

For and against embankments



PORMOL PALMA

Minister for Water Resources Hafizuddin Ahmed in a seminar on August 10 declared the government's decision to build an integrated flood protection embankment under the Eastern Bypass Project and installation of pump stations.

Representatives from the civil society, non-government organisations, engineers' associations and the media were present at the seminar organised by Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB) to discuss permanent protection from floods and solution to water-logging in many parts of Dhaka. The planned flood protection embankment was one of the issues that evoked a lot of debate.

Professor Firoz Ahmed, acting chairman of Water and Sewage Authority (Wasa) said that while embankments protect floodwater from entering the city, at the same time they trap water inside Dhaka. Garbage also gather at the embankment causing serious health hazard to the people.

He also pointed at the insignificant role of Wasa's 180 pumps, which have been installed to pump the water out of Dhaka city. Water logging will be a lasting problem unless the canals and

rivers flowing within and around the city are dredged and widened, Professor Ahmed opined.

Engineer Taksim Ahmed of Bapa said no cordon-off approach can be a practical solution to the problems.

"If Dhaka is saved from flood with the embankment, how are we going to save the other cities? If all the cities are to be protected by embankments, what will happen to the villages?" he asked.

Abu Nasir Khan, secretary general of Bapa also strongly opposed the embankment.

"The embankment will have temporary benefits but for a permanent solution, we must go for an open-cordon approach," said Khan.

The embankment will result in more water-logging, create options for the lowlands to be filled up by the illegal encroachers as siltation and waste heightens the lowlands while lessening the capacity of lakes to recharge groundwater, Khan added.

Temperature of Dhaka will also increase and water quality of surrounding rivers of the city will be germinated as huge volumes of sewage would directly flow into the rivers finding no space for natural treatment with the shortage of lowlands, believed the Bapa secretary general.

"To me the cordon-approach is a 'class genocide' because it will save the

rich in Dhaka and inflict sufferings on the poor on the other side of the embankment," said Sultana Alam, convenor of Dhamondi Environment Development Alliance.

The speakers stressed on the need to make the existing water-bodies in and around Dhaka free flowing while expressing concern at rampant encroachment and earth filling on them.

Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) on August 9 served a legal notice on four secretaries and other officials concerned demanding an immediate initiative to clearly demarcate nineteen khals, four flood flow zones and five major lakes for protecting them from encroachers.

Bela, in its notice said that the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) clearly prohibited developing wetlands for residential, commercial and industrial purposes.

Despite the law, water-bodies are still under constant threat of being filled up by unscrupulous developers and illegal encroachers. At times, even the Rajdhani Unnayan Katipakha (Rajuk) has been found violating its own masterplan.

A top architect at the seminar alleged that the government was more interested in building flood protection embankments as there was scopes for

financial anomalies.

The minister tried to assure the doubters. "The government will initiate the embankment involving the Local Government Engineering Department rather than floating tenders as corruption is at every level. Corruption and lack of unity among political parties hamper the development process," said Hafizuddin.

The government it seems is finally waking up to the need of the hour.

An inter-ministerial committee on August 7 decided to demolish illegal structures from 26 canals and rivers in and around the capital for smooth functioning of the drainage system. It decided to form an expert committee to prepare plans to recover the water-bodies and a cabinet committee to implement the plan.

The meeting, chaired by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan identified unplanned urbanisation and illegal encroachments of canals and rivers as the reasons behind water logging of Dhaka.

The civil society members and experts suggested an integrated plan and implementation of water, sewage and waste management projects involving WASA, Rajuk, WDB, Department of Environment and the civil society to make the projects successful.

'River-link to spell ecological doom for subcontinent'

CITY CORRESPONDENT

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The proposed mega river linking project by India if implemented would spell disaster for the ecology of the entire subcontinent, speakers said at a regional seminar on river linking on Saturday.

The Indian government has already conducted as many as eight feasibility studies on the river linking, the largest transboundary and inter-basin water control project ever, without even consulting the neighbours, the speakers said at the seminar.

They described the project as a potentially dangerous threat to the entire population of the subcontinent.

Bangladesh Peoples' Initiative against River Linking Project (BPIRL), a coalition of environmentalists and professionals, organised the two-day long consultations. Representatives from India, Nepal, Pakistan attended the meeting arranged to focus on the implications of proposed river linking by India.

Riaz Rahman, adviser of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was the chief guest at the inaugural session.

The experts at the seminar said the Indian government has long been keeping the neighbours in dark about the project. They said the proposed project envisages links at 31 points in Ganges and Brahmaputra basins. They feared the project by withdrawing water to some drought prone states of India would eventually change the morphology of the river system in the subconti-

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"The river linking project is still in the conceptual phase and the Indians don't inform us anything officially of it," said Reaz Rahman.

Sudhrendra Sharma, executive director of the Ecological Foundation, Delhi said the common perception of people is that the government should and must supply water. And the power structure, out of arrogance and ignorance, nurture the perception despite the fact that similar projects have earlier failed to meet people's expectation.

He said with the new political party in power many expected the project would be shelved but that has not happened.

Dipak Gyawali, former water resources minister of Nepal, in his speech assured that Nepal would support Bangladesh in opposition to the Indian river linking project as it directly concerns the international rivers.

Syed Shahid Husain, former minister of water and power of Pakistan said the river-linking project of India in violation of the concerns of the neighbours would damage the entire ecosystem of the subcontinent.

Enayetullah Khan, editor of the daily New Age chaired the session. Syeda Rizwana Hasan, director (programme) of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) delivered the welcome speech while Farhad Mazher, managing director of Ubinig, the key-note on BPIRL position.

No guidelines for community centres

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

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The rates of community centres in Dhaka differ according to the wish of the owners as there is no formulated policy for opening and running such establishments.

Taking advantage of this lack of control, community centres have mushroomed in the city over the last few years.

"The total charges for three hundred guests at any community centre in Dhamondi will come down to around Tk. 20,000. I can easily rent a better place somewhere near Shantinagar, which would happily agree to entertain me at almost half of that amount," said Jamilur Rahman, a Dhamondi resident.

The managers of the city's community centres said that the difference in charges is mainly because of the locations.

"In a densely populated area like Malibagh or Mirpur, a community centre with a low rent can cope quite easily. But those in posh areas need to charge higher in order to cover the monthly overhead costs," said one manager.

While inquired, officials at the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) failed to provide any information about an existing policy for the community centres.

The ones in affluent areas charge the highest rates and include separate fees for the hall and the decoration.

Community centres are available at relatively cheaper rates around Badda, Malibagh, Shantinagar, Motijheel and Mirpur. The half fees in these areas vary from around Tk 7,000 to 10,000 while the decoration fee is between Tk 1,300 to 2,500.

Shohagh, one of the most popular community centres, charge in the region of Tk 11,500 in decoration fees for its Shohagh 1. The New Shohagh and the

Modern Shohagh charge Tk 10,350 and 9,200 respectively for the same purpose.

In Dhamondi, Sobhanbagh and Mohammadpur, community centres such as Party Centre, Ullash etc. have a high rate which varies from Tk 18,000 to 20,000.

The most popular community centres, which can accommodate a large number of guests, are Sena Kunja, Darbar Hall, Ladies Club, and others. Including other costs, the total expenditure can get well past Tk 50,000 at these

places.

The owners are said that there was huge competition with the rapidly increasing number of community centres all over the city. Currently there are more than 200 big and small community centres and a very simple official procedure to open up one is being seen as the main reason for the ever-increasing numbers.

Just like in the case of any other business organisation, the owner of such an establishment only has to obtain a trade

license and produce correctly documented income-tax papers to the DCC. Also, before initiation the owner has to submit a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from locals residents.

Some community centre owners are citing the recent budget as a major drawback to their business.

"After the last budget, a community centre has to pay 15% in Value Added Tax (VAT) per guest," said one proprietor.

"We are regularly paying the taxes but with the VAT, we fear that most of us who

are dedicated towards providing a better bargain to our customers, may have to shift to other businesses," he added.

Previously, a 'guest permission' rule was made mandatory for community centres by the government where the centres had to pay an additional Tk. 25 for each guest after the first hundred.

"We had protested against that rule and it was later cancelled. But that plan was comparatively better than the recent VAT," said an employee of Shohagh Community Centre.



PHOTO STAR

health outing, taxicab & train timing

HEALTH

Hospitals

Heart
National Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases (NICVD), - 9130800, 9122560-59

Burn
Dhaka Medical College Hospital Burn Unit-8626812-6

Cancer
National Cancer Institute-8014914, 8826561-65
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University-8612550-4, 861455-9

Diabetes
Diabetic Research Hospital (BIRDEM)- 9661551-5, 8616641-50

Mother & Child Care
Shishu Hospital- 9119119, 8116061-62
Azimpur Mother & Child Health



MARKET CLOSED

TAXI CAB



LIBRARY & INFO-

Yellow Cab

Navana 9558065

Salida 9344477, 0171620881

Cosmo 9112959 and 8127191

Cab One 7113282-3

Nihon 8824741-2

Orion 9347277

Anudip 8125285 and 8127611

Capital 9352847

Union 8130485

Kool 0171826731

Black Cab

Cab Ex 9358401

Cabline 8321162

JBS Cab 019364575

Sajan 018126036

Anudip 8125285 and 8127611

Cab One 7113282-3

Palki 0171052500

Cab I 7113282

Jatri 0171540074

Nipun 9572277

R-Cab 8914782

Star Cab 9571919

Shihab 01820477 & 018228675

KGN 8620011

TRAIN TIMING

Subarna Express

Leaves Dhaka at 4:30 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 10:35 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 7:30 am

Reaches Chittagong at 5:55 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 3:15 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 10:55 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 11:00 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 6:40 am

Leaves Dhaka at 2:30 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 9:20 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 9:45 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 7:00 am

Leaves Dhaka at 5:00 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 11:15 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 8:00 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 9:20 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 9:20 pm

Reaches Chittagong at 10:35 pm

Leaves Dhaka at 7:30 am

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