

Media workshop in Khulna

UNDP-WB expert favours easy solution to arsenic contamination

KHULNA, July 13: UNDP-World Bank South Asia Water and Sanitation Programme expert A K Sengupta has favoured easy and cheaper solutions to the mass-scale arsenic contamination in the groundwater across Bangladesh, reports BSS.

He was addressing the inaugural session of the two-day Media Workshop on Arsenic organised by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNDP, Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB) and Khulna Press Club here on Sunday under Emergency Arsenic Contamination Mitigation Programme, FEJB Chairman Quamrul Islam Chowdhury presided.

Civil Surgeon of Khulna Dr Mohammad Sukuruddin Mridha, FEJB members Badul Alam, Bakhtiar Rana, Hasan Hafiz and Abdur Rahman Khan, Khulna Press Club President

Humayun Kabir Balu and general secretary Manik Saha also spoke. Sengupta gave an account of the state of arsenic contamination in the groundwater of West Bengal in India and a comparative picture in Bangladesh. He said detected in 1983, the spread-out is very little in West Bengal compared to the mass contamination in Bangladesh where it was detected much later.

The UNDP-WB expert said there are some pockets of arsenic in West Bengal but the spread-out in Bangladesh is very heavy.

He said in India people themselves have sealed the arsenic-tainted tube-wells even before the arrival of the officials of various agencies but in Bangladesh the number of arsenic affected tubewells is huge. Sengupta said water analy-

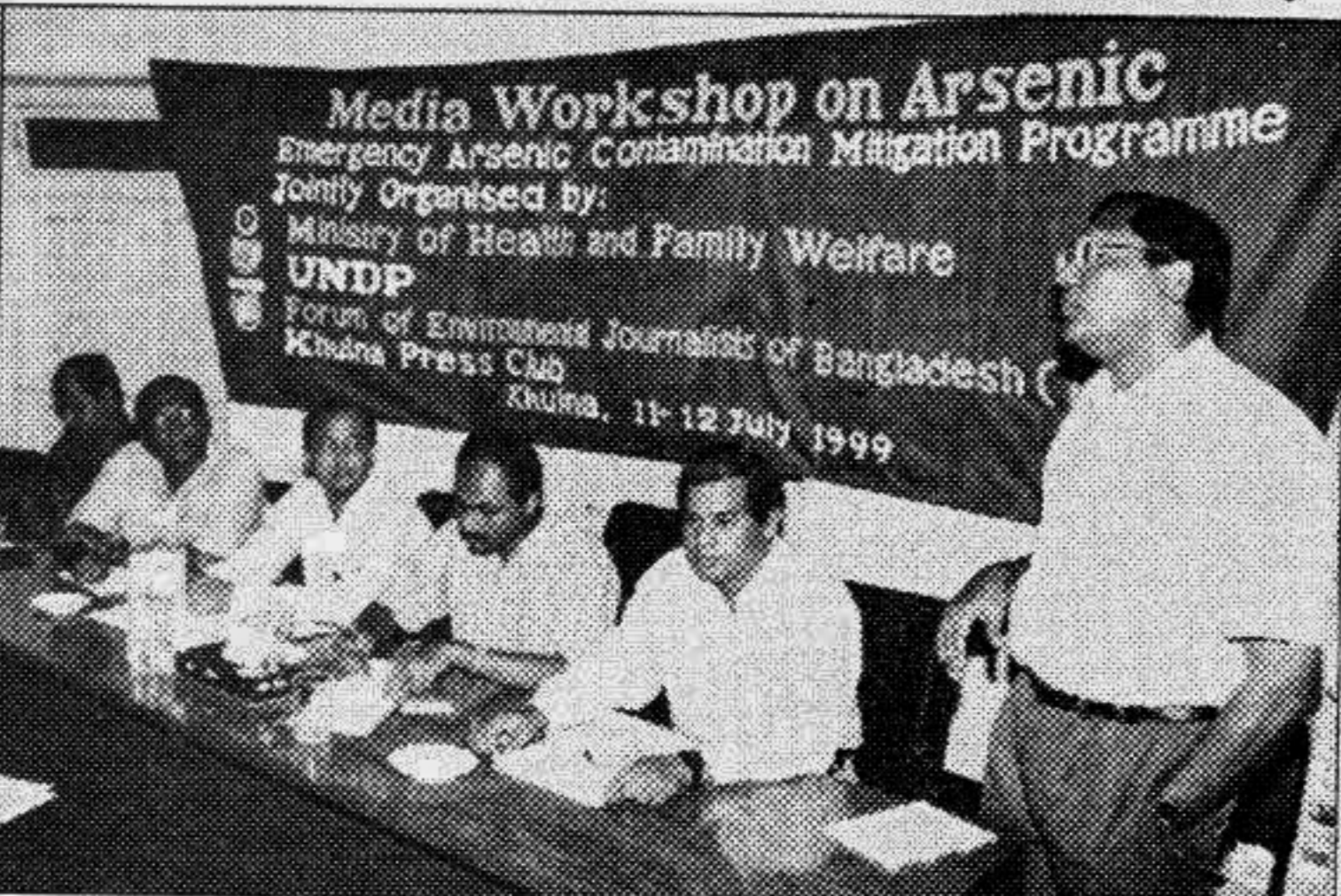
sis is a great problem and testing such a huge number of tube-wells is a big task for any agency in Bangladesh.

He said solution to the arsenic contamination problem lies either in going to the deeper sources of water side by side arsenic removal programme or alternative use of surface water.

Dr Mridha underscored the need for spreading health education among the masses to face the arsenic problem which has already hit 59 out of 64 districts.

Quamrul Chowdhury emphasised the need for collective efforts of the various agencies, professional groups and civil society bodies to mitigate this disaster-like problem.

A total of 26 local journalists and 15 Dhaka-based media took part in the workshop followed by a field trip to different areas of Khulna.



UNDP World Bank South Asia Water and Sanitation Programme expert AK Sen Gupta speaking at a two day media workshop on Arsenic organised by Health and Family Welfare Ministry, UNDP, FEJB and Khulna Press Club at Khulna on July 11-12.

An endless journey back to the capital

By Special Correspondent

It was an endless journey back to the city negotiating through a mess of traffic, moving on a lunar surface-like terrain of a road that links the capital with the south, including the Chittagong port.

It took an hour and a half for the rigorous ride on a motorbike from Chashara in Naryanganj. Normally the distance of only 17 km should take 15 minutes to negotiate. But it often lasts for more than two hours. This time can be reduced further if one is ready to risk a ride on the pavement or to even take the wrong side of the road.

When this correspondent along with a Daily Star photographer dared to negotiate the traffic yesterday afternoon on a motorcycle from Chashara, all kinds of challenges faced them as they tried to make back to the city on time.

The vehicles on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway were moving at a snail's pace. The reason for this is the badly damaged sections on the approaches to the city at Jatrabari and Sayedabad. The effect of digging and re-digging by sewerage and telephone companies alike had left its effect on the roads already wearied by the heavy traffic. Added to this was the monsoons which had set on before any repair work had been done on them.

It was nightmarish to find space between the meander of trucks and buses, their exhausts emitting heavy smoke of sulphur mostly because they were running on first gear.

All were forced to drive on first gear as the going was and the ride as bumpy as possible. Right from Jatrabari upto Hathkolia the pot-holed road was full of traffic and the choice was simple to reach the city, was to skip the traffic, take the wrong side or even a ride on the pavement, following the examples of others.

We followed their cue. But riding on the pavement near the Hardeo only invited more trouble as the condition of the path was no better than the roads. At one place near the community centre at Hardeo glass factory next to a childrens park, the place had been turned into a convenient open air public toilet. Even the rickshaw peddlers avoided the mess.

The only other choice left seemed to be the use of the wrong side of the road. The traffic policemen were simply helpless to stop the madness on the part of everyone. The city seemed far away as everyone tried to find a swift, and faster way back to the city.

The Chief Engineer of the Water Development Board (WDB), Abu Taher Chowdhury said in 24 hours between July 10 and 11, water level of the Gumti rose by two metres due to 370 mm rainfall in the upstream in Tripura of India in the same period.

Shafigu Alam Sarkar, an engineer of the WDB said he was in charge of 35 kilometres of the 74 kilometre long embankment. "At present we are manning 23 vulnerable spots on the embankment," Sarkar said. The Gumti starts from Kakraon in India and meets the Meghna at Daudkandi.

Victims of the flood alleged that there was no warning whatsoever from the local administration who knew that the dyke might give in to the pressure. They said after the inlet gave in, it was announced from some mosques' loudspeakers.

The meeting urged the people to make success the Opposition's July 16 country-wide protest day against the "conspiracy to stop Islamic education."

BNP leader Abdus Salam, Jamaat-e-Islami leaders Abdul Qader Mollah, ATM Azharul Islam and Jashimuddin Sarkar, JP leader Golam Mostafa and IOJ leaders ARM Abdul Matin and Moulana Emdadul Haq Arahazari attended the meeting, chaired by BNP leader M Shamsul Islam MP.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement yesterday also condemned allotment of Rajuk plots to ruling party men depriving 13,000 applicants.

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Reinstated in job after sixteen years

Chowdhury Sanwar Ali, former Deputy Secretary of the Home Ministry, was reinstated in his job on Monday after 16 years following the decision of the review committee set up at the order of the High Court.

Sanwar Ali was given forced retirement in 1983 during the Martial Law regime of Ershad when he was Director of Rural Development Board. He filed a writ petition in the High Court Division in 1997 challenging the validity of forced retirement order of 1983 Martial Law government.

A High Court Division bench comprising Justice K M Hasan and Justice Tozazzal Islam ordered the government to form a forum to review the petition of Chowdhury Sanwar Ali. A high-powered review committee formed at the order of the High Court Division bench gave a decision of reinstating Sanwar Ali with his service seniority and all arrears salaries. The decision was approved by the President.

Sanwar Ali after suffering an ordeal of 16 years got back his job and joined it on July 12, 1999. Freedom Fighter Sanwar Ali is the second son of late Abul Fazal Chowdhury of Habiganj and elder brother of Freedom Fighter Dr CM Delwar Rana, Vice President of BMA and Deputy Director of BIRDEM.

Obituary

Abdul Ghani Akanda, an ex-sanitary inspector died of old age ailment at his village home at Bargaon of Trishal under Mymensingh district recently. He was 95, says a press release.

The deceased left behind his wife, four sons, 2 daughters and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

An Islamic thinker, writer and social worker late Ghani was the vice president of the managing committee of Bargaon Dakhil Madrasah, Trishal, Mymensingh till his death.

JP leader Nurunnabi Chand dies

Former state minister and Jatiya Party leader Nurunnabi Chand died yesterday at Bangladesh Medical College and Hospital in the city, reports UNB.

Suffering from liver cirrhosis for quite a long time, the JP leader breathed his last at 8:15 am at the hospital, JP sources said.

After his *namaz-e-janaza* at Dhanmondi, Baitul Aman Mosque in the afternoon, his body was sent to his home district Rajshahi for burial.

Shameless

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dence, sovereignty as well as Islamic values and national wealth will be protected by the party whose members can not restrain the greed for 301 plots, the meeting observed.

The ruling Awami League will continue grabbing national wealth so long it remains in power, it said and called upon the people to participate in the current anti-government agitation to topple it.

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BNP brought out a procession yesterday protesting the 'false' cases filed against Sadek Hossain Khoka MP and several other party activist.

Ershad tells BSS

Hartal is a means of embarrassing the govt

Former President and Jatiya Party Chief Lt. Gen. (ret'd) Hussain Muhammad Ershad yesterday expressed his dissonance over the politics of hartal and said his party was compelled to call hartal as it belonged to the four-party opposition alliance.

"I am not in favour of hartal and I will never be so in future. But hartal is a means of embarrassing the government and am doing this as part of the alliance's programme," the JP (Ershad-Nazim) chief explained in an exclusive interview with national news agency BSS at his posh Baridhara party office.

He talked to the interviewers soon after his return from the court where he attended a hearing of a case pending against him.

Referring to the opposition alliance, Gen. Ershad, who is still facing a number of corruption and other charges, claimed they have united against the government. "But it will depend on the attitude of the government how long the (opposition) unity continues," he explained. The former army general, who was in prison for nearly six years, said every party has to go for coalition to form a government in the future. "As part of the alliance we are now waging movement simultaneously from our platform and JP will take its own course of action depending on the situation," he added.

Replying to a question on the benefit he derived from Awami League soon after his release from prison, his "public and unconditional" support to it and the subsequent sudden shifting from the camp, the former military dictator said Jatiya Party wants to play the role of a "real opposition" in every field.

"I never did politics as the agent of Awami League nor I am pursuing political tailism of

BNP now. My party has done many things independently.

He remarked, "the present parliament has contributed nothing. MPs themselves are showing their disinterest to attend parliament sessions and people feel shy to listen to their parliamentary discussions."

Gen. Ershad, reflecting his own views on socio-political and economic condition of the country and his party's programme, predicted that no party would get absolute majority in the general elections in future.

Referring to the killing of a police constable on the eve of the recent hartal, Gen. Ershad said he was "very much shocked" about the incident. None from my party hurled the bomb to the police constable," he said cautiously avoiding the question of hurling of bomb from a BNP procession.

Gen. Ershad said he was always against terrorism, bombing and hartal. He also criticised the ruling party for bringing out anti-hartal procession that, he claimed, leads to terrorism and bombing. The former military dictator, however, did not say anything about alleged terrorism of the opposition parties in enforcing hartals.

Seemingly frustrated, Gen. Ershad lamented, "It will be impossible to live any more in this country if no qualitative political changes take place immediately". He, however, did not say that he has started to think to leave the country as and when it is required.

Gen. Ershad observed that there was no qualitative difference between the presidential and parliamentary forms of government. All past presidents and prime ministers, as an executive head in both the systems, earned the title of 'tyrants', he remarked.

DU Senate members suggest Raise income to upgrade standard of education

By DU Correspondent

Members of the Dhaka University (DU) Senate yesterday underscored the need for increasing the source of income of the university for upgrading the standard of education and research activities.

Terming the university's source of income very limited, they suggested the DU authorities to take up the issue sincerely so that the income and resources could be increased from the next academic session.

Many members of the DU Senate also observed that the country's various educational institutions, including the DU, was going down day by day. If we failed to take necessary measures and couldn't assure accountability of teachers, they observed that the down trend of education standard would continue.

Addressing the Senate session, some members alleged that many teachers of DU were engaged in consultancy outside the university hampering their academic activities.

Teachers, those who are involved in consultancy outside the university by hampering their academic duties, should be terminated from the university and sent to the schools," blasted Prof Mostafa Chowdhury who is also the Chairman of Public Service Commission (PSC).

He also said immediate measures should be taken to upgrade the standard of education in various educational institutions across the country. Prof Chowdhury also felt the necessity of nationalising the education and urged the government for taking the responsibilities of education to keep the pace with the ever changing world. He emphasised on increasing the internal resources of DU.

Advocate Syed Ahmed also urged the DU authorities to look into the consultancy issue as there is allegation that the teachers were engaged outside the university by harming their academic duties. He said many teachers are engaged in consultancy beside their academic duties and are not giving the due share of their income to the university which is a violation of university rules.

Replying to Syed Ahmed, the DU Vice-Chancellor Prof AK Azad Chowdhury told the Senate that the university in the out-going session earned Tk five lakh as share of income of teachers consulting beside their

Nepotism in plot allotment

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net ministers, 62 ruling party MPs, seven officials of the prime minister's office and more than one hundred relatives of Awami League leaders.

It took Rajuk about 18 months to pick the 301 individuals out of 13,000 applicants. According to Rajuk official sources, the selection of these 'lucky individuals' took place in several mock phases. The whole process shows how a few people who have access to the corridors of power are always pampered and get the upper hand over others.

Former minister for housing and public works' Mohammad Nasim had first prepared a list which contained names of his children. But when Engineer Mosharrar Hossain took over the ministry in March, he scrapped Nasim's list and drew one of his own.

The lucky ones

Who are those lucky ones that got plots? In a most blatant way, Minister for Housing and Public Works' Engineer Mosharrar Hossain did not deprive himself from owning a plot. His motto must have been that when you distribute something, start it with yourself.

Others in the cabinet who got plots are: Forest and Environment Minister Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs' Kalpa Ranjan Chakma, State Minister for Health Prof M Amanullah, State Minister for Religious Affairs' Moulana Nurul Islam, State Minister for Education Satish Chandra Roy, State Minister for Textiles AKM Jahangir Hossain, Deputy Minister for Education Zinatunnesa Talukder, and Deputy Minister for Industries Hasibur Rahman Swapan.

Communication Minister Anwar Hossain Manjuf's daughter Monjia Rahman also got a piece of Rajuk land. Officials of the prime minister's office (PMO) and their relatives who got plots are: Fahima Khan, wife of PM's private secretary (2) Abdul Mukadir Chowdhury; AFS F M Ba-huddin and Md Ibrahim Hossain Khan; PM's personal assistant Manu Majumder; PM's protocol officer Alauddin Ahmed Chowdhury; Nargis Begum, wife of former DPS Abul Alam Md Shahid Khan; Sowad Khan, son of PM's press secretary Jawadul Karim; and Sultana Nargis, wife of PM's political officer.

Other officials who also got plots are: Md Nuruzzaman Bhuiyan, private secretary to LGRD Minister Zillur Rahman; Mostafizur Rahman, public relations officer of works' ministry; Md Rehanul Islam, APS to Home Minister Mohammad Kamal Abul Nasser Chowdhury; PS to Environment Minister Sajeda Chowdhury; Md Yakub Ali Patwari, PS to former home minister.

Of the 66 MPs who got plots, only two, Ziaul Haque Zia and Nazimuddin Alam, belong to BNP. Golam Faruq Ovi of JP and Kazi Shamsur Rahman of Jamaat are also among the lucky winners. The rest of the MPs belong to AL.

President of AL leaders who got plots, include: Md Kamruzzaman and Abdul Jalil, members of AL presidium, Nurul Majid Humayun, president of Jubo League, Siddiqui Rouf Khan, central assistant office secretary of AL, Lutful Hye Sachhu, an AL leader of Brahmanbaria, Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury and Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser of Chittagong, Ferdous Zaman Mukul of Bogra, Nurul Islam Thahur and Mahubul Zaman Bhuiyan of Rajshahi, Mostafizur Khan of Manikganj, Fulu Sarkar of Jubo League, Kazi Iqbal Hossain, general secretary of Jubo League, Md Lutfur Rahman of Gaibandha, SM Mannan, Nurul Amin of Awami Shechhashebak League, Mukul Bose, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Prof Nazma Rahman, and Sheikh Md Abdullah.

President of AL Laxmipur district AKM Shajahan Kamal, president, Manikganj district AL Golam Mohiuddin, president, Jhenaidah district AL Ayub Hossain, president Gaibandha district AL Lutfur Rahman, General secretary of Chittagong(South) district AL Mosleh Uddin, Noakhali district president of AL Moham-mad Hanif, Gopalganj district AL president Sheikh Moham-mad Abdullah and former general secretary of Sakthira district AL Monsur Ahmed also got plots.

More allottees include Gopalganj AL leader Akram Uddin Ahmed, general secretary of Awami Jubo League city unit (North) Sardar Belayetur Hossain Mukul, former Chhatra League leaders Dr Mosaddek Hossain, Kazi Mizanur Rahman Minto, Abdur Razzak and Mahfuza Chowdhury, wife of former Chhatra League leader

AL terrorists killed

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He said the government since its assumption of power has used the police forces against the opposition and is now trying to confront them to stay in power illegally. Chowdhury said it is Awami League, which has a past record of attacks on police and cited newspaper reports to substantiate his position.

Referring to distribution of government plot, he said the Awami League leaders and activists have started grabbing the wealth of the republic and its people after assuming power. In recent times, they have expedited the process and plot distribution as part of it.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in his speech warned that they would paralyse the country if false cases against Khoka and others are not withdrawn immediately.

Describing the July 7 inci-

dent, he said the BNP that brought out a torch procession that evening ended near Golap Shah mazar much before the murder took place. Besides, the bomb explosion occurred at Zero point when no processionist was present in the area.

Bhuiyan categorically alleged that terrorists of the ruling party exploded the bomb and they came from the Awami League central office. "Real culprits will be identified if the incident is investigated by a judicial body," he said and demanded constitution of a judicial probe committee and compensation for the bomb victims.

"Our movement is not against the police...our movement is against the misuse of the Awami League government," he said and added that the government is trying to confront us with the police to fish in the troubled water.

On Friday, several men belonging to Nasim's list went to Rajuk chairman and had exchange of 'angry words' with him.

Multiple ownership?

As per Rajuk rule any one already owning a plot can not apply for an additional one. Every applicant is therefore required to declare in writing that he or she does not own any land or house. But sources said most of the beneficiaries of this allotment are 'indirect owners' of one or more houses in the capital. In one case involving the son of a city leader of Awami League, he recently changed the name of the ownership house at Banani to his mother's name. It is reported that the house was being constructed on land filled from the Gulshan lake.

The Minister for Forest and Environment, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury was one of the lucky allottees of a Nikunja plot, the new Rajuk announcement also contains her name as a beneficiary in Gulshan. Officials said she has expressed her willingness to retain the Gulshan plot instead of the one in Nikunja.

About Uttara, the sources said majority of the plots are already out of Rajuk's hand as hundreds of court cases are now pending.

Public outrage

Rajuk sources said since Friday, they were constantly being 'teased and sworn at' by people ringing them up.

Rajuk chairman said more plots would be allotted within the next one month or so. When asked how the selection committee worked out such a 'discriminatory' selection, the chairman replied, "there were more applications from the Awami League than anywhere else."

He quoted the existing law and said the law did not have any provision for lottery system in selecting the allottees. "The law says that genuine and deserving people would be given plots," he said.

Many Rajuk officials expressed their dismay over the 'politicising' of the allotment process. They said there must be a judicial inquiry committee to investigate how it was done.

Officials cited a similar practice was done in 1979 when 200 plots were allotted by Rajuk to BNP leaders. They said in 1981 all those allocations were cancelled after an inquiry committee revealed gross irregularity in the process.

Promises broken?

Meanwhile, Karmachari Sangsad of Rajuk yesterday brought out a procession chanting slogans against the Rajuk chairman. They claimed that the chairman had given them assurances that they would get plots which they did not get. Agitated employees pounded on the door of the chairman's office.

Sandbags

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ern, southern and eastern suburbs of Dhaka city and the Chashara railway station.

The DND embankment was designed and built in 1960s as an irrigation project to help farmers in the flood plains.

But it has become a flood protection wall, saving some 600,000 people who have raised their homes in the flood plains over the years, taking over the rice fields.

The area is part of greater Dhaka city and is threatened by the Shitalakhyia, Balu and Buriganga rivers every year.

Last year, local people joined the Army, police, Ansars and engineers in a battle to protect the embankment with sand bags.

As Mujibur supervised his workers, Maya Rani, a Proshika employee came forward from a crowd that was observing preparation of the bags.

"Why they have started the work during monsoon and just when the water levels are rising in the rivers?" she asked.

"Perhaps it helps them recover the money they have to pay to get the contracts," she said.

"Procedural delay in awarding the contract is responsible," said Mujibur Rahman in a sort of self-explanation. WDB sources said shortage of funds delayed the work. The money has been managed as part of an emergency programme to repair the damaged section of the DND embankment before the fury of flood begins alter this month, they said.

Is another lake filling in the offing?

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Meanwhile, allotment of 59 plots in Gulshan-Banani areas sparked concern among people that the nearby lake would have to be filled up because those plots do not exist at all. Of the 301 plots allotted, 59 are in Gulshan. Rajuk officials say that there is no land from which these plots can be handed over unless the lake area is filled or parks in the vicinity are converted into residential plots. It may be recalled here that 35 plots allotted during BNP time are yet to be handed over as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina put a ban on filling of low lying areas and lakes. Officials wonder how land can be found for these people without breaking the provisions of the Dhaka Master Plan.

A new list under process

Another RAJUK source said that the ministry of public works was considering a proposal for preparing a new list of allottees in Gulshan-Banani-Uttara to the applicants who did not get any plot this time. At least 2000 acres of land would have to be acquired for the plan but RAJUK does not have the required estimated amount of taka one thousand crore for this, the source mentioned. Though RAJUK failed to hand over plots to some 300 allottees in Barabara, J Block who got the allotment in 1999.

Sources said after the name of the allottees were announced