



Dwellers at Rampura gather round a wayside tap to collect any quantity of water available to get them through the day.

Water crisis worsens this summer

ABDUL KADER

Hundreds of thousands of people in the city are facing acute water crisis in these hot summer days due to a drastic fall in supply caused by low voltage of electricity and gradual decline of groundwater table.

Besides, rampant theft of water through illegal connection set up in connivance of a section of Wasa employees are also responsible for water shortage, sources said. According to Wasa, more than 1,000 illegal water connections exist in Dhaka.

Due to the low-voltage problem, the daily water supply reduces by more than 10 crore litres. Wasa's maximum capacity is 150 crore to 160 crore litres against the demand of more than 200 crore litres. The current capacity is 140 crore to 145 crore litres.

Residents of different parts of the capital alleged that they get bad-smelled water from Wasa. The areas are Jatrabari, Mirhajirbagh, Sayedabad, Khilgaon, Malibagh, Moghbazar, Rampura, Khilgaon, Badda and Old Dhaka.

M Rafiqul Islam, a resident of Moghbazar said, "People at Peyarabagh and Moghbazar wireless areas get Wasa water mixed with dirt and sewage waste." Similar allegation came from the residents of Rampura and Badda areas.

The residents of Mirpur, Kalyanpur, Mohammadpur, Adabar, West Dhanmondi, Rayerbazar, Nimtala and Dhanmondi Road No-15 are facing water shortage. "We are facing this problem from the last seven to eight days," said M Mustafiz of Jigatola.

Mosharrarf Hossain, a resident of Jatrabari, said the water they are getting from Sayedabad water treatment plant is bad-smelled. "It is undrinkable."

When asked Wasa Managing Director ANH Akhter Hossain identified three reasons behind the problem. He said 85 percent water comes from underground source but during summer the underground water table is dropped resulting in low production.

Secondly, he said, low voltage and power cut cause disruption in water supply. And finally, 15 percent water comes from surface source. During summer the

water level of both the Shitalakhya and Buriganga go down to increase the level of pollution. As a result, the purification process takes more time.

Akhter Hossain also blamed the pumps which have gone out of order, for the water supply shortage. Once a pump goes out of order, it takes 12 to 24 hours to repair it.

On the allegation of bad-smelled water, he said the amount of ammonia used as a water purifying substance is increased when the river water gets more polluted during summer. This ammonia creates a smell, he claimed.

Asked about the complaint of water mixed with waste, he said it could happen for cracks in the pipelines and linkage for taking illegal connections. "I visited some areas of Mirpur and found many illegal connections," he said.

There are 409 deep tube-wells and four surface water treatment plants of Wasa. Sayedabad water treatment plant takes water from the Shitalakhya and Chandnighat treatment plant from the Buriganga.

Private operator charging three times more for Sarovar

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

The Rabindra Sarovar amphitheatre on the bank of the Dhanmondi Lake, a prime spot for cultural performances, has recently been leased to a private company. After taking over, the company Dynamic, have reportedly been charging rent per shift for the venue three times more than the previous rate.

The Dhanmondi Lake area is controlled by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) with the exception of the Rabindra Sarovar.

Cultural activists have alleged that previously, when the Sarovar was under the DCC, the rate was a lot cheaper.

"When the amphitheatre was under the DCC, we just needed to submit Tk 1, 000 to Tk 1,500 to the DCC for a half shift. Now Dynamic are charging in the region of Tk 5,000 for that same venue and for one shift only," said an official of a theatre troupe. "Dynamic have divided the shifts in two slots - from 6am to 12pm and 4pm to 8pm. If anyone wants to take

both the shifts it will cost Tk 10,000," he added.

"The fees do not cover the electricity expenses. Dynamic charge another Tk 200 to Tk 500 to bring 'illegal' connection by attaching a wire to the main electric pole," claimed the official.

When contacted, Tushar, the Dynamic official in charge of the Rabindra Sarovar renting section, confirmed that groups needed to pay Tk 5,000 to Tk 6,000 Taka for one shift and an extra Tk 500 Taka for electricity supply. He however could not give any satisfactory answer to why the charge was so high given the rate under the DCC.

"The place has been given to a private operator but we do not know whether there is any restriction from the DCC regarding the limit for rent," said DCC's zonal executive for Zone 5 Mahbub Ahmed. Mahbub asked this correspondent to talk to an executive engineer of the zone but he refused to say anything claiming that he was not permitted by the chief executive officer (CEO) of DCC to talk to the press.

Cultural activists allege that previously, when the Sarovar was under the DCC, the rate was much cheaper



The Rabindra Sarovar amphitheatre on the bank of the Dhanmondi Lake.

Teletalk still lies in dilemma

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Subscribers of Teletalk Bangladesh Limited continue to face severe problems in making calls as private cellphone operators have refused to sign the interconnection deal.

"We can't sign the agreement with Teletalk until the cases against it have been disposed," said an official of the Association of Telecom Operators, Bangladesh (ATOBS).

The High Court on April 17 issued a ruling, seeking

explanation from the government why the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board's (BTBB) mobile phone license and its subsequent transfer to Teletalk should not be declared illegal. The explanation has been called within the next eight weeks.

The high court bench ruling also stated that the 15 respondents cannot transfer any shares or movable or immovable property until the case against Teletalk has been disposed.

Petitioners -- freelance journalist and telecom con-

sultant Abu Saeed Khan and chief executive officer, Asset and Investment Management Services (AIMS) of Bangladesh Limited, HM Yawer Sayeed - alleged that the formation of the Teletalk company took an illegal turn in ensuring that the seven individuals who owned the company were free to transfer their shares to anyone they wish.

These complications have restricted the 10,000 customers of the state-owned Teletalk in making calls to subscribers of the four private cellular phone operators, who

have over five million subscribers across the country.

The private operators permitted Teletalk to access their networks for about a month, hoping the company would come forward to complete formalities.

Teletalk started commercial operations on March 31.

To run a test on their network, Teletalk took one E-1 connectivity from private operators: GrameenPhone, Telecom Malaysia International Bangladesh (TMB), Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBT) and Sheba Telecom, the present

Banglalink service provider.

BTBB signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with ATOBS for temporary use of interconnectivity, which expired on March 25.

Teletalk suspended its subscription drive on third-day of its launch as it lacked the capacity to handle the huge rush for its service and because of the technical problems it faced.

The enthusiasm grew as prospective Teletalk subscribers were drawn to the free incoming calls as none of the private operators offer such facilities.



Overcrowding of DU dorms like the SM Hall, have left some resident students with no choice but to use whatever space they can find to lay their heads on.

DU dorms overloaded

IMRUL HASAN

Jeenal Rahman is a first year student of management at Dhaka University. With his course final examination just around the corner, Jeenal has no other way but to study while sitting on a bed in the corridor of his dormitory.

"Even during storms and rain, I have to stay here," said a frustrated Jeenal, who is one of the 45 students who are staying in the corridor of Salimullah Muslim Hall of the university because of acute accommodation problems.

While there is a serious shortage of seats at dormitories, the problem is mostly felt by first and second year students. In all the 17 halls of Dhaka University, many students have made makeshift staying arrangements.

Sources said that 2,822 students are staying against 577 allotted seats in Surja Sen Hall while 2,135 students are staying at Salimullah Muslim Hall where there is accommodation for 405 persons. The scenario is similar in most of the other halls also.

Even though many halls have seen extensions, the pressure of students still far outnumbered the increase in seats.

"I have been staying in the corridor for seven months. Tomorrow is my course final but I do not have proper atmosphere to study," said Tuhin Arman, a resident student of Salimullah Muslim Hall.

While a good number of students stay in the auditoriums of the halls, those who

can not manage space there move into the prayer rooms, reading rooms and even the roof of dormitories.

Some students alleged that those who have political backing or are in good terms with student leaders and cadres, get proper seats within days.

More than 32,000 students are studying in Dhaka University. About 70 percent of the students come from rural areas and do not have a place to stay in Dhaka. For them, there are no alternatives for university dormitories. But only 12,000 students have managed to receive accommodation facilities.

When asked Prof. SMA Faiz, the Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University, admitted the crisis.

"We are fully aware of the problems faced by the students. We are trying to lessen the accommodation woes. An initiative has already been taken to build a new dormitory for the female students. But constructing new halls for the male students within a short time is not possible with our internal resources," said Prof. Faiz.