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IF RIVERS DIE, SO WILL WE

A decade since the landmark HC directives, but nothing seems to stop the throttling of the rivers

TAWFIQUE ALI

What was once considered encroachment has become outright murder. But the seriousness of the crime has done little to deter a carnival of corruption plaguing river management.

Despite an intervention by the High Court, the scenario has hardly changed.

In response to a public interest litigation over the slow death of the river Turag due to massive earth filling, an HC bench in early February this year ruled the waterbody be given the status of a living entity, making it a “legal entity”.

It was part of a 17-point directive by the court, which chalked out clear guidelines for saving the country's rivers and wetlands from grabbing and pollution.

The directives paved the way for treating grabbing and polluting rivers as criminal offences and amending laws to empower the National River Conservation Commission as the legal guardian of all rivers. It also asked that all river grabbers be declared ineligible to contest elections and get bank loans.

The HC verdict came in line with yet another landmark HC judgement in 2009 that contained a nine-point directive for river conservation.

Ten years later, however, most of the directives remain either unimplemented or implemented in a way that not only defeated the purpose of the judgement, but perhaps also harmed the rivers more.

Meanwhile, due to ruthless grabbing and toxic pollution of the four Dhaka rivers, there has been an acute crisis of drinking water in the capital city.

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“Killing a river is virtually a collective suicide of all. Killing a river is killing both the present and the future generations.”

HC IN ITS OBSERVATION ON
FEBRUARY 3, 2019



A large portion of the Shitalakhya river in Majidha Nadirpar near the newly-built Dastagir Bridge is being encroached further in defiance of an HC order and in full view of all river custodians, who remain silent. *Inset*, the Turag river near Abdullahpur bridge is barely visible in the distance. All that can be seen is an encroached part, which somehow survived a BIWTA eviction drive a few months back. The photos were taken recently.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

- Basis of river survey controversial
- 9,577 boundary pillars, mostly in the river, river foreshore lines
- All existing pillars to be discarded
- BIWTA undertakes costly project for setting up new pillars with foreshore lines still undetermined
- Over 200kms of walkways remains unfinished, only 22km paved
- Lists of river Char, foreshore land leaseholders not made public
- No exhaustive lists of river grabbers
- Rivers not yet freed of earth, sand fillings
- Status of rivers remains ecologically critical
- River beds filled with sludge
- Trees yet to be planted
- 1.5km Bukland Bund on Buriganga yet to be freed of occupation

ALLEGATIONS AGAINST JU VC

Protesters give documents to edn ministry

36 univ teachers demand VC's immediate removal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two agitating teachers of Jahangirnagar University last night submitted a six-page written complaint and around 70-page written information about the VC's alleged corruption to the education ministry.

Associate Prof Khandaker Hasan Mahmud of geography and environment said he, along with Prof Tareq Reza of Bangla, handed the documents to Abdul Aleem Khan, personal secretary to the education minister.

The development came a day after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina blasted the campus protesters saying that they would have to face punishment if they failed to prove the graft allegations.

Meanwhile, 36 university teachers in a statement yesterday demanded immediate removal of VC Prof Farzana Islam to

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NEW ROAD LAW IMPLEMENTATION

Transport owners now want a month more

Authorities not doing much to raise awareness

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

When the implementation of the Road Transportation Act, 2018 is already delayed by two weeks due to poor preparations by the authorities, transport owners now want one more month before the law is in full use.

On Thursday, Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association (BRTOA) handed a letter to the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges, requesting it to halt realisation of fines for traffic rules violation for a month.

BRTOA said it needed the time to update vehicle documents.

The law, which has harsher punishment for traffic violations, was supposed to take effect on November 1, but the government delayed the implementation for two weeks due to a lack of preparation from the authorities, including the ministry, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and the police.

Although the government said it delayed the implementation to raise public awareness on the law and its punishment, there has been no significant campaign to this end.

Speaking at a programme on Thursday, Road Transport and Bridge Minister Obaidul Quader said, “Mass campaigns have to be carried out. If we execute the law without raising awareness and taking precautions, it may have a boomerang effect.”

Following student demonstrations for road safety, parliament passed the act in September last year with an aim to bring discipline in the transport sector.

On October 22, the authorities issued a gazette stating that the law would come into effect from November 1, replacing the Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983.

According to the new law, if anybody causes accident by reckless and negligent

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Don't move against peaceful protesters at universities

TIB urges authorities
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh yesterday urged the authorities to refrain from taking measures against students and teachers who were peacefully protesting against the universities' authorities including that of Jahangirnagar University.

The Bangladesh branch of the Berlin-based Transparency International also urged the authorities to ensure proper investigation into the corruption allegations against the universities' authorities.

The call came at TIB's general meeting 2018-19 which was held at TIB's Dhanmondi Office yesterday, according to a

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Cyclone Bulbul hurtles towards southern coast

Likely to make landfall in Sundarbans this evening; today's JSC, JDC exams postponed

STAR REPORT

Cyclone Bulbul is likely to make landfall this evening on the Sundarbans, as it was heading towards the coast yesterday.

It may hit the coast after sunset and pass through the coastal areas in Khulna and West Bengal, said Shamsuddin Ahmed, director of Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

It will then continue to move to the northeast, he said.

The time of landfall depends on whether it will be gaining or losing its velocity, he added.

Weather would remain stormy in different parts of the country throughout the day, he added.

Meanwhile, the authorities postponed the Junior School Certificate and Junior Dakhil Certificate exams scheduled for today.

Today's JSC test would be held on November 12 and JDC on November 14, Ziaul Haque, chairman of Dhaka Education Board, told The Daily Star.

Chattogram port authorities have suspended loading and unloading of

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Sramik League 'in name only'

Say insiders; it picks new leadership today

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Sramik League leaders hardly work to ensure workers' rights. They remain busy joining special day's programmes, lobbying influential people and manipulating tenders, allege activists of the platform.

Workers of different sectors were seen taking to the streets demanding minimum wage, adequate pay and payment of arrears, but Sramik League did not stand beside the workers, they said.

Many leaders of the ruling Awami League's associate body were mired in controversies over illegally using government vehicles, not carrying out duties at their workplaces and forming unit committees in exchange for money.

Top Sramik League leaders claim they have 50 lakh leaders and activists. The organisation has committees at the central, national, district, upazila and union levels.

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Jars and water cans filled with water are being carried by pull carts across Babubazar bridge on the Buriganga river. Hundreds of such jars are brought to the capital from Keraniganj every morning. Even though the source of the water is often questionable, people drink the water ignoring the risks of contracting waterborne diseases. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

MENACE OF AIR POLLUTION

Time to join hands, time to act now

Says Alice G Wells, air quality expert and also US assistt secy at South and Central Asia bureau

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Air pollution is a not a problem of any particular country, it is rather a global issue, said Alice G Wells, US acting assistant secretary at the Bureau of South and Central Asia and also an air quality expert.

“We need to address this as the international community. It is not a Bangladesh problem, it is not a Dhaka problem, it is a global problem and a cross border issue...I think environmental collaboration is needed,” she said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star during her recent three-day visit in Dhaka.

According to the Department of Environment (DoE), the average Air Quality Index (AQI) over 24 hours on November 5 stood at 264 in Dhaka, at 180 in Savar, and at 268 in Narayanganj.

According to the AQI, a score between 0-50 is good, 51-100 is moderate, 101-150 is cautionary, 151-200 is unhealthy, 201-300 is very unhealthy, and 300-500 is extremely unhealthy.

Dhaka's air remained unsuitable for breathing for more than half of last year. The air quality remained “very unhealthy” and “extremely unhealthy” for 197 days, according to AQI data, monitored by the DoE under its Clean Air and Sustainable Environment project.

The duration of the presence of “unhealthy” air is increasing every day, the data showed.

Alice gave the example of how fuel is being burned in both India and Pakistan. She said intervention in one side will not bring any result and that a cross-border effort was

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