

Properly renovate shabby rail bridges

Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Sunday directed the Railways Ministry to take up a project to properly repair shabby rail bridges across the country. "I think all the old and worn-out rail bridges will have to be repaired after conducting a survey across the country," she said.

Hasina gave the directive while opening a number of development projects, including two water treatment plants, two bridges and several train services by videoconferencing from her official residence Ganobhaban.

She said if a separate project is taken up to repair the old rail bridges, the government will approve it.

Trains run at a very slow pace and take more time to reach their destinations due to the old and shabby bridges, Hasina said, adding that there are also risks of accidents because of old bridges.

The PM said Bangladesh Railway can finance itself to repair its tracks and bridges quickly.

She regretted that previous

governments had plans to close down train services under a golden-handshake programme and they shut down train services on different routes. "I think it was a suicidal decision."

Hasina said the government is setting up railway networks throughout the country as people travel through trains safely and comfortably at cheaper fares.

Talking about water treatment plants, she urged all to exercise austerity in using water as it takes huge money to purify water in treatment plants.

About the country's economic progress, the PM said it will not be possible to ensure overall development of a country by only making Dhaka-centric development.

"No country can be developed without socio-economic advancement of the grassroots people," she said.

The services opened by the PM yesterday are commissioning of a pair of intercity new trains - 'Jamalpur Express' on the Tarakandi-Jamalpur-

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A man injured during clashes between illegal stone quarry workers and law enforcers is put into an ambulance in Bhajanpur of Tentulia yesterday. The clashes resulted in the death of Jumar Uddin, 60, and injuries to 20 others.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Workers, law enforcers clash

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Nilphamari joined police, officials said. The protesters also assaulted journalists who were taking photos at the scene.

Three police men, three Rab men and nine injured others were taken to Panchagarh hospital. Jumar died

around 3:00pm.

Sirajuddoula, resident medical officer at the hospital, said there were multiple small holes on Jumar's back.

Four of the seriously injured people were taken to Rangpur Medical College Hospital later.

Anti-mosquito drive

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recovered from encroachers and given back to the public.

If elected, he would also introduce electric bus service to help bring down air pollution level in the city.

Besides, a Resources Recovery Facility will be set up in Aminbazar for disposal of waste and turning waste into energy, he added.

Underground and multi-storey parking complexes will be built in busy areas of the DNCC, he mentioned.

Atiqul also promised to ensure civic facilities for slum dwellers and organise festivals in every ward of the DNCC regularly to inspire young people and promote harmonious relations among neighbours.

The mayor aspirant also said women-friendly comprehensive reproductive healthcare centres and primary health care centres would be set up in the areas that were included in the DNCC in recent years.

In the manifesto, he pledged to construct sufficient number of



modern public toilets for the city residents and breast-feeding rooms in all DNCC establishments.

Atiqul also promised to arrange transport facilities for students of schools, colleges and universities in the DNCC.

Footpaths would be freed from encroachers, and a pedestrian-friendly "footpath network" would be set up for all including those with disabilities.

Digital push button signals would be installed at Zebra crossings in the DNCC so that pedestrians can cross roads safely, he added.

None to be evicted before rehabilitation

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Tabith campaigned for around an hour in the area where he said the slum dwellers would not be evicted without proper rehabilitation if he was elected.

He said mostly rich people live in Gulshan and Banani areas while the poorest people live in the adjacent Karail slum.

"This sort of discrimination should end and a long-term rehabilitation is needed for them," the BNP mayoral candidate said amid clapping and cheering of the slum dwellers.

He urged the voters to cast their votes against the "misrules and misdeeds" of the government to bring a change in the city.

Tabith's press wing members were present at the spot to cover the campaigns.

Videos of the campaigns were broadcasted live on Tabith's Facebook page.

Tabith then went to Banani T&T Colony area where BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia's adviser Habibur Rahman Habib, Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi and some other senior leaders joined Tabith.

He delivered a short speech there and then went to Agargaon's BNP Bazar area around 1:30pm.

Flanked by supporters, Tabith took a walk along the 60-foot Road an exchanged greeting with the voters for about half an hour.

Grabbed by 'guardian'

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town's Kasturighat area due to encroachment, show BIWTA documents.

The BIWTA have not been able to construct the port yet. Neither could it reclaim the encroached banks as the grabbers' political connections came into play, officials said.

Mujibur was chairman of Jhlongia union parishad in 2014. He became the mayor in 2018.

Over the last 10 years, the AL leader built a number of shacks and a warehouse grabbing parts of the Bakkhali in the town's Natun Baharchhora area. He rents out the structures, BIWTA and municipality officials and locals said.

This correspondent visited a place in Natun Baharchhora area last month and found a portion of the river filled up with earth. There were 10 shacks and piles of bamboo on the grabbed portion.

Locals said the bamboos, brought from other areas on boats, are sold in the local market. Mujibur is at the heart of the business.

One of the demarcation pillars of the river was seen right next to an illegally constructed building.

During multiple visits to the river in Kosturighat and BIWTA Bungalow areas throughout last month, this correspondent saw trucks dumping garbage into the waterbody.

Asked, Saker Ali, supervisor at Cox's Bazar municipality, told The Daily Star that the waste was collected from different parts of the town and that every day at least 100 truckloads of garbage are dumped into the river.

Several municipality employees, wishing not to be named, said the waste is dumped there at the mayor's instruction.

As river has shrunk in the area due to garbage, a few tin-roofed buildings were built on the bank.

The rampant grabbing can be seen for a stretch of around seven 7km between Nuniachhora and Bangla

Bazar. This reporter saw at least 500 illegal structures there.

The 70km Bakkhali originates from the hills in Bandarban and reaches the Bay of Bengal in Cox's Bazar through Ramu and Maheshkhali.

DIST ADMIN'S LIST

Following a writ filed by the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), the High Court in 2014 directed the Cox's Bazar district administration to prepare a list of river grabbers and reclaim the land based on surveys carried out earlier by the authorities concerned.

The court also directed the authorities concerned to take steps to stop the pollution.

In 2015, the district administration made a list of 92 river grabbers. Mujibur was not on the list.

Cox's Bazar Deputy Commissioner Kamal Hossen said officials did not find Mujibur's involvement in river grabbing during their survey.

Asked about Mujibur's inclusion in the committee, he said the AL leader was in the body for his position as the mayor. "There was no personal choice or any other reason."

He, however, said it would not impact their drive against illegal encroachment on rivers.

"Court asked us to reclaim the river as per a CS survey. As there was no CS survey done in Cox's Bazar, we sought court's direction in this regard. Once we get the direction, we will start our work."

In another order in 2015, the HC asked the Cox's Bazar municipal mayor to stop dumping solid or liquid waste into the Bakkhali or on its banks.

On multiple occasions, Bela served notices to the district administration to take steps for stopping the pollution, but the efforts went in vain.

Muzibur Rahman Howlader, chairman of the National River Conservation Commission, said it was inconceivable that the district administration co-opted someone like

2 'criminals' killed in 'gunfights'

STAR REPORT

Two alleged criminals were killed in what law enforcers claimed were gunfights in Chattogram and Cox's Bazar early yesterday.

A suspected robber was killed in a "shootout" with Rab members in Chattogram's Banskhali upazila, our Chattogram office reports.

Morshed Alam, 35, stood accused in around two dozen cases, including murder, said Mahmudul Hasan, assistant director (media wing) of Rab-7.

Rab also claimed to have recovered five firearms, 14 bullets, and three bullet shells from the spot.

A patrol team of Rab-7 raided Banigram Lotmuni hilly area around 12:30am on information that some criminals were preparing to commit a robbery in the area, said Tarek Aziz, second-in-command of Rab-7 Chandgaon camp.

Sensing the Rab members' presence, the criminals opened fire. The law enforcers then retaliated, he added.

At one stage, Morshed was hit, while his cohorts managed to flee, the official added.

He was taken to Banskhali Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

In Cox's Bazar, an alleged yaba trader was killed in a similar incident with police in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila, reports our correspondent there.

Three policemen were injured during the "gunfight" that took place in Nayabazar area around 3:00am yesterday, said police.

Mohammad Nasir alias Munna, 30, of East Satghoria Para of the upazila, was accused in a narcotics case, said police.

Acting on a tip-off that a consignment of yaba tablets was supposed to be smuggled in Bangladesh from Myanmar, a team of Teknaf police took position in Nayabazar area beside the Naf river, said Pradip Kumar Das, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station.

Some yaba traders suddenly started firing on the police team, injuring three policemen -- ASI Ohed Ullah, constables Abdul Shukkur and Md Helal, the OC claimed.

Police then returned fire, triggering the "gunfight". Nasir was found lying on the spot after the "shootout" ended, the police official added.

Nasir was rushed to Teknaf Upazila Health Complex and later moved to Cox's Bazar General Hospital where doctors declared him dead, he added.

Police also claimed to have recovered 10,000 yaba pills, three homemade firearms, and 12 bullets from the spot.

The Daily Star, however, could not communicate with any of the deceased's families.

GP wants to pay

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carrier with a 46 percent market share, said his company sought the instalment facility as a High Court bench had earlier allowed Robi to pay their dues in instalments.

Following a High Court order on January 14, Robi has deposited Tk 27.60 crore as their first of five instalments to the BTRC.

Later, the regulator withdrew all the restrictions imposed on the carrier.

According to the court order, Robi will have to pay Tk 138 crore to the BTRC.

Grameenphone is now hoping that a hearing will be held within a short time and the review petition will be resolved before February 23, Sadat told The Daily Star.

However, a Supreme Court lawyer said if the Appellate Division did not hear the petition, Grameenphone would be left with no option but to pay the Tk 2,000 crore.

Failing to do so could result in the BTRC taking measures, including appointing administrators, against Grameenphone, he said.

Prime Minister's ICT Affairs Adviser Sajeb Ahmed Wazed recently directed the telecom regulator to strictly follow the court order to realise the money.

Cuba says Trump admin pressured Bolivia to worsen ties

REUTERS, Havana

A day after Bolivia suspended diplomatic relations with Cuba, Havana accused its interim government of having sought to sabotage bilateral ties ever since it took power last year, partly under pressure from the Trump administration.

Communist-run Cuba was a key ally of Bolivia's former leftist President Evo Morales - who resigned amid a political crisis and protests in November - and has supported his assertion that he was toppled in a foreign-backed "coup".

Bolivia's conservative interim President Jeanine Anez, meanwhile, has tried to align the country more closely with US President Donald Trump's administration, which is cranking up sanctions on Cuba.

No level-playing field in city polls

BNP tells diplomats

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top BNP policymakers yesterday told diplomats that there is no level-playing field ahead of the elections of Dhaka north and south city corporations scheduled for February 1.

They said this at a meeting with the diplomatic corps in Dhaka at BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia's Gulshan office and informed them about the prevailing situation.

The BNP leaders brought allegations of violations of electoral code of conduct by the ruling party's mayoral candidates and their supporters attacking BNP candidates during their campaigns, said a party insider who was present at the meeting.

They also informed the diplomats that the government is now engaged in harassing the party's mayoral and councillor candidates in the election by implicating them in politically motivated cases, the source said.

After the meeting, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury told reporters that his party informed the diplomats about the attacks on BNP's Dhaka South City Corporation mayoral candidate Ishraque Hossain and Dhaka North City Corporation

candidate Tabith Awal.

In such a circumstance, there is no level-playing field to hold the city elections in a free, fair and credible manner and the issue has been elaborately presented before the diplomats, the BNP leader said.

Citing demerits of using the much-talked-about Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), BNP drew attention of the diplomats toward the Election Commission's rigid stance on using EVMs in the election, Amir Khasru said.

"Using EVMs is a process to snatch people's voting rights and make the election questionable. It can't be acceptable by any means," he added.

Diplomats of at least 20 countries including the UK, the USA, China, Canada, India, France, Turkey, Germany, Australia and the European Union member states took part in the hour-long closed-door meeting that began around 4:00pm.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, its Standing Committee Members Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku, and some other top party leaders attended the meeting.

AL, BNP men

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local councillor candidate Rokon Uddin Ahmed took position on a nearby street and Ishraque's procession was passing them.

Both sides started shouting provocative slogans against each other. At one stage, they hurled brick chunks, they said.

Several gunshots were heard during the clash. A number of vehicles were also vandalised. Police went to the spot and brought the situation under control half an hour later, witnesses added.

At least 10 people took first aid at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, sources said.

Shah Iftekhar Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Wari division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they recovered seven bullet shells from the spot after they dispersed the feuding groups.

No one was arrested.

Talking to reporters, Ishraque alleged that his supporters came under attack when they were campaigning peacefully.

He also alleged that when they were passing an election camp of an AL-supported councillor contender for reserved seat for women, some started throwing brick chunks from an under-construction building in the area.

"I learnt that they [AL activists] were beating up one of my supporters. As I went to rescue him, they hurled brick chunks at me. At one point, I also heard gunshots," he claimed.

"Whenever our activists came under attack, we wrote to the Election Commission. But it did not take any action," Ishraque alleged at a press conference at his Gopibagh home.

About the role of police, the mayor candidate said police went to the spot after the clash ended.

He added that some policemen were helping them and giving them protection. "But a section of them is acting as ruling party cadres."

Asked whether he was feeling insecure, Ishraque said, "Of course not. I'm the son of a valiant freedom fighter. I'm not afraid of the sound of bullets ... I'm ready to sacrifice my life. I will not quit the race ..."

Replying to a query, he said, "I will file a case in this connection as I'm

respectful to the law."

AL-backed councillor candidate Rokon could not be contacted for comment.

Injured Sohrab Hossain, AL joint secretary of ward-39, said they were conducting electioneering peacefully and the BNP men, led by Ishraque, attacked them.

Most of the 10 who took treatment at DMCH are AL activists. They were wounded as BNP men beat them up and threw brick chunks at them, Sohrab, who is loyal to Rokon, claimed.

Md Alamgir, senior secretary of the EC, said action would be taken after investigation over the incidents of violence during electioneering.

On January 21, Tabith Awal, BNP's mayor candidate for Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC), and his followers came under attack while campaigning in the capital's Gabtoli area.

BNP leaders alleged the attackers were supporters of a local ward councillor candidate backed by the ruling Awami League. AL leaders, however, denied their involvement in the incident.

A case was filed in this connection with Wari Police Station, a police official said.

Cast your vote

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Asked, she said, "He asked for my vote and said he will do his best to increase the quality of the DNCC's service for the citizens. But they all promise a lot and can only be seen during election campaigns. We just hope he does not do the same."

Noted actors like Rozina, Aruna Biswas, Rubel and Dipjol were also seen joining the campaign for Atiqul.

Mosir Rahman, 60, a fruit-stall owner in the area, said, "I am from Gopalganj and whoever is contesting for Boat, I will vote for them. I expect anyone who is elected mayor to do their duty while prioritising citizens."

Addressing the locals, Atiqul said, "I have unveiled my manifesto today. With the support of the people, I want to implement it for the development of the city."

After asking them to vote for their favourite candidate without fear, Atiqul left the campaign around 4:30pm.