

SOLVING DHAKA'S WATERLOGGING WOES

Two city corporations chalk out priorities

HELEMUL ALAM

The two city corporations of Dhaka have drawn up immediate and long-term plans to solve the perennial waterlogging problem in the capital, but recovering canals from encroachers and making them functional remain key challenges.

Officials said the city corporations have already started removing tonnes of waste from the canals, box culverts, and drains as part of their immediate plans, since the rainy season is just a few months away.

They also started taking stock of the pumps installed at different points of the city to pump out rainwater.

Officials said they have started demarcating the canals in their respective jurisdiction as part of the long-term plans. Once the demarcation is completed, they will recover canals from the encroachers and proceed to plant trees, construct walkways, and bicycle lanes on the banks of the canals.

The two city corporations -- Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) -- took responsibility of Dhaka's drainage system and canal management from Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority

(Wasa) on December 31 last year.

On that day, Dhaka Wasa handed over its drainage division, including its workforce and equipment, to the two city corporations. During its time, Wasa was responsible for maintaining 26 canals spanning over 84.5 kilometres, 10 box culverts of around 10km length, and 385km of storm water drainage lines.

The city corporations, on the other hand, managed 2,200km of pipe and surface drains.

But as the shared responsibilities did not work in solving waterlogging, the mayors of the two city corporations blamed it on Dhaka Wasa and wanted to take responsibility of the total drainage system last year.

They said as public representatives, they often face the wrath of the residents for waterlogging, so it makes sense that they manage the whole system.

DNCC now has 29 canals (29.88km long), 180 km long storm sewerage line, 2.3km box culvert, 1.4km long U-type channel, and two pump stations at Kalyanpur and Ramchandrapur under its jurisdiction, according to officials.

DSCC, on the other hand, has 11 canals and other drainage systems.



This canal in Jatrabari's Kajla has been in this shambolic state for a long time. Even though DSCC has launched a cleaning and eviction drive here, the sheer size of the canal and the amount of waste dumped in it is delaying completion of the works. This photo was taken on March 1.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

The government has also decided to hand over 13 more canals to two city corporations, which are under the management of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) and Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakha

(Rajuk).

"We've found 39 canals in Dhaka and asked the DC office of Dhaka to submit an area list of the canals to the city corporations in phases," LGRD Minister Md Tazul Islam told reporters on January 24.

RECOVERING CANALS TOP PRIORITY: TAPOSH

DSCC mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh said although recovering the canals from encroachers is their top priority, DSCC is giving equal importance to removing garbage from the canals and box culverts before the arrival of the rainy season.

"We have already submitted a project proposal to develop four canals to the LGRD ministry. We will start work after getting necessary approvals," Taposh told The Daily Star recently.

He said the 11 canals under DSCC areas cannot flush rainwater properly as encroachers keep them choked at different points.

"We will start with developing four canals -- Manda, Kalunagar, Jirani and Syampur -- under our long-term plan. These canals play a vital role in carrying rainwater in DSCC's area. Gradually we will bring other canals under the project." SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

'Child marriage reached unacceptable levels during the pandemic'

Says MJF Executive Director Shaheen Anam

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although the government is committed to stopping child marriage, during the Covid-19 period, when so many of the support systems were not working, number of child marriages increased at unacceptable levels, said Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) Executive Director Shaheen Anam, after findings of a study was revealed yesterday.

A quick assessment report of Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF) yesterday revealed that at least 13,886 girls from 84 upazilas of 21 districts were forced into child marriages from April to October last year, 48 percent of whom were aged between 13 and 15 years.

The findings of the report titled "Rapid Analysis of Child Marriage Situation during Covid-19" was shared at an MJF-organised webinar presided over by Shaheen Anam. MJF conducted the report in association with UNFPA, Unicef and Plan International Bangladesh.

Citing last year's Unicef report, Plan International Bangladesh Country Director Orla Murphy said, "Bangladesh is home to 38 million child brides, including currently married girls along with women who were first married in childhood. Of these, 13 million married before age 15. Nearly five in 10 child brides gave birth before age 18, and eight in 10 gave birth before age 20. Married girls are over four times more likely to be out of school than unmarried girls."

Meeting SDG targets by 2030 and the national target by 2041 is going to be a real challenge for us as a country, she added.

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Citizen participation is a must to deliver SDG-related services

Speakers say at Oxfam-CPD conference

STAR REPORT

Fatema Begum leads a community-based organisation (CBO) called Karnafuli in Sandwip island of Chattogram district. Her organisation works to ensure smooth and transparent delivery of citizen services from government offices and local government organisations.

Thanks to her efforts and relentless advocacy, 185 sanitary latrines, five culverts, five kilometres of road and 10 deep tube wells have been established in her neighbourhood since 2018.

Last year during the pandemic, she ensured that government's emergency incentive package for marginalised people are disbursed smoothly and transparently.

Furthermore, she has arranged special incentive for marginalised women farmers from the local agricultural and fisheries office and loans for the affected farmers and small businessmen from local banks at only four to five percent interest.

In another part of the country, Farida Yasmin, leader of a similar organisation in Nilphamari's Dimla upazila has also brought about significant positive changes in delivering government services to the poor and marginalised people, particularly in isolated char areas.

She has formed 44 social organisations in five unions of Dimla upazila which are mostly led by women who work with the local government and upazila administration to ensure smooth delivery of citizen services.

According to Farida, thanks to these organisations, inhabitants of ten unions of Dimla upazila have been getting Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) allowances, maternity allowance, disability allowance, and pandemic incentive regularly and without any hassle.

Success stories of such CBOs which have been working to ensure smooth delivery of SDG related services in the grassroots level were shared yesterday in a daylong conference titled "Democratic Governance and Local Development: Experience from Grassroots Citizens Organisations," jointly organised by Oxfam and Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and funded by European Union (EU).

There are 350 CBOs in 13 upazilas of 13 disaster-prone districts under the project titled "Enhancing Participation of CBOs and Civil Society Organisations in Democratic Governance in Bangladesh" jointly implemented by Oxfam and CPD and funded by EU.

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Bangladesh, Australia look to strengthen ties

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

In a shift from aid to trade relations, Bangladesh and Australia want to deepen and widen their economic cooperation, as Bangladesh graduates from LDC status by 2024.

The two countries also look forward to ensure security, openness, and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and closer collaboration to address common challenges and opportunities in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean regions, as well as sustainable solution to the Rohingya crisis.

The consensus came at the fourth foreign office consultation (FOC) between the two countries, held virtually.

Khondker M Talha, director general for East Asia and Pacific at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led Bangladesh's side, while Gary Cowan, first assistant secretary of North and South Asia Division at the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, headed the Australian side.

Bangladesh High Commissioner in Canberra Sufur Rahman and Australian High Commissioner in Dhaka Jeremy Bruer also participated in the talks.

At the session, both parties stressed on greater engagement in agriculture, water resource management, power, energy and mineral resources, trade, investment, ICT, defense, and blue economy.

Currently, bilateral trade between the two countries is about \$2 billion.

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SAGAR-RUNI MURDER CASE

Probe report delayed for the 79th time

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again asked Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) to submit by April 21 the probe report of a case filed over the murders of journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Meherun Runi.

With yesterday's date, the investigation officer has so far taken 79 dates to complete the investigation.

Metropolitan Magistrate Rajesh Chowdhury passed the order after Rab's additional superintendent Khondker Shafiqul Alam, also the case's investigation officer, failed to submit the report yesterday.

Sagar -- news editor at private TV channel Maasranga -- and Runi -- a senior reporter at ATN Bangla -- were killed on February 11, 2012 at their flat in the capital.

After Sher-e-Bangla Nagar police and the Detective Branch of police, Rab was tasked with the probe on April 18, 2012.

ARMS CASE

Charges framed against DGHS driver Malek

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka tribunal yesterday framed charges against Abdul Malek, a driver of the Directorate General of Health Service (DGHS), in a case filed over possessing an illegal firearm and ammunition in September last year.

Malek, now in jail, pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after KM Emrul Kayesh of the Special Tribunal-1 of Dhaka read out the charges to him.

Earlier in the day, the judge rejected a petition submitted for discharging him from the case. The tribunal then set April 5 for starting the trial. The judge also rejected a bail petition submitted on behalf of the accused.

On January 10, Sub-inspector of Turag Police Station Md Rubel Sheikh, also the case's investigation officer, submitted the charge sheet against Malek to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka. It showed 11 people as prosecution witnesses.

On information that Malek was staying in Kamarpara area under Turag Police Station in Dhaka, a team of Rab conducted a drive there on September 20 last year and arrested him along with a foreign-made pistol, a magazine, five rounds of bullets, Tk 1.5 lakh fake currency, a laptop and a mobile phone.

Malek possessed more than Tk 100 crore in wealth, Rab claimed. Rab primarily assumed that Malek accumulated wealth by maintaining good relations with DGHS's high-ranking officials.

Later, two cases -- one for possessing arms and ammunition and the other for possessing fake currencies -- were filed against him with Turag Police Station.

It's sensitive

DNC's proposal to buy mobile trackers denied by govt

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

The government has turned down the proposal of buying mobile trackers for the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC).

DNC placed the proposal before a virtual meeting of the National Narcotics Control Advisory Committee on December 28 last year with an explanation that they need to buy mobile trackers to monitor and trace location of narcotics rings and masterminds.

The committee president -- Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal -- had said mobile tracking is a "sensitive issue", and it will not be right to buy mobile trackers right now.

In exchange for it, the committee suggested to

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MINI BYTES

Twitter is changing itself with new products in pipeline

ZARIF FAIAZ

For years, Twitter has dominated the social media sphere with little to no product variation or change in the way the platform worked. And for years, the strategy seemed to have worked. But recently, Twitter is signaling major changes in its product lines with introduction of new products and acquisitions in a move to take on budding competitors like Clubhouse, Snapchat and so on.

Twitter's major shift in its product lines was hinted with the introduction of Twitter Fleets last year -- a feature that resembles Snap, Instagram and Facebook stories. In recent months, Twitter has rolled out an audio chat service called Twitter Spaces; unveiled plans for a newsletter product, and announced a new feature called Super Follows, which will let people subscribe to special content.

All these new changes are somewhat revolutionary for Twitter, because for so long, Twitter has remained pretty much unchanged in the way they conducted their business. And now, it is moving forward in a rush.

Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey recently shared in an event that the reason Twitter was moving forward at this pace all of a sudden is because he believes Twitter has a few weaknesses that makes investors and analysts not trust the platform as much as it's other Silicon Valley counterparts. According to Jack, Twitter is slow and not innovative, and to reach his ambitious goal of expansion by the end of 2023, Twitter needs to change.

All these boils down to one burning question: what is Twitter going to look



like in the near future? Analysts and experts believe -- endorsed by Twitter spokespersons -- that 'tweets' will remain the heart of Twitter. But the platform wants to attract new users, new generation of users even and it has to head-to-head with its young competitors like TikTok, Snapchat and Clubhouse in order to do that.

Currently, Twitter has 192 million daily active users. The platform falls behind Snapchat -- with 265 million daily active users -- and is threatened by the quick rise of TikTok and very recently, Clubhouse which have around 50 million and 10 million daily active US users, respectively.

Jack Dorsey shared that over the next three years, Twitter wants to increase its number of daily users to at least 315 million and in order to do that, there's no other way but to innovate and reinvent its product line.

It's safe to assume that starting now, Twitter will only keep moving forward at this pace as Twitter's Head of Consumer Product, Kayvon Beykpour recently shared with The Verge, "People should look out for us to keep moving quickly, keep trying things."



Construction of stalls and pavilions is in full swing at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan, ahead of Ekushey book fair. From March 18, this open field will be full of avid readers zigzagging across all the stalls around them and contemplating which books to buy. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN