

Illegal lines cost Wasa Tk 100 crore a year

MIZANUR KHAN

Nazmul Hassan (not his real name) wanted to connect a water supply line to his under construction house in Dhaka's Postogola but was finding the task impossible.

He had been to the Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) office on numerous occasions but no progress was being made to his application for water connection. However things changed when Hassan came across a Wasa lineman during one of his many unfruitful visits.

The lineman told Hassan that he could 'fix' the problem if he was paid a certain amount of money as a show of 'gratitude'. Soon water was flowing uninterrupted for 24 hours at Hassan's three-story flat and Wasa knew nothing about the illegal connection.

Wasa does not have a correct estimate of the number of illegal

lines like Hassan's one in the city. It is believed that among Dhaka's 3,60,000 holders, 2,05,000 have legal connections. Twenty percent of the legitimate lines belong to commercial users and the rest to residents.

"I think there are about 50,000 illegal connections in Dhaka, most of which are in Mirpur as there are more slums and forcibly occupied land there," said ANH Akhter Hossain, the managing director of Wasa.

Postogola and the old part of the city in general have the majority of unauthorised commercial water lines.

A source in Wasa claimed that as many as 66,000 holdings do not have any metres and 50,000 to 60,000 metres were out of order.

With a population of 1.25 crore, Dhaka's daily demand for water is around 2000 million litres, but Wasa is able to supply 1450-1500 million litres.

Wasa relies on surface water

and underground water sources. Eighty five percent of the supply comes from underground sources through 407 deep tubewells. For surface water, there are four treatment plants.

"The pressure is extreme on the underground water. Every year the water level drops by three to 15 metres as it doesn't get the chance to recharge because of random filling of waterbodies and lakes around the city. Although the number of deep tubewells have increased over the last few years, the crisis remains just as acute," said Hossain.

As the population of the city has a yearly 10 percent growth, the need for water by 2006 is expected to shoot up to 2500 million litres a day according to a Wasa study.

A source informed that in 2003, Wasa had a 54 percent system loss of which 20 percent was attributed to technical reasons. The remaining loss was

incurred because of illegal connections.

Disposal of sewage is another Wasa headache. The city currently has a daily volume of 13,00,00 cubic metres of sewage but Wasa has the capacity to treat 1,20,000 cubic metres.

Now the authorities are planning to get tough to safeguard the future.

Wasa announcements published in newspapers over the past weeks categorically mentioned that setting up illegal water and sewerage lines and installation of deep tubewells without taking permission from the authorities were violations of Dhaka Wasa Act 1996 and were punishable offences.

To give the illegal line owners a last chance, Wasa has set a February 15 deadline for making unauthorised connections legal through a process.

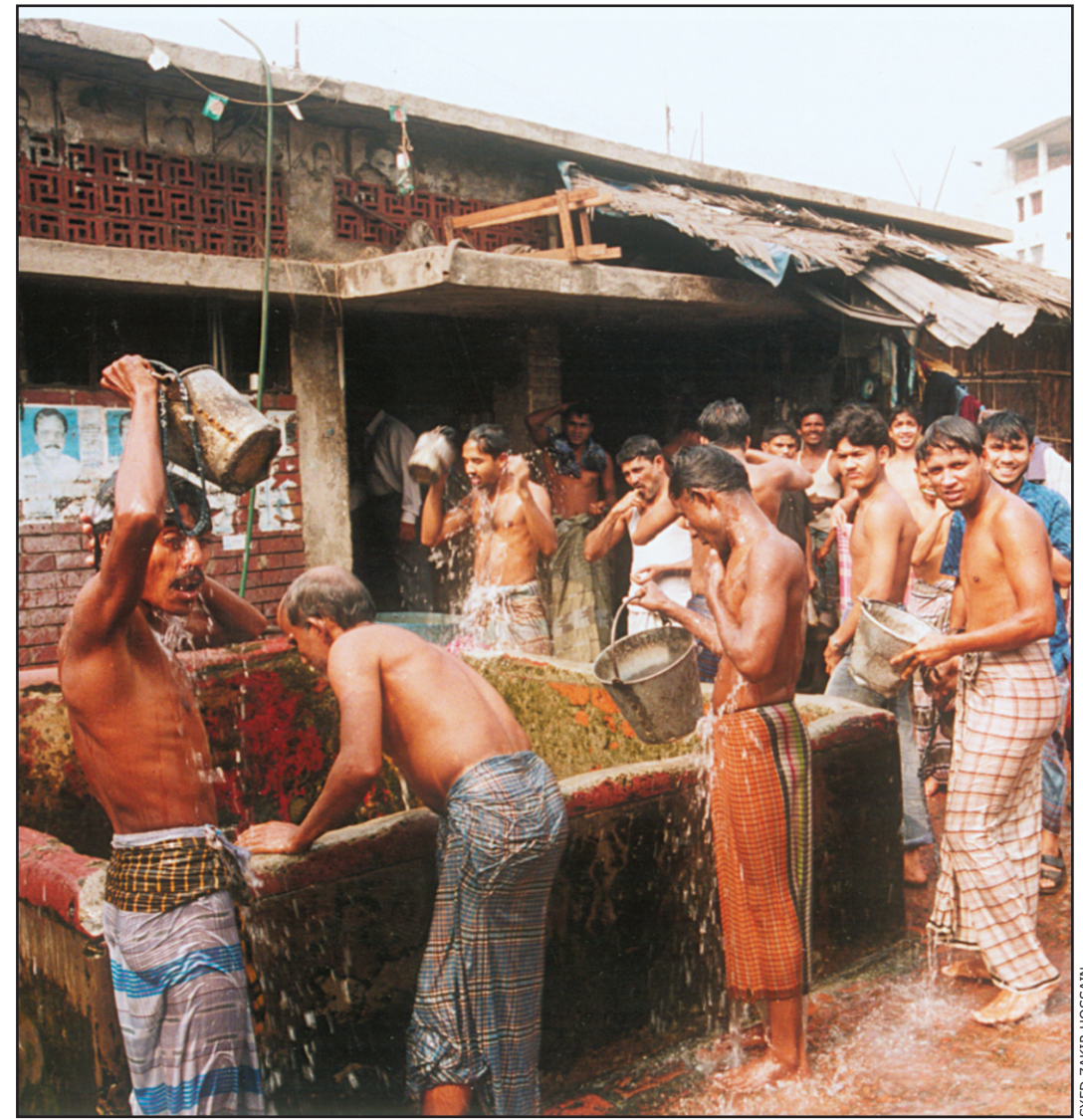
Holders with illegal connections have to apply in a prescribed form to the zonal reve-

nue or project manager's office. The forms costing Tk. 100 each, are available at Janata Bank branches at Fakirerpool, Postogola, Mohammedpur, Mirpur Section 1, Mohakhali (corporate branch) and Wasa's zonal revenue offices.

Wasa has warned that those who fail to meet the deadline have to face strict measures under the law. Any future appeals for getting the lines legalised will not be entertained also after February 15.

Managing director Hossain conceded that it was not possible to get illegal connections unless a section of Wasa employees were involved in the procedure.

"In 2003, our target revenue earning was Tk. 300 crore but in reality, we got a return of Tk.175 crore. I believe by legalising the unauthorised connections, we can expect to add around Tk. 100 crore to Wasa's earnings in future," said Hossain.



Looks like a 'public bath'-- at Karwan Bazar.

Another round of price hike ahead of Eid



CITY CORRESPONDENT

Prices of essentials, especially the Eid-related items, have marked another round of increase in the city's kitchen markets.

The hike started with the soybean oil price last week. But now, with Eid-ul-Azha around the corner, items like onions, pilau rice, ghee, sugar and spices are showing a similar trend.

"Prices of Eid items are making a steady rise," said Akram Hossain, a consumer at Karwan Bazar. "It will go totally out of control just before the Eid day," he said expressing fear and disgust.

This correspondent yesterday found that prices of different items varied in kitchen markets at New Market, Kaptan Bazar, Karwan Bazar, Hatir Pool, Shantinagar and Palassey. But in all the markets most items were selling at much higher prices compared to last Eid.

Local onions are now selling at Tk 26-28 a kilogram while imported Indian varieties sell at Tk 22-24. The price of onions was high also during the last Eid. But they were only Tk 10-12 a kilogram at this time last year.

Soybean price, which has been rising unabated, has marked an all-time high at Tk 60 per litre. Its price

Consumers allege that although there is no crisis of any item, the hoarders are raising prices time to time at their will

was Tk 56 a week go. A five-litre container of soybean oil now sells at Tk 290, up from its last week's Tk 275.

Prices of different brands of ghee including Milk Vita, Red Cow and Baghabari have also registered rise.

Pilau rice, which was selling at Tk 28-30 a kilogram during the last Eid now sells at Tk 35-38.

Prices of spices also marked sharp rise. Cinnamon now sells at Tk 160 per kilogram, Tk 40 up from last Eid. Cardamom, which was Tk 800 a kilogram is now priced at Tk 1000 and clove registered Tk 100 rise per kilogram while cumin by Tk 20.

Prices of powdered and intact dry chilli, turmeric, garlic and ginger have

also marked a steady rise.

Besides Eid-related items, prices of different varieties of pulses, flour and eggs are also rising, market sources said.

Consumers alleged that although there is no crisis of any item, the hoarders are raising prices time to time at their will.

"The authorities have failed to control the market. They neither monitor price situation nor take action against these hoarders," said Ruhul Amin at New Market.

The government had introduced mobile courts ahead of the last Eid. The courts, despite all efforts in Dhaka and Chittagong, failed to control the price hike of essentials.

Recently at a meeting with the District Commissioner of Chittagong, the business community of Khatunganj, Chaktai and Rajakhali who play a big role in import of essentials, placed some proposals for control of the price situation.

They urged the authorities to take immediate steps to stop customs harassment, bribing, toll-taking at different points and smuggling in border areas. They also demanded action against the hoarders. Otherwise, the price situation will never become stable, they warned.

AN ODE TO A POET



They call it Rudra Mela. They converge there every year to remember a poet--Rudra Mohammad Shahidullah, a symbol of youth and vigour. They recite, sing, discuss and dance to pay their tribute to his birthday. This year's day-long programme was inaugurated at Bakultala of the Fine Arts Institute on Friday by journalist Fayeze Ahmed. Poets Samudra Gupta, Nurul Huda, Mohon Raihan, cultural activists like Nasiruddin Yusuf and Golam Quddus and many others attended. Rudra Mela began at the same place in 1991. The poet passed away at the age of 34.