



(Clockwise from left) With only two or three days remaining before Eid, desperate low income shoppers and vendors alike choose to ignore stagnant dirty water at a street market near Shapla Chattar in the capital yesterday, to carry on the buying and selling following morning rains. People going through Baily Road, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, and Shantinagar intersection also have to deal with the same situation. A large section of the city got waterlogged yesterday as usual just after a few hours of downpour.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON, PALASH KHAN, BANGLAR CHOKH

Dhaka street vendors' Eid sales waterlogged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Covering his goods on the footpath with a polythene sheet, street vendor Hakim Mia was looking up at the sky with a grumpy look on his face. Though it stopped raining by afternoon, his suffering continued as customers could not approach his shirts due to water flooding Motijheel's streets yesterday.

"Only three days are left before Eid. But customers are going away due to waterlogging. I am completely ruined," he said in despair.

Just several hours of rain crippled city life as different parts of the capital went under ankle to knee-deep water thanks to poor the drainage system.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department recorded 62 millimetres of rainfall in Dhaka. The rain may continue, said an officer there, adding, "We will let you know tomorrow (Thursday) morning whether there will be any rain on Eid day."

Hawkers' Super Market in Dhanmondi, one of the places usually bustling with shoppers before Eid, was found overflowing with sewage. A few shoppers were seen

nonchalantly going around.

Amidst a similar scenario at Noorjahan Market opposite Dhaka College, Abdur Rob was found doing the shopping with his trousers folded up to the knee while his family waited on the first floor.

"I got a bonus on Sunday and thought of completing my shopping today. Now I have to complete my shopping in knee-deep water," he said, impatiently rubbing an itch on the part of his leg submerged in the murky water.

Although people were expecting the rains in order to cope with the sultry weather prevailing for the last couple of days, the waterlogging had frustrated them. Vendors are the worst sufferers.

The roads around Karwan Bazar, Kathalbag, West Shewrapara, Dhanmondi, Nayapaltan, Fakirapool, Rajabazar, Shantinagar, behind Bangabhaban, Old Dhaka and Hazaribagh were the worst affected.

"Two festivals, Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, are the main income sources of our business but this waterlogging is going to wash away our chances," said Ali Ahmed, running a shop on a footpath in Karwan

Bazar.

"The average sale is around Tk 25,000 every day but it was almost nil today due to the waterlogging as customers do not want to come wading through water," said Ali, nearly on the brink of tears.

"I have kept my shop open raising it several feet using bricks but customers do not want to come," he said.

A Kathalbag resident, Raihan Ahmed, said, "I had to wade through around thigh-deep water to go to the Bashundhara city as I did not get any rickshaw from home."

Heading out with his two kids to get some shopping done, Monzu Miya was found waiting under a shed of a grocery shop. He said he had braved knee-deep water as he had to leave for his Pabna residence within hours.

Many vehicles were found to have gone out of order due to the waterlogging on different streets, forcing those inside to come out on the dirty water and push.

"I had to walk around one kilometre to reach my office at Farmgate as the human hauler I was in broke down due to waterlogging on Green Road," said a commuter, Sohel Ahmed.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

Dhaka goes under knee-deep water within half an hour of rainfall. The distressing photographs of rickshaw-pullers and passengers taking a plunge in muddy water appear with uncanny regularity on front pages of newspapers every morning. The obvious end result of stagnant water on the roads is horrendous traffic jam and all the other misfortunes that come on its heels.

With the tell-tale photograph of the miserable rickshaw-puller and his passengers comes a story, an oft repeated one rather. Inside the corresponding story there is this conspicuous paragraph: "The rain water remains stagnant on city roads as the canals of Dhaka city that used to carry excess water out to the adjoining rivers have been grabbed by the influential quarters. Those canals are all gone now."

Every year, the print media or television reports mention the names of those lost canals with meticulous exactness, but, to our utter disbelief, never mention the names of the people who belong to that "influential quarter", who have grabbed them over the years. They do have names, don't they?

Now the million dollar question is: Why can't we mention their names? Are they citizens with special power and privileges? Do they have a different set of laws for them for which reason they cannot be brought before a court of law?

It is common knowledge that the grabbers of gov-

ernment land, water bodies, railway property, rivers and canals join the bandwagon of the politically active people of the locality for shelter. They create false documents of lease and take possession of the property – the banks of canals. They start to construct temporary structures in the beginning. They keep the local officials of the relevant departments "happy" for years together and thereby one day become legal owners.

There are dozens of laws to deter illegal occupation, grabbing, sale and purchase of government property, especially those that are essential for maintaining natural flow of water, navigation of vessels and breeding of marine species. In that case we wonder why or how "influential people" can grab and make so many canals totally disappear from the face of the earth. Why couldn't they ever be traced and put on trial? Are the canal grabbers more powerful than the government?

It beats any comprehension that more than 10 million city dwellers wallow in knee-deep water after a spell of rain for the greed of a handful of grabbers! How many of them are there? Quarter million? Half a million? And the entire government machinery fails to out them from the government property, so essential to keep the city roads free of rain water!

If those canal grabbers remain outside the purview of the laws of the land, good governance will continue to take a plunge in nasty water on the roads after every spell of rain.

Cry for open space

HELEMLU ALAM

At age four, Farhan Tanvir Tipto did not know how to run. When his father Shahed Siddique noticed it one day, he got scared and immediately took the kid to hospital but the doctor found nothing wrong. He just advised him to let his son run in open spaces.

The life of Tipto, a kindergarten student of YWCA Higher Secondary Girls' School in the capital, had been confined to the 400 sq ft apartment in Hatirpool area where his family lived a park opposite the neighbourhood.

So Shahed, business editor of Independent Television, decided to take him to Panthakunja, a park opposite Pan Pacific Sonaogon Hotel, to give him some open space. But within a few days, it appeared that the park's environment was not suitable for the boy.

Finally, he started taking him to Ramna Park and things began to improve.

The case of Tipto is an eye opener because most parts of Dhaka city do not have enough open space to help the natural growth of children. On top



of that, most of the existing parks and playgrounds are threatened, not well-maintained, or occupied.

The result was that Shahed moved his family into another house of Hatirpool with a not-so-busy road in front of it. Tipto played football and cricket on the street with other children, albeit it was not enough. But which neighbourhood should he move into?

According to a 2013 study of the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B), Dhaka city has the highest concentration of obese children, at 22 percent, compared to the nearest 19 percent in Sylhet city. They are aged between five and 18.

The condition of mothers is even worse in the capital, with 57 percent of them overweight, though Chittagong city has the highest proportion, 64 percent.

Obese and overweight people face higher risks of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, osteoarthritis, and liver and gallbladder diseases, and respiratory problems.

Experts blame excessive rich food intake and less physical activity.

Dr Aliya Naheed, interim head of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases Unit at ICDDR,B, said an overweight child was likely to remain so in his/her adulthood.

Though children can play at schools, the reality is that many schools in Dhaka city do not have playgrounds, she said.

As a result, children get dependent on playing games sitting at home, she added.

Prof AHM Enayet Hussain, a director at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said an obese child might lose the ability to take up challenges.



With a fresh new format, new writers and a new perspective, the *Star Weekend* has an array of articles for your reading pleasure. This week our spotlight is an elaborate description of a homebound soul's struggles for a ticket back home. There is an interesting read on the first time an arrest was made due to animal abuse. We also have a piece on the objections and protests of all the students having to face the newly implemented VAT on education. Don't forget your copy of *Star Weekend* tomorrow, Friday!

