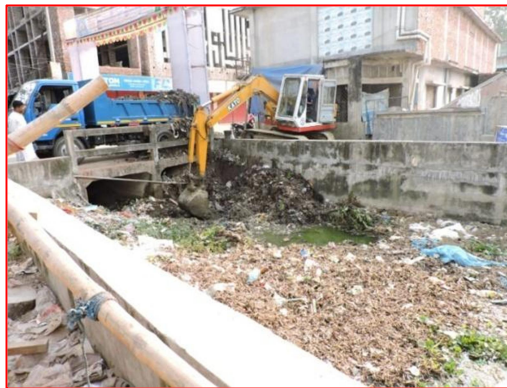


# Shubornno Shorobor: Piloting development of water-side public open space in Singra Pourashava

## Background

Singra pourashava has recently completed the development of a water-side public open space – Shubornno Shorobor (সুৰ্ণ সৰোবৰ). It is a 40 meters-long pilot development of the banks of a canal that stretches approximately 500 meters in the east-west direction. The canal was used to connect the *Atrai* river with *Cholon beel*, the largest shallow lake in the floodplain depression of the country. The urban settlement developed along the banks of the canal making it a central natural feature for the pourashava. However, over the years part of the canal was filled up disconnecting it from the river; recently illegal encroachment has disconnected the canal from the *beel* as well and reduced the length to around 500 meters only. Dumped waste and discharges from the drains and latrines from the adjoining buildings have polluted the water severely. Rather than being a natural asset, the canal was becoming a health hazard for the citizens as well as increasing flood risks and water logging of the core pourashava area.

In 2014, the honourable State Minister of Information and Communication Technology Division, Advocate Zunaid Ahmed Palak (MP) took initiatives to revive the canal and develop the banks as public open spaces. Singra pourashava received a grant of BDT1,000,000 (One Crore) from the Ministry of Local Governments to start the work in 2016. The aim was to restore the total 50m length of the canal by constructing walkways and other public entertainment facilities. However, the fund was not adequate for such extent of the work. Later, the pourashava invested additional BDT 300,000 (Thirty lakhs) to construct retaining and boundary walls with concrete. The partially developed water-side



remained unusable for years. The dark and inaccessible place used by drug addicts and dealers became a security concern for the adjoining houses.

The canal is very important for Singra Pourashava. This is one of the few public open spaces for entertainment and is the channel to drain stormwater. In 2021, urban.co.re – an urban consultancy and research organization – advised the pourashava of the possible design interventions to complete the 40m long stretch as a pilot for guiding the development of the remaining canal. The pourashava used some resources from its annual development fund for completing the works. The new development was named Shubornno Shorobor (সুবর্ন সরোবর) to commemorate the golden jubilee of Bangladesh and was officially inaugurated for the citizens by MP Palak on 24 March 2022.



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## Major Features

**Improving water quality.** The first intervention was cleaning the waste dumped in the canal near the culvert of Balua Bashua Road. Floating wastes were removed regularly by adding some natural minerals to clean the water. The cleaned part discouraged people to dump any more waste. A locally assembled water fountain is used for aeration of the water. These activities significantly improved the water quality. The moisture retained by the canal is keeping the surrounding microclimate cooler. Shubornno Shorobor users now appreciate sitting near the water during hot summer days. Improved water quality has significantly reduced health hazards for the residents living in the adjoining neighbourhoods.

**Universally accessible and permeable walkways.** The designers intentionally avoided any level changes to make the walkways universally accessible. 3-holes-local bricks are used as paving material to reduce heat absorption and emission as concrete. The holes help to drain rainwater drain directly to the ground and recharge the aquifer. The holes also ensure better friction and avoid possibilities of slippage. Elderly citizens especially mentioned the advantage of such walkways. Earlier, they had to walk on the main roads without footpaths for health reasons and remained worried about the passing vehicles. Public open spaces dedicated only to the pedestrians have



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**Introducing different flowering plants and trees.** The young scouts of the adjoining school along



with the Mayor Zannatul Ferdous planted different trees, plants, creepers, and ground covers in the available spaces. In the coming years, some of the large trees are expected to create natural shades with seasonal flowers. The flowering creepers and plants are expected to cover the metal frames and create natural protections for the seating areas and the concrete boundary walls.

**Introducing public art.** One of the best achievements of Shubornno Shorobor is endorsing public art and mural by the Singra Pourashava. In an open mural competition Jo-Lo-Jo (জলজ), proposals were called for backdrops for seaters in seven locations. The remaining wall murals were designed by urban.co.re. A local artist and his assistants painted the walls following those designs. The bright colourful background behind the seats with the contrasting subtle blue shades of long murals is a popular location for taking selfies.

**Promoting local business and street foods.** Public activities are essential for any safe and successful public place. Two of the local tea vendors who run their businesses in the location have now better weather-protected tea stalls; three more street food vendors have set up their kiosks. They remain as the caretakers of the place. They also pay a nominal fee to the pourashava that supports the employment of a cleaner and a night guard. A total of 11 people are now earning their living from Shubornno Shorobor. The pourashava regularly checks to ensure the quality of food.



**Lighting and visibility for inclusive public space.** The water-side development has both solar-powered street lights and electricity-powered energy-efficient LED decorative lights. The well-lit area encourages women and children to use the place even after dark. The decorative lights attract residents to spend time during any festivals. The area has CCTV coverage as well. The paths and seating areas were designed to keep them legible for creating a better sense of security. All of these initiatives have not only increased safety but also reduce crime in the area.



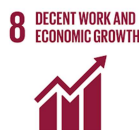


**Raising awareness about waste management.** Waste Management is a big challenge for every municipality in Bangladesh. Awareness can reduce 50% of this problem. A special custom-made waste bin has been designed for Shubornno Shorobor. The metal bins encourage separating biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste at the source. Also, the bins have public awareness messages to encourage reduced use of plastics that harm the environment.



**Attracting new business and cultural activities.** Surrounding areas have started to change following the development. The adjoining buildings are in high demand for rent and have followed the colour schemes of the murals. Shops around the area are changing for the new business to support the visitors coming from the city and neighbouring areas. During special days people of different ages gather for live music, tea, and street foods making Shubornno Shorobor a vibrant place.

**Providing better municipal services.** Singra Pourashava similar to all other local governments in Bangladesh has the mandate to develop and maintain open spaces and water bodies for the citizens' well-being. Shubornno Shorobor is helping to fulfill their mandate under the leadership of the honourable State Minister Zunaïd Ahmed Palak and Mayor Zannatul Ferdous. Pourashava officials are efficiently operating and maintaining the public space. These achievements will help the Pourashava to progress towards achieving different SDG goals.



## Looking forward

Shubornno Shorobor is the only designed public open space for the 50,000 citizens of Singra Pourashava. COVID-19 has established the need for open public spaces in all urban areas for both the physical and mental well-being of the citizens. There is a high demand from the citizens to develop both sides of the remaining approximately 450 meters length of the canal, excavate some portion of the canal that has been filled through encroachment, and clean the accumulated sludge. A drainage system with a sluice gate needs to be developed around the periphery for the adjoining buildings to avoid water pollution and reduce flood risks from backflow from the *beel*. More public facilities and a community building will be developed to generate revenue for sustainable operation and maintenance of the development. All of this development will require an approximate investment of BDT 150,000,000 (Fifteen crores).