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Down to Earth

City's Depleting Playgrounds, Canals and Water Bodies

By A S M Nurunnabi

Our city is already plagued with a number of serious problems, namely traffic jam, air pollution, mugging, terrorism, hartals. Another equally sinister problem has recently been added to these ones. The new problem is acute scarcity of playgrounds for children and other young people of the city.

The impact of such a dearth of playing fields on the mental and physical growth of the rising generation is very much obvious; particularly the adolescents and the young groups are so much affected by the absence of such facilities that they turn to activities which tend to erode the moral values in their upbringing. The demand for playgrounds in the city has, therefore, assumed a critical dimension for the urban society.

The previous picture in this behalf was quite different. There were quite a good number of playgrounds and open spaces where the children and youths from adjoining areas of the city could hold their plays and games.

Such facilities have fallen victims to commercial interests of those having control over them, such as the City Corporation, private owners, or government bodies who have taken up construction of shopping complexes, housing projects and other similar enterprises.

Even the small parks previously set up in some wards of the Corporation for the children of those localities have since ceased to exist on account of unauthorised occupation in many cases for use of impromptu shops or they have become haunts of anti-social elements or are unfit for use as

playgrounds for children on account of their derelict condition.

Similarly, if we look back to the recent past, it may be recalled that young groups belonging to Captain Bazar, Siddik Bazar, Ali Bazar, Paltan, Fakirapool, Arambagh, Tikatuli, and Gopibagh used to play on the then Paltan Maidan. Now that Maidan has shrunk into a narrow strip of land.

A big part of the Paltan Maidan has been used up for building the Hockey Stadium, where the prime consideration is to set up a good many shops of electronic commodities. Owing to its becoming a busy business centre attracting large numbers of customers with their transports jamming the available limited space for parking, very little is left of open space where a sizeable part of rising generation belonging to those areas has any scope for playing games or sports.

It is only during hartals, the traffic-free roads and streets and open lanes and by-lanes offer some opportunities to the young players in these areas to play cricket or football for a limited time.

The same afflictions hit the lakes and rivers in and around the capital. It has been reported that a network of 22 canals that used to form the natural drainage for the capital from the olden times have disappeared or shrunk over the last four decades.

The disappearance of the canal network has not only aggravated the city's drainage problem, but also, apart from depriving the city of its natural beauty, has been causing loss of the annual recharge of ground

water beneath the city, thereby leading to the fall of ground water table, as recent surveys have shown.

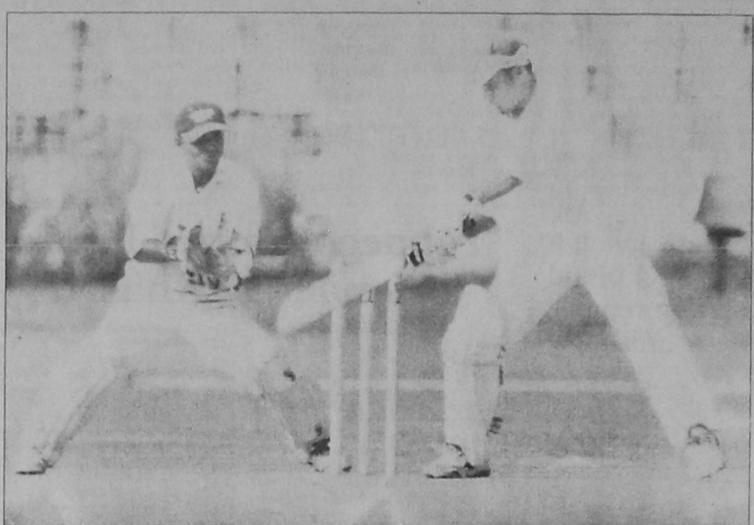
Among the city canals, the Dholai Khal, which once used to be the artery of an important navigational route for country boats has almost disappeared due to four decades of wrong policies of the city administration to construct roads by closing the canal.

Other important khals of the city, such as the Segunbagicha Khal that extended from Shahbagh to the Jirani Khal, the Begunbari Khal extending from Dhanmondi lake to Trimuhini via Rampura emptying into the Balu river, the Ibrahimpur canal, the Kathabagan-Rajarbagh canal, the Gopibagh canal together with other minor canals of the city were all victims of either illegal encroachments, or acquisition for construction of either roads, box culverts, or underground drains.

All these projects have changed the original purposes which the old network of canals was meant to serve.

The classic story of Buriganga's gradual decay has not yet revealed if any remedial steps would be taken for saving the dying river from the large-scale pollution of the river waters from industrial wastes from tanneries and other causative factors, coupled with unchecked encroachments on parts of the river and its banks.

The overall impact of these environmentally ruinous developments, unless checked as early as possible for possible redemption, may pose dire predicament for the city life.



Naimur Rahman of Abahani cuts during the Premier Division Cricket League match against Mohammedan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday (Story on Page 13). — Star photo

JCD, BCL programmes at RU today

RAJSHAHI, Mar 31: Vice-chancellor of Rajshahi University Prof Saïdur Rahman has urged the student organisations to shun the path of movement and resolve their problems through discussion with the authorities for the sake of congenial academic atmosphere, reports UNB.

He gave the call ahead of week-long programmes by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Bangladesh Chhatra League beginning tomorrow in support of their respective demands that include withdrawal of enhanced admission fees for first year students.

BCL also demands construction. — See page 11 col 8

New Dakhil syllabus by June Computer, agri edn to be made compulsory

By Asad-uz Zaman

The Madrassah Education Board has initiated a move to introduce a modern curriculum for Dakhil students.

"We are giving more emphasis on technical and other subjects in preparing a syllabus for Dakhil students," a highly placed source at the Board told The Daily Star yesterday. Computer and agricultural studies will be made compulsory in the proposed curriculum, he said.

About 1.5 lakh students come out of madrassahs in the country every year with little knowledge about modern science and technology.

"Separate syllabus for every subject will be prepared by June. If we can prepare the syllabuses in time and print books, the new curriculum will be introduced from 2001," the source added.

There will be three groups — science, humanities and business studies — at Dakhil level like the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) curriculum.

"Our aim is to bring the Dakhil curriculum at par with that SSC so that madrassah

students can compete with others".

He pointed out that Alem level madrassah students are studying science and other subjects which are almost equivalent to the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level. Many students after passing Alem examinations get admission at BUET, medical colleges and the universities through competitive tests, he mentioned.

Asked whether the new syllabus would be acceptable to madrassah teachers and students, the official of the Board's Academic Council which includes madrassah teachers has already approved the plan to amend the curriculum. If necessary, there will be a national workshop on the issue.

He agreed with the correspondent that there will be crisis of trained teachers in introducing the new curriculum as the madrassah teachers now teach only religious subjects.

Teachers having B. Sc and B. Com degrees will be trained to teach science and commerce subjects, he said.

UNIDO to help process tannery wastes

A UN-agency aided profitable venture will process tannery wastes at Hazaribagh, weighing an estimated 28,000 tons a year, reports UNB.

Under the government project, the huge untanned solid wastes generated by the tanning industry would be treated into by-products that would earn profit for the national exchequer on one hand and check pollution on the other.

According to a recent estimate, about 70,000 tons of raw hides and skins are processed in the Hazaribagh tanneries a year.

And the quantity of untanned solid wastes, namely raw trimming, wet limed fleshing, pelt-trimming generated in this leather hub is estimated 28,000 tons.

"The disposal of the heaps of wastes which are susceptible to bacterial attacks poses a serious threat to the environment," the project survey says.

Officials said at the request of the government, the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation under a project is assisting tanneries to sustain, possibly expand, without causing unnecessary environmental degradation.

One of the outputs envisaged under the project is the preparation of a comprehensive design for a pilot demonstration plant to utilise the untanned solid wastes.

Dr DVR Prakash Rao, a veterinarian and animal nutritionist, was engaged in studying the untanned solid waste scenario, make recommendations for the utilisation of the wastes and prepare a comprehensive design for a pilot demonstration plant together with specifications of equipment required and a cost-benefit analysis.

The expert visited the Hazaribagh tannery hub and recommended extraction of glue of fleshing meal as the most feasible option.

In many countries, the untanned solid wastes generated by the tanning industry are utilised to produce a variety of commercially valuable products such as glue, fleshing meal and dog chews.

Fleshing meal, being a protein-rich substance, is used in the preparation of poultry feed. The total cost of the project designed to produce 3,000 tons

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Sikhs, Hindus vow to fight terrorism in Kashmir

CHATI SINGHPURA, India, Mar 31: Nearly 10,000 Sikhs and Hindus prayed and vowed to fight terrorism as they converged on this Kashmir village where suspected separatist militants massacred 35 Sikhs during US President Bill Clinton's visit to India, reports AP.

Traveling from nearby northern states of Punjab, Haryana and New Delhi, the Sikhs and Hindus joined the bereaved families at a religious ceremony held in a Sikh temple marking the end of the mourning period.

They offered flowers and bowed their heads in prayer. Indian police say the attack on March 20 was carried out by 17 gunmen, mostly infiltrators from Pakistan along with

Kashmiri militants. They lined up men and gunned them down, leaving their bodies strewn outside the village's Sikh's temple. The village is about 70 kilometers from Srinagar, Kashmir's summer capital.

The attack cast a shadow on Clinton's visit to India and Pakistan last week. Both countries claim Kashmir and have gone to war twice over the Himalayan territory.

Today, most shops, businesses, schools and banks in Jammu-Kashmir and Punjab states remained closed in response to a call for general strike given by Sikh organisations to pay homage to those killed by the suspected militants.

Top Sikh leaders from Sikh-majority Punjab state, including

Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, Jagir Kaur and Gurcharan Singh Tohra, addressed nearly 6,000 Sikh residents of Chati Singhpura in an orchard outside the village and advised them against leaving Jammu-Kashmir state.

Thousands of Hindus have fled the Kashmir valley and migrated to neighbouring states following attacks by the Islamic militants since the outbreak of insurgency in 1989.

Nearly 50,000 Sikhs live in Jammu-Kashmir state but they had never been targeted by the militants. The March 20 killing was the first major attack on the Sikh community.

Jammu-Kashmir state is the only Muslim majority state in a predominantly Hindu India.

MP's son sued under PSA

COMILLA, Mar 31: A case was filed with local police under the Public Safety Act against the son of a ruling party MP here on Thursday, reports UNB.

Police said Motaher Hossain, sub-assistant engineer of Chowddagram Thana Public Health Engineering Department office, filed the case against Mainul Hassan, son of Abdul Hakim MP of Comilla-7, and three of his accomplices.

They were charged with toll collection and snatching a timber-laden truck on Wednesday.

In his case, the plaintiff alleged that the four men demanded a huge amount of toll from him when he started constructing a house on his own land at Badurtala adjacent to the residence of the MP.

The timbers, which were being taken to a local sawmill, were later recovered by police along with the truck.

Sharjah

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bring the Proteas back in the game after the loss of two early wickets. Mark Boucher was batting on 35.

Earlier, a sparkling century stand by openers Inran Nazir and Shahid Afridi lifted Pakistan to 263 for six from 50 overs.

The pair rattled up 123 by the 22nd over after captain Moin Khan won his fifth successive toss in the tournament and elected to take first strike.

The middle-order lost its way before Inzamam-ul Haq smashed 53 to leave the South Africans chasing a victory target of more than five runs an over.

The 18-year-old Nazir smashed seven boundaries and two sixes in his 69. Afridi made 52 off 48 balls studded with five fours and a six.

Downing of naval plane Pakistan to sue India before World Court

AMSTERDAM, Mar 31: Pakistan will sue India before the World Court on Monday for shooting down one of its naval planes last year, killing 16 people, reports Reuters.

Pakistan is asking the International Court of Justice in The Hague to rule that air force India was responsible for bringing down its surveillance aircraft, the Atlantic, on August 10.

It wants India to pay compensation to Pakistan and to the families of the dead personnel, most of them young trainees.

The incident, termed an 'act of military aggression' by Pakistan, heightened tension between the neighbouring countries just a month after they pulled back from the brink of war over the disputed Himalayan region of Kashmir.

Pakistan says the aircraft was in its air space when India fired air-to-air missiles. It also says Indian helicopters sneaked into Pakistan to pick up crash debris in an effort to convince others the Atlantic had been in Indian air space.

India says the plane intruded into its airspace and was fired on after warnings were given, so Pakistan is to blame.

The World Court is the main judicial organ of the United Nations and settles disputes between states in accordance with international law.

Its decisions are binding and without appeal.

However, before the court can rule, it must first decide whether it has jurisdiction over the case at all.

India argues the World Court's judges do not have jurisdiction, citing a so-called reservation it filed in 1974 to exclude disputes between India and other Commonwealth

10 yrs in rubbish

SARREGUEMINES, Mar 31: A 60-year-old Frenchwoman and her mentally handicapped daughter have been taken into local authority care after being found living in a house containing 10 years of accumulated rubbish, reports AFP.

According to local health officials, the rubbish — consisting of old clothes, furniture and household waste — was piled up half way to the ceiling in all eight rooms.

The pair lived without water, telephone, heating or proper sanitation, and ate outside using a bin as a fridge. They only entered the house — which was infested with rats — at night to sleep.

Local people at their village in northeast France said they delivered their rubbish to the two women because they said they were interested in it.



Garments workers yesterday staged a token sit-in in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the city to press their demand for weekly holiday on Friday. — Star photo

DAP import tripled because of fall in urea production

By Reaz Ahmad

Rapid increase in import of DAP (diammonium phosphate) fertiliser has minimized the pressure of growing demand for urea this year.

Official sources confirmed a production shortfall of urea by at least four lakh tons this financial year but it was well covered by import of DAP, a fertiliser popular among farmers for its multi-purpose use. DAP contains 18 per cent urea and 46 per cent phosphate.

Since its introduction in fiscal 1997-98 under a government initiative, yearly import of DAP tripled to one and a half lakh tonnes so far this year, importers told The Daily Star.

The government had first imported 50,000 tonnes of DAP, part of which was carried over to the following financial year. IRRI-Boro season is the peak time for use of fertiliser.

Production of urea by the state-run factories will reach a little over 17 lakh tonnes, targeted for the current financial

year, against a demand for 22 lakh tonnes, official sources said.

The production target was lowered this year as some of the urea factories have become old. The factories usually produced over 20 lakh tons a year earlier.

Use and import of DAP picked up at a galloping rate during the current IRRI-Boro season because of its good performance last year, importers said.

Encouraged by the tremendous success of DAP in the country, the government has meantime sought Chinese assistance to set up a DAP factory, officials said.

BDR on alert in some border areas

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) has been put on alert in the bordering areas of some northern districts following Monday's clash at Tetulia that left an BSF member killed, BDR officials said.

Besides, tension mounted along northern border following abduction of a farmer from Kurigram by BSF on Thursday. BDR officials said Indian side has not yet agreed to have a meeting in connection with the abduction despite being officially informed of this.

Earlier, BDR and BSF had a high level three-day meeting in Khulna since Tuesday and both the sides agreed to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in bordering areas.

The two country's joint border survey has been postponed due to 'the prevailing tense situation in some bordering areas, sources added.

Pakistan

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cannot resume until Pakistan creates the right atmosphere.

It says this entails calling a halt to 'cross-border terrorism in Kashmir and to hostile propaganda against its neighbour.

Pakistan denies that it provides anything more than moral, political and diplomatic support for the cause of self-determination in India's Jammu and Kashmir state, where a separatist rebellion has raged for a decade.

India controls about 45 per cent of the disputed Himalayan territory comprising the regions of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. Pakistan holds just over a third of the territory and China controls the remainder.

Faster reform linked

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Since the donors would prefer to concentrate in Paris on substantive dialogue on development issues, they felt that it would be more useful to provide available information on development assistance to you now, rather than in Paris, the letter said.

Kibria said at a press briefing yesterday that the bulging pipeline is not necessarily the failure of the government or the donors.

"Both government and donor procedures are complicated and time consuming. There are many rigid requirements by the donors and they are not released unless these are met fully," the minister said.

He also said that the government would pursue the policy of transparency, accountability and quick implementation of programmes. "But no revolutionary changes should be expected. Although it will be an election year, there is no logical reason for reforms to slow down next year. The opposition parties are also aware about the need for reforms and they should not block the process. Those who act to slow down reforms do not want the country's development."

While appreciating the financial minister's request for indications of aid availability to facilitate the government's budgetary planning, the donors noted that they plan their development assistance programmes through consultations with the government at different times during the year and, therefore, the Economic Relations Division already has the information needed for such planning.

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