



This is how we remember Shishu park, filled with joy and laughter of visitors.

FILE PHOTO



Children having fun on a swing ride inside the Shishu Park.

FILE PHOTO



Now, this merry-go-round which used to be the centre of children's attention is barricaded with tin.



One of the rides now lies abandoned inside the park.

Shishu Park: once bustling, now fading from memory

Dhaka's major outdoor recreational place closed for four and a half years for renovation, no tentative date of reopening

DIPAN NANDY

*"Amader deshta showpnapuri,
Sathi moder phulpuri
Phulpuri, lai pori, lai pori, neel pori
sobar sathe bhaab kori"*

The ever-memorable song starts playing while children, sitting on the metallic horsebacks, delightfully start going round and round – this is a memory many Dhaka residents can still relate to. This song, and most importantly the place associated with it, is none other than Shishu Park, the country's first amusement park for children.

Established in 1979, the public amusement facility has been the go-to place, especially for middle and low-income families, during weekends and other holidays in a city where low-cost options for kids' entertainment are few and far between. Shishu (children) Park has also been a prominent centre of recreation for families coming from every nook and corner of the country.

However, the park remains closed for four and half years and counting. No one knows when the popular children's entertainment destination in the heart of Dhaka will be reopened.

The government suspended the facility for modernisation and development works in January 2019. However, no development works have been done so far due to the delay in the construction of an underground parking lot and complications regarding budget allocation, leading to frustration among citizens and urban experts.

Shakibur Rahman, who has been living in Dhaka for the last four decades, said he passed his childhood with frequent visits to Shishu Park and the National Zoo in

Mirpur with his parents.

"We all have some memories and nostalgia associated with this park," said 60-year-old Rahman.

Recalling his merry-go-round rides on a metallic horse and swaying to the famous background song, Rahman said it has been etched in his memory and many others forever.

"It is disappointing that I could not take my family there as the park has remained closed for years. It is an injustice for a generation who are growing up now," said Rahman, who lives in Kalyanpur.

Rashid Al Amin, who was born and brought up in a village bordering the Kurigram district, shared a similar feeling.

"The first time I visited Dhaka was when I was 10. My uncle took me to Shishu Park at that time. It was one of the best days of my life. But I'm yet to get the opportunity to take my daughter to this Park," said 35-year-old Al Amin, who now lives in Dhanmondi.

Although there are many private amusement parks in Dhaka, they are expensive for a middle-income person like him, he mentioned.

Adil Mohammed Khan, urban planner and a professor at Jahangirnagar University, said the long closure of the Shishu Park is depriving an entire generation of children of outdoor entertainment – something that is crucial for their mental and physical development.

"Dhaka has very limited space for children, and Shishu Park is one of them. The fact that it has been closed for almost half a decade is completely unacceptable. The more concerning issue is, even the authorities do not have a clear idea about when the amusement park will reopen after renovation," asserted Khan.

Mazibur Rahman, curator of the

AT A GLANCE

- Country's first children's amusement park
- Established in 1979, it was a venture by Parjatan
- DCC started to maintain it since 1983
- DSCC took charge after the split of DCC into two in Nov 2011
- The 15-acre park was named after former president Ziaur Rahman
- The name was changed to Hossain Shaheed Suhrawardy Shishu Park on Dec 30, 2021

National Zoo, told The Daily Star that due to the closure of Shishu Park, the number of visitors to the zoo has increased.

"To treat the visiting children with some more additional amusement, we have launched two rides," said Rahman.

THE ONGOING WORK

The Department of Public Works is currently working on the underground car parking inside the park under the Tk 397 crore Swadhinata Stambha (Phase 3) project. Of the amount, Tk 65 crore has been allocated for the park's development.

After extending the deadline for the project several times, it has been set for June 2024. Project officials say the construction works of the underground parking is underway. The roofing of the parking with a capacity of 500 cars has been completed. Its physical progress is 97 percent as of December 2022, according to

the Liberation War affairs ministry.

At the same time, work on the underpass is still ongoing. Its physical progress is 80 percent, according to the ministry officials.

During a recent visit to the park, this correspondent saw that the construction works of underground parking have taken up almost all of the park's area. The roof of the parking lot is about four feet above the ground.

However, there is no information or images of the blueprint or design.

The entire area is surrounded by tin fences. This correspondent tried to peek through an open space between the fences and saw that most of the rides, that used to exist inside the park, were gone. However, two rides were kept surrounded by eight-foot-high tins. The jet plane gifted by the Air Force has been left in the bushes on the west side of the park, with vines and dust being scattered on it.

WHY THE DELAY

When asked about updates on the project, Habibul Islam, project director of the Swadhinata Stambha (Phase 3), said, "The project is being initiated by the Ministry of Liberation War... I cannot talk about it over the phone. However, the project [Shishu Park] will now be maintained by Dhaka South City Corporation."

Officials of DSCC, who are the custodian of the children's park, said they cannot start the modernisation works until the construction of the parking lot is completed.

"The construction is expected to take another year to complete, after which, DSCC's mechanical department will work on the park's modernisation under a separate project," said DSCC spokesperson Abu Naser.

DSCC sought a much higher allocation from the LGRD ministry to replace the old and risky set of rides in the park. The ministry asked the corporation to submit a separate project proposal one and a half years ago, he added.

Accordingly, DSCC prepared a development project proposal of Tk 604 crore. It is currently in the process of approval by the Department of Materials and Infrastructure of the Planning Commission, said Anisur Rahman, superintendent engineer (mechanical circle) of DSCC.

"We are waiting for the approval of the Planning Commission and then the vetting from the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council. It would take three years to complete the park's development works after the project is approved," he added.

According to the DSCC sources, 15 new rides will be installed inside the park, namely Mine Coaster, Disk'O Mega 40, Super Air Race, Tea Cup 9, Flying Carrouseles, Endeavour, Galleon, 12D Theatre, Climbing Car, Bumper Car, Magic Bikes, Trampoline Bed, Super Happy Swing, Merry Go Round and Water Mania.

The country's first children's amusement park, named after ex-president Ziaur Rahman, was a venture by Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation. The former Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) took jurisdiction of the 15-acre park in 1983. Later, DSCC took charge of the facility after the corporation split into two parts in November 2011.

However, with four and a half years gone, the once bustling entrance of the park is now gathering dust. The only notable DSCC move so far has been changing its name to Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy Shishu Park on December 30, 2021.



The Shishu Park now wears a deserted look. This public amusement facility, a go-to place for Dhaka residents, has been closed for four and half years due to development works. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON