

'Developing' Dhupkhola field, but for whose benefit?

Athletes, experts, residents raise alarms over DSCC initiative to build market on playground

HELEMUL ALAM

In a city already devoid of adequate playgrounds, there is a field in Old Dhaka's Gendaria area that has not only stood the test of time but also remains a testament to the capital's sporting legacy.

This Dhupkhola field is not just another playground where people of all ages play sports, including football, cricket, basketball and volleyball. It's a place where people from nearby neighbourhoods also meet, hangout and spend time together with family or friends.

Over the years, the field has become a part of the area's heritage and pride.

However, the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) has started building a market inside the Dhupkhola field, which will not just shrink the space significantly, but also change its characteristics.

This is apparently part of an initiative to "develop" the premises, but according to experts, the plan is ignoring the field's main purpose -- providing adequate area for people to play.

The 7.47-acre field is divided in three parts -- Jagannath College (now Jagannath University) field, East End Club playground, and an open field for all. There's also a park at a corner of the East End Club playground next to a club tent.



Construction work for the project, which will occupy a significant part of the field, has already begun. In the name of "modernising" fields, such initiatives in turn make open spaces to play even scarcer, say experts.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

There is no scope to even take up a single inch of the field's land, as playing fields are already scarce in the megacity.

ADIL MOHAMMAD KHAN
GENERAL SECRETARY OF BIP

Each of the three parts is bigger than a standard football field.

According to the DSCC plan, the authorities will construct a five-storey market to house the 394 shops set up around the fields.

This move will take up 0.62-acre of the total field. The city corporation is also going to construct walkways, seating arrangements, parking spaces and a cafeteria, which will

DHUPKHOLO FIELD

- Total area 7.47 acres
- It has 3 cricket, 2 football academies
- Over 1,000 children, youths play cricket, football on the fields
- Many national level players trained there
- After work, field area will be 4.01 acres

PROJECT AT A GLANCE

- Budget: around Tk 80cr
- Dev work started this month
- To be finished by next year

FACILITIES TO BE BUILT INSIDE THE FIELD

- Market, walkways, seating arrangements, parking spaces, children's play zone, cafeteria
- Market Size 0.62 acres
- Play Zone: 0.6 acres
- 394 shops surrounding field to be shifted to market

PLAYERS, EXPERTS TAKE

- Facilities will significantly reduce field space
- Academies may be deprived of adequate area to practise
- Main features of the field might be lost

further reduce the field's space.

Besides, there will also be a children's zone, which will take up 0.6-acre of the field's space, according to the project document.

The document, however, did not mention how much green space the other arrangements will take up. When asked, the authorities did not disclose the information.

The document, however, did show that after the "development" work, the total football field area will come down to 4.01

acres from the initial 7.47 acres.

According to experts, although the proposed design may make it beautiful, the main features of the field will be lost.

Dhupkhola field is also historically significant to the country's sports scene, which is one of the reasons why many are so concerned by this move.

Md Yakub, coach of Dhupkhola cricket academy, said the field has been welcoming all for decades. Many national cricket players

-- like the first Test centurion of Bangladesh, Aminul Islam Bulbul, Marshal Ayub and Mohammad Zakir Hossain -- trained in the field.

He said they along with Bulbul protested DSCC's move, but the corporation did not pay heed.

Mohammad Rafique, the national cricketer who is often considered to be one of the best spinners to have played for the country, used to train and play friendly

matches at Dhupkhola field.

Besides, former national team footballers such as Ataur and Mamun Babu also trained there.

History aside, presently, every year national players are generated from Dhupkhola field. Over a thousand children and youths play cricket and football there from morning to evening daily, and there are three cricket and two football academies there.

"The city corporation did not say anything about the future of our academy, under which 150 to 200 cricketers, including national age-group players, practise every day," said Rezaul Islam, who was an under-19 national player in 2006, when Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim were his teammates.

"There are three cricket academies here, and under them, around 500 cricketers practise on a regular basis," said Rezaul, also head of Gendaria Cricket Academy.

Another former cricketer, seeking anonymity, said the city corporation could have constructed the walkways in areas currently occupied by shops, but they are doing development work inside the field, reducing its total area by around two-thirds.

The premise has many old trees, which were planted in the beginning of the 80s. They will come under attack during development work, which is very unfortunate, said Yakub.

Every year, at least 50 players participate in the age-level national cricket competition and get a chance to be part of the 20-player age-level national squad, said Nakib Rezwana Shams, a player who had participated in the Under-19 Cricket World Cup.

"The question is, where will these students go now? As the field shrinks, it will be tough for players of the academies to practise together," he said.

Adil Mohammad Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Institute of Planners, said there is no scope to even take up a single inch of the field's land, as playing fields are already scarce in the megacity.

Their research showed that the city's fields barely meet 10 percent of the public demand.

"Walkways are important, but using the field's land for this purpose will shrink the field and change its main characteristics," he said.

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'Our rivers becoming victims of greed'

NRCC chair tells webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rivers across the country are becoming victims of influential and vested quarters' greed, said National River Conservation Commission chairperson ASM Ali Kabir at a webinar yesterday.

He said, "Each river has its own history. Our literature, culture, agro-economy, and every aspect of life depends on our rivers."

"If rivers die, Bangladesh will experience droughts in the northern part and salinity in south. We have to be aware so that our rivers don't have to embrace such fate," he warned.

The webinar was organised by World River Day Celebration Council, to inaugurate a campaign called "March for Rivers".

The programme marked the World River Day today -- observed every last Sunday of September. The day is celebrated across the world to highlight the values of rivers and increase public awareness regarding their conservation.

Kabir also spoke of the rampant encroachment that rivers of the country are subjected to.

"River shores have become victims of the greed of influential and vested quarters. As they maintain their illegal occupancy in the river, we must act to save the rivers from

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Freeing rivers from encroachment
- Mass awareness
- Strict monitoring
- Reviving river economy

their clutches," he added.

He also said the prime minister has instructed the commission to work intrepidly to reclaim the rivers and not spare anyone no matter how powerful they are.

The commission chair hoped to bring all organisations working for the conservation of rivers together under one platform by convening a conference in this year.

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DHAKA-ASHULIA ELEVATED EXPRESSWAY Will be open to public in 2026

Says Quader; construction kicks off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway, the second such expressway centring Dhaka, will be open to public in June 2026, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said yesterday.

The minister set the new deadline after inaugurating the 24-kilometre expressway's pilot pile-boring of "static load test" at a programme in Dhaour on the outskirts of the capital.

The project's physical work started yesterday, four years after approval of the plan. The project's original deadline was June 2022.

Once built, it will connect Hazrat Shahjal International Airport with Abdullahpur, Ashulia, Baipali, and Dhaka Export Processing Zone on Nabinagar-Chandra highway.

It will work as an extension of the under-construction Dhaka Elevated Expressway, which will stretch from Airport to Kutubkhali on Dhaka-Chattogram highway and will facilitate quick entry and exit of vehicles to and from Dhaka.

The government approved the Tk 16,901 crore project in October 2017, and it is being implemented under a government-to-government initiative with China, which will provide 65 percent of the cost as a loan.

But the project could not progress due to delay in loan approval by Chinese EXIM Bank.

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'A huge gap between budget and services'

Say speakers on national allocation for healthcare

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although allocation for the health sector in the national budget has increased, there is a massive gap between allocation and the actual services being provided, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.

To measure the budget's effectiveness, assessing what goals are being attained using the allocations is needed, they said in the online discussion titled "Assessing progress towards realisation of health-related commitments of election 2018".

Speakers said political parties' commitments to develop the health sector during 2018 national elections have become even more relevant because of the pandemic.

Over the course of three national budgets, significant amounts of resources have been allocated to attain the goals.

Yet there remains a long way to go, and all stakeholders must work together to fulfil commitments, they said at the event jointly

WAYS TO IMPROVE HEALTHCARE SERVICES

- Assess allocation goals
- Work together to fulfil commitments
- Ensure adequate human resources
- Decentralise public health admin

organised by Bangladesh Health Watch, Brac James P Grant School of Public Health, and Unnayan Shamannay.

"Just analysing the budgetary allocations will not suffice to understand to what extent the commitments have been realised," said Dr Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, while presenting a keynote.

Dr Atiur, who is also president of Unnayan Shamannay, said, "Rather, stakeholders have to check what goals the administration intends to attain with those allocations."

Former health minister and lawmaker Dr Ruhul Haque said ensuring adequate human resources for healthcare should be considered the topmost priority.

Meanwhile, lawmaker Shamim Haider stressed the need for decentralisation of public health administration.

Ruling party whip of parliament

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Ashwin is known to bring intense heat to the country, and this year's has been no different. But after the last few days' swelter, yesterday's shower was a welcome respite, although it also made traffic movement difficult across many areas. But the joy it brought overwhelmed these children and made them get down to the streets at the capital's Moghbazar to jump around in ankle-deep water.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Sudden shower spells misery for commuters

UNB, Dhaka

A sudden bout rainfall triggered traffic chaos in different parts of the capital. With vehicles stranded on roads for a long time, it caused quite the sufferings to commuters.

On the flipside, the heavy rain that started around 2pm and lasted for half an hour gave residents some relief from the scorching heat of the last two days.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) recorded 52mm rain during the period.

Mounting on pedestrian's woes were the water-logged roads in Moghbazar, Malibagh, Banasree, Hatirjheel, Mirpur and other areas, along with ongoing road digging works of different utility service departments in several areas.

BMD said a low pressure area formed over East Central Bay and adjoining areas was intensified into a well-marked low over East Central Bay and adjoining northeast Bay, which then intensified into a deep depression over the same area.

It is likely to intensify further and move in a west-northwesterly direction, said the Met office in its forecast.

The office forecasts light to moderate rain/thunder showers accompanied by temporary gusty wind over Khulna, Barishal and Chattogram divisions and at one or two places over Rangpur, Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Sylhet divisions, with moderately heavy to heavy falls at isolated places over southern part of the country.

DENGUE UPDATE

Death toll **59**

13 died in Sept so far

34 in Aug, **12** in July

221 more hospitalised yesterday

Total infected **17,115**

SOURCE: DGHS

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Eminence Electric Wires and Cables Limited requires a brand name for marketing their world class cables in the local & export market. The name must be meaningful, euphonic, containing max 4 characters. The nominator of the selected name will be rewarded. Please send your proposed name by September 29, 2021 to the following email.

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