

Dirt, waste choke Dhanmondi Lake

SULTANA RAHMAN

Dhanmondi Lake has become a contaminated site loaded with waste from hospitals and clinics and sewage from surface drains that are directly linked to its stagnant water.

The authorities are blamed for their laid-back attitude to the lake that needs regular cleanups to purify the water for survival of fish and weeds.

Star City sent for test a sample of lake water to the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B). The results show the level of free carbon dioxide at 2.91, up from the standard level of 0.6 and conductivity at 259 MicroS/cm, down from the acceptable limit between 800 and 1,000 MicroS/cm for fishing water.

"High concentration of free carbon dioxide is harmful not only to fish but to flora and fauna as well. It also increases health hazards and gradually pollutes the entire area," said an environmental microbiologist of ICDDR,B.

A number of private sewers are directly connected to the lake, linking road Nos. 11/A, 3/A and 27 and at least 25 surface drains release impure water into the lake water.

"The original plan emphasised the removal of surface drains, linked to the lake and installation of external drainage," said Iqbal Habib, member of Dhanmondi Lake Management Committee (DLMC) and a lake project consultant.

Mushrooming hospitals, diagnostic centres

and housing firms dump waste into the lake under the cover of dark, alleged Shamsul Alam, in charge of security.

The site is running without toilet facilities encouraging visitors and vendors to use the lake, a place for thousands of people a day.

The project also planned to install a water treatment plant or pump-house, but Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and the management committee have not yet structured it.

"The committee is not active. Only two meetings were held in the last two and a half years, while a monthly meeting was to take place," Iqbal said.

Although the construction of the lake development project was complete about two years ago, the DCC could not take control of it yet. Some hoodlums and local ward commissioners are into illegal pisciculture and blamed for water pollution as they throw fish feed in.

"They supplied different species of fish including *rylophorus* which harms the lake the most as it digs up the bed of water-bodies," Iqbal said, adding the lakebed loses its capacity of absorbing dirt and other water pollutants.

He underscored immediate implementation of the original plan to save the lake.

Dhanmondi residents along the lake alleged a large work-shed built by the contractor, Monami International Private Limited, has now become a clubhouse for gangsters and drug addicts. The company did not remove its office from the site to carry on with work elsewhere in the city.

Mushrooming hospitals, diagnostic centres



Mushrooming hospitals, diagnostic centres and housing firms dump waste into Dhanmondi Lake. This picture, with a close-up on left, tells the tale of a point near Road no. 32

High prices slow sales at Saarc fair



Visitors at a stall at Saarc fair.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Sale was not satisfactory despite a good number of people visiting the show, was the opinion of most stall owners at the Fifth South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Trade Fair 2003.

Six of the seven Saarc member countries, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and hosts Bangladesh are participating in the fair that started last Saturday. Maldives opted out this time.

The fair has been organised jointly by the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and Commerce ministry at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Hall premises.

Each year, the fair is held at a different SAARC country.

Readymade garments, leather goods, food products, beverage, ceramics, imitation jewellery, handicrafts, electronic goods and other items are available in 125 stalls in the fair. Bangladesh has 60 stalls while India has 25, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan have 10 stalls each.

"We expected to get things at a cheaper price here than the markets outside but that has not been the case," said Farida Hossain, a housewife coming from Mirpur.

"The shawls and jewellery at the Nepalese stores are very enticing but the prices are beyond my reach," said Sonia Hossain a student.

Some stall owners imposed that the duty imposed on sales pushed the prices up.

"When we calculate 30 per

cent duty, 15 per cent VAT and 15 per cent sales tax before fixing the price of a product, it automatically crosses people's purchasing capacity," said Shiekh Anis Javaid, owner of M/s Wood Packer of Pakistan.

When contacted Manzoor KH Uddin, the event manager said local entrepreneurs have to pay 1.5 per cent tax but foreign traders have to pay the required tax on goods sold to the customs department only at the time of departure.

Some stalls are not too anxious about selling their items since they are designed only to display products.

"We are participating in the fair in order to get more trade partners," said Abul Bashar Dewan of Square Pharmaceuticals Ltd. Sayeedur Rahman, Senior Marketing

Officer of Monno Ceramic also said his organisation is participating to promote exports.

Those who are on the look out for trade partners or agents in different countries felt that the response has been good.

"Traders are showing interest in getting franchise of the company," said Atula Talagala, of Edna Chocolate Private Ltd., Sri Lanka.

Though the stall owners were found to be more or less content with the way the fair has progressed, they however criticised the organisers for not arranging it inside the Friendship Centre.

"Rainwater damaged a lot of valuable goods," said one entrepreneur.

The event manager said that the bout of rain was unexpected in winter.

Losing way in 'X' files?

BISHAWJIT DAS

Police seem reluctant to unravel the mystery cloaking the deaths of five children in a water tank of an under-construction building in a single midday tragedy on December 25, while keening rises among their parents in Uttara.

Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (north zone) Golam Rasul described it as just another accident and told The Daily Star police were investigating the case.

Six days into the tragedy that reduced four next-door families to an emotional wreck, the outcome of the probe is still unknown -- an indication investigators may let it slip beyond people's concern like other nerve-wrecking cases.

Relatives of the dead and locals of Faidabad neighbourhood in Uttara believe an unknown person drowned the children into the 15 feet by 15 feet water tank, as the bodies they say did not bear hallmarks of injury commonly suffered in an accident.

A violent shock convulsed the parents of Sonia, 7, her brother Jamil, 1 year and 3 months, Mahmuda, 4 years and 6 months, Tamanna, 5, and Russell, 6, found dead in the four feet deep water.

Like other days, the children came out of their houses -- all before 10:00am -- after breakfast with their parents or sisters.

"I saw them playing when I went out for work," said Mujibar Rahman, father of Sonia and Jamil -- face registering numbing shock.

His wife Zayed, disconsolate with grief, cried all day -- "My children, my children" and paced around in her room in desperation to forget the forlorn world she had woken up to.

"The loss is so great in so short time," said Jayeda who also lost her 13-year-old mentally challenged daughter Masuma Akhtar Moni three months ago.

"We were bringing them up with great care. We did not imagine we had this in store for us," said the mother strangling a sob and hugging 11-year-old Zahid, her only living child.

The parents carried out hectic searches in the neighbourhood, as they found none of their children even after they announced lost-child calls on loudspeakers about

"How could all drown without raising alarm for help?" she asked.

Mahmuda's mother Monwara Begum fainted on hearing the news and is still reeling from trauma -- all by herself as her husband Sharif Uddin and most of her close relatives live in Saudi Arabia.

"I heard someone screaming a man kidnapped five children and people are looking for them," said Russell's aunt Sabina, bursting into sharp walls of grief.

Although most relatives resigned themselves to the belief that it was an accidental death, Russell's mother Sheuly Begum's suspicion is otherwise round.

Star City found neighbours peeking into the reservoir but they were unharmed by any gas poisoning.

Some locals linked the death of the five to a feud over property between Mujibar and his relative Imran who owns the under-construction building housing the tank.

They claimed to have seen Imran telling police and others that the children plunged to death in the tank and said he initiated the search for the children.

The cover of the tank is open and hundreds still gather there to peer into the dark of the reservoir that proved a death trap.



A mother wails the loss of her child in the Uttara water reservoir tragedy.