

SAVE OUR RIVERS

City rivers polluted like never before

Experts say that the rivers must immediately be linked to the Jamuna in the upstream so that flow of water is augmented and pollution flushed out into downstream

MORSHEK ALI KHAN

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Unprecedented pollution in the four rivers surrounding the capital is not only causing untold suffering to millions living on their banks but also threatening the existence of these rivers.

Experts said that the rivers Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Buriganga remain stagnant for nearly eight months of the year, when millions of gallons of toxic liquid and solid wastes from various industries and homes keep accumulating in its waters

every day.

There is virtually no movement in the river waters during these eight months. The only movement that occurs in these rivers during the period is caused by the high tide and low tide, which pushes the polluted water further upstream during high tide and downstream during low tide.

Millions of people in hundreds of peripheral townships along these rivers are the worst sufferers. During lean period tube-wells in most of these areas remain dry and the residents are cut off from the rivers due to pollution.

According to villagers in Shoalmachi under Savar Police station and along the Turag, the water became unusable just with the start of the lean period.

"There are only three deep tube-wells in the area which are functioning and our women have to fetch water from those wells for every day washing and cooking, we cannot go near the water," said Din Mohammad a shop keeper at Shoalmachi.

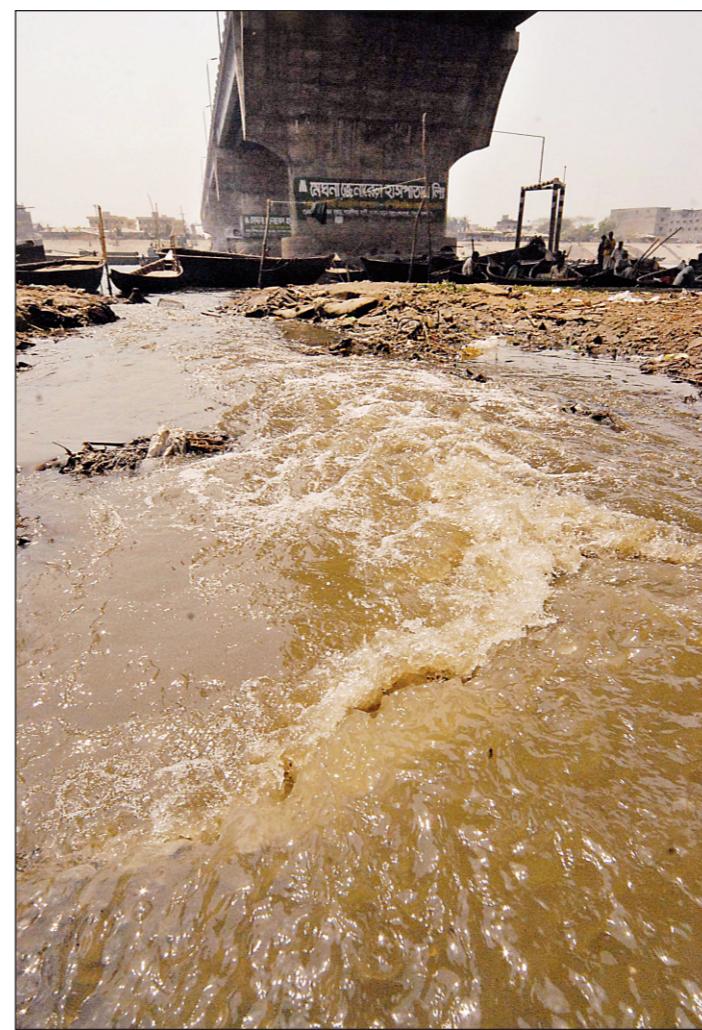
Residents said that the pollution in the rivers this year is worse than any previous years. It is mainly because the last flooding

witnessed the lowest water level in 25 years.

Unless the government takes up immediate steps to connect the river Jamuna in the upstream with these rivers, all the four rivers would slowly become extinct, an expert in the Water Development Board (WDB) said seeking anonymity.

"Millions of gallons of wastes are accumulating in the ten-foot deep river Buriganga and other rivers every day and in this way it

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Untreated wastes from a sewerage outlet flow into the river Buriganga at Babu Bazar under the Second Buriganga Bridge.

SK ENAMUL HAQ

the city that was

Motijheel in downtown was built during the Mughal period. During the time there was a big Mahal for Mirja Mohammad that housed a large pond known as Sukku Mahal's pond. The area was later named Motijheel. A mazar called Shahjalal's mazar where fairs were organised existed. Motijheel and Dilkusha gardens were in the same place earlier. The road dividing the two places was constructed during the British rule.

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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.

"Where shall I go? I am begging just 30 days out of 365 from the people for my son"



-- Sheikh Hasina
Awami League Chief
Told reporters at the Zia International Airport before leaving for the United States, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"This is the largest recovery of wildlife in Bangladesh since Independence"

-- Dr Tapan Kumar Dey
Divisional Forest Officer Project Director, Dulahazra Safari Park
Told reporters as the safari park is thriving with wildlife due to the ongoing drive of the joint forces against illegally kept birds and animals by influential political leaders, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"I did not know that these well-read people are so concerned about our mosque"

-- Abdur Rahman Nazim
Vice-president, Binat Bibi mosque committee
Told a reporter as architecture students made 7 models of the mosque so that the original 600-year old structure can be saved, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"As a teacher I am also feeling ashamed"

-- Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury
Told reporters about the corruption of vice chancellors of universities, on Saturday. Source: Prothom Alo

"He is not in the office and I have no idea when he will be back"

-- Personal assistant of DCC Commissioner
Monowar Hossain Dipjol
Told a reporter as the commissioner was last seen in his office in the first week of January, on Sunday. Source: The Daily Star

"Had I known that Miami people love me so much I would have started doing politics from here"

-- Dr Muhammad Yunus
Nobel Laureate
Told reporters at a reception ceremony at Miami in USA, on Friday. Source: Bhorer Kagoj

Compiled by: Durdana Ghias

SWADHINATA STAMBHA

Few more years to complete?

The historical park remains inaccessible to public for over nine years



A terracotta work completed recently at the Swadhinata Stambha in the city.

WAHIDA MITU

Construction work of Swadhinata Stambha (Independence Monument) at Suhrawardy Udyana will need a few more years to complete, sources said.

The park has remained virtually inaccessible to the public due to the project for the last nine years. Due to slow pace of work and frequent revisions of its components and budget, the project could not be completed on time.

The construction of the monument is getting delayed due to unavoidable circumstances and the place is restricted for public use, said the ministry officials.

Sources said almost 90 percent of the monument's work has been done. Other than a 100-foot glass tower, the other works will be completed within

next June. But it might take several years to complete the tower, they said.

The work began with an estimated cost of Tk 81.27 crore in July 1998 when Awami League was in power. The BNP-led four-party government stopped the work after taking office in 2001 for alleged irregularities.

Then the work remained suspended for three years.

After some revisions, the government revived the project at the end of 2004 curtailing the cost to Tk 76.03 crore.

The then prime minister Khaleda Zia hurriedly inaugurated the monument on October 22, 2006 without the main tower.

According to original design, the height of the tower was 100 feet and the estimated cost was Tk 1.75 crore. The design was revised in 2001 increasing the tower's height to 150 feet that

could cost around Tk 76.70 crore.

Then the tower's design was changed for the second time in August of 2004 lowering the height to 100 feet and the cost to Tk 1.75 crore again. On the basis of the last revised PP, tender was invited four times but no firm responded to the bidding.

The Ministry of Liberation War Affairs then asked the Department of Architecture to plan a 100 feet tower. PWD estimated that this tower would cost Tk 5.60 crore, which is much higher than the earlier estimate.

Due to the increase in expenditure, the Planning Commission has asked the ministry to prepare a fresh project proposal for the tower. The ministry sources said they

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Heritage in wrong hands

Department of Archaeology remains as ineffective as ever to protect historical sites or monuments of importance

DURDANA GHIAS

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Incompetence, poor management, and lack of institutional capacity, skilled manpower and proper legal framework are some reasons holding back the Department of Archaeology (DA), said architects and conservationists.

Over the years the DA has consistently ignored and overlooked hundreds of historical sites in the city with the excuse of lack of funds and manpower. Only Ahsan Manji is an exception.

Recently, 600-year old Binat Bibi Mosque at Narinda in Dhaka was about to be knocked down by the mosque committee for erecting a 70-foot minaret.

Later, the committee and local community were convinced to stop piling for the minaret that was causing vibration, which would have developed cracks in the original structure.

But the high officials of the DA remained in the dark about the whole affairs until there was a report published in Star City that the mosque was about to fall apart.

When this correspondent contacted the high officials, some expressed surprise to hear that such an old mosque exists in the city.

The oldest structure of Dhaka, according to experts and historians, the mosque is still not

declared a protected site by the government, said Md Shafiqul Alam, director of DA.

When asked why it is not possible to protect the site now, a high official of the DA said that they do not 'touch' the structures where religious sentiment is involved.

"The local community will not let us protect these sites. This is one reason we refrain from protecting them. We are unable to protect even those sites listed as protected."

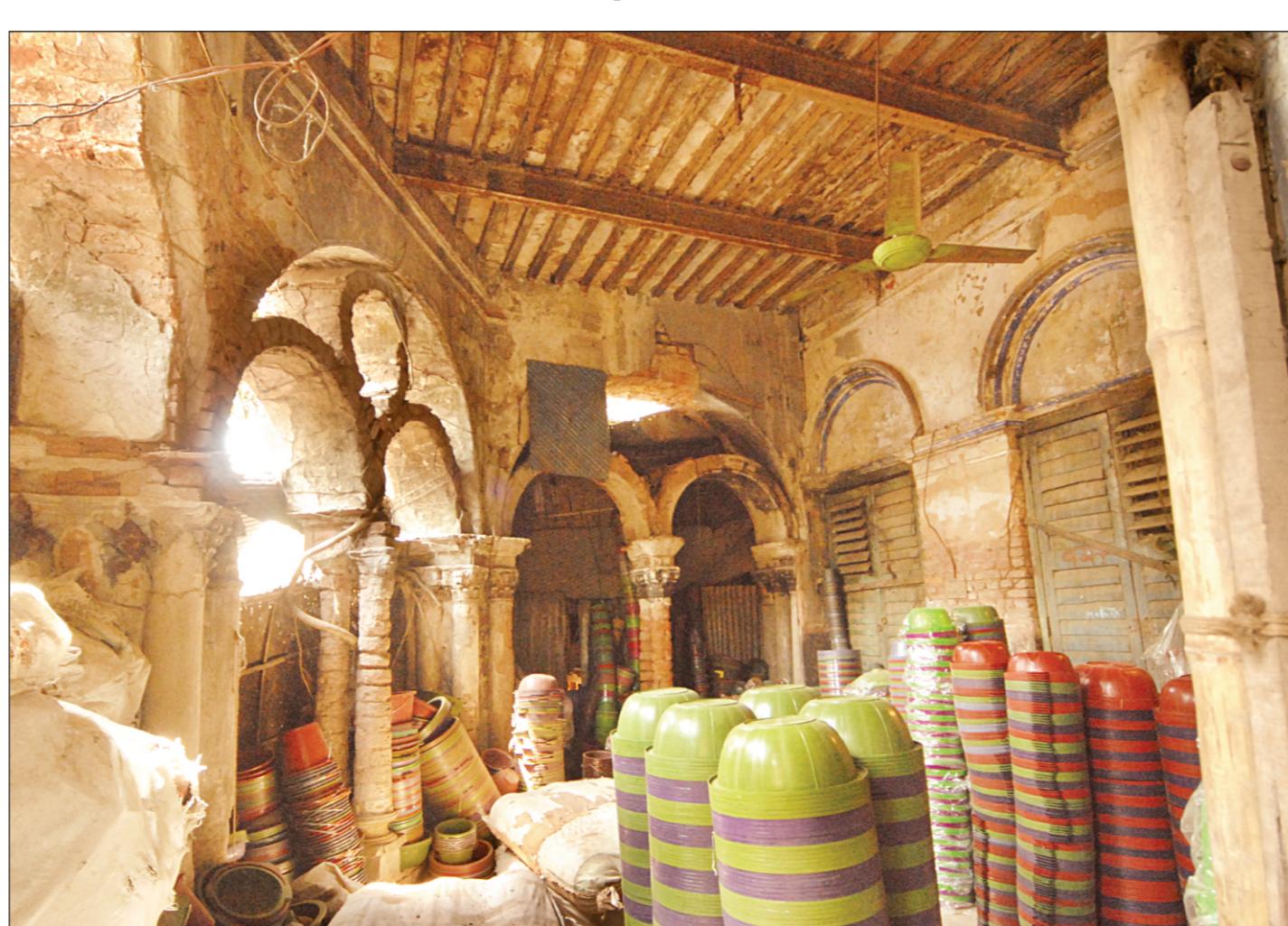
Sadly, whenever DA was allocated funds to preserve historical sites, in most cases the money was spent to deface the old structures, experts alleged.

They said in Shat-Gambud Mosque in Bagerhat, simple brick and plaster were used to cover 60 columns made of precious basalt stones.

Dr Abu Sayeed M Ahmed, a conservation architect, said, "The columns, originally slender, were thickened by 30 inches using brick and plaster. It distorted the mosque's original features and squeezed the interior."

"There was a triangular pediment in front of the mosque which was made circular," he further added.

According to sources, in a project like this a conservation architect should take the decision, which should be implemented by graduate conservation engineers. But in these projects carried out by DA, diploma engineers are



The historical retreat of the Bhawal King at Nolgolla, Mitford now being used as a plastic factory and residence for several families.

taking the decisions and implementing them.

Satmasjid, a Mughal period mosque in the city, has been whitewashed. It was a total waste of money because the whitewash is not supposed to last more than a year, said experts.

"The original white colour was made from shell powder which created a marble effect. They are not even certain that white was the feature of the Mughal period because some edifice of that era were painted pink. For an example, Niyamatullah Complex in Chapainawabganj," said Dr Sayeed.

Taimur Islam, an architect working to conserve Shankharibazar's old buildings for three years, said Shankharibazar is not listed as a protected site.

About the excuse of not protecting religious structures, he said that in UK there is a similar rule called Ecclesiastical Exemption according to which the government can protect some parts of a church and the church authority can renovate some parts.

"It is true that local community can be a problem in protecting these sites but why should we remain silent thinking of these obstacles? We have to go forward and convince them to the last minute so that they come to their senses and think about preserving it," said an activist and conservationist working to save the Binat

Bibi mosque.

"If we can declare a site 'protected' then the local people can at least feel that it is a part of their national heritage," he added.

About the shortage of skilled manpower at DA, sources said mostly diploma engineers are working there. But qualified archaeologists and BSc engineers are needed. Fresh graduate archaeologists from Jahangirnagar University should be encouraged to work with the DA, they suggested.

Asked what steps can be taken to declare Binat Bibi mosque a protected site, ABM Abdul Hawak Chowdhury, secretary, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, said that he would discuss the matter with the director of DA.

Only 9 monuments in the city have been declared as protected sites. But there are many sites in Farashganj, Shankharibazar and Tantibazar, which should be brought to the attention of the government, said Taimur.

"Steps should be taken immediately to conserve these sites before things turn worse. It is a losing battle we are fighting. This must be stopped," he said.