

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 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 eleventh report of the series today covering the then DCC ward-75.

PART 11



The around one-bigha water body inside the Rose Garden Palace remains a testimony to past glory.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## A part of history

### HEMUL ALAM

## PONDS of Dhaka

HEMUL ALAM

Laila Rani has always been a early riser.

Every day, after performing the Fajr prayers, the resident of Old Dhaka gets out of her house and takes a stroll by the banks of a pond located in a corner of a garden inside the property.

Afterwards, she sits on a bench beside the ghat (landing spot) and watches the gentle ripples of the water. Meanwhile, ducks, chickens, sheep and horses lazily roam near the pond.

An avid nature lover, Laila said the reservoir is around one bigha. "When we purchased the land, there used to be two ponds inside the property. One of those was filled up during construction of a rail track in the Pakistan period."

The property was around 22 bighas of which eight bighas remain as portions of it were sold at different times by the family members. Buildings have been built on the sold land, which now surrounds the house and reservoir, she said.

As the golden hue of the morning sun spreads over the reservoir, the reflection of her house in it also gets bigger.

The house and the water body still remain a testimony to the past glory.

The reservoir is situated on KM Das Lane in Tikatuli of Old Dhaka. The

property is popularly known as Rose Garden Palace.

During the end of 19th century,

Baldha Garden, the garden and house of Baldha's landlady, used to be the centre of cultural activities for the elite.

The zamindar of Baldha used to arrange jalsas (musical soirees) regularly at his house.

Once, Hrishikesh Das, a zamindar belonging to a low caste, while attending such a soiree was insulted by one of the high caste guests. Offended, Hrishikesh decided to create his own garden that would outshine the Baldha's.

Thus, he built the Rose Garden Palace. He also dug up the pond known as the Rose Garden Pond and constructed a palace at the

centre of the garden.

Hrishikesh used to stage jalsas of his own beside the around one-bigha reservoir, attended by many. This extravagant lifestyle, however, caused him to go bankrupt, and he was forced to sell the property.

The property was bought by Kazi Abdur Rashid of Brahmanchiar in 1936. He renamed the palace, Rashid Manzil.

The building, which remains a private property to date, has been renovated by its owners keeping the past glory -- the spiral staircase, ornamentation of plaster walls, pillars, tombs, iron faceworks and stain glasses -- intact.

Roses no longer animate the garden, but the house still looks gorgeous. The Department of Archaeology declared

the house protected under the Antiquities Act.

At present, it is owned by barrister Qazi Abdur Raquib, son of Kazi Abdur Rashid. In order to visit the place, one has to obtain permission from the owner.

While visiting the Rose Garden Pond recently, this correspondent met Laila Rani, wife of Raquib. She was sitting by the banks of the water body. And from its clean water and soothing surrounding it becomes evident that the reservoir is being maintained with great love and care.

Laila said she tried to keep the water body clean on a regular basis. "But it breaks my heart to see it getting dirty overnight as some of the people from nearby buildings keep on throwing

garbage." "At times, it gets very tiring. I have requested the neighbours numerous times, but to no avail," said a frustrated Laila.

The nature lover has also planted various trees surrounding the reservoir. She said the pond used to be filled with lotus, but the crabs inside the water body ate the flowers. "Still, it gives me immense pleasure to sit by the banks and relax after a stroll."

Laila said they have taken initiatives to construct a pavement surrounding the reservoir.

"This pond," she said while looking at the gentle ripple of water, "is a part of history. As long as I am alive, I will not fill it up."

(Edited by HASAN MEER)

## IN NEED OF CARE

HEMUL ALAM

Although according to a survey carried out in 2006 by the Dhaka City Corporation, there are four ponds in the capital's Wari, two of them have disappeared completely. The other two need proper maintenance and protection.

Other than the four, there used to be another pond inside a school in the area that was filled up around 10 years back.

**POND AT KM DAS LANE**  
 Back in 1995/1996, there was a fire incident at a packaging factory in the capital's KM Das Lane.

As a local was a pond beside the factory, there was firemen did not have to struggle much. They used the water from it to douse the blaze. Also, the factory did not suffer a huge loss.

The reservoir is still there. It is now owned by National Tuberculosis Relief and Rehabilitation Society of Bangladesh, a charity organisation.

"Nowadays, it will be hard to douse a fire in many areas due to a lack of sufficient water sources, said Ayub Ali Sarkar, its administrative officer. "The reservoir was dug up back in 1923," he said.

At present, the pond is being used for fish cultivation.

The around one-bigha reservoir is



A vibrant water body at RK Mission.

located at 12 KM Das Lane in Tikatuli. It is around 20 feet deep and remains full of water round the year.

But the water body is in a deplorable condition due to a lack of maintenance and dumping of waste. When asked, Ayub said they were trying to keep the reservoir clean. But people keep on dumping waste in it. "Not just us, all has to work together to keep it alive."

**POND AT ABHOY DAS LANE**

Once there used to be a pond at 13/1 Abhoj Das Lane. It has been replaced by a LPG conversion centre -- Toma Auto LPG.

Abdul Aziz, a resident of the area, said the pond was called



The pond at KM Das Lane needs proper maintenance.

"Selim Shaheer Pukur". The water of the around 3.4-bigha water body became dirty due to a constant dumping of waste. It was filled up around two years back, he said.

Imom Hasan, administrative officer of Toma Auto LPG, said they started the conversion centre in 2015. The land was already filled up when they purchased it. Jahinul Islam, an elderly local, said the pond was there since their childhood. The LPG centre was being filled up the water body, he alleged.

**POND INSIDE SCHOOL**

Even around a decade ago, there used to be a pond inside

Kamrunnesa Government Girls High School at 25 Murad Road in Tikatuli.

But the pond does not exist on the DCC base map.

Abdul Aziz, a resident of the area, said there was a ghat (staircase) on its eastern side, where people used to bathe. The pond was surrounded by trees.

"Before the place used to be a post office. Then it was turned to a clinic. Finally, the property became a school," said the 70-year-old. "But the reservoir was still there despite all the changes."

Obaidul Banu, headteacher of the school, said the school was there

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This playground used to be a reservoir.



Not so long ago, the LPG conversion centre was a pond.