# The Parched City Waits

ERSHAD KAMOL
PHOTOS: ZAHEDUL I KHAN

**Long lines of parched residents waiting with buckets or other containers in front of a Wasa truck has become an all too familiar scene for Dhaka dwellers and all indicators suggest that the situation will get worse before it gets better, if it ever does.**

"It's well known to all that every year we suffer a lot due to the acute water crisis. But what does Wasa do to resolve it?" asks an agitated Nazmul Haque, a resident of Senpara Parbata, Mirpur who has to wait at least for two hours in a long queue to collect water from the Wasa lorry. "For the last few years," he adds, "we have been reading in the newspapers about Wasa's plans to solve the crisis. But so far no change is evident."

The government seems to agree with this pessimistic view. At a recent seminar where he was the chief guest, Advocate Rahmat Ali, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD) ministry said it was unlikely that the water supply problem would be solved any time soon but the government had taken 'effective plans' to tackle the crisis. He said the government would solve the water problem in the city in phases by 2013 and water would be brought from the bay, if necessary, by setting up desalination plants. For a poor country like Bangladesh, say scientists, such outlandish plans are hardly realistic.

The government, however, has a history of touting the most impractical plant such as for the last few decades it had plans to supply water to the city dwellers through augmenting water from the Padma River, a plan that has never been implemented. Instead of developing a master plan, Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa), under the Ministry of LGRD, has always taken the short cut approach of installing deep-water pumps to meet the immediate crisis. Such initiatives have been proved ineffective.

Thus during every dry season from (March to June) Dhaka City dwellers suffer from an acute water crisis. In many parts of the city people get sticky and straw coloured water from the Wasa supply line. Such contaminated water, which causes many water-born diseases, is a public health disaster.

The city's northern parts are the most affected. People living in Gulshan, Niketan, Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Shyamoli, Dhanmondi, Jhigatola, Panthopath and others are facing an acute water crisis. Meanwhile, apart from the actual shortage of water that everyone is facing, people living in the middle part of Dhaka and in Old Dhaka such as Rampura, Madhubagh, Paltan, Karwan Bazar, Malibagh, Wari, Lalbagh and others have to bear with an added menace - water that is sticky and foul smelling. It's not that Wasa isn't trying to ease the crisis but so far all it has been able to achieve is the fury of most of Dhaka's 12 million residents who have to live day after day with little or no water.