

Dhaka WASA might discontinue PPI project

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Programme for Performance Improvement (PPI), one of the success stories of Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA), is in uncertain condition as the authorities might discontinue the project from this year.

The employees of PPI are feeling insecure about their jobs as the contract ends in February.

WASA board, in a meeting on February 19, has formed a sub-committee headed by Professor Dr Firoz Ahmed from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) to evaluate the feasibility of PPI. The committee is due to submit its report in mid April.

Among the eight revenue zones of Dhaka WASA, PPI is responsible for billing and revenue collection of zone 3, 4 and 5 where they have succeeded in downsizing the 'system loss' to 26 per cent against the target of 30 per cent earning over Tk 132 crores in the year 2005-06.

On the contrary, system loss in other five zones run by Dhaka WASA itself is 43 per cent. Revenue collection in these zones totalled to only Tk 95 crore 48 lakh.

"They (WASA) had been

signing contracts with us for three months at a time. This has been going on since July last year. We cannot make any future plan about the billing system because of this short-term contracts", said Aftab Ahmed, chairman of PPI.

"We have successfully completed all our task according to the current terms and conditions. I don't see why our contract will not be renewed", he added.

In 1997, Dhaka WASA introduced partial privatisation of billing and revenue collection with a goal to improving its efficiency.

It was a precondition of the World Bank credit of \$ 80.3 million for the Fourth Dhaka Water Supply Project.

Due to a strong resistance and pressure from the WASA employees' union against privatisation, WASA decided to contract out one zone to a private firm and the other to Employees' Multi-purpose Co-operative on a trial basis for a period of one year.

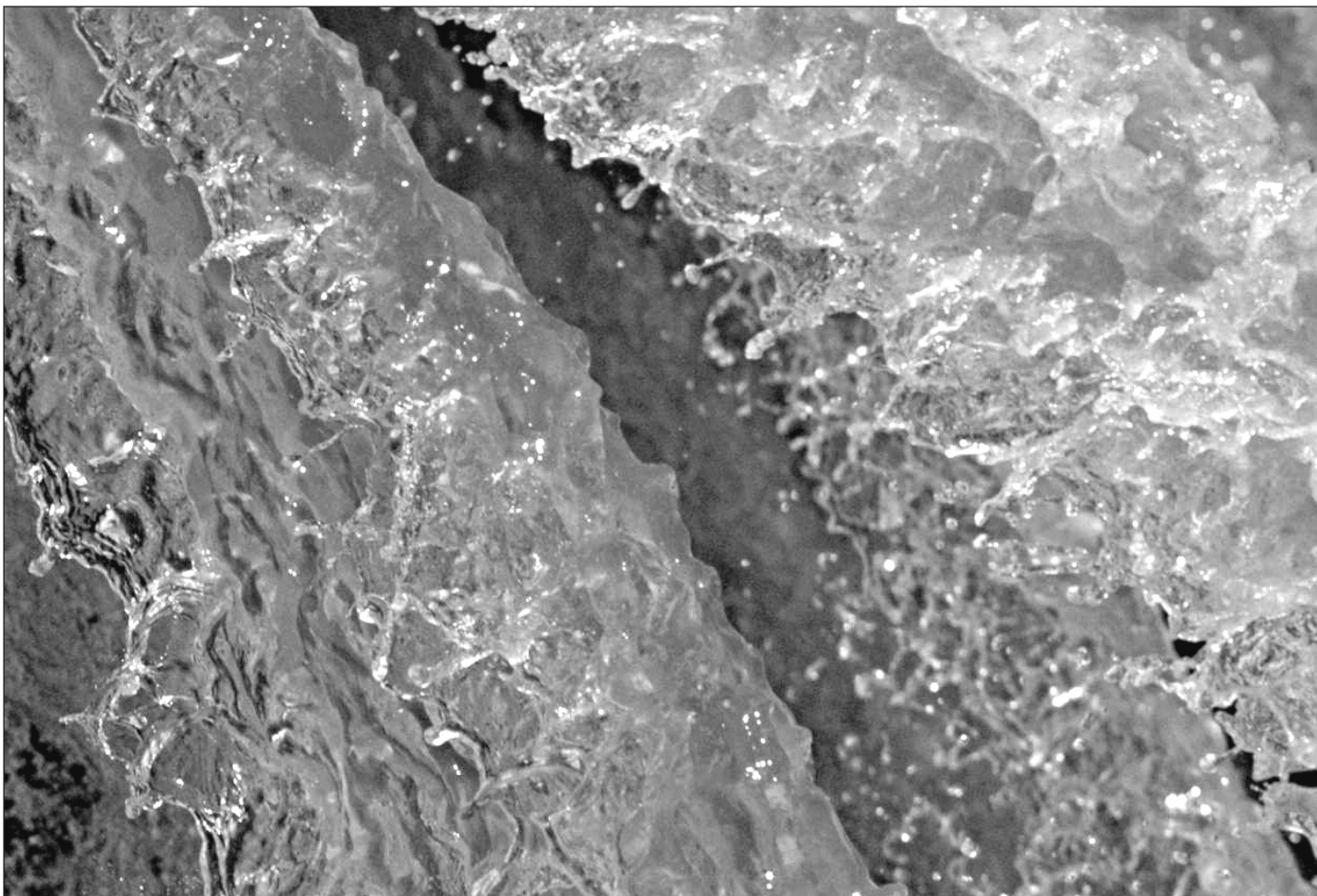
The project was code-named Programme for Performance Improvement.

It was also decided that after one year, the model used by the most successful party would be adopted as the model for billing and reve-

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nue collection.

Since the employees union was the successful party, they were given the responsibility of billing and revenue collection in revenue zones 4 and 5 at first.



STAR PHOTO

Due to their good performance, PPI was given the responsibility of zone 3 as well in September 2003.

Currently, PPI has a total number of 1.24 lakh consumers under these three

zones.

The WASA authorities could not explain why the project was not being continued.

"To survive the future load, Dhaka WASA must improve

its performance and it must curb system loss. Before taking any decision, we are evaluating the situation right now", said Shahidur Rahman Pradhan, managing director of Dhaka WASA, admitting

the fact that PPI so far has been proven to be a very efficient method.

"It was the precondition of World Bank to improve the performance of WASA. PPI was the most successful

party so far. There is no reason for them to discontinue PPI", said Ahmed.

Meanwhile, among the 3,700 employees at Dhaka WASA, 200 employees of PPI are uncertain about their jobs. If PPI is discontinued, they have to return to Dhaka WASA -- where the salary is one-third of that at PPI.

"The reason PPI succeeded in curbing corruption in its three zones is we paid higher wages to our employees", Ahmed mentioned.

Before the introduction of PPI, a WASA billing investigator would only get Tk 5,000 as salary. Under the policy to curb corruption, PPI increased the salary to Tk 12,000 with two festival bonuses and one incentive bonus.

The workers efficiency has improved under PPI as well. For example, same metre reader who used to prepare only 250 bills a month now prepares 800 bills under PPI.

Buying out the integrity of the metre readers was the strategy of PPI that became known as the 'Dhaka Model' in the international community.

PPI was highly praised in the 3rd World Water Forum 2003 held in Kyoto, Japan.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Nawab Bari gate, the historical gateway to Ahsan Monjil has been partially demolished to make rooms for a newly constructed 13-storied commercial building called Islam Plaza at Islampur. The gateway is a protected site under the Department of Archaeology.

City footpaths too uninviting

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Similar scenes were seen on Asad Avenue at Mohammadpur, at Science Laboratory and in Malibagh where the pavements are always missing a slab or two and are flooded with raw sewage from clogged up lines underneath. Pedestrians here also find no other alternative but to get down and walk on the streets risking their lives only to avoid the nuisance on the sidewalks.

"Anyone walking from Moghbazar to Bangla Motor has to use a handkerchief at least three times to subdue the foul odours from dustbins and filth scattered on or near the sidewalks here," said Shakil, a resident of Moghbazar.

When this correspondent asked local residents the reason behind the current state of the sidewalks, they blamed the pedestrians and the authorities while the authorities blamed the local residents for littering and polluting the environment.

"I put up signs on the wall asking not to urinate or litter on the pavement next to my house, but it doesn't seem that anyone actually cares about those signs," said Mazharul Huq, a homeowner residing at Banani. "I don't think Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) really bothers about it as we have to hire our own cleaners to keep the pavement adjacent to my house clean."

Kamal Hossain from Malibagh blamed the neighbourhood businesses including food stores for littering in front of his house. "I personally asked them not to dump garbage on the street as it spoils the atmosphere of the area, but they just dump the garbage here anyway."

"I don't think DCC truly cares to cleaning garbage inside alleys and side roads. They are only interested to clean the main roads," said a frustrated Kamal.

Mohammad Hakim, leader of the DCC cleaners in division 6 and responsible for cleaning the area in Kawan Bazar, blamed the local businesses and pedestrians for littering on the sidewalks.

"There is very little we can do about it as people keep dumping garbage and urinating all over the place," said Hakim. "We have 12 people working here each and every morning to tidy up the streets, but it's hard to keep up the pace with hundreds of people messing it all up."

Mohammad Shahjahan, a DCC conservancy official in the same division, blamed the lack of hygiene awareness amongst the common people who litter on sidewalks.

"There is very little we can do without cooperation from the common people. If they want to have a clean environment, they should drop their habits to indis-

criminately litter just everywhere," said Rahman, adding, "We could also use the help from police to monitor the unsystematic dumping of waste."

Sohel Faruque, chief conservancy officer at DCC, could not be reached for his comments on this issue. An official from his department however told this correspondent that they have the whole city divided into different divisions with the work effectively distributed among the cleaners.

"I am not aware of any irregularities on this issue as everything is being properly regulated and monitored, but in case of exceptions, we can take special measures to clean up a specific place after receiving specific complaints," the official added.

According to Dilbahar Ahmed, assistant town planner at DCC, it is the right time to repair and refurbish the sidewalks in the capital.

"The corporation [DCC] should take steps to refurbish the street pavements as the monsoon is just round the corner and with the current state of the streets and pavements, the sewerage drains are bound to get overflowed and create nuisance for the pedestrians," said Ahmed.

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Tel: 8826578, Email: cezanne@bangla.net

Drik Gallery

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Tel: 9120125, Fax: 9115044, Email: office@drik.net

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Baitual Mukarram Market-Friday

Polwell Market-Friday

BCS Computer City-Friday

Isha Khan Shopping Complex-Friday.

Rajlaxmi Complex-Friday

Stadium Market-Friday

Bangabazar Market-Friday

National Museum-Thursdays

Ahsan Manzil--Thursday.

New Market-Tuesday

Gausia Market-Tuesday

Mouchak Market-Sunday

Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday

Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday

Eastern Plaza-Sunday

Farmview Super Market-Sunday

Muktijuddha Jadughar-Sunday

Dhaka Zoo-Sunday

Shishu Jadughar-Sunday