



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Bapa to challenge roadwork through wetland

The environmentalist group will file a writ petition with High Court in a couple of days

SULTANA RAHMAN

An environmentalist group is set to file a writ petition against the government in a couple of days in an effort to save Rampura-Hatirjheel-Begunbari, the last remaining water body in Dhaka.

"We are preparing initial papers to file the petition," said Abu Naser Khan, secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) that will move the High Court, assisted by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela).

"If we fail to protect the wetland, Dhaka will turn unliveable because of an environmental disaster," he warned. Bapa will challenge a government plan to launch a controversial roadwork project violating the Wetland Protection Act, 2000.

Part of the project is to construct a road with a sewerage line over the

wetland at a cost of Tk 547 crore from Tongi Diversion Road to Progoti Sarani, while the second part is designed to develop the roadside area under Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) as its implementing agency.

Environmental activists working for Bapa say it is a gross violation of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, also known as the Dhaka master plan, that has earmarked the area as a flood retention point.

The environmentalists fear the city will face unprecedented waterlogging that will swamp all roads and localities around Hatirjheel, if the area is filled up.

Many expressed concern over the project and said the area was naturally designed to retain storm water of an area covering 40 square kilometres. Sources said the government is giv-

ing 'top priority' to constructing the road as the city lacks an east-west road network.

"The project concept paper has been sent to the Planning Commission and we look forward to getting approval soon," said DCC Chief Executive Officer Habibur Rahman.

Earlier, the Department of Environment (DoE) also opposed the project saying it will create environmental hazards in the city. The DoE refused to give clearance to it, as it said the project was not planned considering environmental aspects and environment-related laws.

The DoE asked Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) that laid out the plan to carry out a scientific survey before implementation of the project that covers 237.64 acres of low-lying areas. The government owns only

37.64 acres in the huge stretch.

Senior DoE officials said they would not give clearance to the project before a detail impact assessment was carried out for greater interest. "Although the plan can be forwarded without DoE clearance, we are firm on our stand," a DoE official said, asking not to be named.

"Any development work will have to make sure it is environment-friendly," a DoE official said.

The DoE served at least four legal notices on three real estate organisations and a private university that are filling up the wetland in signs of encroachment. Bapa called on the DCC and Rajuk to evict illegal occupiers and take an initiative to protect the wetland.

"We have sent letters to the mayor and the Rajuk chairman informing them about land-grab. We also asked

them not to launch any anti-environment project," the Bapa secretary said.

"We did not want to go to court, but the government has forced us to do so. We hope the government will understand and stop the project," Khan added.

According to the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature or the World Conservation Union), a densely populated city like Dhaka requires 25 percent wetland for breathing space and a sustainable habitat of flora and fauna.

But Dhaka has less than 10 percent wetland that not only threatens its own liveliness but destroys the livelihood of many, especially the poor who depend on it.

PICHCHI HANNAN BEHIND BARS

His remnants terrorise neighbourhood

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The absence of Pichchi Hannan has not stopped his men from terrorising Karwan Bazar, Rajabazar, Green Road, Kathalbag and Panthapath areas.

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on June 26 arrested Hannan, one of the 23 top criminals on the wanted list. Accused in 21 cases including murders, he had been lurking and terrorising the areas although he had a prize on his head.

Although in police custody, Hannan's operations are carried out by his well-organised group as his network of drug

dealings and toll extortion from Kathalbag to Farmgate was not snipped.

"He has a number of mobile connections and never use one twice a day," said a drug peddler of Hannan's syndicate in Karwan Bazar, adding he had seen him only once in the last two years.

This godfather has handpicked and nominated five to eight persons from his group to collect extortion area-wise. These nominees are given a percentage from the extortion collected.

"We practically see no change in our areas, even though Hannan is behind bars. His associates continue his work



In fear of Hannan's men, shops in Katalbag are covered with grills.

unhindered," said Hamidur Rahman (not real name), owner of a furniture showroom in Panthapath.

"I have never seen him, but I run my business paying him regularly. However, I have received his instructions by phone," the businessman added.

"It is better to be ruled by a single group. But now the number of local hoodlums demand extortion," said Sheikh Jaqub Ali, owner of a shop on Indira Road.

"Sweden Aslam, another criminal in custody, has got his group active and is trying to take control of Hannan's area. The underworld battle is going on in our

area," said Mizan, a police source.

Hannan's groups are active in the open space behind the Basundhara Shopping Mall at Panthapath and on its adjacent road, a haven for dealers of drugs such as Phensidyl. This is another area where Aslam's men are trying to conquer.

"It was not an environment a decent family can live in. After the arrest of Hannan, the area has changed for the better. We hope it would continue to remain so," said Mustafizur Rahman, a resident of Green Road.

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 election was free and fair and was held in the most peaceful manner. There was not a single incident of trouble at any polling centre."

-- Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan

BNP Secretary General
Says at a post-poll press conference at Mosaddak Ali Fala's election office on July 1, brushing aside the allegation of vote rigging.
Source: The Daily Star



"Mannan (Abdul Mannan) will show his disrespect for people's opinion if he goes to court as people have voted for me. Everyone should respect people's decision."

-- Mosaddak Ali Fala

Newly elected lawmaker of Ramna-Telgaon constituency
Says in his post-poll reaction at his election office on July 2.
Source: Manab Jamin

"In this age of advanced technology, press photographs can be easily tampered with."

-- Harris Chowdhury

Political Secretary to the Prime Minister
Alleges on July 2 that the pictures published by some newspapers on fake voting in the parliamentary by-polls to Dhaka-10 constituency were not true.
Source: The Daily Star

"We have seen the corpse of democracy in a coffin of election."

-- Mahi B Chowdhury

Lawmaker of Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) and chief polling agent of BDB candidate Abdul Mannan in Dhaka-10 by-polls
Tells a press conference on July 1.
Source: Prothom Alo



"I cast 50 votes myself... plenty others came to vote like me."

-- Faruk (he gave one name)

Resident of Shahjahanpur
Claims to have stamped at least 50 ballots for the ruling alliance candidate at a Dhaka-10 by-polls centre on July 1.
Source: The Daily Star

"The increase in schooling cost outpaces the price hike of essentials or electricity. The rising cost of living and maintenance as the reason for such increased fees sounds absurd. Schools don't even pay tax as we pay."

-- Mahmud Chowdhury

A Guardian
Comments on high fees of English medium schools.
Source: The Daily Star

SURVIVAL UNCERTAIN

Topor, wedding accessories for Hindu brides and grooms are mainly made in the old part of the city where more than a hundred traditional artists are involved in the business. Avijit Dhar, a topor maker at Shankhari Bazar has been in this business for over 15 years and does not want to continue any more. Dukhu Gopal Dhar, Avijit's father handed down this family business, presently facing rough times because of the decline in the number of customers. Avijit says that because of the migration of the Hindu community from Old Dhaka to neighbouring countries, topor makers live in a fear as the business is losing its glamour. Avijit does not want his son in the same profession and his fellow colleagues echoed his sentiments.



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