

## Uttara Lake turned into dumping ground

TAFIQUÉ ALI

Mindless release of untreated waste water, sewage and effluents into the Uttara Lake through scores of drains is fast killing the natural water body.

The lake water has turned tainted, stinking and poisonous. Discharge of domestic and industrial effluents, sediments released from under-construction buildings and liquid sewage has made the lake a virtual dumping ground.

But the city development and utility agencies -- Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripkha (Rajuk), Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) -- seem to have no headache to protect the water body.

The 5-kilometre long lake begins from Dalipara near Zia International Airport and flows across sector 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12 and 13 of Uttara Model Town. It stretches up to Diabari, Chandabagh and Bailjhuri villages under Harirampur union.

Once flowing as 'Baonia Bil' across Baonia, Bailjuri and Harirampur areas along the river Turag, the vast natural water body has now been reduced to a narrow creek of 200-metre wide canal.

Moreover, the lake has turned narrower because of land acquisition by Rajuk in the surrounding areas and for the Dhaka City Protection Embankment on both

southern and eastern banks of the Turag, said environmentalists.

On the other hand, slum dwellers living on the banks of the lake without sanitary latrines and sewer facilities have menacingly been polluting the water body.

Uttara residents attributed the ill fate of the lake to the absence of sewer system and waste treatment facility in the Rajuk plan.

"Rajuk deliberately avoided keeping provision for surface water outlets so that the lake is filled up with sediments and waste creating scope for making new plots," said a former teacher of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology Md Asadullah Khan who lives in sector-5.

Amanullah Ahmad, former vice chancellor of Rajshahi University and a resident of sector-7, said, "Rajuk has filled up a portion of the lake's eastern bank in sector-13 with debris and waste matters overnight and allotted plots there."

As per the original Dhaka Master Plan, there should have been walkways and green parks on the lake banks, said Qazi Khurshiduzzaman Utpal, a resident of sector-13. But the space for tree plantation and walkway has been narrowed for making plots.

"Rajuk allotted 12 plots on the walkway space in sector-13 but it had to stop the move in the face of strong protest by the locals," Utpal said.



Section of the Uttara lake where garbage is dumped.

Rajuk Chief Engineer Emdadul Islam however denied the allegation. He said: "Rajuk did not allot any plots on the edge of the lake meant for walkway and plantation."

DCC has built drainage system to flow surface water into the lake, he said, adding that Dhaka Wasa, on the other hand, has not

yet developed sewer system in the area.

Rajuk has not been able to develop the walkway along the lake as the EcneC (Executive Committee of the National Economic Council) has not approved the project concept paper for Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara and Uttara Lake devel-

opment over the last six to seven years, Emdad said.

"It's unfortunate that the Planning Commission dropped Uttara Lake from the development scheme four months ago," said Ahmed Farid, an environmentalist and former ambassador.

He said the aquatic life of Uttara

Lake has been consistently destroyed although destruction of wetland, open space and water body is a punishable offence as per the Wetland Conservation Act of 2000.

A top official of Dhaka Wasa seeking anonymity said Wasa cannot install sewer system anywhere and anytime as it is an extremely expensive development work.

Rajuk should ensure funds for development of various services at the time of property development, he suggested. "Rajuk should also plan what type of sewer is required and how resources will be generated."

Wasa presently has sewer coverage in only 25 percent of the Dhaka metropolitan area, he said, adding that there is no water carrier sewer system in Uttara to dilute human excreta in the water and treat it at a certain place.

DCC Chief Engineer Idris Mian said other than the lake there are no other means in Uttara to drain out surface water because of the flood protection embankment particularly in the western part of Uttara. Only a sluice gate in the embankment may facilitate diversion of the drains, he added.

Residents of Uttara at a demonstration on December 25 demanded development and beautification of the lake and prevention of sedimentation to save its aquatic system.

## Cattle markets begin sales today

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has permitted temporary cattle markets in the city from January 8 to 10; but many have already started functioning while the others are likely to start trading in a day or two.

"Traders have already begun bringing cattle into the city and to ensure a sufficient number of cattle we are permitting them to enter the market," said a plot owner from Old Dhaka market.

Large numbers of cattle are presently on sale at many markets. Gabtoli, the biggest market in the city is already experiencing a few buyers while visitors are more in number.

DCC has leased out 15 spots in the city for temporary markets for Tk 1 crore, 61 lakhs and 56,000, which is Tk 56 lakh higher than that of last year. Besides this lessees have to pay a fixed amount to clean up the plots used.

The DCC has also fixed the Hasil (commission) at five percent against the sale of each animal.

The legal cattle markets will be situated at Gabtoli, Armanitola, Shantinagar Sunrise Sporting Club, Rajuk field in Uttara sector 12,

Fields adjoining Agargaon Taltala, Meradia Bazar, Postogola, Alam super market, Khilkhet Tanpara, Jigatala-Hajaribagh field, Golapbagh field, Rahmatgonj field, Dupkhula, Brothers Union field, Tejgaon, Hossinidalan.

It is feared that like previous years unauthorised cattle markets might sprout in many parts of the city. In some areas influential people have already started preparing to do so, alleged the authorised lessees.

"Eighteen mobile courts will be working in the city round the clock to take action against any illegal and unauthorised cattle markets, with two assigned only to the Gabtoli area," said Abu Taleb, chief estate office, DCC.

The official also said that a good number of Rab and police officers would also be deployed to ensure security at all cattle markets in the city.

Many businessmen predicted that this year the price of cattle might be little higher than that of last year. However, they also said that nothing can be predicted about the prices till the eve of Eid-ul-Azha. "Everything depends on the ratio of supply and demand," said Kofil Uddin a lessee of Gabtoli cattle market.

## Sewerage water brings Shantibagh to standstill



Shantibagh residents wading through the dirty sewerage water.

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The lives of residents of Shantibagh in the Malibagh area have almost come to a standstill as the overflown stagnant sewerage water has restricted their movement.

The situation has been so for over a year, and the bad odour has made living almost impossible.

"We don't go out of the house unless it is an emergency," said Kazi Rashed, a resident.

"When I return from work I stay indoors. This life of captivity has become my daily routine," he added.

Local shop owners are troubled. The water logging has caused a downside in business. "My business has hit the bottom. Hardly does anyone want to wade across the dirty water to come to my shop," said Mominul a grocery shop owner.

The worst hit is the Shantibagh kitchen market and adjoining areas where stagnant water up to about five inches on road is a common sight.

"Our tenants are leaving.

Two out of five flats of my home have been vacant for the last three months. No new tenants are ready to rent houses under this situation," said Anjuman Ara, a house owner at Shantibagh.

"Tenants can escape by moving to other areas, but where will we go?" she said. "We demand a quick solution to the problem," she added.

The residents also complained that the people are falling victim of skin diseases because of the dirty water.

"My domestic help ended up with scabies after wading through the dirty water for a day or two," said Nasrat Munni, a housewife of the area.

The commissioner of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) ward no. 35 said the problem was due to the renovation work on the sewerage lines. He assured that this problem is temporary and will come to an end soon.

The sewerage lines from all corners connect to the Jhilpar canal at Shantibagh.

"The canal is too narrow to carry such a volume of sewerage water. Work is in progress to widen the canal and we had

to close all outlets leaving a small opening for the water to flow. This resulted in the overflow," said Sajjad Zahir, commissioner of ward 35.

He said that this low-lying area would have a better sewerage system after the project is completed, but would take at least another three months.

Locals complained that the project is taking more time than they were told.

"We undertook the project earlier this year but could not work during the rainy season and thus the delay. We are confident that we could complete the project within the next three months," said the commissioner.

Along with the water logging, about 15 manholes in the area were seen without covers within a range of 500 metres.

"Although we provide covers to the manholes, these are often stolen. We will put in new covers as well," said Nazmul Hai, zonal executive officer, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) zone-4.

The commissioner of the area, too, admitted that manhole covers are stolen from this area regularly.

## Wildlife Rescue Centre at JU

The first of its kind in South Asia

ERSHAD KAMOL

Jahangirnagar University's (JU) Wildlife Rescue Centre (WRC) of the Department of Zoology is the only animal life rescue centre in South Asia confirms Sri Lankan zoologist, Professor Padma Kumari de Silva, chairperson of Otter Specialist Group of Asia.

Professor Mohammad Mostafa Feeroz, chairman, department of zoology, said that Prof de Silva said so after a visit to the WRC a rescue centre to rehabilitate animals in trauma that the centre was the first of its kind in South Asia.

Initially the department of zoology aimed at developing a field laboratory for wildlife to preserve threatened fauna of JU.

But later, the department developed the WRC on the allocated five acres of land along with a water body nearby at the southern corner of the campus. The centre is now used as a field laboratory to save endangered wildlife of Bangladesh.

"The wetlands, woodlands and grasslands of the campus are the habitats of at least 22 nationally threatened wildlife species," said Prof Feeroz. "It is remarkable that such a large number of threatened species is found on the campus, which is not a formal sanctuary," he added.

He said that the department made use of this rare opportunity in October 2004 to establish the WRC.

"The centre is devoted particularly to research on wildlife conservation through rescuing wild animals, captive breeding, re-introduction and non-formal environmental education," Prof Feeroz said.

Students and teachers of the department donated their stipend and a share of their research funds to develop the WRC with six teachers regularly contributing to the WRC fund.

MA Aziz, a lecturer of the department said that M.Phil

students and he contributed their stipend for the WRC's sanctuary.

"But the physical labour we put in for the WRC at the initial stages is tremendous," he said.

On the achievements of the centre, Professor Feeroz said: "We have rescued the following animals: Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), Collared Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*), Eurasian Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*), Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), Spotted Flapshell Turtle (*Lissemys punctata*), Python, Stork bill kingfisher and many others."

We have also been successful in the captive breeding of the Smooth-coated Otter (*Lutra perspicillata*), Bengal Monitor (*Varanus bengalensis*), Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*),



A rescued Barn Owl and a successfully bred Hill Myna at the centre. The Wildlife Rescue Centre at JU campus.

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Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica*), Hill Myna (*Gracula religiosa*), and the Boulenger's Frog (*Rana alticola*)," he added.

The centre has rescued a huge python from Srimangal. M Yousuff, a fourth class employee of the centre, feeds it

with one rat a week.

Padma Kumari Tongchangya, supervisor of the centre, said: "I help students with their fieldwork. In addition, I take care all of the wild animals which live openly at the centre."

The WRC plans to establish captive breeding facility for endangered turtles of Bangladesh along with an amphibian pool for the semi-natural breeding of different amphibian species, said Prof Feeroz.

