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Down to Earth Vanishing Wetland Scenario Around the City

By A S M Nurunnabi

Dhaka city once flushed waste water through as many as 22 canals, built decades back as part of a thoughtful city planning. The major canals like the Dholai Khal, Narindia Khal, Seagun Bagicha Khal used to carry waste water and pollutants from the city in a continued flow, emptying the contents in the Buriganga, the Sutakhal, the Balu and Turag rivers that encircle the city.

The scenario today is completely changed with the strong race for land grabbing and the expansion of the city in all directions. In an unplanned manner, as the inevitable fall-out of the development frenzy, the canals and wetlands are being filled up for construction of roads and markets, and multi-storied apartments. These are being done without making alternative arrangements for the flushing of waste and excess rain on flash flood water from the city proper. Not only is the shrinking landscape distorting the pre-existing land's characteristic features, it is threatening the environment and causing ecological imbalance as well.

The continuous flow of people from rural areas to the capital city has called for more space to accommodate the new arrivals, and the city authorities are found filling up canals and wetlands as the only solution left to meet the immediate need, unaware of the long-term

effect of such an injudicious planning. The apparent lack of any long-term plan regarding saving the low-lying lands from the clutches of developers, or re-commissioning the old canals to solve the water-logging problem, have led experts to apprehend that all these factors may cause natural death of the city's neighbourhood very soon.

If the city of Dhaka is to be saved, there is hardly enough time left before it collapses under its own weight, as keen observers are prompt to point out. In their opinion, there is hardly any scope for the city fathers to indulge themselves in any form of complacency about their neglect or indifference in taking appropriate remedial measures.

In this context, some specific problems may be mentioned. The river of yesteryears known as the Begunbari Khal and its adjoining canals and creeks that form the wetlands in the area, once used to serve as a water route for country boats. These boats laden with merchandise used to sail to and from the outskirts of the metropolis. These wetlands are shrinking every year due to encroachment.

An expert in town planning has observed that some projects of a few prominent housing companies have large areas of wetlands developed on the basis of the notion that wetlands were 'wastelands' without real-

ising that filling up the wetlands not only damages a serene environment but also further exacerbates the drainage problem by blocking the big outlets. Complete environmental impact assessments should have been done before allowing projects in such large areas of wetlands acquired by housing companies.

Senior town planners have said the housing projects in such large areas of wetlands have changed the physical character of those areas. Such projects were however, developed before the adoption of the new Master Plan for Dhaka in 1997, which prohibits changing the physical character of land areas in the metropolis.

RAJUK was reportedly trying to prevent grabbing the vast remaining wetlands as per a directive given by the government two years ago. It has however, proved to be a difficult task and cannot be ensured without the cooperation of all concerned, including the inhabitants and owners of such lands.

Thus we see, as Dhaka continues to expand haphazardly, the wetlands in and around the city gradually yielding to the even increasing demand of the developers. The ambitious private sector developers and imperious housing planners in the government are all contributing to the fast disappearance of such lands.

Tk 150cr frozen food awaiting shipment for 17 days at Mongla

From Staff Correspondent
KHULNA, June 2: Frozen foods worth Tk 150 crore are awaiting shipment at Mongla Port for the last 17 days due to acute shortage of container vessels.

Container vessels are reluctant to anchor at the port due to technical reasons, sources in the Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters' Association said. Sources said the stamped frozen foods meant for export were kept in about 100 containers at the port.

Kazi Shahnewaz, president of Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters' Association has urged the government to take urgent measures for to resolve the crisis of vessels and save exportable frozen shrimps of Tk 150 cr from being completely damaged.

He urged the authorities to send two feeder vessels — 'Banglar Moni' and 'MV DHAP' — to Mongla Port for shipment of the frozen foods.

Meanwhile, exporters are scared of the cancellation of LC due to failure in shipment of frozen foods within the time limit as fixed by the buyers.

"We are carrying huge burden of bank liabilities against our export trade, said some shrimp exporters who have demanded permanent solution to the crisis of feeder vessels at Mongla Port.

BCL activist murdered at Mymensingh

MYMENSINGH, June 2: An activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) was chopped to death today near Muslim Girls High School in the town, reports UNB.

The victim Sohel, 20, son of Abdur Rashid, was a student of Nasirabad College.

Police and witnesses said the Chhatra League activist came under attack while he was taking tea in a tea shop in the outer-stadium area at about 9 am.

At one stage, a gang of youths hit him with sharp weapons and severed tendons of his hands and legs.

He was rushed to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead. The killers hijacked a microbus from Ananda Mohan College at gunpoint and fled by it.

They left the microbus in Norka Upazila of Sherpur district. Police seized the vehicle.

One killed while making bombs in Satkhira

SATKHIRA, June 2: A man was killed and eight others were injured in a bomb explosion at Kashiabati in Kaliganj upazila here Thursday night, reports UNB.

The dead was identified as Fazul Kader, 35, a resident in Paikpara area. Two of the injured were identified as Rustom and Abul Hossain.

Police arrested Hossain while the other injured, Rustom, managed to flee.

Police and local people said one of the bombs went off with big bang when they were making bombs at a house of one Abdul Ahad.



Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori (R) paints an eye on a Bodhidharma doll wishing success of Lower House election at Liberal Democratic Party's head office in Tokyo yesterday. Mori, defying a dramatic plunge in his popularity, dissolved parliament for elections to be held on June 25. At left is Hiromu Nonaka, General Secretary of the party. —AFP photo

Mori dissolves Lower House for elections on June 25

TOKYO, June 2: Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori today declared the Lower House of Parliament be dissolved, paving the way for national elections on June 25, reports AP.

Support for Mori has plummeted since his remark last month that Japan is a "divine nation" centered on the emperor — suggesting to many the kind of nationalistic rhetoric used by politicians before World War II.

But while recent polls suggest his administration is the least popular to face an election since the end of the war, his

Liberal Democrats were not expected to lose their position as the country's ruling party.

At stake in the elections are 480 seats in the lower house, the more powerful of Japan's two-chamber Parliament. The Liberal Democrats hold 267 of the current 500 seats, and with their two coalition partners control 336, a comfortable majority.

Despite Mori's sagging support, LDP leaders have said they hope to win at least 229 seats in the reconfigured chamber. Though considered a fairly easy goal, failure to attain that level could force Mori to resign.

Along with the controversy over the divine nation comments, Mori has been dogged by scandals over the way his administration covered up the gravity of the condition of his predecessor, Keizo Obuchi, who fell into a coma in early April. Obuchi died May 14.

Mori, who assumed office soon after Obuchi's collapse, has also faced reports he was caught in a raid on a brothel while still a college student and that in 1995 he attended a wedding reception where one of the guests was a leading gangster.

He has denied the brothel allegations, and said he was unaware of the gangster's attendance at the reception.

By dissolving the lower house, Mori effectively shelved a no-confidence motion posed by the opposition parties, which argued he has proven himself unfit to lead the nation.

The motion was largely ceremonial as the Liberal Democrats and their two coalition partners have easily enough votes in Parliament to have defeated it.

Yukio Hatoyama, head of the Democratic Party, Japan's largest opposition group, said that ruling party leaders were hoping the dissolution of Parliament would pull voter attention away from the scandals.

"They are just trying to hide," he said.

Leaders from around the world, including US President Bill Clinton, are to attend a state funeral for Obuchi on June 8, and the date Mori has chosen for the election, June 25, would have been Obuchi's 63rd birthday.

Concerns that an untested opposition can't be trusted to nurture Japan's fledgling economic recovery could also outweigh concerns over Mori's outspokenness. The Liberal Democrats have been in control throughout most of the postwar era.

Still, the controversies surrounding Mori are expected to take a bite out of a sizable sympathy vote experts had predicted for the LDP.

"Support for the Mori Administration has plunged across the board since his divine nation remarks," said an editorial Friday in the Mainichi, a major newspaper. "The comments threw doubt on his fitness to lead, and the public has reacted to that."

Bomb blast kills 8 in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, India, June 2: Eight people were killed and 11 wounded today when a bomb went off near a religious gathering in India's troubled state of Jammu and Kashmir, police said, reports Reuters.

Police said the wounded included a prominent Kashmiri Shia religious leader and former housing minister of Kashmir, Mouli Iftikhar Hussain Ansari.

"A powerful bomb exploded when Mouli Iftikhar Hussain Ansari was addressing a religious gathering near Pattan," a police official said.

No militant group has claimed responsibility for the explosion at Pattan, 27 km (16 miles) north of Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir.

Last month, Hizbul Mujahideen militants killed Kashmir's junior power minister, Ghulam Hassan, along with four others in a powerful landmine explosion in South Kashmir.

Separatist violence has surged in Kashmir since the onset of summer. According to officials, 916 people, including 139 Indian security forces personnel and 477 separatist militants have been killed since January.

India, which controls 45 per cent of Kashmir, accuses Pakistan of arming and training Kashmiri separatists, a charge Islamabad denies. Pakistan rules over a third of Kashmir and China the rest.

Nearly a dozen militant groups are fighting New Delhi's rule in Jammu and Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state where police and hospital staffs say more than 30,000 people have been killed in a decade of separatist rebellion.

Shimul sent back to Jessore jail

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, June 2: Leader of outlawed BCP Mahmud Hasan Shimul has been sent back to Jessore Central jail today. He was taken on police remand for seven days for interrogation by Jessore police.

Shimul was also questioned among others about the murder of Chhatra Maitree leader Alok Kumar Dey of Daulatpur. Khulna, said a source close to interrogation teams.

Shimul will be remanded by KMP shortly for questioning about murders of Ganesh, Bitu, Maruf, Panna, Liton, Hasan, Taraidar, Bikash Barhoi, JP leader Abul Kashem, BNP leader Iktiaruddin Bablu and Shajahan, he said. All these murders were committed in Khulna city during the last two years.

JS made ruling party office, says Khaleda

With two days to the budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad, opposition chief Khaleda Zia said yesterday this parliament does no more interest the people since it has been made a ruling party office, reports UNB.

"Awami League has rendered parliament ineffective by turning it a party office. Opposition is not allowed to discuss any national issue in the House. So, at one stage, the opposition MPs were forced to boycott parliament. Now people have no interest in parliament," said Khaleda, also the BNP chief, addressing a council of non-government college teachers.

She was the chief guest at Millennium National Delegate Council of Bangladesh College Teachers Samity (association) and Bangladesh Principals' Association at Engineers Institution in the afternoon.

The council titled "Tomorrow's Teaching: Bangladesh Perspective" was presided over by Prof M Shariful Islam. Barrister Moinul Hossain and Surjanso Bhattacharya from India, among others, spoke on the

occasion. The opposition leader said the government unilaterally signed the Ganges Water Sharing Treaty and Chittagong Hill Tract Peace Agreement going against the public interest and the Constitution, sidetracking parliament.

"Terminating prevailing situation of the country 'volatile', the former prime minister feared the government was pushing the country towards chaos and confusion with its wrong policy, inefficiency and corruption.

Responding to the demands of the teachers, the Khaleda said she could not assure of giving 100 per cent salary allowance from the exchequer to the teachers' salary but would examine the matter with their representatives if she went to office.

But she acknowledged the need for maintaining balance between salary and other facilities of government teachers with that of non-government college teachers according to their quality and efficiency.

Political influence no more useful in getting bank loans: Kibria

Finance Minister S A M Kibria yesterday said political influence in securing bank loans is no more useful in the country, reports BSS.

He said press reports on a recent seminar held by Bangladesh Institute of Bank Management (BIBM) on political influence in granting bank loans were confusing as the reports did not mention when the loans were granted.

The minister said according to the keynote paper in the seminar, over 100 loan defaulters out of the 125 till 1996, belong to BNP and Jatiya Party.

He requested the press to report the default cases accurately in future to give the people clear information about who are the defaulters, when they took the loan and how their loans were sanctioned.

Kibria was addressing a customers' congress marking the first founding anniversary of the Mercantile Bank Ltd at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Commerce Minister M A Jalil and Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Farashuddin spoke as special guests.

AL activist shot dead in Ctg

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 2: A ruling party activist was shot dead by his rivals at Painsong village under Fatikchhari thana this morning.

The victim Md Idris Mia, 32, is an activist of 'Babil Group' of local Awami League. He was picked up and shot by the armed cadres of his rival 'Tipu Group' while he was walking on the street at around 6 am. Idris died on way to hospital.

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03 June 2000

ATTN: ALL MEMBERS OF BGMEA.

An Extra-Ordinary General Meeting and the 17th Annual General Meeting of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association will be held to-day, the **3rd June 2000 at 10 A.M. and 11:30 A.M.** respectively at the Ball Room of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, Dhaka. In this connection notices have already been sent by Courier Service and also published in the national dailies on 11 May 2000. **This is just a reminder.**

All esteemed members of BGMEA are cordially invited to attend.

By order of the Board,

(Signature)
(M. Fasihur Rahman)
Secretary

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

Published by the Editor from Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208 on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: 19 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215, Telephone Numbers: 8124944, 8124955, 8124966, Fax: 8125155, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA. Internet edition address: <http://www.dailystarnews.com> and Email address: datu@bangla.net

\$ 61m for Haripur project \$230m WB aid package

The World Bank Group has announced a major financing package to the tune of 230 million US dollars for Bangladesh, including 60.9 million dollars for the Haripur Power Project, reports UNB.

The group approved on Thursday a debt financing of 54.1 million US dollars by International Finance Corporation (IFC), World Bank's lending window for private sector, and exposure for 115 million dollars in interest-rate swaps. A WB press release said yesterday it also approved a partial risk guarantee of 60.9 million US dollars by International Development Association (IDA), World Bank's concessional lending window, for the Haripur Power Project.

"Both IDA and IFC played key role in catalyzing this commercial financing package for a term of 15 years, which is the first long-term financing of its kind in the country," said the World Bank release.

Director of Power Department at IFC Vivek Talvadkar said the Haripur Project would encourage development of further private infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, promote reform and enable the government to conserve limited public resources for their priorities,

such as education and health-care. The 360-megawatt gas-fired combined-cycle power plant will be built, owned and operated by AES Haripur (Private) Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of the US-based AES Corporation.

The introduction of the Haripur power plant into the system in June 2001 will help alleviate the country's energy crunch, but implementation of power-sector reforms is needed to meet the country's burgeoning demand for electricity, the WB statement said.

It said the project is consistent with the bank group's strategy in the power sector, which aims to promote reform and private-sector investment to improve the efficiency, quality and access to electricity services.

The total project cost is estimated about 183 million US dollars, to be financed through a combination of equity of about 68 million dollars and debt of 54.1 million dollars.

IFC's debt financing includes 40 million dollars from its own account and a syndicate loan of 14.1 million dollars for account of participating international banks.

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