

Wasa delays drive to free encroached canals

TAWFIQUE ALI

The city dwellers continue to suffer from rainwater logging as the Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) is yet to reclaim the canals from land grabbers and illegal occupants to restore their natural flow.

Though the canal reclamation drive was supposed to resume on April 12, Wasa could not go for the drive as it needs to decide whether it will meet World Bank's precondition for funds or mobilise its own resources, said a top Wasa official on condition of anonymity.

The WB has set a precondition for providing funds that the government has to rehabilitate the settlers who are to be evicted from encroached areas.

Wasa officials said the agency is not obliged to compensate the influential land grabbers and illegal occupants of the canals in the process of eviction and reclamation of the canals.

"We will undertake an integrated and extensive reclamation drive by next July for a permanent

solution to the problem," said Wasa Managing Director Dr Kazi Ali Azam.

"We are soon going to conduct a survey to draw a master plan on the city's drainage, sewerage and water supply systems with participation of the Dhaka district administration to facilitate demarcation and reclamation of city canals," he said. "While the WB will sponsor the master plan of the drainage system, ADB will sponsor the master plan of sewerage and water supply systems," Dr Azam said.

The master plans will incorporate restoration of the existing systems and provide for expansion with new lines where necessary.

The Wasa is presently doing lining of the canal banks and building walkways on the reclaimed part of Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND), Jirani and Begunbari canals at a cost of Tk 3 crore sanctioned by the government, he said.

"A major obstacle in carrying out eviction drive against the canal encroachers is court cases filed by the land grabbers," he said. "We cannot demolish many illegal

People with political clout, local goons, developers, filling stations and various organisations are among the canal encroachers, according to the expert committee members

structures built encroaching into the canals because of court cases."

The Wasa is now drawing a Strategic Development Plan to establish a long-term solution to the problem of canal encroachment, according to a Wasa source.

"We are sorting out whether we should take World Bank help and how to make an adjustment with its precondition," he said.

A negotiation between the Wasa and the World Bank is going on in this regard and a decision is likely to come out in the next three or four days.

Excavation and cleaning are urgently needed to restore the usual flow of the city canals to drain out surface water putting an end to perennial waterlogging in the city, said Prof Nazrul Islam, the honor-

ary president of Centre for Urban Studies.

The subcommittee of experts at its meeting in August 2004 decided that the government should rehabilitate the genuine poor and homeless people in the canal areas, said Islam who is a member of canal reclamation expert committee.

Currently the Wasa is trying to find out how many settlers in the canals are genuinely poor and homeless, and who are land grabbers, he said.

The decision was endorsed at the subsequent inter-ministerial meeting chaired by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, he added.

The list of genuine homeless people settled in the canal areas has to be prepared with due caution so that others cannot take undue

advantage of rehabilitation programme, he said.

Coalition for the Urban Poor was assigned to prepare a list of the genuine homeless people (not the influential land grabbers) living encroaching into the canals.

The city originally had a total of 43 canals, all of which are not in a condition for reclamation.

The government identified all 43 canals in the city plagued either with total obstruction to the water flow or hindrance to the flow because of encroachment.

According to findings of the expert committee formed by the LGRD ministry last year, land grabbers have occupied around 2.41 lakh square feet area of 13 canals and four distributaries.

The illegal occupation of the city canals has exposed the city dwellers to a recurrent suffering of rainwater-logging every year.

People with political clout, local goons, developers, filling stations and various organisations are among the canal encroachers, according to the expert committee members.

The canals severely encroached include Segunbagichha canal, Mohakhali canal, Shahjahanpur canal, Begunbari canal, Jirani canal, Kalyanpur canal, Ramchandrapur canal, Khilgaon-Bashabo canal, Abdullahpur canal and Ibrahimpur canal.

The canal reclamation drive first began in March last year. Occupants of the canal area at that time tried to resist the demolition drive in Segunbagichha canal.

In the drive, Wasa reclaimed Kantasur canal, Mohakhali and Gulshan-Banani canal, Ramchandrapur canal, Kalyanpur branch canal, and Begunbari canal.

The reclamation drive last year did not yield much success as the encroachers returned a few days later and rebuilt their structures.

The eviction and reclamation drive, that was supposed to resume in last December, was postponed in the face of the WB precondition. Wasa sources said compliance with the WB precondition would encourage the encroachers.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"The Election Commission works only as a post box in the case of publishing election results"



-- MA Aziz
Chief Election Commissioner
Said in a meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel where he lambasted the media and certain 'vested quarters', on Tuesday.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Shibir is a top class democratic and peaceful organisation of this country"

-- Moudud Ahmed
Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister
Said at the Paltan meeting of Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, on Thursday.
Source: Bhorer Kagoj

"We have to catch the 'Bangla Bhaish' of corruption"



-- Anwar Choudhury
British High Commissioner to Bangladesh
Said at the meet-the-press programme organised by the Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) at its auditorium, on Monday.
Source: Prothom Alo

"The commerce ministry has not much to do to check the price hike"

-- Hafizuddin Ahmed
Newly appointed Commerce Minister
Told reporters in a press conference, on Wednesday.
Source: Prothom Alo

"I don't talk with The Daily Star"

-- Mahmudur Rahman
Energy Adviser
Told reporters when asked about the compensation demanded by Bapex from the energy ministry for its Tk 21 crore investment in 1979, on Sunday.
Source: The Daily Star

"They are poor. They cannot afford to buy saline from outside. So I use these on them"

-- Dr Mustafizur Rahman
Director, National Heart and Cardiac Hospital
Told reporters when asked about using saline without expiry dates on patients, on Wednesday.
Source: Prothom Alo

Shopkeepers still paying toll

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

Although the business leaders in New Market area said they have

resolved the crisis over rampant extortion in the area through negotiation with the student leaders of Dhaka College, the shopkeepers

said they are still not free from extortion.

"They come and ask for a shirt or T-shirt. If we do not give it for free,

they pay Tk 20 to 50 which is almost half of the actual price," said Md Arman, a shopkeeper in this area.

The conflict over extortion

between the students and businessmen surfaced earlier this month when the shopkeepers protested against the extortion on the streets.

A group of leaders of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of the ruling BNP, of Dhaka College allegedly went to collect toll from Chandrima Super Market, a market adjacent to Dhaka College. When the traders protested, the students got engaged in a scuffle with them. Later, the businessmen of all the markets nearby including New Market, Gausia, Chadni Chawk, Chandrima brought out a procession.

They also kept their shutters down for a day as tension ran high in the area.

When asked, the JCD leaders said it was an isolated incident and JCD is not responsible for it. "All of them [extortionists] were not our activists. After the incident, we warned all the activists that they will face expulsion if such things happen again," said Anisur Rahman Sujon, general secretary, JCD Dhaka College unit.

The business leaders said they have reached an agreement with the Dhaka College students to do business in the area peacefully.

"The problem is almost over

after the principal of the college, OC of local police station and the student leaders intervened in the matter," said Nurul Karim Jinnah, president of Chandrima Super Market Shop Owners' Association.

But other businessmen said this is nothing but eyewash. The negotiation took place under pressure from influential leaders of the ruling party, they said.

"It is true that we are not paying toll for the last few weeks. But this is not a permanent solution. From our previous experiences, we know they will come back soon to collect toll again," said Nuru, a businessman of Chandrima Super Market. "We are helpless as the police have remained inactive over the years on this issue."

The shopkeepers however said they will resist the extortion in future at any cost.

The hawkers who their run business on the footpaths adjacent to Dhaka College also allege that they have to pay toll regularly to some extortionists.

"Linemen Bachhu and Kabir collect toll from us every day. The amount of toll varies from Tk 30 to 40 per day for each shop," said one of the hawkers.



Shopkeepers and businessmen in the New Market area continue to pay toll regularly despite an apparent negotiation with the student leaders of nearby Dhaka College.

STAR PHOTO

KUMARS OF RAYERBAZAR

Changing with the way of time

DURDANA GHIAS

Rayerbazar, once a kumar para (potters colony in Bangla), now bears little signs of its glorious past. A Durga Mandir (temple of Hindu goddess Durga) stands there reflecting the past glory of the kumars who were the majority community some forty years ago.

Substitutes like aluminum taking the place of earthen pots and two major historical events -- communal riot in 1964 and the Liberation War in 1971 -- have taken their toll on the kumar para.

"My father made earthen tubs for flower plants. Our family was famous for making earthen flower tubs in this entire area," said Sham Chandra Pal, 70, a member of a potter family.

He traded in earthen pots before 1964, but lost everything in the riot including his flourishing business.

"We brought soil from Shekher Tek, Ring Road and Mangal Chandi of Mirpur. Rayerbazar was actually a village with over 750 ghar kumars (potter families) before 1964 and a bullock cart was a mode of transport on the mud tracts. The village spread as far as West Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur bus stand, tannery area and the canal of the Buriganga River," said Sham Chandra.

"Now we use a 'daish' instead of the wheel, which saves both time and energy -- a technique invented by me," said Sham Chandra with pride. Daish is a frame in which some soil is thrust

into to make a desirable shape.

"It is very easy. Even those who never had a way with soil can also make nice pots. This is a shortcut process. It is now used in every kumar para in Bangladesh," he said.

Children of the rather affluent potter families are not interested in carrying on the tradition.

They work at various banks and offices, but the poorer ones are on the verge of extinction.

They find it very hard to survive by pottery. Many kumars are now applying for jobs in ceramic factories, which in turn is destroying the talents of original kumars.

Today he is a successful trader of earthen pots," said Sham Chandra. "Pottery has spread to other ethnicities too. It would be surprising to note that Muslims are better potters than the original Hindu potters," said the septuagenarian potter.

His innocent remark brought smiles to the faces of Muslim apprentices who were making earthen dolls nearby.

Durga Puja is celebrated in splendour now than before the migration of kumars in Rayerbazar. It is possible because of the 2,000 Hindu and Muslim families that come together to celebrate the festival. The financial contribution of Muslims is more than Hindus.

"We also celebrate Pahela

Baishakh and Chaitra Shangkranti. But our children do not like the traditional food like muri (puffed rice), chira, chhatu, yogart, on these occasions. They prefer to have pilau, korma and biriyani," said Sham Chandra sadly.

"I am the last potter in my family," said Maran Chand Pal, a member of the potter community and a teacher of Charukala.

"Both kumars and non-kumars who are getting proper training from BISCIC and other NGOs are doing excellently in the pottery field. I also train students in my house. I have so far, trained 400 people at home free of cost and give them a stipend when possible," said Maran Chand.

Bangladeshi earthen pots and other showpieces are exported to

England, America, Japan and Scandinavian countries, a matter of prestige to the potter artists. NGOs like Karika, Aarong, Shetuli and others are doing the exports. All these are done on private or personal initiatives.

"There are many hidden talents the kumars have. These vocations can flourish if proper training can be given. In Khurja of Uttar Pradesh, the Indian government is supplying all the raw materials to the 400 ceramic factories and is buying the finished product. We expect this kind of support from Export Promotion Bureau for pottery because our goods have a very great demand in European countries," he said.



Maran Chand Pal engrossed in work in his studio at Rayerbazar.

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