



Illegal structures built on Khilgaon-Basabo canal at Basabo Kadamtala in the capital. Right, the canal is getting filled up at another point due to dumping of waste into it. The abysmal state of the canals contributes to frequent waterlogging in the city. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

# City canals in death throes

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grabbers, some 10km stretches of different canals have been turned into concrete box culverts, clean-up of which is beyond the existing capacities of the city corporations and Dhaka Wasa.

But now, both say they have neither the legal authority nor the financial capacity to do so, and pass the buck on to the district administration and the Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) of Dhaka.

On availability of funds." The Wasa has done this for about 13 canals so far with the World Bank funding, said Taqsem. Even if the banks are protected, in some cases, the end of some canals is blocked by residential structures, making the arteries largely ineffective, he added. As an example, he cited the Mirpur canal which was supposed to carry rainwater to the floodplains of Kalshi and beyond. But a lot of buildings have been constructed in Kalshi, blocking the canal from flowing any further. The open canals are supposed to

serve as major storm water carriers, said Md Mujibur Rahman, professor of civil engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. But since they are clogged with solid waste and constricted by encroachments and installation of narrow concrete channels, the city gets waterlogged every time it rains, he said. Besides, extensive flood flow zones and water retention areas around the capital, where the canals and large-diameter pipes carry rainwater to, have been filled up consistently for years, said the professor, who

has worked on drainage system for over three decades. Unless the illegally occupied canals are reclaimed, it is not possible to save the city from waterlogging, Mujibur added. According to the Flood Action Plan adopted by the government in 1989, the capital city should have conserved at least 20,093 acres of canals apart from floodplains and water retention areas. However, none of the agencies responsible for looking after the city has any idea about the total area of the canals at the moment.

Despite the horrible experience on September 1, there has been no visible attempt so far to restore the canals to their original state. Both mayors Anisul Huq of Dhaka North City Corporation and Sayeed Khokon of Dhaka South in their election manifestos had pledged that they would act to reclaim the canals.

Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan said, "We have not yet undertaken any fresh programme this year to reclaim the encroached canals." What's more important than reclaiming them is to build walkways on both sides as protection demarcations to save the canals from being encroached upon again, he said. "But this is very expensive and depends

## 2 workers die falling from high-rise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two construction workers died as they fell from the seventh floor of an under-construction building in the capital's Uttara yesterday. The dead are Majedul, 30, and Sujan, 28. The two fell around 2:00pm from the scaffolding attached to the seventh floor. They died on the spot, said Alamgir Hossain, sub-inspector of Uttara West Police Station. The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsies last night.

# Tk 2,898cr projects to dredge rivers, repair embankments

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken up two mega projects involving over Tk 2,898 crore on re-excavation of rivers, rehabilitation of embankments and river bank protection across the country, Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud told parliament yesterday. He said the country lost over 1,800 sq km land due to erosion of the Ganges, Jamuna and Padma in the last three decades. The government, however, has so far reclaimed 1,036 sq km land through dredging and building embankments along the Jamuna and Meghna, added the minister. Anisul said a project titled "Rehabilitation of Embankments and Re-excavation of Rivers/canals" was

awaiting approval from the Planning Commission. Under the Tk 1,405 crore project, canals with a combined length of 3,000 km will be excavated or re-excavated. Besides, embankments with a total length of 5,850 km will be repaired or rehabilitated, he informed the House. On the other project titled "River Bank Protection in Bangladesh", the minister said the Tk 1,493 crore scheme is aimed at protecting river banks and towns across the country. He said over 2,400 km river banks are threatened by erosion every year. A Tk 828.65 crore project styled "Flood and River Bank Erosion Risk Management Investment Programme" is underway for a permanent solution to the erosion of the Padma, Ganga and Jamuna, he noted.

On setting up Ganges Barrage, Anisul said the detailed design of the barrage was completed as per the feasibility study of the project. **FORCED RETIREMENT** Public Administration Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam yesterday told the Jatiya Sangsad that the previous BNP government had sent some 42 government officials into forced retirement while the present government has forced five officials into retirement. He said 301 women are working in the government administration as secretaries, joint secretaries, deputy secretaries and deputy commissioners. The government has no plan for now to cancel the appointment of officials who were hired on contractual basis, added the minister.

## Kids must not take

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she said there is no objection if the children of the elite class study at expensive schools, but it has to be ensured that the children of the common people could study at government primary schools. And for this, the conditions of these schools must be improved. The PM also suggested ensuring arrangements for accommodation at schools in the country's hills and char areas. She urged all concerned to turn the country's huge population into human resources and then human capital to further develop the country. The country's literacy rate was 71 percent as of June, she said. "Literate mothers could teach their children about health, nutrition and discipline from early childhood..." Mentioning that the "Bangladesh Literacy Programme" is being implemented with an outlay of Tk 452 crore to eradicate illiteracy and create skilled manpower, Hasina asked the authorities concerned to make sure this programme is implemented properly. She also called upon the local public representatives, the well-off sections of the society and the local administration to voluntarily introduce midday meals at the schools to further reduce the number of dropouts. A fund could be set up and operated by each school management committee in association with the guardians where donations could be received to provide midday meals, the PM added. She recalled that the Father of the Nation formed the Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission and as per its recommendation, he had nationalised some 36,165 primary schools and the jobs of 157,724 teachers. Noting that literacy rate normally increased in all countries in the course of time, she said, "But in our country, it came down to 44 percent from 65 percent during the five-year rule of the BNP-Jamaat government in 2001-2006." The PM said her government ensured 100 percent enrolment of

children eligible for going to school by 2011. Besides, there was an announcement for ensuring "Education for All" by 2015. She added that her government also introduced the midday meal programme for primary students to prevent dropout, and local people had been engaged in the programme. As a result, she said the dropout rate had come down to 20.09 percent from 80 percent in the 80s. Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman Fizar was the special guest at the function. Beatrice Kaldun, head and representative of Unesco Dhaka office, also spoke at the programme presided over by Primary and Mass Education Secretary Mesbah ul Alam. **Drug peddler injured in 'shootout'** A CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

## Commonwealth secretary-gen due on Friday

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Commonwealth Secretary-General Kamalesh Sharma arrives in Dhaka Friday night on a three-day visit. Foreign ministry officials said Sharma is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali and discuss future programmes of the organisation. The foreign minister would host dinner in honour of the Commonwealth secretary general on Saturday. A meeting between them would be held in the morning the same day, added the officials. The 14th Meeting of Commonwealth Foreign Affairs Ministers (CFAMM) will take place in New York on September 24.

## Pay commission

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introduction of a new increment system, no pay commission would be required in future, according to Muhith. Presenting an idea about an alternative arrangement, Muhith said there would be an officer who would submit a report to the cabinet every year. He said the report would contain the conditions of the pay and service of the public servants in a particular year and mention whether any change to it was required. He said some changes regarding pay and allowance would be made considering inflation. He said, "I think in future slight increase will be required after two or three years." Muhith said pay-scale grade would change automatically and the details of this would be in the circular. He said when an employee reaches the last step of a grade by getting increments, his or her grade would automatically change. The finance minister termed the existing time scale and selection grade a corrupt system. It is a system of discrimination; one gets the benefit and the other does not, he said. Muhith said the pay scale given this year was an epoch-making step in the history of the country and that this would reduce corruption. "We hope the reflection of this increase will also be seen in the private sector. It will further increase the number of satisfied people," he said. "As a whole, there will be an impact on the corruption climate," Muhith claimed. He said corruption in the country had reached an intolerable level and one of the reasons for corruption was inequality in salaries. The finance minister said in this fiscal year's budget, no allocation had been made for beggars, even though money was set aside for them in the previous six years. There were no beggars in the country and that those seen begging in Dhaka and Chittagong were habitual beggars, he claimed. "They are sent to the villages but they return to the towns again," he said. "So I have no sympathy for a single beggar in the country," the finance minister said. [From AFP, Reuters and CNN]

# BNP grapples with fear, frustration

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see the poor response to Sunday's protest programme. Top BNP leaders hoped that party men as well as common people would come out in big numbers to protest the hike in power and gas prices, he added. "I think the BNP policymakers will have to review Sunday's programme and identify the problems. Otherwise, there will be no hope of waging a major anti-government movement in future," said the BNP leader. "Our grassroots have seen that their three-month movement yielded no results due to inactiveness of the party's central and Dhaka city units. Since the launch of the movement, many grassroots leaders and activists have been facing cases or on the run to avoid arrest. Why will they risk proba-

ble hassle without seeing any indication of success in the movement?" questioned Mahub Hossain Piaru, president of Sonadanga unit Jubo Dal in Khulna. "The BNP high-ups didn't look after us when we were put behind bars. Why will we take the risk of going to jail again?" another grassroots leader questioned. Party insiders said a BNP assistant office secretary phoned the chiefs of different district units ahead of Sunday's programme, but he didn't get a good response. A Dhaka city unit leader claimed that they were not properly informed about whether protests would be staged in the capital or not. Some leaders of the 20-party alliance said the BNP didn't contact them ahead of the protest programme to discuss time and venues of the

demonstration. "When we contacted BNP leaders, they told us that we would be informed about the programme later. But the time never came. Interestingly, some BNP leaders referred us to other party leaders to know about the programme details," a top alliance leader said. Shahadat Hossain Selim, senior joint secretary of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a component of the alliance, said they waited at Nayapaltan on Sunday for several hours to get instructions from BNP leaders. But none of them contacted the LDP men. A senior BNP leader said central leaders who are looking after the party's organisational activities have failed to run the party in their respective districts. The grassroots have little confidence in them, he added.

# Time for 'global response'

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consistent across all nations, noting that at present, different countries are using different criteria. Europe is dealing with hundreds of thousands of migrants -- many of them fleeing violence in places like Syria -- pouring across the Mediterranean and taking a land route up through the continent. In a preliminary emergency appeal document published yesterday, the UN refugee agency expects the number of refugees fleeing across the Mediterranean to Europe to hit 400,000 this year and could be 450,000 or more in 2016. "In 2015, UNHCR anticipates that approximately 400,000 new arrivals will seek international protection in Europe via the Mediterranean. In 2016 this number could reach 450,000 or more," it said, adding that over 366,000 had already arrived in

2015. Yesterday, tens of thousands of migrants massed on Greek islands as the president of the European Union warned the refugee crisis would last for years and the UN pleaded for a world-wide solution. With Greece's migration minister Yiannis Mouzalas admitting the island of Lesbos was "on the verge of explosion", authorities opened a new centre to process the 30,000 refugees the UN said are stuck there and on other Aegean Sea flashpoints, with Athens promising more for other hotspots. A handful of coastguards and riot police armed with batons had struggled to control some 2,500 migrants in Lesbos's main port, screaming "keep back" as the crowds surged towards a government-chartered ferry bound for Athens. In a speech at the Bruegel Institute, a

think-tank in Brussels, EU President Donald Tusk warned that the human haemorrhage to Europe would be long-lasting. "The wave of migration is not a one-time incident but the beginning of a real exodus, which means that we will have to deal with this problem for many years to come." **"THE SPIRIT OF URGENCY"** Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann called again yesterday for an EU summit, appealing for a return of the spirit of urgency and cooperation seen in the 2008 financial crisis. "In the financial crisis of 2008 we did everything we could to prevent a collapse of banks and the financial system. We must demonstrate the same efforts now so that the right to asylum can be upheld," Faymann said in Vienna. The remarks touched on a deep east-west division within the EU about

how to respond to the crisis, with former Communist-ruled members of the 28-nation bloc, such as Hungary, taking a hardline approach. Dramatic scenes unfolded on the Hungarian-Serbian border yesterday, as hundreds of frustrated migrants and refugees broke through police lines and ran from a holding area. Some parents carried children on their shoulders, struggling to make their way across the rough ground near Roszke in Hungary. As they ran across open corn and sunflower fields, police followed. But officers have not so far stopped any of the refugees. The breakout happened suddenly and did not appear to be planned. Earlier in the day, scuffles broke out as migrants forced to wait in the holding area expressed their frustration. Many cannot understand why, having reached the European Union, they are

not receiving a warmer welcome. Some of the migrants -- most of them from Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan -- also tussled with police on Monday. Police have been blocking a road from the holding site to a transit camp where they can register as refugees and continue their journeys. Many of the refugees and migrants arriving there from Serbia -- having been on the road for weeks in some cases -- are afraid they will get stuck in Hungary and be unable to carry on their journey to their preferred destinations in Western Europe. Some who have made it further north have also complained of poor conditions in the holding areas and transit camps in Hungary. Hungary's government has said it is just trying to enforce EU rules on the movement of migrants without proper documentation. [From AFP, Reuters and CNN]