



PART 19

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

With its serene surrounding, the around 1.25-acre reservoir in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Government Boys' High School in Agargaon is a beauty to behold.

An oasis amid concrete

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 nineteenth report of the series today covering the then DCC ward 41 and 39.

HELEMUL ALAM

Imagine a heron catching fish in a pond. It remains motionless on the edge or in shallow water and wait until a fish comes within range. Having seen one, it moves its head from side to side to calculate the position of the prey in the water and compensate for refraction. Satisfied, it uses its bill and spears the fish.

Now imagine the scene that just unfolded took place in a reservoir located in the heart of the capital.

Though hard to believe, there is still a pond where not only herons, birds such as kingfishers and pankouris are often seen flocking the water body for lunch.

The pond is inside Sher-e-Bangla Nagar Government Boys' High School in Agargaon. Its water is clean and there are turtles, crabs, snakes and fish in the 1.25-acre reservoir. It is surrounded by trees such as coconut, mango and banana.

The school authorities have also kept logs



at different corners of the pond for the birds to sit.

"We have tried to keep the natural elements of the pond intact," said Shafiqur Rahman, principal of the school. "It enhances the beauty and serenity of the area."

"Also, our students (from class VI to X) get an opportunity to have a hands-on experience on fish farming," he said. "But most importantly, they get to learn about nature."

While talking, a heron flew in and sat on one of the logs kept by the bank near the playground.

It was preparing to catch a fish. This correspondent went closer and tried to take a picture. Annoyed, the bird flew away and sat on the

other corner.

"We don't just want to use the pond as a recreational place," smiled Shafiqur. "Our goal is to protect it and its biodiversity."

He said they also teach students how to look after a water body. "Three teachers are in-charge of taking care of the pond."

Shafiqur said they have a plan to start duck farming in it. "It will not only enhance the aesthetic appearance, but also will be a learning experience for the students."

He said they have planted trees near the banks considering the soil quality. "We were also careful about releasing fish in it."

The school is situated on 4.99 acres of land. The pond is there since the beginning of the school in 1969.

The school authorities have recently constructed a boundary wall on the western side of the reservoir for its protection. "Also, swimming is not permitted to ensure students' safety," said the principal.

(Edited by HASAN MEER)

GONE IN A DECADE

Even a decade ago, there used to be two ponds on the capital's Green Road that remained abuzz with children's chatter. The reservoirs had been filled up for constructing multi-storey buildings.

The water of the ponds was very clean, said Shaheen Mollah, a resident of Karwan Bazar.

He said he used to swim in those even in the early 90s. The reservoirs were located within a short distance from each other.

"We often swam there from dawn till dusk. Many of us learnt to swim in those. Even I taught several children how to swim there."

"But those days are gone now," he sighed.

One Hamidul Haque Chowdhury was the owner of the ponds. After his death, his family members filled those up and started selling the land as plots in 2007, said Alam Hossain, manager of a restaurant constructed on a portion of the land.

Hossain said two developer companies purchased the around 66.05-katha land including the ponds in 2007. The condition of the reservoirs was not good as the water became polluted.

One of the water body was around one bigha while the other one around 10 kathas.

GOVT SCIENCE COLLEGE POND

Though the reservoir inside Government Science College in Tejgaon was alive even a decade ago, like many of the capital's ponds it also became a victim of rapid urbanisation.

The pond was dug up in the British period. It was filled up in 2005 and around 10 tin-shed structures were constructed for the class-IV employees of the college.

Its water became polluted as sewage lines from the nearby buildings went

directly into the reservoir. The water started emitting foul odour, said Nurul Amin, a staff at the college.

He said the pond was filled up by the college authorities to avoid the bad smell. They also wrote to the concerned ministry in this regard.

Sirajul Islam, a resident of Tejgunipara, said many of his friends used to bathe in the pond.

POND AT WEST TEJTURI BAZAR

According to locals, the privately-owned water body was filled up in 1981/82 and sold as plots to individuals.

Now, there are four multi-storey buildings, a small factory and around 150 shops in the place of the reservoir.

ELENBARI STAFF QUARTERS POND

Even two years back, the pond inside the Elenbari staff quarters used to be swarmed with people swimming or bathing in it.

But access to the reservoir has become limited after the authorities concerned imposed a restriction. Two of its ghats (landing spots) are now blocked with walls and the pond is fenced.

"The pond belonged to the king of Bhawal," claimed Golap Mia, a resident of the staff quarters. He said there were some incidents of drowning for which the authorities concerned restricted swimming in it.

POND AT WDB OFFICE

The pond located inside the office of Water Development Board on 72 Green Road is comparatively in a better condition.

It is surrounded by trees and the water is clean. People are not allowed to swim in the reservoir to keep it free from pollution.

Motaher Hossain, chief engineer (design) at WDB, said, "In addition to keeping it intact, we will also will dig up two more ponds as per the directive of the prime minister."



Not so long ago, there used to be a pond here on Green Road.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

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