



# WASA oiling rusty pumps to tackle waterlogging

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Engineers of Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) are now trying to repair hundreds of mechanical pumps for jetting out billions of litres of rainwater out of the city's flood protection embankments in the face of severe waterlogging created by monsoon rain.

With the rivers Buriganga, Balu and Turag still flowing below danger level, Wasa was lucky to have flushed most of the recent rainwater into these rivers just by opening the sluice gates. At the D N D, Kalyanpur and Goranchadbari areas however the Wasa pump houses have been kept operational round the clock to pump this huge volume of accumulated water.

"If the water levels of the three rivers rise to another two feet, we shall have to start these pumps immediately to avoid a catastrophic waterlogging in the city," said an engineer of Wasa requesting customary anonymity.

The Wasa is placing 28 pumps at TTPara, between Syedabad and Kamlapur with a capacity of jetting out 200 cusec water per second. It has 53 pumps getting readied at Rampura with a capacity of pumping out 325 cusec water per second. The combined capacity of jetting accumulated water at the large conventional pumps at Kalyanpur,

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"We cannot really avoid waterlogging in Dhaka with even double the number of pump houses because 250 kilometer network of storm sewerage and 2,000 kilometers of surface drains are not really adequate to drain out billions of litres of rainwater that the monsoon brings," said a Wasa official source.

"What we can assure is that by cleaning these drains, the duration of waterlogging could be greatly reduced," he added.

While Wasa prepares strongly on the vulnerable eastern part of the city, the entire stretch of the Rayer Bazar, Lalbagh areas inside the embankment start to swell with tannery wastes from Hazaribagh. Wasa officials said that they had 13 pumping points in the area between Sikder Medical to Gandaia but none except two are operational.

In some areas in the western parts of the city, black liquid wastes have accumulated along with huge volumes of rainwater. According to Water Development Board (WDB), the water level in the rivers around the city is rising rapidly.

"In a day or two we shall be forced to shut down the sluice gates to prevent river water from entering the city. Then the Wasa pumping activities will have to run 24 hours to drain out waste water as well as rainwater," said an engineer of WDB that controls the sluice gates.

Out of 350 square kilometers of the city's surface area, only 260 square kilometer area is protected by flood protection embankment. Wasa currently has a total of fund of Tk 2.5 crore for tackling drainage of storm water and also to run the pumps, sources said.



Workers readying Wasa pumps at Kalyanpur preparing for the floods.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

## Bashabo residents fear catastrophic monsoon

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

Bashabo.

"This year things are supposed to be even worse as a number of swamps in the area have been filled up that could otherwise retain the water. It is surprising that the authorities remain silent when we face immense sufferings every year," he added.

According to local residents, the past governments took several isolated initiatives to tackle waterlogging in the region but no step was taken for its permanent solution.

"Waterlogging is quite a regular experience for us every year. We spend each day of the monsoon to watch the water level rise in the nearby swamps and wait for an eminent flooding," said Tanvir Ahmed, a resident of North

local.

"Although the swamp was marshy and dirty, it used to act as a retention pond in the locality. The swamp has now been filled up to build a community centre, so I can only fear a severe waterlogging situation this year and onwards," he added.

The driving downpour during the last few days, the first cloud-burst of the season, reminded the Bashabo residents about their past sufferings from waterlogging.

"My house is about a foot below the street and we had a hard time blocking the door with wooden planks to keep the water out. But all the efforts went in vain as the street itself was flooded with several feet high water and within an hour there were knee-deep water inside our house,"

said Selim Khan, a garment factory staff from North Bashabo.

In a bid to tackle waterlogging, Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) undertook a project to improve the sewerage system of Bashabo earlier last month. But the massive road-digging under the project has made the situation only worse for the locals.

The several miles long street starting from the Buddhist Temple near the Atish Deepankar Road up to the Kadamtala Bridge has been thoroughly dug up and wedged with enormous sewerage tubes constricting commuters' movement.

"They dug up the streets in such a way that rickshaws, even bicycles cannot make their ways across all this mess," said

Mahabub Ahmed, a resident from Kadamtala.

An official at the Wasa's drainage circle said the entire drainage system of the region is choked with sand and solid wastes as all the nearby water bodies and flood flow zones have been filled up in the last few years.

"The filling up of the nearby flood flow zones have virtually traumatised the sewerage system of the region," said Jafrul Alam, Wasa superintendent engineer for the region.

"Now we are trying to improve the sewerage system so that we can tackle the waterlogging situation in the monsoon," he added.

According to experts, the western parts of the city are dry as Water Development Board workers pumped out water into the Buriganga and Turag rivers.

The city's western part is protected by embankments but the entire eastern region is deluged by floodwaters in absence of any flood control embankment.

The water resources ministry took up the "Eastern Bypass" project in 1998 to protect the eastern region from flooding, which is yet to get final approval from the authorities.

Once implemented, the Tk 2,476-crore project would encompass the 124 square km area from Tongi Railway Bridge to Kanchpur Bridge. The project would save this vast area from recurring floods and also expand the city. It will protect the city from floodwaters of the Balu river that runs from Tongi Bridge to Demra Road.

The floods affected about five million people in the city of about 13 million. The areas such as Sayedabad, Motijheel, Gulshan, Banani, Baridhara, Paltan, Gopibagh, Madartek, Mugda, Goran, Rampura, Malibagh and Badda could have been saved from the floods if the eastern embankment had been built.



Dhaka Wasa has dug up the entirety of Bashabo lanes just to create more problems for proper drainage.

## CAB STUDY ON VEGETABLE PRICES

### Syndicates' incredible grip over prices

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Vegetable prices in Dhaka's retail market are more than three times the prices in Shibpur, 80 kilometres off the city, as a syndicate of middlemen makes exorbitant profit, according to study by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

The study conducted in the first week of this month reveals a staggering 336.29 percent increase, comparing the prices of 15 vegetables at the producers' level in Shibpur in Narsingdi district and the retail market in Dhaka.

The huge gap between the prices at village and the city is largely because of the middlemen's syndicate. The increase is only 55.93 percent at Karwan Bazar wholesale market, but the prices jump by 172.02 percent when the products reach the retail market.

Aubergine costs Tk 7.50 per kilogram at Shibpur while it is Tk 20 at Karwan Bazar. Cucumber



A vegetable shopkeeper at Hatirpool kitchen market.

market. Two years ago, the farmers of Shibpur used to sell one kilogram of spinach at 60 paisa.

"The producers would lose their interest in future if they do not get fair prices and it might force us to import vegetables from abroad in future," Faruque said.

He said the government should have some price control mechanism to reduce the gap between the prices at wholesale markets in villages and the retail market in Dhaka. The influence of the middlemen must be checked.

Forming cooperatives of the producers could be a solution that would facilitate marketing their products in the wholesale markets in Dhaka bypassing the middlemen.

"The government is providing subsidy to the farmers but if they do not get a considerable price of their products, I think the subsidy would not help them," Faruque said.