

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 Playground, 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 seventeenth report of the series today covering the then DCC ward 48, 51 and 53.

PART 17



Once the 1.6-bigha reservoir near the capital's Jhigatola bus stand used to be abuzz with people swimming in it or relaxing by its banks. Now it lies neglected due to the indifference of the authorities concerned.

PHOTOS: RASHED SHUMON, HELEMUL ALAM

## A symbol of negligence



HELEMUL ALAM

Even a few decades ago, there would be a community atmosphere surrounding the pond near the capital's Jhigatola bus stand.

People of all ages would swim in it or relax by its serene and cool water.

Filled with aquatic plants, algae and garbage, the around 1.6-bigha reservoir now lies neglected.

Mohammad Kamal, a resident of the area, said, "Its water was so clean that one could drop a coin and fetch it quite easily." People of the area used its water for their household chores, he added.

There are over 30 semi-concrete one-storey houses surrounding the water body, where employees of the Public Works Department (PWD) and



There used to be a pond here in the place of NAM buildings.

their families reside.

Many of the locals alleged that a good number of the structures were constructed filling up the pond. Also, residents of those houses keep on dumping waste in it, they added.

The water body is there since 1960. Its water started to get dirty around 20 years back.

A pond is not just a recreational place, it also comes in handy during fire incidents and helps prevent waterlogging. But the residents of Jhigatola are deprived of such benefits due to a lack of initiative by the authorities concerned, said Sarowar Hossain, 49, a local.

"My friends and I used to swim in it



The reservoir inside Jute Research Institute remains protected.

every day. So many of us learnt to swim here," he said. "This pond used to be a part of our identity, now it remains uncared for," he sighed.

The reservoir is owned by the PWD. Rashed Kabir, sub-divisional engineer of PWD Dhanmondi division, said they have taken an initiative to renovate it under a project. It will be imple-

mented shortly, he said.

Under the project, six 15-storey buildings will be constructed around the pond and it will also be renovated and beautified, he added.

**2 PONDS IN JUTE RESEARCH INSTT** Once there used to be two ponds inside the Bangladesh Jute Research Institute on Manik Mia Avenue. One of

them was filled up during the construction of NAM buildings in 1996. The other one is in a relatively better condition.

There are coconut trees on the northern side of the pond and a ghat (landing spot) on its southern side. No one is allowed to bathe or swim in it to keep the water clean.

"The condition of the pond was bad. We cleaned and renovated it last year," said Jahangir Hossain, deputy director (administration) of the institution. "We also released fish in it after the renovation," he said.

The around 2-bigha pond is there since the beginning of the research institute, established in 1979, he added.

The buildings (4 and 5) were constructed using a good portion of the other pond in 1996, said Abdul Mannan, president of Karmachari Kalyan Union. He said he joined the institute in 1979.

(Edited by HASAN MEER)

## Still salvageable

Once there used to be five ponds in the capital's Shantinagar and Kakrail areas. Three of them are still surviving, while two were filled up around 20 years back.

### POND IN SHIDHESHWARI

If one visits 76 Shidheshwari, he/she will be surprised to hear chirping of birds amid hustle and bustle of city life.

There is a pond there which is surrounded by trees -- home to many birds. The around five-katha water body is privately owned.

Prof Israt Islam of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), whose family owns the reservoir, said her grandfather purchased it in 1948/49. "But the pond was here before then."

"We want to protect it for which we did not give it to developers," she

said. "We have many fond memories of the pond."

She said once there was a scarcity of water in the area and people used to use its water for household chores.

"But it has become dirty as the residents from the nearby buildings keep on dumping waste in it," she said. "Even though there is a waste collection system, they continue to do so."

"We have lost many of the capital's ponds due to dumping of waste as they were eventually filled up," she said.

**HABIBULLAH BAHAR COLLEGE POND** The pond inside the Habibullah Bahar University College in Kakrail is being maintained by the college authorities. There are four ghats (landing spots) in it.

Abu Bakar Chowdhury, principal



The reservoir at Shidheshwari needs maintenance.

of the college, said the college was established in 1969 in Chamelibagh. "After the Liberation War, we shifted here."

He said there were nine non-Bangalee families who were owners of the pond.

"The institution was set up taking two abandoned houses of those families," he said. "We registered the houses under our name in 2003."

Abu Bakar said the area of the pond is around five bighas and they have ownership of two portions of the pond out of nine. There are other families who are also owners of the pond.

"We have appealed to the housing and public works ministry few months back to give the pond to the college so that we can maintain it properly."

Bakar said they have a plan to

beautify the pond by spending Tk 10 lakh. If the government leased it to them, they could maintain it properly, he said.

"We have 7,000 students who along with others will be able to benefit from the water body as it will remain accessible to all." Kazi Mohammad Jalal Uddin, a resident of the area, said people still bathe in it.

**MINTO ROAD POND** There is still a water body near the Sheraton Hotel (now InterContinental) on Minto Road. The pond is in a good condition as the Public Works Department (PWD) along with the fisheries department is maintaining it properly.

The reservoir, owned by the PWD, is being used by the fisheries department for fish cultivation.

There is a signboard in front of the



The pond on Minto road is protected by the authorities concerned.

water body that says the pond is 0.13 hectares and its depth is two metres. It is fenced, and remains locked round the clock.

The fisheries department cultivate fish in it for supplying those to the Bangabhaban pond, Gono Bhaban lake, Sangsad Bhaban lake, cantonment pond and other government-owned waterbodies.

**ANARKALI MARKET POND** Once there was a pond in place of Anarkali market in Shidheshwari. The around 1.5-bigha reservoir was filled up in 1980. The five-storey market was constructed on the land.

The construction work completed in 1985, said Billal Hossain Khan, vice president of Anarkali Dokan Malik Samity.

The king of Bhawal donated the pond to the Shidheshwari Boys School and College, he said. The

school authorities run the institution with the money they get from the rent of the market.

**KARNAFULI GARDEN CITY POND** It will be difficult for someone to believe that the multi-storey Karnafuli Garden City in Ramna used to be a water body even around two decades ago.

Kazi Md Jalal Uddin, a resident of Kakrail, said he used to swim in it. It was behind a community centre, "Shamima Bibahaghar".

He said the around one-bigha reservoir was surrounded by trees and there was a ghat on the western side. It was filled up around 1996/98.

Zahurul Haque, assistant general manager of Karnafuli Group, however, claimed they purchased the land in 1994 and there was no pond there at that time. "There might have been one there before we bought the land."



The pond inside Habibullah Bahar College is maintained properly.