

# Spare us this beautification, please!

NAZNIN TITHI

A few years back, as I was walking past the National Museum in the cool afternoon breeze, I stopped under the shade of a huge tree. As I looked up at the leaves in an attempt to recognise the tree, I heard someone say, "Pagol naki?" ("Is she insane?") I turned around to find three young men on a rickshaw, bursting out in laughter. I had almost forgotten the incident. But when a friend, a regular commuter on Airport Road, told me with frustration that a large number of trees on that road had been cut and replaced with strange looking bonsai trees, I instantly recalled that incident.

The news that 500 bonsai trees imported from China and Taiwan are being planted on a 6 kilometre road from Banani flyover to Shahjalal International Airport as part of a beautification project didn't surprise me at all. It rather reminded me that we have a history of this kind of beautification. I still remember how the Dhaka North City Corporation took an initiative to beautify the central reservations of some important roads with concrete structures, uprooting the plants and saplings placed there, ahead of the ICC T20 Cricket World Cup in 2014.

This effort of 'beautification' also reminds me of the construction of ugly and disproportionate sculptures at different points of Dhaka over the years. The sculpture of a tiger at Karwan Bazar (not there at present, thankfully), the sculpture of elephants at the Science Lab intersection, the horse-cart sculpture near Sonargoan Hotel, etc., are some of the examples of the horror inflicted upon the public in the name of beautification. Can anyone even relate to these structures which do not reflect an iota of our rich culture and heritage? What is more horrifying is that the disproportionate tiger sculpture, which was built as part of a beautification project ahead of the ICC Cricket



Because of lack of trees the Airport Road now resembles a desert.

PHOTO: SAYEDA SULTANA

Tournament in 2011, killed a poor rickshaw puller when it collapsed on him.

We have learnt that the Roads and Highways Department has hired the advertising firm, Vinyl World Group, for the bonsai beautification project. If any of you have been to the Jahangirnagar University campus lately, you must have seen a lotus sculpture in the middle of a lake, and wondered how such an unpleasant looking object could be part of a campus that is famous for its abundant naturally grown water lilies. The concrete lotus is just one example of this firm's work. In 2014, this firm

also undertook the renovation work of the central reservation of the road starting from Jahangir Gate to Kakoli intersection, where they used bathroom and kitchen tiles on the concrete structures!

Coming back to the bonsai beautification project, we are worried for a number of reasons. First, a large number of fully grown local trees (*Krishnochura*, *Jarul*, *Radhachura*, *Nageshwar*), which had lined the 6 km road for the last 20 to 25 years, had to be cut down to make way for the imported trees. According to environmentalists, this was done in the

darkness of night, most likely to avoid any confrontation with the public. The authorities explained that the trees had to be cut down to make way for wider footpaths. However, this seems like a flimsy excuse, as with foresight and a proper planning process, the footpaths could have been wider but not at the expense of these trees. And we could accept narrow footpaths at some points of the road, but how can we accept a road without trees? The whole road now looks like a desert; thanks to this 'beautification'.

Second, why do we have to import foreign trees which are so expensive, fragile and so difficult to take care of? Let's not talk about how bizarre they look on our roads. Apparently, these 15-20 feet tall saplings had to be brought to the country in a Tk 3 crore container, and Tk. 2 to 3 lakh has already been spent for each tree. Bonsai moreover, is an indoor plant and it can't live and grow on roadsides. Dust would gather on the leaves and eventually the leaves will die. As Dhaka's surface water level is very low, these trees have to be watered regularly and special care has to be taken of the leaves. Experts argue that these bonsai trees are most likely not going to live for more than two years. We have heard that *Krishnochura* would be planted alongside the bonsai trees. But if there is a full grown *Krishnochura* tree beside a bonsai, the bonsai will not get enough sunlight to survive. And since the roots of the bonsai do not go further than a foot under the surface level, what if any of these trees collapses on some pedestrian during a nor'wester?

Third, the firm's assurance that five lakh local trees will be planted on that road sounds like a joke. We have to do some simple math to know that this is not doable. There is not just enough space there to plant such a massive number of trees. Was it then said just to placate the public?

Fourth, if we plant five lakh ornamental plants, will they be able to

remove much carbon from our air? Can big trees be replaced by shrubs and ornamental plants? According to Dr. AFM Jamaluddin, Professor, Department of Horticulture, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Dhaka's temperature is usually 7 to 8 degrees higher than in the villages. The level of CO<sub>2</sub> is increasing and the level of O<sub>2</sub> is decreasing in the city's air. When the carbon level in the air is more than 0.04 percent, people face difficulty breathing, but the carbon level in Dhaka's air is .01 to .02 percent higher than the ideal level.

Considering the weather and temperature of Dhaka, while residents regard planting trees as the most environment-friendly and sustainable option for a city makeover, our city corporations and the firms given the charge of beautifying the city seem to believe in the contrary.

We have so many organisations working for improving Dhaka's environment, but sadly there is no coordination among them. What we should do is involve our urban planners, landscape architects, historians, horticulturists, environmentalists in such projects if we really want to see anything beautiful happening to this city.

Last week, while passing the Airport Road, I told my auto-rickshaw driver to stop, and got down to take a close look at the bonsai trees. The driver said, "These trees came from China." I smiled at him. He then remarked, "How come trees look like that? Will they give shade to people?" When ordinary people of this country quite clearly realise the uselessness of these bonsai trees in our city, why is it that the authorities concerned fail to understand this? I guess the kind of people who consider looking at a tree an act of insanity are on the rise in this unfortunate country.

The writer is a member of the Editorial Department, The Daily Star.

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# Issuance of passports can be made easier

MD. SHAMSUL AREFIN

PASSPORTS are issued to the citizens of a country for international travel. They are issued by the concerned department or by any of its overseas missions, to those who are citizens by birth or by descent.

The passport-issuing authorities (PIAs) of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States have created the "five nations passport group" (FNPG) to strengthen cooperation among passport issuers, to share best practices and discuss innovations relating to the development of passport policies. All of the five nation's countries except Canada fully implemented the e-Passport between 2005 and 2007.

When citizens pay passport fees, they are paying for a service. This service includes identity verification as well as a number of security processes, in addition to the ultimate issuance of the physical document. Passport offices are responsible for issuing, refusing to issue, and revoking, withholding, recovering and providing instructions on the use of passports, with an understanding that the person may not do any wrong that may harm the image of the country abroad. But these security checks are maintained more strictly at the exit points, (i.e. emigration points) at the time of departure.

The Australian Passport Office is a division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. It issues passports to Australian citizens, both in Australia and overseas, and its mandate is set out in the Australian Passports Act 2005. With a population of over 22.5 million, the

Australian passport possession rate is nearly 70 percent.

The New Zealand Passport Service is part of the Department of Internal Affairs. The legal framework for the issuance of passports is provided in the Passport Act 1992. New Zealand's passport possession rate with a population of 4.3 million people is about 75 percent.

Identity and Passport Service, an executive agency of the Home Office, is responsible for passport issuance in the United Kingdom. The General Register's Office, which is responsible for administering vital statistics about its citizens, is also responsible for maintaining security and confidentiality of the "Identity and Passport Service office". UK introduced a newly designed e-Passport during the fall of 2010. The population of the UK is 61.3 million, and approximately 80 percent of UK citizens hold a valid passport. British and Irish citizens have visa-free or visa on arrival access to 172 countries and territories.

In the United States, passport services are part of the Bureau of Consular Affairs of the Department of State. The organisation's mandate is to issue passports to eligible US citizens. The United States Postal Service operates thousands of Post Offices around the country that can accept passport applications on behalf of the United States Department of State.

In France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Switzerland, the passport applicants interact primarily with the police, local municipal office or regional authorities, instead of a dedicated office of passport service. In most cases, the same entity that deals with vital statistics about citizens also

deals with passports. This convergence simplifies identity checks for passport applicants through sharing database, maintaining secrecy, privacy and confidentiality.

In France, passport applications are made in person in the offices of local

Titres Sécurisés, an agency of the French Ministry of the Interior.

It is mandatory for passport applicants to apply in person at their municipality, where their facial photo and fingerprints are taken. Applicants must pick up their passport in

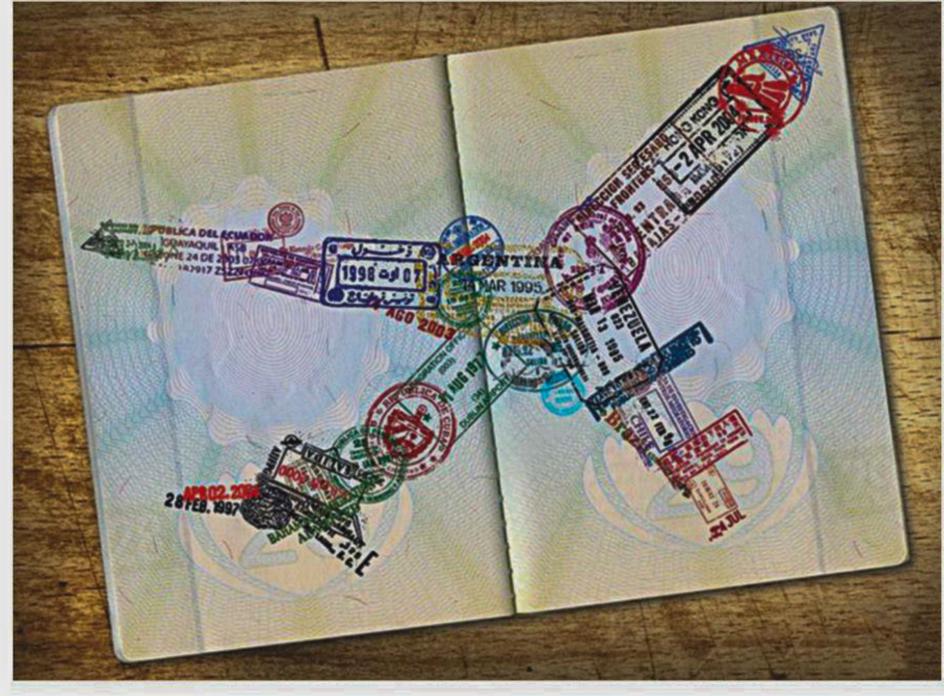
Since all German citizens must register in their municipality, their identities are firmly established at the municipal level. This means that passport applicants' information is readily available to the authorities. Passport applications must be

In Italy, the National Police is responsible for the issuance of passports. Applications can be made at municipalities, police stations or the passport sections of the Commissariat for Public Safety, which are located in every Italian province. Passport applications must be made in person, as is the case with all Schengen Area countries, at which time the applicant's facial photo and fingerprints are taken.

The Japanese passport office is a component of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Local prefectures handle passport applications and issuance. Applications must be made in person, and applicants are notified by postal card or text message when their passport is ready for pick-up.

From these examples, we can see offices other than the Passport Office, like the Post Office, local police station, municipalities, etc. being authorised (or designated) to issue or deliver passports to citizens. This makes the whole thing easier. Countries with large populations are sometimes overwhelmed by the number of passport applications. In a country where the passport issuance rate is below 50 percent of the total population, the youth are looking to travel abroad for various reasons and there is a large number of migrant workers, it would be an intelligent decision to adopt these policies and practices from the first world nations. E-passport is also an option to quicken the process. Electronic sharing of information between law enforcement agencies and other relevant organisation is also an option to consider to save time and ease things for service seekers.

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SOURCE: PINTEREST

municipality. The data is then sent to a local prefecture to be checked before it goes to the Imprimerie Nationale to be electronically printed. The coordination and monitoring of this process is done through database sharing by the Agence Nationale des

person. When they go to pick up their passport, their fingerprints are verified with those recorded. All printing is done in one centralised location based in municipalities.

In Germany, passport applications are handled by local municipalities.

submitted in person and the finished passport must be picked up in person. Fingerprints are taken during both visits. The production of the passport is done by the national printer under the supervision of the federal Ministry of the Interior.

## A WORD A DAY

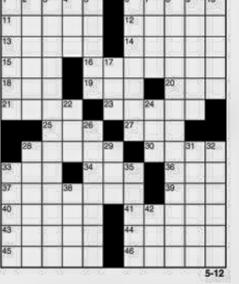


**VISCERAL**  
adjective

Relating to deep inward feelings rather than to the intellect.

## CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Reuben layer
  - 6 Diamond corners
  - 11 Joust need
  - 12 IRS worker
  - 13 Cow of ads
  - 14 Christina of "Sleepy Hollow"
  - 15 Yale rooter
  - 16 1984 Wimbledon winner
  - 18 -- XING
  - 19 Jazz horn
  - 20 Hosp. parts
  - 21 Flight part
  - 23 Cut's counterpart
  - 25 Spot to jot
  - 27 Guidebook feature
  - 28 Stately home
- DOWN**
- 1 Sacks out
  - 2 Spot for ten-spots
  - 3 Puget-Sound-to-Skagway route
  - 4 Chem. or biol.
  - 5 Appears
  - 6 Lawyer's hurdle
  - 7 Not "fer"
  - 8 Conservatory-to-Lounge route
  - 9 Concert bonus
  - 10 Pigs' digs
  - 17 Limit
  - 22 Mythical piper
  - 24 Put into words
  - 26 Depressing things
  - 28 Old five-iron
  - 29 Bird of myth
  - 31 Maintain
  - 32 Declares
  - 33 Nuisances
  - 35 Sports
  - 38 At any time
  - 42 Buck's mate



### YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

SPAN PALMS  
LONE SERIAL  
ALEC TRIPPY  
BOWKNOTS  
TOWHEADS  
PLAIDS BAT  
EAVES PIETA  
AAGO PUTTER  
LOWCLASS  
ROWHOUSE  
TAVERN PROM  
IRISES ESAU  
MEATS NAPS

## BEETLE BAILEY



## BY MORT WALKER



## BABY BLUES



## BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

