

Where will children play?

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Like most children of his age, Tafim Hossain loves to play cricket. He dreams of becoming a batsman and one day play for the national team. So, the 14-year-old keeps on pestering his father to take him to the Shahi Eidgah field near home in Sylhet city to play with his friends. But the field remains occupied with various events such as trade fairs and rallies, leaving almost little to no space for playing. The other playground close to his residence is Kalapathar field. Not only the field has become a garbage destination, structures have also been built encroaching upon it. "I sometimes play cricket on the road," said Tafim. "My mother gets angry as it's quite risky, but what other options do I have?" Like Tafim, most children in Sylhet city undergo similar experiences as unplanned urbanisation is turning the once green city into a concrete jungle, leaving no open spaces. Nowadays, the sight of children playing or running around freely under the open sky has become rare as most of the fields are either occupied or being used to hold fairs or rallies. As a result, children are being deprived of a healthy life, which is crucial for their mental and physical growth, according to experts. Similarly, many residents complained that authorities' indifference is behind the prevailing situation. "A city needs 12 percent of its land reserved as open space, but Sylhet city has only 4 to 5 percent at best if we include the

remaining ever-shrinking playgrounds," said Prof Dr Jahir Bin Alam of the civil and environmental engineering department at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. In addition, he said, "Sylhet is an earthquake prone area because of the nearby Dauki Fault Line. So, the city needs more open spaces..." There used to be around 17 big fields in the city. This correspondent found that access to four fields (Police Lines, Primary Teachers' Training, Koyedir Math and Golf Club) have been restricted by the authorities concerned, six (Majumdar Bari, Badam Bagicha, Charar Par, Rajbari, Laldighirpar Gachhola and Jilkadar Ali) have been grabbed completely, two (MC College and Osmani Medical College) are in deplorable conditions and three (Shahi Eidgah, Alia Madrasa and Registrar Office) are being used for non-sporting purposes. The other two fields (Kalapathar and Amberkhana) are still used for playing, but those have narrowed down significantly due to urban sprawl. Shahi Eidgah field, which had been declared Sheikh Russel Mini Stadium recently, is now being used as a venue for Sylhet International Trade Fair from October 26. On the other hand, almost half of the Amberkhana Colony field has been grabbed and buildings were constructed upon it. Supriyo Deb, a government employee and former cricket player, said, "It's hard to find an open field in the city anymore." Munir Helal, a lawyer at Sylhet court, SEE PAGE 4 COL 6



What may look like a landfill is actually Kalapathar playground, which has been turned into a garbage destination. On the other hand, Amberkhana Colony field, inset, has shrunk significantly due to encroachment. The photos were taken yesterday. PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

NATIONAL POLLS: CTG-12, 13 Contrasting atmosphere in neighbouring constituencies

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

In the neighbouring constituencies of Chattogram-12 (Patiya) and Chattogram-13 (Anwara and Karnaphuli), an opposite situation has been prevailing since the beginning of campaign. In one constituency, posters, banners and camps of almost all candidates were visible, while the other was flooded with only those of the Awami League contestant.

During a visit on Thursday, this correspondent

saw enthusiasm among voters as well as leaders and activists of contesting parties in Patiya upazila, although some expressed concern about fair polls. In Bhatikhine union, several hundred leaders and activists were seen accompanying and campaigning for BNP candidate Enamul Haque. In Chhanahara, Haidgaon, Kelishahar and Kachuai unions, posters and banners of at least five candidates were hung while camps of both AL and BNP were found. Jainal Abedin, 40, a resident of Chhanahara

union, said existence of peaceful polling atmosphere is a long-held tradition in the upazila. "Throughout my life, I never saw violence during any election in this union or in the neighbouring ones," he said. Echoing him, sexagenarian Tapan Paul of Bhatikhine said he voted freely in all elections since 1991. While chatting with fellow villagers at a tea stall in Haidgaon, 80-year-old Jahir Ahmed said he thinks the election would be fair. But mason Jarip Ali and rickshaw-puller Zakir Hossain have a differing opinion. The administration is "favouring" the ruling party candidate, they said. Md Salahuddin, a BNP activist in Kelishahar union, said police were conducting raids every night to arrest party leaders and activists. "Awami League followers do not stop our campaign but police are spreading fear among BNP activists," he said. Local Juba Dal activist Rizwan Uddin also expressed doubt about fair polls in the present situation. Zakir Alamder, a Swetchhashebak League activist, said they did not create obstacles in anyone's campaign. "Awami League candidate Shamsul Haque Chowdhury believes in peaceful co-existence," he said. Meanwhile, the scenario is completely opposite in adjacent Anwara and Karnaphuli upazilas where all posters, banners and camps belong to AL candidate Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed. The atmosphere is also gloomy, and people fear talking about polls. "I've seen several elections but none was like this one," said Abdul Jalil, a rickshaw van-puller SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Banners of three candidates on display side by side in Chattogram-12 (Patiya), a sight absent in most constituencies ahead of the upcoming election. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

CTG-5, 6, 7 Apprehension looms large among voters

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Ctg

Come election time, the country usually remains abuzz with people gossiping, speculating and above all showing their allegiance to the party of their preference. The endless conversations regarding which party has the strongest support or better candidates or who will come out on top -- the nearer the election gets, the passionate the people become. And the debates really heat up over a cup of tea at local tea stalls. But this time it's quite different in Chattogram. With only a week left before the 11th parliamentary election, people seemed to be hesitant to speak their mind. The Daily Star in the last two days visited several constituencies outside the port city and tried to speak to people about the upcoming election. A collective sense of apprehension regarding the polls prevailed among prospective voters. The first stop was Rangunia upazila (Chattogram-7). Though reluctant, some locals eventually spoke to this correspondent. "People won't turn up at polling centres if a secure environment is not ensured," said Abul Hasem, a resident of Mirerkhil village of Sharaf Bhata union. This correspondent met him at a tea stall in the area. "There was a time when people sacrificed lives to realise their voting rights. Those days are long gone. We had a purpose back then, a goal to achieve," said the 70-year-old freedom fighter. "Now, it's about power and money. Who

would want to lose life to exercise his/her franchise these days?" he said. "People are afraid that violence might break out on the election day."

Nizam Uddin, a teacher at Sharaf Bhata Union High School, echoed him. "With only a few days left before the election, all we see is ruling party candidates campaigning. There are no signs of others. If such situation prevails, the election could be a one-sided one."

Though there were quite a few people there, they did not want to share their views. In Chandraghona area of the constituency, Farid Uddin, a local, said, "Other than the ruling party candidate, we don't even know who are contesting. They [opposition candidate] might exist on paper but not in the field."

"As the election approaches, we fear clashes might break out if the opposition takes a stand. Also, outsiders might create trouble on the election day," he said. After hesitation, Kamal Uddin, a resident of Sharaf Bhata union, said, "All parties must be given equal opportunity. Most importantly, they should try to evade violence, so that the election could be festive again."

Hasan Mahmud, publicity secretary of Awami League, and BNP-led alliance's Md Nurul Alam are contesting from Chattogram-7. On Thursday, Nurul Alam at a press conference at Chattogram Press Club expressed doubt over holding a free and fair election and alleged that rivals are not allowing his supporters to campaign.

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BNP candidate Rony, five others sued under Digital Security Act

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

BNP candidate for Patuakhali-3 Golam Maula Rony and five others have been sued under the Digital Security Act. Mehedi Masud, joint secretary of Awami League's local election coordination body, filed the case with Galachipa Police Station on Thursday night. The other accused are Shahjahan Khan, vice president of Patuakhali district BNP, Rony's brother Sarwar Hossain, his brother-in-law Makbul Hossain; Shiplu Khan, former chairman of Chiknikandi Union Parishad; and Shah Alam Sanu, president of Dashmina upazila Juba Dal unit. Quoting the case statement, Officer-in-Charge of Galachipa Police Station Akther Morshed said a telephone conversation of Rony was leaked recently, where he instructed his followers to besiege the police station and file cases against the supporters of the AL candidate. Moreover, other charges like delivering provocative speeches and attempting to make the December 30 election questionable were brought against him, the OC added. This correspondent could not reach Rony for his comments despite repeated attempts.



Two killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

Two people were killed and seven others injured in road accidents in two districts in the last two days, according to reports from our correspondents. In Bagerhat, a local Awami League leader was killed and seven others were injured as a bus hit them in Jashordi area of Kachua upazila on Thursday night, said police quoting locals. Kamal Khan, general secretary of Badhal Union (ward-6) unit of Awami League, died on the spot, they added. Delwar Hossain, general secretary of Badhal union AL, said Kamal Khan, along with others, was returning to their residences after conducting election campaign in the area. Police seized the bus. The injured were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital and Bagerhat Sadar Hospital, said Masud Sarder, deputy assistant director at Bagerhat fire service. Meanwhile in Gopalganj, a man was killed as a truck overturned and fell on him in Gangarampur village of Muksudpur upazila yesterday. Police said the accident occurred as the driver of the truck, loaded with onions, lost control over the vehicle. The deceased -- Sattar Sheikh, 42, son of Kalu Sheikh from the village -- was a rickshaw-van puller. SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

3 'Hizb ut-Tahrir' men arrested in Sylhet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Police arrested three alleged members of banned militant outfit Hizb ut-Tahrir Bangladesh in Tilagar area of Sylhet city on Thursday night. The arrestees are Anwarul Islam Khokhon, Jobayer Bappi and Mahfuzur Rahman Pratik. They are third-year students of Sylhet Agricultural University. Akhter Hossain, officer-in-charge of Shahporan Police Station,

said they were distributing anti-state leaflets among people in Tilagarh area around 11:00pm. "Locals detained and took them to the ward councillor's office," he said, adding, "On information, police arrested them with the leaflets." The OC said a case was also filed against them. Later, a Sylhet court sent them to jail when the law enforcers produced them before it, said the police official.

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