

Circular waterway project on hold



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



Above and top: The new BIWTC pontoon at Basila, part of the city's circular waterway project now being delayed. Above right: A capstan on the pontoon remains unused by boats plying the Buriganga.

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Lack of fund has slowed down the Dhaka Circular Waterway project as it awaits approval of Tk.35 crore from the Economic Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC).

"The original approved budget was Tk.15.72 crore of which Tk.11.32 crore has been already spent for construction of landing stations and dredging rivers. Now the project needs the approval of revised allocation," said a source from the project department.

Recently, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has completed the construction of a landing station on Buriganga River at Basila as a part of the Dhaka Circular Water Way project for navigation. The Shipping Minister is supposed to inaugurate the Basila landing station within a week for public use.

In the original proposal, construction of three landing stations was planned but considering potential of water traffic around the city the budget of the project is revised for ten landing stations, acquisition of land for major landing stations, and dredging of rivers to increase depth and width.

The Dhaka Circular Waterway project combines river ways of Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalkhya which encircled the city. The first phase of the project would include Buriganga and Turag rivers from Sadarghat to Ashulia of 29.50 km of waterways.

The total project spending would be in local currency and used mainly for dredging, construction of landing facilities like terminal building, steel gangway, pontoon, RCC staircase and Toll Stations.

River dredging gets priority in the project as 60 per cent of the total budget is allocated for dredging, whereas 25 per cent of the fund is planned for land acquisition, and 15 per

cent money would be used for the construction of landing facilities from Swarighat to Ashulia.

Major landing stations would be built at Swarighat, Gabtoli, Aminbazar and Ashulia considering current number of commuters and cargo and the prediction of future traffic of the area. Two pontoons, two steel gangways, one terminal building, one transit shed, and connecting road would be constructed at the major landing stations. Only construction of major landing stations at Swarighat is completed so far due to lack of fund.

Construction of a pontoon, steel gangway, and passenger guestroom are completed as the minor landing stations at Kholamora, Basila, Shinnir Tek and Birulia Bazar are waiting for further funding. RCC staircase and Toll Stations will be constructed at Nowabganj and Rayerbazar.

Currently more than 128 lac commuters travel through waterways in the city and thousands of tons of cargo, building materials like bricks, sands, cements, and sheer number of livestock move through the rivers. The circular waterway would reduce the traffic jam of the city, as more commuters would be able to use waterways as navigation. Navigation and dredging would bring flow in rivers, which is useful for fisheries, as the polluted water will not be stagnant. Dhaka city is one of the few cities of the world gifted by circular river ways which could enhance the beauty and develop the environment of the city.

The projected schedule of introducing water bus and taxi for the city commuters on Buriganga and Turag waterways was June 2005. So far 37 per cent work has been completed and 63 per cent remain uncertain.

The minister for shipping Colonel Akbar Hossain assures the continuation of work. "We'll continue the work of circular waterway from our revenue budget," said the minister.

New regulatory body for WASA

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is planning to form a regulatory body for the water and sewerage authorities, according to sources.

The name of this watchdog will be Water and Sewerage Regulatory Commission.

A high level meeting related

to this proposed commission was held at the Local Government Department recently which was attended by representatives from the Ministry of Local Government, Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA), Dhaka City Corporation and Department of Public and Engineering (DPHE).

Senior Assistant Chief of

Rural Development and Cooperatives Department Mabubul Islam, who has had the experience of playing an important role in the enactment of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), was one of the notable participants in the meeting.

Although the decision to set up the regulatory commission

was taken at a cabinet meeting on February 2 this year, the process only started in June.

"The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has expressed its desire to finance the expenditure of forming the commission. It is already mentioned in the ADB's Draft Aid Memoir," revealed a participant of the meeting on condition of anonymity.

The meeting observed that there was a fundamental difference between utility services like gas, electricity and energy or telecommunication with water and sewerage. As water and sewerage is related to everyday survival, proposed formation of a regulatory commission required intense discussion and analysis.

FOLLOW UP

What will Shajahan's widow do?

MORSHED ALI KHAN

She sat in a wooden chair in her modest one-bedroom flat at Shekertak, Adabar. She remembered the July 1 inci-

dent, her eyes full of tears. Widowed by the tragic incident, Shahina Sultana Bhulu is now clinging to her life with her ten-year-old son Shaique, praying that someday she would see justice delivered.

An errant driver dragged Bhulu's husband Dr Shajahan Ali, a medical officer at the Pangu Hospital, to his death by entangling the victim with the illegal extra bumper of the car when he was riding a motorbike. Driver Sujon Sardar and the director (administration) of the Multimode Group at Anchor Tower 1/1B Sonargaon Road, who was travelling in the car, are still elusive to police although the Mohammadpur Police Station filed a murder case.

"I asked my husband when he would start working as a private practitioner and solve the family's financial problems," said an aggrieved Bhulu. "He consoled me saying as soon as he completed his Master's in orthopaedics, the family would be better off."

"Destiny did not allow him to sit for the second part final exams, scheduled for July 20," said Bhulu.

"The people who killed him are rich and powerful. I want to

live with my son and raise him as good as his father without any further trauma. The only thing I want to see is proper justice for the death of my husband," Bhulu said.

Better days never came to the family of Dr Shajahan. Helpless Bhulu does not know how to run the family and bear the cost of Shaique's education. With the death of her husband -- the only earning member of the family -- Bhulu is at a loss.

While the distressed family cries for justice, the police have so far made little progress in tracking down the culprits. The driver used a false address and all 'police raids' on his fictitious house have failed. Officials of the Multimode Group said only that its director (administration), Din Mohammad Khan, the passenger of the car on the day, is on leave. In fact, Khan left the country a day after the tragic incident that killed Dr Shajahan.

The car, a Proton Saga, registration No. Dhaka Metro Ka 02 0626 is registered in another company's name which had earlier been owned by the same group with a Purana Paltan address.

Officials of Multimode group have admitted that the car belonged to their company and the driver was their employee. They also said Din Mohammad was offered the vehicle by the office as part of a package of service benefits.

"I went to Uttar Murakathi under Uzirpur thana in Barisal to catch the driver in his village but relatives told me that Sujon was born in Dhaka and he rarely visited the village. The address the Multimode Group gave us is false," said Investigation Officer Noor-e-Alam.

"If we cannot catch the driver and the passenger, we will go public by publishing wanted ads in the media and press a murder charge against them and they will be tried in absentia," said Alam.



Areas like this, at the city's FDC basti, are a breeding ground for lethal mosquitoes.

Mosquito control

SOHEL ISLAM

The decision of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to hand over mosquito control to private operators may see the light of day in September this year.

"We may be able to complete the process of privatisation of the mosquito control by the first week of September," said Chief Health Officer of DCC Dr Mohammed Ashraf Uddin.

Three bidders Clarity Ecotech, Diligent and Safeway Pest Control participated in the tender earlier this year.

"However, transparency in awarding the contract is very much in question. From what I hear, the owner of Ecotech, who is in very good touch with the Mayor of DCC Sadeque Hossain Khoka, may win the contract," said an insider at DCC on condition of anonymity.

It is also alleged that many of

the technical and financial analyses of the tender committee, which may go against Ecotech, have been ignored owing to the partiality being given to the company. "Ecotech has not had any experience in mosquito control. If they are given the contract mosquito control in the city may fall apart," said the insider.

The other two participants in the tender, Diligent and Safeway Pest Control, have a fair amount of experience in mosquito control. "Diligent, an Indian company, has experience in a number of Indian cities. Safeway Pest Control, a consortium of three Bangladeshi companies has long been working in the city to control mosquitoes. If DCC has to privatise its mosquito control then these two companies should get preference," said another source at DCC.

Meanwhile, DCC had planned to control the mosquito problem in the city by using helicopter-borne pesticide to eliminate excessive Culex mosquitoes at the

beginning of this year. "DCC awarded Ecotech the contract to fit the machinery required to the Air Force's BEL-212 helicopters. Ecotech, however, delayed in supplying the equipment and thus the insecticide spraying programme could not be completed. However, a number of tornadoes hampered the breeding of Culex mosquitoes," said a source of the DCC health department.

City-dwellers have also been spared from the Aedes mosquito threat this year, due to favourable weather conditions and the DCC's awareness campaign about Aedes mosquitoes and their breeding grounds.

"Although the temperature reached up to 33C this year, the humidity has not crossed the 65 per cent mark this year. If the humidity had reached 80 per cent, the Aedes mosquitoes would have bred to dangerous proportions," said sources.



FAMILY PHOTO

Widowed by the tragic accident, Shahina Sultana Bhulu, shown on her wedding day above, is barely making ends meet.