

Down to Earth

City's fast disappearing water bodies

By A S M Nurunnabi

There seems to be no let-up in the growing threat to the city's water bodies. It has been recently estimated that the country has about 10,000 water bodies but no figure is readily available as to the total number of such water areas within the jurisdiction of the Dhaka city authorities. RAJUK has been reportedly trying to prevent grabbing of vast water areas in and around the city as per government directive, but it has proved to be a difficult task. Dhaka continues to expand haphazardly as such wetlands are being rapidly filled up to meet the increasing demand of real estate developers. As a result, the ambitious private sector developers and short-sighted housing planners are all contributing to the rapid disappearance of such wetlands.

As an inevitable fallout from the current development frenzy, filling up canals and wetlands for construction of roads, markets and multi-storyed apartments, no alternative arrangements have remained for flushing out excess flood and rain water from within the city limits. Not only is the shrinking landscape distorting the pre-existing characteristic features of the land it is also threatening the environment and causing ecological imbalance as well.

The apparent absence of any long-term plan for saving the low-lying lands from the clutches of private developers or re-excavating the old city canals to solve the water-logging have led experts to apprehend how serious heavy downpours as were recently experienced could upset the normal city life with far-reaching water-logging.

In this context, the plight of the Buriganga river cannot be overemphasised. The river appears to be under a process of siege because of the greed and thoughtlessness of people in the

surrounding areas. It was understood that the government had approved a 60-crore taka scheme to clear the river embankments of all encroachments and to revive the dying river by taking remedial steps. But so far we find no evidence of government's efforts in this direction.

Lately it has been reported that land grabbers have now turned their attention to the Turag river a tributary of Buriganga river. There is concern that due to the depredations of land-grabbers, river-navigation may be directly affected. Land-grabbing is reportedly going on openly since the long arm of the law has turned ineffectual and encroachment of the river goes unabated causing the emergence of shoals in the river due to continuous sedimentary deposit. During the dry season, water from the river is used for irrigation but this may not be possible if encroachment continues. Authorities concerned should seriously take up the task of saving the Turag river.

Even in the heart of the city, land-grabbers don't hesitate to act boldly. Lately it has been reported that RAJUK officials in their bid to ensure compliance with an environment protection law, are increasingly coming under threat from a vested quarter engaged in filling up a chunk of the Gulshan Lake at Gulshan Section 1.

We have all along observed a strange situation in which government decisions to improve the water scenario in and around and even in the suburbs of the city are not followed up by timely actions due to strong pressure from vested quarters or red-tapism. This seems to be a sad commentary on our capacity to meet such environmental challenges with due promptness.

Paul P Harris, a young lawyer, founded the first Rotary Club in Chicago, USA, along with three of his friends. Since then, Rotary movement has spread to 190 countries with membership rising to 1.2 million.

President Shahabuddin, in his deliberation, said Bangladesh faces many challenges. "Poverty, malnutrition, inadequate healthcare facilities, illiteracy, unemployment and environmental degradation threaten peace and prosperity in Bangladesh."

He urged the Rotarians, the gifted members of the society, to utilise the unique gift of God to alleviate the needs of the underprivileged.

"Show them the way and thereby help the march forward to peace and prosperity."

President Shahabuddin termed the high ethical standards and ideals of service followed by the Rotarians as important values in life and hoped that they would truly and honestly follow those to encourage others to do the same and help build a better society.

In the inaugural session of the conference, eminent lawyer Barrister Kamal Hossain spoke on "Development and Rule of Law," showing a gap between the two in the country which may result in unforeseen crisis.

He observed that development in the country was taking place in absence of the rule of law

Civil society can help restore rule of law, says President

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday indicated a lack of social order and said the rule of law can only be established if the civil society comes forward to press for it, reports UNB.

"Today there is distinct erosion of moral values in society leading to absence of the rule of law," he said.

The President urged professional and business leaders to help improve the situation in society. "You must also guide the future generation to respect the elders, help the needy and be respectful to the laws of the country."

He urged the Rotarians to support for any of their social development plans undertaken

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Poverty alleviation by employing destitute women, the most downtrodden section in society, and thereby increasing their purchasing power had significant impact on the national economy, the BGMEA president said.

He assured the Rotarians

support for any of their social development plans undertaken

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and absence of transparency.

Dr Kamal in this context set an analogy as he said the sudden economic crisis in some of the Southeast Asian countries was a result of development carried out in absence of the rule of law.

The eminent lawyer of international repute, who is also the chief of Gana Forum, said development should mean development for all in society and not for any particular class or group. "Everyone is equal to law."

Garment business leader Anisur Rahman Sinha told the function that the success of the garment sector in the country was possible only because of all support and cooperation of the workers.

Garmen

business leader

Garment business leader