

HATIR JHEEL

Toxic wastes kill retention pond

TAWFIQUE ALI

Unabated dumping of untreated industrial effluent is fast killing Hatirjheel, a low-lying flood retention basin earmarked in the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP).

Hundreds of industrial units mostly of textile dyeing in Tejgaon industrial area are releasing thousands of litres of toxic liquid waste directly into the water body.

Under the Flood Protection Priority of the DMDP, the existing entire stretch of Begunbari Canal from Panthaphath culvert behind



RICKSHAW

Associations flourish on illegal registration

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

An illegal rickshaw registration business continues to thrive in the capital under the very nose of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

Numerous organised groups under the banner of rickshaw owner's and puller's associations with the connivance of DCC officials have been making a fortune by selling fake rickshaw registrations to owners of illegal rickshaws in the city.

There have been allegations that the so-called associations involved in this illegal business of fake registrations flourished under the wings of major political parties. The association leaders designate a particular area for a rickshaw while handing over the fake registration plate and they ensure that the law enforcers do not harass the puller of that particular unauthorised rickshaw.

Monirul Islam from Agargaon, owner of nine rickshaws, told Star City that eight of his rickshaws were plying without any harassment in Agargaon and Pallabi areas with registration plates provided by the association leaders. He collected five of those from Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Rickshaw-Van Malik Sramik Samannay Parishad, a wing of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Monirul had collected other two fake registration plates from the Bangladesh Rickshaw-Van Malik Sramik Sangram Parishad housed on the third floor of 23 Bangabandhu Avenue, office of Bangladesh Awami League (AL).

Both associations claimed that the registration numbers had been issued against proposed registration numbers issued by DCC. Numbers of the proposed DCC registrations claimed by the leaders of these two associations however were not the same.

Sonargaon Hotel up to Rampura Bridge is defined as a flood retention pond.

The Begunbari canal study conducted in January 1995 recommended that stretch of this retention pond could not be reduced to less than existing 84 hectares (at that time).

As per the DMDP, one third of Dhaka's storm and wastewater is drained through this canal and adjoining low-lying area.

Recently, the area has turned into one of the largest mosquito breeding grounds with stagnant wastewater, as Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority

(Wasa) has kept the Rampura sluice gate closed to prevent high level of toxic solid waste in the Hatirjheel from flowing into the river.

The river water may get heavily contaminated with the high toxicity, reaching an untreatable extent for existing water treatment plant, said Wasa officials.

Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation Sadeque Hossain Khoka said one major reason behind overwhelming mosquito menace recently in the city is that the Hatirjheel has turned into a huge mosquito breeding ground.

The bed of the wetland is fast being filled up through a process called eutrophication that kills a lake or water body. Chemicals like nitrates and phosphates act as fertilisers and facilitate massive growth of algae and weeds take over the bed of a water body.

Professor Md Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), who led an expert team that carried out a study on Hatirjheel and Begunbari canal area, said, "Hatirjheel, though is a wetland, has been turned into a wasteland."

He said he had suggested in the study report taking measures to contain toxic wastes of Tejgaon industrial area. "No wastewater should be discharged into the

Hatirjheel but not only the industries in Tejgaon, Wasa itself does it."

Quality of raw water deteriorates to such an extent with industrial and domestic wastes that it becomes impossible to bring it to a drinkable condition at Wasa's water treatment plant. The contamination level with high toxicity turns critical particularly during February and March in absence of rain.

"The effluent treatment plants in the industrial units are actually inoperative," said Prof Rahman. He said there are even many hidden disposal lines that carry toxic industrial wastes and release into Hatirjheel spelling a serious environmental threat.

Industrial waste discharge even occurs through Wasa's storm sewerage system.

According to a source in the Wasa, 155 industrial units mostly of textile dyeing in Tejgaon release a huge volume of untreated toxic effluents into the Hatirjheel. Interestingly, most of these units have clearance from the Department of Environment.

The Sayedabad water treatment plant of Wasa is not capable of treating heavy metal (in textile dye) and other toxic effluents in water. One is not allowed to discharge untreated heavy metal in

open space or in water.

Extreme contamination with toxic industrial wastewater has completely destroyed the aquatic life in Hatirjheel area and Begunbari canal. Fate of canals like Narai and Devdholai, Trimohini (confluence) and the river Balu to further east is the same. Stagnant liquid toxic effluents destroy aquatic diversity and it is all the more dreadful that toxicity get transmitted to human body through consumption of fish, said architect Iqbal Habib, member secretary of Bangladesh

Paroibesh Andolok (Bapa).

Wasa itself releases the whole lot of untreated domestic and other sewages of entire Baridhara and Badda areas into the Gulshan Lake and Hatirjheel, as the agency has no sewer system in those areas, he said.

Begunbari originally used to flow from the confluence of three canals -- Paribagh, Kathalbagan and Panthaphat -- up to the Jirani canal to the east.

Begunbari now links Sonargaon Jheel (at the back of Sonargaon Hotel) on west and Hatirjheel on the east.

Wasa Deputy MD and (cur-

ently in-charge of MD) Shahidur Rahman Pradhan said that water of the rivers around the city is already polluted.

"We have closed the Rampura sluice gate to increase oxygen in the water and we will open it with rainfall," he said. "Around 80 percent of used water goes as sewer water but Wasa has no treatment plant for such water except the one at Pagla in Sayedabad."

A number of locals of Tejgaon (Ward no-37) meanwhile alleged that illegal land grab-

bers have been running a very lucrative business erecting makeshift structures across a vast swath of south Begunbari canal area and renting them to poor people.

These slum settlements not only significantly contribute to pollution of the low-lying area but also harbour criminals. An unscrupulous section of officials make money providing illegal connections of utility services to these makeshift structures.

Photo: Star City

Sluice gate of Hatirjheel has been shut to serve Wasa's water treatment plant (left). The designated retention pond has become extremely polluted due to stagnant wastewater.

Photo: Star City

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