

Contaminated Wasa water

SULTANA RAHMAN

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) and the Department of Environment (DoE) have detected coliform, a bacteria in groundwater pumped up by the Wasa, which experts say is 'alarming' for public health.

Managing Director of Dhaka Wasa ANH Akter Hossain told the Star City that groundwater of Old Dhaka, Kamrangirchar and Narayanganj becomes tainted in dry season as it gets in touch with the surface water already contaminated by coliform.

"During the dry season the ground water level goes down and polluted water from adjacent rivers like Buriganga, Shitalakha fills the vacuum. This is the way how the coliform reaches the ground water," he explained.

"We have already found coliform in the groundwater of Old Dhaka and Narayanganj. The bacteria are not supposed to be there," Hossain said.

Presence of coliform in groundwater because of unsafe sewage disposal system has emerged as a major health concern for residents of the overpopulated Dhaka City. Wasa offers sewerage coverage to about 30 percent of Dhaka

City or about 110 square km. Of more than 10 lakh households, only 48,997 have links to the 779-km sewerage lines.

"The rivers are so polluted that sometimes the water becomes untreatable. We are planning to set up a treatment plant at the Rampura gate to stop the flow of untreated waste to the Balu and Shitalakha rivers," the Wasa MD said.

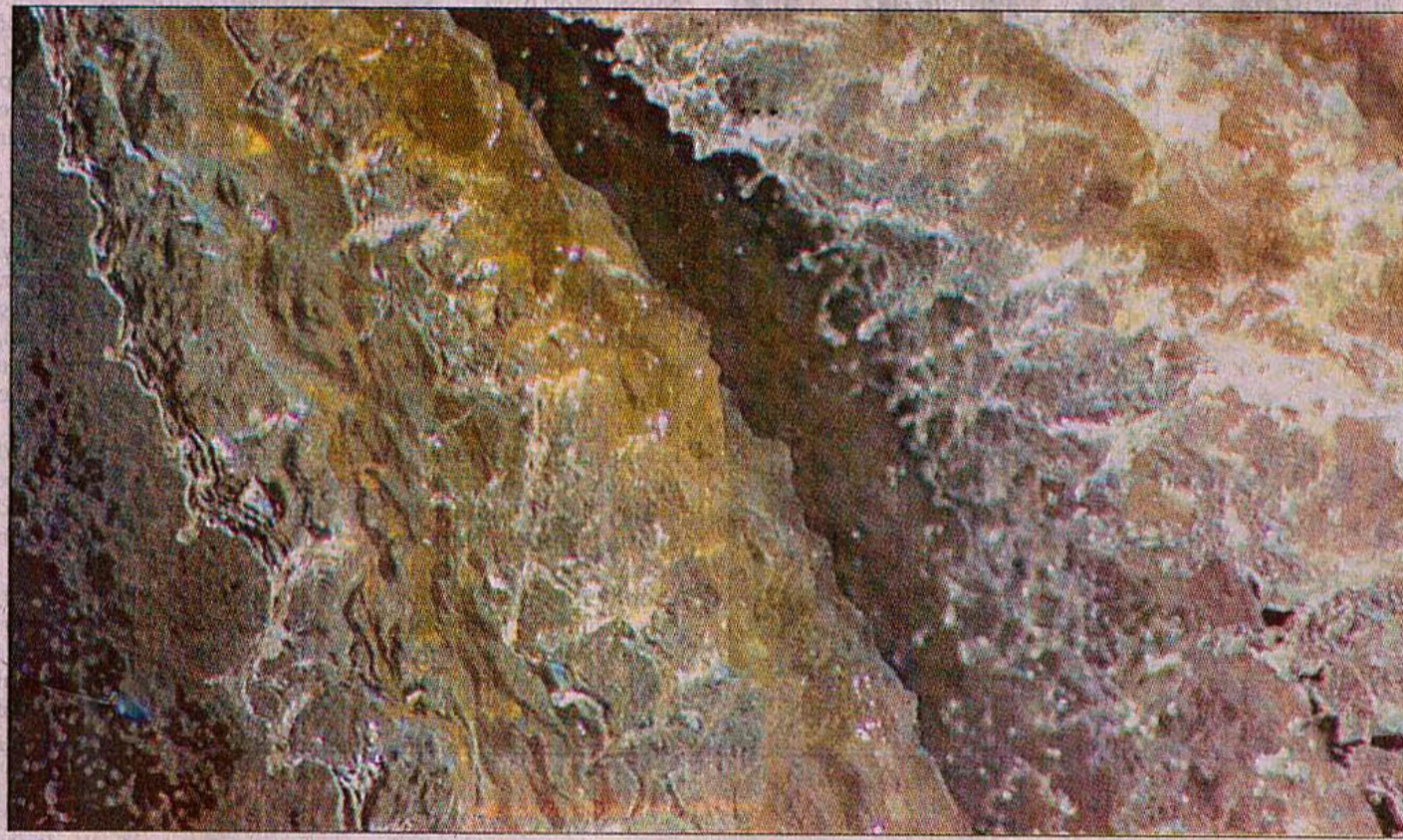
"Sewerage lines often get linked to water lines causing the contamination. The age-old water pipelines sometimes leak," he said.

Officials believe people often connect their sewerage lines to the storm water drainage system. This also leads to pollution of the rivers, lakes and wetlands.

"The presence of coliform in its organic compound form in ground water is alarming. An intensive investigation is necessary now to know whether it is there in organic form," said Dr Ahmed Ismail Mustafa, professor of department of Applied Chemistry in Dhaka University.

Wasa and the DoE have jointly examined groundwater from 32 pumping stations. Eleven of them were found to be churning out chemicals in water. The identified chemicals are residual chlorine, coliform and faecal coliform.

"Presence of chlorine and



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

coliform in Dhaka's groundwater is unexpected," Mustafa said. "Coliform seeps into groundwater because of soil contamination. Chemicals from industries can contaminate groundwater too," he said adding that it needs a wide

investigation to identify the reasons for groundwater contamination.

According to a report titled 'Combine program of bacteria/residual chlorine analysis of Wasa' by the DoE, 10 coliform and three faecal coliform were

found in 100 millilitre of water taken from a pump at Warelessgate in Maghbazar. But pure water does not contain any of these substances.

"I wonder how the coliform has reached the ground water! It indicates that ground water in

the city is being contaminated gradually," said Dr Mustafa.

He also said a massive use of insecticides, which contains Coliform, could contaminate groundwater in the long run. On the other hand, coliform comes from human excreta.

Chemically ripened tomatoes galore



STAR PHOTO

Rosy red tomatoes are a temptation, yet none is aware of the poisonous chemicals used to give them the colour.

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The vegetable wholesale market at Karwan Bazar has been flooded with chemically ripened tomatoes.

City dwellers come to the Karwan Bazar wholesales market expecting to buy fresh winter tomatoes at a cheaper rate. But although the price is reasonably cheap, fresh tomatoes are rarely found.

"I have come here to buy *deshi* (local) tomatoes which I could not find at other kitchen markets. I have searched for half an hour but have not seen a single naturally ripened soft tomato. They are all hard and a little too red in colour," said Panna Haider of Lake Circus.

The wholesalers also confessed that the hard and extra red tomatoes are artificially ripened.

"These tomatoes are ripened by using chemicals. On the other hand tomatoes that are grown naturally without the use of chemicals are soft and

not sparkling red," said a tomato wholesaler.

"The tomatoes that are available at Karwan Bazar vegetable wholesale market are all ripened by using chemicals," added the wholesaler.

The public health analyst of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) also informed that the DCC's food and sanitation officer recently found artificially developed tomatoes at Karwan Bazar.

Institute of Public Health (IPH) sources said that the agrochemical ephrel is sprayed to ripen raw tomatoes. As they are hard when ephrel is sprayed on them, the tomatoes remain that way even when full-grown and do not soften up.

Dr. Golam Mowlah, director of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Science of Dhaka University said that some companies were importing plant hormones like ethylene. These chemicals are used to strengthen roots of plants so

that the farmers have a better harvest. But if used on raw tomatoes they can distort the real taste of tomatoes.

The chemicals are used to foster ripening of raw tomato in the field by the farmers and also in the cold storage. Chemically ripened tomatoes are easy to preserve which also increases the demand for these tomatoes.

"As they are hard, you can preserve them for three or four days," said another wholesaler of Karwan Bazar. Some wholesalers are also confusing customers by claiming that the artificial tomatoes were high breed ones.

"I thought these were Indian tomatoes but the wholesalers said that they were actually local and high breed," said Shirin Akter, a housewife.

"If they are high breed and ripened naturally, then the tomatoes should be soft and tasty, but these tomatoes remain hard even after cooking," added Shirin.

Desa punishes 40 meter readers for corruption in 4 years

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Unscrupulous meter readers constitute nearly half of the staff against whom Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Desa) took disciplinary action in the last four years.

During January 2001 to November 2004, Desa punished a total of 82 staff, 40 of them are meter readers considered as the most corrupt section of the power distribution sector.

The meter readers, backed by influential trade union leaders, are engaged in various illegal activities, which are the major reason behind the power sector's huge systems loss.

These dishonest Desa staff through underhand dealings with a section of customers take bribes to show fictitious reading of their electric meters to reduce the bill.

According to Desa's summary of departmental disciplinary action, 10 permanent meter readers were sacked and another two given forced-

retirement during the period.

Besides, annual increments of eight meter readers were stalled and 19 temporary meter reading staff were terminated, the Desa report says.

"We are in a process of eliminating corruption. We are trying to stop all types of irregularities within the organisation," said a

high official of Desa. As the unscrupulous meter readers are blamed for the theft of power or 'systems loss' the Desa has initiated various measures to curb the corruption, they said.

The Desa started self-billing system in some areas of the city including Dhanmondi and Gulshan a few years back but

The meter readers, backed by influential trade union leaders, are engaged in various illegal activities, which are the major reason behind the power sector's huge systems loss

high official of Desa.

Desa sources said the 40 meter readers were accused of irregular reading, preparing fake bills for taking bribe, creating obstacle in meter reading and embezzling the money of electricity bill by making false daily collection statements.

later cancelled it due to poor response from consumers.

Moreover, dishonest customers also manipulate their meters and it is difficult to collect bills from influential people, Desa officials alleged.

The Desa has also started recruiting meter readers on

temporary basis so that they cannot indulge in meter-related irregularities and other misdeeds.

At present Desa has 198 permanent meter readers and 156 temporary ones.

A high official of Desa said the temporary staff cannot commit corruption as they do not get enough time to build up a nexus with the dishonest consumers. "Moreover, they try to be clean as they want their contract to be renewed," he said.

The Desa has a plan to introduce pre-paid metering system in the city that would also contain corruption in meter reading, officials said.

"Desa's business of Tk 1.5 crore depends on the meter readers as selling electricity is the only source of income for Desa," said Golam Mustafa, member (Finance) of Desa.

He said Desa is trying to train the meter readers for the last two years to prevent them from committing corruption and irregularities.



An aerial view of a lighted city at night.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

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.



"People all over the country are now living in peace. This condition must be maintained as we believe in peace, not in terrorism"

-- Khaleda Zia
 Prime Minister
 Said at a public meeting in Mirsharai, Chittagong on January 13.
 Source: The Daily Star

"You distort all reports giving wrong information. Therefore, you should not be allowed to be present at such meetings"

-- Nazmul Huda
 Communications Minister
 Told journalists on January 10 at a meeting in his ministry.
 Source: Prothom Alo

"Allah might forgive those who declared me murtad (deviated from Islam) and hope wisdom will prevail in them soon"

-- Dr. Kamal Hossain
 President, Gono Forum
 Said at the Zia International Airport commenting on leaders of Khatme Nabuwat Bangladesh calling him murtad, on January 13.
 Source: The Daily Star

"Sheikh Hasina's dream of creating 'a Bangladesh free from collaborators' will never come true"



-- Matiur Rahman Nizami
 Industries Minister and Amir, Jamat-E-Islami, Bangladesh
 Said at a public meeting in Gairbandha on January 13
 Source: Prothom Alo

"Adulterated goods have flooded the market due to the failure of BSTI (Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution) to monitor the market"

-- Mahmudul Hasan
 Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Industries
 Said at a JS committee meeting on January 11.
 Source: The Daily Star