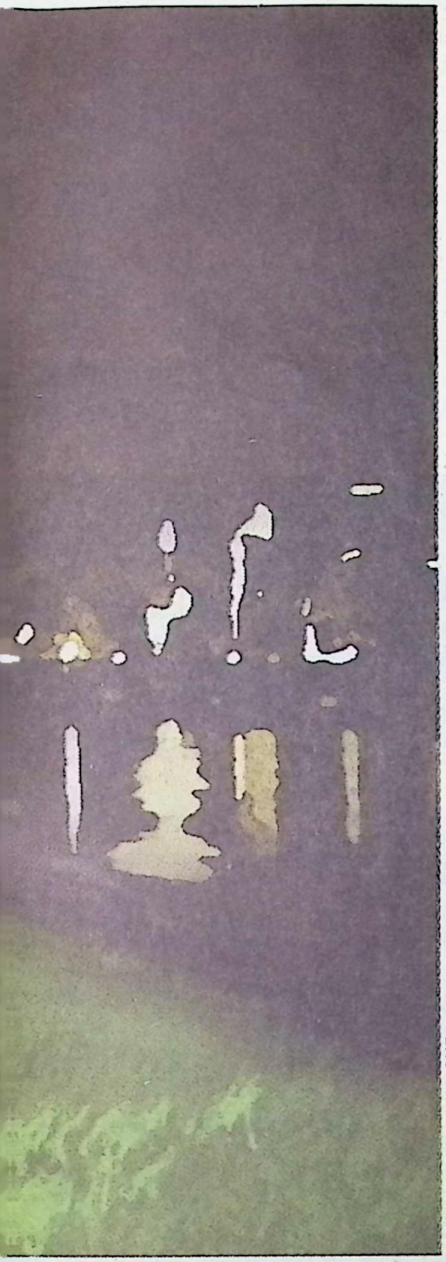


ART WORK BY ARIF HAQUE

ON the wall of the Dhaka WASA's Drainage Circle at Topkhana hung an artist's impression of the Dhaka Flood Protection Embankment. Drawn just after the great deluge of 1988, the image depicted the embankment in the most civilised manner.

The unnamed artist took great care in giving the future beri bandh all the components that we might deem necessary for aesthetics -- a wide walk-way, lush green grass, trees, street-lights, and a tinge of blue in the nearby water of the river Buriganga.

The dyke today, more than twenty years later bears the testimony of utter negligence and mindless planning. From Tongi by the Turag up to Postogola on the bank of the river Buriganga, the 30-kilometre long dyke that should have been a great facilitator to Dhaka's road communication system and to people's leisure, cries loud for help. Instead of being a lovely drive bypassing dozens of places with an unhindered view of the river, it offers instant dismay for obvious reasons.

Locals know why the bank of the river is so neglected and left to rot. These areas by the river are hardly used by the affluent section of the city population.

The whole stretch of the embankment is thus left outside the purview of city development. After all, none from those impoverished areas are going to complain. Their commissioners and the members of parliament are too busy to look into their day-to-day problems.

The mayor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Sadek Hossain Khoka, who during his eight-year-long tenure persuaded banks, real estate developers, and top business houses to take up beautification programs at city intersections, meridians, and roadside spaces, has an idea about the embankment's development which is vital for the protection of the river.

"You see, the problem with the embankment is that it is owned by several departments of the government," suggests Khoka. "If my office is given the sole responsibility of its beautification and maintenance, we will chalk out some ways to do so."

But whatever the plans are, the embankment needs urgent attention without which the campaign for saving the rivers around the city looks grossly incomplete.

**A protest**

A young man stands at the intersection of Kamrangir Char Steel Bridge and Lalbagh Fort Road on the bank of the Buriganga recently. He watches closely as some DCC cleaners unload a rubbish truck onto the slope of the embankment that rolled into the river. Suddenly he approaches the truck driver and shouts: "Why are you dumping this rubbish here?"

"That is not your business," replies the driver, waving to his workers to continue unloading.

The young man replies that he lives nearby and the rubbish was causing serious stench in the area.

"I won't let you unload here," says the young man in rage and grabs the shovel from a worker.

The driver jumps out of his seat with an iron bar and threatens to get the young man arrested for obstructing "government job."

"Get out of here you rascal or I will break your leg," he shouts.

Soon a dozen locals joins the young man and charge at the driver. Sensing public wrath, the driver leaves his truck and runs towards Showarighat. The two workers swiftly surrender to the public and says that they have to obey orders. They say that someone called Lal Mia, a relative of the local commissioner had asked them to unload rubbish into the water.

"There is a plot in the water that belongs to Lal Mia. We have to fill it up," says one of the terrified labourers.

Half an hour later, the driver of the rubbish truck returns to the spot in an expensive private car, accompanied by a man in his late 50s wearing a snow-white panjabi. Over fifty local people now hold