

# Reclaim encroached rivers, canals

President asks deputy commissioners

UNB, Dhaka

Mentioning that the country's many cities and district towns experience water-logging even after a moderate rain due to the grabbing of canals, rivers and other water sources, President Abdul Hamid yesterday asked the deputy commissioners to reclaim those to maintain the natural flow of water.

"Public property, canals, rivers, water sources and even hills are going under illegal occupation of influential quarters. And that's why unplanned structures are being set up in these places disrupting the natural flow of water," he said while addressing the DCs' Conference at the Bangabhaban in the evening.

Hamid said, "When a moderate rainfall occurs, Dhaka and Chittagong cities along with the country's almost all district towns go under water, paralyzing the public life and damaging roads and streets."

So, he said, public property, forest, hills, canals, rivers and open water

bodies must be protected for the nation's greater interest.

The president also said hill cutting and illegal sand extraction from rivers must be stopped as well. "Water flow [in rivers] must be ensured and water bodies should be conserved. The development of social forestation, flood control and management, haors and wetlands is a must to conserve biodiversity. If we can do so, there'll be a balanced, public-oriented and long-lasting development."

Referring to the consequences of recent natural disasters that hit the country, he said the nature of natural calamities is changing gradually with a greater intensity due to global climate change.

He said the DCs should play a more active role in implementing the government's ongoing projects taken to reduce the risks of natural disasters and cope with its aftermath.

Hamid asked the DCs to perform their duties, rising above all kinds of fear, greediness and anger for the

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Heavy rain has washed away a chunk of the Rangamati-Khagrachhari Link Road in Khamarpara area about 16km from Rangamati town late Tuesday night. The photo was taken around 1:00pm yesterday.

PHOTO: ANVIL CHAKMA

# Rab arrests three 'militants' in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rapid Action Battalion yesterday claimed to have arrested three suspected militants during a drive in the city's Badda area.

The arrestees are Mushfiqul Haque, 24, Biplob Hossain Kamal alias Sunnah Kamal, 26, and Mamunur Rashid alias Abu Yeusha, 26, all of whom were picked up during a drive in the city's Badda area.

Rab said that the three are members of the Sarwar-Jamia group of banned militant outfit, Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Of the arrestees, Kamal, along with his two friends Imam Hossain Rashed, 27, and Hasan Mahmud, 26, used to work at Telex Ltd on Road No-4 at Block-C in Banani, and went missing on June 3.

Their families filed general diaries with Banani Police Station on June 3 and 4 in this regard.

Kamal, who completed Dawra Hadith, is an imam and was a business assistant at the office, claimed his uncle Rashid Alam, who added that they went to different Rab and police offices to look for him.

Rab, however, claimed that Kamal left his Chandpur home several days ago without informing his family.

In a press release, the force yesterday also claimed that the trio arrested was involved in recruiting new members, collecting funds for the group and circulating radical materials and videos using secret apps.

Rab officials said, during primary interrogation Mushfiqul admitted his involvement with a fanatic Islamist organisation named Return to Islam and was motivated to join JMB

through Mamunur Rashid Kajal, who has been missing from his home in Sylhet for the last 6-7 months.

# Sunken

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notifying them that the institution would remain closed for the day "due to natural calamity".

Many passengers had to walk miles after getting off buses stuck in tailbacks in major thoroughfares, including Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Mirpur Road, Manik Mia Avenue and Pragati Sarani.

The sufferings of the commuters worsened due to the road digging works of different utility service providers in different parts of the city.

Maksud Reza, a private banker living in Dhanmondi-27 area, said he could not reach his office in time due to the traffic.

"I had to struggle a lot to get in a bus in the morning, but got stuck in jam for hours. It took more than three hours to reach my office in Banani where I found knee-deep water."

"The situation is becoming unbearable every day. I don't think the authorities are much worried about it," he said.

Farhana Ahmed, who works at a firm in Farmgate, said, "I can reach

my office from my home in Eskaton area in just 10 minutes. But today, it took over two and a half hours."

Schoolchildren, many of whom had exams, and women were seen negotiating dilapidated roads and footpaths smeared with filth.

Sharmin Deeba, who lives on Indira Road area in Farmgate, said she faced difficulties taking her son to school in Dhanmondi as all the roads in her area virtually turned into waterbodies.

"The moment we stepped out of my home we found ourselves in a deep sea. The road in front of my home was waterlogged. I literally had to beg a rickshaw puller to take us to Dhanmondi," she said.

SM Rezaul, a private service holder, said, "It took three hours to go to Farmgate from Bashundhara Residential Area through Gulshan and Tejgaon. It usually takes an hour."

"Seeing the weather, I did not dare bring my car. I changed rickshaws five times to go to my office," he said.

Due to the torrential rains, many

areas in Rajabazar, Kathalbagh, Bhutergoli, Kalabagan, Tallabagh, Dhanmondi, Sukrabad, Tejgunipara, Karwan Bazar, Green Road, Azimpur, Mirpur, Mouchak, Malibagh, Motijheel and Gulistan went under knee to waist-deep water.

The premises of the Secretariat on Abdul Gani Road and the area in front of parliament on Manik Mia Avenue were also flooded.

Emran Hossain, an official at the Cabinet Division, said, "I haven't seen such waterlogging here in the last 13 years."

People in Old Dhaka also had a terrible day. Areas including Postagola, Faridabad, Gandaria, Laximibazar, Tantibazar and Bangshal went under knee-deep water.

Meanwhile, many took to social media to talk about their sufferings or express their anger at the waterlogging.

"How long will it take for the authorities to wake up? How long will we have to suffer this way?" Akib Javed, who works at a firm in Mohakhali, wrote on Facebook.

# EC working independently

PM tells French envoy

UNB, Dhaka

Describing the Election Commission as an independent body, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said it has been working independently in every field.

She said this when French Ambassador to Bangladesh Sophie Aubert met her at her office.

After the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed journalists.

He said the French diplomat apprised the PM of the update of the Smart Card project of the Election Commission, which is being implemented by a French company.

Aubert sought Bangladesh government's support in this regard, saying that the French government was also providing support to complete the project quickly.

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# Admin must retain

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magistrates could not run mobile courts that used to try a number of offences, including illegal assembly, public nuisance, unauthorised connection of electricity, water and gas, and cheating at examination centres.

Delivering a verdict on three writ petitions, the HC observed that empowering executive magistrates with judicial powers is "a frontal attack on the independence of the judiciary and is violative of the theory of separation of powers".

In the conference yesterday, the divisional commissioner of Dhaka demanded lifting of their status to grade-I, said officers present at the meeting.

During their meeting with the prime minister on the first day of the conference, the DCs wanted legal protections alleging that officers in the posts of DC, ADC, UNO, Assistant Commissioners (Land) and upazila engineers often faced cases and attacks while implementing development projects.

As Narayanganj DC demanded the opportunity for them to work for the UN peacekeeping missions, the government assured them of taking necessary measures in this regard.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed instructed the DCs to try to keep prices of daily essentials within the purchasing capacity of people.

The government should protect the rights of consumers, he said, adding that the law and order situation was okay and asked the DCs to keep it that way.

In order to boost the country's exports, the government selected 14 products in 41 districts under its "one district one product" scheme, he said, adding that DCs should take pragmatic steps in this regard.

Producers of those selected goods will be given 20 percent cash incentives, Tofail said.

After meeting the DCs, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon told reporters that a survey for selecting the site of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib International Airport would be finalised by August.

DCs urged him to modernise

domestic airports and demanded an airport be constructed in Bogra.

LGRD Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said he instructed the DCs to improve the living standard of the rural people. "We have also directed them to build parks on government khas land for proper growth of children."

DCs informed Obaidul Quader that they could not implement the government and high court direction for keeping locally made or battery-run three-wheelers including easy bike, nosimon and korimon off high ways due to interference by local political leaders.

Learning this, the road transport and bridges minister asked the DCs to inform him directly in case of such interferences.

"I am the general secretary of ruling Awami League. You will inform me directly if you face any political interference while banning three-wheelers on highways. I want to know who are acting against the government as well as the party's decision to stop the plying of three-wheelers on roads," he told reporters after the meeting.

The minister also asked the DCs to remove hooks, bumpers and any other additional parts attached to vehicles.

"You have magistrates with you. Carry out mobile courts to remove hooks and bumpers from all vehicles," Quader told the DCs.

He also asked them not to spend too much time in ensuring protocol for visiting VIPs.

"Give more time to people and ease their sufferings instead," he said.

The cabinet division in a press statement said the government would turn DC office buildings of the colonial era into libraries and museums.

It also added that government would examine the issue of introducing haor allowance for civil service officials.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury asked them to take steps to stop the use of top soil in brick kilns.

# Result of govt negligence, inaction

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the city should have conserved 5,523 acres of water retention area, 20,093 acres of canals and rivers and 74,598 acres of flood flow zones.

But most of them are gone, thanks to years of negligence and inaction of various government bodies concerned.

As a result, even if there is 50 to 60 millimetres of rain in a day, the Dhaka Wasa pumps cannot drain out the storm water, resulting in the clogging of roads, lanes and by-lanes, said Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan.

So it takes two to three hours to drain out the water, even after the rain stops, he added.

All the 80 water pumps at Rampura, Kamalapur and Kalyanpur pump stations of Dhaka Wasa are working to drain out the accumulated rainwater in the city, but water gets stagnant on the city roads if it rains incessantly.

With its current capacity, Wasa's accumulated pump system can drain out 45 cubic metres of water per second. According to officials, rainfall above 40mm in Dhaka would take at least three hours to recede, as the available pumping facility is capable of draining only 20mm of rainfall.

The Water Development Board has a pump station at Goran Chatbari in Mirpur to drain out storm water.

The delay in pumping out storm water occurs because of slow passage of the water to pump stations, Taqsem said, adding that the slow passage was caused by inadequate capacity of the scanty storm drainage pipelines, severe lack of water retention areas and scanty canals clogged with solid

waste.

For immediate remedy, the Wasa chief said, there must be 12 percent of the total city available as rain water retention areas. Also, the remaining canals and storm drainage facility must be cleared and the storm drainage network should be expanded with enhanced capacity.

Visiting Dhanmondi-27, which remained submerged for much of the day, Dhaka South City Corporation Mayor Sayeed Khokon blamed the Dhaka Wasa authorities and the bad drainage system for waterlogging in the capital.

His counterpart in the North Annisul Huq, while visiting waterlogged Kalshi and Sangbadik Khal, said the city's remaining canals and water retention areas were either clogged with solid waste or filled up.

"It is not our duty to clean the clogged canals," he said, "Wasa has to clean all the remaining canals on an emergency basis, otherwise storm water will not recede fast."

It may be noted that it is indeed the city corporations' duty to collect the solid waste that clog the canals and storm sewer.

With the canals grabbed and encroached, no one has the magic wands to resolve the storm water problem, and Dhaka mayors have no authority to evict the grabbers, Annisul said. "We will try our best to solve the problem with new drainage project."

Asked what the government is doing to solve this, local government, rural development and cooperatives Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said it would not recur as the

government learned a lesson this year.

"I promise that you will not see these [waterlogging] from next year," he said, adding that they instructed the Dhaka Wasa to excavate the city's remaining 18 canals immediately.

According to experts, inadequate storm-water drainage system managed by seven different authorities, including private housing developers like Bashundhara, is to blame for taking the Dhaka streets under water every time there is even a moderate rain. There is no coordination among these authorities.

Three organisations -- Rajuk, Wasa and the two city corporations -- have developed the drainage facility in Uttara Model Town.

The storm-water drainage management of the Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) and the cantonment areas are being looked after by the Bangladesh Water Development Board and the Cantonment Board respectively.

Dhaka Wasa with 370km storm drainage pipelines covers only one-fifth its service area of 400sqkm, of which some 350sqkm of the surface is paved, preventing the ground percolation of rainwater, said Taqsem.

The Wasa claims the city still has 26 canals, though most of them remain clogged with solid waste.

The two city corporations maintain over 2,000km of feeder drains (open and small diameter pipes) to carry rainwater, and liquid waste from homes into canals and wider diameter storm sewer system, according to Sirajul Islam, chief town planner of Dhaka South City Corporation.

# ASSAULT ON GIRL Expelled BCL leader sent to jail in Sirajganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A Sirajganj court sent a suspended Chhatra League leader to jail yesterday, a day after he was arrested on charge of assaulting a female college student.

The court passed the order after police produced Saddam Hossain, 25, deputy publicity secretary of Sadar unit BCL, before it over the assault on the student of Sirajganj Government College.

Principal Prof SM Monwar Hossain alleged that Saddam harassed a few female members of Bangladesh National Cadet Corps on the campus on Tuesday.

"As a second year student protested it, Saddam along with his friends assaulted the girl."

As other students came forward to her rescue, the BCL leader and the others fled, he said.

Later in the evening, police detained Saddam near the college campus after they were informed about the incident, said Helal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Sirajganj Sadar Police Station.

The principal later filed a case against Saddam and some unidentified boys for assaulting the girl, he said.

The central unit of Chhatra League, a pro-Awami League student body, has expelled Saddam for his "activities against the organisation", said Ekramul Haque, secretary of BCL in Sirajganj.

# Armed guards

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The Hindustan Times on Sunday cited a wholesaler at a market in the city of Indore, in Madhya Pradesh state, saying that the security of tomatoes was of "considerable concern" because of their "skyrocketing" prices.

The wholesaler said the administrators of the Devi Ahilya Bai Holker market had appointed half a dozen armed

guards to keep the tomatoes safe - particularly when they are being unloaded from trucks.

There have been reports elsewhere in the country this month of thieves making off with tonnes of tomatoes worth thousands of rupees.

Madhya Pradesh actually had a bumper crop of the fruit this year, so

much so that farmers were dumping tomatoes on roads about a month ago.

But tomatoes are now off-season there and heavy rains have damaged crops in some key areas that are currently producing them.

The shortage this month has seen prices nearly double in various parts of the country to about 100 rupees (\$1.55, £1.19) per kg, "severely

pinching the pocket of the common man", The Indian Express reports.

One commentator in the India Today website warns that "onions are known to tumble governments" in India, and says that tomatoes - a staple used in many dishes as well - must be giving current politicians "similar nightmares".