

WASA STEPS TO STOP ENCROACHMENT

Paved walkways to be built on banks of recovered canals



RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

The areas of 21 canals recovered recently by Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) from encroachers will be restored through excavating and widening to improve the waterlogging problem in the capital, said sources in Dhaka Wasa.

Paved walkways will also be built on both banks of at least seven canals in the city within the next two years under Dhaka Sanitation Project of Wasa, according to the drainage authority of Wasa.

Restoration work is going on and a major portion has been completed already, said Zahirul Alam, chief of Wasa drainage wing.

According to him, most areas of these canals have been cleaned up so far. "The eviction drives have been stopped and our emphasis is now on excavating and widening the canals before the next dry season," Zahir said.

The waterlogging problem in different parts of the city will improve significantly once the canals regained by Dhaka Wasa are fully restored, he hoped.

However, some parts of three canals at Jirani, Kalyanpur and Hazaribagh could not be reclaimed by Wasa as roads had been built on or across those with the approval of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) or National Housing Authority (NHA), said sources.

These three canals could not be connected to their proposed points for smooth water disposal due to the roads constructed by DCC. The NHA also approved these roads for real estate com-

panies, added the sources.

An approach road was built by two real estate companies encroaching on the one third of the Hazaribagh canal. Due to this, a vast area between New Market and Nababganj in the city remain waterlogged, they said.

It would be quite impossible for the Wasa to solve the waterlogging problem in the city unless the canals are excavated all the way through the illegal roads, sources observed.

Some parts of these canals also remain under the possession of encroachers due to court injunctions, the sources said.

Meanwhile the eviction drive of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) ended Wednesday on the west bank of Shitalakhya River without removing most of the listed illegal establishments.

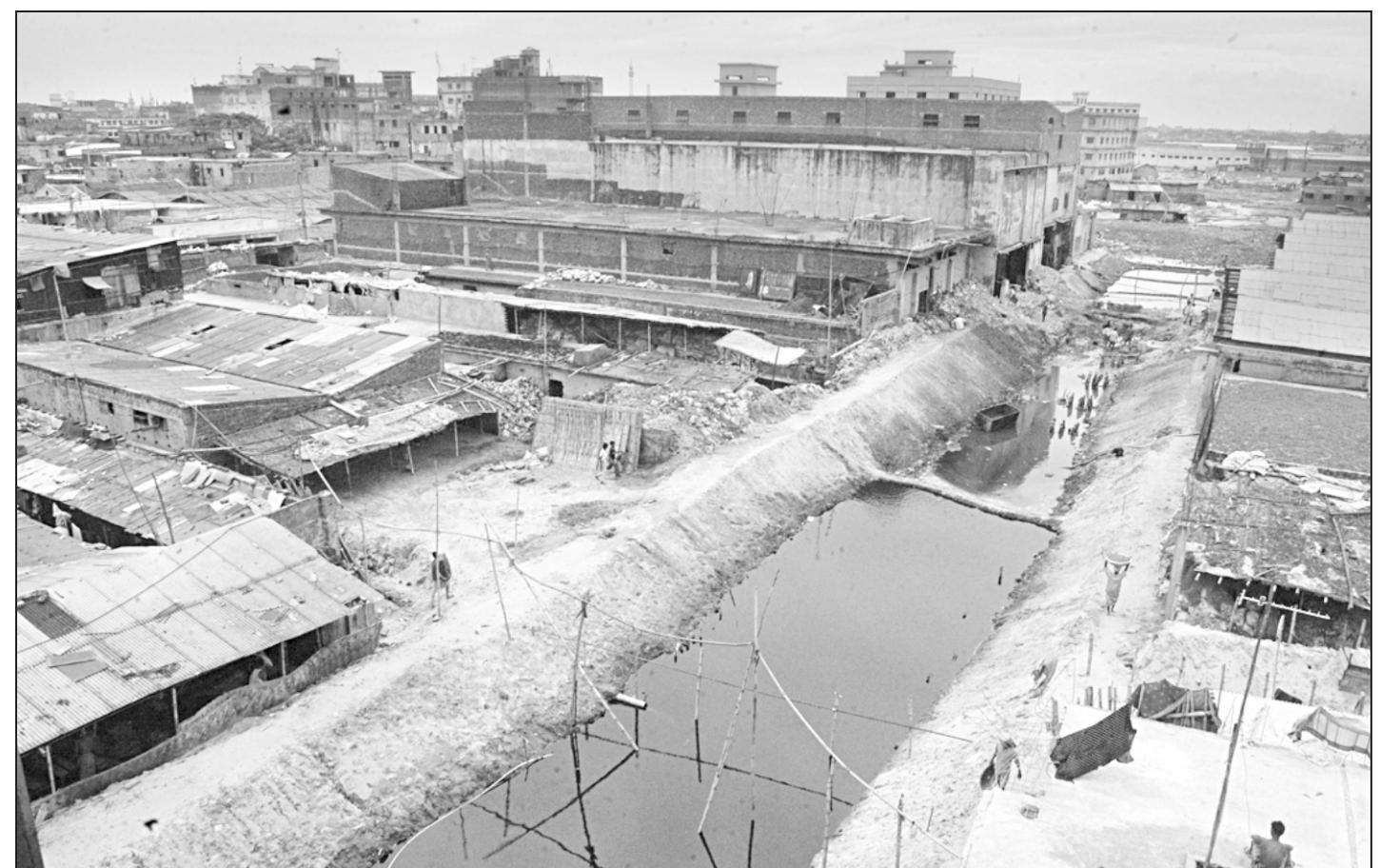
BIWTA has decided to demolish 31 illegal establishments stretching from the Char Syedpur area to Godnali.

Although the eviction drive continued for four days, most of the listed illegal establishments, except in Tanbazar area, remained untouched.

A building owner preferring anonymity alleged that a number of establishments were not demolished and they were given time to go for injunction.

But BIWTA Senior Deputy Director (Port and Transport) Saiful Islam claimed that most of the illegal establishments were demolished.

The drive could not be conducted in Char Syedpur, Shitalakhya and Hajiganj area due to time constraint, he added.



Kalyanpur canal (top) and Hazaribagh canal are among the 21 canals Wasa taking steps to protect from encroachment.



Long queue of ticket seekers near the boundary wall of Hotel Sonargaon has become a regular sight. STAR PHOTO

Struggle for tickets to ride

Scores seeking job in ME countries queue for hours everyday in rain and shine

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A crowd of around a hundred sweaty and exhausted faces gathered on the pavement in front of the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel is an everyday sight for anyone passing through the city's Karwan Bazar intersection.

Regardless if it is day or night, rain or shine, the weary workers, seeking airplane tickets to their jobs in the Middle East, are compelled to wait in zigzagging queues outside the boundaries of Sonargaon Hotel where a number of travel agencies are located.

Officials of Sonargaon Hotel anticipate that the picture will only turn grimmer in future as the demand for plane tickets to Middle Eastern countries is multiplying every month.

"The heat is unbearable. I feel like collapsing," said Aminul Islam, one of the noticeably exhausted people, standing in the midday sun. He had been in the line since 6:30am and only managed to zig-zag a few metres forward ever

since.

Being unable to bear the scorching heat on a Sunday noon, Mohammad Sharif, a garment factory supervisor also fasting that day, nearly fainted from dehydration.

Around three thousand people visit the travel agencies located on the premises of Hotel Sonargaon to book or confirm their plane tickets to their destinations in Middle Eastern countries.

Out of them, only around two thousand manage to get their desired plane tickets while around a thousand of them, after going through agonising ordeals and having spent hundreds of thousands of taka to get their visas, face uncertainties in their pursuit of better future.

During a visit to the location, many ticket seekers complained to this correspondent that they had been visiting the ticketing agents for many days without any success. Many of the aspiring migrants have even spent the whole night in the open to secure their spot in the queue.

A disappointed Harun, who spent half of the previous night in the queue, was afraid that he would lose his serial the next day and his visa might get cancelled if he cannot collect the ticket within the next couple of days.

"I spent the last four days here for the ticket and I need it by tomorrow, or my visa might get cancelled," said Harun asking, "Who would compensate me if I lose my visa this year?"

"I will have to wait for another year before I get to apply again," he said.

According to sources, around one thousand visas to the Middle Eastern countries were cancelled earlier this month. The visas of another eight thousand migrants would meet the same fate unless the migrants can have their plane tickets confirmed soon.

The situation is not getting any better for the already exhausted crowd in front of the agencies as all the eight airlines have reportedly run out of vacant seats for next week.

According to travel agents, the situation would turn only worse if immediate steps are not taken to

increase flights.

"If special flights are not arranged by this month, things will turn only gloomier in the next couple of months," said Aminul Islam, member secretary of Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB).

Islam said Bangladesh Biman could play a vital role to improve the situation.

"Although Bangladesh Biman could play a vital part in easing the sufferings of all these people, the helpless passengers are getting absolutely no response from them," he said.

Islam, however, said, "Under the current circumstances, arranging special flights would a far-fetched idea for Biman as they are having trouble even keeping their regular flights on schedule."

Good crowd

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Academy in Shegun Bagicha. The fair has around 200 stalls.

Another month-long handloom fair with 130 stalls began on September 18 at city's T&T ground at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh and SME Foundation organised the Tant and Shilpa Mela 2007.

Three other fairs will begin soon at Karwan Bazar, Shyamoli and Kalabagan.

Unruly truckers still enter city

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time of the day and the size of the vehicle.

"The other day I had to pay Tk 700 near the Jatrabari signal as I reached the city at around 6:00pm," said Enamul, adding that the truckers have to start an hour or two ahead of 8:00pm – the authorised time of entry to the city.

"If we head out after 8:00pm, it will take hours just to reach the warehouse. We drive hundreds of miles every night and starting a bit late saves many hours," Enamul said.

About the general perception that most accidents are caused by truck drivers, Abdur Rashid, a truck driver from Dinajpur claiming to have a clean record throughout his

eight-year-long trucking career, said, "Trucks might be involved in a few accidents that occur on the highways, but not in the city."

To ensure public safety and ease traffic congestion in the capital, restricted hours of entry – from 8:00am to 8:00pm – were introduced in 2000 for heavy vehicles including full size trucks or trailer trucks, according to traffic department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

Covered delivery vans are, however, exempt from the restriction from 11:00am to 4:00pm while pickups trucks or vans and other light delivery vehicles are also exempt from the restriction during the day.

The restricted hours are, how-

ever, being violated in the evening, especially by heavy cargo transport vehicles. Heavy trucks are also seen occasionally roaming in the city during the daytime, jeopardising city traffic management and creating haggling tailbacks.

When asked, Mohammad Mostafa Kamal, general secretary of Truck Owners' Association, said, "I am not aware of any trucks or lorries plying the city streets during daytime. If any truck is operating during the day, it's a matter between the driver or the owner of that vehicle and the traffic authorities – not mine."

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