

Large areas in Rayer Bazar, Katashur waterlogged

Toxic wastes from the tanneries and other industries keep accumulating in these densely populated areas with the drainage system collapsing due to encroachments on Katashur canal

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Thousands of families in the city's Rayer Bazar and Katashur areas are exposed to serious health hazard due to a sudden waterlogging caused by construction of an illegal structure on the Katashur canal.

Liquid toxic wastes from the tanneries, other industries and sewerage water has flooded many roads in this densely populated area protected by a flood protection embankment. At low-lying places the wastewater has created ponds with children from the local slums playing in the toxic water.

According to an engineer of Dhaka Wasa's Drainage Circle the sudden water logging occurred as Noor Real Estate, a developer in the area filled up the Katashur canal and installed only four concrete pipes underneath for the drainage of the wastes.

"The four pipes are too small in diameter to drain out the huge volume of waste water generated by industries and thousands of households," said Zahurul Alam, Superintendent Engineer of the

Wasa'a Drainage Circle.

On March 22 the Dhaka Wasa knocked down dozens of structures from the Katashur canal in a bid to bring back flow in the canal. Still more than a hundred structures encroach the Katashur

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canal that carries wastes to the retention pond in Kalyanpur.

"We have to conduct several more drives to remove those encroachments," Alam said. Water Development Board

(WDB) engineers said that millions of gallons of highly toxic wastewater is fast accumulating inside the Rayer Bazar and Katashur areas.

"Encroachments on the canals are preventing drainage so badly that our sluice gate on the embankment hardly receives any wastes these days," said an engineer of the WDB Dhaka Division. Most of the tannery wastes flow into the river Buriganga through the Rayer Bazar sluice gate, maintained by the Water Development Board.

In the small lanes and by-lanes of Katashur liquid waste from the underground sewerage lines was gushing out yesterday, flooding the roads. A pungent smell filled the air.

"We are living with this for the last seven days, it is very unhealthy," said a grocery shopkeeper in Katashur.

The low-lying area on the western side of Rayer Bazar kitchen market has been completely inundated with wastewater that looked thick and black. The wastewater pond was created within the last seven days, locals said.



Toxic pond: A large area on the western side of Rayer Bazar is filled with highly toxic wastes.

Independence day celebration in city



Celebrating the day at the DU campus (top). A 159-foot kite takes off at the DU playground on the occasion of the Independence day (bottom). Photos by Syed Zakir Hossain

WAHIDA MITU

City dwellers celebrated the Independence Day on Monday by participating in different programmes organised by socio-cultural organisations.

Throughout the day thousands of people from all walks of life thronged the Liberation War Museum at Segunbagicha and attended the special programmes arranged there on the occasion of the Independence Day. Most of the visitors were children taken by their parents to the museum to show them the history of the nation.

This correspondent found Monjurul Ehsan narrating to his 10-year-old daughter the history of the war. "These pictures [on display at the museum] help me narrate the Liberation War history chronologically and clearly," said Manjurul.

The Liberation War Museum organised weeklong programmes starting from March 22 to celebrate the Independence and National Day.

On the Independence Day, the programme started at 9:30am where students from different schools and cultural organisations including Siddeshwari Girl's College, UCEP (Underprivileged Children's Educational Programs) School and Sunbeam School performed in colourful cultural

programmes.

"It is really nice to perform in the programme on our Independence Day," said Farzana Akhter Shantona, a class 8 student of

UCEP School after performing in a cultural show.

In the afternoon, noted artists of the country including Hashem Khan, Rafiqun Nabi, Quayyum

Chowdhury and Shishir Bhattacharya joined an art workshop on the museum premises to depict the hopes and dreams of the Liberation War through paintings. The struggle for freedom, the bloody war and its impacts were reflected in the paintings.

Dhakabashi, a socio-cultural organisation engaged in upholding the tradition and cultural heritage of Dhaka city, arranged a daylong kite flying competition on the Dhaka University playground on the Independence Day. Tapan Chowdhury, energy and sports adviser of the caretaker government, attended the programme as chief guest.

In late afternoon Bangladesh Rowing Federation organised a boat race on the Buriganga river. But the race failed to generate enthusiasm among city dwellers. The race did not represent the traditional racing boats of the country.

The celebrations wore a different look on the river Buriganga, when artists in a modern vessel moved from area to area singing various patriotic songs on loud speakers fitted on the top. The unusual event was organised by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs.



ANTIQUITIES ACT 1968

Proves futile to conserve heritage

TAWFIQUE ALI

The existing antiquities law is too weak to effectively conserve the country's heritage sites or structures with historical and architectural significance. Neither can this law prevent destruction of these priceless structures, said top government officials.

Even though the department of archaeology (DA) is very much aware of such destruction of historical structures and archaeological heritage sites -- particularly in and around the capital, it hardly can do anything to protect these due to drawbacks in the conservation law, said M Shafiqul Alam, director of DA.

Conservation of heritage sites and monuments is all the more sensitive and difficult in the capital because of rocketing price of land here, he said.

"We do feel that a particular site or edifice should be protected," Alam said, "But we cannot protect it unless and until its private owner gives consent in favour of the conservation."

The foremost precondition, as per the Antiquities Act of 1968 (amended in 1976), to declare a historical monument or a heritage site protected is that the government has to obtain consent of the private owner first, he said.

"We need to amend the Antiquities Act and make it up-to-date for conservation of our heritage," said Alam. "We could not declare any new building or site as national heritage sites during the past 30 years in Dhaka. There are only 19 declared protected sites in Dhaka, most of which are not under the government's control and are being occupied illegally."

First, the government has to propose to a private owner that the government intends to declare the structure or site as national heritage site, Alam said, adding, "In case the owner rejects the proposal, the whole

effort becomes complicated as there is no provision in the Antiquities Act to declare a national heritage site by force."

A private owner has the right to sue the government in case the government had turned the site into national heritage site without the owner's consent, said the DA director.

In some cases, the DA can declare religious edifices as national heritage sites, but the task is very difficult for structures without religious affiliation.

ABM Abdul Haq Chowdhury, secretary to the cultural affairs ministry, said there are many old buildings all over the country, but the government cannot conserve all of them mainly because of fund constraints.

"If needed, the government will have to amend the old law in public interest," said the secretary, "But I have to look into the law before I respond to the matter elaborately."

In the light of Metropolitan Building Construction Rules of 2006, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) asked the DA to prepare a comprehensive list of heritage sites and historical structures in Dhaka.

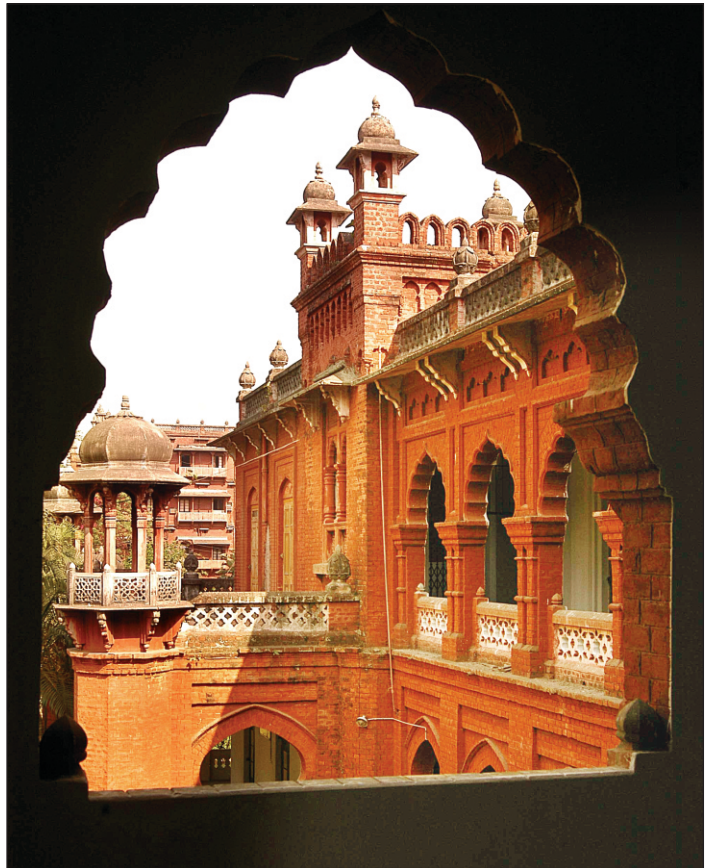
The DA prepared a list of only eight such sites. Rajuk was not satisfied over the outcome of the work done by DA and it asked Institute of Architects, Bangladesh (IAB) to do the job.

An IAB committee headed by conservation architect Abu Sayeed M Ahmed has been working on the project. "We will be able to submit first phase of the final list within the next one and a half months," said Ahmed.

The building rules restrict any development work within 500 metres radius of a declared heritage site, Ahmed said. He however agreed that a site could not be declared protected unless the private owner agrees to the government's proposal.

President of IAB Mubasshar Hussain said the declaration of heritage sites is crucial to save any structure or site with historical or

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The Laws cannot even protect historic Curzon Hall as the building is not listed by the Department of Archaeology.

cultural significance as it [the declaration] as it ensures public ownership on a heritage site.

Government must also acquire a site and pay due compensation to its owner in the same manner a private land is acquired for building public infrastructures like roads or

bridges. But, the conservation work must follow immediately after the land acquisition, Mubasshar suggested.