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| Friday , August 10 , 2012 |

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Calcutta Weather

Temperature
 Min : 26.20°C (+0)
 Max : 32.20°C (+0)

Rainfall : 1.20 mm
Relative Humidity:
 Max : 95.00% Min : 77.00%
Sunrise : 5:13 AM
Sunset : 6:12 PM

Today
 One or two spells of light to moderate rain may occur. Maximum temperature likely to be around 31°C.

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Dig to save dry pond

A STAFF REPORTER



A clean-up drive at the pond at Bikramgarh. For years, the water body, once a part of the Bikramgarh Jheel, has become a waste disposal ground. (Bhubaneswarananda Halder)

A group of Calcuttans that had cleaned the Santragachhi Jheel has now taken up the task of re-excavating an old water body in Jadavpur that has turned into a waste disposal ground.

The pond, in Ward 95, is now filled with weeds because of years of neglect. The banks are dotted with shops, huts, a garage and heaps of waste. Some local residents alleged the shops and huts had been built on land that was originally a part of the pond.

"It has completely dried up. Our aim is to restore it to its original state," said Arjan Basu Roy of the NGO Nature Mates.

The work started on Thursday with five men removing the weeds from the surface and cleaning the banks. "The men will remove the weeds and create space for a

machine that will dig out the layers of earth that has formed over the water table," said Basu Roy.

The pond has dried up because waste had been dumped on it for years. Residents of the area alleged that some local builders had pumped out the water because they wanted to take over the land.

"The water was pumped out from the pond one night in the early part of last decade. A link between the Bikramgarh Jheel and this pond was also blocked so that rainwater could not flow into it," said Tapan Dasgupta, the local councillor.

The pond was originally a part of Bikramgarh Jheel, an 8-acre water body to the south of South City, which was also cleaned by the group in June.

The landfill began when refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan started settling on the banks of the water body after the Partition. A road that was built cutting across the *jheel* separated it from the larger water body.

The encroachment continued even after the influx of refugees stopped. At present, shops and huts line up the bank of the water body. A club also runs from a dried-up portion, which has been converted into a children's park.

For Basu Roy and others who want to save the pond, the primary task is to restore what is still left to be encroached. "We do not have the authority to evict anyone. We will excavate the portion that is still vacant," said Basu Roy.

Contribution from private parties is of crucial importance. "We live on donations from individuals and private institutions. The backhoe loader that will excavate the earth will be provided free to us," Basu Roy added.

Quippo Construction Equipment Limited, a company that gives construction equipment on rent, is lending the machine.

The group has gathered about Rs 15,000 but they believe about Rs 1.5 lakh will be required for the work. Basu Roy plans to start another round of excavation in December, when the water table will go down. "The water table is generally high during the monsoon. It goes down in winter and we can excavate deeper then. We would want to dig about 15ft," he said.

Councillor Dasgupta said he had been trying to get the water body cleaned for a long time. "Last year, Rs 5 lakh had been released to restore the pond from the local MLA's area development fund. I repeatedly met officials of the planning and management division of the civic body, requesting them taking up the work, but nothing happened," he added.

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| | |
| Rs 1,199 | Rs 5,999 |
| Rs 399 | Rs 340 |
| Rs 765 | Rs 600 |
| Rs 2,000 | Rs 765 |
| Rs 1,299 | Rs 599 |
| Rs 1,599 | Rs 399 |
| Rs 799 | Rs 499 |

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