

RICKSHAW OFF-LIMIT PROGRAMME

WB keen to help 16,000 affected rickshaw-pullers

SULTANA RAHMAN

The World Bank (WB) is keen on funding a project to help about 16,000 rickshawpullers who were severely affected by withdrawal of rickshaws from Technical to Kalabagan on Mirpur Road in the city under a WB-financed project.

Considering the hardship of the rickshawpullers and their families after making the road off-limit to rickshaws last year, the WB has asked the Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) to launch a rehabilitation programme.

"World Bank is ready to address the social problem and we may request them for necessary credit facility which is estimated to be around Tk 30 crore," said DTCB executive director Quamrul Islam Siddique.

Similar problems will arise when the road, which stretches from Kalabagan to Azimpur, will be made rickshaw-free under

Non-Motorised Transport (NMT) Free Pilot Project.

A recent study on NMT-free programme conducted by DTCB revealed that the rickshawpullers residing in Rayerbazar, Kamrangirchar, Lalbagh, Hazaribagh, Nilkhet-Babupura, Kataban and Kathalbagan slum would be severely affected because of the proposed withdrawal of rickshaws.

"My six-member family depend on my daily earning. But my income is decreasing as city roads are being made rickshaw-free one after another," said rickshawpuller Habib. "Now we cannot take short-cut way that kills time reducing my income."

Like Habib, hundreds of other rickshawpullers face the same dilemma due to limited access to city's major roads as they cannot paddle to their destinations directly. And they lose time for severe traffic congestion espe-

cially on the roads where they have access.

Sources however said DTCB is in dilemma over implementation of its decision to make two major roads rickshaw-free including the Kalabagan-Azimpur part of Mirpur Road due to diametrical pressure from the government and the World Bank.

The government had to shift repeatedly the date of making the road off-limit to rickshaws. The road was originally scheduled to be free from rickshaw in August this year but now the programme has fallen into uncertainty.

Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka believes it would not be possible to implement the rickshaw off-limit plan as per schedule. "If we withdraw rickshaws from all the major roads, a large number of rickshawpullers will become unemployed and their families will face serious hardship," Khoka told the Star City.

A team of WB reviewed the project in July this year and expressed dissatisfaction over the slow progress of rickshaw off-limit programme. The team put pressure on the authorities to make the identified roads free from rickshaws on time.

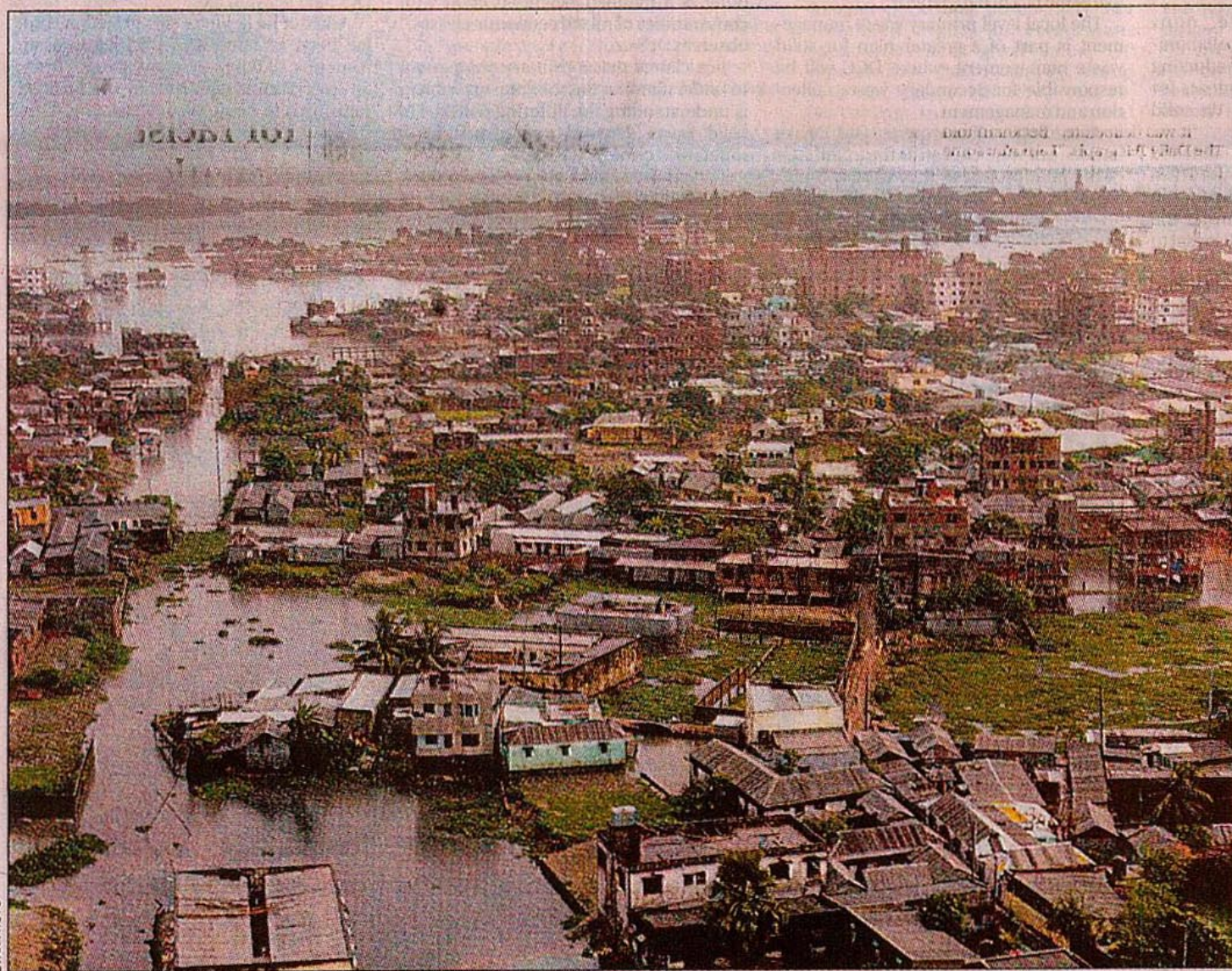
The Dhaka Integrated Transport Study, a government survey funded by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), found that some 19.2 percent passengers use rickshaws as their mode of transports while only 9.5 percent use buses.

According to DCC, some 89,000 licensed rickshaws and vans are currently plying on the city streets. But DCC officials admitted that the city has nearly four lakh rickshaws, mostly unlicensed or with fake licence, which cause huge traffic congestion.

Karim Mian, 45, a rickshaw-puller from Dhanmondi is aware of the rickshaw off-limit programme on eight main and link roads in the city. Though his rickshaw never plies the main roads (his rickshaw lacks proper licence) he is afraid of what the future holds for him. The World Bank funded Dhaka Urban Transport Project has recently chalked out a programme to rehabilitate 16,000 rickshaw-pullers like Karim Mian once city roads become free of non-motorised vehicles.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



STALE PHOTO

Eastern embankment raises concerns

PORIMOL PALMA

City planners and environmentalists have urged the authorities to seriously rethink the decision of constructing the eastern flood protection embankment.

They voiced their concern on observing the sufferings of people because of waterlogging following the flood and heavy rains this year and the subsequent impact on health, environment and supply of drinking water in the Dhaka Metropolitan area.

The minister for water resources Hafizuddin Ahmed's declaration and the World Bank's keen interest regarding the embankment-cum-bypass road have raised more environment-related worries.

"The western flood protection embankment has had more negative impacts rather positive ones for the city dwellers and that is why we have to be very careful about constructing the eastern embankment. Waterlogging has become a permanent problem in the areas near the western embankment

and it is causing health hazard as waste is gathering at the bank," said Professor Nazrul Islam of the department of Geography and Environment of Dhaka University.

Acknowledging the need for a bypass route to ease traffic congestion of the city, Professor Nazrul however said that integrating the embankment in the bypass project could act as a boomerang.

"The health and environment situation of Dhaka is inevitably linked with cordoning and not cordoning the city with embankments," he said adding that it will be impossible for utility service providers to manage an over-populated city in the future.

Emphasising on the objective of the feasibility study from environmental perspective, he said the authorities also should regulate the mushroom growth of industries in and around the metropolitan area.

According to the Water and Sewage Authority (WASA) the pumps in the city's Kallyanpur, Goran Chatbari and Dholaihal

areas and some 105 temporary pumps have the capacity of pumping only 54 cubic meter water whereas 695 cubic meters are generated a second an hour of one inch of rain.

WASA's managing director Akhter Hossain said more pumps would be set up soon but acknowledged difficulties they face.

"It is not possible to pump water out of the city when the water level on the other side of the dam is higher than the level inside," he said. "However, we fear that the population of Dhaka will exceed two crore if the eastern embankment is built," he added.

"The lakes and canals will be filled up in legal and illegal ways. Cost of land will rise and builders will construct apartments and commercial complexes. The authorities will be unable to restrain them," he further said.

"What can be done is acquire all abandoned land in the eastern zone of the city and allocate them to a limited number of people for housing and com-

mercial purposes. The lakes must be dredged so that they can maintain their natural flow," he suggested.

But Professor Nazrul said that their previous track record does not give confidence about the authorities' ability to tackle powerful concerns bent on grabbing land.

Pointing at Kallyanpur and Goran Chatbari reservoirs, Hossain said the amount of water that is supposed to be stored in those reservoirs from almost the entire western part of Dhaka, cannot gather as the lakes through which the water should flow have been encroached and blocked in many places.

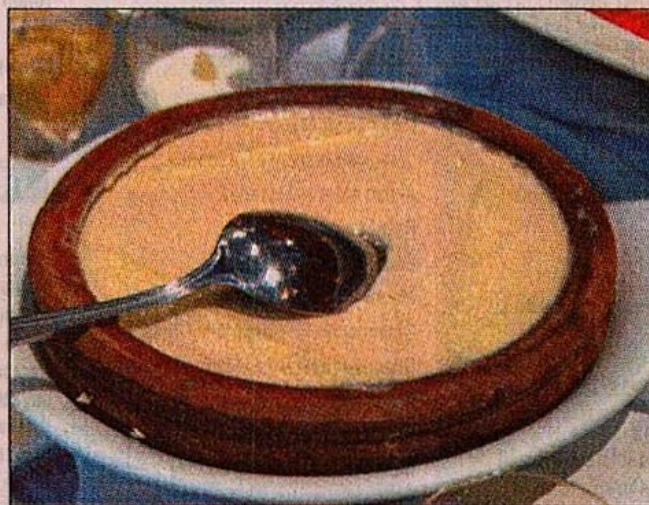
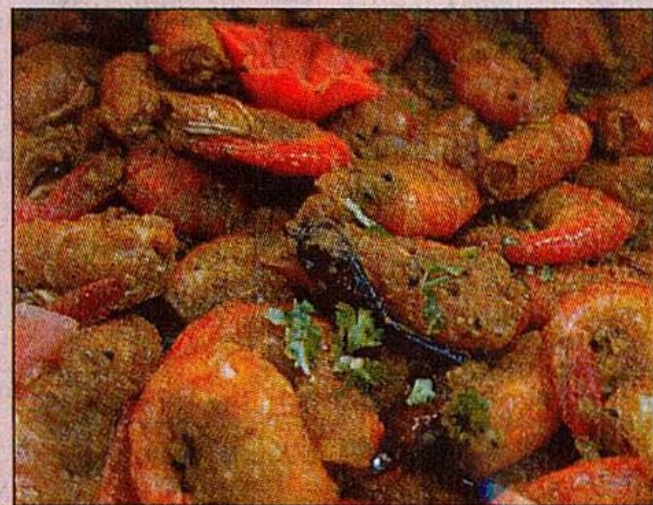
Wasa sources said that presently the Kallyanpur reservoir has an area of 272 hectares although originally it had 370 hectares. Nearly a hundred hectares have been encroached. Hossain informed that only 125 kilometres out of Dhaka's 256 km lake area of 26 lakes exists at present and the government plans to re-dredge 19 of them.

INDIAN FOOD FESTIVAL PARBON ENDS TODAY

Indian food festival Parbon held at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel's Bithika restaurant concludes today. The festival that started October 10 features a wide range of authentic Indian cuisine embellished with traditional Indian cultural events.

Guest chefs from India along with Sheraton's Executive Chef Adam Glass prepared exclusive dinners to leave behind the original taste of Indian cuisine with locals.

The hot sizzling buffet included Kashoori methi murgh, Kashmiri vandi masala, Lucknow's mutton qurma, Rajasthani chicken haryali, Hydrabadi fish garam masala and, lacing the top, were desserts like firni, roshmalai and shahi tukra which were the most popular dishes among visiting food connoisseurs.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN