

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 filed 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-storied 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.

No extra-curricular activities in varsities for about a decade

Student union polls not held due to frequent clashes

By Abul Kalam Azad

Extra-curricular activities in country's different universities are virtually non-existent, as student union elections could not be held for years due to intra- and inter-party violence.

Student bodies aspirant of political supremacy on campus engaged in violent clashes in most universities since 1990.

Sources said a favourable situation for elections, which are supposed to be held annually, is unlikely any time soon as violent clashes that have frequently led to deaths is still always a possibility in most university campuses.

But it is actually the lack of consensus among leading political parties, particularly between the ruling party and the main opposition party that has caused the deadlock.

The past ten years have seen the ruling party-backed student

front always favouring the polls and the opposition-backed student wing always opposing it.

During BNP's tenure from 1991 to '96, their student wing JCD wanted elections but the then opposition AL-backed BCL did not agree. Now BCL is interested but JCD is not.

As rival student fronts always disagreed, university authorities shied away from announcing a date for election apprehending violent protests and fierce gun-fights that have claimed lives in the past.

Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) election was last held on June 6, 1990. Since then, different student bodies have resisted the polls on different grounds. Once termed as a 'mini-parliament' the DUCSU committee was dissolved in June 1997.

DU Vice Chancellor Prof. AK

Azad Chowdhury said that the student fronts should reach a consensus in this matter before polls could be held.

The story of Jahangirnagar University is not any different; JU students are without any student representatives since 1991. JU Vice Chancellor Prof. Abdul Bayes said however that he was planning to hold elections this year.

Election to the Rajshahi University Central Student Union (RUCSU) was last held in 1990. Several attempts by authorities in this regard have proven futile.

BUET where election to the Engineering University Central Student Union (EUCSU) were held regularly since 1999 has recently joined the club as polls could not be held in 2000 due to

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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 made the call while inaugurating the 17th Rotary District Conference titled "Protitee 2001" at a local hotel in the morning yesterday.

The 2-day annual conference of the Rotary International District 3280, Bangladesh, this year is designed to create awareness amongst Rotarians which will lead them to action for the benefit of mankind. Thus the conference is titled 'Conference of Awareness and Action.'

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

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 reputation, who is also the chief of Gano 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-out support and cooperation of the workers.

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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Muggers stab fish trader, take away Tk 1.5 lakh

By Staff Correspondent

Miscreants stabbed a fish trader and took away Tk 1.5 lakh from him at Doyel Crossing near Curzon Hall of the Dhaka University yesterday evening.

The victim was identified as Mohammad Ashraf Alam, 35, son of Ali Akbar of Green Road in the city.

When Ashraf reached Doyel crossing in a rickshaw at about 4:30 pm, a gang of four muggers intercepted him.

They took Ashraf behind the mazzars of three national leaders an asked him to give money. As Ashraf refused to oblige, the gang stabbed in his chest and abdomen. They took away the money which he collected from his parties at New Market.

Ashraf was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

When contacted Ramna police station at about 7:30 pm, the duty officer said that they were not aware of the incident.



BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia along with senior party leaders placing wreath at the mazar of founder of the party and former president Ziaur Rahman on the occasion of his 65th birth anniversary yesterday. -- Star photo

Textbook prices increased by 20pc 'illegally'

By Staff Correspondent

Prices of various textbooks for secondary level have been increased by about 20 per cent over that of last year in an unauthorised way.

Three concerns of Beximco group which were awarded the job of printing the books have increased the prices with 'unofficial approval' of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), sources concerned alleged.

The Beximco trio -- Pustaka, Shuktara and Free Press -- have done it in violation of terms of the tender for the job. The new price list of the books have been published by sellers authorised by Pustaka.

But the NCTB is keeping mum on the issue.

Earlier, it had announced that prices of books would not be increased this year.

Printing and publication industry sources said prices of books have been raised by about 20 per cent on an average and that of some books by even more than 30 per cent.

Price of a Bengali textbook for class VI has been raised to Tk

25.69 from Tk. 20.15, General Science to Tk 33.81 from Tk 27.90, Biology for class IX to Tk 53.95 from Tk44.20 and English to Tk 41.99 from Tk 26.30.

The three companies have gone for the price increase although they had obtained the contract for printing the books at a higher rate than in previous years.

Meanwhile, about 75 per cent of primary level students are yet to get textbooks which are supposed to be distributed free of cost among them, various sources said.

A section of book traders taking advantage of the situation are selling those.

Leaders of the printing and publication industry had earlier put forward some proposals to help resolve the textbook crisis but the authorities are yet to respond to those.

Last year, the president of printers association was put under detention because of failure to print and distribute textbooks in time.

Case under PSA

17 BNP, JCD men sued at Magura

From Staff Correspondent

MAGURA, Jan 19: A case under Public Safety Act (PSA) was filed with Magura sadar thana yesterday accusing 17 BNP and JCD activists.

They were sued for assaulting Advocate Hasan Siraj Suja, general secretary of Jatitya Party district unit on January 15.

Suja was attacked and seriously injured by some activists of BNP and Chhatra Dal in front of the Magura District Collector's Office.

Magura District Bar Association on Thursday brought out a procession in the town protesting the attack on Advocate Suja. The lawyers later held a rally and demanded punishment to those responsible for the attack.

'Zia helped AL survive armed revolution'

BNP leaders said yesterday that founder of their party and the then president Ziaur Rahman had done the most for Awami League helping its survival from an armed revolution and paving the way for doing politics with honour, reports UNB.

"Some 30,000 political leaders were killed during the post-independence rule of Awami League. There was a move aimed at armed revolution against the government," BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said.

"What would have been the fate of Awami League if JSD or the party of Siraj Shikder or even the party of Bhasani had taken over power?" he asked addressing a discussion meeting.

BNP organized the discussion to mark the 65th birth anniversary of the party founder and it was held at the Institution of Engineers in the afternoon.

Deputy leader of the Opposition in Parliament Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury, M Saifur Rahman, Khondoker Mosharraf Hossain, Prof M A Majed, Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, Sadek Hossain Khoka, Hamidullah Khan and journalist Monirul Alam also spoke at the discussion meeting, chaired by Mannan Bhuiyan.

Opposition Leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia attended it sitting among the audience.

Bhuiyan observed that Awami League survived as Ziaur Rahman came to power and gave it scope to do politics with dignity and virtually founded the present AL. "Zia re-established Awami League."

Electronic goods worth Tk 2.5 lakh looted in city

By Staff Correspondent

Robbers took away electronic goods worth about Tk 2.5 lakh from a shop at DIT Road at West Rampura in the city early yesterday.

A gang of robbers entered Mela confectionery and Computer Training Center by cutting grill and breaking open the door at about 3:30 am.

They took away a woven, a refrigerator, two computers and computer equipment worth about Tk. 2.42 lakh from the shop.

M A Alam Tito, owner of the shop, filed a case with Khilgaon thana in this regard.

None was arrested in this connection till filing of this report last night.

Mysterious boxes

Six crew placed on fresh remand

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 19: The six crew including a Pakistani national arrested in connection with dropping of mysterious boxes in the Bay of Bengal on December 17, were placed on a three-day fresh remand yesterday, police said.

They would be sent to Dhaka again on Sunday for joint interrogation.

Earlier, the six crew were placed on a seven-day remand and sent to Dhaka for interrogation by JIC. On expiry of remand, they were brought back to Chittagong last week.

Mysterious boxes were dropped in the Bay of Bengal from two mechanised boats by 28 crew including a Pakistani national on December 17 when Navy patrol ship challenged them.

Fire at plastic factory at Lalbagh

By Staff Correspondent

Fire gutted a huge quantity of leather and plastic goods at Posta Ghat in the city's Lalbagh area in the early hours of yesterday.

Fire brigade sources said the fire originated from Haji Samsuddin Plastic Factory at about 2:30 am and soon engulfed the nearby leather warehouse.

Six fire fighting units from Palashi, Fire Brigade Headquarters, and Sadar Ghat rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze at about 4-30 am.

The extent of damage caused by the fire could not be ascertained till filing of this report last night.

No casualties were reported, Fire Brigade sources said.

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Leading artistes of LRB (L) performing at Pepsi Live Concert at the Army Stadium in the city yesterday afternoon. (R) Young people thronging the venue to enjoy the concert. Proceeds from the event organised by the Oncology Club and sponsored by Pepsi will be used for the benefit of cancer patients in the country.



-- Star photos

Timber worth TK 50 lakh seized near Sundarbans

KHULNA, Jan 19: Coast guards and forest officials in a joint drive today seized a huge quantity of 'Sundari' wood from a canal behind Chaterhat police camp in Mongla, reports UNB.

Mongla Coast Guard officials said they launched the operation with the help of Changpai Range forest officials in 2-km area of the canal, adjacent to the Sunderbans, the world's largest mangrove forest, and recovered about 7,000 cubic feet of timber worth about Tk 50 lakh.

Local sources said timber trader Qudus Ejarader and his brother Mostafa Ejarader in

collusion with unscrupulous law enforcement personnel were running the illegal timber business for long.

Establishing an organised network, they collected and stockpiled the timber in the canal. As per demands, they supply the logs to the parties concerned at convenient times.

Sundari, a precious flora species in the Sunderbans, is depleting fast due to top dying disease and indiscriminate felling by a section of greedy woodcutters ignoring government ban.

Locals alleged that police are fully aware of the matter, but remain silent taking bribes from the traders.

Another source said the two brothers built their stockpile in the canal with the help of a former forest official. The trader brothers went into hiding following the operation.

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Wife murdered at Pallabi

By Staff Correspondent

A young housewife was murdered allegedly by her husband at her residence at Section-11 in the city's Pallabi area early yesterday.

She was identified as Yasmeen, 23, wife of Rabiul Haq.

Police went to the house at about 8:45 am and found the body hanging from a ceiling fan. They recovered the body and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

Yasmeen's brother Babul filed a case with Pallabi Police Station accusing Rabiul of killing his sister and then hanging her body with the ceiling fan.

Police arrested Rabiul for his alleged involvement in the killing and produced him before the CMM's Court yesterday.

Cong hope to lure Trinamool seems belied once again

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Jan 19 : The hopes of India's main opposition Congress led by Sonia Gandhi to lure Trinamool Congress headed by Mamata Banerjee appear to have been belied once again.

Mamata made it abundantly clear yesterday evening that there was no question of her party snapping its alliance with the Prime Minister A B Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party for the sake of firming up electoral ties with Congress for the coming assembly elections in West Bengal. She was speaking to newsmen after a meeting with a delegation of BJP leaders from the state at her official residence here.

Not only this. What is more politically significant is that Mamata also indicated that Trinamool Congress was not

averse to the idea of having a common manifesto with BJP for the elections in West Bengal. "It is a worthwhile idea," she said in reply to a question.

Mamata's remarks could put at rest speculations in certain quarters about possible fresh political equation following a series of meetings Congress leaders from West Bengal Pranab Mukherjee, A B A Ghani Khan Choudhury and Priyaranjan Dasgupta had with her in Calcutta recently. Apparently, the Congress leaders had rushed to meet Mamata to revive the proposal of a "mahajot" (grand alliance) without BJP against the ruling CPI(M) in West Bengal in the assembly elections. The proposal was put forward by Mamata herself early last year

and was lapped by Khan Choudhury, who was the then chief of West Bengal Congress unit, but has been repeatedly shot down by Congress high command which said there could be no tie-up with Trinamool as long as it had truck with BJP.

Mukherjee had, however, sought to play down the significance of his visit to Mamata's residence in Calcutta saying it was to enquire about the health of Trinamool Congress chief, who was hurt in the foot in a violence after her public meeting in Midnapore district more than two weeks back, and that no political meaning should be read into this. By contrast, Khan Choudhury was forthright and said he did

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