

## Ferry suspension makes Kalurghat Bridge risky

Heavy vehicles ignore rules

DWAIPAYAN BARUA

The age-old Kalurghat Bridge, only after seven months of its renovation, has become risky as heavily loaded vehicles are crossing the bridge disregarding the weight limit.

The heavy vehicles use the bridge as the ferry service on the river Karnaphuli at Kalurghat point has not been operating for more than four months.

Movement on the bridge was suspended on August 10 in 2004 as the bridge became risky due to multiple cracks in the pillars, track plates, packing plates, fishplates and side channels, sources said.

Roads and Highways (R & H) Department launched the ferry service as an alternative means for the period of Kalurghat Bridge renovation work.

The renovation work, under the authority of Bangladesh Railway, took around 11 months at a cost of Tk 10 crore. The bridge was opened to traffic on June 22 last year. The ferry service, however, continued to operate with a view to preventing movement of heavy vehicles on the bridge.

Vehicles weighing over 10 tonnes are prohibited on Kalurghat Bridge due to its structural incapability. But within four months of its reopening, the ferry service was closed down abruptly on October 16. As a result, heavy vehicles beyond capacity of 10 tonnes are now plying through the bridge.

Jashim, a leaser of ferry ghat, said they are not operating the ghat as the one-year contract between the leaser Abdus Salam Enterprise and Roads & Highways (R & H) expired on October 3 last year.

Md Ishaq, Sub Divisional Engineer of R & H, Chittagong Sub-Division, said they cancelled the lease of the Abdus Salam Enterprise and took responsibility of the ferry on September 26 following its failure to pay the 4th installment.

But, the ferry service under R & H has proved to be a losing concern and the authorities closed it down after just 20 days.

The R & H earned only Tk 2,500 a day from the service whereas the lease organisation used to pay them Tk 68,000 a day, sources said.

"The heavy vehicles started using the bridge instead of the ferry as soon as it was opened to traffic because of high charges by the leasers," said an R & H official.

The railway fixed Tk 30 as charge for each loaded truck or bus on the bridge while Tk it is 170 in the ferry. This huge difference might have prompted the owners to use the bridge, he

**Vehicles weighing over 10 tonnes are prohibited on Kalurghat Bridge due to its structural incapability. But within four months of its reopening, the ferry service was closed down abruptly on October 16**

said. "Though it was costly for us to run the ferry we were determined to continue the service. But we had to stop it following suspension of oil supply for the ferry as we were unable to pay the price for oil", Ishaq said. Besides, "We don't have any allocation from government in this regard," he added.

Firoze Iqbal, executive engineer of the R & H, said we requested the government for more allocation for oil and it is under process.

Transportation of heavily loaded vehicles to and from Chittagong and southern Chittagong districts depend entirely on the ferry service at two points-- Firingibazaar Bridge ghat and Kalurghat Bridge.

Movement of heavy vehicles on the Shah Amanat Bridge is also prohibited due to its poor condition.

The ferry service at the Firingibazaar Bridgeghata point was also remained suspended for seven days this month. It caused serious disruption in transporting goods and raw materials to Bandarban, Cox's Bazar and

Tekhnaf from rest of the country.

Nasir, a truck driver, said at least 1000 heavy vehicles like truck, buses or covered van, used the two points.

Now most of the vehicles use the Kalurghat Bridge, he said. Akbar, a truck driver from North Bengal, said he preferred the Kalurghat Bridge as the Shah Amanat Bridge is not in good condition and only one ferry operates at the Firingibazaar point for only six hours a day.

A number of people, including schoolchildren, were found crossing the narrow bridge on foot taking risk.

Schoolgirl Nasima, who crosses the bridge on foot on her way to school, said when a vehicle comes nearer to her on the bridge she clenches the railing. The bridge starts trembling while the vehicles cross it, she said.

Billah, guard of the bridge, said nobody cares when we forbid the people to cross the bridge on foot.



The injured garments workers at a hospital in the port city.

## Nightmarish to forever haunt survivors

Relatives of RMG Factory inferno victims still gather at hospitals in search of their dear ones

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The few hours of the RMG factory inferno of February 23 night will forever haunt the survivors and the relatives of the victims.

The survivors are among the fortunate few, who will not forget for a moment the nightmarish experience of the worst-ever RMG industrial fire that roasted 55 workers alive so far and injured hundreds more at KTS Composite Textile Mill at the Kalurghat BSCIC Industrial Area under Chandgaon Police Station.

The relatives of the missing workers still gather everyday at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) and the burned factory area in search of their dear ones.

A tired Omar Faruq was taking rest after four days of searching his younger brother Omar Chisty, 20, a cutting assistant of the factory, who has been missing since the deadly night.

He said he is yet to find his

brother dead or alive, neither in the CMCH wards or in the morgue.

Hosne Ara, a poor mother standing in front of the factory gate carrying a scurf of her missing daughter Milu Akhter in hand, said Milu was suffering from fever on that morning and was reluctant to go to the mill.

"Milu told me at 7.30am when we met for the last time before going to the factory that she would somehow manage a leave from the KTS bosses and return home early, but she didn't," Hosne Ara recalled the memories in tears.

"I just want to know about her fate," the helpless mother said.

A couple, Selim and Momtaj, who were working in the sewing section on the third floor of the mill, said we first went to the staircase when the fire broke out but could not get out of it due to the dark and hot smoke blowing out from the downstairs.

"The other workers broke a window through which I came down with the help of a scurf to

the second floor and found a bamboo fixed by the local people to rescue us," said Momtaj.

My husband also managed to come down in similar way, she added.

Selim, however, said there were about 500 workers on the third floor when the fire broke out.

Ayesha Begum, 18, also a survivor working as a helper at the same floor in sewing section, said she joined the work on Thursday after four days of leave. She said she jumped from the second floor after coming down there with a rope through a window of the third floor.

"I don't know how could I do that daring act," she said.

Ayesha just got her left hand broken.

"Who will take me to the hospital?" she asks as she stays alone at the local Selim Colony in the BSCIC area.

Like her, Hasina, 13, Riaz, 12, and Aziz, 19, also jumped from the third floor and saved their lives.



A heavily loaded truck plies through Kalurghat Bridge ignoring weight limit, left, and a woman, right, clenches the railing when a bus runs through the bridge.



A heavily loaded truck plies through Kalurghat Bridge ignoring weight limit, left, and a woman, right, clenches the railing when a bus runs through the bridge.

## theweekthatwas

### Protest against hill cutting

Chittagong Environment Movement staged a demonstration in the port city on Thursday demanding an end to illegal hill cutting and punishment to the culprits involved in the bad practice.

It formed a human chain with participation of the people from all walks of life in front of Chittagong Press Club (CPC) in the morning.

Later, speakers at a rally said

unscrupulous elements are devouring hills defying the restriction as the authorities concerned turned a blind eye to the problem.

They demanded withdrawal of the director of Department of Environment, Chittagong with a call for proper initiatives to protect the hills.

Mahfuzur Rahman Chowdhury, Saroj Kanti Das, Mostafa Kamal, Tusher Kanti Basak, Morshed Alam, Helal Uddin Chowdhury and Gazi Moinuddin spoke at the rally with Movement coordinator Sharif Chowhan in the chair.



Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury inaugurates a week-long photo exhibition of Nimai Ghosh titled 'Satyajit Roy: Script to Screen' at the gallery of Chittagong Government Arts College on February 23 as the chief guest. Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri, extreme left, was present as the special guest. Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts and Indian

### 4 get Ekushey Padak posthumously

Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) awarded "Posthumous Ekushey Sammanana Padak" to four people for contribution to education, social work, journalism and cultural arenas.

Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury handed over the medals to the family members of awardees at the Ekushe Mela Manch at Lalidighi Maidan in the city on Wednesday.

Mouvi Nur Ahmed Chairman was awarded for his contribution to education. Advocate Badsha Mia Chowdhury for social work, Nurul Islam for journalism and Satya Saha for culture.

Former Chittagong University vice-chancellor Dr Abu Yusuf Alam and CCC Chief Education Officer Prof Rawshan Akter Hanif also spoke at the function.

### New VC seeks help to lessen session jam

Newly appointed Vice-Chancellor (VC) of Chittagong University Prof Dr M Badiul Alam on Thursday called upon the university teachers to perform their duties with utmost sincerity to address the session jam.

He was addressing a view exchange meeting with the teachers at the Social Science faculty auditorium.

Prof Alam in his speech assured the meeting of resuming construction of second unit of Science Faculty building and initiatives for repairing the law faculty building.

He underscored the need for maintaining transparency and accountability in the administrative activities of the university.

Science Faculty Dean Prof Nazmus Sadat M Yahia, Arts Faculty Dean Prof Mansur Uddin Ahmed, Commerce Faculty Dean Prof Dr Monjur Morshed Mahmud, Social Science Faculty Dean Prof Dr Moinul Islam, Law Faculty Dean Mohammed Zakir Hossain, Biological Science Faculty Dean Prof Dr Mohammed Anisul Islam and Chittagong University Teachers' Association (CUTA) President Prof Dr Ahmed Fazle Hasan Chowdhury were present.

### JICA to help develop agro-based industries

Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is keen to help develop agro-based industries and light engineering sub-sectors in Bangladesh under a technical assistance programme.

JICA Project Launching Adviser Takafumi Ueada and Study Team Chief Consultant Katsuyoshi Wada said this at a meeting to exchange views with the leaders of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) at the

CCI auditorium in the city on Sunday.

With the assistance of World Bank, JICA is also working for administrative reform, establishment of special economic zone and skill development in both government and private sectors in Bangladesh, they said.

JICA, Japan embassy, Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO) and Japan Bank of International Cooperation (JBIC) are taking programmes for developing infrastructure and other sectors in Bangladesh as well, they added.

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) President Saifuzzaman in his address of welcome referred to the potentials trade and investment-friendly atmosphere in Chittagong and called for JICA initiative for Japan-Chittagong Friendship Bridge in the port city.

### Measles Vaccination Campaign begins

Image, a social welfare and community clinic, launched Measles Vaccination Campaign 2005-2006 at the Image Clinic at Nasirabad Zakir Hossain Road on Sunday.

National cricketer Mohammed Rafique, also an honorary envoy of Unicef, inaugurated the campaign at the MES College ground.

Prof Dr Probat Chandra Barua, head of Community Medicine,



A painting exhibition titled 'Breakfast News' of artist Yasmin Jahan was held at the Alliance Francaise auditorium in the port city on February 22.

Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH), was the chief guest at the inaugural ceremony with Image President Dr Prasun Kumar Barua in the chair.

A total of 1200 children received vaccination from Image on the day.

The organisers at the inaugural ceremony said around 20,000 children below 5 die of measles every year. The national measles vaccination campaign aims at vaccinating 34 million children.

It will be the world's biggest vacci-

nation campaign that involved 50,000 vaccinators and 7,50,000 volunteers in 62 districts and five city corporations in Bangladesh, they said.