

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 tenth report of the series today covering the then DCC ward-77.

PART 10



The over 100-year-old Sankhanidhi Pond inside the capital's Baldha Garden still offers a much-needed respite from the jaded city life.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Waiting to be cherished again



HELEMI ALAM

Amid narrow and dusty alleys, endless traffic and people pushing and shoving to go about their business in Old Dhaka, there lies a water body surrounded by rare plant species collected from different parts of the world.

Encircled by grill fences, the square-shaped pond has two ghats (landing spot).

The concrete staircase of one of the ghats goes down almost to the bottom of the reservoir. There are tree tubs placed in the middle of the staircase enhancing the aesthetic beauty of the area. The ghat is also decorated with mosaic.

There are murals of flowers on benches next to the ghat where one can sit under the shades of trees to take in the splendour of the surrounding.

The pond, known as Sankhanidhi, is over 100 years old.

It falls under ward-77 (old) of the undivided Dhaka City Corporation (now ward-41 of Dhaka South City Corporation), and according to the

base map of DCC, whose survey was conducted in 2006, it is the only pond in the area.

The around nine-katha water body was dug up under the directives of Zamindar (landlord) Narendra Narayan Roy Chaudhury. It is located inside Baldha Garden at Wari -- one of the oldest botanical gardens established in this part of Bengal.

The landlord of the estate of Baldha began creating the garden in 1909 and continued to add to it until his death in 1943.

During a recent visit, it was seen that the pond, once filled with various aquatic plants, was flowerless and not properly cleaned.

Over the years, due to negligence of the authorities concerned, both the pond and garden have been left in a sorry state. Also, high-rise buildings surrounding the garden are blocking sunshine resulting in death of many plant species.

The garden has become a hub of anti-social activities, according to locals.

Mohammad Abdul Mannan, a staff at Baldha Garden, said, "Even around 15 years back, the pond was full of red and white lotus and Amazon lilies. But to kill mosquitoes, tilapias were released in the pond. The fish eventually ate the roots of the flowers."

"The water of the pond has to be cleaned so that the flowers can grow again," said Mannan.

He said the garden along with the pond is being maintained by the Forest Department since 1962.

There are seven gardeners to look after the garden while one person tends to the water body.

About the present situation of the pond and the garden, Mannan said, "We are facing a manpower shortage. There used to be around 22 staff to look after those around two decades ago."

The garden is divided into two parts - Psyche and Cybele. The Sankhanidhi pond is at the Cybele portion of the garden. The bottom of the pond was converted into concrete back in the 80s.

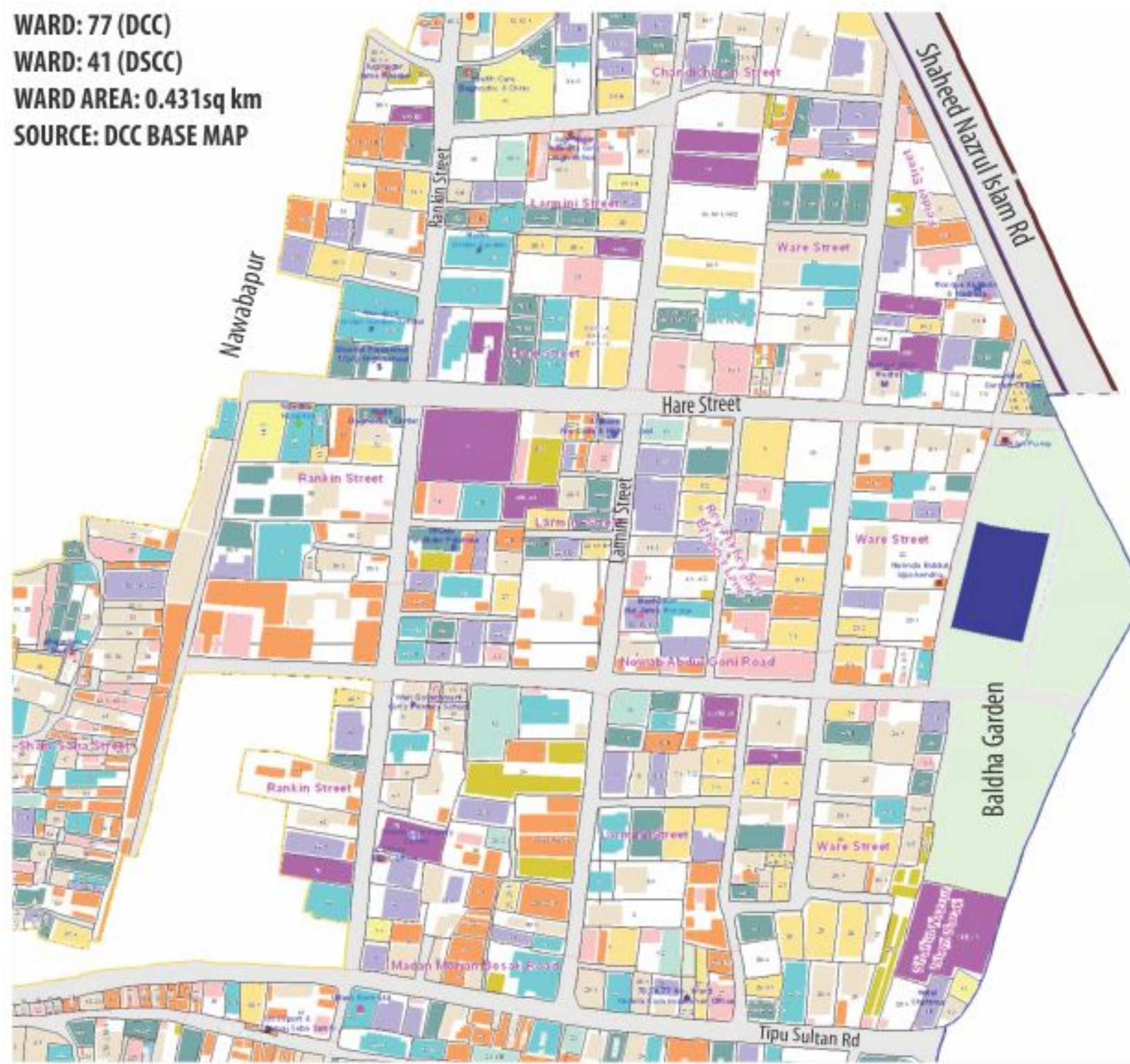
It is well-known that Narendra Narayan Roy Chaudhury loved to spend time near the water body. He along with his family members would sit beside the ghat and enjoy serenity of the liquid landscape brightened by the aquatic flowers.

Also, it was the camellias of the

SANKHANIDHI POND

Ward: 77 (old)
Size (approx): Nine kathas
Owner: Forest Department
At present: Needs proper maintenance

WARD: 77 (DCC)
WARD: 41 (DSCC)
WARD AREA: 0.431sq km
SOURCE: DCC BASE MAP



Baldha Garden that inspired Rabindranath Tagore to compose the poem "Camellia" during his visit there in the late 20s.

Locals said they heard from the elders that Narendra Narayan often

arranged musical programmes next to the reservoir.

The pond and the garden should be preserved and cherished, they added.

As long as Narendra Narayan was alive, he continued to expand the

garden and looked after it. But after his death, the Forest Department has been in charge of the maintenance of the garden. But, in reality, this exquisite garden and the serene water body is not properly being maintained.

While walking along the reservoir, visitors will come across the shrine of Narendra Narayan, which is near the pond on a lawn in the south-east corner adding solemnity to the serene atmosphere.

There is also an epitaph engraved on it, which reads: "I am a passionate lover of nature! With all her phases -- my joy for ever! ... With all her best wishes for thee, Passer-by drop me a flower! -- Goodbye! Sincerely yours, N Roy".

Narendra's true passion was nature and its conservation. All he ever wanted was that his pond and garden would be loved by all.

Near his shrine, this correspondent met a group of youths who were visiting the garden.

Sankhanidhi Pond along with the garden is an important part of Dhaka's rich history. And just like Narendra, all should join hands to save the cherished garden and pond of his, whose splendour he shared with all, they said in unison.

(Edited by Hasan Meer)



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanges pleasantries at a function marking the 42nd founding anniversary of the President Guard Regiment at its Dhaka Cantonment headquarters yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Bangladesh no country for militants: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Mentioning that Bangladesh has set an example in the world with its success in curbing terrorism and militancy, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for continuing the trend so that militants cannot use the country's soil for their own interest.

"Law enforcement agencies and the armed forces together with a cross section of people have made this possible, and this trend should continue..." she said.

The premier was addressing a function marking the 42nd founding anniversary of the President Guard Regiment (PGR) at its Dhaka Cantonment headquarters.

On this day in 1975, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman established the regiment.

PGR Commander Brig Gen Md Jahangir Harun delivered the welcome address on the occasion.

Describing terrorism and militancy as a global problem, the premier said the government has attained successes in curbing the menace.

She, however, said another problem,

drug addiction, still lies before the nation. "...the government has taken steps to curb it."

Hasina said all steps have been taken to modernise and enrich the armed forces so that their members alongside police do not lag behind other countries while discharging their duties in the UN peacekeeping missions.

As the head of the government, Hasina said she has a close relationship with the PGR as she meets its members every day while discharging her duties.

"Your skills, dutifulness and integrity prove that all of you are specially selected and...are reliable guards. You're discharging your duties with trustworthiness, loyalty, discipline and professionalism."

Earlier on her arrival, the premier was received by Army Chief General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiqul Huq and the PGR commander. A smartly turned out contingent of PGR gave her a state salute.

She also exchanged pleasantries with all the officers, junior commissioned officers and met the family members of the martyred PGR members and handed over gifts and donations to them.



Prof Rajib Humayun dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Noted linguist, writer and researcher Prof Rajib Humayun died at a hospital in the capital yesterday. He was 67.

A former teacher of Dhaka University, Prof Humayun breathed his last around 2:05am.

His first namaz-e-janaza was held at DU central mosque premises, participated by, among others, DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique and a number of teachers of the university.

Later, a second namaz-e-janaza was held at a mosque after the Asr prayers near his Purbia Manipur residence in Mirpur.

He was buried at Martyred

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