



Botanical Gardens of Dhaka: Are they truly the urban oasis they used to be?

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But do the botanical gardens of our city present this picture to us? And do they function as the lungs of our city like they used to?

PRESERVATION CRISIS AT THE BALDAH GARDEN

The Baldah Garden, situated in Wari, is the forgotten museum of countless flora that desperately needs our attention. Presently, there are two sections of the garden — Psyche and Cybele. While the Cybele garden remains open for public visits from 8 AM to 5 PM, the Psyche garden is only reserved for the staff.

While talking to The Daily Star, the Curator of the Baldah Garden, Taslima Khatun said, “Baldah Garden has some of the rarest species of plants that are found

anywhere else in Bangladesh. But as you can see, the surrounding high rises and even the garden nearby are choking the garden. Lack of proper sunlight and air, and the dust and smog are doing nothing but killing the plants.”

The exquisite Baldah Garden, which was once famous for local and exotic plant species, including — Amazon Lily (Victoria Amazonica), the world's largest aquatic plant — and attracted nature enthusiasts and botanists from all over, is gradually losing its charm.

Taslima further added, “Nature lovers and researchers are welcome in this place. However, hardly anyone who genuinely loves plant life ever comes. We plan to make the Baldah Garden a hub for botanists and students, who can come and continue their research here.”

Taslima informed us that designated guards and caretakers of the Baldah Garden constantly monitor security, even on weekends. So, no one should be concerned about their safety. Moreover, no one is allowed to host any sort of picnic here, but considering the well-being of the community, the Baldah Garden is open for everyone to jog and exercise.

Nimai Datta, a resident of the area who owns a chemical business, regularly comes to the Baldah Garden to walk and exercise. He shared, “I come to the garden every morning to jog and not once I have faced any safety issues. However, it breaks my heart to see how some people — especially teenagers — misuse this wonderful place.”

So, when did we turn a blind eye

to the magnificent Baldah Garden? Being enchanted by the camellias of this place, the poet and Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore was inspired to compose his poem “Camellia,” during his stay in the Joy House of Baldah Garden. Yet, all is still not lost and perhaps, the younger generation of botanists and nature lovers may help revive the beauty of Baldah Garden.

One of the gardeners, Abu Taher, mentioned, “Presently, we are 7 people working here, whereas previously there were 15. There are 5 gardeners and 2 security guards. But we need more manpower to function properly.”

Although the Baldah Garden may not have the charm that it had before, it can be an ecological treasure for future generations if proper measures are taken

to preserve the biodiversity within it, which is gradually decaying.

THE DECLINING STATE OF THE NATIONAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

During a visit to the National Botanical Garden in Mirpur on 31 December, 2023, we saw a family of seven having a picnic.

When asked about the security and cleanliness of the garden, Mashrul, a member of this group, answered, “As we live in Mirpur, we come here often to enjoy quality time and there aren't many recreational places nearby. However, there is no clean restroom here and unruly boys roam around this place, which is quite distressing for the people, who come here with their families.”

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