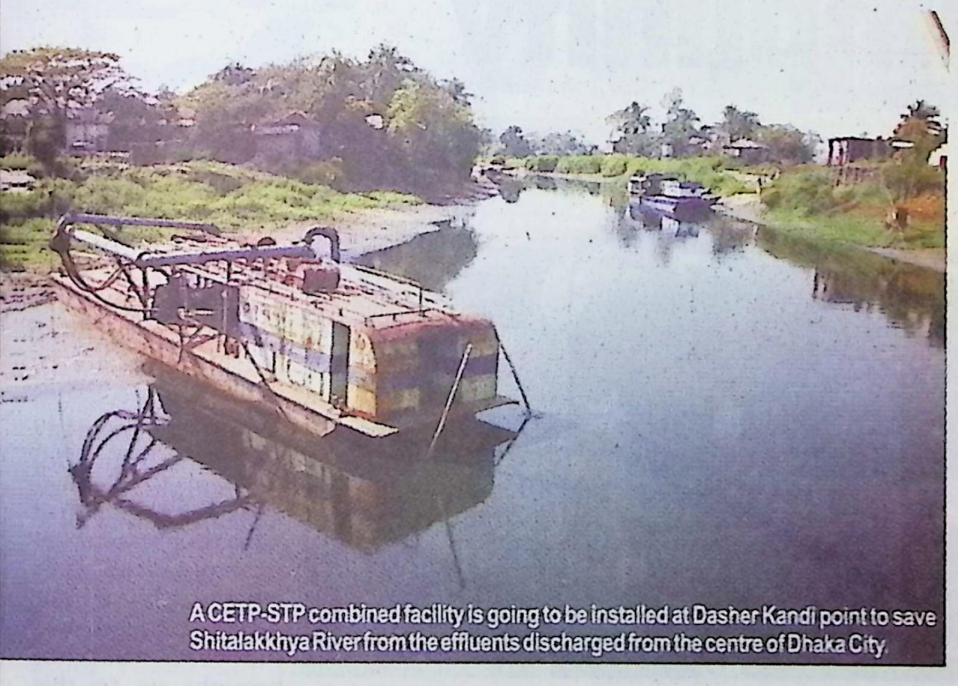
dwellers. According to Professor Mujib the organic pollution in the river is contributed by the poor state of sewerage and sanitation system of Dhaka's urban areas. "Presently, the underground sewer network covers only 30 percent of the existing urban areas of the city, and 20 percent of the population residing in it", continues Professor Mujib, "For the remaining areas especially the fringe areas which are witnessing rapid development recently and comprise mostly of low income neighbourhoods, mostly drain the domestic sewage into the canals which are ultimately discharged in the Shitalakkhya River through Balu River."

"During the dry season Balu River and other canals connected to Shitalakkhya River carry only waste water. Both industrial effluent and untreated domestic sewage discharge are equally responsible for the degraded state of water resources. Besides, there are so many hanging latrines on Balu River and other canals. So the problem is very complex", says Professor Mujib.



A CETP-STP combined facility is going to be installed at Dasher Kandi point to save Shitalakkhya River from the effluents discharged from the centre of Dhaka City.

"Wasa must address the problem to the government so that it can provide proper sewage system in Dhaka to save its water bodies. Until it reaches the target of assuring proper sewage system it should force the Dhaka dwellers to use alternative sanitation facilities like septic tanks and soak pits. The government should also take steps for sanitation facilities in the slums where hanging latrines on the canals is common", he adds.

Professor Mujib suggests installing five or six Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) at several points in Dhaka so that the domestic wastes do not drain in the river water. He says, "World Bank is going to install a CETP-STP combined facility at Dasher Kandi point at Demra where three major canals meet in one point and discharge wastes in Balu River. After installing the treatment plant water of both the river Balu and Shitalakkhya will be improved."

Professor Rahman also suggests dredging Balu River to increase its flow, which is only 60 cubic metres per second during the dry season. According to him flow of the river must be increased to get proper benefit from the treatment plant. "At the same time the disposal of ongoing industrial waste in river water must be controlled at any cost. I don't understand the role that the Department of Environment is playing. Under the current scenario no new industrial unit should be allowed to install within one kilometre of both of the rivers Balu and Shitalakkhya", he says.

Dhaka Wasa is preparing, with funding from the World Bank, its sewage master plan, which is expected to begin functioning from 2012. If the programme works properly, it will help to control domestic waste disposal in river water. But the problem is that no organisation is concerned about the disposal of industrial and domestic wastes into Shitalakkhya River from the DND area. The DND area, under Water Development Board, was developed for agricultural activities. But, at present the highly populated area has turned into a semi-industrial zone. And both domestic and industrial wastes are disposed in Shitalakkhya River through the DND canal.

In fact, ongoing pollution of Shitalalkhya River and its tributary Balu River must be controlled at any cost for the sake of public health, ecosystem and economical development of the surrounding areas. This requires support for the enforcement agency, in order to strengthen its regulatory capacity, its capability to work with industry to introduce pollution prevention and waste minimisation approaches. It is also necessary to ensure co-ordination between the concerned ministries and agencies. Moreover, industry should be provided with a package of incentives and technical assistance to encourage them to adopt sustained use of waste treatment and waste minimisation technologies. At the same time it must be ensured that different agencies such as Wasa, Dhaka City Corporation, Rajuk, Bangladesh Water Development Board and Pourashavas play active roles to control pollution of Shitalakkhya River and its tributary Balu River and other water bodies.

Unless the concerned bodies make a united effort to arrest the terrible degradation of this crucial river, the Shitalakhkya will face the same fate as many of its sisters: a slow and painful death.