



The workers of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) seal a drain, through which factory wastes used to stream into the river Buriganga, at Gabtoli on the outskirts of the capital yesterday. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

5pc progress in 2 years

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the river so that it can wash away the pollutants from the stagnant water. Several ministers dealing with river issues also made several commitments to change the situation within the tenure of this government.

The Buriganga and other rivers around Dhaka, including the Turag, the Bangshi, Tongi Khal, the Balu and the Shitalakhya, have become highly polluted as the authorities have been indiscriminately dumping almost all the industrial and household waste into these rivers.

Among them, the Buriganga is the most polluted, having zero oxygen level in its waters for nine months in a year due to a dumping of toxic tannery waste from Hazaribagh containing around 300 chemicals including chromium.

Under the project, about 7.11 crore cubic metres of waste need to be removed from the 162-km waterway. A total of 5.53 crore cubic metres of earth spoils would be removed manually and

1.57 crore cubic metres will be removed by dredging.

But only 23 km have so far been dredged in Pungli between Alenga and Salehpur and 6.5 km in the Turag.

Additional Chief Engineer Md Amanullah, also the project director, said the government this year had allocated Tk 40 crore, half of which would be spent to repay last year's dues.

"We need to excavate 23 km to reconnect the Pungli and the Jamuna which alone needs around Tk 100 crore this year. I hope they will increase the fund in the revised budget," said Amanullah.

Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) Sunil Baran Deb Roy, who served as the project director till February, is unsure when the project would end.

Sunil claimed the project made around 8 percent progress. But according to a review report of the Annual Development Programme

(ADP) in March, only 2.66 percent progress was made till February.

In 2009 a project to clean the river launched by the shipping ministry failed completely. It removed 300 tonnes of garbage from the Buriganga bed without closing hundreds of waste disposal points and conducted awareness campaign at a cost of around Tk 50 crore.

Besides, the monitoring and enforcement wing of the Department of Environment conducted drives in several dyeing industries in different industrial clusters around the Dhaka city.

Only a few hundred industries have set up Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) in their installations, but most of them have left those unused. A World Bank study showed in 2006 that the number of different industries dumping waste in and around the city would not be fewer than 7,000 units.

Ironically, the government's cleaning efforts and dumping waste have been

going on side by side.

The Dhaka Water Supply Authority (Wasa) alone dumps 25,000 cubic metres of solid waste into the rivers every day. A few hundred launches and engine trawlers also dump engine oil into the rivers.

"Even when the project would be completed, it would not help much because the government could not stop the pollution sources. It was necessary to stop the pollution sources first," said a top hydrologist.

"It is going to be a waste of money if the government cannot stop such pollution," he said requesting anonymity.

Dhaka commenced its journey as the capital of Subah Bangala in the Mughal era 400 years ago. The city still provides an extensive network of inland waterways all over Bangladesh, particularly within the southern districts. Hundreds of launches and 41,000 engine boats ply the Buriganga every day to transport goods and passengers.

Role reversed only in 7 yrs

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caretaker government headed by then controversial President Iajuddin Ahmed.

In December 2006, Hasina wrote to the UN Secretary General asking for a UN-mediated election rather than the prospect of the general election under the then caretaker government led by Iajuddin, according to US diplomatic cables leaked by WikiLeaks in September 2011.

The cable sent on January 7, 2007 by the then US ambassador to Dhaka Patricia A Butenis also reads: "Hasina expressed some interest in a UN mediated election, but it was clear she envisioned an election effectively run by the UN and not just UN mediation of the political issues separating the two major political alliances."

The rest, as they say, is history.

The BNP-led alliance could not proceed further with its

strategy for holding the election. The AL-led alliance in early January announced a boycott of the 9th parliamentary polls and vowed to resist them. The country was plunging into more political turmoil.

The armed forces at that time feared that their involvement in holding a controversial election might have a negative impact on their participation in UN peace-keeping missions. So they played an active role in forcing Iajuddin to resign as the chief adviser by declaring a state of emergency on January 11, 2007 and suspending the election scheduled for January 22 the same year.

And later the UN contributed to a large extent in garnering funds for the preparation of electoral rolls with photographs and other logistics for holding the December 29, 2008 parliamentary polls.

This time around, the

situation is a little more complicated as the Hasina's government has abolished the caretaker government system, paving the way for her government's staying in power during the election.

The Khaleda-led opposition alliance has been rejecting it and reiterating that they would boycott and resist the election if it is held without the restoration of a non-partisan caretaker government.

They are also preparing to intensify street agitation from the middle of October to realise their demand.

The Hasina government, however, has been refusing to meet the demand and expressing its determination to remain in power during the election. The ruling AL has also recently refused to hold talks with the BNP.

Amid such a situation, the UN chief, who earlier sent a delegation last December and in May this year, on Friday called Hasina and Khaleda

and urged them to hold talks for a peaceful resolution of the ongoing political crisis.

He may also send a delegation again in the middle of next month to broker talks between the two rivals.

The UN chief's effort seems to have encouraged ambassadors of other nations who have been speaking over the last few months on the issue of a dialogue between the AL and the BNP.

Political analysts hint that UN involvement in the situation will generate pressure on Hasina's government to negotiate with the BNP to find an amicable solution to the crisis.

And under such a situation it may not be as easy as Hasina's government had thought to proceed with its strategy for holding the general election.

So, it is not hard to predict now that history may repeat itself, this time to favour Khaleda.

Judge jailed

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the convict in a packed court room and fined him Tk 10,000. Failure to pay the fine will result in an additional two months of jail time.

Earlier the prosecution and the defence had completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 10 prosecution witnesses.

The court also cancelled his

bail and sent him to jail with a conviction warrant, adding that the prosecution proved the charge against the judge beyond of doubt.

Javed, hearing the judgment, broke down in tears and said that he will challenge the verdict in the higher court.

Police had arrested him while in possession of 342

bottles of phensedyl and a pistol on December 1 last year in front of Eden College around 7:20pm in the city's New Market area.

The Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs had suspended Javed after his arrest.

Later a case was filed against him with the New Market Police Station. Police

on December 20 last year pressed charges against him in connection with the drug case.

He was released on bail on February 26, after nearly three months of his arrest, considering his health condition.

The court framed charge against him on March 7 and began the trial on May 9.

Harvesting edible algae on rooftop

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With its high levels of protein and nutrients, "it is beneficial to food security," he told AFP.

"If you compare it to meat it will take six months to grow a kilogram of beef, but this we can grow in a week," said Patsakorn.

Spirulina has been described by health food

experts as a super-food, and it is becoming more popular worldwide.

The empty space on top of Bangkok's many skyscrapers provide suitable growing conditions for spirulina as the constant high temperatures and sunlight are ideal breeding conditions.

The algae also helps com-

bat carbon dioxide levels through photosynthesis, its champions say, and growing it in cities means it can reach consumers the same day it is harvested.

"There has been a lot of trial and error," Derek Blitz, technology director at EnerGaia, told AFP.

In the laboratory, lines of different sized test tubes all

connected to one another act as the breeding ground for the algae.

On the rooftop, barrels of different shapes are in testing, to see which will produce the highest yield.

The company says it is the only producer of fresh spirulina in the world; other companies only sell dried and processed varieties.

BIWTA moves to check Turag pollution

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) yesterday sealed off seven outlets of six ready-mix concrete factories, which were polluting the Turag river near Gabtoli by discharging untreated water.

The outlets were constructed several years ago, and sediments like cement, sand and other untreated waste were being discharged

into the river through these outlets, causing water pollution, said a BIWTA official.

Abul Bashar, director port of BIWTA, said they had sealed the seven outlets without penalising for this time, but if the factories again ran the outlets legal actions would be taken against the persons responsible.

He added that more drives against the polluters

of four rivers surrounding the capital -- Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakhya -- would be conducted.

"We have identified more 257 outlets, which are dumping various types of waste, like that of industrial, household, clinical and tannery, into the Buriganga river," said Bashar.

He added they would soon seal those outlets too.

Acid thrown

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Sumi is a class eight student of Badarpur Shaheedsmritee High School.

Helena said her husband Nesar Uddin was furious with her, as she had filed a case against him on charges of repression.

On hearing the victims' cries, locals rushed to the spot, but the attackers by that time had fled.

Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Patuakhali Police Station, said a drive was on to arrest the culprits.

ALIM'S DEFENCE IN WAR TRIAL First witness testifies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury yesterday testified at war crimes tribunal as the first defence witness in the case against former BNP lawmaker Abdul Alim.

Alim was indicted on 17 charges including murders and genocide allegedly committed during the Liberation War in 1971.

But during Rashid's 15-minute testimony before the tribunal-2, he did not mention Alim's name for a single time.

During his cross-examination, he rather said he had heard Alim's name for the

first time when the later became a minister.

"I didn't hear Alim's name in 1971. I heard his [Alim's] name when he became a minister, so I can't talk anything about his [Alim's] role in 1971," said Rashid.

According to the defence documents, Alim was elected chairman of Joypurhat municipality in 1975 and 1977 and minister in 1978.

Rashid, 55, said he used to live with his parents at CO Colony in Joypurhat town during the Liberation War. He was a student of class VI at that time.

In the last part of April

1971, Pakistani army entered Joypurhat and caused havoc there by killing people and torching houses, he said.

From his father, Rashid learnt that there was an office of Abbas Ali Khan beside their house. Abbas was the chairman of Joypurhat Peace Committee, an auxiliary force of Pakistani army in 1971, he said.

According to the prosecution, Alim was the chairman of Joypurhat Peace Committee.

Rashid said his father used to go to the storehouse of Shaonlal Bazla to sell paddy and rice there.

He had learnt from his father that Shaonlal was a Marwari, and Pakistani army didn't cause any harm to them as they were very powerful.

According to the prosecution, Alim occupied Shaonlal's storehouse after Pakistani army entered Joypurhat in April 20. He set an office of the Peace Committee and Pakistani army, and a training centre there for Razakar.

The tribunal-2 completed recording Rashid's testimony and cross-examination before adjourning the case proceeding until September 1.

Fair polls with all parties joining

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In response, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad said ensuring participation of all political parties in the elections is one of the two major challenges before the commission. He, however, expressed the hope that all parties would contest the polls, meeting sources said.

Security during the elections is another major challenge for the EC, Rakibuddin added.

The meeting convened by the EC was attended by diplomats from different embassies including those of the US, the UK, Canada, Sweden, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland and South Korea, and representatives of the United Nations, European Union, USAID and DFID.

Emerging from the 90-minute meeting, UN Resident Coordinator in Dhaka Neal

Walker told journalists, "We have exchanged views on our mutual hope for a free, fair, credible and inclusive election."

He said the countries and development partners that are providing support to the electoral process in Bangladesh through the EC have come here to hear what the EC is doing with regard to its preparations for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

"We have exchanged views on the preparations it [the EC] is carrying out towards that end," Walker said.

Talking to journalists, the CEC said, "We sought different kinds of technical assistance from them to conduct the national election." For example, he said, they will provide some transparent ballot boxes and irremovable ink ahead of the election.

"We asked for cameras to

be installed at the polling centres for monitoring the situation on the election day. If we can do so, it will minimise offences at polling centres."

The CEC said they did not talk about political issues; rather, they discussed technical assistance and election preparations.

Asked about dialogue with political parties, Rakibuddin said, "We have not taken any decision about any formal dialogue with political parties... Political parties can contact us anytime and give any suggestion or comment on any issue."

At the beginning of the meeting, the CEC gave an introductory speech on their polls preparation. Meeting sources said one of the diplomats referred to news reports and wanted to know whether the EC would hold talks with political parties soon.

In reply, the CEC said they do not have any such plan now. "Our previous [Election] commission had held talks with the political parties before the amendment to the RPO and this commission has also discussed with the parties the issue of delimitation. Dialogue is an ongoing process and we will hold dialogue, if necessary," he was quoted as saying.

Another diplomat asked about army deployment during the polls. Rakibuddin explained the definition of law enforcement agency, and hoped that the army would extend help this time as it did during the previous election.

Asked about a specific date of the election, the CEC said at the meeting election would be held within 90 days before the expiry of tenure of the present parliament, and the date would be announced considering the situation.





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