

WITHSTANDING WATERLOGGING



1. A family salvages its belongings from the rainwater rising gradually inside the house at Rampura in the capital yesterday. 2. Children watch a man trying to catch fish in a narrow alley of Rajabazar. 3. A large tree in Ramna Park fell as the soil went soft following the overnight torrential rain. 4. The sandbagging at the entrance to this flat building in Fakirpool was barely holding up the rainwater. 5. A few vehicles fill up their tanks braving waist-deep water on this street near Notre Dame College. 6. A funeral procession makes its way through almost waist-deep water on a street in Arambagh.

Pakistan detains young suicide bomber group

AFP, Peshawar

Pakistani authorities said yesterday they had taken into custody a group of juvenile would-be suicide bombers trained and brainwashed by Taliban militants in the country's northwest.

"A total of nine boys trained as suicide bombers were arrested during raids and two others surrendered themselves to authorities," military spokesman Major General Athar Abbas told AFP.

Another military spokesman in the Swat valley, where Pakistan has fought Taliban fighters who launched an uprising two years ago, said nine of the 11- to 20-year-olds were trained as suicide bombers.

Bashir Bilour, a cabinet minister in North West Frontier Province, accused Taliban fighters in Swat of forcibly recruiting about 200 boys, giving them militant training and coaching some to become suicide bombers.

"The parents of many such children have contacted the authorities for their rehabilitation complaining that they had been brain-

washed by Taliban," Bilour told AFP. "The government is making a comprehensive policy to rehabilitate such children," Bilour said.

After Taliban fighters advanced from Swat into the district of Buner, 100 kilometres (60 miles) from Islamabad, Pakistan in April launched a massive offensive under US pressure to crush Islamists considered a major threat.

Most of the fighting has been cut off from independent media coverage, making it impossible to confirm claims made by either the Pakistani armed forces or Taliban militia.

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said this month that the military had "eliminated" extremists and the government has sent back around 400,000 of the 1.9 million civilians who were displaced by the fighting.

But deadly skirmishes have continued, raising fears that the Taliban merely escaped into the mountains and regrouped, as they did after two previous offensives in Swat and elsewhere in the militant-infested northwest.

'71 genocide

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academics from Hong Kong, Korea, Germany, Japan, Pakistan, Canada, Cambodia, UK and Bangladesh.

A special programme involving witnesses and victims of the genocide and representatives of post-liberation generation will be organised. Arrangements will also be made to ensure participation of the expatriate Bangladeshis via online video.

Mofidul Haque said Liberation War Museum held the first conference March last year to create consensus on the trial of war criminals at home and abroad.

Now that the nation had voted for a change upholding the values of Liberation War the government has also

decided to try the war criminals and make necessary amendments to the International Tribunal Act 1973, he added.

"The conference, therefore, holds great significance for Bangladesh as well as the global community as it will manifest how societies victimised by genocides and mass atrocities move forward and how the world community can prevent such brutality from recurring in future," said Mofidul.

It also seeks to develop strategies for advocacy, lobbying and awareness about the recognition of the genocide in Bangladesh and related unresolved issues of justice and truth.

Asked if there were any probable hindrance in trying

the war criminals, Liberation War Museum Trustee Akku Chowdhury said since the government is fully committed, they found no obstacle to it.

On remarks of a Pakistani delegate early this year that it was not the right time to go ahead with the war crime issue, he said Pakistan should come forward in trying the criminals who acted against humanity.

"All Pakistanis are not responsible for the crime," he said.

The conference can also be viewed by streaming video via Liberation War Museum website, www.liberationwarmuseum.org/genocide.

Museum trustees Tariq Ali and Rabiu Hussain also spoke at the press conference.

Clogged drains

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Wasa had earlier taken initiatives in line with a decision of the last caretaker government to recover 26 out of 43 canals from encroachers.

However, the initiatives have so far yielded very little success. Besides, once the recovery drive is over, many of the canals again get choked up or encroached due to lack of excavation, proper demarcation and monitoring, experts said.

According to experts, 150 square kilometers area of the city under Wasa requires around 350 km storm drainage line, whereas presently it has now only 285 km drainage line.

"About 90 km more storm water line of WASA is needed to be set up at different areas to strengthen the drainage system," said an official of Wasa.

Besides, the existing water pipes should also be replaced by bigger ones so that they discharge more waters as most of the water bodies have been filled up at many places," added the official.

Wasa had 135 km drainage line in 1990, which is now 265 km but the population in the capital has gone up to 1.20 crore from that of 68.44 lakh in 1991, said officials of Wasa and Rajuk.

In many places where there is no drainage system of WASA, DCC covers the area by pipe drains or surface drains, they said.

Wasa is responsible mainly for maintaining city's drainage system cleaning them once in a year but most of the time 50 percent of the drains remain clogged due to manual work, said architect Iqbal Habib, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolok.

DCC also does not get them cleaned properly, which is also a reason of waterlogging, said Habib.

He said an integrated master plan is very necessary to save the city from waterlogging.

Habib said Wasa conducts drives only to recover canals but their water retention capacity has reduced due to

lack of excavation.

Construction of box culvert was also a totally wrong plan, as the passages under these culverts are not cleaned leaving them choked up round the year resulting in water stagnation, he said.

Wasa has two permanent pump stations at Dholai Khal and Kolyanpur while Bangladesh Water Development Board runs another pump house at Goran Chatbari in Mirpur.

Apart from them, there are two more temporary pump stations at Rampura and Janapath in Kamalapur, he said.

According to the official figures Wasa has now 285 km long pipe drains, 65 km drain and 9 km box culverts while DCC has 999.468 km open drain and 1052.198 km pipe drain.

But as there is a lack of coordination between Wasa and DCC the drainage management system suffers heavily worsening the waterlogging in the city, sources of both Wasa and DCC said.

DCC Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khokh said the drainage system should come under one umbrella to get better result and drive to recover canals from encroachers is also very important.

State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanok said they had already started the drive to recover all the 43 canals of the city.

He said they would take proper steps to prevent re-encroachment.

35 missing

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weather, took shelter in different canals in the sprawling mangrove forest.

River crafts of forest department have been kept in safe places for rough condition of sea due to depression over the bay.

Despite stormy weather, activities at Mongla port were normal. Met Office hoisted local cautionary signal number three for the seaport.

Save Dhaka city

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chairman, chief engineer of PWD and the DMP commissioner at her office yesterday.

PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad briefed newsmen after the meeting.

Hasina asked for cleaning the city's drainage system, mostly reported clogged, in a bid to remove water stagnancy.

She further ordered the authorities concerned to dig ponds at different points of the city for containing the rainwater and thus prevent the water from getting stagnated.

About yesterday's water stagnancy in the city, she wondered, "If rain of one night can cause such water stagnancy, then, if raining continues in the future for several days, how disastrous a situation can be created!"

She said DCC, Wasa, Rajuk, BTCL, Desa and all other departments concerned would have to conduct their respective works in a coordinated way considering the sufferings of the people.

"We are working round the clock to give people peace and tranquility. But if people suffer from any department's negli-

gence, it cannot be tolerated.

There must be coordination among the departments working in the capital," she said.

The authorities concerned were also asked by the premier to ensure proper management of cables of electricity, telephone and cable connections for safety of the city dwellers.

Underground supply line of electricity can be an effective way of proper wire management, she told the meet.

The PM deplored that the city dwellers are suffering from water logging as most of the canals of the city have been filled up.

Earlier in the morning, while addressing the inaugural session of a three-day Deputy Commissioner (DC) conference at the PM's office, Hasina blamed unplanned building construction by the developers by filling up canals, ponds for the water stagnancy in the city.

She asked the DCs to remain alert so that district ponds and canals are not filled up in the name of constructing buildings.

"In every case of establishment, you (DCs) must remain alert so that people do not fill

up ponds or canals."

About the government's plan to face the phenomenal global warming, the prime minister said the government has already planned to launch capital and maintenance dredging in the country's major rivers to save people from unexpected flooding and tidal surges.

Huge lands can be reclaimed through dredging the rivers, she said.

Hasina asked the DCs to make deep study about the courses of the rivers in their respective districts so that the government can formulate the dredging plans in a proper way.

PM also told the DCs that she did not come to the office on scheduled time yesterday morning so that people do not suffer more following her motorcade movement.

"We are working all the time to give people a better life. We need to be more active to ensure the people's comforts," Hasina said.

PM's adviser HT Imam, Principal Secretary MA Karim and Office Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman were also present.

Besides, unabated pollution of natural water bodies including scores of rivers with industrial effluent, and grabbing of their shorelines by illegal encroachers are to be blamed for the decreasing capture fishes across the country, they said.

Citing an example of negligence towards fishery sector when it comes to policy issues, an expert referred to the recent developments on setting up of a deep-sea port at Sonadia. He noted with concern that fishery ministry has not yet been made part of an inter-ministerial consultation on study of its impact although it (proposed port) would affect the eco-system of marine life including fishes in a huge potential sea-zone.

Livestock and fishery sector together contributes around eight percent to the national income, which is also 32 percent of the total agricultural income. About 90 percent of the domestic requirement of animal protein comes from fish and livestock.

Experts blamed ignoring fish-friendly environmental aspects during irrigation and flood control infrastructure development over the last two decades for the diminishing contribution of capture fisheries to the national fish basket.

Md Ehsanul Bari, managing director of Grameen

Motsho O Pashusampad Foundation (GMPF), told The Daily Star yesterday that over the years, they succeeded in augmenting fish production by engaging poor people in developing fisheries in derelict ponds and water bodies in the country. The GMPF, a Grameen Bank subsidiary, managed over 800 water bodies since mid '80s to raise fisheries and for other income generating activities.

Officials of the ministry concerned spelt out plans for developing "model fisheries" in a big way across the country from 2011.

Following today's national fisheries week rally in the city, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to announce tomorrow observance of the week and hand over awards to successful fish ventures at Osmany Smriti Auditorium.

A five-day fisheries fair will be held from August 1 on the premises of Bangladesh Shishu Academy. The fisheries minister will attend the closing function of fisheries week on August 5.

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