

Waterlogging: Consequence of ill-planned urbanisation

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

RECENTLY, after just 70 mm of rain, the vast area from Mirpur to Azimpur, Rampura to Hatkhola to Karwan bazaar went under water. Hundreds of people were stranded at bus stands and road dividers. With the collapse of the city's transport network, most people were left with no choice but to wade their way back home through knee-deep water. Why do residents of Dhaka have to go through such ordeals every monsoon even when the rainfall is not that heavy? The fact is, Dhaka is one of the most ill-planned cities in the world, and has seen a consistent rise in terms of population over the last three decades. But, the city's infrastructure has not been able to cope with this soaring population.

Despite expenditure of millions of taka in different projects, the city is in a dismal state with respect to water supply, sanitation, and drainage system. The sewage system covers only 60% of the city's population. About 50% of the urban waste is allowed to decompose and putrefy on the road side. Quite a substantial part of it goes into open drains, choking them permanently, so even after a mild shower water cannot flow through the drains and inundates the road and the few open spaces left after haphazard construction of apartment blocks.

Construction companies have made illegal encroachments and built apartment blocks in low-lying areas without leaving any arrangement for the outflow of either rainwater or waste water in normal situations. Experts say it is the concretisation of Dhaka city that is responsible for the crisis, not the rainfall. And to that extent, Rajuk's culpability for the crisis is total.

Perhaps the best proof of this is the land developed by filling marshy complexes in Ashulia, Tongi, Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Badda, Basundhara and DND embankment area. All these complexes were built on marshes that surround the mouth of the Buriganga river. In the early 1990s, or even later, when Rajuk allowed developers to start construction by filling up these low lying areas, environmentalists warned the government of a possible backlash. Because of the commercial promise they held, grabbers backed by political influence went ahead with construction works without caring for environmental clearance, but the Ministry of Environment did not exercise its authority.

The choking of the rivers, and old canals like Begunbari khal, Baunia khal, Gulshan-Baridhara lake, Uttara lake and Hatirjheel lake, is considered one of the major reasons for water logging. For safety reasons, if nothing else, the banks of the rivers should have been kept clear, but they were taken up on the pretext of providing vital services like establishing haats, bazaars, roads and mosques for the people. The first structure was on the riverbed itself, thereby restricting its flow and obstructing discharge of rainwater into the river.

Historical records show that in the Dhaka City's Development Plan of 1917, highest importance was attached to conserving the Dholai khal and other khals for easy passage of water during rainy season. The 20-year plan formulated for 'Dhaka City Development' in 1997 emphasised construction of structures on pillars in the flood-prone areas to allow free flow of water during heavy rainfall and flood. The recommendation was for construction of 30 large tanks in different areas of the city to prevent waterlogging. Shockingly, some of the tanks have been filled up.

Structures built on the banks of rivers Buriganga and Shitalakhyia are good examples of uncontrolled development. Every single inch of encroachment is responsible for the present

crisis. There had been cloudbursts in the past, but Dhakaites had never faced a situation like it is today. The writing has been on the wall for a long time. It has nothing to do with the quantity of water. It has everything to do with the faulty planning of the city.

All these developments were done with myopic vision. Environment was never a part -- and largely still isn't -- of either the government's or Rajuk's or City Corporation's agenda of action. Little did the planners realise that the "mega city" they were planning to build up would become unlivable after a few years. How did this happen? Every city has its share of dissipation space -- wetlands, and waste lands. These act like sponges and take the pressure out in such abnormal situations. Shockingly, watershed and waste lands surrounding the city have given way to building complexes.

Even during the Moghul period and British rule, urbanisation took place with the highest attention attached to sewage management. A cursory look at old Dhaka city would reveal that although at that time roads were narrow, drains were quite wide and deep to allow passage of water and waste with little hindrance. Dhaka city could once boast of 22 canals that would have allowed easy and quick disposal of waste without creating waterlogging in the area. But, due to greed, and to some extent out of need, we have filled up the canals and marshy lands to develop housing for the growing population, business establishments and educational institutes with the excuse of promoting education and economic boom in the country! That only invited colossal sufferings.

Residential areas like Demra, Jurain, Dolairpar, Nandipara, Kadamtoli, Goran, Khilgaon, Rampura-Ulan, Gabtoli, Kallyanpur, West Dhanmondi, Rayerbazar etc. have been built on filled land. By constructing embankment around some of these places, we could withstand the onslaught of flood water leaking into these areas partially, but what avenues did we leave to prevent waterlogging due to internal flooding or heavy rainfall?

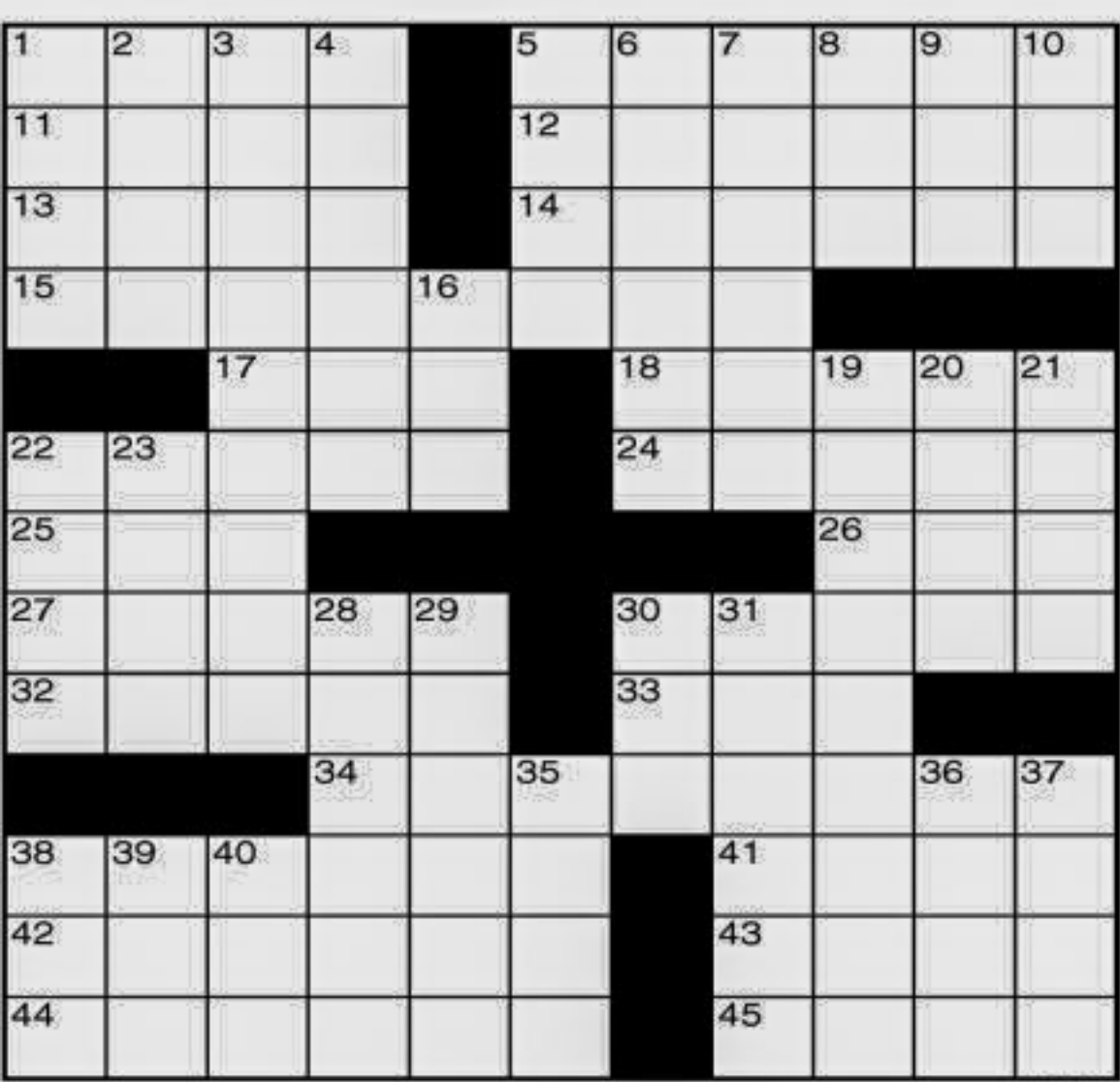
Despite the fact that rainfall is not so high these days because of climatic situation or freakish weather pattern, waterlogging remains a serious problem. It's not true that the general public or public leaders or policy makers do not know what actually compounds their problems. Shockingly, we remain silent spectators to all these activities being carried out before our eyes!

Public leaders and policy makers in all the governments indulged in rhetoric of presenting a beautiful and dazzling Dhaka, and occasionally seemed to try to keep the city clean or get rid of the festering malaise, but then lapsed into total inaction. Citizens have become cynical about the ability of the government or its agencies to combat the problems. A section of public leaders and government officials have allowed buildings and market places to be put up here and there without any attention to planning laws and environmental ethics, thereby causing pollution and degradation.

In a sense, Dhaka is being strangled. Whenever any agency gets clearance for any infrastructure project, it uses the project to create more so that this extra land could be allotted to builders and more money can be made. It is a carefully planned strategy. It is a transition from wetland to wasteland to wealth land.

There must be an urban land policy that treats land as a resource to be used for the benefit of the citizens. There should also be framework of urban institutions which can meet the current and emerging requirements of a growing metropolis like Dhaka city, as well as a cadre of urban administrators who have the training and motivation to meet the challenges. Cities are manifestations not only of physical architecture but also of the architecture of the mind. We can't let the rot persist.

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CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

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Yesterday's answer



Sustain pottery heritage by altering habit

MD. ZAHIDUR RAHMAN, and TAHMINA KHATUN

BANGLADESH has many rich heritages which are inseparable parts of our identity as a nation, because the spirit, direction, convention, custom, civilisation and tradition of the nation are found, as they are reflected, in its cultural and historical heritages. The cultural heritages are the most important heritages, and are passed down to us through the years by the collective efforts of our forefathers, from one generation to the next, defining our essence as a nation to the global community. With the passage of time, some of our glorious cultural heritages like muslin sarees along with some others have been lost forever, and are only ornamenting our national museum now. It is also alarming that some glorious cultural heritages are now on the verge of extinction due to the celebration of our modern life style, indifference and negligence to cultural heritages. Of them, pottery is one of the most important heritages which is on the brink of becoming obsolete.

Pottery heritage was famous for its diverse design and for its indispensability in households as utensils. Presently, the number of pottery workers is decreasing gradually as a result of the change in culture and our inclination towards ceramic and metal utensils. Only few pottery products are now made in the rural areas to meet the rural poor's demands, and occasionally for Bangalee festivals such as Pahela Baishakh. Lack of raw materials and inadequate patronisation are also responsible for the slow decay of pottery. Because of the slump in local demand for utensils, many pottery workers are now making only inartistic pots for curd as it has local market value and because it is easy to make. As a result, many pottery workers have forgotten their inherited pottery designs. This

inartistic curd pot production, too, will be at risk if anyone invents any alternative. It is also found that some families are not interested in involving their children in this because of the lack of demand. In order to survive, the community is thinking of shifting to other professions.

From the present scenario, it can be easily predicted that the pottery heritage may become extinct before, if necessary steps are not taken. It will not be surprising if we have to put this cultural heritage in the museum for the next generation to know about it. It is time for us now to save our cultural pottery heritage by innovative approaches. Many think tanks are trying to save this heritage by introducing diversified pottery products for beautifying houses (vases, flower pot crafts etc.). In reality, these aesthetic pottery products for house decoration are not popular because of our low purchasing capacity, inadequate space in houses and indifference to decorating houses. Only people of means can afford it. In addition, the imported ceramic products often outsell our pottery products. So, for sustaining this cultural heritage, we must use pottery products.

Many neighbouring countries are using pottery items. For example, the Indians use onetime earthen tea cups. The former rail minister of India, Lalu Prasad Yadav, popularised earthen pots in the railway and thus replaced the plastic cups. Later, everyone followed it, as it reduces health risks apart from preserving the cultural heritage. Moreover, strong patriotism of the Indians boosted this cultural heritage and helped in sustaining it.

Apparently, onetime earthen tea/coffee cups seem little costly, but it is economically feasible in the long run in terms of health and sustenance of the pottery heritage. It will increase employment, develop market chain for pottery, and save water and energy resources. Moreover, used onetime tea cups can be recycled as raw material of ring slabs for the sanitary latrine industry. On the other hand,

ceramic tea cups are used again and again at tea stalls, which increases the risk of communicable diseases. It also wastes 30 liters of water per stall per day. In every tea stall, minimum of one dozen ceramic cups are damaged per month and these imperishable broken cups cause soil infertility. It is also found that the country spends huge amounts of money for importing ceramic cups or raw materials for their manufacture.

Considering the beneficial sides of earthen tea cup, we can initiate its use in our tea/coffee stalls. As our literacy rate and GDP has increased, our citizens can afford, and should afford, the additional cost to drink tea by using onetime earthen tea cups. Initially, the urban population should take initiatives to implement the idea as they are more educated and richer compared to the rural people. According to the World Bank (2012), about 28% of the total population (44.8 million) of Bangladesh is living in urban areas, and they drink tea. 22.4 millions cups will be sold per day if one fourth of the total urban population take tea twice a day outside the home, and thus Tk. 5.6 million will be earned daily, which can ensure the livelihood of about 20,000 pottery workers.

Though it is not easy to initiate a new habit for the tea consumers, it is not impossible. For implementing it, pragmatic efforts like awareness building and motivating people, voluntary work, patronisation by both private and public sectors, installation of modern technology, in-depth research and policy advocacy are required.

In conclusion, we can say that the existence of our pottery heritage is threatened. As it is an integral part of our culture, saving this heritage by changing our habit or by any other means or effort is our social as well as national responsibility.

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Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE:

A GREAT FIGURE OR PHYSIQUE IS NICE, BUT IT'S SELF-CONFIDENCE THAT MAKES SOMEONE REALLY SEXY.

- VIVICA FOX

CRYPTOQUOTE

6-2

NEIOT C ZMKCJMK FQMCNOK
JCDK GOCNK JVCA YEM IX JE
OED JVMEIZV KCVN EJVKM'X
KHXX YEM CA QAXJCAJ?

- VKAMH TCLQT JVEMKCI

A XYDLBAAXR is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.



QUOTABLE Quote

People ask the difference between a leader and a boss. The leader leads, and the boss drives.



Theodore Roosevelt



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