

# Encroachers, pollution destroy water bodies

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Encroachment and pollution of Atir khal and Haikkar khal, two major canals of the city, is likely to cause serious environmental threats, fears Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Save the Environment programme.

"The canals are polluted by local influential businessmen, who are using these to their advantage," said JK Baral, Joint Secretary, Bapa.

According to Baral, sand and cement traders, brickfield owners and small businesses located on the bank of the canals are extensively polluting the canals and their banks.

On a visit to the site, Star City found a number of brickfields operating near the banks of the two canals.

"These brickfields often dispose their waste and other materials into the canals, polluting it to a massive extent," said a resident of the area.

Residents of the area alleged that the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) dump garbage at specified spots by the edge of the canals.

"Encouraged by DCC's action, other small businesses also dump their garbage in the canals," said Motin, a Rayerbazar resident.

Another resident said that besides waste, traders pile the banks with sand and cement.

"These piles of cement and sand are usually washed down to the water bodies during the rainy season, settling at the bottom of the canal making the water dirty and creating problems for aquatic

The environmental threats can be quite harmful not only for Rayerbazar and Basila residents, but for all city dwellers, according to Save the Environment Programme officials. "The water bodies like Atir Khal and Haikkar khal, along with rivers like Buriganga, Shitalakhya, Balu, Turag, Debdholai are valuable assets to this city that had around 45 canals earlier," said Nasser Khan, convener, Save the Environment Programme.

survival," said Iqbal Habib, Executive Body Member, Bapa and a member of the Urban Governance Programme Committee.

Bapa and Save the Environment officials criticised the concerned authorities for initiating projects like culvert constructions and roads near these canals.

"These projects have hindered the mass of water flowing in during the monsoons," said Nasser Khan, Convener, Save the Environment programme.

Of late, encroachment has also increased in the area.

"Ever since the announcement of the construction of the third Buriganga Bridge to be built at Basila, influential people are grabbing land on either side of the canals," said Habib explaining the problem.

He said the demand for land in the area is quite high because of this, and residents also allege

that some influential people are filling up the water bodies with an intention to encroach the spots.

Some encroachers have put up tin-sheds for business while cement and sand traders are expanding their areas with every passing day.

"Though they are unaware of the environmental threats, residents do understand the unethical activities of these people. But they cannot do anything against it as most of them work for these businesses.

Others remain docile as these businessmen are connected to politicians of the ruling party," Habib said.

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He said that currently only five out of the 45 water bodies exist in the city.

"As most of these are either dried out or filled up, the overall ecosystem is currently at risk," he said, adding that these were reasons for the scarcity of clean air.

"Earlier these open bodies helped to keep the air clean and healthy. But not any more," he said.

Besides this, he pointed out that the lack of water bodies are heating up the city and affecting the overall climate, and the addition of the high demand for water caused by the city's increasing population, the groundwater is losing its carrying capacity.

Khan also said that natural



An encroached section of Atir Khal.

calamities have increased over the last decade because of the restraints these water bodies have been facing.

"If these canals and rivers are not saved and a proper master plan not implemented, natural disasters like floods and others

will definitely increase," he said.

To raise awareness amongst city-dwellers and to be heard by the concerned authorities, both Bapa and Save the Environment Programme organised a number of rallies in the last few months, protesting the pollution and

encroachment of the canals.

"We are yet to receive favourable response to our protests from the authorities," said Khan.

Despite repeated attempts, Star City failed to obtain any comments about the crisis from the office of Dhaka's Deputy

Commissioner.

"It is about time city-dwellers and organisations come forward to save these water bodies. Otherwise they would not survive in the long run," said Mohidul Islam, General Secretary, Bapa.

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