

SPOTLIGHT



LOOKING FOR A BETTER PLAN

ELITA KARIM

PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

"Books - check. Pens and pencils - check. Rain coat - check. Umbrella - check. Old knee boots - check." - a part of the daily check lists made by 21-year-old Fatimah Sifat. Studying final year BBA at a private university, Fatimah prepares herself for the worst, everyday. There was a time when carrying an umbrella only would suffice. But the last few weeks have changed everything. "I carry a bigger bag now," says Fatimah. "I now have a rain coat in case there is a rain storm. I also bought a pair of old used boots from a shed near my grandmother's house in Bakshibazaar. I carry these boots in my bag and wear them whenever I have to walk to university in the midst of traffic,

crowds and rain water."

While the scorching heat is too much to bear on some days, other days are not doing any better thanks to the continuous rain and accumulated water on the streets, which lead to the creation of mini ponds and small rivers around the city. Going to work, classes, to the hospital or doing daily activities have become a huge challenge for everyone in Dhaka city.

The obvious reason for all the water logging in the city is the rain. "But rain is a blessing. It falls from the heavens for the people, but then has nowhere to go," says Iqbal Habib, an architect and environment activist. "If we could comprehend this much - that rain water needs to move along its own path and not get blocked - and act upon this understanding, water logging would decrease immediately."

In 1887, Patric Geddes, a pioneering town planner had

exclaimed that the numerous rivers, streams, ponds and *khaal* were enormous resources for the country. Not only do the rivers offer an alternative means of transport to the locals, but also create a natural pathway for the rain water to move with the flow. "These pathways have now been blocked or destroyed," says Habib. "The rain water accumulating would naturally flow underground through the drainage system or simply evaporate." Unfortunately, there is no way for the rain water to flow underground. "A walk around would also reveal potholes and streets under construction in many parts of the city. Thanks to the water logging issue, many of these holes and damages cause rickshaws to topple over.

Decades of structuring and restructuring the city, embellishing it with high rises, corporate buildings, apartment buildings, parking lots have



definitely given it the more contemporary look that many of us secretly admire. However, nobody remembered to place the drains in the city. In fact, many of them are now blocked -- with buildings, malls and wedding halls built over them. "For a proper drainage system to run in a city there needs to be a

surface drain, underground drainage ending to a box culvert towards a canal or a river, finally crossing the dam," explains Iqbal Habib. "It is the responsibility of the City Corporation to keep the surface drains clean, maintain them regularly, check the depth etc." The City Corporation obviously



failed one of its major tasks.

Then again, a major chunk of the drainage system also falls under WASA. "At least 35 to 38 percent of the drainage system is absolutely ignored," Habib adds. "If you see the culverts in Rayerbazaar, Mohammadpur and other parts of the city, the culverts there are makeshifts

dumps; filled to the brim with the City Corporation's garbage."

It is also the responsibility of the Water Development Board to ensure that the pathway for the rain water to flow into the river is smooth, that proper pumps are installed in the city and more. "This also has not been done," says Habib.



"Because of the obstructions that we have created in the city for rain water, water logging increases by the year, which in turn adds to the over crowded streets, creating more congestion."

A city is not a proper city, if it cannot manage 60-70 mm of rainfall on a regular basis, "which is actually normal in our part of the world," says Iqbal Habib. An immediate solution to the problem is to give the responsibility of maintaining the drainage system to the current mayor. "Its unfortunate that the mayor has not been given the authorisation to fix this matter," adds Habib. "A comprehensive city planning, moreover, the drainage system will be incomplete without the city's people and its mayor. Once the mayor is given the authorisation to plan and structure, all the other organisations and elements responsible for maintaining the drainage system will fall into place automatically." Everything is connected, says Iqbal Habib. As long as we each do our job passionately and reliably, the water logging issue, along with other issues failing the city will be solved in no time. ■