

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 twenty fourth report of the series today covering the then DCC ward 1 and 5.

Result of negligence

Once the capital's Bhashantek was called fondly called Kahar Daria (huge water body) as the entire area used to transform into a wetland during the rainy seasons.

There used to be three ponds in the area that would get filled with water to the brink.

According to locals, boats of different sizes plied the area on a regular basis. But boat communication stopped since the construction of an embankment after the 1988 flood, they added.

Also, water of the ponds became polluted around 15 years back while major portions of the reservoirs were illegally grabbed, said Mohammad Abbas, a resident of the area.

Among the ponds, two were at Block-C and another at Block-E inside the Bhashantek colony.

The reservoir on the western side of Block-C was around 16 bighas while the one on the eastern side around 20 bighas. The pond at Block-E was around 16 bighas.

The water of the ponds was clean and used by many. The water bodies were also filled with fish, said Abbas.

According to locals, around 96 floating families were brought in the Bhashantek area during the 70s under a rehabilitation programme. The ponds were given to them so that they could cultivate fish in.

But over the years, structures were built upon those illegally. Also, quality of the water deteriorated drastically due to continuous

dumping of waste. Negligence of the authorities concerned played a major role behind the present situation of those vital organs.

However, Sheikh Sohel Rana, sub-divisional engineer of the National Housing Authority (division-1), said there are two ponds in the area while the other one is a wetland. During construction of the embankment, a large amount of soil was dug up in the area, which eventually became the wetland.

A project has been taken by the National Housing Authority for the slum dwellers and under which 10,000 flats will be given to them at a low cost. A total of 2,600 people got plots from the government in Block A, B, C, D and E of the colony, he said.

Abdul Mannan, a resident of the area, said those who got possession of the land, built structures encroaching upon the pond. Makeshift tin-shed structures, rickshaw garages and shops were constructed on the filled-up land, he said.

The ponds were dug up during the British period under private initiatives. But they were turned into khas (government) land during the Pakistan period, he said. There were vast areas around the pond that were being used for rice cultivation.

The entire area is around 96 acres including a school, ponds and open space.



PART 24

The reservoir inside the park at Uttara Sector 4 remains an open invitation for all to enjoy its serenity.

PHOTOS: HELEMUL ALAM

A RAY OF HOPE

HELEMUL ALAM

Arjun could not stop clapping as he saw around 15 swans by the bank of a pond. Excited, the three-year-old went closer to get a better look. But the birds quickly went into the water creating gentle ripples and floated away.

Arjun kept on clapping. "Look how happy he is," said his uncle Sawpon Kumar Saha. Meanwhile, Sawpon's daughter Bunon was running around and kept on calling Arjun to chase her.

The three were by the reservoir inside a park in Uttara Sector 4.

"We often come here," said the resident of Uttara. "The children can play for as long as they want here while I walk by the pond."

While most of the capital's ponds have either been polluted or lost to urban sprawl, this reservoir remains as a ray of hope for the dwellers. It is being maintained with great care by the authorities concerned.

The pond is not only surrounded by trees, there are also flowers by its banks enhancing the aesthetic beauty of the area.

There is also a walkway around the pond for people to walk. If they get tired, they can sit on the benches by the banks and relax while enjoying the



tranquil water. The park, comprising a field, reservoir and a playground for children, is being maintained by Uttara Sector 4 Kalyan Samity (welfare association). The total area is around six acres.

Mohammad Quaisarul Islam, general secretary of the Kalyan Samity, said they are maintaining the park including the pond since 2005. The pond is there since the beginning of the Uttara Residential Area. Rajuk re-excavated it in 2005, he said.

Sajib, a resident of Kurmitola, often visits the pond. When this correspondent met him, he was sitting by it. "My family members and I drop by regularly. The park is well maintained and beautiful."

"I love to spend time by the pond most," he smiled. "Look how peaceful it is."

Ismat Tahmid and Shahad, residents of Sector 4, were jogging by the reservoir.

"I come here to jog almost every day," said

Ismat. She paused, took a deep breath and said, "The air is so clean here with the fresh smell of grass."

Meanwhile, Shahad smiled heartily. "I mostly sit by the water," he said.

Quaisarul Islam, general secretary of the Kalyan Samity, said, "We maintain the park and the reservoir on a regular basis. Even people from other neighbourhoods visit the area to enjoy the atmosphere." He said Rajuk constructed the walkways in 2010.

The park stays open from morning to 9:00pm. There is 90 staff including 20 cleaners, three gardeners and 50 security guards ensuring the safety of the neighbourhood as well as overseeing the cleaning activities, he added.

POND IN SECTOR 2 There is also a reservoir on the premises of the Armed Forces Division in Uttara Sector 2.

The authorities are renovating the pond and it will be turned into a swimming pool, said Nayek Nasim Siddiq Eliyas. He said departmental swimming competition is held there.

The renovation work is suspended for now. It will resume after the rainy season, he added.

(Edited by HASAN MEER)



The pond at Block E inside Bhashantek colony.



The reservoir on the eastern side of Block C.

MA Samad dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

MA Samad, a social worker of Gazipur and a close aide to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, died yesterday at a city hospital at the age of 77, says a press release.

He left behind his three sons, a daughter and a large number of well-wishers to mourn his death.

Locals expressed sympathy to the bereaved family members.

Bishwo Shahitto Kendro awards

FROM PAGE 4

students from 2,000 educational institutions of the country are included in the programme.

While speaking as the chief guest at the prize giving ceremony, Bangladesh Bank Governor Fazle Kabir said reading books will develop values among the students, helping them become good human beings.

He advised the students to read books of prominent writers including those of western ones.

Khandaker Mohammad Asaduzzaman, acting president of BSK, said students can expand their horizon simply by reading books.

Shah Alam Sarwar, managing director of IFIC Bank and one of the trustee board

members of BSK, asked students to become good human beings no matter which profession they would choose in future.

Shikha Laetitia Gomes, principal of Holy Cross College, spoke among others.

Under the reading programme, the participants got the opportunity to read 12 books. The awardees have been selected in four categories - whoever finished reading six books were placed under the category of "Shagoto", 8 books under "Shubhechcha", 10 under "Abhinandan", and 12 under "Shera Pathok".

Speakers also urged students to join Alor Pathshala, a mobile app where a number of books has been published by BSK.

Three arrested for harassing monk

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

Police yesterday arrested three persons in Jessore's Benapole for allegedly harassing a monk.

The three forced him to hurl abuse at Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi, then took video footage of the incident and uploaded it on Facebook, said police.

The arrestees are Riazul Islam, 30, Amin Hossain, 24, and Toufiq Ahmed, 32. The monk Gyan Mitra Bhikkhu, of Rangamati, returned to Bangladesh from India on Wednesday following treatment.

After entering the country, he went to a nearby store. "Suddenly few youths forcibly put me inside a vehicle." The monk said they took him to an unknown place and videoed the incident.

The footage went viral on social networking sites on Thursday evening. It showed that anonymous persons were pressurising the monk to hurl abuse at Suu Kyi and those responsible for persecution of Rohingyas in Myanmar.

Police filed a general diary and arrested the trio by tracing one of their Facebook ID, said OC Apurbo Hasan of Benapole Port Police Station. Of the arrestees, Amin is a student at a local college while the others are traders.

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