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POLLUTION IN CITY RIVERS ALARMING

Untreated waste exposes millions to health risks

MORSHED ALI KHAN and RAFIQ HASAN

Sewage and industrial waste treatment plants are a vital necessity for the millions of people living along the three main city rivers facing grave health risks due to an alarming rise in pollution level in the river water.

Dhaka Wasa (Water Supply and Sewerage Authority) officials responsible for drainage of waste said at least five major effluent treatment plants are urgently required for treating millions of cubic metres of liquid waste before their release into the rivers.

The increasing burden of toxic waste is not only killing the rivers but also contaminating the groundwater, they added.

More than 80 percent of human waste generated in the city are directly flowing into the rivers every day. Making matters worse, millions of cubic metres of untreated highly toxic waste from the tanneries at Hazaribagh and the industrial belts at Tejgaon, Savar, Tongi and Demra are dumped into the rivers.

The extremely polluted water might set off an epidemic of serious diseases anytime during the lean period, when the city rivers are totally stagnant, Wasa officials warned.

At present Wasa operates the lone sewage treatment plant in the country at Pagla, treating less than 20 percent of the city's waste.

Setting up effluent treatment plants should be of the utmost priority, Wasa Managing Director ANH Akhtar Hossain told The Daily

Star. But successive governments have ignored the pressing problems of urban areas, even though these are where more than 60 percent of the total population is likely to live within the next decade, he added.

"There is a slight interest now in building an effluent treatment plant at Rampura and we have finalised a proposal on it. Hopefully the government will consider it urgently," Hossain said.

Hossain said the areas where

Wasa has proposed to set up the five waste treatment plants are Diabari, Tongi, Uttarkhan, Boiddertek in Rampura and Kamrangirchar. Considering the serious fund constraints that Wasa is currently suffering from, he added, it would be happy to see the Rampura plant starting first.

TRIMOHINI IN AGONY
Hundreds of thousands of people living in proximity to extreme water pollution in Trimohini area, down-

stream from Rampura, continue to suffer.

Villagers at Baghpara, Trimohini, Babur Jaga, Balurpar, Nasirabad and Dasherbandi said, only a few years back, the three canals criss-crossing their villages used to serve as lifelines for them. But now the same lifelines have turned into their enemies, breeding diseases and mosquitoes during the dry season.

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Waste from Shyambazar vegetables and fruits market in Old Dhaka is one of the many contributors to the rising level of pollution in the Buriganga water.

Foreign secys to talk Indo-Bangla issues in June

UNB, Dhaka

A frosty relation between Bangladesh and India following the postponement of Saarc summit twice and the recent border row gives the signs of a thaw with a foreign secretary-level meeting slated for June in New Delhi.

Dhaka and New Delhi agreed to hold the overdue foreign secretary level consultation around mid-June, diplomatic sources told UNB yesterday.

The important talks, supposed to be held once a year, did not take place in last two years for various reasons.

The last such meeting was held in Dhaka April 28-30, 2003 between
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String of rebel attacks kills 31 in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

Insurgents staged a series of car bombings and other attacks yesterday, killing at least 31 Iraqis and wounding dozens a day after the country's first democratically elected government was approved.

Iraq's most-wanted terrorist reportedly threatened more violence and warned Iraqis against collaborating with the Americans.

At least 10 car bombs exploded in seven areas in and around Baghdad on Friday, the US military said. Four American soldiers sustained minor injuries in the attacks. It provided no

further details.

"We see these attacks as another desperate attempt by the terrorists to discredit the newly formed Iraqi government," the US-led coalition said in a statement, adding the violence was falling "to drive a wedge between the Iraqi people and their right to choose their own destiny."

The most serious of the attacks involved four suicide car bombs, which exploded in quick succession in the Azamiyah section of central Baghdad, Iraqi police chief Brig. Khalid al-Hassan said.

The first one hit an Iraqi army

patrol, the second a police patrol and the third and fourth struck separate barricades near the headquarters of the Interior Ministry's local special forces unit, al-Hassan said.

At least 20 Iraqis, including 15 soldiers and five civilians, were killed and at least 30 troops and 35 civilians were injured, Col. Hussein Mutlak said.

Ambulances sped to hospitals and policemen crouched in fear after the explosions in Baghdad, which set fire and caused heavy damage to the special forces headquarters.

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Knocked unconscious, kids lose memory

DMCH gets two such cases every month; many of them wander off

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

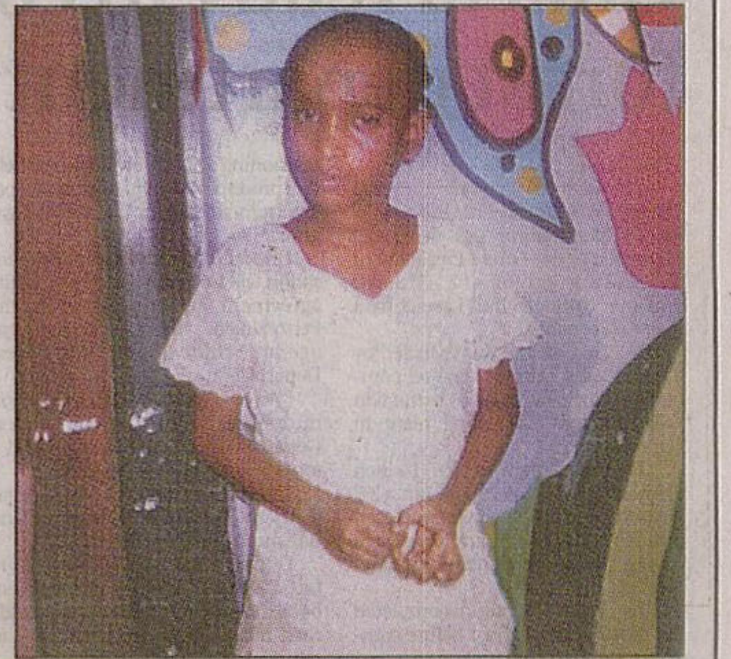
Jasmin, a six-year-old girl, was injured along with her aunt Hazera Begum in a road accident in Dhaka this past March. Both were admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH), where Hazera Begum died from her injuries immediately after admission. Jasmin survived, but when she woke up she could not remember where she lived.

The hospital authorities, unable to find the address of her family, sent Jasmin to Mirpur Public Shelter Home for rehabilitation, where she is still waiting for her parents.

Jasmin's case, though peculiar, is not unique. Experts say dozens of children admitted to the DMCH have been unable to recall their home address after waking from unconsciousness.

Many of these patients admitted in an unconscious state after road accidents or being drugged by abductors suffer from amnesia. They do not regain the memory of where they live and descend into a life of prolonged hardship, according to DMCH sources.

The hospital receives at least two children every month in such a state, said Peroza Khanam, a social welfare officer at the DMCH.
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Eleven-year-old Anamika, unable to recall her address, has been staying at a city shelter home for a year now. She was left in an unconscious state at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.



Hilsha price marks fall

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Price of hilsha, the most popular and delicious fish, has come within the reach of common people as its supply from the coastal areas has increased in last few days.

Fish traders are now selling a pair of hilsha, one kilogram each, at Tk 300. Buyers can buy small size hilsha at even Tk 50 at different markets in the city while even two weeks ago the price was almost double.

A lot of people were seen buying hilsha at different markets yesterday.

"I wanted to buy a hilsha two weeks ago but the price was too high at Tk 400 each. Now that the
SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Better boro crop unlikely to ease rice prices

REAZ AHMAD

A projected bumper Boro harvest this season may offset the persisting supply shortage in rice market but is unlikely to make a marked dent in the price spiral of rice.

Market sources as well as officials of the Ministry of Agriculture apprehend that the upward trend in rice prices is unlikely to be arrested as Boro growers will mainly use the good harvest to recoup the high production cost and massive loss of crops in the last Aman season due to devastating floods.

Diesel price hike in January when Boro cultivation was at its peak made the farmers, already hit hard by the Aman crop failure, to invest at least 10 percent more on irrigation, according to an estimate by the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

Moreover, the agriculture ministry's repeated pleas for providing Tk 381 crore subsidy on the prices of diesel used for irrigation purposes were turned down by the finance minister. He argued the subsidy

fund would be misused as diesel is also used in engine boats and other non-farm activities in the rural areas.

The food ministry expects a Boro bounty with production rising up to 1.40 crore tonnes and has already gone for an ambitious drive from April 25 to procure at least 10 lakh tonnes of Boro rice and paddy from the farmers. The supply shortage in rice market will be over, it thinks.

But market sources fear that despite a good Boro harvest, rice prices that soared exorbitantly due to the Aman crop-loss are unlikely to come down soon.

Against this backdrop, the food ministry is now offering a record high price of Tk 14.50 a kg for procuring Boro rice.

Farmers might however get higher prices in the market than the government-offered rate, market sources predict.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar had earlier told The Daily Star that there was no level playing field for farmers as the ones using electricity
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Couple freed after 8 yrs in jail in false murder case

BDNEWS, Sjerpur

A couple was released from Sjerpur District Jail yesterday after eight years of imprisonment in a false case.

A High Court bench on April 17 ordered to release them on bail.

Kamala Khatun of Bhatpara village under Sadar upazila of the district and her second husband Mizanur Rahman had been awarded life imprisonment in a case of abduction and killing of one of her sons.

Julhasuddin, first husband of Kamala, hid Kamala's youngest son Faruk and lodged the false case against the couple in 1995, in which the additional district and sessions judge sentenced them to life imprisonment in 1997.

The plot of the first husband was unearthed when Faruk gave a statement to the jail super and additional district magistrate on February 24 last. Faruk is now in safe custody.

On release, Kamala demanded punishment of the perpetrators including her first husband Julhasuddin for implicating them in the false case. They had to spend 7 years 11 months and two days in jail.

Manobadhikar Samity and Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association have taken the responsibility to rehabilitate Kamala.

3 Hizbut Tawheed activists held with leaflets

BDNEWS, Manikganj


The police yesterday arrested three activists of Hizbut Tawheed, an Islamist outfit, with over 500 leaflets near a conference venue of Women Awami League at Singair in the district.

The arrestees are Mohammad Helal Sajjal, 30, of Gauranadi of Barisal, Helal Hossain, 20, of Uttar Balbania of Barguna, and Sohel, 16, of Charfashion of Bhola.

Singair police said locals smelt a rat when they saw seven strangers roaming around the conference venue at Bynile High School yesterday. When they challenged the strangers, four of them fled the scene. Locals held the remaining three, who identified themselves as activists of Hizbut Tawheed, and later handed them over to police.

The arrestees told the police that an Imam named Imamuazzaman Bayezid Khan is their leader.

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