

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 sixth report of the series today covering the then DCC ward-85, which is now ward-49 of the Dhaka South City Corporation.



Outfall Staff Quarter Pond continues to offer people a much-needed breathing space.

Dhalpur Pond has been filled up to make way for a community centre.

PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON

One still vibrant, another wiped out



HELEMUL ALAM

The day was hot with an occasional glimpse of cirrus clouds. It was almost noon and the sun shone with all its might.

But that could not dampen the spirit of a group of youths who were swimming in a pond on a Sunday afternoon in April.

They were playing and laughing constantly in the water body. Soon, an infectious happiness spread throughout the area. Even the elderly locals grinned at them while passing by.

The youths were swimming in the Outfall Staff Quarter Pond in the capital's Dhalpur area.

Though this is a common sight in the villages where ponds are available, a water body stretching for around 3.76 acres uninterrupted under the open sky remains a rare sight in Dhaka.

The pond belongs to the Dhaka City Corporation, which has also

constructed walkways around the pond some 10 years back and set up a grill-fence around it. The water body is also surrounded by various trees such as coconut.

DCC's Outfall Staff Quarter Pond remains an example of how a water body can be protected and enjoyed by all.

The area falls under Ward 85 (old) of the undivided Dhaka City Corporation, which is now Ward 49 of Dhaka South City Corporation. The 1.087 sq km ward comprises Brahman Chiran and Dhalpur areas.

Raju Ahmed, a resident of the staff quarter, said, "There was a makeshift ghat (landing spot) on the north side and a permanent one on the other side."

To create a community atmosphere, the DCC removed a kitchen market and slums from near the pond area. Now the people of the community can relax by the pond area and enjoy their time with families and friends.

Raju said many people from nearby areas still swims in the water body. "The pond was full of fish. My friends and I spent so many days catching fish there," he

said.

Mohammad Yunus, another resident of the area, said the authorities concerned recently limited access to the pond to ensure people's safety.

This correspondent also spoke with some of the youths who were enjoying their time in the pond.

One of them, Jannatul Nafiz, a class-X student of a local school, said he and his friends often swim in the pond. Around 100 people swim there every day.

Another student, Akash Bepary, said, "I learnt swimming when I was six," and jumped in the water body.

The pond area provides a much-needed breathing space for the people, said locals.

"Around a thousand people frequent the area everyday," said Mohammad Yasin, an Ansar member. "Both men and women walk in groups around the pond in the morning and evening."

He said the authorities of the DCC staff quarter allow outsiders to visit the pond area from five to nine in the morning and from four in the afternoon till the Maghrib prayers for ensuring safety of the

people of the area.

In addition, there is a signboard next to the pond, which says residents of the staff quarter can walk around the pond area from five to eight in the evening.

DHALPUR POND

There used to be another pond in the Dhalpur area known as Dhalpur Pond that has been lost to the maze of urbanisation.

The around 1.01 acre pond belonged to the DCC, which was turned into a community centre in 2001 under the initiative of a local ward commissioner, according to locals.

The DCC map, which was published after a survey carried out from February to April 2006, shows that there is only one pond in the area -- the Outfall Staff Quarter Pond. The map, however, does show the Dhalpur Community Centre.

The construction work started back in 1998 by filling up the water body, said Mohammad Manik, a resident of Dhalpur. "It took two years to destroy an important part of the neighbourhood and build a community centre there," he said.

He said the pond was mostly

OUTFALL STAFF QUARTER POND

SIZE: 3.76 acres (apprx)

WARD: 85 (old)

OWNER: DCC

AT PRESENT: Still Vibrant

DHALPUR POND

SIZE: 1.01 acres (apprx)

WARD: 85 (old)

OWNER: DCC

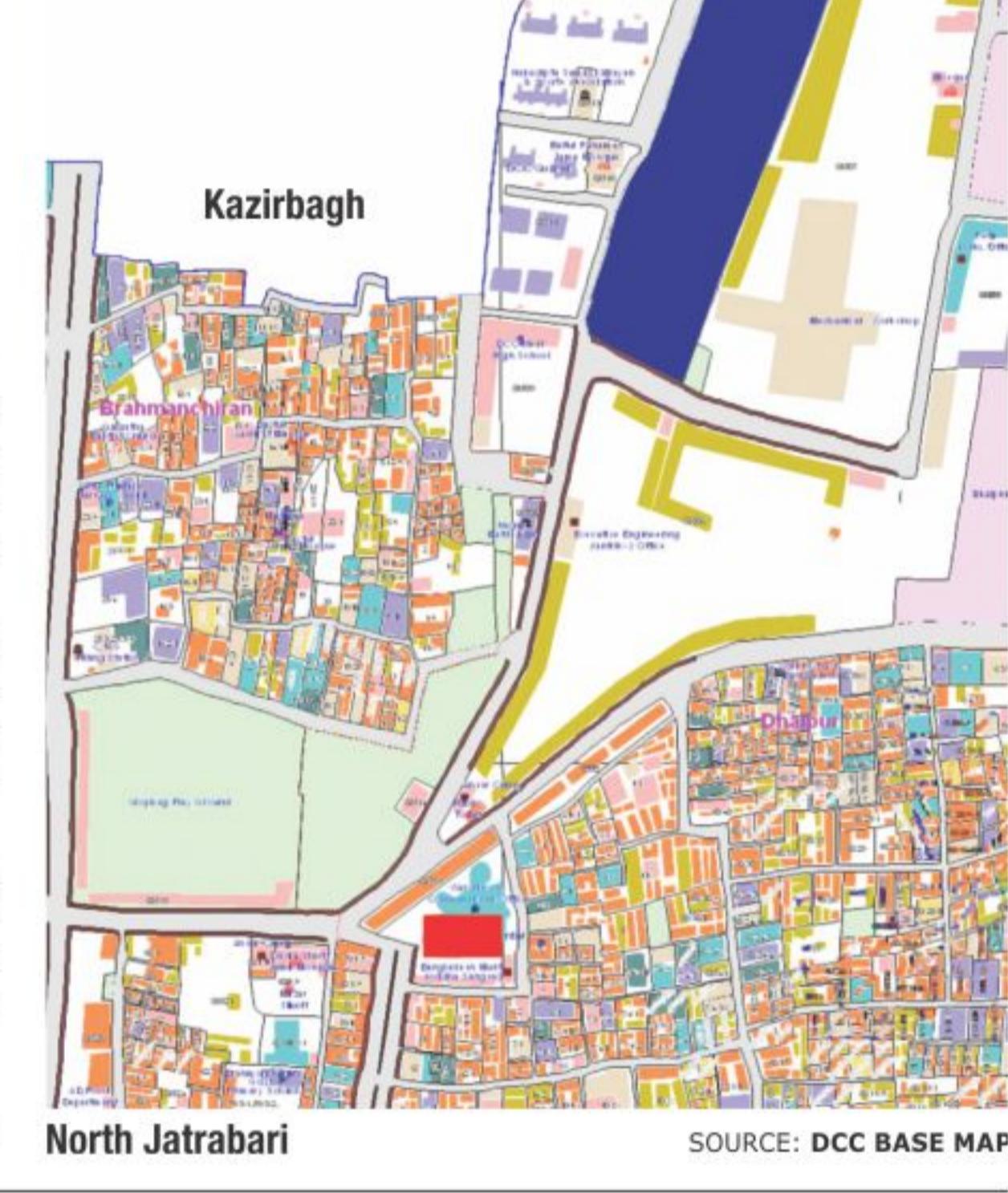
FILLED UP: 2001

AT PRESENT: Community Centre

WARD: 85 (DCC)

WARD: 49 (DSCC)

WARD AREA: 1.087 sq km



SOURCE: DCC BASE MAP

(Edited by Hasan Meer)

Gabtoli cattle market damaged by fire

22 animals burnt to death

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 22 animals, including cows and goats, were burnt to death in a fire that broke out at Gabtoli cattle market in Dhaka yesterday morning.

Twenty-five other cows which were burnt partially were butchered immediately, said traders, adding, the dead animals included 15 cows, three goats and four sheep.

The fire started around 10:00am under one of the sheds and then spread to the others.

Three out of the eight sheds made with plastic roofing had completely been gutted before five fire fighting units doused the fire in an hour, said Selimuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Darussalam Police Station.

Firemen primarily suspected that an electric short circuit might have caused the fire. They, however, said

further investigation is needed.

Over 300 cattle were under the three damaged sheds. The traders managed to rescue most of them after the fire.

Mohammad Shiplu had 51 cows in two affected sheds. After witnessing the fire from a nearby area, he rushed to the market and rescued most of the animals. Three of his cows were roasted and 15 others burnt partially by that time.

"I incurred a loss of over Tk 8 lakh," he said.

Another trader, Mohammad Anu, had been rearing 20 cows in the shed-1 to get profit before Eid-ul-Azha. Five of his cows died and seven were badly injured.

"We tried to untie the animals... But it was almost impossible as the fire created severe heat and the plastic was melting down on us," he said.



The damaged Gabtoli cattle market in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Two minors 'gang raped' in Comilla

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Comilla

A girl and her niece were allegedly gang raped in Comilla on Wednesday night.

According to the statement of a case filed by their relatives, a 12-year-old girl and her niece, aged around 8, were returning home from their relative's house in the city by a rickshaw.

On the way, a gang of around five people took them to a nearby abandoned house and raped them.

In the case, filed with Comilla Sadar South Police Station, three people were accused by names and five to six others were not named.

Officer-in-Charge Nazrul Islam said they detained a youth in this connection.

The two girls were sent to a local hospital for medical tests, he said.

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