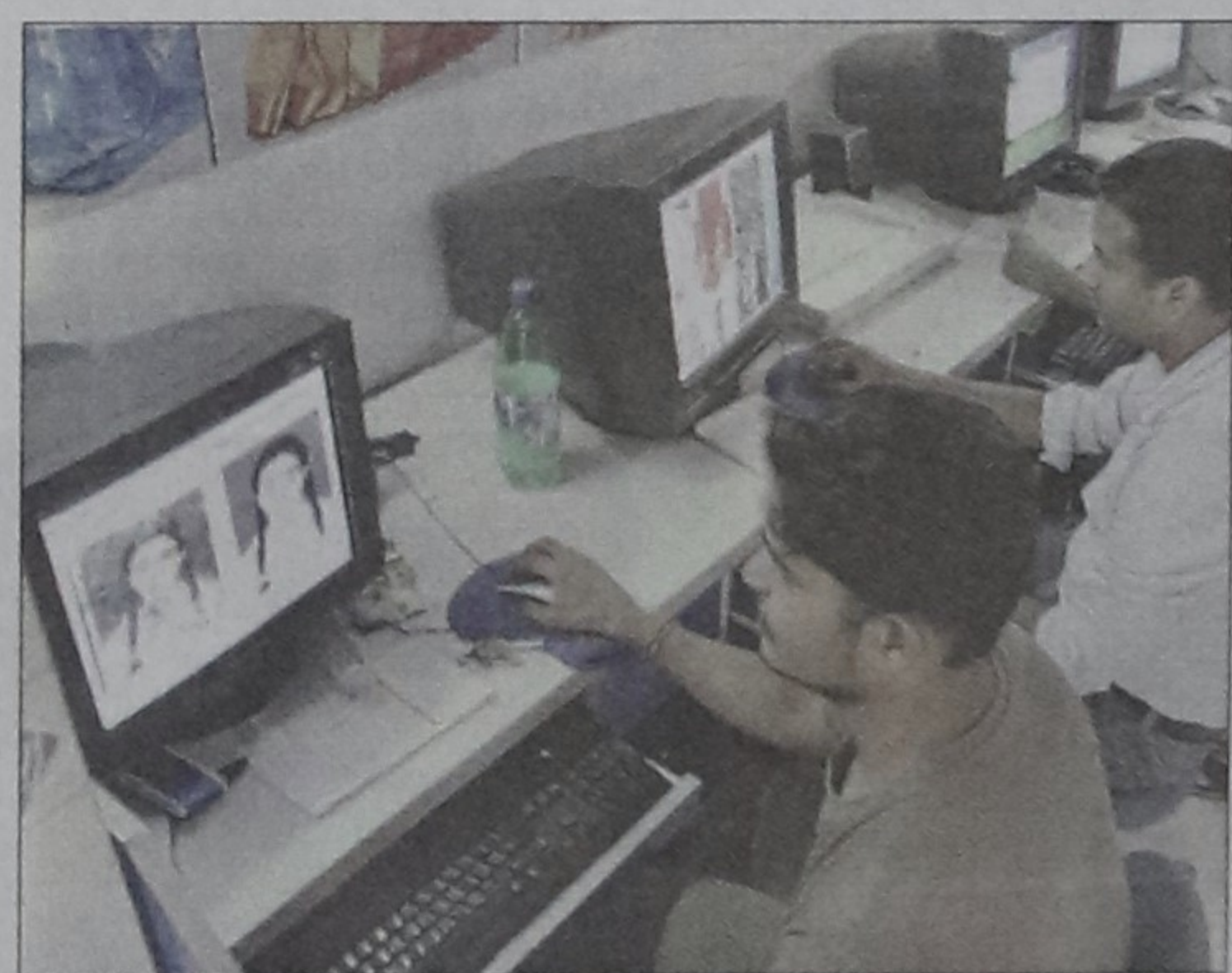
They are also more likely to pass them on, said Jalil Ahmed of Quick Digital Photo Lab in Gulshan. "Those who start off with old, sentimental photos also send new ones from their digital cameras," he said.

It is no strange that old photos are getting fresh attention. The advent of low-priced scanners, printers and photo-manipulation software has prompted more and more people to restore pictures and send them to family and friends.

"Even a few years ago, there were only a small number of digital studios who would reproduce or mend old photographs. But now, almost every digital photography studio in the city can do it at much lower prices than before," said Jalil Ahmed.

"Even a lot of freelance graphic designers and even amateurs are joining and mending photographs for a quick buck," he said.

"Good digital studios would not take up just every photograph to mend," Jalil explains,



"take our studio for example, we would closely assess whether the photograph is fixable without compromising the original features."

However, a lot of studios and graphic designers seem to claim that they can fix any photograph no matter how damaged they are. They can even convert black and white photographs to colour ones.

"A lot of studios and even freelance graphic designers tend to take in badly damaged photographs to fix them. This is not always a good idea because when a photograph is severely damaged you may end up ruining its

originality," said Faruq of N R Digital Studio.

And now photo-processing technology is rapidly moving into every home. Companies are offering special packages that include a scanner, an ink jet printer and assorted cables and software packages for quite economical prices.

Therefore, a good number of people, with some skills with Adobe Corporation's flagship image-editing software Photoshop, are editing, mending and even reproducing old photographs for some extra money. "I enjoy working with

Photoshop," says Asheque Ahsan, an undergraduate student and aspiring graphics designer. "I take up photographs from friends and relatives, and mend them for small fees. It is a good source to earn for my ordinary expenses"

With Photoshop, it is possible to complete all the delicate steps using only a few in-built tools. After the software has finished its job with the image, photo labs can print it on bromide paper and the customers can preserve the main picture digitally.

The software is also capable of reproducing pictures even if a portion of the photograph is missing, has become torn or faded.

The city now has about a dozen laboratories that specialise in fixing distorted images.

The costs for reproduction of this sort of images depend on the extent of distortion.

Charges range from Tk. 300 for the less distorted ones to Tk. 800 or more for worst cases depending on their size and quality, according to studio owners in the city.

Even a few years ago photo technicians used to repair pictures manually. Mending a single photograph took almost three days. But it can now be done in hours and the quality too is much better.