

# Cordon approach to water management less effective: Experts

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ENVIRONMENT - BANGLADESH

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## TBS REPORT

The cordon approach – such as embankments, floodwalls, channelisation, and canalisation – that imposed on Bangladesh about seven decades ago primarily by external aid agencies for water management here has failed to serve its intended purposes and, instead, posed various threats to the environment and ecology of the cordoned areas, experts said at a webinar Thursday.

What is more, regional and global threats to Bangladesh's rivers have made the situation worse, they added.

S Nazrul Islam, chief of the development research branch of the United Nations Department of Economic And Social Affairs, who presented the keynote at the seminar styled “Water Development in Bangladesh: Past Present and Future,” termed the cordon approach as a “suicidal process”.

He observed this method gradually destroys tidal plains, water bodies, soil quality, flora, and

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# Cordon approach to water

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fauna as well as may lead to waterlogging, river bed aggradation, and bank erosion. Subsequently, the land goes underwater and salinity rises on the coast.

He also argued that the adoption of the open approach may provide a way out of this predicament. Besides, ecological and open approaches can also mitigate the five dimensions of climate effect – submergence, salinity intrusion, destabilisation of rivers, increase in extreme weather events, and increased risk of diseases, Nazrul said.

But, at the same time, he said a lack of required knowledge and material interests are the major obstacles to introducing the open approach.

Both these deficits need to be overcome to put Bangladesh on a path towards an effective, pro-people, and sustainable water development, he continued.

Nazrul Islam also expressed concerns over the Bangladesh Delta Plan and termed it as a “problematic conception”.

He said it has the uncritical acceptance of implementing agencies’ review of the past water development

projects of Bangladesh and uncritical acceptance of the relevance of the Dutch model of delta management for Bangladesh (Bengal Delta) as well as lack of adequate attention to trans-boundary river experiences.

Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning, however, opposed Nazrul in terms of the cordon approach. “The approach has some demerits but we cannot stop it,” he said, adding there are still some areas that need such an approach. The adoption of this strategy has helped grain production and productivity to rise manifolds in different areas across the country.