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A river sacrificed to realtors Salutes to martyrs

MORSHED ALI KHAN and RAFIQ HASAN

The river Turag, the main tributary of the river Buriganga on the northern fringe of the city, is fast being sacrificed to development, with its shores stolen for building construction and its waters polluted by industrialists, making it one among many rivers in the country to face environmental devastation.

The most recent aggression against the river at Mirpur came from the Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's office, which has leased out acres of the shore and

foreshore to the Borobazar kitchen market committee.

Dipjal, the local ward commissioner, said the shore was allocated to several hundred "poor traders" after the government recently evicted the kitchen market from the Dhaka protection embankment. The committee is now building a concrete structure on the river.

Local people said that all canals leading to the river Turag in the Mirpur area are being filled under Dipjal's direct patronage, an allegation which Dipjal himself denied.

With huge encroachments along its shores and heavy pollution in its

water, the sight of the river Turag at the Amin Bazar, Baghbari and Diabari areas of Mirpur is so pathetic that local people think it is only a matter of time before the river dies down.

Originating from Bangshi and the old Brahmaputra rivers, the Turag has a total length of 78-kilometers, 23 of which flow around the city. Its water at the Mirpur bridge area looks like discarded engine oil and poses a serious health hazard to the millions living along it. The main source of its pollution is the industrial waste emitted by the Hazaribagh tanneries.

In the upstream near Ashuliya, Birulia, Sinnirtek and Nawaberbagh, the Turag is virtually devoid of both a shore and foreshore, since individuals as well as top real estate developers have claimed mile after mile of both, erecting new structures at various places along the river.

The government has partially dredged the Turag from Ashuliya up to Amin Bazar, even though the river is under the Dhaka Circular Waterway project, but it has not demarcated the river to save it from the land-hungry developers.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The nation yesterday celebrated the 35th Independence and National Day, paying tributes to the three million martyrs who sacrificed their lives to free the country from the yoke of Pakistani colonial rule.

On this day in 1971, the unarmed Bangalees of the then East Pakistan burst into a flame to resist the Pakistani occupation forces who unleashed one of the world's worst genocides to suppress them.

The peace loving Bangalees took up arms against the highly-trained Pakistani troops for freedom as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared the country's

independence on March 26.

The victory was achieved on December 16 after a bloody nine-month War of Independence.

A 21-gun salute at dawn marked the beginning of the celebrations. National flag was hoisted atop government buildings, offices of corporate bodies, banks, leading business houses and houses of the people in general to mark the day.

The day was a public holiday. All government and important private buildings were illuminated with kaleidoscopic lights at night. Streets in the capital were decorated with national flags, banners and festoons.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia places a wreath at the National Memorial at Savar to pay homage yesterday to Independence War martyrs on the Independence and National Day.

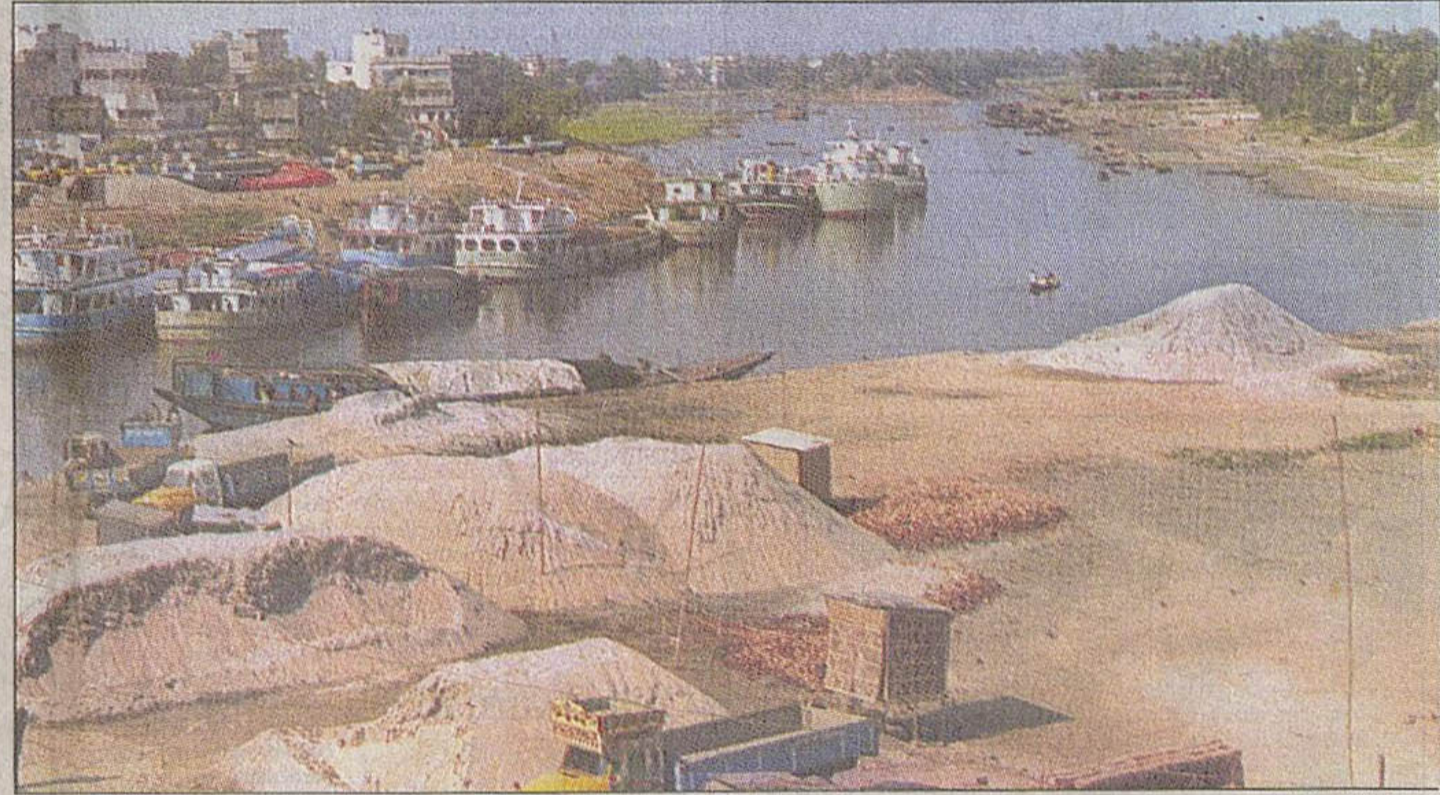


PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

CHOKING LIFELINE: Encroachment runs right through the heart of the river Turag at Mirpur, as acres of its shore and foreshore are being filled up to build a concrete structure for "poor traders".

20 more job seekers return from abroad

Find little or no job in Maldives, jailed in Mauritania

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty more fortune seekers came back home yesterday from the Maldives and Mauritania after being cheated by unscrupulous manpower agents.

Of them, 12 returned from the Maldives and eight from the African country of Mauritania, with their hopes for job shattered.

The names of five of the Bangladeshis coming back from the Maldives could be known. They are Zakir, Julhas, Hekmat, Pathan Ali and Saiful.

They came by an Indian Airlines flight in the morning after spending around 3-4 months in search of jobs in the Indian Ocean archipelago.

Relatives of the returnees said each of the job seekers had paid the manpower agents Tk 1.50 lakh to 1.70 lakh for a journey to Male with tourist visa.

The brokers lured them to the Maldives assuring them of high-salaried job. But most of them did not get job even after spending three months there. Some of them worked for a couple of months but did not get salary.

The eight Bangladeshis who came back yesterday from Mauritania were jailed there for five and a half months after being caught by the police.

The returnees were identified as Liton Morol, Iqbal, Khokon, Shahid Mian, Nazrul Islam, Muniir, Zahir

and Abu Taher.

The manpower agents assured them of sending to Spain or Italy. But they were taken to Mauritania and then forced to cross the Sahara desert by car. Mauritania police arrested them from the desert and sent them to jail on charge of trespassing.

The immigration officials at the Zia International Airport, however, did not disclose the names of the returnees. The officials did not even allow journalists to talk to the returnees. The immigration staff helped them come out of the airport secretly.

But the relatives of the fortune seekers confirmed their homecoming. A number of relatives were seen

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

5 robbers beaten to death

BDNEWS, Narsingdi

An angry mob beat five alleged robbers to death at Bashgari Notun Bazar in Raipura upazila under the district yesterday afternoon.

As the gang of five entered a jewellery shop, Prantosh Shutrathor, owner of the shop, cried out for help.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Bangabandhu missing in state programmes

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's founding father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's name and contributions were completely ignored in the state programmes and in the state-owned

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5



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