

Flood-hit Dhaka reels from water crisis

MIZANUR KHAN

More than two million city residents are in acute drinking water crisis as supply has become contaminated with

30 water pumps of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) already inundated by rising floodwater.

Water pipelines stretching over a few hundred kilometres and many reservoirs have also gone under water, posing a serious threat to public health.

According to media reports, floods have already affected more than 50 lakh people or half the total city population. People in 18 thanas of 22 are already marooned.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) has forecast that more city areas may go under water in the next few days as four rivers around the capi-

tal, already flowing much above the danger mark, continue to swell.

ANH Akhter Hossain, managing director (MD) of Wasa, said the authorities have started to rush safe drinking water to the affected people by boat and rickshaw-van.

"As the situation in Khilgaon, Bashabo, Goran and Nandipara has worsened, we have started to supply water there at 14 points in portable tanks," he said. "We will also supply in 5-litre cans."

But the situation is still far from satisfactory. Many have already been attacked with diarrhoea and typhoid.

Wasa officials said although some pumps are now submerged, the authorities have not stopped using them.

"If we stop the pumps, dirty water will get inside the pipelines because of the

vacuum created," the Wasa MD said. "We have to keep the water pressure in the pipelines high all the time as a protection against contamination."

Wasa has made special arrangements for uninterrupted power supply to the inundated pumps.

The flood-hit areas in the eastern part of Dhaka where people have been facing the water crisis include Swamibagh, Arambagh, Fakirapool, Gopibagh, Rampura, Badda, Sabujbagh, Motijheel, Kamalapur, Basabo, Khilgaon, Goran, Meradia, Mughda, Manda, Kajla, Rajakhali, Matuail, Jatrabari and Madartek.

On the western fringe, the worst affected areas are Lalbagh, Rayerbazar, Islampur, Bangshal, Shyampur, Faridabad, Swarighat, Sadarghat and Kamalbagh.

Basabo and Meradia are the worst hit areas. "We virtually are left without a single drop to drink," said Shayla Shabnam, a Dhaka University student in Basabo.

Pipelines have leaked and water now reeks of sewage.

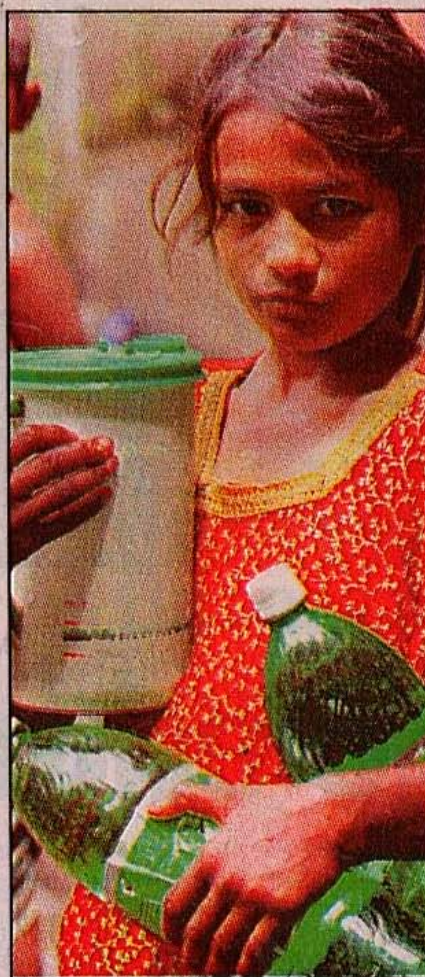
"We bring drinking water in pitchers from our uncle's house in Tejgaon," said Ahmed Shafi, a Meradia resident.

Residents now purify water by using fitkiri (alum) and water purifying tablets. "The tablets adds a bad odour to water," said a local.

Many families have already left the inundated areas for higher ground.

Wasa has directed its staff to stay in the zonal offices even after office hours.

"They will monitor the situation and inform the head office in case of emergencies," a source said.



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 sky is open and it is difficult to control."

-- M Shamsul Islam

Information Minister

Says at a press briefing on July 21,

when some journalists said a

number of satellite channels includ-

ing some Indian ones are transmit-

ting late night programmes contrary

to religious and social values.

Source: The Daily Star



"Even if I vote for Russell, his leader Sheikh Hasina cannot become the prime minister during the rule of the present government. So the four-party alliance should be strengthened by people if they want Gazipur to be developed."

-- Professor MA Mannan

Alliance Candidate for Gazipur-2 by-polls

Says on July 20 at an election campaign rally in Horinal.

Source: Prothom Alo

"Now there is no big hoodlum, except the small ones in the area."

-- Altaf Hussain

Commissioner of Lalbagh ward No. 61

Tells a public meeting organised to protest rising crimes in the area, on July 23.

Source: Prothom Alo

"We want nothing but rain to stop. We may survive this time if it does."

-- Kalimuddin (one name used)

A flood-affected slum dweller in Dokkingaon

Tells the Prothom Alo on July 23.

Source: Prothom Alo



"Some newspapers are giving good coverage to Bangla Bhai. I have not seen a headline on me being in politics for 40 years, but there are four-column headlines on Bangla Bhai."

-- Motiur Rahman Nizami

Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami and Industries Minister

Says at a press conference on July 22.

Source: Prothom Alo

"Godfathers are more powerful than the prime minister."

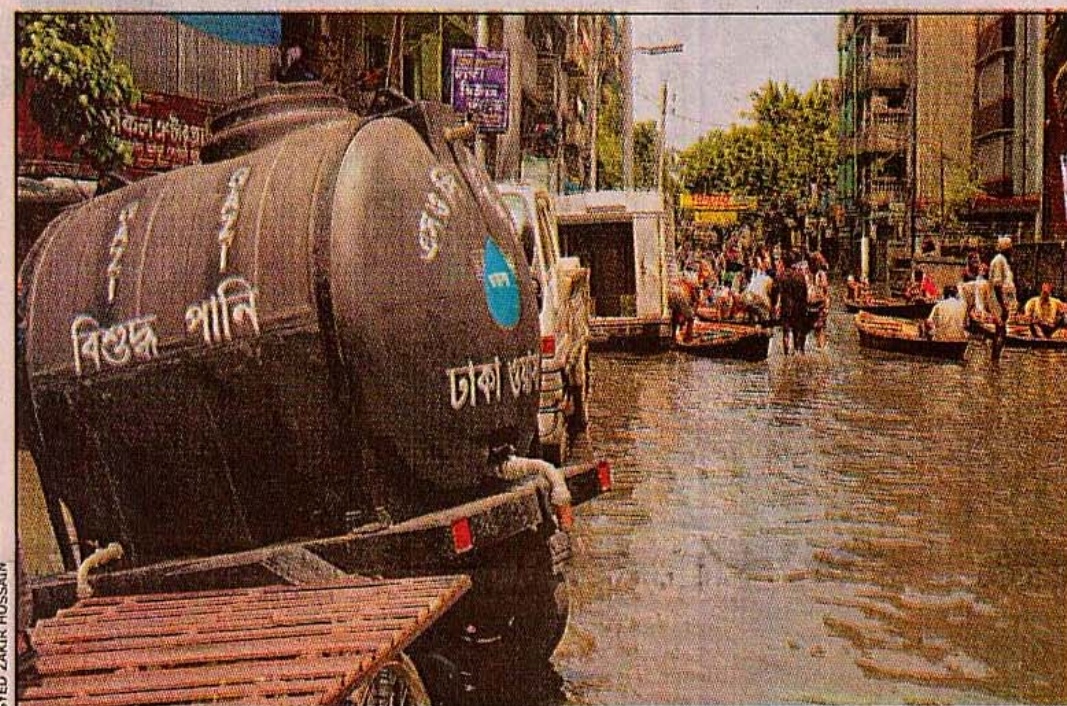
-- Chowdhury Forman Reza Liton

Eldest son of abducted businessman Jamal Uddin

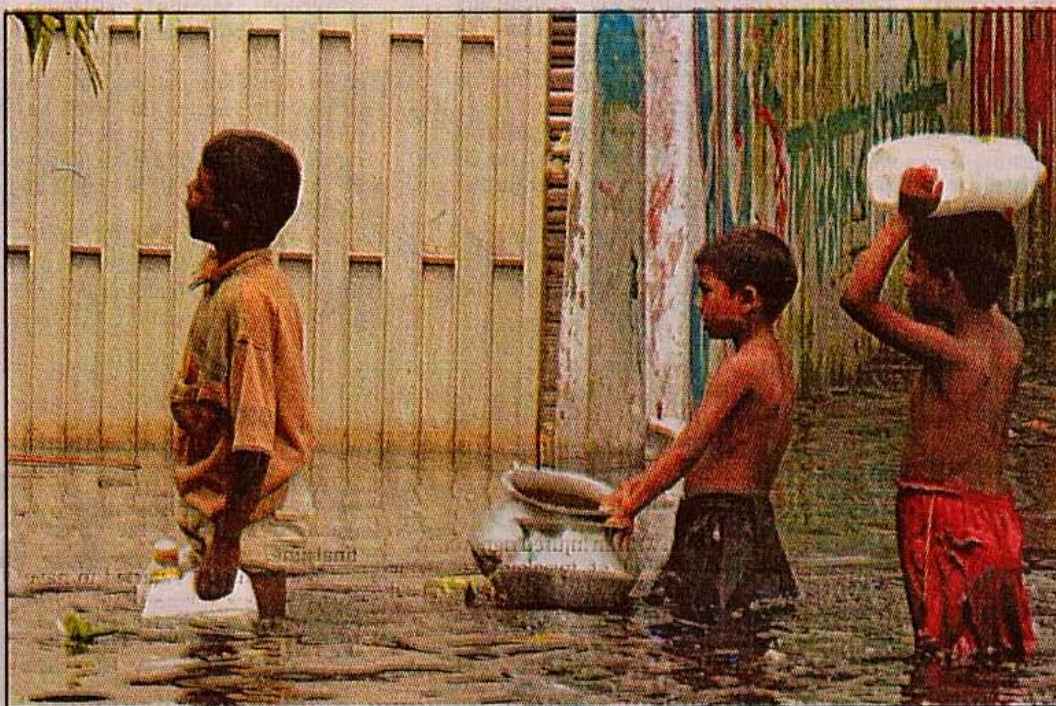
Says on July 24 at a programme in front of the Press Club, asking why none of

the abductors have been arrested even after the list was handed over to Prime

Minister Khaleda Zia. Source: Prothom Alo



Water, a rare commodity these days although the rains have brought in floods, is being distributed by Wasa (left) as little boys wait for their fill (right).



Two parks go to Rajuk for facelift

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The city developer, Rajuk, has taken away two public parks from Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) because of its failure to maintain them, according to a recent decision.

It was decided to remove the park at the DIT Extension Road opposite the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation and Panthakunja park at the Sonargaon intersection from DCC's control.

The decision was made at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui on July 17 at the Prime Minister's Office, where Rajuk's Chief Engineer Emdadul Islam and DCC Chief Executive Officer Habibur Rahman were also present.

Although the parks were meant to be maintained as open spaces, the DCC rented out part of the park on the DIT Extension Road as toilets and was planning to hand over another part of it on a commercial basis as markets and shops.

Of the six public parks in Motijheel

and Dilkusha areas, the park between Shilpa Bank and Adamjee Building is the only one left, a Rajuk official said.

"The triangular two-bigha park was developed in the early 1980s and was handed over to the DCC for maintenance," he said.

In an attempt to rationalise this project, Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said the site was not a park but a strip of government land marked for constructing public toilets, a responsibility that lay with the DCC Health Department.

"There are no public toilets in Dilkusha-Motijheel area. Construction of the toilets are part of the 100 public toilets to be built around the city, funded by the Asian Development Bank," the mayor told Star City, adding that the city lacks free space to develop such city facilities.

Numerous requests made at spot visits by Rajuk officials to stop construction fell on deaf ears. As construction continued, Rajuk filed a case under the wetland and open space protection law with Motijheel Police Station last week.

A Rajuk engineer said the ongoing construction in the park area does not only amount to a breach of protection and building laws but also spoils the beauty of the city.

"The DCC has rented out a portion of the Panthakunja Park in front of the Sonargaon Hotel to the Kanthalbagan Club and they have put up a structure there," Rajuk's chief engineer said.

The DCC estate division accepted a letter from Rajuk on July 19 that claimed the two parks for renovation, protection and maintenance. The DCC is now preparing a reply. According to the Town Improvement Act 1953, all parks belong to the DCC, a DCC official said.

Rajuk's chief engineer said the Central Park in Baridhara was handed over to the Baridhara Society and it is well maintained. Rajuk plans to take away other parks in phases from the DCC, he added.

"The Panthakunja Park will be handed over to the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel for maintenance and the BRTC will maintain the DIT extension park. We will go on an eviction drive soon and we don't need

DCC permission to take back our parks," Rajuk's chief engineer said.

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI) has requested Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to hand over three parks and two medians for maintenance and beautification, but nothing has taken place since.

Despite several attempts, DCC's chief executive officer could not be contacted for comments.

Denying Rajuk's allegations, a DCC official said not all parks are used for commercial purposes. "We have evicted encroachers several times but influential people like local commissioners and police have helped re-encroachment," he said.

Over the years, the DCC has failed to maintain several parks, playgrounds and open spaces to construct buildings like mosque-cum-markets and colonies.

Half the Shaheed Park in Mohammadpur, the only playground in the densely populated area, has been turned into a mosque-cum-market. The large public park opposite the Shooting

Club in Gulshan was converted into a DCC sweepers' colony to accommodate several hundred families. In Karwan Bazar, the space earmarked for parking has been leased to shop owners.

Meantime, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on July 19 declared illegal an initiative of the DCC to construct a multistorey shopping complex in front of the GPO near Bangabandhu Avenue.

The bench of Justice MD Ruhul Amin, MM Ruhul Amin and Md Tafazzal Islam allowed the appeal of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela).

The 1.2-acre land of Udayan Market, an under-construction shopping complex, was earmarked in the city's master plan for car parking. The Ministry of Public Works handed over the land to the DCC in 1986 and instead of a car park, the DCC started construction of the shopping complex, Bela said in a press release.

The site is the only open space for air and light to pass into the surrounding buildings. If the DCC constructs the 341-shop complex and office spaces, the area will face more traffic jam, Bela said.



A flower shop that still thrives on encroached land in Shahbagh.

Shops thrive on encroached land

SULTANA RAHMAN

More than 30 flower and food shops are plying their trade on encroached government land at Shahbagh intersection in alleged underhand dealings with Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) officials and ward commissioners.

The grabbers have recently hung a signboard in the name of Shahbagh Phool Babosayee Samiti (a flower traders' association) which some people called an attempt to camouflage encroachment.

The process of legalising the business on occupied land begins with forming associations. When the DCC tries to evict the grabbers, they go to court seeking a stay order on the eviction drive. Shahbagh Flower Traders Association is the latest addition to the long line of such mushrooming associa-

tions.

"It is high time we evicted the occupiers before anyone goes to court, otherwise the DCC will lose land to grabbers," a DCC official said.

DCC's estate department, tasked with evicting the illegal occupiers, allegedly ignores the situation or helps the occupiers grab land.

"We tried several times to clear the illegal shops off Shahbagh, but the drives fizzled out as the DCC has no permanent police force. The unavailability of police force delays the eviction," an estate department official said, asking not to be named.

Shop owners said every shop pays Tk 5,000 a month to Ward Commissioner Chowdhury Alam Ratan, an allegation he brushed aside, when contacted by Star City. Alam said he did not have any dealings with the shopkeepers.

The Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists of Dhaka University unit, it is alleged, also collect rents.

"The ward commissioner takes the money from us as he has influence on DCC officials. There has been no respite from paying money to commissioners or extortionists since we ventured into this business," a shop owner said, requesting anonymity.

"Over the last two months, the situation has turned worse as both the ward commissioner and JCD activists are demanding rents from us separately," a shop owner said.

Supporters of another Ward Commissioner Khaja Habib also demand rents," the shop owner said. "Besides monthly rent, we have to pay money to some others on political and social occasions," another business-man said.

Khaja Habib also denied the allegation saying: "I'm not involved in extortion. I don't know anything about it."

A shopkeeper said: "We are passing our days in misery as the money we earn is spent on extortion. I have applied to the DCC for my shop's legal status. Once I get approval I may not have to pay so much illegal toll."

Apart from Malancha, no other flower shop has legal permission from the DCC. The shops sprouted around a three-storey building illegally built by DCC's former chief engineer.

Later, the DCC permitted its commercial use. The former DCC chief engineer, also chairman of Bangabandhu Social Welfare Parishad, turned the second floor of the building into its office. The JCD leaders have now locked the office of Bangabandhu Social Welfare Parishad.