

The green cost of development

Data shows Sylhet City Corporation reportedly fell 332 trees in last 5 years; actual count around 3 times more

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

During mass development in an urban area, the monetary cost is always disclosed. But what about the environmental cost, which is more valuable than money?

Sylhet, a relatively small city of 26.50 square kilometres, gives a glimpse into the reality. Once referred to as a green city, Sylhet is riding on a development spree in the last decade.

Thanks to the city corporation's unplanned urbanisation and no environmental conservation plan, the city is rapidly losing its green cover.

According to data given by the Sylhet City Corporation (SCC), they felled 263 trees in last five years since 2016; while the data of the Forest Department, the permitting authority for felling trees, shows that the corporation felled another 69 trees by this time.

However, a data analysis between Google Street View of 2015 and field visit to assess the present situation, The Daily Star found that the corporation felled at least 873 trees while implementing seven development projects, mostly road widening.

A few years ago, the Rikabibazar-Subidbazar road via Mirer Maidan used to be covered with trees planted on both sides of the road. It also helped Sylhet Municipality win the award of best institutional tree planter

TREES FELLED FOR DEVELOPMENT

| AREA | GIVEN DATA | SCC LISTED | FOREST DEPT PERMITTED | DS FINDING |
|--|------------|------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Amberkhana to Bandarbar via Chowhatta, Zindabazar | 0 | No | Data N/A | 96 |
| Subidbazar to Madina Market Road | 0 | No | Data N/A | 77 |
| Kazi Jalaluddin School Adjacent Road, Kumarpara | 2 | Yes | Yes | 70 |
| Zindabazar to Tilagarh via Nairpur | 0 | No | Data N/A | 58 |
| Amberkhana Primary School to Tilagarh via Electricity Supply | 25 | No | Yes | 76 |
| Chowhatta to Kumarpara Road | 0 | No | Data N/A | 39 |
| Kumarpara Christian Tila to Shahi Eidgah Point | 18 | No | Yes | 54 |
| Keane Bridge to Humayun Rashid Chatter Road Side | 64 | Yes | Data N/A | 94 |
| Amberkhana to Chowkideki Road Side | 13 | Yes | Yes | 40 |
| Mirer Maidan to Blue Bird School Bridge Road Side | 40 | Yes | Data N/A | 65 |
| Bangabir Road to Sifat Ullah Mosque Road Side | 22 | Yes | Yes | 35 |
| Shajalal Shrine's Western Side to Osmani School Road Side | 26 | No | Yes | 37 |
| PDB Mosque to Nabab Road's Picher Mukh | 71 | Yes | Data N/A | 76 |
| Bakhtiar Bibi School Premises | 1 | Yes | Yes | 6 |
| Shahi Eidgah WDB Road Side | 18 | Yes | Data N/A | 18 |
| Pouro Bironi at Dhopa Dighir Par | 6 | Yes | Yes | 6 |
| Manik Pir Tila | 26 | Yes | Yes | 26 |
| TOTAL: | 332 | | | 873 |

on World Environment Day 1999.

But in 2015 and 2016, all trees of the road, no less than 200, were felled to expand it into two lanes with a concrete divider shaped as "wood log" with flowering trees in them.

Though the road, being referred to as "Tree Lane", now looks spectacular when the red and yellow flowers of Krishnachura (Delonix regia) and Radhachura (Caesalpinia pulcherrima) bloom, the cool breeze and shade from the green cover are gone forever.

Like the road, the one next to Kazi Jalal Uddin Girls High School at Kumarpara was also expanded recently, at a cost of a razed hillock and at least 70 trees.

However, SCC and Forest Department in their given data shows only 2 trees were felled.

Visiting all the areas in the city where trees were felled, collecting present data and comparing them with Google Street View of 2015, this correspondent found a notable mismatch between the actual numbers of felled trees with the provided data of the authorities.

At least 68 more trees were found to be felled at Kazi Jalal Uddin School Adjacent road in Kumarpara; 51 at Amberkhana Primary School to Tilagarh road; 36 at Kumarpara Christian Tila to Shahi Eidgah road;

30 at Kean Bridge to Humayun Rashid Chatter road; 27 at Amberkhana to Chowkideki road; 25 at Mirer Maidan road; 13 at Bangabir road; 11 at Hazrat Shajalal (R) Shrine's Western Side to Osmani School road; 5 each at PDB Mosque to Nabab Road's end and Bakhtiar Bibi Primary School premises in Mirabazar.

Moreover, though SCC or Forest Department didn't provide any data, this newspaper found more trees were felled in other areas as well.

For example, 96 were felled at Amberkhana to Bandarbar road via Chowhatta and Zindabazar; 77 at Subidbazar to Madina Market road; 58 at Zindabazar to Tilagarh road via Nairpur and 39 at Chowhatta to Kumarpara road.

According to the SCC data, they have called for open tender to sell the felled trees and sold 263 for Tk 2,21,050. The market price, however, is way more than that.

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) in Sylhet, said, "There will always be a mismatch in the count of felled trees, as the authorities keep tally of only those with timber value."

"The green cover relies on all trees, even the saplings. But they [authorities] mercilessly chop all trees in their path," he said.

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N'ganj residents worry as gas smell spreads thru' city

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

Narayanganj city dwellers are passing days amid anxiety and fear of a fatal fire accident as gas smell continues to spread over different parts of the town.

The smell may be coming from a gas pipe leak and an accident may occur any time if necessary measures are not taken immediately, said locals.

Residents started getting the smell since Sunday night. But no measures were taken to this matter till filing of the report yesterday afternoon.

Contacted in the evening, officials of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd said they were looking into the matter.

Ali Miah, a resident of College Road in the city, said, "We started getting the smell of gas since early hours of today (Monday). We tried to contact staff of Titas Gas over phone, but to no avail. So, we have kept our gas connection turned off."

Similar incidents happened in Chashara, Tanbazar, Minabazar, Golachipa, Dewbhogh, Khanpur and its adjacent areas.

The issue also went viral on social media and many expressed their anxiety and frustration at the indifference of the authorities concerned.

"We are getting severe gas smells in our kitchen

and on the road. What's the problem? We are all panicked. We want to draw attention of Titas Gas authorities," wrote Avijit Saha in his Facebook post.

"Probably, gas pipe leaks have developed at different spots in Narayanganj. Please take cautionary measures to survive and don't turn on your stoves," said Sadik Al Mamun.

Naimul Islam, a fire service official in Mandalpara unit, said they have contacted the Titas gas authorities and requested them to take immediate measures to solve the problem.

Contacted, Atiqul Islam, engineer of Fatullah zone of Titas Gas, said they have sent a team to look into the matter. If there is any problem, necessary measures will be taken immediately, he assured.

Golam Faruk, general manager of Titas in Narayanganj, echoed him. Meanwhile, gas supply was suspended yesterday in some parts of Narayanganj and Munshiganj districts to upgrade the service, said officials.

However, Titas gas officials said there are no connections between that and the gas smell.

Mentionable on September 4 last year, a deadly explosion caused by a gas pipe leak took place at Pashchim Talla Baitus Salat Mosque, leaving 34 people dead.

Sheikh Hasina's 41st Homecoming Day observed

BSS, Dhaka

The 41st Homecoming Day of Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was observed yesterday, recalling her return home on May 17 in 1981 after a long exile.

President Md Abdul Hamid issued a message on Sunday on the occasion. Marking the day, various organisations, including Awami League, usually arrange elaborate programmes throughout the country, but this year the day was celebrated on a limited scale in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. As part of AL's programme, a two-day documentary exhibition titled "Sheikh Hasina's Four Decades: Indomitable Progress of Changed Bangladesh" was inaugurated on Sunday on the premises of Bangabandhu Bhaban at Dhanmondi-32.

AL General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader inaugurated the exhibition virtually while AL information and research affairs sub-committee arranged it.

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Facing acute transport crisis, Dhaka returnees were seen resorting to alternative -- and often risky -- means, like a full family riding on a motorbike, along with luggage. This photo was taken from Aminbazar on Dhaka-Aricha Highway.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Holidaymakers scramble to Dhaka as vacation ends

Pay exorbitant fares due to transport crisis; Jatri Kalyan demands resumption of long-haul buses

STAR REPORT

Holidaymakers are struggling to return to the capital following the Eid vacation, due to the transport crisis caused by the suspension of long-distance bus service.

Over the last two days, hundreds of people were seen entering the city on foot under the scorching sun, as many offices and factories have already reopened after the holidays.

Besides land routes, the ferry ghats were also swarming with returnees.

Meanwhile, many were seen flouting health guidelines -- not wearing masks or maintaining physical distancing -- raising the risk of Covid-19 transmission.

While people from high-income groups are returning either in private cars, flights, or rented vehicles, middle-class and low-income people are using cheaper means. But they're facing all kinds of difficulties as they have to pay two to three times more than the usual fare due to the transport crisis, our correspondents saw.

Visiting different spots in Dhaka and nearby areas in the morning, our photojournalist saw people coming to Aminbazar -- an entry point to the city -- by whatever vehicles they could avail.

They hired motorcycles, auto-rickshaws, easy-bikes, minibuses, and private cars to reach their destinations. Some even had to change vehicles multiple times to return to Dhaka.

From Aminbazar, people in droves were seen walking into the city, and after

reaching the capital, they took rickshaws, motorcycles and auto-rickshaws to reach their destinations.

Motorcycles were seen carrying as many as four passengers and many auto-rickshaws were carrying passengers beyond capacity -- putting lives at risk.

Despite the hassle, most returnees were relief on their faces, as they were happy to have spent the vacation with their families. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samiti, a passenger welfare association, demanded resumption of public transport -- maintaining strict health safety rules -- to reduce the sufferings of commuters.

In a statement yesterday, signed by its secretary general Moazzam Haque, the association said passengers are paying exorbitant sums, as long-haul buses aren't available.

The organisation demanded resumption of inter-district and long-distance non-AC bus services on an emergency basis, in order to reduce sufferings of passengers and reduce health risks caused by less safer means of travel.

In the meantime, according to data released by Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, some 1.06 crore mobile phone users left Dhaka from May 4 till May 15, despite the movement restrictions.

Health experts have expressed concerns that the cross-country travelling en masse may cause a sharp spike in the number of

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Heat wave may continue: BMD

UNB, Dhaka

The mild heat wave which is sweeping over parts of Bangladesh for the last couple of days may continue for four or five more days, according to Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), assistant meteorologist Afroza Sultana told the news agency.

The heat wave is sweeping over Dhaka, Khulna and Barishal divisions and over certain regions of Rajshahi, Pabna, Rangamati, Chandpur, Maizid and Feni.

Rain or thunder showers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at a few places over Sylhet division and at one or two places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka and Mymensingh divisions and the region of Cumilla, said a met office bulletin.

Weather may remain dry elsewhere in the country, it said. Besides, temperature in both day and night may rise slightly.

The maximum temperature of the country was recorded at 38 degree Celsius in Rangamati on Monday.

Railway mulls resuming 'Mango Special Train'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Bangladesh Railway (BR) is planning to resume its special service -- the Mango Special Train -- this year to ensure smooth and secure transportation of the nation's favourite fruit to its main selling hub in Dhaka.

"We sent a proposal for starting the service from May 25. If approved, it will run between Dhaka and Chapainawabganj via Rajshahi," Mihir Kanti Guha, West Zone General Manager of BR told The Daily Star yesterday.

Transport of mangoes in the special train would cost Tk 1,117 per tonne whereas courier services cost Tk 20,000 per tonne and private trucks cost around Tk 2,000 a tonne, railway officials and mango traders said.

Some railway officials said a circle of courier service operators have become active against the government move to introduce the special train.

They have been 'lobbying hard' with government high-ups to reject the proposal sent to BR headquarters in Dhaka by the west zone, they said.

The train is proposed to leave Chapainawabganj at 4:30pm every day during the season and will take nine and a half hours to reach Dhaka's Kamalapur station at 2am. Railway officials said the special train would have five wagons, each with a 43-tonne capacity.

Other than carrying 150 tonnes of mangoes daily, the train would be sufficient for carrying various other agricultural products, they said.

Last year, the Mango Special Train was launched for the first time in the wake of growers' transportation problems amid the coronavirus pandemic. BR earned Tk 9.30 lakh revenue by transporting 857 tonnes of mango, lychee and other agricultural products.

65-day fishing ban at sea to begin May 20

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

A 65-day ban on fishing at sea will remain in effect from midnight on May 20 till July 23, covering up to 200 nautical miles along the coast.

During the period, netting using any fishing boat, mechanical or other vessel will be completely banned, said officials of Department of Fisheries.

The ban is being enforced in 14 coastal districts, 65 upazilas and Chattogram city, fisheries officials said.

Dr Muhammad Tanvir Hossain Chowdhury, deputy chief (marine) of Department of Fisheries Dhaka, said it would

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N'ganj councillor sued under DSA

1 held in another case at Sathkira

STAR REPORT

A councillor of Narayanganj City Corporation was sued under the Digital Security Act (DSA) yesterday.

Maksudul Alam Khandaker Khorshed, who gained popularity for arranging measures to perform last rites of anyone dying from Covid-19, irrespective of their religion, is the councillor of ward 13.

Sayed Akhter alias Sayeda Shuily (40) filed the case against Khorshed and Ferdousi Akhter Rehana with Fatullah Model Police Station accusing them of spreading slanderous stories against her on Facebook live, said police.

"Shuily filed the case at 1am," OC Kamruzzaman of the police station told our Narayanganj correspondent.

"Previously, Khorshed's wife Afroza Khandaker filed a GD against Shuily accusing her of blackmailing the councillor to marry her... But now, Shuily said she did not blackmail Khorshed, rather, Khorshed and Rehana tarnished her image on social media," said the OC.

Meanwhile in Sathkira, police on Sunday arrested a lawyer in a case filed under DSA, reports our local correspondent. The accused, M Sha Alam, is former president of the district's bar association.

On May 12, Liakat Ali, an apprentice lawyer, filed the case against Sha Alam and four other lawyers.

According to the case statement, the accused assaulted Liakat and forced him to pose for a photo with a placard that said he was a fake lawyer on October 6 last year.

Later, they spread the photo through Facebook, it added.



One of the two fawns born at the mini zoo in Barishal's Durgasagar. The photo was taken last Sunday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Durgasagar mini zoo welcomes baby deer

Nature flourishing at the historic Barishal tourist spot

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Two baby deer were born at the mini zoo project in Durgasagar, a major centre of tourism at Barishal district.

In addition, a peahen (female peafowl) laid six eggs that are waiting to be hatched. The district administration is attempting to increase the area of the cage for the birds.

On December 12, 2020, the then Deputy Commissioner SM Ajar Rahman inaugurated a project that includes a mini zoo, children's park, walkway and resthouse lighting. The Tk 16.18-crore project is being implemented under an agreement with the tourism corporation, said Md Ali Shuja, assistant commissioner and in-charge of the tourism centre.

He said that one deer calf was born three months ago and another deer calf was born a month ago.

"We are seeing if these cages can be extended to solve issues of space," he added.

"The place has remained closed due to ongoing lockdown. Around 300-800 people used to visit every day. But in the lockdown, nature has flourished at Durgasagar. With the last fawns being born, there are now nine deer. The peahen has laid six eggs in the last 10-12 days," said Tapan Lashkar, caretaker of the tourist centre.

"Currently, the peafowls' cage is 20 feet by 15 feet and the ones for deer are 50 feet by 40 feet," he said, "We are looking into expanding these spaces."

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