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Lake project delayed by lack of money, manpower

By Morshed Ali Khan

Delay in releasing funds coupled with severe labour shortage has put a brake on the Dhannondi lake development project, sources said.

A revised project proposal involving Tk 14.78 crore is awaiting approval of the Planning Commission. Once approved, it will be sent to Local Government Ministry which will in turn send it to the Finance Ministry. Then the fund will be released through a government order. Sources from the bureaucratic tangle in releasing funds might cause the project to fall apart.

However, despite repeated attempts the officials of the DCC's Engineering Section could not be reached for confirmation.

Sources also said the lake development project was originally scheduled to be completed in June 1999 but the deadline

has been extended till end of this year.

The revised amount is nearly five crores more from the original projection of Tk 10 crore. The sources said, with some new components being added and some others slashed the project cost may go as high as Tk 20 crore. About three crore taka, spent for relocation of WASA, DESA and T&T lines, have not been included in the revised proposal. None could, however, clarify where this additional amount would come from.

Explaining the sluggish pace, sources concerned with implementation of the project also said that they were facing an acute shortage of both skilled and unskilled labour. At the moment about 100 labourers are working at the site

against a requirement of nearly 1000.

Site engineer Hafizur Rahaman said the entire construction sector is now facing an acute labour shortage. He said thousands of unskilled labourers are now busy harvesting in rural areas. Moreover, hundreds of skilled manpower, such as masons, welder, bricklayers, casters and rod shutters have gone to the Middle East for a better prospects over the last two years, leaving a big vacuum in the construction sector.

Sources said several components including the length of walkways have been crossed off the project while some others have been added. Retention walls near BDR gate, Satmasjid Road, Road-27 ends and a concrete yard at Road-32 have been taken up. The concrete yard would cost an additional Tk 78

lakh while cost of the retention walls could not be known.

Meanwhile, large scale encroachment and residents' persistent refusal to relocate sewer lines leading to the lake have brought work on the western part of Road-32 to a complete halt. Officials said it was not possible to work there unless those lines were relocated and encroached lands restored. The 'Ideal Police Outpost' at Road-24 has its sewer lines directed into the lake. Sources said notices were served on the offenders time and again, but to no avail.

One DCC source said although it was decided that the Estate Department of DCC would take measures to do away with the encroachment through its legal wing, the department has so far done "nothing".

Doctors at Pakundia, thana health complex, where Roushanara is now recovering from the trauma, would not say whether a rape was committed till final report comes from the office of Kishoreganj civil surgeon.

Meanwhile, relationship among the five accused and the male colleagues of the victim in the union Parishad has now come under scrutiny. Concerned sources cited some recent examples of 'non-cooperation' from the part of other male members in Roushanara's union.

Roushanara had lodged a case with the Pakundia Police Station on May 2, complaining that five persons stormed her Kazihati residence on the night of May 1 and Fazlul Haq, one of those five, violated her chastity after forcing her school-going daughter out of the house. Victim's husband, Hares Uddin,

Two weeks after the reported rape of Union Parishad member Roushanara Begum, police hunt for the main accused continues while doctors are yet to ascertain the nature of the assault.

As mystery shrouds the May 1 alleged rape incident of Roushanara, an elected member of Jangala Union Parishad under Pakundia thana in Kishoreganj, district administration now shifts focus to other phenomena that could provide a clue in pursuing the case.

Only day before yesterday, the personal attires of Roushanara were sent to Dhaka for chemical test at the Institute of Public Health (IPH). If IPH results were positive, it would reinforce primary assessment that 'indecent assault' was inflicted upon Roushanara.

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During a daylong visit to Pakundia on Wednesday, this correspondent came across a cross section of people in the thana headquarters and they all expressed deep concern about such attack on an elected representative at the grassroots level of local government administration.

Kishoreganj Deputy Commissioner (DC) A.M. Farhad, who came to see Roushanara at the hospital for the third time on Wednesday, said district administration was seriously looking into the relationship between the accused and some of the union Parishad men.

"People told me that some of the accused were frequent visitors to union Parishad office but we have to examine all the aspects first."

The DC explained that the government's endeavour to see empowerment of women at grassroots level has been frustrated in some places because of 'male egocentric' attitude towards new female leadership in local government bodies.

Lying pale on a hospital bed, victim Roushanara herself narrated to The Daily Star how often her call for holding meetings with other male colleagues in the Parishad went unheeded.

Chairman of the Jangala Union Parishad A.K.M. Fazlul Haq Bachu acknowledged that three male members of the union, who were invited recently by Roushanara for a seat.

Roushanara, however, did not reply to a query regarding 'cool relationship' with Reaz Master's family.



Power and plight

UP membership could not give her the protection.

Star photo: Sk Enamul Haque

rickshaw-puller, was not home at that time.

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Reforms retarded

By Naimul Haq

The government is yet to implement the proposed 'unification of the divided health and family planning services' at thana level and below, greatly affecting realisation of the objectives of health sector reforms.

A report jointly prepared by the government and the World Bank as part of Annual Performance Review said, "Delay in implementing the proposed unification process of health and family planning services at thana level and below is causing major obstacles in achieving goals of the reforms in health programmes."

Unification is one of the major components of planned change in the US dollar 2.9 billion five-year health and population sector programme (HPSP), launched in July 1998.

People now have to go to two different places for the services -- for health related problems they go to health centres while for reproductive health and

family planning services they go to family planning centres.

To make the services available at 'one stop', the government had decided to go for unification of the services.

The report said, "Progress on many key HPSP initiatives, including the establishment of community clinics from where the proposed 'one stop' services would be available and improving quality and access, depends on the reorganisation of service delivery at thana level and below."

The report prepared during March-April this year also said, "Implementation of the agreed plans has slowed down. The health ministry needs to re-invigorate the process with more effort to increase understanding and ownership of the reform process at all levels within the ministry and in other ministries such as establishment and finance."

It further said that in order to achieve the objectives of op-

erational plans, "unification of the divided health and family planning services at thana and below needs to be implemented latest by June. Specific and decisive action is needed for the unification including finalisation of the job descriptions."

The report recommended that immediate action should be taken to transfer 10 per cent of family planning staff under the development budget to the revenue budget by June 15 as part of phased transfer of all required staff.

"Unfortunately, the unification process has not yet taken place due to some 'difficulties', said health ministry official.

"For the proposed reorganisation, a statutory regulatory order (SRO) is required which involves specification of staff status and position, transfer order, salary structure and others. Until we have the SRO, it is not possible to implement the unification process."

A senior doctor at a government hospital was found doing private practice during duty hours.

The Resident Medical Officer (RMO) of Pirojpur Modern Government Hospital was seeing patients taking fees in his office room during duty hours on May 3. A number of patients were sitting in the room when this correspondent visited the hospital at around 1 pm.

The patients told this correspondent that they came to consult the RMO. "We do so whenever needed and some of us are here for the third time," one of them said.

Asked if the doctor charged any fee, another patient said, "For every visit, we give Tk 100."

The RMO admitted that he privately sees in his office only those patients who seek special care.

"Every day I am approached by many patients coming from distance places. They request me to see them privately and as early as possible so that they can go back home the same day," he said.

This correspondent saw a police officer coming to the RMO with his son who was bitten by a stray dog. The doctor prescribed some medicine and Si Anwar offered him the usual fee of Tk 100. He hesitated to take the money but finally took it.

When the RMO was busy seeing patients privately, indoor patients on the 1st floor of the hospital continued to suffer.

Some of the indoor patients alleged that the doctors hardly pay any attention to them. The male ward remains almost without any duty nurses round the clock.

No major incident was reported.

Our correspondent adds: The still mill workers held a rally at EPZ gate in the evening.

They announced a fresh agitation programme, including a two-day hartal in the port city on May 30 and 31 to press home their demand for reopening of the mills.

Meanwhile, the hospital

PM leaves for the Hague today

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaves Dhaka today for the Hague to deliver speech at the Hague Peace Conference in the Netherlands, reports UNB.

The Hague Appeal for Peace invited the Prime Minister to attend the concluding session of its centenary celebration that began May 11. She will deliver her speech on May 15.

The Prime Minister is expected to meet UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on the sidelines of the peace conference.

By Rafiq Hasan back from Pirojpur

faces acute shortage of doctors. Three emergency medical officers recently posted in the hospital were still to join duty. Besides, medicine, orthopaedic and gynaecology departments have no consultants for long.

Most of the patients alleged that they are not supplied with drugs.

Regarding this, the RMO said, "We are facing acute shortage of drugs and other medical accessories supply for the past two months. In such circumstances, we are compelled to ask patients to arrange drugs and other medical accessories on their own."

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Private pocketing in public time

By Rafiq Hasan back from Pirojpur

Wonder rice to wane hungry cries

By Reaz Ahmad, back from the Philippines

In line with IRRI's goal of developing 'new plant types', Transgenic Rice comes as yet another wonder, promising the world a new solution to hunger.

"Transgenic Rice is a rice plant with an alien gene or genes from other foreign sources, such as wild relatives of rice, virus, bacteria and fungi. Techniques of genetic engineering is being applied to induce novel characteristics in traditional rice plants," said an IRRI scientist.

Talking to some visiting Asian journalists late last month, IRRI scientists said genetic engineering would help enhance pest and disease resistance, increase tolerance to flooding and drought, raise yield potential, improve nutritional value and reduce production cost.

In recent years, though IRRI has developed a number of Transgenic Rice varieties, their availability to farmers remained a far cry for some technical reasons and controversies.

The biosafety guidelines in the Philippines, where IRRI is headquartered, do not permit field test of transgenic rice in that country. Most of the Asian countries including Bangladesh do not have their own set of biosafety guidelines yet.

IRRI scientists told the journalists that development of transgenic rice outside Transgenic Greenhouse could not be done by IRRI until the Philippines Biosafety Guidelines permitted field test. Transgenic Greenhouse is a controlled environment in which IRRI conducts test on genetically modified rice plants.

The Philippines is the third country in Asia after Japan and India to introduce biosafety guidelines. Bangladesh is now in an advanced stage of introducing its own guidelines.

There are strong controversies worldwide over possible environmental fallback and the threat genetically modified crops might pose to human

health, the scientists pointed out.

They are also concerned about food-allergy characteristics of some genes taken from foreign sources. After ingestion, these may reach blood circulation and trigger allergic reactions.

Bacterial Blight (BB) is one of the most destructive diseases of rice throughout the world.

IRRI, a gene called Xa-21 was transferred from a wild species to its modern variety IR-24. Preliminary field experi-

ence showed that new transgenic rice called IRBB-21 is resistant to BB.

Stem border damage is also a serious problem in rice, causing estimated losses of 10 to 30 per cent of the total yield. *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt) is a common soil bacterium capable of producing insecticidal proteins. IRRI has developed transgenic rice with Bt genes — known as Bt rice — to address stem borer problem.

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