

BARISHAL CANALS: PART I

Only in memories

There is a saying in Bangla: "Dhan, nodi, khal -- ei tin-e Barishal" [paddy, river and canal -- three things that make Barishal]. Reality contradicts this adage these days. There were a total of 48 canals in the city. Over the years, many of them have died. Here is the first part of a series on how the waterbodies experienced their demise.

M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL with SK MEHEDI HASSAN

Even a few years ago, Barishal did not witness much waterlogging that the city is experiencing nowadays.

A flood-like situation will arise, like previous years, during monsoon. Roads will drown even after a brief rain, causing public sufferings. People will have to wade through ankle- or knee-deep water.

"Even five years ago, we could not imagine this situation," said Anower Hossain, a shopkeeper in Rupatoli area. Similar comments came from Moklesur Rahman Moni, a student of BM College.

What's causing this gradual worsening of the situation? When asked, locals mentioned dead or dying canals as the root cause.

Once upon a time, rainwater would make its way to the rivers Kirtankhola and Kalijira through more than a dozen canals that do not exist anymore.

Grabbers' hunger for land, authorities' collective failure as well as people's absolute disregard for the waterbodies led to this.

With the canals having no demarcation, grabbers closed in on them. Residents thoughtlessly dumped garbage in them every day -- choking the canals and disrupting their normal flow. And the authorities were reportedly reluctant to save them.

Gradually, the channels disappeared from sight in 20 years.

Barishal City Corporation Executive Engineer Anisuzzaman said there were 48 canals in the city. Of them, 14 are now dead, he said.

Talking to The Daily Star, many locals expressed their anger and frustration while some looked back nostalgically.

There were three canals -- Tajkathi, Gilatoli Prodhani and Gilatoli Shakha -- in and around Bashundhara Housing area years ago, said Khaleque Talukder, 68, a resident of the area.



Left, Battola canal is not visible anymore. It exists in the form of sewer under the footpath. Right, though Chandmari canal is visible, it is practically a drain. The photos were taken recently.



PHOTO: M JAHIRUL ISLAM JEWEL

"They now only exist in memory," he said.

After unabated encroachment, government agencies completed the final course of action by implementing development projects on them.

"Can you imagine there was a canal called 'Bhatar Khal' in place of the road I'm standing on?" said Shajahan Molla, 70, from Brown Compound area. The canal used to flow through the heart of the city, he added.

Similarly, no one can locate Chandmari, Kalikhola and Ghanopara canals in Sher-e-Bangla Hospital, Bishwashbari and Goalbari areas respectively. Residential buildings, business establishments and roads have replaced them.

"There was a wide canal near my house where hundreds of boats plied and people caught fish around two decades ago," said Maksudur Rahaman Khan, former principal of Government Rajbari Mohila College, who lives on Kalibari Road.

The 70-year-old added that he would transport various goods on boat through this canal.

He blamed the government, between 2001 and 2006, for destroying the canals and turning most of them into drains.

Shajahan Molla, a retired government officer, said, "I built my house near Bhatar Khal with hope for easy transportation and good drainage system around 30 years ago. But unfortunately the waterbody does not exist today due to the drainage project."

Former college principal Maksudur used to buy plants from boats which were carried from Sarupkathi, three decades ago. "I witnessed how the canals disappeared," he said.

Abdur Rahaman Khan, a retired banker living in Banglabazar area, said people used to take boats as transport as the city was blessed with dozens of canals.

"I came to this city on a boat with my parents for my matriculation exams in 1968," he said.

Reminiscing journey by boat on Battola Khal, a channel of Nobogram canal, he said youngsters today are deprived of that experience.

A market, Battola Bazar, developed because of its proximity to the canal. Now, the market exists but the canal does not, he added.

Haimanti Sukla, an architect of Barishal City Corporation, said there was a good drainage system 15 years ago because of the presence of Nobogram Khal, which is dying.

Dying canals are also affecting agriculture and business. Anower Hossain said, "I used to bring firewood on boat or trawler to sell those to city dwellers when the canals were alive. Transport cost was low. Now, I have to hire trucks at higher cost."

Similarly, Rafiqul Islam, 40, a farmer from Kalijira area, said, "Five years ago, I used to grow various vegetables and rice. I stopped growing those due to a lack of

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DEAD CANALS

NAME	DISAPPEARED	LENGTH (KM)	LOCATION
Bhatar	2004-2010	0.39	Kirtankhola- Nathullabad Bridge
Tajkathi	2005-2010	1.35	Radio Centre- Putiakhali Khal
Chandmari	2004-2010	1.29	Kirtankhola-Sher-e-Bangla hospital
Napitkhali	1998-2005	0.8	Sagordi Khal-Nuria school
Ghanopara	2005-2012	1.55	Veduria Khal-Goalbari
Chahata Karikarbari	2007-2016	0.9	Veduria Khal-Bagabari
Kalikhola	2008-2017	1.40	Choupasha Khal-Bishwashbari
Gilatoli Prodhani	2005-2016	1.85	Kirtankhola-Gas Turbine
Gilatoli Shakha	2010-2015	1.84	Rab office-Putiakhali Khal
Adarsha	2000-2008	0.86	Kirtankhola-Palli Bidyut office
Fakirbari	1996-2015	1.65	Chaupasha Khal-Harinfula Khal
Mallik Market	2001-2015	0.9	Harinfula Khal-Mallik Market
Choukider Bari	2005-2017	0.4	Harinfula Khal-Munshibari
Maidan	2005-2015	0.7	Rayer Khal-Sonamir Pul

SOURCE: BCC, LOCALS

Nikhil Sen passes away

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barishal

Nikhil Sen, cultural activist and recipient of Ekushey Padak 2018, passed away at Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital yesterday. He was 88.

He left behind his wife, two daughters, a son and a host of well-wishers to mourn his death.

Nikhil was honoured with the "Ekushey Padak" in 2018 for his contributions to drama. He has also been honoured with various awards including "Shilpakala Padak", "Shaheed Munir Chowdhury Padak", "Naren Biswas Padak", and "Shaheed Altaf Mahamud Padak".

He significantly contributed to the Language Movement and different socio-cultural activities in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Different socio-cultural and political leaders have expressed grief at the demise of Nikhil Sen.

Road accidents kill 11, injure 46 in one day

STAR REPORT

With reckless driving, violation of traffic rules as well as operation of unfit vehicles continuing, eight fatal road accidents took place across the country yesterday, killing 11 people and injuring 46, according to reports from our correspondents.

In Khulna, three people were killed as a car and a bus collided head-on on Khulna-Jashore highway in Raripara area of Phultala upazila.

The deceased are: Dr Moyazzem Hossain, owner of Cure Home General

Hospital; Sahadat Hossain, resident surgeon of Gazi Medical College Hospital; and Zahangir Hossain, the car driver.

Md Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Phultala Police Station, told The Daily Star that the accident occurred around 4pm.

Police seized the bus but its driver managed to flee.

In another accident, biker Zahidul Islam, 40, a health assistant of Bharat Bhaiyana Union Health Centre was killed as a truck hit him from behind

on Jashore-Chuknagar road in Naranja area of Dumuria upazila.

Zahidul, from Adoya Narayanpur village in Keshabpur upazila, died on the spot, said Aminul Islam Biplob, officer-in-charge of Dumuria Police Station.

In Cumilla, two people were killed and 20 others injured after a bus hit a minibus from behind on Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Baniapara of Daudkandi upazila

Sujon Debnath, 20, from

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Newlyweds found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Savar

A couple was found hanging from the ceiling of their rented room in Horindhara area of Hemayetpur in Savar yesterday.

Quoting locals, police said the deceased Mohamad Ali, 20, and Rumi, 18, got married five days ago. They both worked at a local RMG factory in Savar.

Both the bodies were sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital for autopsy.

AFM Sayeed, officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station, said on information from locals, police rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies after breaking open the door.

However, the reason behind the death could not be ascertained immediately.

20 gold bars recovered from Dhaka airport trash bin

UNB, Dhaka

Customs officials yesterday recovered 20 gold bars, weighing around 2.32kg, from a trash bin at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID) searched the bin under the boarding bridge of the airport around 5pm and found the gold bars, worth around Tk 1.16cr, wrapped with black scotch tape in a plastic bag, said sources at the CIID headquarters. No further details were known immediately.

A good part-time

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Publishers are seemingly happy with the arrangement as well, as they need extra hands to smoothly operate business at stalls.

"We employ university students as they are knowledgeable on contemporary books and writers, and usually have good communication skills," said Shatabdi Vobo, owner of Sabyasachi.

He said that stall attendants are also being provided light snacks every evening and lunch on Fridays and Saturdays.

Meanwhile, a total of 145 new books arrived at the book fair yesterday.



Private sector partners with UN Women officials at the launching ceremony of a joint partnership at Radisson Blu Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Accelerating gender equality in the private sector

Unilever and UN Women launch joint initiative for Women's Day

CITY DESK

Unilever Bangladesh Limited (UBL) in partnership with UN Women Bangladesh hosted the launch of a joint celebration of International Women's Day 2019 at Radisson Blu Dhaka Water Garden yesterday morning. With the objective to spark a movement for unlocking opportunities to achieve gender equality and promoting women empowerment across sectors, the ceremony marked the inauguration of four events leading up to March 8, said a press release.

The event brought together the senior management from 11 organisations - Berger Paints Bangladesh Limited, Brac, Citibank N.A. Bangladesh, Grameenphone, GSK Bangladesh, HSBC Bangladesh, Marico Bangladesh Limited, Microsoft Bangladesh, Nestle Bangladesh Limited, Robi Axiata Limited and Standard Chartered Bank Bangladesh, and Vice Chancellors, Deans and Directors from five universities - North South University, Brac University, Independent University Bangladesh, Islamic University of Technology and Jahangirnagar University along with partners and donors from the development sector such as Brac and Terres Des Hommes.

The event commenced with opening remarks from Kedar Lele, CEO and managing director of UBL, and Shoko Ishikawa, country representative of UN Women

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