

Troubled environment strikes back

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

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

Oral saline, water purifying tablets pricey

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Unscrupulous businessmen are cashing in on the woes of the flood victims by increasing prices of oral saline.

Oral saline that had been sold at Tk three is now being priced at Tk four to five. Retailers allege that they have to buy them at an increased rate from the wholesalers. There is also a shortage of water purifying tablets in the city's markets. Halogen tablets are being sold at three times higher than its previous price.

"I used to buy these saline packets for Tk three earlier but now the salesman is charging Tk five for each packet," said Abdul Hossain of Mugdapara. Because of this situation, people in remote flood effected areas stand to suffer more.

According to the Disaster Monitoring Cell of the Directorate of Health, 52,809 people were taken ill with diarrhoea in 243 upazilas of 38 districts around the country until yesterday and 33 of them had died. At least 715 people were down with waterborne diseases in Dhaka with one death reported.

Oral saline is the only remedy for diarrhoea as it prevents dehydration or fluid loss from the human body. Relief

Production doubled to stave off cri-



workers said that the present supply of oral saline is insufficient for such a large number of patients.

Meanwhile most of the oral saline producers have increased their production to meet the growing need as the floodwater has begun to recede.

The authorities of Oral Saline Production and Distribution Cell of Institute of Public Health said they have doubled their production to meet the present demand. They said that usually around 1, 30,000 packets of oral saline are produced in their five unit offices in Dhaka, Jessore, Barisal, Comilla and Rangpur.

"But we have doubled our working shifts

from July 29 and produced 2,58,850 packets every day," said Dr. Md. Rashiduzzaman, deputy director of the cell. He said at least one crore extra packets of oral saline is necessary to meet the demands during floods. Dr. Rashiduzzaman also added that the Essential Drug Company Ltd. is producing five lakh packets of oral saline. Bangladesh Rifles also started producing oral saline from Thursday.

"Supply of oral saline to different areas depend on distribution and not on production," the deputy director said. He said the cell distributes packets of oral saline to civil surgeons of different districts

and the surgeons then distribute them in their own areas.

"I do not think there should be a scarcity of oral saline in any area if civil surgeons can distribute it properly," he said adding that 1,21,800 packets of saline was supplied for Dhaka from July 1 to July 28.

However, he expressed his frustration that some civil surgeons do not collect the one-lakh saline packets they are supposed to in normal situations for storage purpose in the event of natural disasters. "They do not collect it even when the cell authorities ask them to and create a huge demand when serious calamities like a flood happens. How can we manage it if everyone wants such a large number of saline packets at the same time?"

The deputy director also added that supply of fresh water in inundated areas is a must to fight the disease. "Some of the medical teams that came to collect saline said that in some areas flood effected people do not even have fresh water to prepare oral saline."

ICDDR, B Employee's Multipurpose Co-operative Society Ltd. that produces oral saline, especially the rice powder saline, has increased its production too.

"Usually we produce 50,000 packets per

month but now we are making 20,000 packets per day," said Mohammed Yunus, Manager of the society. However, he added that the society is unable to produce to its full capability due to a lack of manpower and storage facilities.

At present around 30 persons including the hospital's staff and contractual employees work everyday. More manpower is needed as they produce the saline manually. The society also doesn't have a proper machine for double sealing the packets.

"We cannot produce more packets in advance as our rice saline remains edible for only two months after production in normal temperature. It lasts six months if refrigerated. But we do not have enough storage facilities," said Yunus. He said that none of the private drug companies want to produce oral saline for these reasons.

"They would not be able to make any profit because of the limited storage facilities," he explained.

When asked the deputy director of Oral Saline Production and Distribution Cell also conceded that they are unable to produce and store more packets beforehand to meet any disaster as they do not have enough funds for it.

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 Bhola 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."

-- Qazi 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."

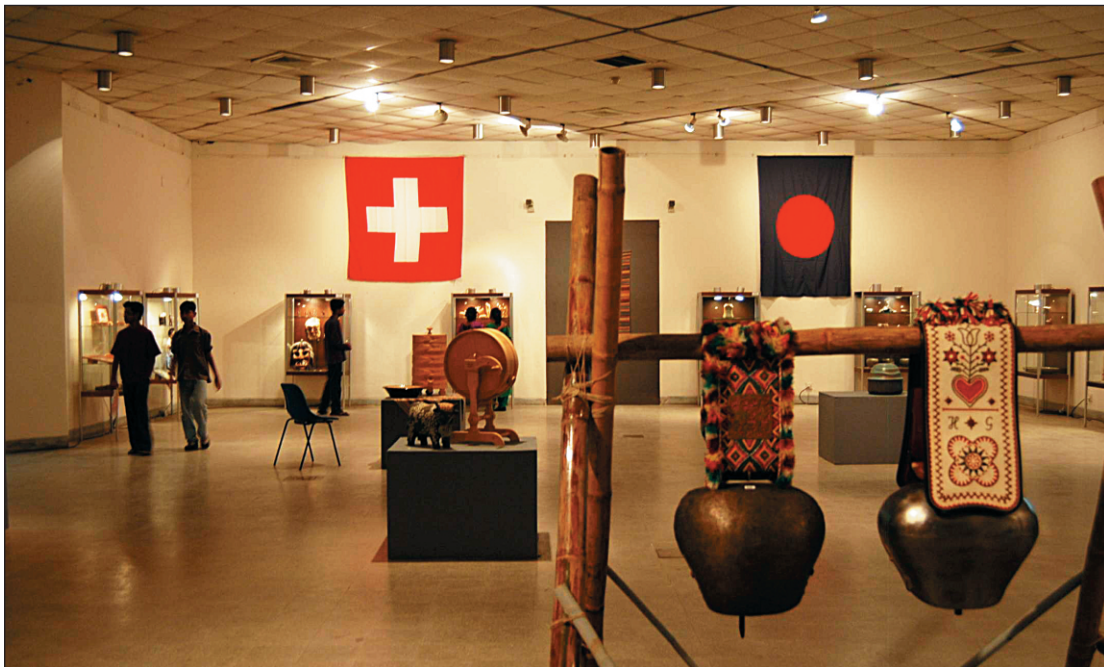
-- Abdul Karim

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.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



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 Bhattashali Gallery of the museum, the show will remain open to public from 10:30am to 5:00pm everyday till August 10.