

UNPLANNED URBANISATION AND WATERLOGGING

The place is called DND

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Unplanned construction of roads and disappearance of canals, ponds and low-lying areas has turned the 57-square kilometre Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) area into a permanently waterlogged area.

In DND every canal, pond and low-lying area has been filled up by uncollected rubbish generated by more than a million people living there. The severe consequences of unplanned urbanisation are also beginning to show not only with permanent water logging but also with unhealthy living conditions. As the waterlogging starts, the water taps and tubewells get submerged and a severe water crisis persists in the area during rainy season.

Experts in city wastewater drainage system said originally the DND was created to make room for agricultural land near the city. The whole idea of DND agricultural pocket near the city was to keep the city kitchen markets supplied with fresh vegetables. But as time went by, none of the government agencies kept track of the original concept. Slowly and surely the entire DND area was sold out to land-hungry city dwellers, who bought all sizes of plots. The DND area is heavily fortified

with dykes and it has one water retention pond with a pump house at Shimirail area to jettison all the wastewater generated inside. The retention pond was originally created to hold rainwater for irrigation in the mid sixties.

The old pump has a capacity of jetting out 14.5 cubic metres of water per second out of the protected area, but unplanned growth of the area has been so rapid that nowadays waste and rain water generated in parts of the area cannot roll on to the retention pond, creating pockets of water logging.

According to officials, one of the biggest blows to the DND came with the construction of Jatrabari-Kanchpur Road and Narayanganj Diversion Road, which instantly created three subdivisions within the DND area, cutting off drainage in one third of the area.

The Water Development Board (WDB) has now proposed to immediately restore some drainage system by recovering the canals and by setting up a pump with a capacity of jetting out 50 cubic metres of water a second.

The government on June 12 announced launching of a TK 233 crore to address the waterlogging problem at the DND. The Secretary of the Water

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School children wade through waterlogged streets in DND area.

MEDICAL WASTE MANAGEMENT

Deadly wastes ending up at doorsteps

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Although public awareness about medical wastes has increased in recent years, a huge amount of such dangerous wastes are being routinely dumped on the city streets, posing serious environmental risks and health hazards.

The generation rate of medical wastes has increased rapidly over the past 10 years due to the increased number and size of healthcare facilities and use of disposable medical products.

Officially there are around 800 clinics and hospitals in the city that generate about 200 metric tons of wastes daily. The volume of total solid wastes generated in the city is around 3,500 metric tons.

About 50 percent of the total wastes are collected by the municipal authorities while the rest remain uncollected, degrading the environment.

"Any type of waste poses threat to humans and medical waste is the worst of them. It requires specialised treatment and proper management before disposal," said Prof Mahmudur Rahman, director, Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR).



A waste picker is searching through used syringes and saline bags from a dump at the Pongu Hospital.

Rahman said in recent times awareness among the hospital managements has increased, but still it is not adequate. Only a few have necessary facilities for safe disposal of wastes.

Most healthcare establishments still dispose of wastes on roads, dustbins, drains and any open space available where they mix up with household wastes. Hospital sweepers are not properly trained to handle them. "Medical wastes need to be classified and quarantined accordingly," Rahman added.

Rahman said there are various types of medical wastes. Among them the biological wastes such as human tissues, blood, body fluids, organs, body parts, human fetuses, and other similar wastes from surgeries, biopsies and autopsies pose sever threat.

Other clinical wastes include dressings from infected or surgical wounds, disposable towels, gloves, broken hospital equipment, needles, syringes, scalpel blades, razors, infusion sets, broken glass and blood tubes.

"A major concern about biological wastes generated in hospitals is that it could spread infectious and blood-transmitted diseases including hepatitis B, tuberculo-

sis, diphtheria and even AIDS," he added.

Waste pickers are especially vulnerable because they handle the wastes with bare hands.

"Medical wastes also worsen environmental pollution especially during monsoon. Living microorganism such as bacteria or fungus grow faster in wet surface. And also they might get washed out of a concentrated area to other places spreading diseases," Rahman said.

Decomposed medical wastes may also contaminate underground water and soil.

The only visible efforts to manage medical wastes and increase awareness are now being made by Prism Bangladesh, an NGO, in collaboration with Dhaka City Corporation.

Prism initiated the Hospital Waste Management Project in February 2004, financed by the World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP).

DCC officials said that Prism successfully reached the primary goal of raising awareness and training up hospital staff about the hazards caused by medical wastes.

"Prism Bangladesh received a

one-acre plot in Matuail from DCC to run the waste management plant," said Tarit Kanti Biswas, project coordinator, Hospital Waste Management Project.

Biswas said currently 185 healthcare establishments are receiving service from Prism.

So far Prism has provided training to 3,209 hospital staff including doctors, nurses and maintenance staff of 126 healthcare establishments in the city. These hospitals are using specialised needle breakers and separate containers for various wastes.

"After safe collection and transportation to the Matuail site, we disinfect some wastes with chemicals, treat them in our autoclaving machine while some wastes go for deep burial and some for incineration," said Biswas.

"Since it requires service charge, government hospitals are not taking our service. However, DCC is discussing the issue with the government hospital authorities. We have been successful in making them understand the issue. Hopefully they will take required measures about waste management," Biswas said.

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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.

"Deaths in custody, mistreatment of the detainees, lack of clarity on who gets arrested and why and so-called 'secret' detentions are all unacceptable"



-- Patricia A Butenis
Outgoing US Ambassador

Said mentioning the case of Cholesh Ritchill in particular while addressing the American Alumni Association at Gulshan Club, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"Does reform mean Awami League (AL) without me and BNP without its chairperson?"

-- Sheikh Hasina
AL President

Told reporters at Mawa Ferry Ghat on her way to Dhaka from Gopalganj, on Wednesday. Source: The Daily Star

"We understand what is good and what is bad for us. Our national image will be undermined if we go by the advice of foreign countries"

-- Barrister Mainul Hosein
Law and Information Adviser

Told reporters responding to repeated calls by US Ambassador Patricia A Butenis for lifting ban on indoor politics, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"If I were not here, I could never know how CCC [Chittagong City Corporation] is devouring hills spreading over such a huge area to implement a housing project"

-- MA Matin
Communications Adviser

Said while visiting the project site at Kaibalyadham under Pahartoli Police Station, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"I swear I do not know a single person of Bashundhara"

-- Justice Fazlul Haque

Former forest adviser in Iajuddin-led caretaker government Told reporters after allegedly taking bribe on from Bashundhara to get them 84 acres of khas land when he was in office, on Monday. Source: The Daily Star

"We are now hearing about BNP (Zia) ... In the past we saw BNP (Huda), BNP (Matin) but all these initiatives proved fruitless"

-- Goyeswar Chandra Ray
Joint Secretary General, BNP

Told reporters referring to reported split in BNP, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

Compiled by Durdana Ghias

GOVT SAFE CUSTODY

Court summons director following allegation of repression

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Following an appeal made by an adolescent girl for not sending her back to a government safe home, the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-5 on June 12 ordered the director and matron of the Lalmatia Women, Children and Girls' Safe Custody Lodging Home to be present physically at the tribunal on July 2.

The tribunal summoned the director of the home, magistrate Kazi Zebunnesa, and matron Rawshan Ara while dealing with a case filed by the girl who was in safe custody at the home under the Department of Women and Children.

The girl complained of repression at the home and expressed fear of further repression if she was sent back to the home.

There are allegations of gross violation of human rights in other government shelter homes under the Department of Social Welfare. Some 85 juveniles fled away from Dhola government shelter home at Mymensingh on June 6.

There are allegations of forced prostitution, physical torture, bribery and other kinds of human rights violations against the authorities of the government shelter homes.

The authorities of the Department of Social Welfare did not refuse the allegations but sought specific proofs against the corrupt employees.

Sakuntola (not her real name), a 16-year-old girl and daughter of a rich businessman of Mohammadpur, told Star City, "I experienced the hell when I was at Lalmatia shelter home for three days after being rescued by police from

some abductors at Chandpur two months ago. During my stay there I was beaten up several times."

A lawyer of a child rights organisation alleged that his client had to pay Tk 1,000 for sending her documents to the magistrate from the shelter home at Mirpur.

He said a criminal gang in collaboration with some unscrupulous officials of the shelter home are providing girls and women for prostitution.

The Department of Social Welfare has recently transferred Salahuddin Ahmed, assistant director of Mirpur shelter home, for a number of allegations against him.

Recently 85 residents fled away from Dhola shelter home after the murder of a man, Shah Alam, inside the home under the Social Welfare Department.

About the murder and overall situation at Dhola shelter home, Wahida Banu, chairperson of Bangladesh Shishu Odhikar Forum, told Star City that the forum has already conducted investigation and will make public the report within a week.

One of the investigators of the forum told Star City, "I saw nothing positive there. The Dhola shelter home is riddled with human rights violation. Despite having open space inside the home, none of the residents are permitted to come out of their room."

Habibur Rahman, director of the Department of Social Welfare, did not refuse the allegations. He said they need specific proofs to punish the people responsible.

About the Mirpur shelter home, he said, "Officially it is a vagrant drop-in centre, not a shelter home.

But due to lack of accommodation in existing shelter homes, the government is using it as a safe custody. The home has its own magistrate to decide whether the residents are vagrant or not. They are later sent to other homes."

About the transferred assistant director of the Mirpur home, Habibur said transfer is not a punishment. But he admitted that several allegations have been found against the official.

Hafizur Rahman Mian, director of the Department of Social Welfare, said the old-fashioned shelter and safe homes of the country need immediate reform and development. The government has allotted funds for the development of these homes in the new national budget. That could solve some of the prevailing problems.



No sooner had the authority of Karatitola CSS Memorial High School, near Sayedabad Bus Stand, cleaned its wall of hundreds of posters, a promoter of a Bangla film pasted an obscene poster on the same wall where hundreds of children read. The offense is punishable under the municipal act.