

## PROJECT OF CTG DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY Contractor illegally razes 92,700sqft hill

*Builds wall around the flattened hill beside under-construction link road in Salimpur area*

MOSTAFA YOUSUF

Spectra Engineering Limited, contractor of a road construction project between the port city's Bayezid area and Dhaka-Chattogram highway razed hills on 92,700 square feet of land in the last few years.

But the firm has faced almost no action for harming the environment in Chattogram's Salimpur area.

Officials said the firm dumped truckloads of earth it had cut from the hills to the Foy's Lake, a major tourist attraction.

Spectra won the contract from Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) in 2012 to build the 6km-long road. The hill-cutting was aimed at grabbing the land, environment department officials said.

Environment Minister Shahab Uddin visited the area on February 06 following reports in the media and asked the Department of Environment (DoE) to take action against the company.

The DoE later fined CDA Tk 10 crore

for cutting the hills without following the original plan.

The company also built a wall around the land, DoE officials said.

DoE Director (Chattogram) Mohammad Moazzom Hossain told The Daily Star that an inspection by his department last month found that the hills had been destroyed.

"They built a 15-foot high wall so that no one could tell what they were doing. They razed the hills although it was not necessary for the project," he said.

"We have issued a notice to the engineering firm to appear at a hearing. We will take action as per the law", he added.

CDA Executive Engineer Rajib Dad, who is directing the road-construction project, told The Daily Star that the razing of the hills had nothing to do with the project.

Contacted, Spectra's Project Manager Robiul Haque said no hill was cut without following the project map.

He also claimed that there was no hill in the area and said the allegations were false.



A wall constructed after flattening part of a hill in Jangal Salimpur area of Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila. A construction firm named Spectra Engineering Limited, which razed the hill, claimed it did this to keep construction materials there. The photo was taken on Thursday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

### CORONAVIRUS SCARE

## None infected in Bangladesh

*Says IEDCR after analysing 55 samples from China returnees*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh is still free from the novel corona virus infection, the authorities concerned said yesterday after analysing 55 samples from people who returned from China recently and were suspected to be infected.

Prof Meerjady Sabrina Flora, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), spoke to journalists in this regard during a regular press briefing in her office in Dhaka.

"We have tested a total of 55 cases, including the latest one from Rangpur, upon suspicion. Every case tested had the same result -- negative. So, we can say firmly there is no coronavirus infection inside the country," Prof Meerjady said.

On Saturday, the student who returned from China on January 29 was admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital with respiratory problems.

An IEDCR team collected samples to test from the student that same evening. After testing those, they said the student did not have coronavirus.

Authorities said they would discharge the student today.

IEDCR director informed that Bangladesh is not among the high-risk countries listed by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the novel coronavirus infection.

"We have communication with China and other neighbouring countries [where coronavirus has been confirmed]. Flights are being operated to Singapore every day. So, there are risks but we have taken preparation for this."

She urged people not to panic about coronavirus and stay sincere in maintaining hygiene.

Meanwhile, the 312 Bangladeshis who returned from Chinese city Wuhan -- the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak and kept quarantined in Ashkona Hajji Camp are well and would be released on Sunday.

"We are working on preparations to discharge all of the Wuhan returnees on Feb 16. All of them are well. We hope there will be no problem," Dr

Shahnila Ferdoushi, director of the Center for Disease Control (CDC) of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), told The Daily Star.

Prof Abul Kalam Azad, director general of the DGHS, yesterday held a meeting through video conference with all divisional directors, civil surgeons and upazila health and family planning officers across the country.

He informed the officials about the coronavirus situation across the globe and told them to take necessary preparations in this regard.

Authorities concerned have also stepped up surveillance in all entry points to bring all the inbound passengers to the country.

Health officers at all border entry points across the country screened some 12,630 inbound passengers from different countries in 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday.

None of the passengers was identified with any symptom of coronavirus during the screenings, according to IEDCR.

Over the 24-hour period, Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport reported the highest number of passengers screened was 6,162.

Two other seaports -- Chattogram Seaport and the Mongla Seaport screened a total of 240 passenger.

All the land ports collectively screened a total of 6,228 inbound passengers in the last 24 hours.

The IEDCR has provided hotline numbers for any necessary information or service regarding corona virus.

The hotline numbers are -- 01927711784, 01927711785, 01937000011, and 01937110011.

Meanwhile, at a press briefing after the regular weekly meeting at the Prime Minister's office, Secretary (Coordination and Reform) of the Cabinet Division Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, "In accordance with the Cabinet's decision, no more Bangladeshis will be brought back from coronavirus affected China, as the authorities concerned didn't find any authenticity of the allegations that Bangladeshis residing in China are not getting food or other facilities."

## No separate tribunal

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the jurisdiction for quick disposal of such cases and ease the huge backlog of drug-related cases.

He said necessary number of narcotics control tribunals were supposed to be formed in line with article 44 of the Narcotics Control Act, 2018.

But the Law and Justice Division is yet to set up any Narcotics Control Tribunal and it cannot entrust the tribunal's responsibility to any additional district judge or sessions judge due to administrative reasons, said Mujibur.

"So, complexities have been created in disposal of cases filed under the Narcotics Control Act, 2018 since it became effective, and the number of pending cases filed under this law keeps growing day by day."

As per article 44 of the proposed law, the courts, having the jurisdiction, can try the narcotic-related cases as per the gravity of crimes and a sessions judge or a metropolitan sessions judge concerned can fix one or more courts that have the jurisdiction to try narcotic-related crimes in their respective areas, the secretary said.

He said changes have been brought to 22 articles of the exiting law.

Meanwhile, the cabinet approved in principle the draft of Bangladesh

Tourism Corporation Bill, 2020 to remove some problems and obscurities from the exiting Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation Order, 1972.

The Bill was brought to make the existing law a time-befitting one to increase collection of revenue from the tourism sector, said Mujibur.

With a four-member board of directors, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) now faces difficulty to take prompt decisions in coordination with other ministries and departments concerned, the secretary said.

Since the ministries and departments concerned have no representatives in the BPC board, it does get the desired assistance from the agencies for the development of the country's tourism sector, he added.

"If the proposed law is passed, the board of Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation will be formed with senior secretaries, secretaries and representatives of the ministries and departments concerned," Mujibur said.

Besides, the cabinet adopted a felicitation motion greeting the Bangladesh U-19 cricket team for clinching the ICC Under-19 World Cup 2020 trophy, beating India by three wickets in the final of the tournament in Potchefstroom, South Africa on Sunday.

## HC bans all sorts of gambling

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article 27 of the constitution says, "All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law", the HC said.

The court appreciated the government's drives against gambling and illegal casinos.

The bench of Justice Sheikh Hassan Arif and Justice Md Mahmud Hassan Talukder delivered the verdict following a writ petition filed by Supreme Court lawyers Samiul Huq and Rokonuddin Md Faruq in 2016 seeking orders on the government for taking action.

The petition said gambling is illegal and a punishable offence under the Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1976, Chittagong Metropolitan Police Ordinance 1978, and Public Gambling Act 1867, and Article 18(2) of the constitution. But authorities concerned at clubs arrange card and dice games and bingo in violation of the law.

Following the same petition, another

HC bench on December 5, 2016, directed the government to immediately stop gambling at 13 clubs.

The clubs are: Dhaka Club Ltd, Uttara Club Ltd, Gulshan Club Ltd, Dhanmondi Club Ltd, Banani Club Ltd, Officers' Club Dhaka, Ladies' Club Dhaka, Cadet College Club Dhaka, Chittagong Club Ltd, Chittagong Seniors' Club Ltd, Narayanganj Club Ltd, Sylhet Club Ltd, and Khulna Club Ltd.

The HC had also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain as to why they should not be directed to take actions against the unlawful business.

Redowan Ahmed Runjid appeared for the writ petitioners while Deputy Attorney General Bipul Bagmar represented the state and Ruhul Quddus Kazal argued for Dhaka Club Ltd.

On July 1, 2014, another HC bench in its full verdict declared "nipun", "dice games" and bingo illegal and taking part and organising such games was a

punishable offence.

The bench delivered the verdict rejecting a petition of Md Jafar Ullah, chief of Naogaon Muktiyoddha Welfare Club, challenging the legality of law enforcers' action against the club for conducting such games.

"Any game that is played for money, wager or stake or in other words played risking money or something of value for a chance to win a prize is gambling," it said.

"Whoever found present in the 'common gaming-house' for the purpose of gaming, no matter playing for money, wager, stake or otherwise, is punishable under the said Act.

"Owning, keeping or having charge of common gaming-house as contemplated under Section 3 of the Public Gambling Act, 1867, is an offence and punishable ..."

"Lottery" is a form of gambling punishable under Section 294A of the Penal Code with exceptions provided therein, the HC said.

## Project delayed, cost doubles

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"It was specifically a failure to carry out feasibility study properly, preparing DPP without following feasibility study and non-identification of elements of the project [initially]," said an IMED assessment report in June 2018.

The Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) report mentioned delay in land acquisition and utility shifting, non-implementation of environmental impact assessment, lack of planning in procuring goods, and slow pace of construction work as other weaknesses of the project.

Md Ishaque, the project director, told this newspaper on January 26 that they would not be able to meet the previously revised deadline, June this year, as the contractors would not be able to complete most of the flyovers and separate lanes for slow-moving vehicles by this time.

Last month, the project authorities sent a special revision proposal to the road transport and bridges ministry to increase project costs by Tk 621 crore; it is now awaiting approval at the planning ministry, said project officials.

According to the IMED report, however, the project would require even more funds in the near future to construct more separate lanes by 2023 at various busy parts of the road to cope with the ever growing number of vehicles.

The IMED is a separate division under the planning ministry which evaluates all government development projects.

**WHY IS THE PROJECT IMPORTANT?** The highway is a part of the Asian Highway network, the Saarc Highway Corridor, and the South Asia Subregional Economic Cooperation (SASEC) road connectivity initiative.

As a part of these connectivity initiatives, the government has decided to turn the entire stretches from Dhaka to the Indian border areas in the northern districts into four-lane roads.

The work for upgradation of a 190km section from Elega to Rangpur to a four-lane highway has already started and upgradation of Rangpur-Banglabandha and Rangpur-Burimari roads to four-lane is now under government consideration.

Upgradation of these roads will not only facilitate inter-district connectivity but also regional connectivity, especially with India, Nepal and Bhutan, project officials said.

According to the feasibility study of the Joydevpur-Elega project, the number of vehicles on this highway everyday was 13,250 in 2011 and is projected to be 33,920 and 57,310 in 2025 and 2034 respectively.

**'POOR PLANNING'** In March 2013, the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnc) approved the project at a cost of Tk 2,788 crore.

The Asian Development Bank, the OPEC Fund for International Development, and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Development made commitments to provide Tk 1,843 crore of the total cost.

The cost had to be revised within 10 months as the amount of land mentioned in the original DPP was inadequate, according to the IMED report.

The original DPP proposed the acquisition of 18.91 hectares (1 hectare = about 2.47 acres) of land but completion of the project was not possible with that amount of land, it mentioned.

The project cost rose to Tk 3,066 crore as Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader in January 2014 approved the first revision -- which was adding another 16.52 hectares of land.

The authorities then undertook a special revision of the project in August 2016, escalating the cost to Tk 3,364 crore, due to increasing expenditure on land and structures.

Major changes in the project, however, were brought about in the second revision in May 2018.

Seven more flyovers (in addition to the originally planned two), 11 underpasses, and five foot-over bridges, were added to the project. The authorities also decided to construct a separate lane for slow-moving vehicles on both sides of the highway, instead of on one side, according to the report.

For this, the authorities had to acquire another 34.54 hectares of land and widen all bridges and culverts, the report stated. As a result, the cost of the project rose to Tk 5,593.15 crore and the revised deadline was set for June 2020.

"The second revision was required as all necessary elements were not incorporated while DPP was prepared," reads the IMED report. "The real progress of the work is not satisfactory."

Meanwhile, commuters face congestion near the under-construction flyovers when pressure of vehicles increases, though most of the road work has been done, according to our Tangail Correspondent, who visited the project area on February 5.

Besides, the ruts or surface depression on this highway, especially on around 15m towards Joydevpur from Elega, is causing problems for travelers, although the project authorities did some refurbishment before the last Eid journey, he reported, citing local transport operators.

**PROGRESS GOOD!**

At a meeting on government projects with foreign funds on December 29 last year, Md Ishaque, the project director, said "Progress of the project is good."

Although the roadwork could be completed by June this year, work on the flyovers would not be done by this time, so the deadline needed to be extended, he said, according to the meeting minutes.

The project director also mentioned that an additional secretary of the RHD has already talked to the deputy commissioners of Gazipur and Tangail to solve the problems related to land acquisition.

A representative of the Planning Commission, who attended the meeting, said, "The ministry should pay more attention to persons responsible

for the escalation of project cost and duration."

ABM Sertajur Rahman, deputy project director, said construction of four flyovers has already been done while another would be completed by June this year.

But the remaining four would take some more time with two flyovers taking till March 2021 to complete, he told The Daily Star on January 23.

"Delay in land acquisition is the main reason behind the project delay," he said, adding, "Rise of land acquisition cost is ultimately causing the cost escalation of the project."

The cost of land rose due to three reasons -- introduction of a new land acquisition law, the cost rise in the rate schedules of the Public Works Department (PWD), and rise in land prices, said Sertajur.

As per the previous land acquisition law, they had to pay two times the land price but now have to pay three times that, he said. The government has to bear the additional costs.

The project witnessed 73.16 per cent physical progress and 66.98 per cent financial progress till December 2019.

Contacted, Project Director Md Ishaque denied the allegations of slow pace of construction work. "Wherever we got land, our work speed is good."

He, however, admitted that the delay in land acquisition is delaying the entire project.

Asked about the observations of "poor planning" in the IMED report, he said he was not aware why separate "Slow Moving Vehicles Track (SMVT)" on both sides of the road was not included in the DPP.

"I was not project director at that time. Had SMVT on both sides been included in the DPP, they could have acquired land for this earlier."

He, however, said they have added more flyovers and SMVTs on both sides for uninterrupted traffic movement.

Replying to another query about the IMED report that said constructing more separate lanes at various busy parts of the road would require till 2023, Ishaque said, "It will not require separate lanes as the entire road will have six lanes [with two SMVTs]."

## Another Test

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4-26 and was declared man of the match.

However, Naseem was unavailable to bowl yesterday due to pain in his ribs but Pakistan still took about one hour and 25 minutes to remove the remaining four Tigers' wickets, inflicting a 10th defeat on Bangladesh in 11 matches, with the other drawn.

Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haque was dismissed in the first over after resumption. The left-hander was trapped in front by Shaheen Shah Afridi after scoring a 93-ball 41.

The last recognised batsman, Liton Das, who had started the day with Mominul, fell in the 61st over and the Tigers were soon bundled out.

## People to lose interest in JS if vital issues not discussed

*Menon tells parliament*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon yesterday in parliament said people would lose interest in the House if lawmakers were not allowed to hold discussions on important issues.

Pointing to his submission of a notice in parliament seeking permission to discuss the sorry state of the banking sector, Menon said the Speaker did not consider it for discussion.

"MPs in parliament generally cannot express their independent opinion in many cases due to Article 70 of the constitution. If we can't hold discussions on such important issues, we will only listen to government's praise in parliament," he said while discussing the thanksgiving motion on the president's address.

Under the Article 70, lawmakers lose their seats in parliament if they vote in the House against the party that nominated them.

Pointing to the low voter turnout in the February 1 Dhaka city polls, Menon said apathy among the people to vote could cause disaster for the country's democracy.

"Such low turnout will also make political parties irrelevant in the country's politics," he said. "Even [many] supporters of the Awami League and the 14-party did not go to the polling centres."

Talking about the banking sector, Menon said the government borrowings from the sector had touched the ceiling in the first six months of this fiscal year.

He mentioned that the credit flow in the private sector was the lowest in the last 11 years, which is only 9.83 per cent.

He also criticised Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal for his claim that the amount of defaulted loan would not increase. "The steps he has taken to reduce the amount was pro-businessmen, not pro-banking sector or pro-economy."

Menon demanded the government publish the name of those laundering money abroad.

He put emphasis on forming a bank commission to bring discipline in the banking sector.

## We may

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be slow, Tedros warned it could accelerate.

"Containment remains our objective, but all countries must use the window of opportunity created by the containment strategy to prepare for the virus's possible arrival," he said.

Outside mainland China, there have been more than 350 infections reported in nearly 30 places. There have been two deaths, one in the Philippines and the other in Hong Kong.

Several countries have banned arrivals from China while major airlines have suspended flights, and Air China cancelled some of its flights to the United States.

The WHO-led mission to China is being headed up by Bruce Aylward, a veteran of previous health emergencies, Tedros said. Aylward oversaw the WHO's 2014-2016 response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa.

The WHO said in recent days there had been "some stabilising" in the numbers of new cases of the coronavirus in China. But the UN agency cautioned it was too early to say if the virus had peaked.

The SARS-like virus is believed to have emerged late last year in the central city of Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province where millions of people are under lockdown in a bid to stop it spreading.