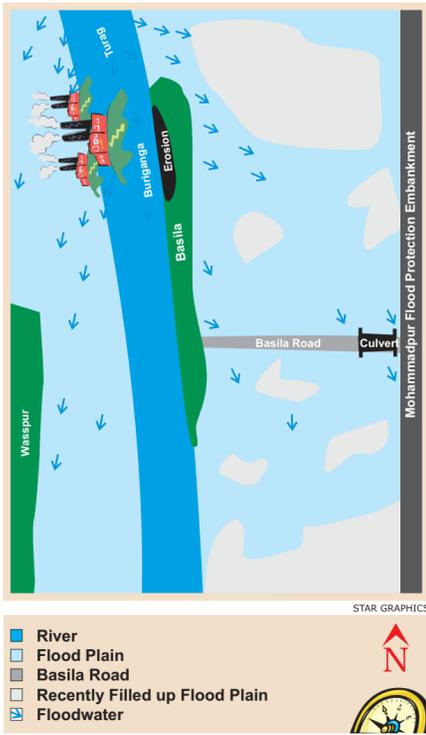


thecitythatwas

In 1676, Shayesta Khan built Chakbazar Shahi Masjid, one of the oldest mosques in Dhaka, on a 10-metre high platform. The area of the mosque was 7840 square feet. The platform housed some shops. The rent of these shops was used to upkeep the mosque. Nayeab and Nazirs of Dhaka came here for Eid prayers. The mosque was a typical Shayesta Khan style, lost now due to reconstruction.

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Basila becomes victim of nature's wrath



MORSHED ALI KHAN

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"Every action has an equal and opposite reaction"-- so if you mess with nature it messes with you -- a statement true in every sense of the word if one visits Basila across the flood plains of Mohammadpur on the eastern bank of the Buriganga.

The raging river that had been badly and brutally tampered with devastated the area devouring 27 houses since August 13. It still threatens to wipe out the entire island of Basila surrounded by flood plains on one side and the Buriganga on the other.

The erosion was obvious because of construction of three brick kilns illegally on the river, demolition of which Basila residents demanded. The kiln owners however did not stop after the encroachment and at the beginning of the floods they dumped millions of reject bricks into the river to build a solid dyke to prevent the river from flowing on both sides of their installations.

On the other side between Mohammadpur flood protection embankment and Basila, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) constructed a kilometer long road from east to west over the flood plains, which lacked culverts for flow of water from upstream of Buriganga.

With a 10-foot wide culvert the Basila road stood on the way of water from the Buriganga and a

flood plain of more than 20 square kilometers. This huge volume of water hit the road on the north of Basila and swirled back to the river, where it had shrunk by the dykes. This instantly caused a massive turbulence in the river changing its channel and hit Basila with all its might.

An engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) said the Basila road should have at least six culverts to drain the immense volume of water flowing down from the north during flood season. The engineer said since water flows from north to south in Bangladesh, any road running from east to west must have enough culverts.

"I cannot understand how DCC engineers could have ignored basics when constructing the Basila road," he said.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) officials who frantically tried to demolish the dyke by dredging the area near the kilns, pointed out that water which should have flowed over an area of three kilometers was now flowing over an area of 350 meters. The depth of the river near Basila was measured at 76 feet, a record for the river Buriganga in BIWTA books.

"This is a man-made disaster that you can see for yourself, nature is taking revenge on man for flouting its laws so mindlessly," said BITWA Deputy Director, Port.

Water Development Board (WDB) officials also blamed



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indiscriminate filling of low-lying lands around Basila for the raging mood of the river. They said at least 12 real estate developers were rapidly filling up the flood plains, leaving no room to accommodate this huge volume of water that rushes downstream during flood season.

"If these problems are not addressed, we are foreseeing a big disaster in the near future," a WDB engineer said.

Locals complained of unplanned extraction of sand from the river bed causing turbulence in its water. They said influential people are scooping the river bed with small dredgers and selling sand to the booming construction sector of the city. They are also using the sand

for filling up low-lying land. The extraction is so intense that the river bed has become extremely uneven causing whirlpools in the water.

"The turbulent water is eroding the banks rapidly," said Shahjada, one of the victims of Basila disaster.

Although the authorities have sent the illegal kiln owners notices of eviction, no sign of them moving out is yet to be seen.

All concerned believe that action must be taken to remove the brick kilns, build culverts on the Basila road and stop unplanned extraction of sand and filling up of the flood plains if Basila has to be saved from the wrath of nature.

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.

"They are saying no to all our decisions. The opposition party is suffering from a negative approach syndrome"



-- Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan
General Secretary of ruling party BNP

Says in a statement on September 6 about the non-confidence of the Awami League leaders regarding involvement of the foreign investigation agencies in the August 21 grenade attack probe.
Source: Prothom Alo

"Nobody barred the journalists from entering, nobody gave them permission either. But journalists will not be allowed to enter. That is the final word"

-- Rezaul Karim Mallik
Assistant Police Commissioner

Tells the journalists on September 7 when they wanted to enter into the premises of the special court set up for the trial of the jail killing case.
Source: Prothom Alo



"At first I was surprised to hear his speech. Then I was shocked. I felt exactly as I would have felt if a friend talked to me in that way"

-- Veena Sikri
Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka

Tells reporters on September 9 while giving her reactions to the sharp criticism of Bangladesh's foreign minister Morshed Khan against Indian policies.
Source: The Daily Star

"Some people say that 40,000 guerillas are being trained in Madrasas (religious schools). If so, that is great. We will seize power by using them"

-- Mobaydur Rahman
Columnist, The Daily Inquilab

Says at a roundtable on September 8 organised by monthly magazine Madina in Dhaka. Sources: Prothom Alo

"Conscious and patriotic students of Dhaka University resisted and chased away the miscreants from the campus"

-- Shahabuddin Laltu
President of JCD, student wing of ruling BNP

Tells at a press conference on September 11 after alleged JCD activists attacked a united procession of opposition student organisations on the Dhaka University campus.
Source: The Daily Star

Satellite towns to expand Dhaka

SULTANA RAHMAN

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The already over-populated capital Dhaka will be expanded through development of five satellite towns on its periphery. The Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has recently decided to develop the towns and also identified the locations in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Savar and Keraniganj. The project will be implemented on around 2,500 acre khas land. The proposed towns will be developed keeping in mind the demand of low and middle-income groups of people.

Meanwhile, district administrators of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur at the PSC meeting on September 2, expressed their desire to build five satellite towns on over 2,500 acres of land under their jurisdiction.

According to surveys conducted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and other non-government

organisations, the city experiences the arrival of 5,000 people every day although it is already over-burdened with more than 10 million residents.

The district authorities submitted a list of government land at a recent meeting of the PSC on the Ministry of Land. The parliamentary body is working to identify the lands for recommending them to the government for construction of the satellite towns.

"All these areas are on Dhaka's periphery and the proposed towns will be modern and convenient for people," said Mahbubur Rahman, chairman of the parliamentary body on land ministry.

Among the proposed locations, Paltash of Gazipur and Sonargaon in Narayanganj have already received the green signal, according to sources. A final report will be submitted after inspections of the sites following which, the parliamentary committee will decide on how to implement the

project. "I have personally discussed the matter with the Prime Minister and she has approved the idea. The high officials of the land ministry and members of the parliamentary body will soon visit the proposed locations. If we find the places appropriate for constructing the towns, we will then recommend initiation of the project to the government," said Mahbubur Rahman.

The parliamentary committee meeting also discussed the status of pending cases related to land acquisition since 1948. There are about 743 such cases being contested between the government and affected owners.

People, whose lands have been acquired by the government since 1948, are supposed to receive Tk 342 crore from the government, said sources.

District Commissioner of Dhaka Md. Abdul Bari told Star City that they had the money and would compensate the

affected people within the next few months. The parliamentary committee was also reportedly assured that the pending cases would be resolved in a year's

time. It was still not clear which agency of the government would implement the satellite town project.

"If the government asks us, we are ready to work on the project," said Rajuk's chief engineer M Emdadul Islam when contacted.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

The unplanned city fast turning into a concrete jungle.

Novo Theatre yet to open to visitors



STAR PHOTO

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

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Dhaka Modern Novo Theatre is yet to open to visitors, although the project was complete in June.

"The project was not officially extended as the staff working on the project are not getting salary. Nor does the project director hold the position officially," said an official with the science and information and communication technology ministry.

The public relations officer of the ministry said the floods delayed the launch of Novo Theatre and the ministry could not fix a date for its inauguration.

The cost of the project was estimated at over Tk 120 crore, which was approved at a meeting of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council.

The proposal of Novo Theatre was prepared during the BNP rule in 1995. In 1996, the Awami League government renamed the project Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre, beginning construction in Bijoy Sarani on July 17, 2000

Equipment was imported from Japan, which added to the delay. Sources said the 3D cinema and the capsule ride simulator are not yet fixed.

The ministry also proposed a new name for Novo Theatre on an instruction from the Prime Minister's Office.

"Dhaka Modern Novo Theatre has been renamed Bhashani

Novo Theatre. The name has been approved by the Prime Minister's Office, although it did not come in gazette notification," said an official close to the project.

The sources said Novo Theatre was remanded Bhashani Novo Theatre only to prevent other government changing the name of the national leader.

The proposal of Novo Theatre

was prepared during the BNP rule in 1995. In 1996, the Awami League government renamed the project Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Novo Theatre, beginning construction in Bijoy Sarani on July 17, 2000.

With the BNP coming back to power in 2001, the name of the project changed into Dhaka Modern Novo Theatre and the construction

restarted in July 2002 with Masud & Co. as the constructor.

The Novo Theatre was planned to inform people, especially students, about the world of astronomy and space science.

The Novo Theatre has a 350-seat planetarium where people would be able to view planets and stars in an artificially created sky. An auditorium consists of 170 seats in the theatre area.

The three-storey building has been constructed for administrative work and different things will be exhibited to enhance knowledge of space and other disciplines of science.

To maintain the equilibrium with nature, three water retention bodies, fountains, a flower garden, garden lights and soothing landscape were also built there.