The Morning After

SYED ZAIN AL-MAHMOOD

On the night of July 27, 35-year-old executive Riyad Amin went to bed as usual after carefully placing his shiny new Toyota Corolla in the parking lot in front of his apartment. He woke in the wee hours of the morning, and gripped by a sense of foreboding, rushed to the window. His favourite car was submerged in water up to its windows -- overnight rain had flooded the parking area and the road beyond.

"I was completely helpless," says Riyad. "I knew the interior would be ruined. I also knew I couldn't get the car out until the water receded. I couldn't go to work. I just sat and stared at the dirty brown flood."

Millions of Dhaka city dwellers were left staring in dismay at the deluge last week as record rainfall caused severe waterlogging in large parts of the city. With water knee deep on many streets, business was disrupted and the transport system ground to a halt.

Naima Sultana, resident of the Mouchak area, was trying to get to a job interview. She managed to persuade a rickshaw to take her after promising an exorbitant sum. But before she could get far, one of the rear wheels of the vehicle landed in a pothole and she was flung headlong into the dirty brown water.

"It was the worst day of my life," recalls Naima. "Is this what we pay taxes for? Is it so hard to build a drainage system that works?

As Dhaka took on the look of Venice minus the gondolas, and news channels reported the death of at least seven people from flood-related incidents, the spotlight was once again on the city's inadequate and poorly maintained infrastructure.

Dhaka, located as it is on the floodplains of the Meghna-Brahmaputra, never enjoyed a totally satisfactory drainage system. But the situation has been compounded by rapid and unplanned urbanisation over the last few decades. Dhaka is surrounded by rivers -- the Buriganga to the South, Balu to the east; Tongi Khal to the north and Turag to the west. The drainage of the city mainly depends



Water logging causes untold suffering for lower and middle income people.