

Move to restore 7 Mirpur canals

Demarcation begins: Excavation and widening to follow

RAHMAN SABUR TAGIN

Dhaka Water and Sewerage authority (Wasa) in collaboration with the Deputy Commissioner's (DC) office in Dhaka and National Housing Authority (NHA) is demarcating seven natural canals in Mirpur in a move to restore them.

A large area in Mirpur remains waterlogged as five of these canals – Rupnagar main sewerage canal, Housing canal, Baishtaki canal, Journalist Colony canal, Kalshi canal and two others – running through lands belonging to the NHA or the DC's office had been encroached on by laying narrow sewerage pipes.

Samsul Alam, a shop keeper at Kazipara bus stand said, the Rokeya Sarani area goes under water during rain because of the narrow sewerage pipes. When we open the covers of all manholes the water goes down within an hour.

"The waterlogging would not take place if the canal were there," Shamsul said.

Zahirul Alam, chief of drainage wing of Dhaka Wasa, said Wasa with the help of the DC's office and NHA was demarcating the canals.

Upon completion of the demarcation and obtaining the official authority to maintain these seven vital canals for the improvement of drainage system in the Mirpur area, Wasa would evict encroachers and start restoration of the canals through excavating and widening them by January next year, Alam added.

Asked if the Wasa has the legal right to evict the plots under the private housing estates, Zahirul said the NHA agreed to give a map of the area with demarcation of the canals.

The housing estate would cancel the plots they leased to the people, he added.

During a visit to the area, this correspondent found that a



A natural canal in Mirpur. It was supposed to be filled up with putting the drainage pipes (inset) underneath the soil.

number of private real estate firms choked up the Rupnagar canal by filling it up with mere 60-inch-diameter concrete pipes laid underneath.

The canal, falling on the Turag River in the town protection embankment area, has been converted into a narrow underground sewerage pipeline all throughout Eastern Housing Estate.

"A 60-inch concrete pipe cannot serve the purpose of a 60-foot-wide canal. Converting these canals into narrow pipelines is decreasing the drainage

capacity," said Zahirul Alam, Dhaka Wasa drainage wing chief.

"We should maintain the canals not only for ourselves, but also for the next generation. People should come forward to help maintain a smooth flow of the canals," Alam added.

Locals feared that without restoring the canals, waterlogging situation in Mirpur would not improve.

They complained that the remainder of the Rupnagar canal from Road 23 to Road 33 is rapidly being encroached upon by influential people in absence of

vigilance by law enforcers.

The NHA zone office said they had lodged cases with Pallabi Police Station against the canal grabbers.

Officials at Pallabi Police Station, however, said since the NHA authorities did not mention any name of canal grabbers in the case, it is very difficult for them to go in action. Due to that, they had to release three persons they had apprehended on charge of illegal canal filling.

The Housing canal, falling on Rupnagar canal through Kazipara, Monipur and section 2

of Mirpur, has also been converted into an underground sewerage line from Kochukhet old market to Avenue 3 of Shalbari.

The Baishtaki canal that runs through Navy camp and falls onto the River Turag at Manikdi, has been filled up for cultivation and for setting up of slums.

The Kalshi canal on the eastern edge of Alakdi village has been filled up and replaced with underground concrete pipes. This canal runs by the eastern side of Mirpur section 11 kitchen market and falls onto the Turag.

Women commuters

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The ordeal of the women commuters of the lower income group is tougher than the white-collar office goers. They cannot afford the buses with ticket counters. They travel by the run-down local buses.

"In the local buses women are hassled in many ways. When we get on a bus and get down the helpers touch or push us unnecessarily. If we have to stand in a packed bus that is very uncomfortable," said Shahana, a garment worker.

But male passengers are not always hostile towards females. Some are quite chivalrous towards women.

"It is true that sometimes the bus is too crowded for a woman to get on. But many male passengers are quite helpful. They give space while boarding a bus and offer seats if a woman is standing," said Munmun, a workingwoman.

"I heard about the BRTC bus service for women. I saw the buses in Azimpur but never rode one. I do not even know the timetable of the buses," she said.

According to sources at BRTC, at present it has three such buses. The routes are from Khilgaon to Gulistan, from Mirpur to Gulistan and from Narayanganj to Dhaka. The one from Mirpur to Gulistan is

a one-way service.

Asked about the scanty bus services, Subhashish Saha, deputy general manager, BRTC, said subsidy is needed to increase the number of buses and bus routes as the existing routes are operating on loss.

"At present we have three buses for women on three routes. Two buses under the Motijheel Depot are incurring a monthly loss of around Tk 1 lakh each and the one-way bus in the Mirpur-Gulistan around Tk 50,000," he said.

"In 2005, we had 12 buses for women passengers but due to the recurring losses we had to shrink the service to three buses. At present we need a substantial amount of subsidy to revive the service," he said.

"The main reason for loss is that we get women passengers in the office time only. In other times we do not have enough women passengers. Many women travel with a male relative. So they also do not ride these buses. On the other hand, male passengers sometimes get into the bus forcefully," he added.

"Now we are thinking that whether the buses can be run in the office hours only. That will help the women office goers and reduce our losses," he said.

"We do not sell the phones just to anyone. We look for people who would pay well and

would not bother us afterwards," added Motin.

"The customers have to approach us and then we ask them of their preferences and budgets. We display our booty only when we sense a deal is about to be struck," he said.

According to Jamal Hossain, owner of a cellphone shop at Uttara, the underground cell phone market has become a huge business in the city where traders are swindling people out of money by selling bootlegged and refurbished cell phones that are in fact malfunctioning.

"The slums usually also have a small mobile phone repair shop with a group of technicians, spare parts and accessories. The phones are cleaned up and their covers are replaced so that they look almost new. Later, most sets are packed into suitcases and usually sent to the different selling points," he added.

The buying process of these phones is also just as tricky. The traders usually sit with their suitcases closed and consider a number of things before displaying their stock to anyone.

Abdul Motin, a seller of such phones, said the sellers have to be extremely cautious in picking their customers and complete the whole transaction secretly.

"The phone sets that we sell in here usually do not cost more than Tk 2,000 because they are mostly second hand sets. We, basically, offer people the opportunity to buy cellphones at really cheap prices. This is what drives hundreds bargain hunters to flocking to these markets," said Jayanto Biswas, a trader at Baitul Mukarram market.

Advertising, Bank & market timing

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Gulshan 1, 2 markets-Friday
Elephant Road-Friday
Bishal Center-Friday
Baitul Mukarram Market-Friday
Polwell Market-Friday
BCS Computer City-Friday
Isha Khan Shopping Complex-Friday
Rajlaxmi Complex-Friday
Stadium Market-Friday
Bangabazar Market-Friday
National Museum-Thursday
Ahsan Manzil-Thursday
New Market-Tuesday
Gausia Market-Tuesday
Mouchak Market-Sunday
Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday
Tuesdays
Dhanmondi Hawkers Market-Tuesday
Eastern Plaza-Sunday
Farmview Super Market-Sunday
Muktijuddha Jagduhar-Sunday
Dhaka Zoo-Sunday
Shishu Jagduhar-Sunday

Poverty is not always main cause of child trafficking

A foreign consultant tells the Star City

MOON MOON SULTANA

Poverty is not always the main cause of child trafficking in Bangladesh. A major reason is dysfunctional families, which fail to provide protection to the children. Child marriage is another leading cause behind the problem.

John Frederick, a social worker and a freelance child trafficking consultant who recently visited Bangladesh, made the observations in an interview with Star City.

Frederick started his career as a social worker in Juvenile Court in the United States in the early eighties. He started working on trafficked, abused and sexually exploited children and women in South Asia back in 1987. Since then he has been living in Nepal and working as a freelance consultant.

He visited Bangladesh last month as the chief facilitator of a workshop on reintegration of street children jointly organised by the Ministry of Social Services, Department of Social Services and United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef).

Following is the excerpt of the interview:

Star City: What are the leading causes of child trafficking, child prostitution and violence against women in South Asia?