

Once Dhaka was adorned with several hundred ponds. Like canals, only a handful exist now. But they are also in death throes due to negligence of the authorities concerned. Although, according to the Field, Open Space, Park and Natural Water Body Protection Act 2000, filling up of any water body including pond is illegal, it's going on unabated. The Daily Star found 63 ponds in the maps of undivided Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) in its 28 wards out of 90. A survey for the map was carried out between 2003 and 2011. But many of the water bodies were filled up before the period and also even after the survey. We are publishing the fourth report of the series today covering the then DCC ward-87, which is now ward-51 of the Dhaka South City Corporation.



This is what Bagicha pond looks like now as the owner of the water body filled it up around six months back. The photo was taken at the capital's Mirhajirbagh area recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

It was there just six months ago

PONDS of Dhaka

HELEMUL ALAM

Imagine a pond surrounded by trees that were home to many birds, welcoming all with their chirps.

It had a name too. The water body was fittingly called "Bagicha pond", since the place looked like a beautiful garden.

But the owner filled it up by dumping sand since the beginning of this year.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw an open space where sand was being dumped.

It was impossible to say that the place used to be a water body as there was no sign of water. There were still some trees surrounding the land along with tin-roofed structures.

The Bagicha pond was famous among the residents of Mirhajirbagh under ward-87 of the undivided Dhaka City Corporation, who used its clean water on a regular basis even a decade ago.

The ward comprising Mirhajirbagh, Dholaipar and Par Gendaria -- now ward-51 of Dhaka South City Corporation -- is around 0.657 sq km.

The around 2.5 bigha pond was dug up during the British period, according to locals. It was situated beside the Bagicha mosque and was used by devotees for ablutions.

"Back in the 80s, my friends and I would swim in it regularly," said Omar Faruk, a resident of Mirhajirbagh.

"But mostly we would go there for the mangoes," he reminisced. "We used to climb up the trees on its banks for plucking the fruits in secret."

"Whenever we realised that the owner was nearby, we would jump into the water," he said.

Though Omar was smiling, he could not hide the sadness in his

voice. "It was a good place to take rest too," he added.

Ali Hossain, a local businessman, said even 10 years ago whenever they faced a shortage of water they relied on the Bagicha pond.

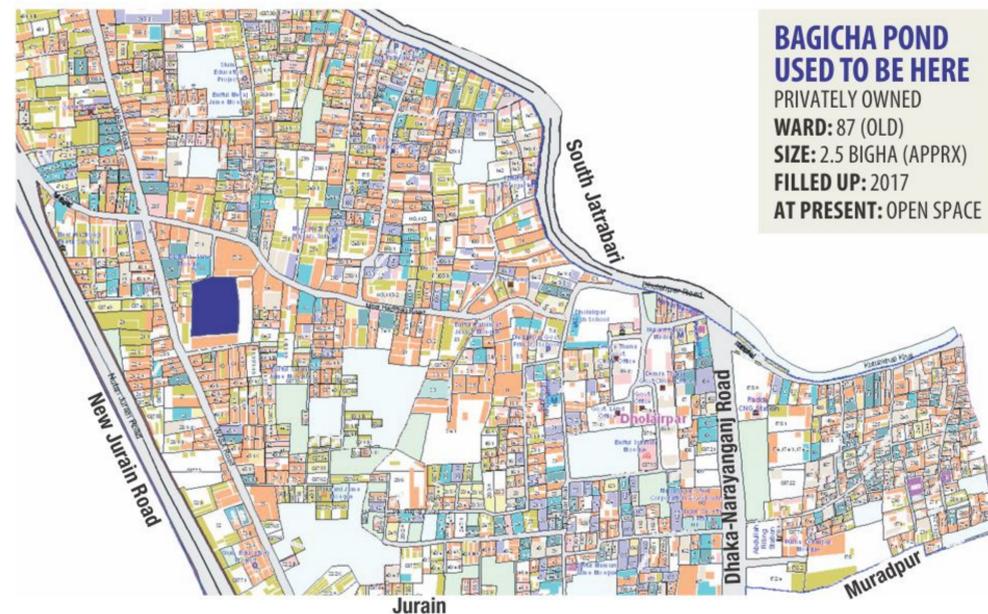
Jahirul Islam, manager of Rangdhanu Furniture located next to the pond area, said the owner started filling up the pond from the first week of January.

"Due to incessant dumping of waste from the nearby houses, the water of the pond became unusable around five to seven years back," he said.

Contacted, Md Jamil, son of the pond owner, said they were yet to decide what they will do with the land. "Maybe we will build houses on it," he said.

The pond, however, still exists in the base map of the Dhaka City Corporation since the survey for the map was carried out in 2006.

(Edited by Hasan Meer)



BAGICHA POND USED TO BE HERE
 PRIVATELY OWNED
 WARD: 87 (OLD)
 SIZE: 2.5 BIGHA (APPRX)
 FILLED UP: 2017
 AT PRESENT: OPEN SPACE



Before boarding a bus home at Sayedabad Bus Terminal in the capital yesterday, a gang of bede women (gypsies) drag and taunt a young holidaymaker for money. Dhaka residents are witnessing a spate of extortion incidents by the bedes and hijras (transgender individuals) ahead of Eid.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Extortion in disguise

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

The extortion is going on in the capital in the name of Eid tips.

Local hoodlums are allegedly extorting money from hawkers and vendors who set up shops on the footpaths.

Many hawkers in the city's Karwan Bazar, Farmgate and Motijheel areas said they have been forced to pay the extortion money to the "linemen" appointed by local criminals and police.

Extortion by linemen is an old practice and it is quite impossible to run a business on the footpaths without paying them the money, alleged the hawkers.

During a visit to Farmgate area on Wednesday, several hawkers told these correspondents that they had been running the shops since 2007 and paying "money" to the linemen.

"I give Tk 400 to these linemen every day during this Eid season," said

a clothes vendor in the area.

The linemen have increased the amount targeting the Eid, said the hawkers, adding, they risk being evicted from the streets if they deny paying the additional amount.

Arif Chowdhury, president of National Hawker's Federation, said, "The amount has been doubled ahead of Eid. Anyone usually pays Tk 200 per day, now has to pay Tk 400."

"It also varies what products you are selling. If it is an Eid product, the amount would be higher," he added.

On the other hand, some street vendors said they run the shops only for Eid as the linemen let them do business for one month in exchange for money.

Apart from the linemen, local criminals also keep on extorting businessmen in the name of Eid tips.

On early June 13, extortionists stormed into the residence of a restaur-

ant owner in the city's Mohakhali Dakkhinpara area.

Azad, brother of the victim -- owner of Niribili Hotel in the area, said a group of miscreants had entered their house at 5:00am and opened fire on his brother as the latter refused to pay toll.

Meanwhile, as the Eid is drawing near, hijras (transgender people) are also on the prowl extorting money from people and traders as Eid tips.

Several traders at the capital's Karwan Bazar alleged that the hijras appear in group and force them for money.

The practice has been rampant on the occasion of Eid, they said, adding, if they refuse to pay money, hijras create nuisance in front of the shops.

On June 15, Ratna Hijra in Mirpur's East Shewrapara bit a house owner as the latter refused to give her money as Eid tips.

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