

Spending Tk 6cr a year on a white elephant

Hossain Seraj, Magura

Magura Textile Mills (MTM) under BTMC (Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation) incurs a loss of about Tk 6 crore a year although it is officially shut down.

"Though the mill is kept closed, it incurs a loss of about Tk 6 crore a year due to maintenance cost that include tax, electricity bills and machinery depreciation", its Assistant Commercial Officer Kazi Monirul Islam told this correspondent.

The mill with an accumulated loss of about Tk 101.90 crore was reopened for the third time in September 2004 under a two-year contract with Kamaphuli Traders (KT) in Pabna. The mill was producing yarn with cotton, supplied by KT on the basis of payment of 'service charge'.

The mill was earning Tk 5,991 per bale for producing yarn for KT, officials said. But as the KT stopped cotton supply about six months ahead of expiry of its contract, the mill

TALE OF 'CLOSED' MAGURA TEXTILE MILLS

authorities were compelled to lay off the mill. This time, the mill incurred a loss of about Tk 7.28 crore, they said.

About 400 workers who worked on 'no work no pay' basis are now jobless and 24 officials and employees are not getting salaries for 17 months.

After reopening, its authorities on several occasions expressed optimism that the mill would make profit if trade union is not allowed and smooth power supply is maintained, which were ensured during the period of production, some sources at the mill said.

The mill authorities now blame shortage of running capital and old machinery for the recent losses. According to them, production was interrupted as many old spindles grind to a halt. These needed repair but that could not be done due to lack of spares, they claimed.

Its acting Chief Executive Abdul Salam claimed that the mill could not be run smoothly and profitably due to shortage of running capital.

"As the mill incurred loss, we could not arrange staff salaries for 17 months", he added.

Meanwhile, sources said, BTMC has again decided to resume production in the mill on the basis of service charge.

But most of its officials expressed doubt about profit earning by the mill on by realising only 'service charge' and said it should be privatised immediately.

Earlier, the mill was closed twice in 1999 and 2002 with an accumulated loss of Tk 85.61 crore.

The Magura Textile Mill with 25056 spindles was set up on 16 acres of land at Vitasair in Magura town at a cost of Tk. 37.77 crore in 1985. But it failed to earn profit since

its inception. The mill was closed in 1999 with a loss of Tk. 67.14 crore. In the wake of continued loss, BTMC decided to lay off the mill.

In such a situation, workers urged BTMC not to privatise the mill and agreed under government management on 'any condition'.

From March 2000 to January 2002, the mill produced yarn for Kamaphuli Traders in exchange of service charge. Workers worked on 'no work no pay' basis. But the mill failed to earn profit and was closed again. The loss during the period was about 18.47 crore, officials said.

BTMC then again decided to privatise the mill. But failing to do so due to pressure from different quarters and non-availability of buyer, BTMC reopened the mill on September 23, 2004 under new terms and condition for workers and started producing yarn for Kamaphuli Traders in exchange of 'service charge'.

School boys held with pipegun

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bbaria

Two students of Annada Government High School were arrested with a pipe gun at Datoriara in Brahmanbaria town yesterday.

The arrestees are Asadur Rahman Imon and Ahsan Ahmed Chowdhury.

According to police sources, an altercation took place between two groups of students of Collegepara and Datoriara areas following a cricket match earlier on the day.

Following this, Asadur Rahman, equipped with a pipegun, along with several others attacked a shop owned by a family of one of their rivals.

On information, a police team headed by SI Imtiaz rushed to the spot and arrested Imon and Ahsan along with a locally made pipe gun.

A case was filed in this connection, police said.

JCD, Jubo Dal men threaten newsman

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Gofran Biswas, Patuakhali Correspondent of English language daily The Bangladesh Observer has been threatened with death by some activists of Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal, fronts of ruling BNP in Kalapara following publication of a news about their alleged involvement in drug trading.

Gofran filed a general diary (GD No-668) with Kalapara police station on Saturday against four men of the parties. The accused are Akkas Gazi, president of Kalapara upazila Jubo Dal unit, its secretary Harun-or-Rashid and activist Mamun Sikder and Chhatra Dal president Md Badal Mridha.

According to GD, the four ruling party youths threatened him with death after a news item on their involvement in drug trading was published in the Observer on Saturday.

Akhaura bypass rail track to open in May

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

The Akhaura by-pass track on Dhaka-Sylhet rail line is awaiting inauguration since its completion in January. The by-pass facility will reduce the travel time by one hour.

Construction of the work began in 2003 and completed in the mid-dling of last year. The project involve Tk 32 crore.

According to railway sources, the inauguration was deferred several times since January.

The latest date was fixed on April 12 but it was cancelled.

The sources said Finance Minister Saifur Rahman was scheduled to open the by-pass track.

They however said it will be opened within a month but could not specify any date.

The project was taken up at the initiative of the finance minister, they added.

Teens join Daily Star event in Brahmanbaria

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

The Global Youth Service Day was observed here yesterday through various programmes, participated by teenagers.

Held at North South School in the town, it was jointly organised by The Daily Star Readers' Club in Brahmanbaria and Serve the Society to Introduce Tomorrow (SSIT), a local voluntary organisation involving youths.

The programme included a discussion meeting, English debate competition and speech in English. Prizes were awarded to winners. Topic of the debate was 'English is Needed for Higher Education'.

Tawfiqul Islam and his team won the debate competition while Amrin was selected as the best English speaker.

Md. Matin Ahmed, founder chairman of SSIT and secretary of The Daily Star Readers' Club moderated the debate.

In the second session, all the participating teenagers and guests enjoyed a 30-minute speech in English.

The discussion meeting was held at the same venue with Mubarak Ali Khadem, principal of North South School and advisor to The Daily Star Readers' Club in chair.

The participants included headmaster Parimal Bhaumik, The Daily Star Correspondent Sheikh Shahidul Islam, principal Suparul Islam, Md Tofael Ahmed, Amrin Khan and Tawfiqul Islam.



ADAR ALI FINALLY FLEES SATKHIRA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Resisted by women, drug peddler Adar Ali in Palashpole area in Satkhira town has left the area closing his 'business'.

He has hung a signboard on a tree in front of his shop to sell it and his residence nearby.

Over 100 women brought out a procession in the town and staged demonstration in front of the drug peddler's shop on Friday and locked it. They also demanded arrest of drug peddlers as the menace increased alarmingly in the town,

particularly among youths.

The women earlier formed an organisation styled Palashpole Udyi Sangha and launching an anti-drug campaign in Palashpole.

As the administration failed to dismantle the drug rings, leaders of the newly formed organisation came out on streets, chanting slogans.

The decision of the big drug peddler to sell his shop and residence is now a talk of the town and people of all walks of life praising the women for their courageous campaign.

A blessing for ultra-poor women in Patuakhali

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

A Danida project has made life of over 20,000 ultra poor women easy by involving them in building rural infra-structures in Patuakhali.

The women, organised under groups, are engaged in work like rural road maintenance, re-excavation of canals and tree plantation.

The ten-year project launched in 1994 ended last year. The duration was extended by one year and the project is scheduled to expire in June 30 this year.

Seeing its success, different quarters have demanded further extension of the project.

The Tk-67 crore Danida (Danish International Development Agency) Rural Development Project-16 (RDP-16) is being implemented jointly by Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) and Danida.

A women working in the project earns Tk 100 to 120 a day. As a mandatory provision, they have to deposit 25 per cent of their income with their bank accounts, which they will get at a

DANIDA PROJECT

time for doing income generating activities. They are being trained in fish and vegetable cultivation, poultry farming, rearing cow and goat and nursery.

They are also being made aware about sanitation, adult education and the curse of dowry and other social vices.

The success of the project is evident. So far, 170 kilometre rural roads, 380 concrete bridges, 54 box culverts, 211 pipe culverts and 40 village markets have been built, 28 km canals re-excavated and 2 km river embankments renovated, most of them by engaging poor women, according to Danida official Anisur Rahman.

Over 60,000 saplings of timber trees have been planted along 85 km rural roads.

"This project has changed our life", said Sokina Begum, 35 of Kakrabunua village in Patuakhali Sadar upazila while talking to this correspondent.

"I was virtually starving with my four

children and my day-labour husband. Now I am earning for the family and also saving for future. I will raise a poultry firm with the savings," she said.

Hazera Begum of same village said, "My three sons are going to school since I joined the project two years back.

"My husband is a rickshawpuller. We are better off now with my income," she added.

LGED engineer Abul Kalam who supervises implementation of the project in Sadar upazila said, "All ongoing work under the project will be completed by June this year. We have built roads linking remote villages with upazila or district headquarters, he said.

The projects have covered only 50 per cent areas of the district. It should be extended to cover the while district, the LGED engineer said.



Ultra-poor women working in a road development project in Patuakhali.

PHOTO: STAR

JMB cadre held in Tangail

Zobaer was allegedly trained in Afghanistan

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A cadre of banned Islamist militant outfit Ja'amatul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), allegedly trained in Afghanistan, was arrested by Tangail DB police yesterday.

The arrestee has been identified as Khandakar Mohammad Zobaer, 28, son of Khandakar Abdul Khalek of Meer Kumulle village in Delduar upazila in the district.

Police sources said, acting on a tip-off, a team of Tangail DB police raided a house at Meer Kumulle



village at around 10 am and arrested JMB cadre Zobaer. Nazrul Islam, Officer-in-Charge

of Delduar police station, said Zobaer is one of the 30 listed JMB cadres in the upazila, escaping arrest since the August 17 bomb blasts in the district. He was trained in Afghanistan on use of arms, he OC said quoting from his confessions.

Tangail DB police are questioning Zobaer at its office under tight security, he said.

During primary interrogation Zobaer admitted his involvement in the August 17 bomb blasts at Tangail town, DB police sources said.



PHOTO: STAR

Quest for 'Mr. clean' ... Sushashoner Janyo Nagirik (citizens for good governance), an NGO, formed human chains in Chandpur (left) and Netrakona yesterday demanding nomination of honest candidates in the next parliamentary election.

Brahmaputra sand lifting has become a cause for concern

A number of important installations under threat

AMINUL ISLAM, Mymensingh

A number of important installations including the Mymensingh town protection embankment, Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge and Muktiuddha Memorial are threatened due to indiscriminate lifting of earth and sand from Brahmaputra riverbed in the Sadar upazila.

According to sources, the government's Mineral Resources Bureau in Dhaka authorised some traders to lift earth and sand from the riverbed at nine points in Mymensingh Sadar upazila. These are Begunabari, Goonti Ghat, Khagadahan, Jaikhana Ghat, Kachari Ferry Ghat, Laibari Ferry Ghat, Bridge Ghat, Baira Ghat and Bhabokhali Ghat.

But the lessees belonging to a ruling party are lifting earth and sand indiscriminately, violating terms and conditions of lease agreements, the sources said. Such lifting of sand and soil continues throughout the dry season every year, which is threatening the environment and creating massive erosion in the rainy season.

The devastating effect of such sand lifting from the riverbed was first noticed by local authorities after work on the town protection embankment (TPE) started a few years ago. They urged the authorities concerned not to allow such massive digging in the riverbed, but their suggestion was ignored, the sources claimed.

After taking lease, sand traders choose the spots on their own to minimise cost and do not care to abide by terms and conditions, a sand trader at Kachari Ferry Ghat disclosed to this correspondent requesting anonymity. They use trucks to



PHOTO: STAR

Truckloads of sand being lifted from Brahmaputra riverbed near Mymensingh town protection embankment.

carry sand and soil from the riverbed, which damages the embankments, making those vulnerable to erosion and floods, he said.

This correspondent during a visit to Kachari Ferry Ghat area recently saw sand was being lifted indiscriminately from the riverbed between Mymensingh collectorate building and the circuit house, very close to the town protection embankment. The earth cutting continues from morning till evening everyday.

Sources in local Water

Development Board (WDB) and Roads and Highway Department (RHD) said if sand collection continues at the present rate, installations located between the railway bridge and Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge and the TPE would be affected. This will change the course of mighty Brahmaputra, resulting in severe river erosion, they observed.

They however said planned sand lifting as per terms and conditions and suggestions of WDB and RHD could be beneficial.

A project to dredge the Brahmaputra river in the area to make it navigable was taken 25 years ago but the plan is yet to be implemented.

Silting up of the river at certain points on the one hand due to dumping of garbage and unplanned digging along the banks on the other hand could change the river course and bring a catastrophe in the area, environmentalists said.



PHOTO: STAR

Recipients of awards after the English debate and speech competitions, jointly organised by the Daily Star Readers Club and SSIT, a local voluntary organisation, in Brahmanbaria yesterday.