



the city that was

On the banks of the Buriganga stands the pink majestic Ahsan Manzil, an example of the nation's rich cultural heritage. The home of Dhaka's Nawab and a silent spectator to many events, it has 31 rooms with a huge dome atop which can be seen from afar. Renovated and turned into a museum recently, it has 23 galleries displaying portraits, furniture and utensils used by the Nawab.

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Troubled environment strikes back

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SULTANA RAHMAN

The flood-prone capital runs the risk of edging towards an ecological disaster as most flood-flow zones and water bodies have been filled up over the years in a disturbing sign of reckless urban growth.

The filling-up of vast areas in Ashulia, Banashree, Aftabnagar, Meradia, Baunia, Badda, Amin Bazar and Hatirjheel, known as water catchments, increased the hazards of floods that swamped much of the city.

The Dhaka Master Plan has clearly marked these areas for flood retention and the Wetland Conservation Act, 2000 bars land development in water bodies.

According to the Conservation Act, no-one has the right to develop wetlands, flood-flow zones or catchments. But developers and landowners have illegally occupied and filled up the areas.

Aerial photos show how water bodies are narrowing down because of land filling.

The government also violates laws. The government plans to develop the city's last remaining water body in Hatirjheel area, spelling a disaster for the city," said Professor Nurul Hasan, chairman of Urban Planning Department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology.

Experts said the areas could consume a huge volume of floodwaters and protect many areas from flooding. Moreover, the city had canals, 26 water reservoirs, hundreds of small and large ponds and marshlands which preserved overflowing water while the canals sent it into different channels.

"If we had saved the water bodies, canals and ponds, it could have consumed a third of floodwater," said Selim Bhuiyan, executive engineer of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre of the Water Development Board (WDB).

A 1992 survey conducted by Flood Action Plan (FAP) under WDB, the area of Dhaka is 118.62 square kilometres, while it has about 736 hectares of water bodies that are only 6 percent of the total area.

"The flood-prone and densely populated city requires 25 percent wetland and water bodies for flood control, breathing space and sustainable habitats of flora and fauna," Nurul Hasan said.

Last year, a developer engaged more than 100 dredgers for dumping millions of cubic metres of earth in the large wetland, Ashulia, which is under the flood action plan-zone 8A. It planned to create 35,000 plots on 6,000 bighas.

Apart from this project, the developer has grabbed more than 73 acres of government land in Ashulia.

Rajuk filed a case under clauses 5 and 8 of the Wetland Conservation Act against the developer with Savar Police Station. The developer was accused of illegally occupying wetland in Ashulia and filling it up without an official clearance.

The low-lying areas near Rampura towards the Balu river, which is now called Aftabnagar under the flood action plan zone 8B, have also been grabbed. "It has made the drainage system in Dhaka vulnerable. Now it will be a serious barrier to the recession of floodwaters," a WDB official said.

The government planned to impose regulations on real estate developers to control the trend of filling up low-lying lands. It was supposed to formulate a separate policy for regulating the unplanned growth of the high-rise buildings. The housing and public works ministry last year initiated the plan, which is now shelved.

Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas said the Wetland Protection Act would be strictly enforced from now on to ensure environmental balance and flooding.

The ministry will demarcate 'all flood flow zones' around the city on the basis of the Dhaka Master Plan and aerial photos and make a public announcement soon, giving clear guidelines for real estate development.



Flood-hit Goran: More city areas will be flooded in the coming years if reckless urbanisation goes on.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

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.

"Flood can be a curse for the people in the country but it is a blessing for the coalition government. Prime Minister termed the flood as blessing because 10 crore taka has been deposited in her relief fund and she gave nothing to the people."



--Sheikh Hasina
Leader of the opposition and AI chief
Said in a meeting with Bholi Lawyers' Society in her office on July 30.

Source: Daily Manabzamin

"Former President Ziaur Rahman may have announced the start of the liberation war on March 27, but Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed independence of the country on March 7."

--AAMS Arefin Siddique
President, Dhaka University Teachers' Association
Said at a discussion on Distortion of Liberation War: Conspiracy of the anti-war forces on July 29. Source: The Daily Star.

"How do I know who supports which party."

-- Fazle Rabbi
Returning Officer, Gazipur-2 by-poll
Tells on July 30 when asked about opposition allegations on the biased recruitment of the presiding and polling officer. Source: Prothom Alo.



"I want to forget what happened to me and want to stand by the people of the country to face the devastating flood."

-- Gazi Faruque Ahmed
President, Proshika
Tells journalists at a press conference on July 30 at a city hospital after released from jail on bail. Source: Prothom Alo.

"Minister moves at his own pace and the market moves at its own. Price does not come down due to lack of supply."

-- Abdul Karim
Trader at Karwan Bazar kitchen market
Said on July 30 when asked why the prices of essentials are not coming down after the ministry took certain measures to arrest the price hike.
Source: Prothom Alo.



ARTS AND CRAFTS SHOW

The Embassy of Switzerland in Dhaka in cooperation with Bangladesh National Museum has organised a joint exhibition of arts and crafts of the two countries. Inaugurated on July 30 at the Nalinikanta Bhattacharjee Gallery of the museum, the show will remain open to public from 10:30am to 5:00pm everyday till August 10.

