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Filling of ponds, waterbodies continues unabated

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Filling of the ponds and other waterbodies in Chittagong city and adjoining areas goes on unabated, causing environmental degradation.

Chittagong once had around 16,000 ponds and waterbodies even 25 years ago. But rampant filling of waterbodies for commercial and residential purposes has reduced the figure to a shocking 1,000 now, according to the researchers.

Conscious citizens, environmentalists and researchers said the negative impact of continuous filling of the ponds and natural waterbodies is grave and many.

"Non-existence of sufficient ponds or waterbodies will not only pose threat to the overall environment or geographical setting of the city and district but also cause ecological imbalance," they said.

Dr Shahidul Islam, professor of Chittagong University Geography Department, conducted a survey in 1981 in this regard. In his survey he found existence of 15,941 ponds and waterbodies in Chittagong and Greater Chittagong districts.

He made a follow-up after ten years in 1991 and this time found to his wonder that more than 13,000 ponds and

waterbodies, of 15,941, disappeared.

"I'm disheartened at the gradual extinction of these natural assets from this beautiful city and district," he said.

The environmentalists believe that the total figure of ponds and waterbodies now will be more or less 1,000.

"The on-going filling has been causing ecological imbalance to the city to a

25 percent of open space, including vegetation and water to keep the city geographically and environmentally in order for a good living of its dwellers.

Waterbodies are also very important to keep the hydrological cycle okay, face fire disaster and attract tourists, he said.

Chittagong once had many well-known water bodies such as Dewan Gouri Shankar Dighi, Lal Dighi, Hamzar

still surviving with their beauty and majesty.

The 1961 Master Plan of Chittagong Development Authority (CDA) mentioned a good number of ponds and waterbodies in the city. The CDA included those in its structure plan, urban plan and detail area plan in 1996 also and emphasised the need for these ponds and waterbodies.

Rampant filling of ponds and waterbodies is also causing sewerage problem in the port city, said a CDA official.

The water bodies could contain a good quantity of water during heavy monsoon to help reduce the waterlogging and inundation, the official added.

Fire fighters also face trouble in extinguishing fire in absence of ponds or waterbodies in the areas where incident of fire take place.

"Shortage of water is a major problem for us in case of an incident of fire," said Rashedul Islam Majumder, Assistant Director of Fire Service and Civil Defence.

He said in most of the cases, especially at city's densely populated areas, we have to depend entirely on our own reserve for water to control the fire.

He urged the conscious people not to fill up the water bodies or ponds insensibly in future.

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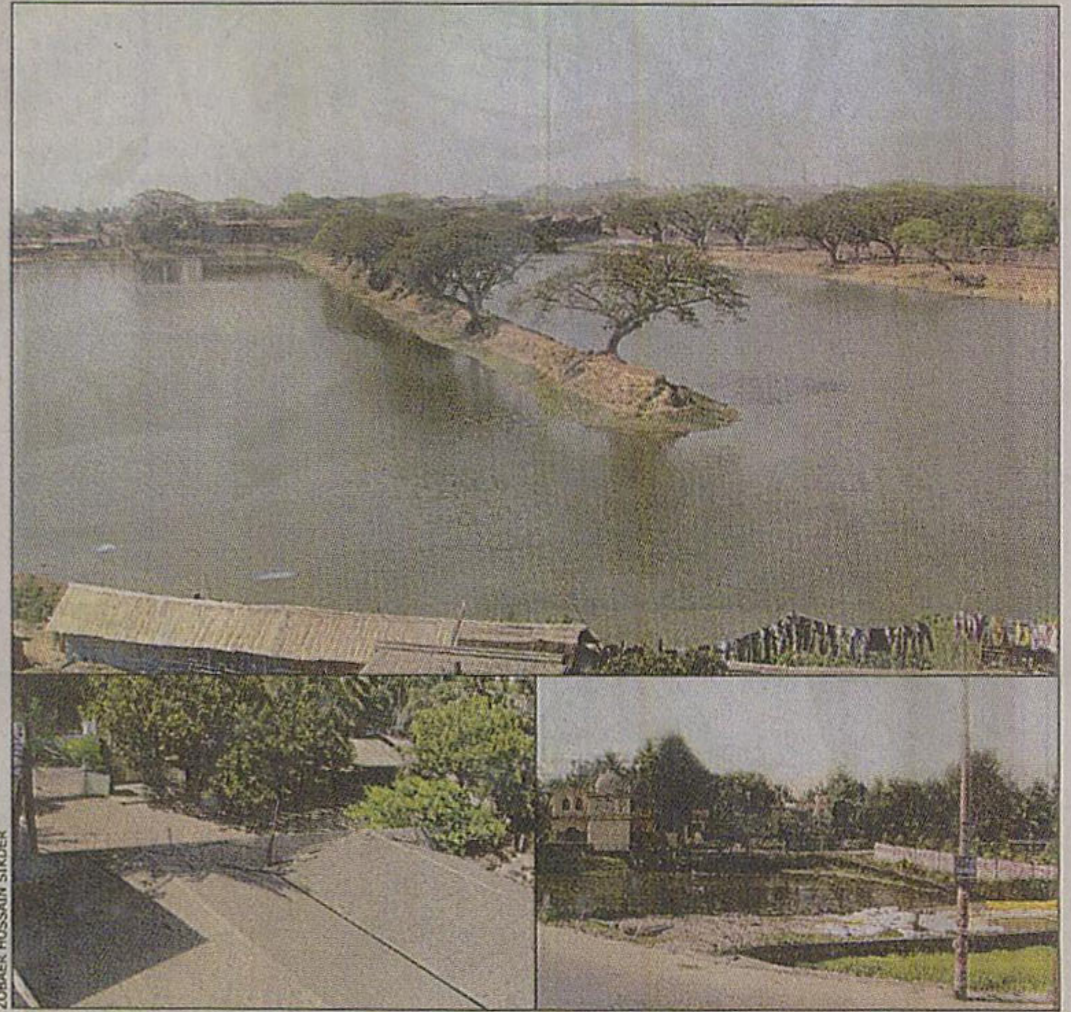
large extent," said Mosharrif Hossain, director of the Department of Environment (DoE) in Chittagong.

He said fast urbanisation and demand of land due to growing real estate business for building commercial structures or residential houses might have been the reasons behind such filling of ponds and waterbodies.

Mosharrif said an urban city requires

Dighi, Tekchander Dighi, Amir Khar Dighi, Shib Khar Dighi, Hazarir Dighi, Atim Shahar Dighi, Khanjar Dighi, Ranir Dighi, Asker Dighi, Nunu Khar Dighi, Shiblalor Dighi, Mazzabir Dighi, Moulvipukur, Agabad Dheba, Bheluar Dighi, Zora Dighi and Kamaldah Dighi.

Of these, Zora Dighi, Asker Dighi, Agrabad Dheba, Bheluar Dighi, Ranir Dighi and Mohammedpur Pukur are



Jora Dighi of Bangladesh Railway at Pahartali, top, is one of the few existing waterbodies. Bottom left, A community centre now stands on what was once a waterbody near the Chawk Bazar intersection in the city and Moulavi Pukur, right, at Chandgaon is gradually shrinking.



Ailing staffs and children pose for photograph with the officials of Youngone before boarding a private Air Ambulance at Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport on Saturday.

A noble gesture

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

When Rokhsana, Al-Amin and Priya Dutta were born their parents were the happiest ones like others.

But things started turning other way soon to wreak havoc on the poor families of Monowara, Sharmin and Rina Dutta. To their utter disbelief, they came to know that their sweet little kids have critical heart diseases and they will die in next few years if they don't get treatment on emergency basis.

Knowing this heartbreaking news, the very world of Monowara, Sharmin and Rina -- three low-paid employees of Youngone Group and mothers of Rokhsana, 2, Al-Amin, 4 and Priya, 8 -- were almost devastated as they couldn't even think what to do in such a crucial situation with their meager wages.

At this stage there came the Youngone Group, the largest foreign investor in Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ), to extend its benevolence to the three with its unique healthcare facilities. Many of the Youngone workers and staffs were not aware of such 'humanitarian facilities' at their very doorsteps.

Monowara, mother of Rokhsana, has been working as helper at the company for the last two years. "I was just shattered when I know that my daughter had developed the congenital heart disease about a month ago," said Monowara. Local doctors told me that it would take at least Tk 3 lakh for treatment, which was far beyond my capacity, she said.

Then one of the 51 counselors, who look after the welfare of Youngone workers, suggested me to inform it to the company authorities. "The authorities assured me of

all support about the future of my child when I approached them and told me not to be worried any more," she added.

Priya's mother Rina has been working as a cleaner for 12 years and father as a peon at Youngone.

The poor couple had similar story like Monowara.

"I'm so happy that my company has taken the responsibility to cure my daughter suffering from critical heart disease," Rina said.

The company has set an example in Bangladesh by introducing such an extra-ordinary healthcare service especially for people like us who fight for everyday to earn bread and butter, she said.

Sharmin, who has been working as an operator for the last eight year, also got a lease of life after the company took over the responsibility for treatment of her child Al-Amin.

Like Rokhsana, Al-Amin and Priya, two other workers -- Sheuly Dey, 25, and Shahin Akhter, 24, -- suffering from critical heart diseases for long are also beneficiary of the humanitarian service.

The five accompanied by their parents and Youngone doctors were flown to Dhaka in a highly sophisticated and state-of-the-art air ambulance of the Korean company from Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport on January 21 morning. The company will bear all the expenses of their treatment at the Apollo Hospitals.

All the five were suffering from congenital heart diseases like Ventricular Septal Defect (VSD), Atrial Septal Defect (ASD) and Patent Ductus Arteriosus (PDA), said Dr NK Barua, Chief Medical Officer of the company.

Peter Bauer, president of Youngone, said, "The diseases are critical in nature and treatment for these are very expensive, yet the company will bear the entire cost as part of its humanitarian medicare service for its employees and dependents."

He said about 69 employees and dependents have so far received the service since 2000 free of cost and returned to their normal lives.

"I believe that if you want best services from your workers or employees, you must take best care of their welfare too," Peters said.

He said Youngone has arranged open-heart surgery of congenital heart diseases, valve replacement, coronary bypass surgery, and kidney transplantation for its employees and their dependents.

Last month one employee Junu Barua, a case of ASD, was successfully operated upon at the Apollo Hospitals in Dhaka.

Besides, three workers were treated at Woodland Hospital in Kolkata in 2000 for congenital heart diseases at the cost of Youngone. One worker got his kidney transplanted at Vallore in Madras, Youngone sources said.

Peter said, "The main objective of Youngone health facilities is to maintain a high degree of occupational health and safety for the workers. For this, it runs three well-equipped medical centres with a full-time doctor and two nurses for each 1,000 workers at both CEPZ and DEPZ and also employs six specialists on internal medicine, gynaecology, eye, dental, TB and physiotherapy."

He said other large companies should follow the example to get maximum service from their employees.

SAFE secretary general visits CSE

The new South Asian Federation of Exchange (SAFE) Secretary General Aftab Ahmad Chowdhury visited the Chittagong Stock Exchange on Thursday.

Aftab, also managing director and chief executive officer of Islamabad Stock Exchange, Pakistan, held discussion with the CSE officials and exchanged experiences on SAFE activities. He also received the SAFE documents from CSE secretariat to continue the future course of actions of bourses' federation from Pakistan.

He said a new office with required human resources will start functioning very soon.

The CSE performed as the secretariat of the SAFE until September 2005 from its inception in 2000.

'Raise voice against bomb attacks'

Speakers at a discussion on literature on Friday called upon the writers to raise their voices against the bomb attacks, rising of extremists, and recent political and social unrest across the country.

Abasar Sangskritik Goshthi organised the discussion (Sahitya Adda) at Chittagong Academy auditorium with its president Sanjib Banik in the chair. Poet and journalist Rashed Rouf, writer Biswajit Sen, poet Jinnah Chowdhury, teacher Sukumar Shil, and litterateur Bipul Barua took part in the discussion.

MA Hallim, Dilip Kirtania, Goutam Kanungo, Sanjit Dey, Sujan Saju, Arif Raihan, Khorshed Alam, Hamid Chowdhury and Diruba Ruba recited poems moderated by R Rahman.

Anti-communalism alliance formed

Speakers at an open discussion emphasised the need for spreading the spirit of secularism in the country to fight the extremist forces.

"Time has come now to root out obstacles on the way to establish a democratic and secular country," they said.

Anti-Communalism Democratic Cultural Alliance (ACDCA), a forum of intellectuals and professionals, organised the dialogue at Chittagong Shilpakala Academy on Saturday. Writer Begum Mushtari Shafi presided.

An 85-member convening committee of the organisation was formed at the meeting. Noted social scientist Dr. Anupam Sen and Begum Mushtari Shafi were elected joint conveners while former general secretary of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Chittagong chapter Dr AQM Sirajul Islam and Engineer AKM Fazlullah were elected member secretary and treasurer.

The Prothom Alo Resident Editor Abul Momen, lawyers Rana Das Gupta and Kazi Golam Sarwar, dramatist Mahabub Hasan, NGO organiser Kamal Sen Gupta, cultural activists Jahangir Kabir, Anup Saha, Munir Helal, Abhijit Sen Gupta, Shahriar Khaled, Anchal Chowdhury and Anisur Rahman Nasim and journalist Anjan Sen spoke at the discussion.

the week that was



Whip Syed Wahidul Alam speaks at a programme at Nadirhat at Hathazari as the chief guest on Friday. Concern Services for Disabled (CSD) organised the programme to register the disabled.

Free medical camp for the disabled

Concern Services for Disabled (CSD), a social welfare organisation, arranged a daylong registration and free medical camp for the handicapped at Nadirhat of Fateyabad under Hathajari upazila on Friday morning.

Jatiya Sangsad Whip Syed Wahidul Alam MP was present as the chief guest. CSD organised the programme as part of a project on education, treatment and rehabilitation of the disabled persons.

CSD President Nusrat Iqbal and Chief Adviser Prof. Shayesta Khan distributed winter clothes among 200 handicapped people. Suhrid Samabesh, readers' club of the daily Shamokal, donated the clothes.

Former Head of the Orthopaedics Department of Chittagong Medical College

Hospital Dr Manjurul Islam and psychiatrist Dr Syed Mahfuzur Rahman conducted free medical check up.

CSD General Secretary Biswajit Gupta Bishu, Director of Hotel Sirmoon Nirmal Kanti Dey, businessman Nur Uddin Javed, Staff Reporter of daily Shamokal Soumen Dhar and Photojournalist Rajesh Chakrabarty also spoke at the function.

Dialogue on childcare held

Speakers at a dialogue stressed the need for proper attention to and care of children with a view to creating brighter generations for the greater interest of the nation.

Bright Bangladesh Forum, a non-government organisation, arranged the dialogue with media representatives at its office at West Bakalia on

Saturday.

Chittagong Press Club (CPC) President Abu Sufian was present as chief guest while Bureau Chief of Bhorer Kagoj Omar Kaiser and Chief Reporter of Suprobhat Bangladesh M Nasirul Hoque were the special guests. CPC General Secretary Kalim Sarwar presided.

West Bakalia Ward Commissioner Saidul Alam, Forum Chief Executive Utpal Barua, Journalists Kamal Parvez, Oliur Rahman and Suparna Barua, Forum Advocacy Officer Nasrin Jahan Khan and Assistant Advocacy Officer Morshedul Alam also spoke.

"Children are the future leaders and nation builders and, therefore, it is a moral obligation for all of us to take best care of them," the speakers said.

SCF threatens strike at schools

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) leaders at a rally demanded immediate cancellation of the 'government's decision to privatise publication of textbooks and the price hike of paper.

They threatened to call countrywide strike in schools if the demands were not met on January 30.

SCF organised the rally in observance of its 22nd founding anniversary on the Central Shaheed Minar premises on Saturday.

They said textbooks of all classes are not yet available in the markets though the new academic session already passed a month.

SCF Chittagong President Fakhruddin Kabir Atik addressed the rally as chief guest. General Secretary Saifuzzaman Shakon, Vice President Saifuddin Kabir Abid and Organising Secretary Bishu Moy Dev spoke.

Charon Sangskritik Kendro organised a cultural function.



Poet and columnist Abul Momen, second from right, speaks at a discussion on 'Save people, save country and save democracy' at the Chittagong Shilpakala Academy seminar hall in the city on Friday, organised by Jangibad Birodhi Gonorantrik Sangskritik Morcha, an anti-militant organisation.