

# Govt to build on crucial wetland

A controversial government project plans major construction work on Hatirjheel, the city's last remaining water body



The Tk 1022 crore, 200 acre, project of the government is in gross violation of the wetland conservation act.

MORSHED ALI KHAN and SULTANA RAHMAN

The government is planning to acquire 200 acres of 'land' at Rampura-Hatirjheel-Begunbari, the last remaining water body of the city, to launch a controversial development project.

The Tk 1022 crore project is in gross violation of the city's master plan (Dhaka Metropolitan

Development Plan or DMDP) which clearly earmarks the area as a flood retention point. It is also in violation of the wetland conservation act, environmentalists said.

The Public Works Department and the Department of Environment have opposed the project, saying if the Hatirjheel area is filled up the city will face an unprecedented water logging problem in which all roads and localities

around Hatirjheel will be inundated with even the slightest rainfall.

Environmentalists have also expressed their deep concern over the project, stating that the 'jheel' is a vast natural retainer for storm water servicing a 40 square kilometre area of the city.

The intended project includes plans for the construction of housing units, multi-storied shopping and commercial complexes, hotels

and bus terminals with a link road extending the present Panthapath from Tongi Diversion Road up to Rampura. In addition, it plans a high-rise housing colony for rehabilitating hundreds of DCC sweepers, who are now illegally occupying a public park in Gulshan. The project also envisions the relocation of the country's largest wholesale vegetable market from Karwan Bazar.

Sources claim that the Prime Minister instructed the DTCC (Dhaka Transport Coordination Board) to expedite procedures for implementation of the project at a meeting held on July 14. The project will involve at least seven different organisations, which include DTCC, Rajuk, DCC, WASA, TITAS, T&T and DESA.

The government is planning to lease out 100 acres\* of the acquired land to a consortium of developers at an approximate cost of Tk seven crore per acre. Once the developer completes work on each plot, they will be sold to individuals with Bangladeshi expatriates having priority of purchase.

Executive Director of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCC) Quamrul Islam Siddique has admitted that the authorities failed to conduct any proper survey on the Hatirjheel area. But he added, "the project is primarily based on a research paper compiled by a BUET student, and DCC's engineering section is currently conducting another survey." But it was learnt that the DCC has so far only floated a tender, inviting bids for the proposed survey.

The Ministry of Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives has initiated the project which will extend from Tongi Diversion Road to Progati Sarani in Rampura, covering 237.64 acres of low-lying land. The state already owns 37.64 acres of this huge stretch.

Dr Anisuzzaman of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) said that an extremely densely populated city like Dhaka requires 25 per cent wetland for healthy ecological balance and sustainability of habitat for important flora and fauna.

"But Dhaka currently has less than 10 per cent wetland which is also being threatened," said Anisuzzaman. This not only endangers the survival of the city itself, but is also destroying the livelihood of millions of people, especially the poor who depend on the environment for survival, according to the ecologist.

"We have to understand that a wetland is not a wasteland. A wetland gives us much more than money can buy," concluded Anisuzzaman.

\*1 acre = 3 bigha (approx.)

# Making a killing from people's cravings

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Most rural migrants into the city are forced to become entrepreneurs, as their dreams of a better life in the city quickly fall by the wayside. Left to survive solely by their wits they must come up with a means of livelihood fast or fall by the wayside themselves.

One of the quickest ways to do this appears to be targeting the city-dwellers food-cravings and are cashing-in on those.

A case in example would be that of Abdul Mannan with his street-side food-stall, on Mirpur Road, which daily serves mouthwatering *piazu* and *chola-boot* to the commuters in this road. Reportedly, he has

been in the edible business of selling street-side snacks for the last 10 years, and so far has never suffered a slump in his profit margin.

"I have a regular group of customers who are sure to come by almost everyday and enjoy my *piazu* and *chola-boot*," said Mannan. "I think it's the inexpensive delicacy that I have to offer that somehow has them running back for more."

Not far off from Mannan's stall, is a *ghritokumari* (aloe vera) juice stall, owned by Md Abdul Ghani. He sells each glass of juice at a price of Tk 2 and they have an additional mixture of sugar, and other herbal products in them.

"Each glass of juice that I sell, has immense qualities, which

help my customers to douse off their daily stress and weaknesses," said Ghani "I am certain that my juices work better than any energy drink."

Ghani has a separate towel-selling store at Sadarghat, but his family is supported better with the juice stall's daily profit.

Mannan, on the other hand, does not have any other businesses beside his *piazu* and *chola*; he makes a daily profit of Tk 200 which means a respectable monthly profit of Tk 6000.

"Except for the local hoodlums and the police raids, my business runs quite well and I am grateful that at least, it supports my family of six members," said Mannan.



# Saving soles

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Imagine you are walking down the street and suddenly the strap of your slippers comes off or your toes begin to peep through your shoes. In this city, such an occurrence is easily tended to. You will hardly have to hobble or shuffle far to find someone to help you out in such emergencies.

They are of course the *moochiwallahs* or cobblers, offering an essential service to the people of the city. Cobblers can be found at every nook and cranny of the city, though hardly in luxurious surroundings.

Mostly they are found sitting at a place where people congregate. Be it a bus stop or market place, your eyes will home in on a cobbler sitting with his tools under a shabby umbrella. Though even the shade of an old umbrella is an extravagance for some, who ply their trade under the open sky.

"The heat is really energy-sapping but I force myself to work," says Nitai Chandra Das who sits with a few fellow cobblers in front of Rayerbazar Municipality Market.

He goes on to explain that they were once asked to sit under the staircase of the market, out of the way of pedestrians. "But we turned down the offer since it would have cut down our business. It is too low

to sit under and also the afternoon sun would have blazed directly upon us, leading to even fewer customers," he clarifies.

Though their work brings comfort to many, or helps to postpone the expenditure of buying new shoes, life does not run smooth for these hard-workers. A tough schedule from eight in the morning to ten at night barely brings in enough for a decent wage.

"There is no specific amount that we earn," says Gouranga Chandra Das, who sits next to Nitai. "Sometimes it is Tk 50 per day, sometimes not even a paisa," he notes cheerlessly. "Only God knows how I am managing to get by in life with a family of six."

Some of them feel it was inevitable that they entered the *moochi* business since their ancestors did the same. "I have been doing this job since my father died in the Independence War," informs Bolohari Das. "Mending shoes is the only job that I know," he adds. "I was destined for it," he concludes indifferently.

Nevertheless, these men do not welcome their own children to the profession. "I know it is a necessary service for society, but I certainly do not want my children to opt for it," stresses Gouranga. Most of his fellow cobblers agree.



Most small 'entrepreneurs' in the city find it easiest to make a living selling street-side snacks.

## city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"The match itself was competitive and results both individually and collectively had to be achieved through hard work, skill and patience, rather than just turning up and going through the motions as some exports had suggested."



-- Steve Waugh  
Aussie Test Skipper  
Writing in his column for News Ltd before the start of the Cairns Test on Thursday.

"Any effort to reinstate such a law, in the name of checking vulgarism in films, is a denial of freedom of expression through drama."

-- Syed Shamsul Haq

Speaking at the city's Central Shahidminar, last Tuesday, protesting the comments of Information Minister, Tariqul Islam, that the Dramatic Performance Act of 1876 might be reintroduced



"A Free Trade Agreement with India will work out only when it will prove to be mutually beneficial for both the countries."

-- M Morshed Khan  
Foreign Minister  
Talking to The Independent at the Foreign Office last Thursday

"I did not react like everyone else on hearing the news of the launch capsizing in Chandpur, because our whole country is capsizing with its 14 crore people right in front of us"

-- Fazal Shahabuddin

Speaking at a reception in the National Press Club, last Wednesday, reported by Bangla daily, Prothom Alo

"If she [the Prime Minister] really meant political reforms, she would have taken some definite steps... Terrorism and corruption are part of major political politics."

-- Bimal Biswas

General Secretary, Workers Party  
Speaking at the national convention of the Bangladesh Political Science Association last week, on the Prime Minister's appeal to bring a qualitative change in our old fashioned politics.

