

Dengue catches city napping

SULTANA RAHMAN

With over 400 hand spray machines inoperative, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) runs out of steam to fight aedes mosquitoes responsible for dengue that staged a deadly comeback in the absence of surveillance.

Dengue came back with the arrival of monsoon, infecting at least 42 people, most of them admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital, Dhaka Shishu Hospital, Al Raji Hospital and Samorita with dengue haemorrhagic fever since early June.

"This year dengue has struck the city earlier than expected in a sign of alarm," said Dr Rabeya Baten, medical officer of Samorita Hospital, who has received four patients early this month.

According to the health directorate control room, at least 195 people died of dengue and 14,089 were infected up to June.

DCC Chief Health Officer Azizul Hoque wrote to different city hospitals and clinics on June 20, asking them to keep the DCC posted on dengue patients and the areas they came from.

"On information, we will mark the areas as risky and launch a mosquito control drive

there," a DCC health officer said.

The anti-mosquito drive hit snags as over 400 of 1,352 hand foggers went out of order and more than 300 machines went missing. Only about 500 machines are now working in the city's 10 zones.

"The inoperative machines were dumped at the Mosquito Control Department (MCD) in Lalbagh, DCC's 10 zonal offices and Nagar Bhaban," said an official of the DCC health department.

But neither the DCC health department nor the zonal offices asked the authorities to repair the inoperative machines.

DCC's senior pest control officer, Dr Nasim Us Seraj, said: "The breeding of larvae is under control."

The DCC-run aedes surveillance and monitoring cell was closed mysteriously amid the spread of dengue in 2002.

This year round, the DCC will not be able to fight dengue because of long suspension of surveillance, experts fear.

"We need more information on dengue-risk areas to take special measures. Now we are in the dark about which areas should get priority," another DCC official said.

"We are not sure whether information on dengue will be

available, as hospitals are not obliged to update us on incidence of the disease," he said.

Before the shutdown of the surveillance cell in 2002, the DCC identified at least 26 possible aedes-breeding zones, including Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmondi, Baridhara, Kalabagan, Kanthal Bagan, Jigatola, Lalbagh, Hajaribagh and Shankhari Bazar.

The DCC then marked eight of its 10 zones as having alarming concentration of aedes mosquitoes. The presence of 20 larvae in a container is said to be normal, the limit which has been far outstripped over the years, raising the number to 215 in a container.

The number of adult aedes mosquitoes in the city rose up to 10 times the normal. Unchecked infestation of eggs and larvae has allowed billions of adult mosquitoes to grow. "The situation has not been changed so far," the health official said.

Experts said eggs of aedes could survive even for two years in odd weathers making cyst. When they come in touch with water for two or three days, they become larvae and aedes spreads its wings to strike.

This year the risk of dengue haemorrhagic fever is high, specialists predicted. During the monsoon, aedes larvae breed high in stagnant water around

households.

"If preventive measures are not taken now, dengue will spread wide in two weeks," Rabeya Baten said.

The government allocated Tk 15 crore in proposed mosquito control budget for the fiscal 2004-2005, up from Tk 12 crore for the fiscal 2003-2004.

The health directorate has got approval for purchase of 90 new fogging machines. Five fogger machines will be working in each ward from now on as part of dengue control measures. We will get Tk 90,000 for announcement by microphone in a ward to build anti-dengue awareness," the DCC chief health officer said.

The ICDDR,B research centre says the latest DCC larval survey found the highest aedes egg concentration in rooftop uncovered water tanks, open cemented water tanks in under-construction buildings and tyres in the open.

Dengue and dengue haemorrhagic fever have emerged over the years as a major public health risk. The primary vector mosquito has spread throughout the tropics and into susceptible human populations in urban areas.

Runaway urbanisation created new breeding grounds for the vector and quickened the spread of the disease.



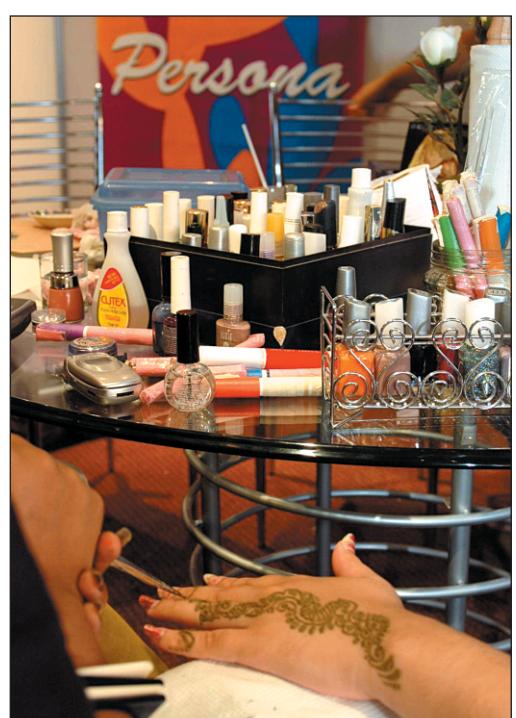
The DCC gearing to combat the mosquito menace which has infected many.

SOURCE: accuweather.com

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SHOWCASING WEDDING ACCESSORIES



A wedding festival, the first of its kind, drew hundreds of visitors to feast their eyes on the specially decorated stalls showcasing wedding accessories like cards, bridal saris of silk, katan and chiffon; serwanis, turbans, lehangas, bridal room and entrance decorations and ornaments. The two-day festival at the Spectra Convention Centre in Gulshan involved matchmaking agencies that produced biographical data of prospective brides and grooms on request. The event came to a close yesterday.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Cars to roll through Mohakhali flyover in October

Communications minister visits the site

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The first flyover in Mohakhali will be open to traffic in the first week of October.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda yesterday visited the flyover site and expressed satisfaction with the progress of work. More than 95 percent of the work has been completed and the Roads and

Highways Department is now giving the final touch to the flyover, communications ministry officials said.

During his visit to the flyover, Huda was told that the rest of the work including infrastructural development, bitumen carpeting, approach roads, lightening and beautification would be complete in July.

The flyover is being con-

structed at a cost of Tk 113.52 crore with the financial help of the World Bank under Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP). First Metalurgical Construction Company of China constructed the 17.9-metre wide and 1.12-km long bridge.

The flyover will have four lanes on each direction and is expected to ease traffic congestion at the busy Mohakhali intersection.

The construction of the flyover started in December 2001 and was scheduled to end in June this year. But the work was delayed by three months mainly because of installation of a shock absorption system to withstand earthquake. The installation of Shock Transmission Unit (STU) will be complete in September.

Another flyover in Khilgaon is still under construction.



Women, left, in Old Dhaka wait for hours to collect water and a cobweb of electric cables hangs overhead, putting people's lives in danger.



Old and uncared-for

Utility services such as gas and electricity hit lows in Old Dhaka

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Old Dhaka is left out of facelifts and civic amenities that are provided for the new quarter of the city on a priority basis.

"As certain sections of Old Dhaka qualify among some of the most densely populated areas in the world, utility services such as electricity, gas, water, sewerage and drainage always feel the pressure. Lack of open space is another problem," said Professor Nazrul Islam, prominent urban expert.

The old quarter of the capital that once proudly housed the residences of Nawabs and

Zamindars of Dhaka and still home to a number of archaeological sites and six important commercial points has not seen modernisation since independence.

Stagnated rainwater still swamps places like Shankhari Bazar, Islampur, Sutrapur, Laxmi Bazar, Tanti Bazar, Bangshal and Swarughat.

"We are the deprived lot of Dhaka. People who come from other parts of the city cannot drink water here as it smells foul. Our narrow roads are unfit for walking because of constant traffic jams and garbage dumped on them," said Lutful Haq, a businessman in Islampur.

The old quarter of the capital that once proudly housed the residences of Nawabs and

been transformed into parking lots for pushcarts and other vehicles and people dump household waste in open spaces there.

"We don't have any open space available to take a fresh breath. Decent people cannot go there. In the evening, they become haunts of drug addicts and criminals and vagabonds," said Mohammad Siraj, a student of Jagannath University College.

Foul odour in water supplied by the Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) is a long-standing complaint from Old Dhaka residents, but officials shrug it off.

"There are thousands of leaks in pipelines throughout the city

which is a reason for foul smell and it is not only in Old Dhaka," a Wasa official said.

He pointed out that the source of the water in the old city -- the Buriganga -- is highly polluted, the reason extra water purification chemicals are added to the supply which makes water smelly.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) does not have any wholesale future plans about Old Dhaka.

"The DCC alone cannot change the entire set-up of Old Dhaka. Still, we are working on different small projects. It requires massive decisions," a senior DCC official said.