

The most agonisingly constant trait of a city is that it's fast-paced, with little to no space for its inhabitants to take a break. This is why parks within a city are of such great significance. To inspect the state of recreational spaces and amenities within the port city, **Arun Bikash Dey**, our staff correspondent from Chattogram, took a look at the nine parks namely -- Biplob Udyan, Jatishangha Park, Laldighi Park, Butterfly Park, Karnaphuli Park, Swadhinata Park, Kazir Dewri Shishu Park, Concord Foy's Lake Amusement Park and Jamboree Park. What he finds is that the port city is significantly lacking in providing residents with healthy avenues for recreation. At the same time, there's hope too as some of the parks are being maintained properly and providing much needed respite to residents.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

A place of allure and respite

Located in the Agrabad area, the Jamboree Park in Chattogram city has become a sought-after place for residents.

Run by the Public Works Department (PWD), the park has drawn in visitors since its inauguration day on September 8, 2018.

People from different walks of life come to the park every day from 4:00pm and stay till evening; even on the holidays. According to visitors, the park grows even more attractive in the evening due to its dazzling lamp lights.

Due to the pandemic, the park was closed for two years. However, at present, the park gained new life as visitors are flocking there in droves.

Tahmina Akter, a resident of Agrabad area, said earlier there was no park in the greater

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Agrabad area where visitors had free access.

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Permanent benches have been set up around the edges. Around 10,000 trees of 65 species have been planted in the park due to its natural beauty.

For security, 14 closed circuit cameras have been installed. The entire park has been raised three feet above the road to protect it from rain and tidal water.

Visitors can get inside through six gates -- two on the north and south side respectively, one in front of a 10-storey building on the east side, and one in front of the Agrabad Ma O Shishu Hospital on the west.

The park was inaugurated by the then Housing and Public Works Minister Mosharraf Hossain. Visitors have thronged the park ever since, making it one of the best amusement parks in the city.



Calmness at the heart of the city

The Laldighi Park is one of the few parks in the port city that offer visitors free access. The park is located at the centre of the port city, around a kilometre away from the New Market area.

The park is well-equipped with a spacious mosque, a pond right in middle, and two walkways around the pond. The entire landscape is covered in green, which offers visitors a much-needed sense of calm.

Run by Chattogram City Corporation (CCC), the park remains open between 6:00am and 8:00am and 3:00pm and 7:00 pm for residents.

While visiting the park recently, this correspondent saw a significant number of visitors. Parents were walking around while their children playing in the view. Many were seen chitchatting in the sitting area.

Md Ismail, a diabetes patient, said, "Doctors advised me to walk at least two hours a day, so I come to the park every morning and evening to walk without hassle."

"The city's footpaths are not pedestrian-friendly. Therefore, this park is a blessing for us," he added.

Soma Ghosh, a resident of the city's Jamal Khan Road, came to the park with her daughter. They were seen standing by the railing of the pond.

"My daughter wanted me to take her for an outing, so I've brought her here," said Soma. "It's a nice park but there's no rides or amusement facilities for children."

Subhash Barua, an elderly local, said, "Although it's a nice park, at present, 30 people can sit at the arrangements provided. However, it should be extended up to 60."

Contacted, Jahar Lal Hazari, CCC councillor of ward no 32 (Anderkilla), said he would take initiative to increase the park's sitting arrangements.

On the topic of setting up a kid's zone, he said he would submit a proposal to CCC in this regard.

70 LAKH PEOPLE, ONLY 9 PARKS

With Chattogram city running short of recreational places, its dwellers are being deprived of passing their leisure healthily. There are only nine parks in Chattogram city for around 70 lakh dwellers. They are namely -- Biplob Udyan, Jatishangha Park, Laldighi Park, Butterfly Park, Karnaphuli Park, Swadhinata Park (popularly known as Mini Bangladesh), Kazir Dewri Shishu Park, Concord Foy's Lake Amusement Park and Jamboree Park.

Of these, the first three are run by Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) while Jamboree Park is run by Public Works Department. Visitors don't have to pay to access these four parks.

However, the Jatishangha Park and Biplob Udyan don't draw in as many visitors due to their conditions.

The rest of the parks are run privately. Contacted, Bishwajit Ghosh, deputy manager (marketing) of Concord Foy's Lake Amusement Park, said a good number of visitors come to the park every day, happy with the park's arrangement.

Although privately run parks are doing well, residents still have to buy tickets to gain entrance there. As a result, low- and middle-income groups are not able to access those



as much as they would like to.

Moreover, many of these recreational places are not visitor-friendly anymore.

Take for instance the Jatishangha Park and Biplob Udyan run by CCC, which supposedly have "free access".

The Jatishangha Park, located in Panchlaish area, has been left in a sorry state for almost seven years, while Biplob Udyan located in Sholashahar area, has turned into



a commercial space.

Shahedul Azam, a resident of Panchlaish area, went to Jatishangha Park last Saturday. He said he couldn't enter the park seeing its sorry state. "Soil was piled up all around, as if, it was not a park, rather a dump," he said.

Jahirul Islam, a private job holder, said the park was once the most sought-after place for city dwellers. "There was once a well-kept garden, a small water body with fishes, sitting arrangements, a walkway -- but they're all gone now."

On the other hand, Biplob Udyan has nothing to offer visitors for recreation. The park has no boundary wall, for which it becomes unsafe after sundown, said locals.

At present, there are many fast food shops, built occupying a significant space with the permission of authorities. A total of 20 shops stand in a row.

"It's not a park now, but rather a food corner," said Dipankar Roy, who came to visit the park with his daughter.

According to sources, the park's "ruin" started on November 28, 2018, when CCC signed a contract with two private organisations to develop it. They built shops very quickly to rent those out in exchange for a substantial advanced payment.

Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, convener of Public Health Rights Protection Committee, Chattogram said, "A public park should not be handed over to private organisations. As Biplob Udyan's fate has been handed over to businessmen, [they] would prioritise business over public service."

Social Scientist Prof Dr Anupam Sen, also vice chancellor of Premier University Chattogram, said the port city should have at least 20 parks and more open space and playgrounds.

Contacted, CCC mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said a project has been initiated to renovate Jatishangha Park, while initiatives to develop Biplob Udyan would be taken soon.

Restoring a lost beauty

Flapping their colourful wings, they hover from one flower to another. After collecting nectar, they float around to another destination, leaving spectators in awe of their mundane tasks. Indeed, butterflies are graceful creatures.

But these beautiful creatures are a rare sight in the port city. However, thanks to a privately-owned, six-acre stretched Butterfly Park adjacent to Chattogram's Shah Amanat International Airport, port city residents can enjoy their beauty once again.

While visiting the park on Thursday, this correspondent saw many visitors across generations at the park, passing their time amidst the butterflies.

According to officials, the park contains around 200 butterflies of 18 species.

Alim Uddin, curator and keeper of the park, said, "We have a laboratory in the park where we breed butterflies. The insect



can live at best for 28 days. Months between March and September is their breeding season."

"They lay eggs on leaves while the larva eats the leaves until they transform into a butterfly. A larva turns into a butterfly in six to 12 days," said the curator.

Apart from the butterfly sanctuary, there are various rides in the park for children's amusement. There's also a big pond in the park where visitors can go for a boat ride. Additionally, there's an artificial lake and a butterfly museum.

Arko Chowdhury, a third grader, was running after a butterfly in an attempt to catch it. Without success, he was seen to run after another.

