

CITY CANALS

Recovery is not enough!

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Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority's (Wasa) efforts to recover the 12 city canals from illegal occupancy may bring a little respite from waterlogging in the city due to lack of appropriate measures to ensure smooth flow of water in these canals.

Although Wasa has had some success in removing encroachment from the canals, no measures have been taken to rejuvenate the lifeless canals to revamp the overall drainage system of the city.

Experts believe that removing encroachments from these canals is only the tip of the iceberg. The 'almost dead' city canals need to be revitalised through comprehensive dredging and excavation to foster smooth flow of water.

"Now that the canals are free from encroachments, it is high time to implement tangible measures to clean up the canals to boost the flow of water," said a high official from Wasa requesting anonymity.

According to a survey conducted by Dhaka district administration and Wasa in 2004, a total of 35 canals exist in the capital city. While 12 of these canals are in a reasonably active state, 20 have virtually died out.

According to Wasa sources, the 12 canals that fell under the eviction drive include the canals in Kalyanpur (Agargaon), Shyamali, Bangla College, Katasur, Begunbari, Segunbagicha, Shahjahanpur, Gulshan-Banani, Ibrahimpur,

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Khilgaon-Bashabo along with some isolated ones.

Although, the authorities managed to free the canals from makeshift structures and illegal grabbers during the drive, any manner of preservation or refurbishment schemes has been absent. The initial plans of excavating the canals for smoother flow of water along with the construction of walkways and cross drains have been left out.

A huge portion of the canal that stretches from Tongi Diversion Road to Rampura Bridge has been filled up by the authorities while the rest of the canals are virtually littered with rubbish.

The 1-mile long Ghopdakshin canal is completely dead with a number of saw mills standing over the filled up land, while the Segunbagicha canal, Matuwail canal, Shyampur canal and Kadamtala canal are virtually choked with garbage and litter.

Although Wasa officials claimed to have removed around 100 tonnes of garbage from the base of the 6 km long

Segunbagicha canal in 2005, sources admitted that a few hundreds of tonnes worth of litter still remain in the canal base.

Around 3 tonnes of garbage was removed from the canal behind Bangladesh Bank earlier this month. However, even a moderate shower is creating filthy waterlogging in the streets, as the authorities are yet to move the recovered garbage from the designated place.

An official source from the Drainage Circle of Wasa said that no form of measures have been taken to fine tune the state of any of these canals in the past. Indifference from the concerned authorities has only allowed corrosion of these canals.

Wasa did their part by constructing box culverts while the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) helped along the situation by filling up the canals, said the source.

According to experts, roughly a billion litres of water is discharged through the means of household and industrial wastes

along with rainwater and other sources in the city every day. However, the small number of active water bodies and even smaller number of retention ponds is barely enough to accommodate this amount of water.

"Even if we manage to revamp the canals and ensure the flow of water, we need to guide the water of canals to fall into retention ponds," said a drainage expert from Wasa.

As a solution to the current problem, the official suggested proper preservation of the small number of water bodies that are available in the northeastern region of the city.

"Most of the damage is done as most of the water bodies have been haphazardly filled up. But we need to make sure that the situation does not worsen by preserving the small number of water bodies in the city that can be used as retention ponds," said the official.



The Mutwail canal, recently recovered but needs to be excavated for a smooth flow of storm water.

THIRD BURIGANGA BRIDGE

Irregularities halt construction work

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Construction work on the third Buriganga Bridge at Basila has come to a halt with complications arising from unspecified deviation from the original plan and irregularities in land acquisition, sources said.

Earlier, as the construction work continued in full swing,

completing up to 30 percent of the work ahead of schedule, engineers of the Roads and Highways Department (R&HD) and the Mir Akhter Hossain Ltd, the contractor of the project realised that a mysterious deviation had taken place to save an illegally extended part of a local school.

According to sources more irregularities were reported in the project involving land acquisition.

Local people alleged that there are instances when huge compensation was paid for land acquisition but the land was never incorporated within the project.

"We locals know everyone here who received compensation for land acquired by the Deputy Commissioner's office in 2005 but in one particular case we know for sure that the land owner received the hefty compensation

but never gave away the land for the bridge," said a long time resident of Basila pointing out the plot in question is located near the culvert on the Basila road.

With the deviation unearthed, the bridge officials asked the government to

start procedures to acquire more lands on the Basila side. In February the officials requested the central land allocation committee under the Ministry of Land to expedite the procedure on the basis that many of its workers were sitting idle.

The director of the third Buriganga bridge project, Mahbubur Rahman said that his office duly demarcated the project area with concrete pillars following DC office's acquisition.

"We are not aware of any irregularity in land acquisition," he said. "The work on the bridge has not totally stopped, we are now working on the pillars situated in the river," he added.

To utter annoyance of the local people the Deputy Commissioner's office recently sent the land acquisition letters to several families in Basila. These families said that they had already given almost all their land for the bridge in 2005 and rebuilt on whatever they were left with. "We want a thorough enquiry into the matter, there is telltale corruption in the whole procedure," said a resident requesting not to be named.

"On the other side of the river in Basila, the bridge design was negotiated," local people alleged. They said that a private graveyard, outside land acquisition area, was incorporated in the project despite protests from the people. The project officials said that the graveyard area was incorporated in the project after the former Member of Parliament Amanullah Aman negotiated a verbal deal with the owners.

The TK 49 crore third Buriganga project is funded by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development and is scheduled to be completed in 2010. The Basila bridge would open new roads from the capital to connect vast areas in Keraniganj and also connect Savar and Mawa Roads.

CONSTRUCTION WITHOUT AUTHORISATION

Rajuk to go tough on DU

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk) will serve a notice on the Dhaka University (DU) authorities to stop the construction of all buildings without Rajuk authorisation, said Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon.

He said any building that has been built without approval from Rajuk is illegal.

According to Rajuk sources, there are many organisations, which defy the laws on construction and keep constructing without permission. DU, Dhaka City Corporation and Public Works Department are among these institutions.

The Rajuk move comes following a report published in Star City on Sunday on DU's latest venture to build a 10-storey building without seeking permission from Rajuk.

"If they [DU authorities] build any building without permission from Rajuk then first we will serve them a notice and then we will demolish the construction," said Haroon.

Around 15 to 20 big trees were chopped down on last Tuesday on the green patch near Science Annex Building of DU to start the construction involving Tk 15 crore which will be borne by a trust.

Over the years crores of taka has been spent on similar unauthorised constructions on the DU campus that wiped out valuable collection of trees.

Leading architects of the country said that by erecting buildings without approval DU is violating the Building Construction Act 2006, which is punishable by seven and a half years of prison terms.

DU should have a phase-wise master plan, where buildings and their heights will be specified, to stop its becoming a concrete jungle. The construction sites and extensions will have to be under the plan, they said.

The architects said DU authorities are eager to start the construction of the 10-storey building as soon as possible as the project cost is to be borne by a trust. A bizarre building for Applied Physics Department was built within the compound of Curzon Hall destroying its aesthetic beauty, said one of the architects.

A high official of the Department of Architecture said that DU engineering section is operating without any qualified engineers. Therefore in the last 50 years no fine building was erected and the old ones were destroyed in the name of extension.

"Pedestrian walkways and green spaces have disappeared in the process of haphazard extension," he said.

Till now, DU has ignored all media reports on its illegal construction and defiantly continued constructing new buildings and defacing old ones.

Among a few examples, the NIPA [National Institute for Public Administration] building, was subjected to erratic painting.

The lift of the Lecture Theatre building was turned into an office.

The DU authorities also took an attempt to build a tower for a private mobile company on the roof of the Central Library without considering its architectural beauty, which is now apparently postponed following newspaper reports.

In the last 86 years DU authorities have failed to draft a master plan and took up construction projects on piecemeal basis to eat up its pristine campus. Construction and extension of buildings went on haphazardly without taking into consideration any aesthetic value of the campus.

Extension of Shahidullah Hall is an 'ugly' structure without any architectural beauty and consistence with the main building, said

a senior architect.

The DU authorities said they did not seek permission from Rajuk and did not need it because DU is an old institution while Rajuk is a new one. They considered DU a 'state within a state' and so are competent to construct any building on their 'own' space.

SMA Faiz, vice chancellor, DU, reportedly said that from now on they will go up vertically and replace old buildings with new ones so that no more open spaces are used up. The progress of making a master plan for DU is 'under process', he said.

DU authorities are now planning another 10-storey building for the social science faculty on the open space on the eastern side of Madhur Canteen.



Felled trees at the campus, where DU authorities plan to construct a ten-storey building without approval from Rajuk.



Construction of the third Buriganga bridge has come to a halt.