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EASTERN BYPASS

WDB Okays study, sends it to ministry

Country's second most important project in terms of poverty alleviation now awaits ministerial nod

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The Water Development Board (WDB) has approved the updated version of the Dhaka eastern bypass project and sent it to the Water Resources Ministry for final approval, sources said.

A UK-based consultant and its associates up-dated all previous studies on the Tk 2,475 project officially called Dhaka Integrated Flood Control Embankment Cum Eastern Bypass Road Multipurpose Project, for a fee of Tk 2.9 crore. Seven ministries with the water resources ministry in the lead would implement the project.

"We have scrutinized the updated version of the studies and approved it at our level, now it is up to the ministry to convene a meeting with relevant ministries and take steps to launch the project," said an engineer of the WDB requesting anonymity.

The 30-km bypass-cum-embankment would encompass the 124 square km area from Tongi railway bridge to Kanchpur bridge. An inter-ministerial meeting in July 2004 classified the project as the second most important one in terms of national priority to reduce poverty. The project would secure this vast area from recurring floods and also expand the city. It would also play a vital role in diverting west and southbound traffic from northern parts of the country.

"The biggest problem to launch the project would be to procure funds but

considering its importance we are hopeful that the government would give it its due priority," said another engineer of the WDB.

While preparations are underway to launch the long awaited project, the government however has no plan in hand to save the natural canals and water retention ponds in the 124 square kilo-

water logging and other hazards.

Most of the low-lying land in the bypass project area is now in the grip of private housing companies and individuals. From Khilkhet to Kanchpur along the river Balu, massive signboards have been installed announcing the start of mega housing projects.

Unless the government moves in

Unless the government moves in immediately to demarcate the canals and flood retention ponds, the entire eastern fringe is set to be 'an environmental nightmare' as soon as the embankment-cum-bypass is completed, experts at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said

metre area under the project, mostly low-lying, now being filled up indiscriminately.

Lack of initiative to retain the natural canals and water retention ponds before the project starts has raised fears among environmentalists and experts that as in the case of the western flood protection embankment, the 'new city extension' on the eastern fringe would be an environmental nightmare, resulting in permanent

immediately to demarcate the canals and flood retention ponds, the entire eastern fringe is set to be 'an environmental nightmare' as soon as the embankment-cum-bypass is completed, experts at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said.

The project is also planned without a feasibility study on the existing western embankment that causes serious water

logging due to lack of flood and wastewater retention ponds. Although Dhaka WASA is now trying to recover the encroached natural canals in the western part of the city, unabated unplanned urbanisation has engulfed all water retention ponds, leaving a vast area from Tongi to Kellar Mor most vulnerable to waterlogging. Dhaka Wasa's Drainage Section spends crores of taka in vain to pump out water from different areas within the western embankment, which get waterlogged during the rainy season.

"If you are thinking of encompassing such a large area with a dyke, the first thing you have to think of is drainage," said one expert requesting anonymity.

The 30-km western embankment, protecting an area of 136 sq km from Tongi railway bridge to Kellar Mor in Lalbagh was completed four years ago. During the rainy season, when drainage from inside the embankment becomes impossible due to rise in water level outside, serious water logging takes place in parts of Mirpur, Shyamoli, Mohammadpur, Rayer Bazaar, Hazaribagh, Nawabganj, Lalbagh and Imamganj. The water that gets logged for months is mainly tannery and other industrial wastes, and it exposes millions living in these areas to health hazards.

Idle TCB watches BDR's success

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

When fair-price outlets set up by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) at 17 points in the city continues to gain immense popularity, TCB (Trading Corporation of Bangladesh), a government organisation officially responsible for providing essential commodities at fair prices to the citizens, remains virtually inactive.

Hundreds of people -- especially middle class, lower middle class and the poor -- are rushing to the BDR fair-price outlets. This onrush of people points at the urgency of setting up more of such outlets throughout the country.

BDR started to set up fair-price outlets on March 15 and received tremendous response from the general public. People are thronging these outlets not only to get quality products at fair prices, but also to buy goods

that are weighed accurately.

Price difference between the BDR outlets and open market retailers is huge. For instance, ginger sells at Tk 22 per kg at BDR outlet while it is priced at Tk 40 to Tk 50 in the open market. BDR sells a kg of garlic at Tk 40 only, whereas the open markets sell the same at a staggering price of Tk 70 to Tk 90.

Shakil Ahmed, director general of BDR, said these outlets are selling five items now, but thanks to the huge public response, BDR is going to carry more items in its outlets shortly.

The other government organisation that could be very effective in assisting BDR to restraining price spiralling is TCB.

TCB was established in 1972 with an objective to protect consumers' rights, maintain fair prices by ensuring a balanced supply of commodities for the consumers and thus prevent and deter hoarding by unscrupulous

trading cartels.

Other objectives of TCB included searching, extending, promoting and maintaining international markets for local products to increase national revenue.

TCB has reached such a state that even commodities sold at BDR outlets are priced lower than that of TCB.

This correspondent asked Mohammad Ali Patwari, joint secretary of commerce ministry, how BDR is successfully purchasing products at prices lower than that of TCB. He said BDR is buying directly from the producers while TCB have to buy products through tenders.

When asked why BDR is setting up fair-price outlets for the citizens when it should be TCB's duty to do so, Patwari reasoned that BDR had to take up the task because the public needed

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STAR PHOTO

BDR's fair price outlets gain popularity while the government-run TCB sits idle.

KHOKA'S CORNER CAR PARK DEVOURS GREENS



A large green space of the Dhanmondi Lake area on Road 32 has been converted into a car park. Hardly 50 metres away at the intersection of Mirpur Road a conventional and purpose built car park mostly remains occupied by vendors. The green space has lost all its lawn to the vehicles parked there throughout the day. Officially the Tk 20 crore Dhanmondi Lake development project had designated a total of 13 spots around the lake for car park. DCC is in charge of maintenance of the lake.

STAR PHOTO

Rajuk drives proving futile

The magistrates cannot hand down fine and imprisonment unless empowered to do so

TAWFIQUE ALI

The housing and public works ministry has proposed that Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) magistrate should be empowered to penalise the building occupiers with fine and imprisonment.

Secretary of the ministry SM Jafrullah said they have already sent the proposal to the establishment ministry. The establishment ministry will forward it to the home ministry that will finally delegate the power to the magistrate.

Building Construction Act of 1952 (amended act no-15 of 2006) provides for imprisonment up to seven years or with a mini-

mum fine of Tk 50,000 or both for the offenders of the act, provisions of Metropolitan Building Construction Rules-2006 and Bangladesh National Building Code.

The Rajuk magistrate needs empowerment of that of a metropolitan magistrate to hand down imprisonment above five years' imprisonment, said a source.

But the magistrate will not take an offence under the building laws into its cognisance. A prosecution has to be initiated by an authorised officer of Rajuk or police. The convicted will have scope to file appeal against conviction within 30 days.

The building users are
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STAR PHOTO

A worker of REB snaps the electricity supply of Pakija dyeing factory as per the order of DoE. The factory was fined for not using its ETP.