

Where basic amenities remain elusive

In July 2017, Dhaka North City Corporation took 18 wards under its wing, which were previously under the union parishad system. It divided the newly added wards into 5 zones. While this move came with a promise of development for these wards, the reality after five years is way far from that. They remain as backward as they used to be, if not more.

ARAFAT RAHAMAN AND DIPAN NANDY

Residents of the newly-added wards in Dhaka North City Corporation expressed dissatisfaction after being denied civic amenities, claiming that life was far better when they were under the union parishad.

During a recent visit to several wards in zone 10 (wards: 37, 38, 41, and 42), The Daily Star correspondents found that the reality falls far short of expectations when it comes to major issues that people face in their communities.

Although high-rises have mushroomed in these areas, basic facilities — better roads, streetlights, electricity, gas, and proper waste management — remain elusive for its residents.

NO GAS FOR 4 MONTHS

"It has been four months since the gas supply was suspended in our line. But we still have to continue paying just for subscribing to the service," said Saiful Islam, a resident of Satarkul area in ward 41.

"We have been urging the company as well as the councillor to solve the crisis but they continue to turn a blind eye. So we have to buy gas cylinders, which costs us extra money," he added.

After failing to disconnect some illegal connections, the authorities



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

came under DNCC five years ago. But becoming a part of the city corporation has only brought sufferings to us," he added.

UNDER THE WATER, THERE WERE CROPLANDS

While visiting the Pukurpara area under Satarkul, these correspondents found an empty boat, waiting at the bank of what seemed a "waterbody".

But after a few minutes, a man approaching the boat proved these correspondents wrong saying, "Once I used to cultivate crops here. But the entire place went underwater, thanks to unplanned development."

Mujibur Rahman, who was formerly a farmer, said, "Tall buildings were being built around our croplands, which ended up blocking the regular flow of water. As a result, our lands submerged during monsoon and turned into such water bodies."

"Is this what development costs?" he asked.

While visiting Moynartek area under ward 38, Md Ridoy, a young rickshaw-puller, said, "You are lucky that you did not come here during monsoon. You would not even see these roads, as they remain underwater for most of that time."

Iqbal Hossain, a resident of Beraid, echoed the same. "As there is no proper drainage system in this area, it goes under knee-deep water after only half an hour of rain."

NARROW ROADS, NO STREETLIGHTS Apart from Satarkul's main road, most of the roads are in a dilapidated state. These roads are so narrow that only two small vehicles can move through them at a time.

Mohammad Abdullah, 70, a resident of Beraid, said, "The roads were made when we were under the union

parishad. They have not been repaired even after five years of being a part of the city corporation."

While talking about the streets, a youth showed some newly-installed streetlights with electricity poles. However, residents still have to depend on outdoor lamps while walking on streets at night, as those are still not functional, he said.

NO WASTE MANAGEMENT MECHANISM

In absence of a proper waste management system, many people dump household wastes into nearby canals or wherever they can. The roads remain dirty with garbage, as the authorities do not take any measures to clean them.

Farhad Hossain of Pukurpara area (ward 41) said, "We collected funds from locals to repair the old sewerage line and clean the streets. But all these are

responsibilities of the city authorities. What are they doing?"

"Waste and accumulated rainwater have also become a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes," he added.

THE DARK SIDE

Drug abuse has become a major issue in these areas, as a large number of youths in the neighbourhood are addicted to narcotics, according to locals. But councillors do not take the initiatives to solve this social crisis, said Kabir Hossain, a resident.

While talking to The Daily Star, Shafiqul Islam, a former councillor of ward 41, said, "As the first elected councillor, I tried to enrich civic facilities. The gas supply was normal during my tenure but residents now have been suffering from disrupted gas service."

He said two roads were also constructed during his time, which remain as the last bricks installed on these roads to date.

On drug addiction, he said, "I managed to improve the situation, which is again worsening."

THE AUTHORITIES' TAKE

Contacted, the current councillor of ward 41 Abdul Matin admitted that the condition of his ward is the same as it was under the union parishad, if not worse.

"I fear facing the people of my area and avoid social gatherings as I know I have not fulfilled most of my promises to them," he said.

"Gas supply will resume soon. We will adjust bills for those who have been paying without getting the service," he claimed.

He blamed budget constraints as the reason behind the current situation in the area.

Ward 42 Councillor Ayub Anshar Mintu also pointed out the scarcity of budget. "We only got around Tk 17 crore as budget last year. We are trying to improve the facilities using this low allocation," he said.

"We have been working on constructing a new road, installing streetlights and some other development works, which will be visible soon," he added.

Kazi Ziaul Baset, executive officer of zone 10 (additional charge), refused to comment on the matter when contacted.



The Daily Star explored the plight of these neglected wards in a five-story series. Today we look into wards 37, 38, 41, and 42 under zone-10.

suspended the gas supply of the entire line, he added.

Talking to the Daily Star, residents of Pukurpara, Taltola, and Merulkhola under ward 41, and different areas, including Beraid under ward-42, shared a similar experience.

"We were better off under Union Parishad," said another resident, Forhad Hossain.

"We thought we would finally see the light of development when our area

A village of mosques

DIPAN NANDY AND ARAFAT RAHAMAN

Beraid is a small place in terms of size, but it is huge in terms of popularity, thanks to a large number of ancient mosques.

Though this village is situated in a remote area, seven miles away from North Badda in the capital, it is popularly known as the "village of mosques".

Most of the mosques in the village were built during the Sultanate, Mughal, British and Pakistani periods, according to elderly locals.

The village now has a total of 15 mosques. Surprisingly, seven of the

"Bhuiyapara Jame Masjid mosque was established in 1505, although there are conflicting opinions regarding the authenticity of this information."

mosques were built before 1900, making this village popular, to the point that it was dubbed "Mosjider Gram" by locals.

Among others, Morolpara Jame Masjid was built in 1833, Purbopara Jame Masjid in 1893, Agarpara and Chotkipara Jame Masjid in 1893, Askartek Jame Masjid in 1888, Chinadipara Jame Masjid in 1893 and Aroiddopara Jame Masjid in 1896.

Apart from these six ancient mosques, Bhuiyapara Jame Masjid, also the central mosque of the village, is the oldest among all. Though there are differing opinions on the mosque's age, some claim it is 200 years old, while others say it is 400 years old.

However, most people think that the mosque was built during the Sultanate period. This mosque is architecturally similar to the Baba Saleh Mosque in Sonargaon.

A nameplate in front of the mosque reads: "Bhuiyapara Jame Masjid

mosque was established in 1505, although there are conflicting opinions regarding the authenticity of this information."

According to a booklet named "Mosjider Gram Beraid", published by Beraid Public Library, the mosque stood 17 feet 6 inches tall, while the interior was measured 16 feet by 16 feet.

In 1906, the authorities expanded the mosque areas for the first time. Later it was renovated several times, as mentioned in the book.

At present, the total length of the mosque's interior is 52 feet in the north-south and 33 feet

in the east-west. The balcony spans 52 feet and is 44 feet wide. The mosque now has a total area of 9,221 square feet.

Md Iqbal, a 70-year-old resident of Beraid, was found chatting with some of his old friends on the premises.

He said, "A long time ago, people knew our village as 'Mosjider Gram'. There are so many old mosques in our village like this one."

The mosque committee's President Haji Belayet Hossain said people often come wide to see the Department of Archaeology preserved the mosque, he said.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



BERAID GONOPATHAGAR Cultivating reading habits since 2001

DIPAN NANDY AND ARAFAT RAHAMAN

At first glance, it looks like a simple tin-shed house. One will not even find any decent-looking furniture inside the room. But this tiny and simple room is the lighthouse for the people of Beraid, formally known as Beraid village, situated seven miles away from North Badda in Dhaka.

The place is called Beraid Gonopathagar, a library established in 2001.

When readers enter the library, they will notice the words of Henrik Ibsen, Vincent Starrett, and other thinkers hanging on the walls. Around 3,700 books are housed in the library, including histories of the Liberation War, novels, stories, short stories, essays, poetry, plays, children's literature, and many more.

Over 50 people, the majority of whom are youths, visit the library every day.

"Anyone can read books here, and they can also borrow books to read at home," said senior librarian Sirajul Islam Bhuiyan.

The library remains open from 9:00am to 8:00pm, seven days a week, he added.

These correspondents met Jannat Hossen at the library, who came to return a book on rhymes.

The five-year-old said reading books has become a hobby for her since she began visiting this library near her home. "I like to read books of rhymes and short stories the most," she added.

"My sister and I come to this library regularly and read our favourite books."

Apart from books, some daily newspapers were also seen hung in a corner of the library for its readers.

Emdad Hossain Bhuiyan, a journalist by profession and the man behind this initiative, said, "This library is not a profitable organisation. But the maintenance cost is on the rise as we have to buy new books every year."

"We have to spend around Tk 2 lakh per annum to run this library," he added.

