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Where did all the greenery go?

Research shows Dhaka's green, open space shrunk alarmingly in last 28 years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka should have a 2-acre playground and 1-acre park for every 12,500 people. However, the current situation is far from ideal, as there is only a 1-acre playground-park available for every 37,900 people.

This information was revealed in a research report titled "28 Years of Reservoir and Greenery Destruction in The Capital: Reality and Salvation Roadmap", at an event organised yesterday in the BIP auditorium of the capital by the Bangladesh Institute of Planners and the Urban Development Journalists Forum, Bangladesh.

In the Dhaka central zone, the percentage of park-playground area is a mere 0.9 percent of the total area.

Dhaka North City Corporation has a 251.7-acre park-playground area, while its southern counterpart has 340 acres dedicated to park-playground facilities.

Shockingly, 41 out of the 129 wards in the two city corporations' area lack playgrounds. Considering the current situation and the population's needs, the report suggests that Dhaka requires 1,582 acres of park-playground spaces.

Presently, Dhaka has 29.85 sq km of green or free space, compared to approximately 52.48 sq km in 1995.

Similarly, the wetland areas have decreased to 4.28 sq km from 30.24 sq km in 1995.

During the discussion, Sultana Kamal, president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, pointed out that the occupation of green lands and water bodies was not just due to technical or social reasons, but also had political motives.



Three years after the launching of dedicated cycle lanes by DNCC, the initiative is yet to bear any fruit for the cyclists of the capital. The lanes are mostly occupied by street vendors, garbage, illegally parked buses and police barricades. These photos were taken from Manik Mia Avenue recently.

PHOTO: SAJJAD HOSSAIN



WORLD BICYCLE DAY

Paved for pedals, occupied by vehicles, vendors

Cycle lanes remain unused for 3 years

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Shakil Hossain, a private job holder residing in the capital's Mohammadpur area, expressed his frustration regarding his commute to Farmgate on his bicycle, as he is forced to ride outside the dedicated lane.

Despite the introduction of Dhaka North City Corporation's dedicated bicycle lane on Manik Mia Avenue over three years ago, Shakil has to ride his bicycle outside of it.

While acknowledging the positive intention behind this initiative, Shakil raised concerns about its effectiveness.

"The designated bicycle lanes are frequently occupied by vendors, motorbikes, government officials' parked cars, and buses waiting to pick up passengers. For the bicycle lane to serve its purpose, it must be kept completely clear of such obstructions," he said.

Over a year since the inauguration of DNCC's dedicated bicycle lanes, cyclists said it failed to serve their intended purpose.

During a recent visit to Manik Mia Avenue, it was found that the

lane, marked with green and white cycle icons, was occupied by over 30 makeshift street vendor carts. At some portions of the road, the markings were faded.

Buses of private organisations frequently utilise the lane for employee pick-up and drop-off. Government-owned vehicles are also seen parked there. The cycle lane near Rajdhani High School was barricaded by the traffic police.

The so-called dedicated bicycle lanes in Dhaka are a sham. DNCC needs to wake up and see this menace.

CYCLIST MEHEDI HASAN

Shahed Al Masud, deputy commissioner of Tejgaon zone's traffic department, said although markings have been made on the lane, there are no specific instructions or guidelines to ensure its active usage for cycling.

"We use the bicycle lane as a parking space because it is not

feasible to allocate enough space inside the parliament building. We do not have enough human resources to ensure this as well," said Shahed.

Illegal parking not only affects the Manik Mia Avenue road but also extends to Agargaon, where a separate cycle lane is similarly blocked.

DNCC's negligence has resulted in several spots along the lane being obstructed by garbage and sand. Three locations near the MP hostel road were found blocked by garbage, impeding cyclists' movement, while four spots were obstructed by sand.

In October 2019, the capital's first dedicated cycle lane was inaugurated in Agargaon. Subsequently, DNCC unveiled another lane on Manik Mia Avenue as part of a Tk 694 crore urban development project. However, these lanes are yet to make any meaningful impact in the city.

Hedaytul Hasan Philip, a volunteer of Hemonto Riders, said, "If the police takes a closer look at this matter and conduct a drive to prevent illegal parking, it is possible to stop parking in the cycle lane."

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Corrupt individuals have taken over these green lands and open space... they have little interest in preserving green spaces and parks, given that they and their children reside abroad.

SULTANA KAMAL, President of Bapa

There should be reforms within the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) board as it lacked the expertise necessary for effective decision-making.

SYEDA RIZWANA HASAN, Chief executive of Bela

She said corrupt individuals have taken over these areas, as they had little interest in preserving green spaces and parks, given that they and their children reside abroad.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, criticised the actions of Rajuk for filling up water bodies, clearing forests, and creating plots in Purbachal.

She questioned the motives behind these actions and called for reforms within the Rajuk board, stating

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The Daily Star

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'Budget doesn't cater to needs of migrant workers'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development yesterday said migrant workers have been ignored in the proposed national budget for 2023-2024, as the government did not come up with any new financial measure for them.

Although contributions of more than 1.49 crore expatriates working in 176 countries in Bangladesh's national development are well recognised, its reflection is absent in the proposed budget, the caucus said in a statement, signed by its President Barrister Shameem Haider Patwary and Secretary General Mahjabeen Khaled.

It urged the government to allocate Tk 4,500 crore in the revised budget for different ministries concerned for migrants' welfare.

The caucus said Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal in his budget speech mentioned the government's different initiatives to enhance migrant workers' skills. However, he did not announce any new financial measure in this regard.

Nevertheless, the finance minister told the Jatiya Sangsad lack of skills of migrant workers has been hindering a satisfactory growth of inward remittance, it added.

Despite having recommendation to increase the existing 2.5 cash incentive further to remit money through formal channels, the proposed budget missed out on the issue.

In the proposed budget, the government has allocated Tk 1,018 crore for the expatriates' welfare ministry.

'45.55 billion plastic bags used daily'

Speakers tell webinar, demand ban of its use

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should immediately ban single-use plastic due to its severe threats to people's well-being and the environment, said speakers at a programme yesterday.

Environmentalists, educators, researchers, and rights activists convened in a virtual webinar, titled "Curbing Plastic Pollution: Lessons Learned and Way Forward", organised by Change Initiative.

Speakers informed that Bangladesh ranks among the top 20 countries worldwide contributing to the alarming levels of plastic pollution. Around 45.55 billion polythene bags are used in the country each year. This amounts to an alarming 273 million kilos of single-use plastic consumed annually.

During the event, Saba Sabnam, a research intern from Change Initiative, delivered a presentation.

She highlighted the risks associated with plastic waste in water bodies, such as creating breeding grounds for disease-spreading mosquitoes. She also mentioned the ingestion of microplastics by marine life and the presence of toxic chemicals in contaminated seafood.

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There is a need for more stringent waste disposal practices and I encourage researchers to investigate polythene alternatives.

PRESIDENT OF BPGMEA

Shamim Ahmed