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Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus placed a wreath at the National Memorial in Savar, honouring the martyrs of the 1971 Liberation War, marking Victory Day yesterday. People from all walks of life, and various political parties and organisations, including BNP, paid their tributes. The Anti-Discrimination Student Movement brought out a procession in Dhaka University area, while Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami staged a rally at the capital's Nayapaltn.



PHOTO: PID, RASHED SHUMON, PRABIR DAS AND PALASH KHAN



51,000 hajj slots remain vacant amid high reg costs

RASHIDUL HASAN

Around 51,000 hajj quotas remained unfulfilled as the deadline for hajj registration for next year ended on Sunday.

Only 4,800 intended pilgrims completed their bank payments under the government hajj management, while 71,800 registered under private hajj management by the December 15 deadline, sources at the Hajj Office at Ashkona Hajj Camp told The Daily Star yesterday.

As per the agreement between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia, 1.27 lakh Bangladeshis can perform hajj in 2025 - 10,000 under government management and the rest through private agencies.

Due to poor response, the government extended the registration deadline three times since November.

Amid this situation, Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB), a platform of around 1,500 private hajj agencies, expressed frustration as a huge number of quotas remain unfulfilled, causing significant loss in their business.

Officials of different hajj agencies said people are not showing interest in completing hajj registration due to various reasons, including the high cost of hajj packages.

Under private management, a Bangladeshi pilgrim must pay Tk 5,23,000 for the general package and Tk 7 lakh for the special package. The government's packages start at Tk 4.78 lakh, with an optional second package costing Tk 5.75 lakh.

Compared to last year, the costs of these packages have decreased by Tk 1 lakh and Tk 11,710 respectively.

However, HAAB leaders said the food cost - Tk 40,000 - was not included in the government hajj package.

HAAB General Secretary Farid Ahmed Mojumdar said, "Most hajj pilgrims are elderly. This year, accommodations are three kilometres from the Haram Sharif, making it challenging for them."

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Once the lifelines of Dhaka, the city's canals are now mere shadows of their former selves - clogged with pollution, suffocated by encroachment, and neglected due to flawed urban planning. In this seven-part series, The Daily Star explores the current condition of the capital's canals, botched restoration attempts, and how the sorry state of these waterways is exacerbating the city's waterlogging woes. Together, these stories reveal what it will take to bring Dhaka's dying canals back to life. Here is the sixth part of the series:

DHAKA'S LOST CANALS

Once flowing, now forgotten

HELEMUL ALAM

At first glance, Dayaganj in the old part of Dhaka appears to be a typical city street scene.

Beneath a railway bridge, cars and rickshaws jostle for space, and vendors ply their wares.

Yet, underneath the road lies a forgotten history.

In the 1970s, this very spot was home to a thriving canal. Boats laden with goods would glide under the bridge. A nearby ghat was alive with all sorts of activities during peak hours.

Noor Jahan, an elderly resident of Gandaria, recalled those days with nostalgia.

"It was a huge canal even in the 70s," she said. "There was a ghat near the Dayaganj Noor Mosque where many boats would unload goods. By the mid-80s, the boats disappeared, and the canal was transformed into a box culvert."

Nazrul Islam, another long-time resident of Gandaria, reminisced about his childhood by the canal. "The water was fresh, and people caught fish there. We would even jump from the bridge into the canal," he said.

But this once-vibrant waterway, like so many others in Dhaka, has succumbed to encroachment, neglect, and urbanisation.



Rickshaws jostle with cars beneath a railway bridge while pedestrians make their way to their destinations. Once, a thriving canal flowed beneath this road, with boats loaded with goods docking at a nearby ghat. By the mid-1980s, the canal was transformed into a box culvert and is now buried underground.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

COUNT OF LOST CANALS

Dhaka was once a city intertwined with water. According to a 2022 study by the River and Delta Research Centre (RDRC), there were 175 canals, lakes, and channels crisscrossing the city.

Over the past 80 years, 80 of these have disappeared entirely, while 15 have been

significantly reduced.

The culprits: rampant encroachment, urban sprawl, and a lack of maintenance by the authorities concerned.

The study compared historical cadastral survey (CS) maps from 1880-1940 with modern satellite imagery. The findings were stark: Dhaka had approximately 326 kilometres of watercourses during the CS period. By 2022, this figure had dwindled to 206 kilometres. The canals' combined water area had shrunk by over 300 hectares.

The average width of the canals today is 21 metres. However, these figures from the CS were measured during the dry season, ignoring the full extent of the canals during wetter months.

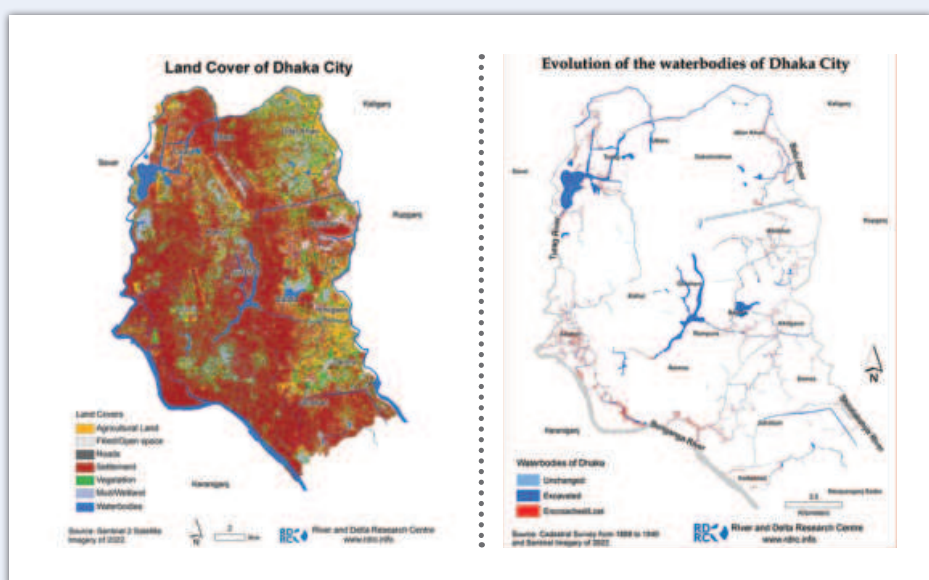
DHAKA WASA'S FAILURES

Since 1988, the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has been responsible for maintaining 26 canals spanning 84.5 kilometres, along with 385 kilometres of stormwater drains and 10 kilometres of box culverts.

However, Wasa has struggled to protect these canals from encroachment and pollution.

Currently, only 24 of the 26 Wasa-

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Accountable
govt can
safeguard
people's power
Says Tarique Rahman

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Acting
Chairman
Tarique
Rahman



yesterday said an accountable government and a functional parliament can safeguard the political power of the people.

"We must harness this unity to build a Bangladesh free from discrimination and division. We must remember that without empowering the people, national unity cannot be strong or sustainable," he said in a post on his verified Facebook page.

The BNP leader said a parliament composed of elected representatives, committed to reflecting the aspirations of the people through a public mandate, serves as the cornerstone of democratic governance in both the state and society.

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JULY UPRISING
It's an 'unfinished
revolution'
Says Farhad Mazhar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Poet and writer Farhad Mazhar has termed the July uprising an "unfinished revolution" and called for continued intellectual and cultural struggle to achieve ultimate victory.

Speaking at a solo lecture organised by Bangla Academy yesterday to mark National Victory Day, Farhad Mazhar said the pro-uprising people must unite against the binary political discourse between secularism and religion, which, he claimed, emerged after Bangladesh's independence in 1971.

He argued that the July uprising has created the "people's will" necessary for nation-building, but criticised the uprising's leaders for taking an oath under what he described as "Sheikh Hasina's fascist constitution."

Mazhar traced the region's ideological struggles to 1857, linking them to the independence movements of 1947, the Language Movement, and the Liberation War of 1971.

However, he said the post-independence division between secularism and religion hindered progress.

Farhad Mazhar urged people to unite against the binary political mindset between secularism and religion to get rid of "religious fascism."

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July uprising reclaims
1971 spirit from
Awami monopoly
Say students; Nahid states
people now enjoy victory free
from fascism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The July uprising has made the 1971 Liberation War universal by freeing it from the partisan narrative of the "Awami fascist forces" that tarnished and monopolised the country's independence struggle, said leaders of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement yesterday.

The spirit of 1971 now belongs to everyone - it is not the property of any single party, they added.

They made the remarks during a brief rally held at the Central Shaheed Minar following their "Victory Procession" marking Victory Day.

They brought out the procession around 12:00pm from the Central Shaheed Minar, which marched through Shahbagh and the Supreme Court area before ending at the Shaheed Minar at 1:45pm.

Speaking at the rally, Arif Sohel, member secretary

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We almost
always try to
distort history

Says Kader Siddique

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Savar

People in Bangladesh almost always try to distort history, and those who remain in power want to portray themselves as great heroes of history, said Krishak Samik Janata League President Abdul Kader Siddique yesterday.

He came up with the remark after paying tribute to the brave martyrs at the National Memorial in Savar on the occasion of Victory Day.

"We almost always try to

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