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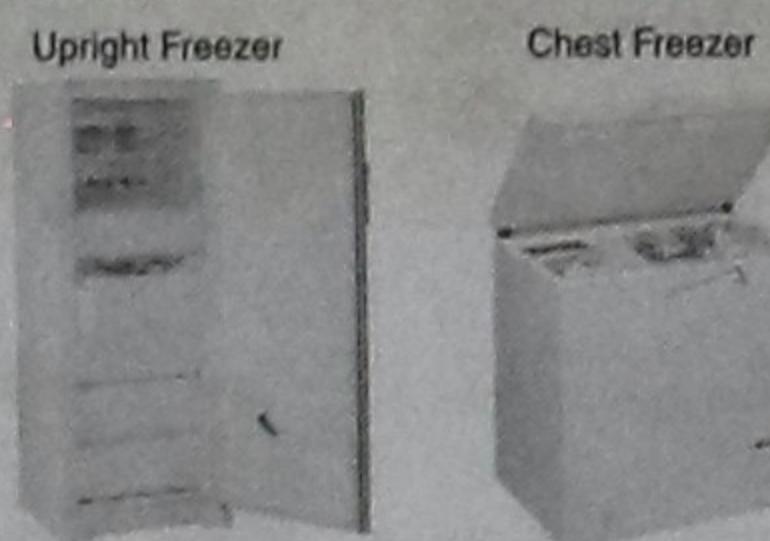
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**Down to Earth****Vanishing Wetland Scenario Around the City**

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 Dhulai Khal, Narinda Khal, Sengun Bagicha Khal used to carry waste water and pollutants from the city in a continued flow, emptying the contents in the Buriganga, the Sitalakha, 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 fallout of the development frenzy, the canals and wetlands are being filled up for construction of roads and markets, and multi-storyed 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.

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 recommissioning of 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 yesterdays 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-

ing 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 the city's neighbourhood very soon.

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 or 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.

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