

WATER CRISIS IN DHAKA

No sign of new plants in near future

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The city dwellers will continue to face water crisis in the next four or five years as there is no plan in sight to set up new water treatment plants which according to experts is the only solution to the city's aggravating water crisis. Former and serving officials of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) said without

from planning to implementation, they said. "Except for setting up more water treatment plants, there is no alternative left for minimising the water crisis in Dhaka," Kazi Mohammad Sheesh, former chief engineer of the Dhaka Wasa told Star City. Dhaka Wasa conducted a feasibility study on the city's water demand way back in 1964 and decided to set up treatment

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setting up more water treatment plants, Dhaka Wasa would not be able to meet the increasing demand for water in the densely populated city. The experts suggest giving more emphasis on treatment of surface water instead of using groundwater as the groundwater table is falling every year. Setting up of such a treatment plant needs at least four to five years

plants for using surface water. However, the authority started installing deep tube-wells to meet the demand for interim period. And since then the authorities have been following the interim policy to solve water crisis for the last four decades. They increased the number of deep tube-wells instead of setting up water treatment plants, Mohammad Sheesh said.



City dwellers collect water distributed by Wasa and share it in the face of the continuing water crisis.

"Wasa set up only one treatment plant at Sayedabad in these four decades," he said. "Lack of commitment to set up water treatment plants created a huge gap between demand and supply of water and intensified the crisis." Estimated daily demand for water in the city is about 200 crore litres while production capacity of Dhaka Wasa is about 180 crore litres and average daily supply is 164 crore litres, according to Wasa statistics. On Sunday, a top official of Wasa on condition of anonymity said: "For meeting the increasing demand Dhaka Wasa has to start the second phase of the Sayedabad water treatment plant project and even if implementation of the second phase begins from today, at least four years will be required for getting water from the plant." The water demand in Dhaka is increasing rapidly as annual growth rate of population in the city is about 5 per cent which is four times higher than the national population growth rate of the country, the Wasa official said. Increasing population of the city and unplanned urbanisation have severe impact on the water supply management and is widening the gap between demand and supply of water. Moreover making a proper assessment of area-based water

demand become very hard for the Wasa as the commercial and residential areas have lost their characteristics. The existing four water treatment plants are supplying 18 per cent of the total water supplies by Dhaka Wasa. Rest of the water supply comes from groundwater through 430 deep tube-wells, according to the Wasa data. Along side the Wasa deep tube-wells, more than 1,000 authorised private and numerous unauthorised deep tube-wells are also lifting water from underground which is downing the groundwater table between 2 and 3 meters annually. "For developing water supply management for the capital city, Wasa has four projects and these projects have been approved by ECNEC, but shortage of funds has kept those projects on papers only," the official said. "Wasa alone can do nothing and there is no chance for resolving the water crisis within next four or five years even if the policymakers start working for the a permanent solution to the crisis from today," he added. The managing director of Wasa could not be contacted since he is now in Australia to attend a seminar on water treatment plants.

Rickshaw eviction: Is it the only solution?

WAHIDA MITU

Rickshaws carry a major section of passengers and it is not prudent to evict them from city roads, said speakers at an 'exchange-of-views' programme organised by Manusher Jonya Rasta (Roads for people) at the CIRDAP auditorium recently. Statistics by Dhaka Urban Transport Project, (DUTP) in 1998 shows that rickshaws occupy 38 percent of the road carrying 54 percent passengers while private vehicles occupy 34 percent carrying nine percent passengers. Speakers criticised the government for banning rickshaws without any measures to control the increasing number of cars. "Thirty seven percent of the city residents is comprised of slum dwellers and 45-50 percent are from the middle class. These people can only afford rickshaw for communication," said Professor Nurul Islam Nazem, Department of Geography and Environment, Dhaka University (DU). Slum dwellers also walk,

middle class people use buses and rickshaws while the 10 rest percent use cars, he said. He posed the question: "Which group should receive priority while planning for vehicle structure - 10 or 50 percent people." "Rather than evicting them, lanes could be provided for rickshaws as done along the New Market road, train rickshaw pullers regarding traffic rules and management," he said. "Rickshaw eviction is not the solution. This will give rise to other problems," Islam said. Dr KM Maniruzzaman, associate professor and chairman, Urban and Regional Planning (URP) department, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) also said: "Eviction will add to the already existing unemployment problem." He emphasised on improving the public bus service to resolve the transport problem. He said that public transport should be made user friendly, which in turn will encourage commuters to use them. Maruf Rahman, coordinator, Manusher Jonya Rasta said that 42 types of jobs are related with

Dr KM Maniruzzaman, chairman, Urban and Regional Planning (URP) department, BUET said: "Eviction will add to the already existing unemployment problem." He emphasised on improving the public bus service to resolve the transport problem

rickshaws, including making, painting, selling and pulling them. The keynote paper showed that rickshaw pullers' income has decreased from 32 to 41 percent after they were made off-limit on various city roads. Helal Uddin Nagri, adviser institutional support, Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board (DTCB) said that the city has 3,000 kilometre (km) roads, which includes 310 km of primary and secondary roads, of which only 16 km are off limit to rickshaws. "We use rickshaws because they are available, else we will walk, but we need more foot-

paths," said Tushar Rahman, secretary general of Citizen Rights Movement. However, Abu Naser Khan, convenor, Paribesh Bachao Andolan (Save the Environment Movement) pointed out that there should be different lanes for buses and rickshaws. He said there must be some roads that will be off limit to rickshaws, while other roads must have a different lane for them. Md Abdul Bari, executive director, Bangladesh Environmental Development Organization (Bedo) has been training rickshaw pullers on traffic rules, health care, social security and insurance policy for 10 years and has trained 27,000 of them so far. "Training of rickshaw pullers will reduce the present traffic congestions," he said. Professor Dr Sarwar Jahan, from Urban and Regional Planning (URP) department of BUET said transportation increases with the increasing population, so planning in all aspects is vital. Prof M M Akash from Economics Department of DU said that he was observing the

problem from two points of views -- the socio-economical, which according to law cannot evict a person from the present job without a replacement, and necessity meaning more speed, low costs and carrying more people. "In Bangladesh the income of the affluent class at present is 84 times more than the middle and low income groups, whereas in 1991 the difference was only 20," he added. Shakil Bin Qushem, a BUET lecturer read the keynote paper. He stressed the need for development of infrastructure of roads and public buses. While Dr K M Maniruzzaman, presided over the meeting, Amit Ranjan Dey played the role of moderator. Mohidul Haque Khan from Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan (Bapa), KM Mujibul Haq, traffic inspector (TI) Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Dr SM Saleh Uddin, additional executive director DTCB, Anwar Ahmed, additional executive director of DTCB and among others also spoke.

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"No, it's not correct. However, the fact is they [cabinet colleagues] do politics, but I don't"

-- Saifur Rahman
Finance and Planning Minister

Told reporters when asked if there is any opposition in the cabinet to a further rise in oil prices, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"The most important thing for the government is to openly admit, instead of denial, that there is a real problem in the energy sector. This will establish credibility, and make required austerity and fiscal measures more acceptable to the people"

-- M Syeduzzaman
Former finance minister

Told in an interview with The Daily Star, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"We [the agitators] cannot return home since Friday as the BNP men are still threatening us"

-- Moslehuddin Masud
Convenor, Sangram Parishad

Told the reporters as water is still dear at Shanir Akhra, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"None of you will be spared if we open the Pandora's box"

-- Abdur Rahman
JMB Chief

Told at the court in Jhalkathi facing trial for judges murder case, on Tuesday. Source: The Daily Star

"May be the [election commission] officials did not enter the house out of fear as a signboard said 'Beware of dogs'"

-- Md Shahjahan
Election Officer, Chittagong

Told reporters as only 25 people of 32 families of a house 'Hamid Manjil' was enlisted as voters, on Monday. Source: Prothom Alo

"Except some important sections, most of the tracks are in really bad condition. We need to rehabilitate almost the entire railway network."

-- A Bangladesh Railway (BR) high official

Told reporters requesting anonymity as more than half of the country's 2,792-km railway network is unsafe and rickety, causing over 700 accidents a year, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"If there is load shedding then we will arrange one candle for two examinees. But as one candle cannot give light to two, it is better if the students bring candles themselves"

-- Sirajul Islam
Principal, Chittagong College

Told reporters as HSC examinees were asked by teachers to bring candles with their exam paraphernalia, on Saturday. Source: Prothom Alo



Rickshaws await in line for passengers at the Bangla Motor intersection.

Give and take - well placed

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

This is a story of 'system' as the rickshaw pullers call it. A total of 50 to 60 rickshaw pullers ply only in between the Maghbazar and Bangla Motor intersections. They have created a give and take relationship with the law enforcers. Each rickshaw puller pays Tk 20 a day to the on-duty police officer and Ansar member near Bangla Motor intersection, and in return the traffic constables permit them to cross the rickshaw off-limit road. The rickshaw pullers benefit

as they get a quick trip without much competition. Hasmat Ali, is one such privileged a rickshaw puller who is permitted to ply his rickshaw through the Bangla Motor intersection. Although the police and Ansar stop others in front of TMC market, 200 metres before the Bangla Motor intersection he crosses this barrier without any obstacle. When asked how he manages it, Ali smiled and said "Sir, it's a matter of understanding." What kind of understanding? The question flung open. He tried to ignore the question

at first but conceded to say: "Some other rickshaw pullers and I pay Tk 20 a day to police and Ansar." And your advantage? "Since the authorities made Bangla Motor crossing off-limits to rickshaw hundreds of passengers take rickshaw after crossing Bangla Motor intersection. The competition at that point is very high as a large number of rickshaw wait for passengers," Ali said. "The rickshaws that pay the toll are chanced to go up to the intersection. It is easy to get passengers from there, as the competition is less, but to get a

trip we have to compete with at least 70 rickshaws," he said. The traffic authority made Bangla Motor intersection off-limit to rickshaw in January 2005. How do you manage the law-enforcers where new faces are on duty everyday? "We haven't seen so many changes here. We have so far only 13 to 15 police-ansar here by rotation in the last one year," said Ali. "We are about 30 to 35 who have created this 'system'," he added. "We get 80 to 90 trips along this route at a fixed fare of Tk 5. After paying Tk 90 as rickshaw rent, Tk 20 to the law-enforcers

and Tk 30 for other expenses we can earn between Tk. 200 to 250. The other rickshaw pullers here who do not 'enjoy' this system only get 40 to 50 trips a day," said Ali. Ali said that rickshaw pullers, on an average pay around Tk 600 at this point everyday. "Three law enforcers are assigned here per shift which means they each earn Tk 200 per day extra beside their fixed salary," Ali continued. "I also heard that many Police and Ansar personnel lobby hard to be placed on duty at this point," said Ali. Aha! Ali's well that ends well.