



Some areas remained waterlogged even two days after the downpour on Thursday night. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Why must Dhaka drown after heavy rain?

City authorities must take effective steps to end waterlogging



A CLOSER LOOK

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TASNEEM TAYEB

While Dhaka was being lashed by a rainstorm on the evening of September 21, a tragedy unfolded near Dhaka Commerce College in Mirpur as four lives, including three of a family, were lost to electrocution amidst waterlogging.

Street vendor Mizanur Rahman (32) was trying to cross an inundated road – as an immediate result of the 134mm rainfall the capital endured since the evening on Thursday – with his seven-month-old son Hossain in his arms, along with his wife Mukta Begum (22), and seven-year-old daughter Lima. They were returning to their home in a slum near Botanical Garden from Mukta's parental home in Jhilpar slum. Lightning struck, leading to an electric wire falling into the water, which resulted in the electrocution of the family. A 20-year-old autorickshaw driver, Anik, was the only person who dared to go to the rescue of the family. As Anik pushed baby Hossain from the arms of his electrocuted father, he too lost his life. Later, videos on social media surfaced showing how a handful of bystanders were trying to get the lifeless bodies out of the water using gamcha and sticks.

The downpour resulted in unspeakable suffering for city dwellers, including severe waterlogging in many areas in New Market, Mirpur, Dakshinkhan, Khilkhet, Ashkona, Bangshal, Jurain, and Matuail, among others. While the city corporations did try to remove water from many of the worst affected areas, the inefficient drainage system made it difficult to do so. Some areas remained waterlogged even two days after the downpour, such as Jurain, Shyampur, Abdullahpur, Dakshinkhan, Utar Khan, Ashkona.

The tragedy of the family-of-four on Thursday night has once again brought to fore the never-ending failure of the city's drainage system. From unplanned and environmentally-hostile urbanisation to random digging of the roads by various authorities and the drains being clogged due to irresponsible waste disposal, there are multiple factors contributing to our persistent waterlogging woes.

First of all, while we are surrounding the city with high-rise buildings – both commercial and residential – we are doing little to also build the capacity of the drainage system to bear this added load. In the pursuit of urbanising Dhaka, we have encroached upon ponds, lakes, and canals, blocking the channels that are critical for effective natural drainage of water, including by government bodies themselves, resulting in rapid loss of natural drainage mechanisms. Take, for instance, the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), which earlier filled about 11 acres of a 53-acre water retention area in Gabtoli's

Goidartek for the establishment of a four-storey building to be used as a tissue culture laboratory. Then, in 2021, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) took initiatives to build eco parks and other permanent structures by filling up the Turag River. The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) last year filled up a water retention pond in Ashkona for a housing project for its employees and officials. All this, unfortunately, is only the tip of the iceberg.

According to Fire Service and Civil Defence data, of the 100 ponds recorded in Dhaka in 2018, at least 71 have been filled up over the last five years. And, according to a survey report by the Institute of Water

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Modelling, wetlands, canals, and lowlands covering more than 10,000 hectares in Dhaka have been choked since 1985.

Both the DNCC and DSCC mayors in January 2021, after being handed over the responsibility for the drainage system from Dhaka Wasa, committed that the lost water bodies would be reclaimed. But little visible progress has been made so far. At that time, the DSCC went so far as to suggest that the Shyampur, Manda, Kalunagar, and Jirni canals along with Panthapath and Shegunbagicha box culverts would be reclaimed and developed so that, by March that year, the locals would get respite from waterlogging. Unfortunately, due to bureaucratic red tape, funds for the project, titled "Canal Restoration, Renovation and Aesthetic Environment Creation Project," could not be cleared for months and months. And even since the funds were allocated, no visible and effective progress has been made in the project so far.

The second major problem contributing to the capital's waterlogging woes is the poorly managed drainage system that gives up in the face of slight downpours. A

lot of it certainly has to do with our ill-managed waste disposal system. Despite the 2002 ban on the use of polythene bags, they are still in use and often end up in the drains, canals, and other water bodies, thus clogging the waterways. This is the result of a two-pronged problem: 1) the lack of enforcement of the plastic ban; and 2) the disorganised and insufficient waste management system across the country, not just in Dhaka.

A study titled "Solid Waste Management in Dhaka City" by Nature Study Society of Bangladesh suggests that about 5,000 tonnes of waste is generated in Dhaka every day, of which only about half is collected and disposed of in an organised manner. Although the blame is often put on the people, in a city where there is an acute lack of waste disposal bins (let alone segregated bins), it is a challenge for even those with good intentions to practise responsible waste disposal. The onus is on the city corporations to make sure that there are sufficient services and mechanisms in place for people to discard waste responsibly.

Even when it comes to waste collection by the municipality, while recyclable waste (such as e-waste, recyclable fabric, and plastic waste) is collected and sold to actors in the recycling industry, the waste that cannot be recycled (including single-use plastic products such as one-time utensils, straws, etc) is dumped haphazardly in random places.

These wastes – biodegradable, non-biodegradable, chemical, electronic, and recyclable – often end up jumbled together in the wrong places, including in canals, lakes, ponds, drains, and openings of drains, such that water cannot pass through them. Even the investment of around Tk 1,300 crore by the two city corporations between 2016 and 2020 to declutter canals, drains, box culverts, and remove accumulated waste have not made any impact because, after the clean-up, irresponsibly dumped waste smotherers these openings anew.

The two city corporations in the capital do sound sincere when they say they are working relentlessly to recover the canals and ponds, or developing a drainage system to eliminate the problem of waterlogging. Still, their efforts are not resulting in any positive, demonstrable changes in the situation. While more than Tk 3,000 crore has been spent to combat waterlogging in Dhaka – by Dhaka Wasa and the city corporations in the last 12 years – these investments have yielded almost no results.

In response to the paralysis of the city due to Thursday's rain, both the city corporations are only sharing laundry lists of the work that they have apparently done. But all this shows is that whatever the city corporations are doing is simply not working. They must revisit their plans and see where they are going wrong with these investments, or evaluate if their strategy is even relevant in the first place. Baby Hossain was saved this time around. But there are more children out there who are at the risk of losing their lives due to our ineffective drainage system. No one should have to die due to the failures – if not apathy – of the authorities.

Sustainable tourism need not be an oxymoron



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MOHAMMAD SHAHIDUL ISLAM

The tourism industry in Bangladesh always has to tread on a tightrope, balancing economic development and environmental preservation. On this World Tourism Day, the country is standing on untapped opportunities that would allow the sector to flourish. For the nation to act as a model for other countries, it must figure out a more efficient way to prioritise protecting nature without sacrificing economic growth.

Although Bangladesh's tourism sector is still in its infancy, accounting for slightly more than three percent of the country's GDP in 2023, it possesses an incredible amount of untapped potential. The Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, and the never-ending coastline of Cox's Bazar are only two examples of the country's natural beauty. However, there are issues with the sector as a whole, particularly concerning the

and building supplies sourced from the immediate area to reduce negative environmental impacts. Investing in waste management and water purification technologies is another way to mitigate harm.

Costa Rica is an excellent model for understanding how to practise ecotourism. The Central American nation has invested a lot to preserve natural resources, eliminate waste, and promote eco-friendly projects. As a result, Costa Rica has become a leader in sustainable tourism on a global scale and has garnered the attention of millions of eco-conscious travellers. Bangladesh can learn much from the country, like how successful government incentives can support environment-friendly development.

Initiatives mindful of the environment can bring significant benefits in Bangladesh's tourism sector. Solar-powered lodges with

to support the change toward greener practices. This would serve as an incentive for companies to make this shift. Businesses that go out of their way to implement eco-friendly policies ought to be rewarded with tax rebates, subsidies, and loans with significantly reduced interest rates. Any initiative, including sustainable tourism, must be co-created and co-managed by the people living

Cox's Bazar is in jeopardy due to the coastline's catastrophic erosion, brought on by climate change, while illegal logging and pollution are slowly choking the Sundarbans. Despite the Sundarbans being designated a Unesco World Heritage Site, it is still struggling. These issues highlight why the tourism industry needs to make strides toward improving its environmental sustainability.



Bangladesh must figure out a more efficient way to prioritise protecting nature without sacrificing economic growth. FILE PHOTO: STAR

environmental damage it causes.

For instance, Cox's Bazar is in jeopardy due to the coastline's catastrophic erosion, brought on by climate change, while illegal logging and pollution are slowly choking the Sundarbans. Despite the Sundarbans being designated a Unesco World Heritage Site, it is still struggling. These issues highlight why the tourism industry needs to make strides toward improving its environmental sustainability.

Corporations investing in projects that benefit the environment should be more than a passing trend or demonstration of a company's commitment to social responsibilities. This is a practice that attempts to protect the environment and simultaneously ensure the firm's profitability, a delicate balance. Such expenditures may take on a few different forms in the tourism business. For example, eco-friendly hotels typically use renewable energy

rainwater collection systems could be an eco-friendly and a financially advantageous accommodation choice in the hospitality industry. Guests will have the opportunity to have a genuine, environmentally conscientious experience if investments are made in cultural centres and eco-lodges, which might leverage the region's diversity and natural beauty. Bangladesh, often known as the "land of rivers," can capitalise on the expanding water tourism business by offering tours in boats powered by solar energy.

The tourism industry is in desperate need of a clearly defined regulatory system that considers environmental standards; for instance, certain environmental criteria should be in place to issue business licences and monitor operations. A national eco-certification programme should be implemented for businesses that fulfil specified sustainability requirements

in the area to save the natural environment and local culture. Creating cooperative partnerships with global organisations like the World Tourism Organization to share information and combine resources should be considered. And awareness programmes that instruct tourists and residents on the significance of environmental stewardship must be developed.

As Bangladesh increasingly becomes a popular tourist destination worldwide, the country's government must work to guarantee that economic growth is not unsustainable. Investments in green technology may help the nation become a pioneer in sustainable tourism, and at the same time, will ensure that benefits are not only monetary in nature but also environmental. Let us celebrate the optimism for a brighter tomorrow in Bangladesh and for all of humanity on this World Tourism Day.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Soak

6 Catchers' needs

11 Clear sky

12 Improvised

13 Gladiator's spot

14 New Hampshire city

15 — Mahal

16 Give the oath of office to

18 Lucy of "Kill Bill"

19 Dawn goddess

20 Fall mo.

21 Cuts off

23 Drug bust units

25 Musician's job

27 "My country - of thee"

28 Stylishly quaint

30 Engrave

33 Possesses

34 Summer mo.

36 Period of history

37 Hawks' home

39 Baseball score

40 Bee attack

41 Ferber book

43 Critical asset

44 Full moon, for one

45 Door sign

46 More tender

DOWN

1 John or Paul

2 Transport for Ellington

3 John Grisham novel

4 Egg layer

5 Wipe off

6 Succeeds

7 Creative germ

8 John Grisham novel

9 Invigorating drinks

10 Fragrance

17 Stir-fry pan

22 Plop down

24 Tell tales

26 Friend of Potter and Weasley

28 Wicker material

29 Unconscious

31 Liner trip

32 Closet item

33 Briskness

35 Shocked sounds

38 Price to play

42 Cry of discovery

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MONDAY'S ANSWERS

L	U	N	G		S	W	E	E	T
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