

SAVE DHAKA

CIVIC AMENITIES: Part -1

Alarming fall in sub-soil water

By Sharier Khan



FAMILIAR SCENE: A woman in Chawkbazar area guarding a large number of pitchers and cans for filling water from a way-side DCC hydrant. Water supply in the older parts of the city is both inadequate and erratic. — Star photo

Only 15 years ago, the sub-soil water level in the city was quite high. One could pump out water from a depth of only 30 to 35 feet. But now sub-soil water cannot be reached within a depth of about 90 feet.

As the population of the capital has increased rapidly over the years, the crisis of water has reached an alarming proportion, so much so that virtually water is now a scarce commodity. Besides, the supply system of water in many areas has become too faulty. The most depressing fact is that experts or even officials concerned see no possibility of the water crisis being solved within the next couple of years.

As summer approaches, the sub-soil water level, on which the city dwellers depend almost entirely for water, begin to go down further.

In many areas like Mughdipara, Gopibagh, Maniknagar, Khilgaon, Bashabo, Shahjahanpur, Shaheedbagh, Golapbagh, Rajarbagh, Moghbazar, Pikhana, Enayetganj, Ganakutuli, Hajaribag, Badda, Jigatola, Mirpur, Mohammadpur and various other places water becomes so dearer in the summer that people are compelled to buy a pitcher of water for Tk five or more.

According to Dhaka WASA sources, in the summer, pumping of water by motors from the sub-soil reserve is also affected due to frequent power disruptions.

The Dhaka WASA, at the most, can supply water for about half of the city's population. While there is a demand for 130 crore litres of water a day, WASA can supply only 74 crore litres. But, as WASA's technical system loss is over 22 per cent, almost a quarter of the supplies never reach the thirsty citizens. In addition this, the WASA's administrative system loss amounts to another 25 per cent, raising the total system loss to 47 per cent, sources concerned said.

According to a recent report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, the

technical system loss is due to leakages or cracks at different points of supply lines, existence of 39,000 metre-less water connections, invalid metres in different connections and large-scale theft of water.

Presently, the Dhaka WASA has 187 deep tubewells and a 100-year old water treatment plant at Chandnighat. The committee report says that for a city like Dhaka, at least 350 deep tubewells are required to meet the total demand for water. However, the report does not recommend installing more deep tubewells, rather, it suggests implementation of a long term master plan.

WASA sources said the Chandnighat plant which supplies some 1.70 crore litres of water daily from the Buriganga river is currently undergoing a rehabilitation programme. Under this programme, the water extraction pipeline would be

extended towards deeper areas of the Buriganga. On completion of this programme, the plant would be able to produce 2.23 crore litres of water.

The Buriganga has become alarmingly polluted. The portion of river facing the Chandnighat plant has become stagnant and unusable. Therefore, it has become difficult for the plant to purify the water as per World Health Organisation standard," a WASA engineer said, requesting anonymity.

WASA has provided over 1.41 lakh water connections to households while there could be at least 25,000 more illegal lines, according to sources concerned.

The pipeline network of WASA, set up in 1963, presently stands at more than 1292 kilometres.

Some programmes for improving the water supply situa-

tion could not be implemented for a long time mainly due to lack of funds. These include the Tk 300-crore Sayeedabad Water Treatment Plant which would be able to supply 45 crore litres of water daily from river Shitalakkhha. However, an agreement for French assistance for the project has been signed and it is expected to be completed — in phases — by 2010.

Sources say that since WASA runs on a 'no-gain-no-loss-basis', it fails to fund its own projects. Yet, if the system loss could be reduced radically, its revenue would have increased sharply, official said adding, the WASA could then fund its projects to a great extent.

WASA's annual revenue in fiscal 1993-94 was Tk 60 crore. This year the target is Tk 70 crore.

DU 'Ka' unit results published

The Dhaka University published the results of the 'Ka' unit (Science) admission test for the session '94-95 yesterday, reports UNB.

The detail results and the time-table of viva-voce of the successful candidates have been attached to the notice boards at the Science and Biological Science Department.

The interview will start at the Biology Faculty Dean office from 9:00 am on June 6 according to merit list from 1 to 2500.

The successful candidates have been asked to bring their admission test admit cards, original mark sheets of SSC and HSC examinations and two copies of passport size photographs.

Transport strike

able for road accidents after proper investigation, filing cases against drivers under Section 302 be stopped, terminals be freed from the clutches of hooligans, union hijacking be stopped and prices of spare parts, including tyre and tube, be reduced.

A meeting between the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority Chairman Mohammad Ismail Hossain and federation leaders at the BRTA office on May 25 failed to find any acceptable solution due to 'dillydallying' attitude of the government, Shahjahan Khan said.

"We are sorry for the inconveniences of the passengers, but the government's intransigence toward the legitimate demand of transport workers forced us to call the strike," Khan regretted.

Fire at garments factory in city

A fire broke out in a garments factory at Pallabi in the city early yesterday.

The blaze which originated from electric short circuit lasted for more than two hours, sources said.

The finishing unit and godown of the garments factory — the Purabi Apparels Limited — were gutted, police and fire service sources said.

The factory is located at the third and fourth floor of a building adjacent to the Purabi Cinema Hall at Pallabi.

Fire fighters from five stations of the city rushed to the spot to extinguish the fire that engulfed the factory within a very short time, fire service sources said.

Funding of political parties

A meeting at Manik Mia Avenue calls for at least 100 loud-speakers to cover the sprawling lane while the Pantha Path needs 35 while Bangabandhu Avenue can be covered with 25 of the blaring horns. A 100-speaker public address system alone costs between Tk 35,000 and Tk 40,000 while the organisers have to pay additional amounts for the stage, canopies and chairs. A 24 by 36 ft stage of eight feet height may cost between Tk 35,000 and 50,000.

In addition, the parties have to pay large sums for transport which are used to bring the supporters and workers to the meeting venue from the city outskirts and, sometimes, from neighbouring towns.

On almost all the occasions, the meeting organisers have to pay pocket money to those brought to attend the meeting. "The size of a public meeting depends on how much you spend for that meeting," one leader of an opposition party said, adding, "It varies from Taka one lakh to even ten lakh or more."

Referring the 1993 national conference of the ruling party at Manik Mia Avenue, a decorator estimated that such a huge stage and public address system would have cost more than Tk 200,000.

Affluent and leading businessmen are the main source of funds for the political parties.



Basic Instinct star US actress Sharon Stone, wearing diamonds, drinks champagne Friday in the southern French town of Mougins before presiding an evening dedicated to fighting AIDS to benefit a research foundation. — AFP/UNB photo

Pawar to initiate moves for unity of Cong

NEW DELHI, May 27: Senior Congress-I leader Sharad Pawar today indicated that he would initiate moves within the party for a rapprochement with the breakaway group to unite the Lok Sabha general elections, reports PTI.

Talking to newsmen here after a 45-minute meeting with Sonia Gandhi, he said she was of the view that senior leaders like him should take up efforts for unity.

Asked specifically if he would talk to breakaway group leaders, Arjun Singh, and N D Tewary, the former Maharashtra chief minister said "Let us first talk to my party colleagues, including the party president. Individual efforts

will not help and the party has to take a collective approach."

He said he would return from Bombay tomorrow and meet party leaders, including Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao.

Pawar said unity of all who believed in Congress ideology was possible but everyone should also realise that there was a party, leadership and agree to work within the party.

Pawar dismissed as "public posturing" the charges made against the Congress leadership at the May 19 convention of breakaway group. "Nothing is impossible," he said in reply to a question whether unity with the dissidents was still possible.

The Midnight File

Islamic Movement in Israel ends polls boycott

JERUSALEM, May 27: Ending a longstanding boycott, Israel's Islamic Movement is urging followers to vote in elections next year in an effort to strengthen Arab representation in parliament, its leader said Saturday. The decision could help Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin win reelection and enlarge the bloc of parties supporting his peace moves, which currently have only a small majority in the Knesset, reports AP.

Move to shut Chernobyl N-plant

KIEV, May 27: Ukraine and a consortium of Western companies signed a memorandum today to plan the closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power station and build a gas-fired plant to replace it. The memorandum, kept largely secret until its signing, aims to ensure that Chernobyl, site of the world's worst nuclear accident nine years ago, can be closed by the year 2000 as Ukraine has promised, reports Reuters.

AL questions integrity of enumerators

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League yesterday alleged that most of the enumerators hired by the Election Commission for the country-wide voter registration were deliberately selected from among activists of the ruling BNP and that they were not following the EC instructions regarding their task.

In a statement, M Rahmat Ali, a member of the AL election affairs committee, said the enumerators were not including all the sympathisers of the opposition parties in their lists of eligible voters.

He demanded appointment of the employees of different government and semi-government organisations, school teachers and workers of the Agriculture Department as enumerators and supervisors.

If necessary, he said, the time limit for collecting information about voters should be extended and all partisan

appointments cancelled.

Rahmat Ali also demanded measures for inclusion of expatriate Bangladeshis and those working away from their own localities in the electoral roll.

The AL leader further alleged that in many places the enumerators were not filling all the blanks in the registration form.

If the present situation continues, he apprehended, a correct electoral roll would never be prepared and many eligible voters would be deprived of their franchise.

EC advice

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The Commission in this regard points out, provision has been made in Clause 11 of the form for preparation of the database and providing identity cards to them. Steps can be taken about the voters on the basis of the information provided in the Clause 11 after preparations of the database.

At the moment, the EC stressed, eligible voters have to fill up form in the places where they are willing to become voters.

Meanwhile, enumerators yesterday continued to visit house-to-house to collect information for the third day towards the registration of voters.

The government by an executive order had declared yesterday as a public holiday to enable the officers and employees of the government, semi-government, autonomous and private organisations to enroll their names in the voter list.

EC may extend time

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would be paid duly for this extra load, the officials added.

An EC official said that bringing an estimated 60 million voters under registration within a period of one week was a tremendous task. Moreover, he pointed out that the voter registration process was facing some problems because of inclusion of new information requirements. All this may force the EC to extend the registration deadline by one week, he said.

Sources said the registration form was made complicated by certain EC officials though the former Chief Election Commissioner in a notification, earlier, had called for simplifying the registration form.

The EC itself is embarrassed as many people are ringing it almost everyday lodging complaints about the registration form. In some cases, the enumerators also failed to convince people on issues such as identification mark and date of birth.

For example, the guidelines for enumerators emphasise getting identification mark of a prospective voter, such as the length, thickness or shape of an eyebrow of a person. Many felt that it was ridiculous as an eyebrow is not a permanent identification mark.

It was learnt from sources in the EC that in the rural areas many farmers were scared to put their thumb impression on the required form. Many farmers and villagers expressed their fear that by putting their thumb impression on a paper, they might lose the ownership of their land.

It may be mentioned here that in rural areas, where illiteracy rate is high, the usual method of concluding a transaction is by a thumb print.

Complications also arose as most of the rural people and labourers are not aware of their actual dates of birth. The EC, however, had instructed the enumerators to determine an approximate date of birth by asking a set of questions.

But in many cases, the busy enumerators were found to be fixing dates of birth of the voters by guesswork.

The enumerators said that they were facing difficulties as many, who appeared to be teenagers, insisted on being registered as voters without

any proof to justify their claim. Problem also existed among women, particularly aged ones who were reluctant to get enlisted as voters because it required a lot of confidential personal information to be revealed.

When asked about the confidentiality of detailed personal information of the voters, the EC officials remained mum. Nowhere in the form, the EC promises any confidentiality of the information gathered by the enumerators.

The work of enumerators would be verified from June 1 by supervisors, one for every four enumerators.

Meanwhile, voter registration in the city started early in the morning yesterday as it was declared a public holiday for facilitating the job.

There are, however, allegations that the enumerators are not collecting information about all eligible voters of certain areas.

A resident of Razabazar area said the enumerators visit only two floors of a five-storied building, while an inhabitant of Azimur area said no enumerator visited his house till yesterday.

A resident of Zafraabad said an enumerator, who is a school teacher, sent his younger brother for collecting information. When the voters asked him to show his identity card, he admitted that his brother was actually assigned to do the job.

Another enumerator, who is a high school teacher of Lalmaia area, said he had to examine answer scripts of the recently held SSC examinations. Therefore he was under considerable pressure, and thought that it was impossible to finish enumeration of 200 people within the stipulated time.

EC has mobilised 407,060 persons including 80,690 supervisors and 5,048 assistant registration officers to register voters all over the country.

Tk 69 crore has been allocated from the revenue budget for completing this task, which will be used to prepare a new electoral roll. The electoral roll will form the database for the issuance of voters' identity cards.

But the ID card project still hangs in the balance because experts are of the view that it is not possible to issue ID cards to all the estimated 60 million voters within the next six months.

Serbs take 220 hostage

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said were built into the resumption of air strikes six months after the Serbs last forced the UN to abandon the NATO option.

NATO chief Willy Claes warned that the three-year-old mission in Bosnia was at a turning point.

Bosnian Serb spokesman Jovan Zanic said the Serbs were determined to "make a point to the entire world," and added: If it wishes to proceed, the international community as a whole will have to pay a very, very heavy price.

The UN Security Council refused when Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali asked it to rule on a third air strike and told him the decision was his job.

French President Jacques Chirac demanded better protection for peacekeepers on the ground as the price for keeping 3,800 French troops — the largest UN contingent — in Bosnia.

UN sources said Paris wanted a new UN mandate to reduce the number of peacekeepers and redeploy them more safely.

AP from Brussels adds: An emergency meeting of NATO ambassadors on Saturday endorsed the UN peacekeeping mission in former Yugoslavia and ordered military commanders to draft new ways of supporting the unarmed peacekeepers.

"The alliance supports the continued presence of the UN peace forces with their safety assured and a strengthened ability to carry out a clear mandate," NATO said in a statement.

France had called the meeting after French troops serving with the UN forces were killed or captured during escalating fighting Friday.

The ambassadors ordered military commanders to study "additional means the alliance could adopt to support UN peace forces in the conduct of their mission."

Diplomats at allied headquarters said the military planners would present their report to a meeting of NATO foreign ministers Tuesday in the Dutch resort of Noordwijk. They refused to say what the 'additional means' might be.

NATO Secretary General

Willy Claes said the Serbs had violated "all norms of civilized behaviour" by threatening the lives of captured UN peacekeepers.

The NATO statement also called for the immediate release of the hostages.

Reading the statement, Claes made no direct reference to further NATO air strikes. But he said the alliance was "ready to respond to requests from the UN for further actions."

US Defence Secretary William Perry held urgent consultations with Britain and Germany on Saturday.

Perry, who was scheduled to return to Washington on Saturday night, diverted his military aircraft to London in order to meet with Defence Secretaries Malcolm Rifkind of Britain and Volker Ruehe of Germany.

Perry said he was holding the meeting to reaffirm Washington's strong stand in the face of Bosnian Serb defiance of UN mandates.

"We have to show solidarity, be firm, show resolve," Perry told reporters on his aircraft. "It is a very rough time for everyone."

OIC for tougher action

Another report says: The head of the 52-member Organisation of Islamic Conference called Saturday for more effective punitive action by the United Nations and NATO against Bosnian Serbs.

A statement from the Jeddah-based headquarters of the OIC, said Secretary General Hamid al-Gabid "strongly condemned the brutal Serb attacks ... which have caused immense loss of life and constitute grave violations of the relevant Security Council resolutions."

Meanwhile, presidents of eight central and western European nations backed NATO airstrikes in Bosnia today and condemned Bosnian Serbs for holding United Nations peacekeepers.

"We fully support the NATO airstrikes requested by the United Nations," said Hungarian President Arpad Goncz on behalf of the heads of state holding a meeting in the Hungarian resort of Keszthely.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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