

# Water basin encroachments bring misery to rain-drenched city

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Normal life once again comes to a standstill across the country seriously paralyzing the capital as torrential rains which began three days back still continues incessantly. Waters that covered most parts of the city cannot recede because of poor drainage system, bringing calm to the usual hustle and bustle of the city.

Urban development experts said waterlogging has become a commonplace in Dhaka because of reckless growth and encroachment of water bodies by land-sharks.

"Mindless filling of city canals and other water bodies over the years has destroyed water retention capabilities exposing the city to frequent inundation," they observed.

Over 30 canals, according to experts, have disappeared from the map because of the unplanned development of the city.

Ashulia, Banoshree, Aftabnagar, Meradia, Baunia, Badda, Kalyanpur, Amin Bazar, Hatirjheel and many other water retention basins have already been indiscriminately grabbed by public and private organisations and unscrupulous property developers.

A source of the city development agency Rajuk told the Star



City that all development plans including the latest Dhaka Master Plan (DMP) have clearly marked these areas for flood retention and the Wetland Conservation Act bars development of land in such water bodies.

According to the Wetland Conservation Act 2000, no filling up of any wetland, flood flow zones or rainfall catchment areas is permissible. But a number of money-hungry property developers aided by some government officials and politicians, have illegally occupied and filled these areas up under the very nose of the authorities.

"Not only developers, authorities also violate laws in many cases. The government plans to develop city's last

remaining water body at Hatirjheel," said Professor Nurul Hasan, chairman of Urban Planning Department of BUET.

Experts said these areas could accumulate huge volumes of water and protect many areas from waterlogging. Moreover the Buriganga and Turag rivers have also been encroached and in many parts they look like narrow canals.

"We have to stop further encroachment and recover the stolen water bodies from these land grabbers to save the city," a government official said, adding: "These occupiers are very influential and politically well connected."

A recent inter-ministerial meeting identified 26 canals for

immediate recovery. Rajuk, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) and the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) were asked to identify the lost canals and take measures for recovery while the home ministry has been asked to facilitate the initiative.

Experts said the government has to take serious action to revive the lost canals to ensure free flow of water and connectivity with the four major rivers by the city.

"The authorities have asked different bodies to work on it but unfortunately little progress has been made as yet. None wishes to take the initial step towards implementing the work," said a Rajuk official.



Smooth flow of transport came to a halt around the Shapla circle as rain water logged the entire city (above); a banana seller attempts to collect his floating wares (extreme left) and a truck loaded with goods gets stuck in a deep cavity caused by road damage (left).

## Downpour hits day labourers hard



An unwelcome rest day for CNG driven auto rickshaws which are lined along a diversion road in Ganderia, most of them afraid of water entering the engines while some of them are already damaged (left) and rickshaws waded through water at Dainik Bangla intersection (right).



KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The consecutive three-day heavy downpour in the city hit the floating people, mostly day labourers, hard as they are struggling to manage work and find a dry place to take shelter.

Thousands of rain-soaked people spent three days and nights without or with least food and wet clothes. Many of them fell sick. The heavy cloudburst ousted them from their shanties and forced them to leave footpaths.

The homeless people tried to save themselves from the unbroken rain spell along with gusty wind seeking shelter in the premises of markets and other buildings as most of the city pavements have been inundated.

In Moghbazar where hundreds of day-labourers flock in every morning with the hope of getting temporary jobs especially in the construction projects waited until noon on Monday and yesterday before going back frustrated.

"No employer came here

(temporary job market) yesterday and today (Tuesday)," said Jibon, a 26-year-old construction worker, at Moghbazar.

Habib, a hawker in Farmgate area, was seen sitting idle beside his makeshift shop. "In last two days I could not sell a single shirt and I have already spent my last penny. If it (rain) continues today I would have no choice but to starve," he said.

Kader, who runs a small fruits shop at Farmgate, said, "I had no choice but to open the shop as many of my items have already started rotting. If I can't sell all of these by today, I will lose all of my investment."

"There is no customer today. I have sold only two kg of apple in five hours after opening the shop," added Kader.

Farmgate as well as other areas of the city where hawkers bustle everyday have become almost hawker-free. Street urchins who sell cigarettes, chocolates, pirated books and flowers were not seen at road intersections amid incessant rain.

Beggars in the city also suf-

fered seriously by the natural calamity. Adil, who regularly begs in Dilu Road area, sitting idle in a tea stall with a hopeless mind said, "People do not have time to stop and give alms to me."

Only the rickshaw-pullers were active, most of them run their three-wheelers soaking in rains. They can earn more against their hard labour in rainy days.

The income of CNG auto-rickshaw and taxicab drivers also declined specially on Monday as many vehicles went out of order on the waterlogged roads.

"It was a good day to earn some more but suddenly I saw the engine going down," said auto-rickshaw driver Mukul at Malibagh. "God knows how will I manage the rent for today."

The government has declared a public holiday today but the day-labourers in the city have no option but to go to work to earn meal. They will never be lucky enough to enjoy such holidays but they must be happy to go back to work.

## Dhaka-Aricha highway becomes death trap for JU inhabitants

Road accidents kill seven teachers, students in 10 years

EMRAN HOSSAIN EMON

The Dhaka-Aricha highway has become a death trap for the inhabitants of the Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus with accidents killing at least seven teachers and students in the last ten years in absence of road safety measures.

The latest victim of the JU authorities and the government's inaction in taking necessary initiatives to check such accidents is Jakia Sultana Sumi, a first-year student of Philosophy Department who was killed in front of the campus on September 6.

Sumi, a resident of Pritilata Hall and daughter of Sajjad

Mohammad Younus of Ponkabila village in Narail Sadar upazila, was run over by a staff bus of a garment factory near the university main gate at around 8:30am.

Her death sparked massive protest by students who set ablaze four trucks, three buses, three CNG three-wheelers and five pick-up vans after the accident.

Drivers' unwillingness to abide by traffic rules, lack of knowledge about the rules, reckless driving, overtaking and the law enforcement agencies' failure to ensure road safety are the main reasons of frequent accidents, experts believe.

The JU students are agitating for setting up speed-breakers on

the highway, a traffic police box near the campus and installation of road-divider from university main gate to Bishmile but the authorities did not pay heed to their demands.

The only action which the authorities had taken was to erect speed-breakers on the highway but within a week the speed-breakers disappeared.

"The authorities have removed the breakers showing traffic rules but the highway near Savar Cantonment has ten speed-breakers in one kilometer area," complained a student.

A high police official said the speed-breakers were removed to facilitate extortion from buses that ply on the road. Requesting ano-

nymity, he said activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, ruling BNP's student wing, have compelled the government to do so.

After the September 6 accident, the JU students have started fresh agitation to press home their six-point demand. They also urged the authorities to name the road in front of Arts Faculty building after Sumi and establish a full-fledged hospital on the campus.

JU Vice-chancellor Prof Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman however said all necessary initiatives will be taken immediately to ensure road safety. "Syndicate has decided to meet the students' demands as soon as possible," he said.

JU teachers and students form a human chain to draw attention to the danger posed on the Dhaka-Aricha highway that claimed many lives in the recent past.

