

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 seventh report of the series today covering the then DCC ward-83, which is now ward-47 of the Dhaka South City Corporation.



Gandaria Pond under a constant threat of encroachment and pollution. A soothing Govt Modern Flour Mill Pond remains protected. PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON

HERITAGE LOST



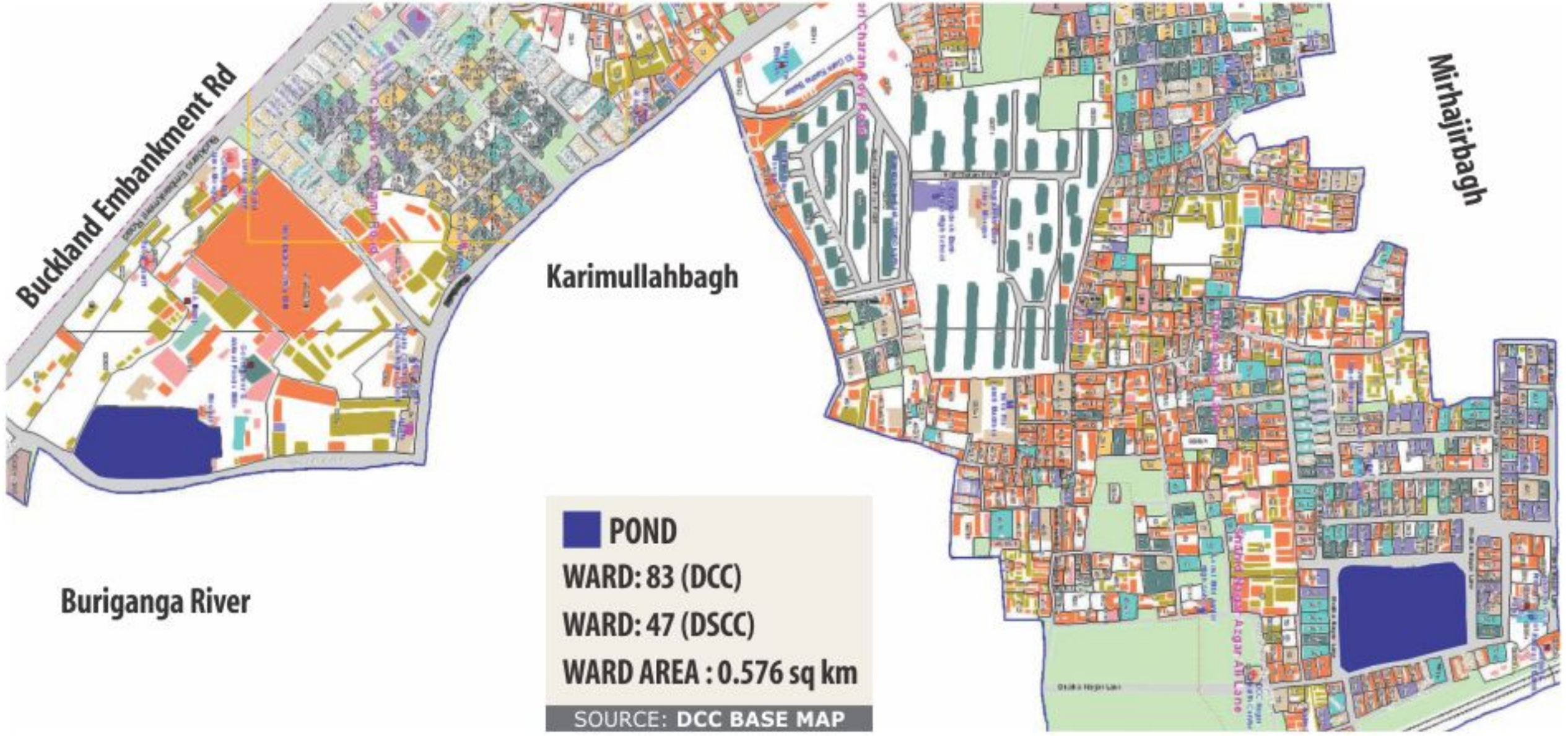
PONDS of Dhaka

HELEMUL ALAM

Once there were six ponds in Ward-83 of the undivided Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), offering a much-needed respite to the residents from the jaded city life. The water bodies were a vital part of the ward, used by almost all. Besides being a natural haven and a centre to relax awhile, these ponds used to cater for households of the communities. But over the years four of the water bodies were lost to urban sprawl.

Due to the negligence of Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk), the water body is in death throes. Rampant encroachment and dumping of waste from the nearby households continue to threaten its existence. If not immediately saved, the pond will disappear soon and remain just a whisper of the past, said locals. Rajuk acquired the land for its residential project, Gandaria DIT plot, in 1962/63, said a Rajuk official. When asked, he said they do not have any concrete plan to protect the pond. Ali Hossain, a resident of the Gandaria DIT plot, said the pond was used by many. "We grew up with the pond. It's a vital part of the neighbourhood. Please do something to

chairman M Bazlul Karim Chaudhury said necessary steps would be taken soon to protect the pond. **POND AT JURAIN GRAVEYARD** The pond was first turned into a playground during the 90s under the initiative of a local ward commissioner. But the playground did not last long either. It was turned into an extended part of the Jurain graveyard after five years. Ali Hossain, a resident of the area, said they had many fond memories of the water body during their childhood. The area used to be abuzz with people swimming in it or relaxing by the banks. The 0.33 acre pond was on the DCC base map where DCC was mentioned as the owner of the water body.



Postogola Cremation Ghat Pukur has become a cremation ground.

Of the remaining two, one is barely surviving due to the negligence of the authorities concerned. The other one is still in a relatively better condition. Among the six, two were on the DCC base map where DCC mentioned that the ponds belonged to them. However, both have now disappeared due to a lack of protection. The around 0.576 sq km ward comprises Gandaria, Postogola, Lal Mohan Poddar Lane, Dhaka Cotton Mills, Bangladesh Bank Colony and Dhaka Nagar Lane of Sutrapur among other areas. It now falls under Ward-47 of Dhaka South City Corporation.

GANDARIA POND The around five-bigha pond in the capital's Gandaria was not only a source of fresh water for the residents, it was also a part of their heritage, according to locals.

save our heritage," he implored. Unabated encroachment by influential persons continues to destroy the water body, said locals. One fourth of the pond has already been grabbed, they added. Also, incessant dumping of waste from the nearby households making the water, once fresh, dirty. "For the last five years, due to the worsening quality of the pond water, no one uses it anymore," said Anwar Hossain, a resident of the area. Josna Akhtar, another resident, said she and her sister used to swim in the water body around 25 years back. "We used to have so much fun swimming there during the warm summer days. Our children can't even imagine that nowadays. To them, it's just a dirty water body." She also requested the authorities concerned to save the pond. Contacted, Rajuk's immediate past



Chhapra Masjid Pukur replaced by buildings.

CREMATION GHAT PUKUR The pond was also on the DCC base map, mentioning it as the owner of the water body. It was turned into a cremation ground around seven years back. The around 0.22 acre pond was inside the crematory area, which is now being used as a part of the crematory ground. An official of the crematory said as the pond was under threat of being grabbed, and the DCC recovered the pond in 2010-11. By that time, most of the pond was also filled up due to dumping of waste from the nearby re-rolling mills, he said. "Also, there was a scarcity of burial place for some people of the Hindu community like the sweepers and Robidas, who bury the dead instead of cremating. So, after getting the pond from the DCC, the crematory authori-

ties filled it up for extending the burial place in 2010-2011." **CHHAPRA MASJID PUKUR** The around 1.53 acres of pond was located next to 44/2 Dhalka Nagar Lane in Sutrapur area since the Pakistan period. It was filled up during the last part of the 90s. A resident of the area claimed that the water body was owned by the Nawab family, and later came under the Dhaka City Corporation in the 80s under the initiative of a local ward commissioner. The pond was filled up and divided into around 20 plots, said a local wishing anonymity. He said a mosque was also built on the land around that time. Now, there are around 20 multi-storey buildings in the area. The DCC before its split in 2011 mentioned the pond as theirs in their documents. Though the water body existed on

paper, in reality, multi-storey buildings were constructed on the land where the pond once was, said locals. **EKRAM SHAHEBER PUKUR** The privately-owned pond was used by residents of the Dhalka Nagar and Sutrapur areas on a regular basis. There were three ghats (landing spot) and water of the pond was clean, said locals. But the owner sold the pond in 1989 due to a financial crisis, said Syed Mozammel Hossain, a family member of the owner. The pond was filled up around that time. "I still miss the pond," he said. "It would have been very useful during this hot weather. Not just for us, for everyone." Now, there are furniture shops and

a resident of the area. The around 1.5 bighas of water body is comparatively in a better condition as its water was found to be clean during a visit in April. "Like many others, I used to bathe in the pond," said Mofazzal. He said the pond was used by people from different areas even few years back. Now, access to the water body is limited as the mill has set up boundary walls surrounding it. Contacted, an official of the flour mill said the boundary walls were set up around two years back for ensuring safety of the people and also for protecting the water body. Julfikar Rahman, chief miller of the mill, said the mill was constructed in 1956, since then the pond is there. The mill was shut down in 2005 and reopened in 2015 after renovation.

WARD 83 (OLD)	SIZE (APPRX)	OWNER	AT PRESENT
Gandaria Pond	5 bigha	Govt	Barely Surviving
Govt Modern Flour Mill pond	1.5 bigha	Govt	Still Vibrant

WARD 83 (OLD)	SIZE	OWNER	FILLED UP (APPRX)	AT PRESENT
Jurain Extended Graveyard Pond	0.33 acre	Govt	90s	Graveyard
Postogola Cremation Ghat Pukur	0.22 acre	Govt	2000s	Cremation ground
Chhapra Masjid Pukur	1.53 acre	Govt	90s	Buildings
Ekram Shaheber Pukur in Dhalka Nagar	1 bigha	Individual	80s	Shops

permanent and makeshift structures instead of the around one-bigha water body. **GOVT FLOUR MILL POND** The pond at the Government Modern Flour Mill in Postogola was dug up in the 50s around the same time the flour mill was set up, said Mofazzal Hossain,

"We want to keep the pond alive as it enhances the beauty of the area. Also, it works as a retention area, which will help a lot during any fire incident," he said. The water of the pond is clean and free of pollution, he prided.

(Edited by Hasan Meer)



The pond at Jurain graveyard has been filled up for extending the graveyard.



Shops and makeshift structures occupy what once was Ekram Shaheber Pukur.