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Down to Earth

The Tragedy of a Dying River

By A S M Nurunnabi

A river's contribution to the making of a city beautiful is great on account of its environmental impact. This was the case in respect of Buriganga in the recent past when the river used to be Dhaka City's window for fresh air and water front for pleasant promenading.

The mighty river was once the pride and joy of the inhabitants of the city. A trip on the river or to merely sit along its banks was a delight. No more, for it's now a heavily polluted and pitiable stream — a stinking nightmare — because it has hardly any strength left in the currents to wash out the loads of industrial and domestic wastes as well as the river traffic out-pourings on its body away into the stronger currents of the confluence of rivers that it joins downstream.

It is well-established how the river came to such a sorry pass. The present level of dissolved oxygen in Buriganga water is much less than the minimum dissolved oxygen level required for healthy aquatic life.

An estimated 450,000 cubic metres of waste liquid per day pours into Buriganga from three source points alone, namely the Hazariabagh tanneries, the Dholaikhal and the Pagla Sewage Treatment Plant.

The inflow at these points consumes 40 tons of dissolved oxygen from the natural flow of the river. Add to these other discharges from installations directly encroaching on the river. The Department of Environment has reportedly identified

a total of 113 encroachments polluting the river, including households, factories, dockyards, vegetable markets, and stores of perishables.

There is a common belief which has absolutely no scientific basis and yet hard to erase is that rivers can absorb any amount of rubbish consigned to them. The plumb of the rivers will remain precarious until it is brought home to all concerned the utter fallacy of this belief. So far as the Buriganga is concerned, another disquieting feature is that many people depend on this river and its canals for their supply of drinking water notwithstanding the terrible state of pollution which threatens public health.

There is still another grave dimension of the problem connected with Buriganga river. In gross violation of the rules, many builders have encroached on the river bank and extended their structures right into the river waters, obstructing the free flow of water and destroying the beauty of the river front. Encroachments on the banks of the Buriganga river have been continuing for quite sometime but no action had been taken against such occupants so far.

The illegal constructions and encroachments along the southern bank of the river have begun to affect the navigation and free flow of water. In order to clear the river bank of all unauthorised structures and prevent encroachment, the

Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) has prepared a Tk 16.5 crore project which will hopefully be implemented from July this year after formal approval from the ministry concerned.

The BWDB has selected for the project a four-kilometre stretch of the river's southern bank from the China-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge to the west.

While the authorities are fighting a losing battle against pollution, the structures threatening the free flow of river water compounds the problem caused by the industrial effluents and organic waste.

Most encroachments on the northern bank of the river were removed when the Dhaka Flood Protection Project was taken up. The phenomenon of coming up of illegal structures on government land on the river banks in violation of rules is a matter which deserves serious attention and a long-term solution.

Some keen observers have suggested formation of a supervisory body for the revival of the dying Buriganga. In this context, a possible step that might be readily taken is the setting up of a 'Buriganga Authority' to regulate traffic as well as industrial, commercial and domestic encroachments on the river, while the three major sources of pollution could either be removed or taken care of by recycling or remedial technology.



Many streets and low-lying areas in the city went under knee-deep water due to downpour yesterday. This picture was taken from Greenway, Maghbazar. — Star photo

More rains likely today, tomorrow

By Special Correspondent
A heavy downpour flooded many streets and low-lying areas in the city yesterday.

The rainfall was recorded at 141 mm. Elsewhere, dark clouds bursting in a pre-monsoon spell, washed the drought stricken country.

Drizzles to heavy rains were reported virtually from all over the country barring Teknaf, Cox's Bazar and Kutubdia island.

Meteorological Department said the rains were an 'extension of Thursday's system' that started with intermittent rains on Wednesday. More rains are expected today and tomorrow.

It forecast a 'normal season' this year despite the prolonged drought.

Sweeper did it?

By Staff Correspondent

A sweeper at the Bangabhaban may have damaged the chair meant for the President and another chair for guests at the Darbar Hall Monday morning using sharp weapons that was found at the presidential palace, said a police official yesterday.

Officials of Motijheel thana along with CID and SB officials visited the spot and launched an investigation into the incident after a Bangabhaban official filed a general diary with Motijheel thana in this regard on Wednesday.

According to the official, investigation has so far revealed that the sweeper did the act to put the blame on a number of khalasis following a row with them at the presidential palace. The official, however, said a team of CID and SB investigators headed by an ASP of CID and another of SB were probing the incident.

Second phase of Nepalese polls on Monday

KATHMANDU, May 14: Campaigning for the second phase of Nepal's general election reached its climax today, the final day for political parties to woo voters, reports Reuters.

28 convicted for assassination of Burundi's president

BUJUMBURA, Burundi, May 14: Burundi's Supreme Court today convicted 28 people, including five who were condemned to death, for the 1993 assassination of the country's first democratically-elected president, a justice official said, reports AP.

Most of those convicted in closed-door hearings were soldiers. President Melchiro Ndadaye, a Hutu, was gunned down by Tutsi paratroopers shortly after his inauguration in an assassination that unleashed ethnic strife that has since left more than 200,000 Burundians dead.

Car lifter

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places of the country and sell those by changing colour, chassis and number plates.

Bagerhat police recovered a microbus and a private car from Sundarmona village under Sadar thana on March 14 this year and arrested Abdur Rob, 36, and Abu Saeed, 28. They are members of 'Haji Shahed Gang', police said. The two vehicles were stolen from Mirpur, Dhaka.

Haji Shahed snatched a microbus (No-02-0002) from Rajshahi bus stand on December 19, 1998 poisoning its driver to death. He has so far stolen as many as 200 cars and microbuses from different parts of the country, police said.

Khaleda

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She said the programme would be peaceful and directly related to the people.

Thousands of people would take part in the 500-km road march and much enthusiasm had already been created in the areas through which it would proceed, she added.

The opposition leader called upon to take part in the programme on their own initiative and urged concerned people to extend their all-out co-operation to make it a success.

Duma vote on Yeltsin's impeachment today

MOSCOW, May 14: Angry lawmakers argued and shouted today over impeaching Boris Yeltsin after the Kremlin warned that any move to remove the president will be a declaration of war and plunge Russia into crisis, reports AP.

Kremlin officials made the stark warnings as the lower chamber of parliament, the Duma, began a second day of hearings on five charges. Lawmakers blasted each other with passionate speeches for and against impeachment, as opposition leaders predicted at least one charge will be approved.

Impeaching Yeltsin will seriously aggravate the political situation and be a declaration of war, a senior Kremlin official was quoted as saying by the ITAR-Tass news agency.

The president's decisions may be most unexpected, the officials said in an apparent warning that the Duma will be dissolved if it backs impeachment.

Nationalist leader Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, whose party backs Yeltsin, repeatedly lost his temper, shouting at lawmakers that the president must not be impeached because NATO's air strikes against Yugoslavia are also a threat to Russia.

"We have an external enemy. They will destroy us. They're bombing Yugoslavia... so they can later bomb... Moscow," he shouted, slamming his fist on the podium.

An impeachment vote is scheduled for tomorrow. The charges against Yeltsin are: destroying the Soviet Union, selling out Russia to the West, starting war in the break-away region of Chechnya, illegally dissolving parliament in 1993, and waging genocide against the Russian nation with policies that wrecked the economy and health care system and sent life expectancy plunging.

But liberal deputies also attacked the president, with lawmaker Vladimir Lyshenko accusing Yeltsin of betraying democracy and urging him to resign.

"Boris Nikolayevich, you have to decide. Tomorrow might be too late, Lyshenko thundered.

Pro-Kremlin lawmakers said the hearings were a travesty of justice. "We will not allow... a political mob trial," said Vladimir Ryzhkov.

Lawmakers heard today from five witnesses who spoke mainly on legal aspects of impeachment. But 25 other witnesses, including former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, failed to show up. Most of the witnesses reportedly oppose impeachment and the Duma cannot compel attendance.

Pak FM sees gains from its N-tests

SINGAPORE, May 14: Pakistan's foreign minister said today that the diplomatic and security gains from its nuclear tests had been worth the economic price, reports Reuters.

Almost one year after Pakistan detonated five nuclear devices, sparking widespread international sanctions, Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz told Reuters the country had started to return to normal.

He said that although the country had faced a difficult year in 1998, the gradual lifting of some sanctions in January had eased the situation.

When asked in hindsight whether Pakistan still needed to test weapons in May regardless of the cost, the foreign minister had no doubts.

"Absolutely. The primary objective of every country is to safeguard its security," he said.

Road accidents kill 4 in Sylhet

SYLHET, May 14: Four people were killed and 60 others injured in separate road accidents on the Sylhet-Dhaka and Sylhet-Sunamganj highways on Thursday, reports AP.

Of the injured, 35 were admitted to Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital (SOMCH) and different clinics.

Police and Fire Brigade sources said a collision between a coach and a truck at Kamaichara on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway left one person dead on the spot and 25 injured at about 5 am.

Later, two more passengers succumbed to their injuries at Moulvibazar Sadar Hospital.

An unidentified girl, aged about 9, was crushed under the wheels of a speeding minibus at Tajpur in Chhatkat thana on the Sylhet-Sunamganj highway.

Some 35 people sustained wounds when two coaches collided at Nadampur.

Sonali Bank

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tee in favour of Turan bank for the credit.

But the Turan bank withdrew the guarantee through a fax message on January 1, 1995 which was not accepted by the Sonali Bank. The non-acceptance was conveyed to the Turan bank.

But Turan bank did not respond since then, the official said.

According to Sonali Bank officials, credit line facilities to exporters produced good result and helped increase export from Bangladesh to the CIS countries. "Except a dispute with Turan bank, we hardly face any difficulty in realising export bills," said a senior official of Sonali Bank.

BAPEX asked

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surprised all by asking BAPEX to sign a contract with Nico to study and develop the reserved gas fields in the country.

Nico Resources itself did not propose development of gas fields. Rather, it had proposed to the Ministry that it was interested in a joint study with BAPEX, provided it received CIDA funds, the sources said.

The Ministry had also instructed BAPEX to sign the joint venture agreements by Sunday.

Meanwhile a Canadian government delegation headed by Secretary of State Ramond Chan arrives today. Representatives of Nico Resources may also accompany the delegation.

However, due to technicalities, it would not be possible for BAPEX to meet the deadline, the sources said.

The Ministry's directive has already sent "wrong signals" to bigger joint ventures, specially with Malaysian national oil company Petronas, which had submitted a clear cut joint venture proposal with BAPEX, the sources said.

Energy experts say that the only chance for revamping BAPEX was to involve it in joint ventures with financially sound companies on competitive deals.

The country has a dozen reserved or ring fenced discovered gas fields, most of those in Block 9, kept out of the Second Round Bidding.

19 Chinese nationals deported

The government deported 19 Chinese nationals yesterday, five days after they had arrived here from Hong Kong, officials said, reports BSS.

The Chinese were detained on arrival at the Zia International airport as they failed to explain their purpose of visiting Bangladesh. They were interrogated by different agencies.

Immigration officials said the Chinese were sent back by a Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight.

Immigration officials, quoting the Chinese embassy officials, said the Chinese mission was not aware of their tour.

Crash programme

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lower priced Independent Private Power (IPP) projects at risk of not getting financing from lenders," one source said.

The banks' representatives also reminded the Secretary Bangladesh government's commitment to the Donors at the Paris Consortium meeting.

"At the Paris Consortium meet, the Government of Bangladesh pledged that all future IPPs would be implemented through a transparent bidding process and other prudent criteria, including (a) least cost generation plan, (b) international competitive bidding, (c) financial burden on GOB/PDB, balance of payments and foreign exchange reserves of the Bangladesh Bank," the source said.

Despite negative signals from the donors and cautious criticism from the government's own power experts, the higher authorities are pushing ahead with the crash programme.

It has been decided that power tariff under this programme would be 4.5 US cents per unit. "In contrast, the Meghnaghat and Haripur projects with a total capacity of 810 MW -- which are now in a stagnant state due to lack of government funds -- offer 2.79 cents and 2.72 cents respectively," the source pointed out.

Meanwhile, the 60 MW Mysmingsh power plant project, initiated in 1994 under the Rural Power Company (RPC), remains shelved since August last when a barge carrying the generators of the plant got stuck up in a shoal near Mysmingsh. Instead of salvaging that barge, the government recently asked RPC to go for second phase of the plant with the same contractor at about the same cost as that of the first phase.

Although experts pointed out that the cost of the second phase should be much less than that of the first phase and that the first phase needed to be completed first, the authorities are now processing the formalities for the second phase.

The Energy Ministry held a series of meetings with different private sector power companies last week and asked them to fill up a single-page form to begin the unsolicited negotiations.

Besides, the ministry is also going to negotiate with a Chinese firm for setting up a 210 MW power plant on supplier's credit, which is normally discouraged due to high rate of interest on it.

Nasim

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area is a restricted zone.

Assembly, rally, meeting or any other political programme on the Bagerhat surrounding area are not desirable, he said.

Nasim said he had telephone conversations with BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, MP, and BNP leader Morshed Khan, MP, and requested them to find out an alternative route.

The home minister assured them that the government would do everything possible to ensure smooth observance of the programme.

"Although it is an anti-government programme, we will take all measure for smooth conclusion of the programme," he said.

Nasim said he had already requested the state minister for shipping to arrange special ferries at Aricha-Nagarbari route for the road marchers, he said.

To a question, the home minister said BNP leaders requested him to withdraw the restriction and assured him of maintaining peace and discipline while crossing the bridge.

Nasim told the opposition leaders that despite their good intentions, some people might create a law and order situation at the key point in installation.

In recent times, law and order situation was created in different political programmes, he reminded the BNP leaders.

He said even on the day the Bangabandhu Bridge was inaugurated last year, Awami League organised its meeting outside the restricted area.

The ban was imposed "in public interest to bring the safety and security of the structure and its surrounding areas," Nasim said.

"Adequate number of ferries will be arranged at the Aricha-Nagarbari Ghat," he said and hoped the opposition party would understand the situation, considering the security of the bridge as well as public interests.

BNP to go ahead

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general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

Addressing a press briefing at 29 Minto Road, the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, in the evening he said the opposition parties had announced their road marches on May 3 and 4 and repeatedly said that the programme will be "very" peaceful and disciplined.

Termining the government's fear as a lame excuse, Bhuiyan said, "There is no scope of the government to prohibit us under any law of the country. There is no such law in the country to impose ban on the march. Even if the government cannot obstruct us by imposing Section 144 because all the vehicles of the road march will pass normally."

As per our earlier announced programme, Begum Zia will address a public gathering at Alenga under Tangail, on the eastern side of the bridge and another rally at Kadda in Sirajganj on the western side. Both

Two shot dead in Banskhal

CHITTAGONG, May 14: Two persons were killed and two others injured in separate incidents at Chanua in Banskhal thana, of the district yesterday, police said today, reports UNB.

Police said that one Yakub, 40, was shot dead on the spot in a clash between two rival groups. A man and a woman were injured in the incident. The injured persons were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Police said the two groups clashed over land dispute.

In another incident, dacots fired on a young man at Kadamarsal of Khabanchand union. He died on way to hospital. The victim Didarul Alam, 25, was killed for passing information to police about some dacots.

Govt would be wise

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has undertaken not to hold any public meetings anywhere near either side of the bridge and assured minister Nasim that no one will alight from the cars while the cars are on it. If there are additional conditions that need to be fulfilled to further guarantee the safety of the bridge then let the government place them before here could be limitations on how many vehicles could be on the bridge at a time. This number can easily be controlled through negotiations with the opposition.

We consider the initial offers of the BNP secretary general as constructive. We think the BNP can be made to take more precautionary measures through further talks. But everything will depend on the motive of the government, whether it is to safeguard the bridge or to foil the opposition's programme.

Finally we would like to point out that we want to sway the opposition away from calling hartals. To do so the opposition must be allowed to organise alternative programmes. They

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