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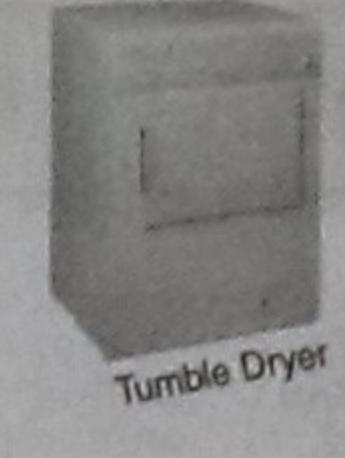
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## Down to Earth

# Improper use of city's wetlands

By A S M Nurunnabi

It has been lately observed that in the absence of coordinated planning, wetlands and low-lying areas in the eastern part of Dhaka city are quickly losing their geographical characteristics, inviting an ecological imbalance and a probable environmental disaster of a serious nature.

The urban development authority, RAJUK, in its metropolitan development plan has earmarked a number of retention ponds in the eastern part of the city and discouraged permanent structures in the area. The ponds are reportedly planned to retain rain water and city waste waters.

According to environmental groups, the wetlands around the city should be retained to maintain ecological balance and help the rivers Buriganga and the Sitalakhy as balancing factors.

According to available indications, the property developers and influential quarters are, however, carrying out massive land filling and housing developments works ignoring the warning from RAJUK. Besides, there are government orders asking the authorities concerned not to change the geographical characteristics of the wetlands and low-lying areas. But it has been seen that such orders and instructions are not being attended to. Under the existing rule, permission has to be obtained for removing earth or any other digging in the RAJUK area. But no one really bothers about taking permission for this.

The apparent neglect or in-

difference of the concerned quarters has provided scope to carry out massive land filling in the low-lying areas without obstruction from RAJUK.

After the area was developed to some extent, it has become easier to get new construction plans approved by RAJUK.

In a recent report it has been

stated that the Department of Environment and the Department of Forests of the government have taken up a project proposal for examining the feasibility for building a circular waterway round the Dhaka city to relieve its traffic congestion and air pollution. At the end of the project study, the Ministries of Water Resources and Shipping will be brought into the picture.

In this context, it has been explained that to facilitate drainage of flood water, protection of lakes and ponds and wetlands in and around the capital are imperative needs for maintenance of a healthy environment.

The volume of Dhaka city's men and vehicles has been steadily building up to a monstrous proportion. We have already a surfeit of plans and ideas as viable *modus operandi* for tackling the ever growing city congestion. Ambitious plans on this behalf with substantial volume of foreign aid for construction of fly-overs, by-pass roads, etc are frequently heard of. But there has been very scanty evidence so far by way of solid achievement through their implementation.

While an innumerable debate on possible relief in this sector continues, the size of the city

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