

Kuakata road project okayed when its life expired

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Re-construction of the 22 km Kalapara-Kuakata road under a Danida assisted project has become uncertain as the project period is over.

The five-year project to renovate important roads in Patuakhali and Barguna districts was launched on May 1 in 2001. The project period expired on June 30 this year. The 22 km stretch of the road could not be renovated due to delayed project approval by the government.

The Patuakhali-Kuakata road development project involving Tk 126 crore was taken up considering prospects of tourism in Kuakata and fish farming in the coastal areas.

The 50 kilometre portion of the

road from Patuakhali to Kalapara has been reconstructed at a cost of Tk 70 crore, provided by Danida.

Under the project, periodic maintenance of 35 kilometre other roads in Patuakhali and Barguna districts has been completed at a cost of Tk 6.85 crore. These are one-kilometre Amtali-Barguna road, nine-kilometre Patuakhali-Mirzagonj road and 25-kilometre Labukhali-Baufal road.

An official of Road & Highways Department (R&H) in Patuakhali said, after completing the Patuakhali-Amtali portion of the road, Danida submitted a revised project in August 2004 to R&H Department for reconstruction of the Kalapara-Kuakata portion. The R&H department sent it to the communications ministry with a

note of approval.

The ministry sent it to the Cabinet Committee, which returned it to the ministry, seeking comments from the Economic Relations Division (ERD) and the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) as it involved foreign assistance. The ministry then sent it to ERD and then to IMED.

The ministry had assured the R&H that the project would be approved by December 2004 but it was not done.

Meanwhile, the donors gave letters to ERD and the ministry to hasten the approval process. In reply, ERD assured the donors that the project would be approved by June 1, 2005 but it failed. At last, the ministry approved the project on June 30 this year when the project

period ended.

"We failed to complete the Kalapara-Kuakata road as we lost 10 months from the project period due to delayed approval. Danida disagreed to extend the project", an official of CAMSAQ, consulting firm of the project, told this correspondent.

When contacted, R&H Executive Engineer Abdus Salam said, "A meeting was held between officials of Danida and communications ministry on June 20 this year in Dhaka, where Danida disagreed to extend the project period."

"Danida assured us that the project could be considered when they take up a new project in Bangladesh", he added.

He however said that the R&H department would complete the Kalapara-Kuakata road with its own resources if Danida finally refuses to do the work. "We will renovate the road to Kuakata tourist spot", he asserted.

The delay in project approval which left the road incomplete evoked criticism from local political leaders.

Local lawmaker Mahbuur Rahman said, "Danida should complete the whole project to establish better communication between Kuakata and the rest of the country to promote tourism and socio-economic development of people of the area".

ABM Mosharraf Hossain, president of Kalapara BNP said, "We are hopeful that Danida would complete the project to establish a better road link to the tourist spot. We have requested them through the communication ministry to complete the whole project."

Besides development of tourism, there is bright prospects for private sector fish farming in the area, and many prospective investors showed interest after road renovation was taken up.

Pirates abduct 12 fishermen in Sundarbans for ransom

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Pirates abducted 12 fishermen Thursday night from Badhan Jhuti canal in the Sundarbans and demanded Tk one lakh as ransom for their release.

The pirates set a 7-day deadline for the payment and threatened to kill them for non-compliance.

Quoting local people police said, about 20 fishermen went for fishing in the Sundarbans on Tuesday after taking permission from the forest department.

When the fishermen were asleep on their boats at night, pirates attacked and abducted 12 of them, demanding a ransom of Tk one lakh.

The pirates kept the fishermen hostage in the deep forest, according to fishermen Saheb Ali and Abdus Samad of Patakhal village in Shyamnagar upazila, who managed to escape.

On contact, Afsar Gazi, father of victim Habibur Rahman and Fatik Sadar, father of another victim Abu Hossain of Sora village in the same upazila said their sons along with others went to the Sundarbans for fishing. Pirates abducted them for ransom, they said.

Afsar Gazi filed a general diary GD with Kalaroa thana.

Sub Inspector Swapan of Shyamnagar thana confirmed the incident.

Piracy and abduction in the Sundarbans increased in recent years. In last six months, at least five such incidents took place in which over 50 fishermen were abducted for ransom.

The slide in law and order in the mangrove forest decreased fishing and honey collection in the area.

SAJID MURDER IN CUSTODY

Nagorik Committee rally demands arrest of cops

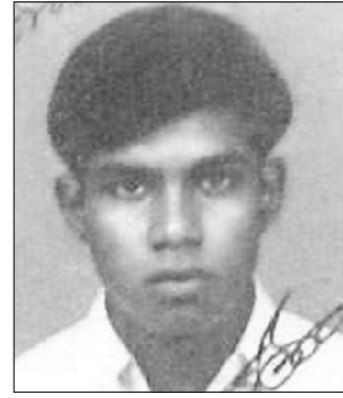
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Gaibandha Nagorik Committee leaders at a rally in the town yesterday demanded arrest of police men allegedly involved in Sajid murder.

They expressed resentment that there has not been any progress in investigation of the case 47 days after the murder.

A large number of people attended the rally held at the Shaheed Minar, where the speakers demanded capital punishment to the culprits to stop recurrence of death in custody.

Sajedur Rahman Sajid, 26, of Munshipara in Gaibandha town, a medical representative of a pharmaceutical company, was arrested on the night of May 18. He was taken on seven days' remand.



On May 21, on the third day of remand, he died in custody. Police claimed that he committed suicide but the autopsy report said the youth was strangled.

The death in custody triggered

protests by local people and socio-cultural organisations, who organised a series of agitation programmes including protest rallies, formation of human chains and submission of memorandum to the Deputy Commissioner for arrest of persons responsible for the alleged murder. Black flags were hoisted atop all houses and shops in the town as a mark of protest.

Speakers at yesterday's rally also demanded arrest of ruling party cadres who attacked and foiled a peaceful Nagorik Committee rally held earlier in the town to protest the murder.

They alleged that former Officer-in-Charge of Gaibandha Sadar police station was involved in the murder and demanded formation of a high-powered committee to investigate the matter.

Thousands under open sky in Khagrachhari

Rains trigger flash flood, swell 3 rivers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khagrachhari

Day-long rains yesterday swelled the three hill rivers in Khagrachhari, causing flash flood and displacing several thousand people.

The Chenghi, Mainee and Feni rivers crossed their danger marks and were rising as rains continued, official source said yesterday afternoon. There may be rain today also, they

said. Most of the low-lying areas in the district have been inundated, submerging scores of homesteads.

The worst affected areas include Gonjopara, Muslimpara, Golabari, Raj Jamonipara, Muslimpara, Mohazonpara, Shavdamiyapara, Aparna Chowdhury Para in the sadar upazila, where most of the homesteads and croplands have gone under water, officials said.

Over 4,000 people left homes in

Sadar upazila alone and moved to higher places, they said. They are under the open sky and need food and drinking water.

Many villages in Panchhani, Dighinala, Mohalchhari and Ramgarh upazilas has also been inundated.

Erosion by the swelled rivers has devoured many homesteads along their banks, which will intensify when the flood water will recede, people in the affected areas said.



PHOTO: STAR

The rugged road to tourist spot Kuakata. Its renovation has become uncertain due to delayed approval by the government.

Join agitation to topple govt

AL leader Mannan urges people

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Awami League (AL) central organising secretary Abdul Mannan yesterday urged the people to join the current anti-government agitation to realise the opposition's demand for reform to the caretaker system and the Election Commission (EC).

A free, fair and credible election is not possible without the reforms. The opposition will not allow holding of any 'farical' polls, he said at a reception accorded to him by Sathkira district AL, held at Shaheed Abdur Razzak Park in the town.

The front-ranking AL leader said the

government is reluctant to accept the reform proposals as they know that they would not be able to retain power without rigging. People have already rejected them for their "misrule and corruption" during their four and a half years' rule.

The election commission is adamant to update the voter list without going house to house because it has tacit approval of the ruling alliance, he claimed.

"This is a part of a conspiracy to hold a farical election. Taking the people along, we will resist the evil move," Abdul Mannan said.

The AL-led 14 party opposition

alliance will not allow holding of polls without reforms as those are not people's demand, he said.

Chaired by district AL president, the meeting was addressed by among others Dr AFM Ruhul Haque, former lawmakers Monsur Ahmed and Dr Mokhesur Rahman, Nazrul Islam, SM Kamal Hossain, Sheikh Abu Nasim, Mahidul Haque, A Ahmed, SM Shawkat Hossain, Jagul Haidar, Golam Mostafa and Ghosh Sanat Kumar.

Mannan said the opposition agitation will continue till reforms to the care taker government system and the Election Commission are

done.

"There will be no dialogue with the government if it includes Jamaat in the committee," he said.

He alleged that BNP's dilly-dally tactics proves that they do not want the proposed reforms and a solution to present political crisis. He also criticised the government for what he called sheltering Islamist militants.

"The government has created the militants to use them to perpetuate in. The arrest of Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai is an eye wash because their godfathers in the government are untouched," he alleged.

The AL on several occasions earlier pointed to the rise of militants but Jamaat brushed aside those saying, Bangla Bhai was a creation of the media.



PHOTO: STAR

The Sylhet unit of Udichi, a cultural organisation, brought out a procession and formed a human chain in the city yesterday demanding re-investigation into bomb blasts at its function in Jessore seven years ago that killed 10 and injured over 100 people. A Jessore court on June 28 acquitted all the 23 accused in the case because of 'inadequacy' in investigation.

MANDATORY SCREENING

Use of blood from professional donors down

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Use of blood from professional donors decreased to 18 per cent from 70 per cent.

Use of blood from relatives increased from 15 per cent to 57 per cent while that of volunteers from 10 per cent to 26 per cent.

Nilphamari civil surgeon (CS) Dr Abdur Rahim disclosed this at a workshop held at his conference room on Thursday. Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS), a renowned NGO, organised the workshop while its project co-ordinator Anthony D'cruze graced the programme.

It was possible following introduction of a mandatory blood screening programme jointly initiated by the government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 2000, the CS said. The programme was aimed at ensuring safe blood transfusion to recipients, he said.

The CS further said 29 per cent professional donors suffer from Hepatitis-B, 22 per cent from syphilis and six per cent from Hepatitis-C.

It was not mandatory to screen blood in either government or non-government hospitals before launching of the programme.

Hospital sources said blood transfusion is required for surgical operations, treatment of anemia and recovery of rapid loss of blood after accidents.

In Bangladesh, over 3.75 lakh units of blood are required annually. At present, about two lakh units of blood can be screened from blood transfusion centres including 53 district hospitals. The World Health Organisation (WHO) provides training and technical support and helps install equipment. There are blood banks and reference laboratories in the centres.

Dr Abdul Mazid, In-charge of blood transfusion centre of Nilphamari district hospital said the aim of the project is not only to ensure blood screening in a proper manner but also to create low risk donor group. Cent per cent voluntary blood donation is the goal of the programme, he said.

RDRS director (Community health) Dr Selina Rahman said her organisation is assisting the government to enhance awareness among people and conducting motivational campaign for voluntary blood donation. 'Accessibility to safe blood is people's right,' she said.

RDRS co-ordinator (Social empowerment) Liaquat Ali Khan said his organisation will form voluntary blood donor group comprising 1,000 eligible officers, staff and group members of village federation (local people's body).

Physicians and nurses of government hospitals, blood transfusion technicians, local elite and journalists were present at the workshop.

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