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DREDGING IGNORES TASKFORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

Balu to be widened up to 37 metres in place of 100

PINAKI ROY

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) prepares to dredge the Balu river, the major channel to drain floodwaters out of the city, without adhering to the recommendations of the government taskforce on rivers flowing through and around the capital.

Comprising government officials, experts and environmentalists, the taskforce had recom-

mended widening up the river for at least 100 metres. The recommendations unveiled on December 26, 2002 were based on the Cadastral Survey (CS), the means to define or re-establish boundaries of public and/or private land.

But the BIWTA are now going to dredge the river only for up to 37 metres in width, almost one third of the recommended width.

Environmentalists fear once the river is dredged without scrupu-

lously following the recommendations it would not be possible to increase the width in future leading to massive environmental problem for the capital with an ever-growing population.

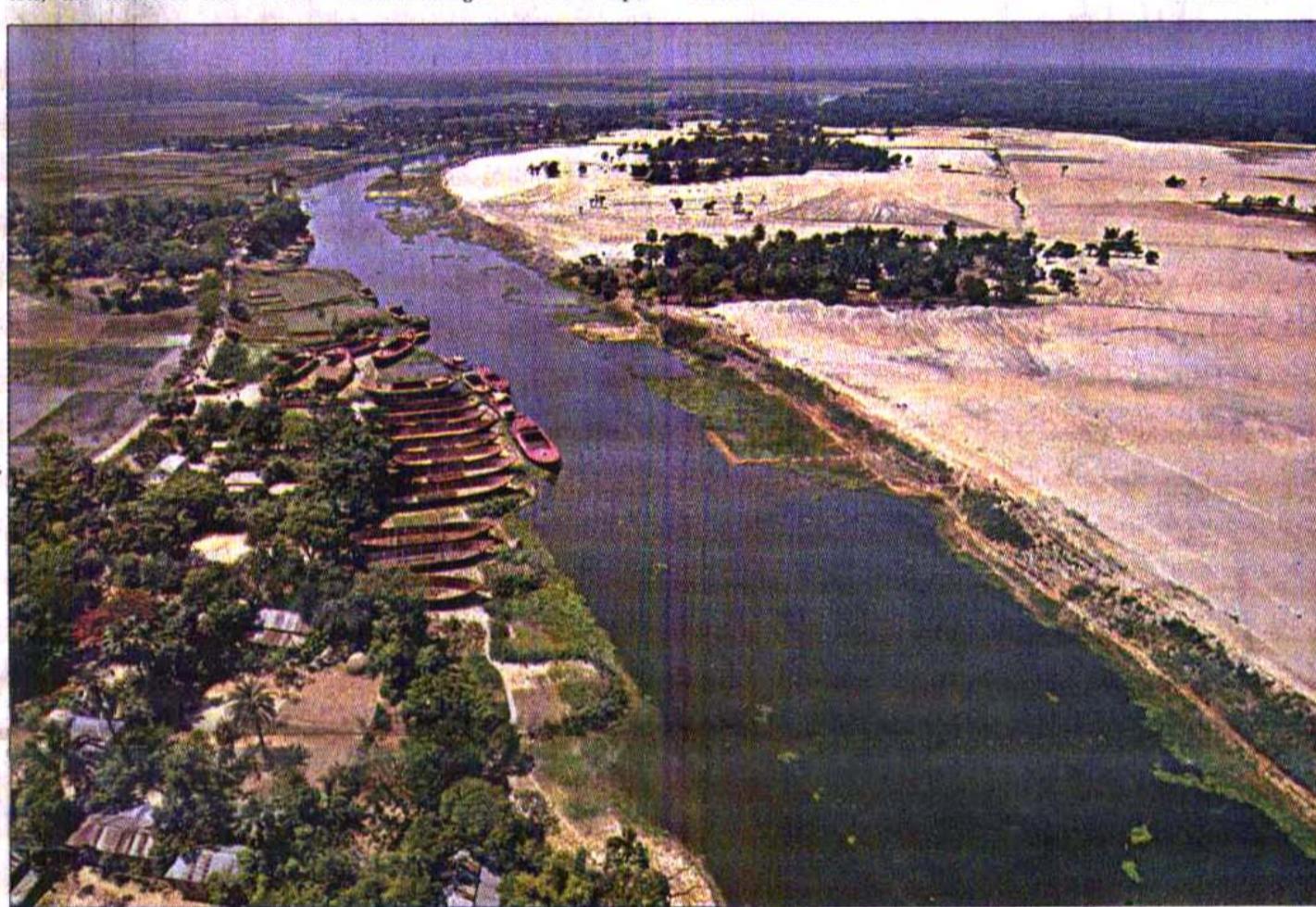
According to the Cadastral Survey (CS) conducted for the period from 1888 through 1940, the Balu River was more than 100 metres wide. At some points it was 200 to 250 metres. Even the recently published government documents describe the river to be 100 metres

wide and 45 kilometres long.

But the water transport authorities plan to dredge the channel only for 37 metres (120 feet) wide as locals have already encroached on either bank of the river and managed to have land documents, said BIWTA Secretary Monowar Hossain.

He added, "If the government should dredge the river as wide as 300 feet, it would be a project requiring a massive land acquisition."

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An aerial shot of the river Balu, an important means of draining out floodwater from the capital.

A noble move to save Sidr-hit children

SHAMIM ASHRAF, from Patuakhali

Among many good Samaritans who came forward with aid for the Sidr victims in Kuakata, Shibli Mostafa definitely stands out.

Around 150 local children, shocked by the devastation of Sidr, gather every day at Shibli's Children Debate Training Centre beside the sea dyke and spend three hours of educational activities followed by a welcome evening meal which remains a big worry for the Sidr-hit low income group locals.

The programme was launched by a group of friends under the banner of "Mamar Bari" immediately after the cyclone devastated the region.

"Following Sidr's attack, I

30,000 fishermen have lone usable pond

HASAN JAHID TUSHER, from Meher Alir Char, Sundarbans

noticed that the children were left traumatised and unattended by their parents who were busy rebuilding their houses," Shibli, executive director of an NGO, Working for Better Life, told The Daily Star.

Children in this part of the country are often victims of malnourishment and early marriage and the school dropout rate is also quite high, he said, adding, "Sidr has left them more vulnerable to diseases."

Shibli said he feared many children who have lost their textbooks and whose schools were damaged in the cyclone might consequently lose interest in education. Many families may marry off their teenage girls during this

day.

Fishermen at these chars have demanded that the authorities take immediate steps to clean these ponds as diarrhoea has broken out in different areas due to crisis of drinkable water. And any delay in this regard might lead to an epidemic, they feared.

Meanwhile, the administration is providing purified water received as US relief at Maron Char. But fishermen hardly take this water following a rumour that it causes diarrhoea.

At Meher Alir Char Thursday morning, it was found that hundreds of fishermen had already gathered around the eight acre-pond to collect water. Many of them had come from

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Fishermen collect "drinking" water for their days at sea from a large pond in Sidr-hit Meherchar of Bagerhat as this pond is the only source of sweet water in the area.

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18 ancient clay seals found at Bhasu Bihar

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Archaeologists have discovered 18 ancient clay seals, mostly from the Pala dynasty, and two brick-built structures at Bhasu Bihar archaeological site in Shibganj upazila of Bogra during an excavation.

One of the clay seals bears the first "Dharmachakra" message of Gautam Buddha inscribed on it, said Nahid Sultana, custodian and a member of the excavation team.

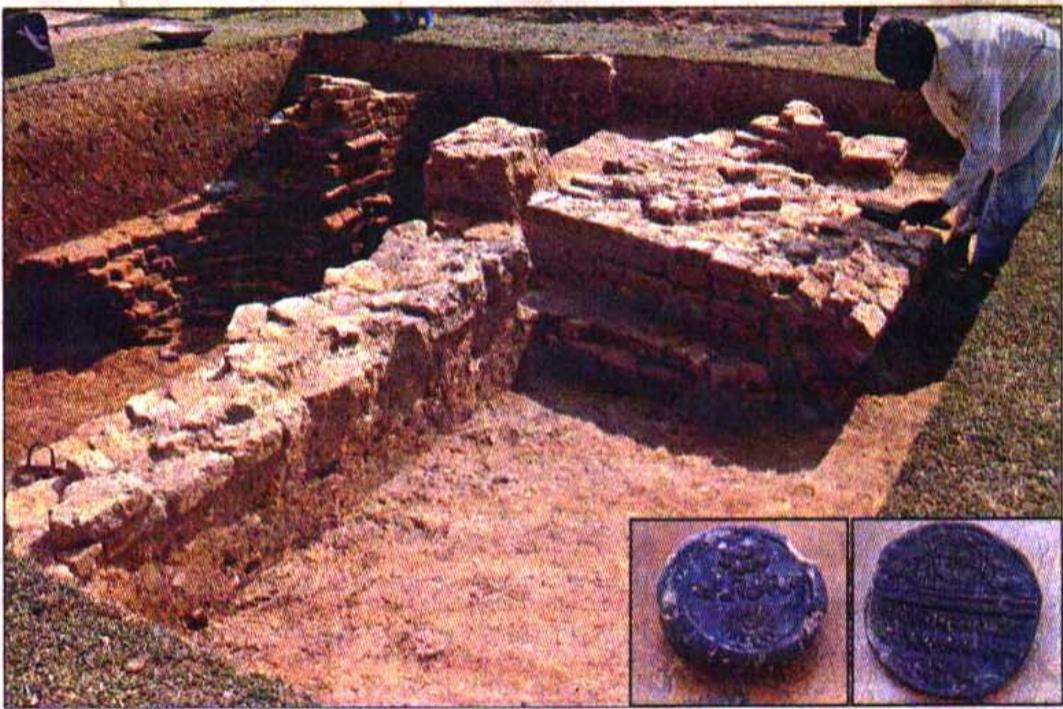
A seven-member team of the Archaeology Department headed by Regional Director Abdul Haleque started the excavation work on 22 November.

Nahid Sultana said most of the 18 seals are 1,000 years old.

A few small pieces of bronze and two ancient brick structures were also found in separate excavations in the site.

Nahid said the department

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An ancient brick-built structure at a dig at Bhasu Bihar of Shibganj upazila in Bogra. Archaeologists also discovered clay seals, inset left, dating back to the Pala dynasty and one "Dharmachakra" message seal of Gautam Buddha.

PHOTO: HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU

wide and 45 kilometres long. But the water transport authorities plan to dredge the channel only for 37 metres (120 feet) wide as locals have already encroached on either bank of the river and managed to have land documents, said BIWTA Secretary Monowar Hossain.

He added, "If the government should dredge the river as wide as 300 feet, it would be a project requiring a massive land acquisition."

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