

Corruption rampant at lone eye hospital in Patuakhali

MD. SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The lone modern eye hospital in Patuakhali, set up by a donor agency in 1993, faces rampant mismanagement, corruption and irregularities by its local authorities. Its 37 staff are not getting salary for three months because of fund crisis.

The 25-bed Patuakhali BNSB Eye Hospital was set up on 0.66 acres of land at Kaler Pukar Par by Andheri Hille Bonn, a German donor agency. The land was donated by Patuakhali municipality.

Over the years, eight doctors and seven paramedics left the hospital and the number of patients visiting it dwindled to half due to decline in treatment facilities and mismanagement, sources there said.

The donor agency in a letter asked its local management committee to improve the overall condition to get fresh assistance. The letter from Germany signed by Elvira Greiner, president of the donor agency, reached the hospital on June 22, sources said.

It asked for meeting six conditions including holding of a free and fair election to the 19-member 'local executive committee' that runs the hospital and resignation of its secretary Mostaq Ahmed Pinu, who is also chairman of Patuakhali pourasabha.

The letter followed a board meeting of the donor agency held in Germany on June 8 that reviewed a nine-page report sent by a probe

committee after visiting the hospital.

The letter said further funding to be considered only after resignation of Pinu from the committee and meeting other conditions.

The conditions include changes in the management committee, placing adequate staff at operations level, fulfilling all recommendations of the probe team, investigation into

hospital.

As per agreement, Andheri Hille Bonn bore all expenditures of the hospital for ten years, which expired in 2002. The donor agency stopped funding the hospital since then after finding irregularities, the sources said.

But it continued funds for two programmes organising 20 eye

hospital and no one could do anything without her permission. She controlled all departments. There were allegations of misbehaviour by her.

The consultant had an unauthorised eye clinic at her residence where she engaged hospital staff and used all facilities at BNSB Eye Hospital for her private clinic. At times medicines were also taken to her clinic, the sources said quoting the probe report.

Since 1997, 12 doctors left the BNSB hospital due to alleged mismanagement by the former chief consultant. They are Dr. Shafique, Dr. Parimol, Dr. Monjur, Dr. Mainul, Dr. Shahana Mustari, Dr. Poal, Dr. Shahinur, Dr. Kabir, Dr. Lokman Hakim, Dr. Jalil, Dr. Sabur and Dr. Zahid Hasan. Only three doctors against seven posts are working there now.

Eight paramedics also left the hospital. The authorities recruited seven new ones.

Report also added that one cleaner was suspended last year because he was caught while taking a patient to the consultant's private clinic from the hospital.

The number of patients decreased day by day because of mismanagement and lack of proper treatment facilities.

Now 100 to 125 patients come to the hospital a day, which over 200 a year ago, sources said.

The probe report suggested removal of the chief consultant within two months as a 'penal measure'.

Following the report, the chief consultant was removed on April 30 this year.

Sources said monthly average income of the hospital has declined to around Tk 2 lakh from Tk 4 lakh three years back. The average expenditure is over Tk 3 lakh. The excess expenditure is being met from earlier bank deposit.

When contacted, Abdul Haq, declined to comment.

When contacted Mostaq Ahmed Pinu said, "We have already signed a contract with CAM, another international donor agency, which will assist us because they (Andheri Hille Bonn) are not in good terms with me. The hospital has Tk 8 lakh savings bonds which will mature soon and we will get over Tk 20 lakh. We will pay arrears staff salaries with this money."

Patients suffer as doctors leave BNSB Eye Hospital; staff unpaid for three months

the 'role' of former chief consultant and her business network built allegedly by using the hospital facilities.

Hospital sources said, the three-year term of a regular local executive committee headed by Abdul Haq, former pourasabha chairman, expired on July 31 last year. Abdul Haq extended its tenure for six months illegally without holding any general meeting of the committee.

Later, a new committee headed by a local BNP leader was formed allegedly violating rules. The new committee is yet to be approved by CARITAS, an NGO, which along with Bangladesh National Society for Blind (BNSB) looks after the

campus in remote areas and at primary schools.

A three-member investigation team formed by the donor agency led by Dr. K Zaman, honorary general secretary of BNSB eye hospital in Mymensingh, visited the hospital during April 12-14 in 2004.

The probe team submitted a nine-page report on the hospital to higher authorities in Andheri Hille Bonn in Germany and to CARITAS for necessary action.

The sources claimed that the report identified former consultant as the 'main cause of corruption and irregularities'.

It said the chief consultant, who was the 'most powerful woman' in



Seeking relief from summer heat...As temperature mounts at noon, a rickshawpuller along with his minor son takes shelter under his three-wheeler kept in greens in CRB area in Chittagong city.

Accustomed to their customs office under the blue!

Officials rush to Botuli from 23 km away only when goods arrive

RAJAT KANTI GOSWAMI, Moulvibazar

The Botuli land customs office in Juri, housed in a small tin shed, usually remains locked. A signboard is hung at the site, as if to justify its existence.

When import or export merchandise arrive, customs officials are informed and they come from Juri upazila headquarters 23 kilometres away. They perform official formalities sitting in open space.

Custom Officer Akkas Ali said the office lacks minimum facilities like furniture and security guard. There is no residential accommodation. So, to preserve important files and documents, they rented a house at Juri upazila headquarter as per advice of higher authorities.

Import export through the border point remains virtually stopped during rainy season as the two-kilometre road connecting Botuli and Raghna land port across the border in Tripura

becomes unusable. Transports do not ply the road because of the ramshackle wooden bridge over Juri river at the zero point.

The land customs is on the verge of closure due to lack of infrastructure facilities, manpower and proper road link.

The land customs was set up to promote trade with India and provide immigration facilities to people of Bangladesh and India.

But due to lack of facilities, customs officials now perform duties at a rental house at Juri upazila headquarter.

Botuli land customs was opened following an agreement between the governments of India and Bangladesh.

In 1975, the land port was closed for unknown reason. After a long interval, it was reopened in 1997. At that time, the Indian government had shown interest to construct a bridge over Juri river at the zero point, but Bangladesh government rejected the

proposed.

Later, in 2001, a wooden bridge was constructed and import-export started. Imports through the customs station include coal, machinery spares, fruits and spices while exports include fish, dry-fish, jamdani sharee, soap and electronic items.

During a visit to the area, local people said, the customs office usually remains locked. Officials come from Juri upazila headquarter when merchandise arrive and perform their duties in an open place.

Akkas Ali said, a revenue earning target of Tk 8, 31,000 was fixed for the land customs for the last financial but only Tk 1, 95,000 was earned till November.

He said, due to bad communication and poor infrastructure facilities, import cost is higher than in other border points. Traders can not open Letter of Credit (LC) due to nonavailability of dollars.

Botuli immigration check post is

situated besides the land custom office.

Sub-inspector Murshed Alam said Indian authorities do not issue visa to Bangladeshi nationals to travel through Botuli check post though Bangladesh issues visa to Indian nationals.

At the immigration check post, only a table and five plastic chairs were seen. Files and documents were kept on a bamboo made rack.

Immigration officials also use the small office room as residence.

Alam said the dilapidated office room is risky as a crack has developed in the wall and it may collapse any time.

However, custom officials, immigration police and local people said there is good prospects to increase exports to Tripura and boost revenue earning if the road link and infrastructure facilities are improved in Botuli land customs.



The Patuakhali BNSB Eye Hospital, now facing rampant corruption by its local authorities.

PHOTO: STAR

Toxic textile waste polluting Louhajang river in Tangail

Mill authorities evade action by managing paper from DoE

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Untreated toxic waste released from dyeing and printing units of a textile mill in Tangail Sadar upazila is polluting Louhajang river.

The pollution which is going on for several years now is threatening fish resources, crops and the greenery, locals said.

The local administration can not take action against the mill authorities for pollution as it managed permission from the Directorate of Environment (DoE).

Alauddin Textile Mills was set up at Khudirampur in 1995 on three acres of land beside the Dhaka-Tangail road. According to Factory Act, the mill authorities have to

dispose of the chemical waste in a pond or pit in its compound.

But they release the waste into adjacent Louhajang river through three pipes since the mills operation began, the locals said.

When contacted, sources in Tangail district administration said the mill authorities were given reminders on several occasions to install its own waste treatment facilities. Finally, on August 14 last year, it was given one month's time to make arrangement for disposing of the toxic waste in a safe place within its compound.

But the Alauddin Textile Mills (ATM) Ltd did not care the order. The mill authorities procured a letter from the Directorate of

Environment allowing it to operate, promising that a treatment unit would be installed within a year. But nothing has been done yet.

Somnath Lahiree, an official of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) in Tangail, said the mill has been polluting the river water for long but the district administration can not take any action against the mill authorities as they collected a paper from the DoE.

Dr Azharul Islam, a skin specialist, said diseases are spreading fast in villages on Louhajang river banks as they use the toxic water.

Some fishermen told this correspondent that fish resources have decreased in the river due to pollu-

tion.

Farmers in the area said lands using water from the river and its tributaries are becoming barren day by day. Different kinds of crops and vegetables were produced in adjoining villages including Khidirampur, Bhatkura, Kumulle, and Goshairi few years ago. These do not grow well in the areas following use of toxic water, they said.

When contacted over cellphone, Mohammad Atoar Rahman, manager of Alauddin Textile Mills, admitted pollution of the river by toxic waste from the mill.

"We have already taken a plan to set up a treatment unit", he said.



The water of Louhajang river is Tangail has turned blackish at many places due to pollution by waste released from a textile mill.

PHOTO: STAR

BDR, BSF trade fire again in Satkhira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) traded gunfire on Hijaldi border in Kalaroa upazila Saturday night.

BSF personnel from Daharkanda and Padmabla camps in Swarupnagar in 24 Parganas district fired five bullets at Hijaldi BDR camp at about 2am. BDR replied with 17 shots. Lt. Col. Khan Asadur Rahman, Commanding Officer of 41 Rifles Battalion said. No casualty was reported.

BDR has been put on alert as BSF reinforced its strength and intensified patrol, he said.

Tension is prevailing along the border since June 12 when a BSF personnel was killed in cross-border firing by border guards after some BSF troops intruded into Bangladesh territory in Hijaldi.

BDR sources said, after the incident, BSF dug bunkers and its troops are on red alert in the area.

ZAKIGANJ BORDER CLASH People returning home: Flag meet tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A flag meeting will be held at Harinagar BSF camp tomorrow.

The meeting would follow skirmishes between BDR and BSF on Amolshid border in Zakiganj on Wednesday after Indian border guards intruded into Bangladesh to occupy 256 acres of land near border pillar No. 1354.

The two border guards traded about 1800 shots in five hours.

A Bangladeshi—Abul Kalam injured in the crossfire, is being treated at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College hospital.

BDR reinforcement in the border will remain in force as BSF also increased its strength after the incident, Commander of 38 Rifles Battalion Lt. Col. Abu Tasnim told the Daily Star yesterday.

BDR will be represented by a 7-member team led by the Battalion Commander, he said.

Meanwhile, the situation on Zakiganj border is returning to normalcy as people are returning to their homes in Amolshid, Uttarkul and Kazipara villages.

The Indian border guards crossed the river by country boats and tried to occupy the lands but their attempt was foiled by BDR.

BDR sources said the 256 acres are in Bangladesh territory since 1947 and Bangladeshi nationals have been cultivating the lands since then.

PICKETS STAGE BLOCKADE



(From top) Opposition activists damaging a vehicle in Sylhet and squatting on rail tracks in Rajshahi and on a road in Dinajpur during their countrywide rail-road barricade programme yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR