

DRAINAGE SYSTEM AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

Dhaka needs effective steps on an urgent basis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka needs effective steps to improve its drainage system and check environmental pollution on an urgent basis, experts, urban planners and environmentalists say.

Expressing deep concern at the encroachment of lowlands and canals, and unplanned growth of the city at a roundtable yesterday, they said it seems there are no authorities with the responsibility of saving the city.

Different government and non-government organisations and developers are grabbing and filling up lowlands in and around the city with no steps taken to stop this, they pointed out.

The roundtable on 'Waterlogged Dhaka - what is the way to solution' held at the Jatiya Press Club was jointly organised by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB).

Speakers observed the acute waterlogging in the city following rainfall from the beginning of this month shows government initiatives in the wake of severe waterlogging last year have failed due to ineffectiveness of government agencies like Wasa (Water and Sewerage Authority), Rajuk or city corporation.

They suggested formation of a body with executive powers in the light of the city's master plan for proper monitoring and maintenance of the natural canals and other water bodies.

Prof Muzaffar Ahmed, who chaired the roundtable, said, "A committee was formed under the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) to restore the city canals and eliminate the causes of water logging. Wasa was entrusted with doing the job but no positive changes have taken place so far."



PHOTO: STAR

Prof Muzaffar Ahmed speaks at a roundtable on 'Waterlogged Dhaka: What is the way to solution' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. The Bangladesh Environment Movement and the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh organised the event.

"Let us make a long-term plan incorporating the issue of ecology and involving the city dwellers in its implementation to eliminate waterlogging permanently," said Muzaffar, also president of Bapa.

Architect Iqbal Habib blamed Wasa for not incorporating the natural canals into its drainage system and this coupled with illegal encroachment of lowlands is causing waterlogging.

Of the 35 canals in greater Dhaka, 16 have become non-existent and others are partly filled up or encroached upon. There are some water retention ponds in the city but rainwater cannot flow to those as the canals are filled-up, he said.

Wasa spent Tk 29 crore over the last one year to remove

waterlogging but no tangible improvement in the situation could be made due to lack of people's participation and coordination among the government agencies concerned, Habib in his keynote paper mentioned.

Former chief engineer of Wasa Kazi Mohammad Sheesh said more than 50 percent of solid or liquid waste, which is not treated, causes serious water pollution, threatening public health. Industrial and hospital wastes add to the pollution.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed blamed influential vested quarters for land grabbing and filling up lowlands and canals. He urged all to build a strong movement to realise their civil rights.

Prof Asif Nazrul of Dhaka University said violation of environ-

ment laws is rising alarmingly. Many people of the city would have been in jail if the laws were implemented properly. There are about 3,000 complaints filed with the Department of Environment unresolved, he added.

Daily Desh Bangla Editor Ferdous Ahmad Koraisi said the civil society should press politicians to address these problems.

Other speakers included Hunger Project Country Director Badiul Alam Majumder, Bapa General Secretary Mohidul Haque Khan, Joint Secretary Taksin Khan, IAB General Secretary Sanaul Haque, architect Rabiul Hossain, advocate Abed Raja and Samson Das of Coalition for the Urban Poor.

SUNAMGANJ-3 BY-POLLS

EC claims it has complied with HC order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday claimed it has properly followed the recent High Court (HC) directive to gather personal information of the candidates in the Sunamganj-3 by-election.

A press release issued by the public relations office of the EC secretariat denied some recent media reports that suggested that the EC did not fully comply with the HC directive to collect personal details of the MP aspirants and disseminate those among the public.

It said the commission used affidavit forms to seek personal information of the people contesting the by-election.

"All candidates have submitted the affidavit forms along with the nomination papers to the returning officer," said the release signed by SM Asaduzzaman, acting public relations officer.

It said the affidavit forms containing the personal information of the candidates have been posted for public viewing on the noticeboards at the offices of returning officer (RO) and assistant returning officer.

Besides, the RO with the assistance of the district information officer has taken initiative to spread the information among the voters through microphones, overhead projectors in important places of the constituency, and leaflets, said the press release.

Deputy Secretary (law) of the EC secretariat will oversee the activities, it added.

BB to donate Tk 5 lakh for Hridoy's treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) will donate Tk 5 lakh for the treatment of Atiqur Rahman Hridoy, a meritorious student of Buet who has been suffering from deadly disease leukaemia.

The decision was taken at a board meeting of the bank yesterday.

A BB official said another Tk 5 lakh will be donated to Ridoy on behalf of the bank employees.

Hridoy, the eldest of three offspring of Md Monirul Islam, a BB official, is now lying in a cabin of BSMMU Hospital.

Doctors have said Hridoy's bone marrow needs to be transplanted which would require around Tk 45 lakh.

Hridoy, a brilliant student throughout his life, got a GPA of 4.75 in SSC, 4.5 in HSC, and is studying Computer Engineering at Buet.

Hridoy's friends and classmates are doing their best to collect money for him.

Family members of Hridoy are looking forward for any contribution that would help him recover from the deadly disease.

Contributions can be sent to Md Monirul Islam, Account No 34004384, City Bank (Islamic banking branch), Motijheel, Dhaka.

'Restore original Nat'l Women's Dev Policy'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Karmojibi Nari, an organisation of working women, yesterday demanded cancellation of the amended National Women's Development Policy, 2004 and restoration of the original policy formulated in 1997.

The amendments have been brought to the policy only to impose restrictions on women's participation in politics and other sectors and prevent direct election to the parliamentary seats reserved for women, said the organisation leaders at a rally at Mukhtang in the city.

Such undemocratic amendments negate the prime minister's announcement and political stand regarding the Beijing declaration, said Shirin Akhtar, president of Karmojibi Nari.

Terminating the amendments contrary to development of women and equal rights, she said such step has offset all the achievements of women's movement in the country.

Rokeya Rafiq Babi, Hazera Sultana, Arifa Aktar Anu, Nahid Aktar and Nilima Akhtar also spoke.

Indian team leaves Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

The visiting Indian parliamentary delegation, led by State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Defence of India Bijoy Krishna Handique, left Dhaka yesterday after a four-day official visit to Bangladesh.

Whips Md Fazlul Haque and Syed Shahidul Haque Jamal, Additional Secretary of the Parliament Secretariat Abu Naki Rezwanul Haque saw them off at the Zia International Airport, says an official release.

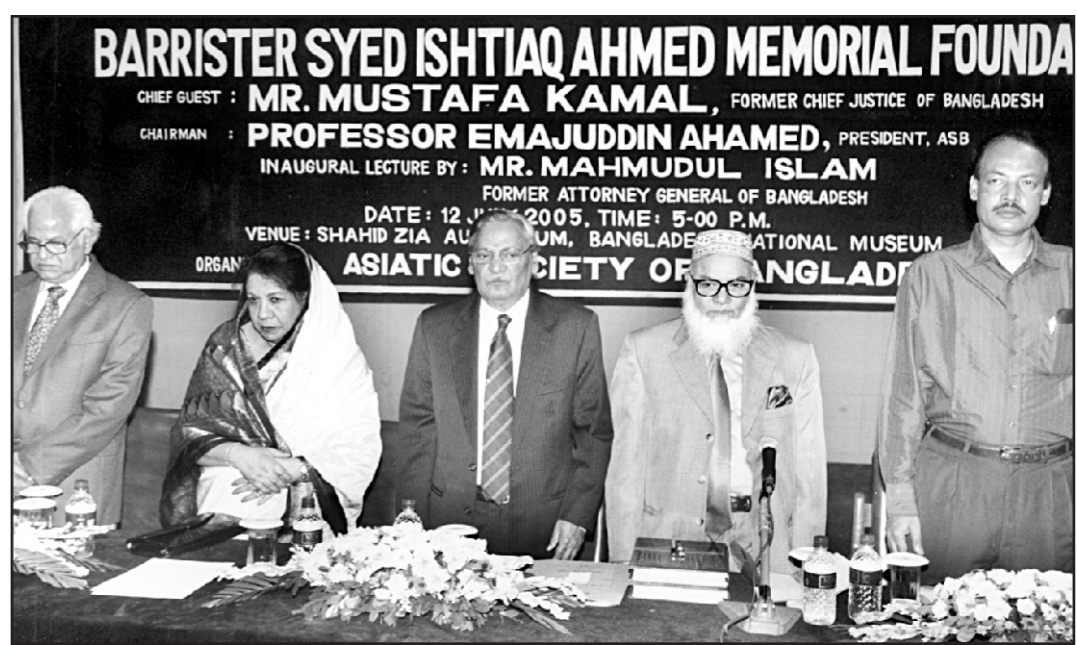


PHOTO: STAR

Participants in the inaugural ceremony of 'Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation' observe a one-minute silence in memory of late Barrister Ishtiaq at an auditorium at the National Museum in the city yesterday. From left are Prof Sirajul Islam, Prof Sufia Ahmed, Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, Justice Mustafa Kamal and Mahfuzur Rahman.

'Corruption, politicisation undermine rule of law'

Barrister Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation launched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pervasive corruption and politicisation of the services and institutions have seriously undermined the rule of law in the country, said former attorney general Mahmudul Islam in a keynote paper presented at the launching ceremony of 'Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed Memorial Foundation' in the city yesterday.

He also said independence of judiciary is a pre-requisite to establishment of the rule of law.

Barrister Nihad Kabir read out the paper as Mahmudul Islam could not attend the function due to his illness.

The memorial foundation, a trust fund, was established at the Asiatic

Society of Bangladesh.

If the rule of law is continued to be undermined, it would not ultimately help anybody, not even those who are reaping the benefit by undermining it, the paper said.

Criticising the 'crossfire' by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), the paper mentioned that such a story can be accepted in one or two cases, but when it is being advanced regularly to explain the cases of death in the custody, it is totally unacceptable and a flagrant violation of the rule of law.

It also said that every person, even notorious criminal, can claim the security of his life and liberty and any punishment to be meted out must come as a result of verdict by a court.

Regarding the immunity to the persons involved with the 'Operation Clean Heart' in 2003, the paper said that although such a law is constitutionally permissible, it is contrary to the concept of the rule of law.

Speaking as chief guest, former chief justice Mustafa Kamal said Barrister Ishtiaq was a pioneer in establishing the rule of law in the country.

Ishtiaq also played a vital role in making the judiciary modern, he added.

Prof Sirajul Islam and National Professor Sufia Ahmed also spoke at the function, chaired by Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, president of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

Jubo Dal leader murdered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Unidentified assailants chopped a Jubo Dal leader to death at Sitakunda upazila of the district on Monday night.

He was identified as Mahbubul Alam, 25, son of Tajul Islam of Kadam Rasul.

Police said the murder took place at around 9:30pm when Mahub was returning to his home after attending a milad mahfil in the neighbourhood.

The gang of criminals chopped him indiscriminately after picking him up to a secluded place.

Locals rushed Mahub in critical state to upazila health complex where on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Police could not ascertain the motive behind the murder of Mahub who was Jubo Dal president of Kadam Rasul unit.

A case was filed with Sitakunda Police Station in this connection.

None was arrested till yesterday.

GARMENTS TRAGEDY 300 jobless workers receive Tk 2,000 each

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inditax, a Spanish garments buyer, yesterday gave Tk 2,000 to each of 300 workers who were rendered jobless following the collapse of a nine-storey factory building of the Spectrum Sweater Industries Ltd. in Savar.

The money was disbursed among the affected workers at a function organised by the Bangladesh National Council of Textile, Garments and Leather Workers and the National Garments Workers Federation at the National Press Club in the city.

Speaking on the occasion, the workers said more victims could have been rescued from under the debris if the government took the incident seriously.

Although the jobless workers are suffering severe financial hardship, the government still remains indifferent to their woes, they added.

National Council General Secretary Roy Ramesh Chandra said the Council will set up a trust fund with the assistance from the government, BGMEA, civil society, labour organisations to help the family members of the victims.

He also said 300 more workers will receive the same amount in the next phase of disbursement. Earlier, 200 workers were given Tk 2,000 each on June 26.

The Spectrum disaster took place on April 12, leaving 64 workers dead and 84 others injured.

Sramik Federation President Abdul Kader Hawlader, Garment labour leaders Abdul Matin Master, Shahidullah Chowdhury, Abdul Kader, Diruba Aanguri, Nazma Akhter and Nurul Islam also spoke



PHOTO: STAR

Karmojibi Nari stages a demonstration in the city yesterday demanding cancellation of the amendments to the National Women's Development Policy.

Niko gets \$4m illegal payment

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billion without any competition or any qualification. Marginal fields are basically underutilised gas fields that require reinvestment for further production of gas.

Sources said if the government would provide some funds, the national gas companies or Bapex themselves could do the job. Niko has done in Feni. "After all, Petrobangla pays the government more than Tk 2,500 crore annually," noted one source.

"Niko does not have to take risks like oil companies who operate under Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs). When it develops gas fields in Chhatak east (unexplored), it will count profits in Chhatak west and collect its investment cost on a priority basis. The same goes with its Feni field," he added.

Initially, Bapex will get only 20 percent of gas and Niko 80 percent. When its investment cost is fully paid, Bapex will get 40 percent and Niko 60 percent. In contrast, the PSCs offer Petrobangla a minimum share of 50 percent and at one point, Petrobangla takes over a gas field.

"This makes Bapex a perpetual loser and Niko a permanent winner," the source pointed out.

Such a crooked deal has been made possible due to the influence of an 'alternative centre of power' within the government and the role of the then (oustured recently) state minister for energy AKM Mosharrar Hossain.

A prime example of how a minister's pressure benefits a foreign company depriving the national company is the \$4 million payment that went to Niko's account while the JVA dictates the payment will be deposited in a joint account of Niko and Bapex. Mosharrar also pushed Bapex to sign the JVA although the move was initiated during the

Awami League rule.

Mosharrar forced Petrobangla to make the payment in April. He had earlier compelled Petrobangla to purchase gas from Niko-Bapex from late last year without fixing a gas tariff or making any agreement.

Niko-Bapex was selling 20 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) to 40 mmcf of gas to Petrobangla from October last year when there was a gas crisis in the country.

There was no gas sales-purchase agreement because Niko was pushing for a price of \$2.35 per thousand cubic feet (a unit) while Petrobangla believes the price should not be more than \$1.75 per unit. Petrobangla does not get free gas from Niko, while it gets huge free gas from Unocal and Cairn because these companies operate under carefully designed PSCs.

"Niko had threatened Petrobangla with suspension of gas supplies in March unless payment is made. Then on instructions from the state minister, Petrobangla arranged the payment to Niko-Bapex joint venture," said one source.

"However, when Bapex wanted to open a joint account with Niko, Bangladesh Bank asked Bapex whether it has any gas sales agreement. The central bank said unless it has any such agreement, it cannot be permitted to open a foreign exchange account."

But this did not prevent Niko from taking the payment in its account all by itself.

On the other hand, a few benefits for Bapex as spelt out in the JVA also did not materialise. For instance, the JVA provides for transfer of technology to Bapex but so far there has been no noticeable technology transfer. Niko is supposed to provide a five-year scholarship for a Bapex

technical staff each year to become a petroleum engineer through studies in Canada. No such move has been taken.

Bapex staffs were supposed to be trained by Niko for supervision of drilling and other technical work but no such step was taken.

Niko took a couple of Bapex officials to Canada for study on marginal gas fields prior to the signing of the JVA. After the signing, the only people who visited Canada were some bureaucrats and the state minister.

The draft JVA outlined a provision that in case gas is found in Chhatak field, Niko-Bapex will submit a development proposal which will be placed for a 'Swiss challenge' seeking bids from other oil companies matching that proposal. This would have lowered the investment cost and ensured some sort of competition. But the provision was later dropped.

Instead, Niko has now been given a total risk free deal for Chhatak east. The JVA says that if the exploration finds no gas in Chhatak east, Niko will get back the cost from gas sales of Chhatak west and vice versa.

In contrast, companies like Unocal and Cairn, which spent several hundred million dollars for oil and gas exploration and development, had to swallow the losses for not finding gas in a number of exploration wells.

"Niko deal is a crooked one. Petrobangla had tried to resist it, and this is why the (previous) Awami League government did not award it although it had initiated the process. The present government should rectify its mistakes now," noted an industry insider.

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Khulna Achol programme today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The leaders of Brihatar Khulna Unnyan Sangram Samannaya Parishad yesterday demanded of the government to reopen all the closed mills and factories in Khulna Division and payment of arrears of the workers immediately.

They also demanded protection of the Mongla port and the Sundarbans from destruction and set up the water and sewerage authority (Wasa) to supply pure drinking water in Khulna.

The leaders of Parishad, a Khulna based development forum in Dhaka, made the demands at a sit-in demonstration at Mukhtang in the city. They also formed a human chain to realise their demands.

They announced a one hour 'Khulna Achol' programme from 11:am to 12:00 noon today to protest the non-allocation of fund in budget for the development of Khulna division.

They also expressed solidarity with the countryside dawn-to-dusk hartal called by jute and textile mill workers on July 16 demanding payment of arrears and budgetary allocation for jute sector.

Liaquat Ali, vice president of the Parishad, Talukdar Abdul Khalek M.P., Communist Party of Bangladesh central leader Ruhin Hossain Prince, committee executive members M Alauddin, Advocate Motin, Kartik Chakraborti, Amit Baran Biswas and Ali Azad Babu also spoke.

Our Staff Correspondent from Khulna adds: Greater Khulna Development Action Coordination Committee (GKDACC) will observe one-hour work stoppage programme from 11:00am to 12:00 noon today.

Obituary



Alhaj Abdus Samad Khan, proprietor of S a m a d Electronics and father of Selim Khan, proprietor of Sangeeta, passed away

on Monday at the age of 65, says a press release.

He is survived by his wife, two sons, and one daughter.

He was buried at Jurain graveyard yesterday.

His quikhwani will be held at his house at 33 Nandalal Dutt Lane, Laxmibazar, after Asr prayers on July 14.

Relatives, friends and well-wishers are requested to attend the quikhwani.

Alhaj Hafiz Samsuddin

Alhaj Hafiz Samsuddin, a social worker and father of columnist Md Siddiqur Rahman, passed away due to old age complications on July 3 at the age of 95, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, four sons