

With over 5,000 tonnes of untreated and highly toxic liquid and solid wastes contaminating its water everyday, the river Buriganga has turned into a stagnant sewerage. The toxic wastes have wiped out all aquatic lives from the river. The repeated toxic onslaught on the life line of Dhaka has contaminated the ground water and the agricultural land around it. Due to lack of flow in the water during the lean period the wastes are accumulating at an alarming rate. The water is thick and resembles discarded engine oil, emitting an unbearable stench. During eight months of the year the Buriganga is cut off from its source, the Jamuna river in the upstream near Manikganj. A project to open up the Bangshi river to revive the four rivers around the city is now gathering dust with the Water Development Board.

Text by: Morshed Ali Khan
photo: SK Enamul Haq

BURIGANGA, OUR DYING LIFELINE



RAYER BAZAR KITCHEN MARKET

Thousands at risk under unsafe building

DCC engineers declared the building 'extremely unsafe' a year ago but failed to launch the repair work due to 'bureaucratic tangle'

WAHIDA MITU

Although the engineers of Dhaka City Cooperation (DCC) had declared the two-storey structure of Rayer Bazar kitchen market extremely unsafe almost a year ago, thousands of shoppers and near about 300 shopkeepers have no way but to put themselves at risk every day inside the building.

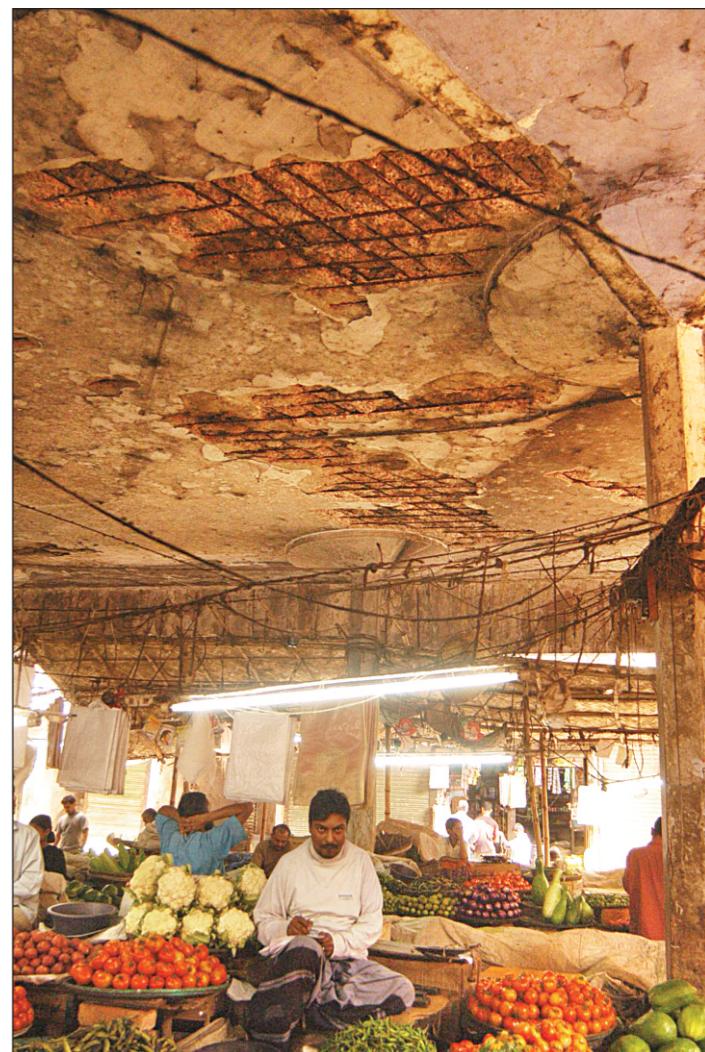
Shopkeepers in this worn out building with around 28,000 square feet floor space had been living with extreme fear for the last eleven months.

After inspecting the building, the DCC officials on April 4, 2006 posted a notice on the building warning the people that the building might collapse. Almost a year has gone by, but DCC has yet to take any measure to demolish the dilapidated structure.

Most shoppers come to this kitchen market from Rayer Bazar, Dhamondi, Shankor, Hazaribagh, Modhubazar and Zafarabad. The market is especially popular among the middle and lower income group of the area since prices of commodities are relatively cheaper here. Narrow streets leading to the market is seen as the main reason for the affluent to stay away from this market.

Mohammad Jashimuddin, a vegetable trader in the market, said the shopkeepers conduct their business in the building with a constant worry that the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



The dilapidated roof of Rayer Bazar kitchen market under which thousands shop risking their lives (top). A DCC notice board warning shoppers of the worn out roof (below).



CITY BILLBOARDS

DCC has 'no time' to think of beauty

When asked why innumerable billboards were being permitted in the board meeting that is damaging the city's aesthetic beauty, a DCC official who attends the meeting said: "We approve what comes to us through official procedure. We do not have time to think of beauty."



Billboards obstructing the azure sky from the eyes of the city dwellers.

DURDANA GHIAS

place in the city from where one cannot see a billboard.

Many of these billboards are illegal, which are being demolished by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). Another reason is the abuse of disre-

ctory power by the officials of DCC in permitting the billboards.

Khondaker Hasibul Kabir, a landscape architect and lecturer of BRAC University, said that there should be proper rules about how a billboard can be erected in different areas. The size, height, intensity of colours and direction of light are also important.

"The question of aesthetic beauty is relative. Before giving permission for a billboard it is important to see in which area it is being erected. There should be specific rules for different zones like commercial, residential or shopping zones," said Kabir.

"If we put a billboard beside a road then we will have to know the characteristics of the road also. Because every place has its own essence and this should be taken into consideration. It is important whether the billboard is obstructing the view of a garden. It is important for me whether I can see the sky. The rules should be more specific and detailed," he said.

There are 717 authorised hoardings in Dhaka city of which 367 are on the DCC, PWD or Roads and Highways land and 350 on private properties. The officials said it is not possible to ascertain the number of illegal billboards.

An applicant needs the approval of the Traffic Engineering Department and Beautification Cell of DCC to

erect a billboard in the city. If these two departments have no objection, then the application is sent to the DCC board meeting for the permission.

During the long bureaucratic process none apparently looks into the aesthetic aspect of the city. Even the Beautification Cell does not consider it.

When asked why innumerable billboards were being permitted in the board meeting that is damaging the city's aesthetic beauty, a DCC official who attends the meeting said: "We approve what comes to us through official procedure. We do not have time to think of beauty."

Kamruzzaman Chowdhury, chief estate officer of DCC, said there is same rule for the whole city. "There is no specific rule for different areas -- no rule about the intensity of colour and direction of light on the billboards."

When asked about taking into consideration the aesthetic beauty before giving permission, he said: "We take the opinion of the Beautification Cell."

According to rules, the maximum size of a billboard should be 600 square feet. There is a surveyor group of DCC that monitors if anyone has crossed the permissible limit but it is not always possible to find out any violation of the rules.

ardise and upgrade the quality of the rickshaws," said an official at the DCC tax department.

He said DCC, with assistance from the Traffic Department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), started giving out driving licences to rickshaw-pullers from February 18.

"Although applicants were scarce when we first started giving out the licences, rickshaw-pullers in thousands started coming to us last week and the crowd is getting bigger," said Shahid Ullah, another official of the DCC tax department.

"Currently we are distributing the licences only from the Nagar Bhaban but soon we will decentralise the distribution process and the licences would be available in the all the DCC regional offices," he added.

DCC's efforts to issue rickshaw licences last year failed, but project in-charge Syed Jahangir Hossain this time hopeful about the continuation of their efforts.

"We managed to issue only 960 licences during our earlier efforts due to poor response from the rickshaw-pullers. But I'm optimistic about the project this time," he said.

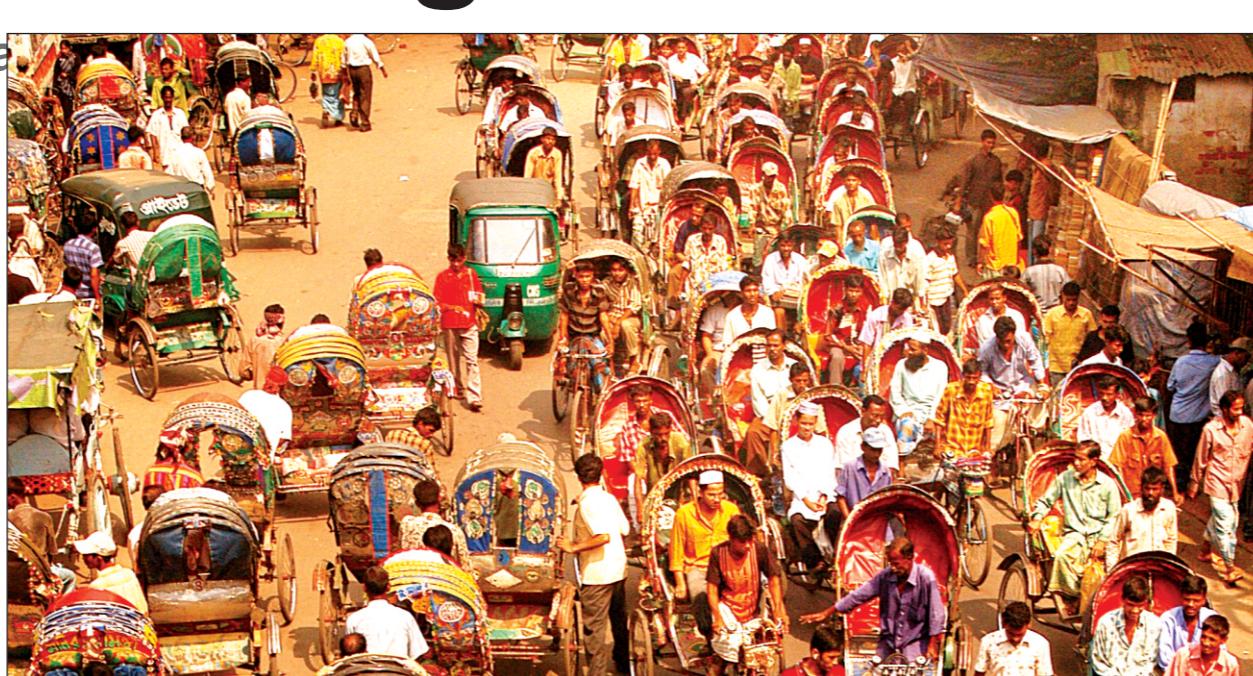
Both the rickshaw owners and pullers have welcomed DCC's latest initiatives.

"It's nice to have a licence which will recognise me as a legal driver and help me handle the traffic and legal matters properly," said Md Sazzad, a rickshaw-puller from Badda.

Munir Hossain, a resident of Malibagh who owns 10 rickshaws, told this correspondent that it is a good idea to issue licences to all the rickshaw-pullers. "There are some unscrupulous pullers who tend to run away with rickshaws. Now with the licence it would be easier to take legal actions against this kind of people."

Mohiuddin Chowdhury, general secretary of Bangladesh Rickshaw

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22



Thousands of rickshaw pullers working in the city will soon receive licences.

STAR PHOTO

Rickshaw pullers get licences

DCC issues licences to thousands of rickshaw pullers

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

and traffic officials examining the physical fitness and traffic awareness of the pullers before giving out the licences," he added.

During the establishment of 'Dhaka Municipality' in 1864, registration of rickshaws and carrying driving licences by the pullers were mandatory. But with the rapid increase of rickshaws, the system has collapsed.

Now an estimated number of 85,000 rickshaws in the city have licences while another 4 lakh to 5 lakh are operating without licence. The number of rickshaw-pullers could be around 10 lakh, according to DCC and other sources.

"Although rickshaws remain as the most favourite transport of the city dwellers over the years, virtually no steps have been taken to stand-

by (rickshaw-pullers) have to pay Tk 30 for a laminated copy of the licence, which would be valid for one year," said Syed Jahangir Hossain, the project in-charge.

"We also have medical experts