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Runaway road corruption

Tk 210cr spent from repair funds in 3 years, still Dhaka roads full of potholes

PINAKI ROY

Dhaka roads remain pockmarked with potholes even though the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) spent Tk 210 crore in the last three fiscal years on road construction and repair. Yet no major repair work had been undertaken in the last two years.

Mayor Sedique Hossain Khoka said a major reason for the rundown roads is runaway misuse of funds.

The amount was mainly spent on payment of arrears bills. Sometimes, the contractors illegally got repair work orders and even received cheques more than once

for the same job," the mayor told The Daily Star.

To make the pillage easier, the DCC did not maintain any database on the roads that have been repaired or constructed. This virtually left the corporation in the dark and no one knew if work orders were being issued for the same road repair time and again.

But forced by the World Bank, the DCC is now colour-coding the roads that have been repaired or constructed.

"We are now taking care of things and trying to eliminate manipulation. We have decided to colour-code the city map to know which

roads have been repaired or constructed," Khoka said. "This will eliminate duplication of work order for the same roads."

Chief Engineer Dr Golam Quadir Moimuddin Chowdhury said some of the duplications in work orders were done through manipulation, but some were done unwillingly because of lack of transparency.

According to insiders, a syndicate in nexus with certain contractors skims off a chunk of the fund earmarked for repair or road construction, leaving very little for real work.

The corrupt DCC officials, especially those in the engineering

section, award jobs to the selective contractors. The contractors and engineers change with the election of a new mayor, but the practice continues.

Some contractors enlisted with the DCC have told The Daily Star about the dealings they have with the officials. According to them, they pay 10 per cent of the work amount to engineers to get work, 10 per cent to 'brokers' to clear cheques, 10 per cent to local ward commissioners and half a per cent to the accounts section.

"We can only do some cosmetic repairs with the fund left after that

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One to die for acid attack on wife

UNB, Gazipur

A young man was condemned to death by a special tribunal here yesterday for throwing acid on his wife five years ago, which blinded and deafened the minor girl.

Handing down the death penalty to Swapan Gazi, 26, the judge also fined him Tk 50,000 payable to the victim.

According to the prosecution, Swapan Gazi and his wife were last night arrested 72 alleged extortionists last night hours after Prime Minister Khaleda Zia directed law enforcers for the crackdown.

"We have already launched a crackdown on criminals and extortionists at bus terminals," said Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Ashraf Huda.

Crackdown on city bus terminal criminals

72 'extortionists' held by joint forces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a surprise move, joint forces swooped on five city bus terminals last night and arrested 72 alleged extortionists last night hours after Prime Minister Khaleda Zia directed law enforcers for the crackdown.

"We have already launched a crackdown on criminals and extortionists at bus terminals," said Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Ashraf Huda.

"The drive that began under the cover of top secrecy would restart tomorrow (Tuesday) morning," another top official said.

"Most officials except for a few knew about the drive tonight," he added.

During the two-hour sweep starting at 8:30pm, the forces picked up 30 at Mahakhali, 13 at Gulistan, 20 at Sayedabad and 9 at Joy Kali Mondir.

Sources said the joint forces were manned by police, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles, Rapid Action Team and the Detective Branch of Police swooped on Sayedabad, Joy Kali Mondir, Gulistan, Mohakhali and Fulbaria bus terminals.

A senior police officer said the crackdown would continue until the

arrest of all listed criminals. Earlier, police made a list of gang operatives at the terminals.

According to the sources, goons extort several lakhs of taka from each of the terminals in the name of various associations with whom some influential people are also involved.

Earlier UNB added Khaleda asked the law enforcers to immediately stop harassment of transport owners, workers and passengers as well as extortion at bus terminals.

The directive came from a high-level meeting that sat to evaluate the

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Workers place sandbags at an end of the first bridge on the Dhaleshwari River to save it from further erosion. The bridge is an important link between Dhaka and the southern region.

Tremors bare lack of preparedness

OUR CORRESPONDENT

A moderate earthquake and a train of aftershocks on Sunday heightened experts' fear of a major crisis in the Chittagong region because of the government's unpreparedness for tackling post-quake situation.

Sunday's tremor, the latest in a series of over 100 quakes that jolted the region in the past three and a half years was the strongest since 1997.

"We fear a major quake in future in the wake of a large number of moderate ones, but there is no preparedness on the part of the administration," said Prof Jahangir Alam, convenor of the Earthquake

Research Cell. "Even coordination among the Chittagong City Corporation, fire brigades and other bodies is seriously lacking," said Prof Jahangir, also chair of civil engineering at Chittagong University of Engineering and Technology.

Even Sunday dawn's tremor could have become devastating if it had lasted longer," he added.

Sunday's quake that measured 5.09 on the Richter scale and lasted for 20 seconds and injured 25 people and damaged at least 500 houses.

Eight killed in Saudi firefight

REUTERS, Riyadh

Six militants and two policemen were killed yesterday in a fierce firefight with security forces during a crackdown on wanted criminals, Saudi Arabia's Interior Ministry said.

Eight other policemen were slightly wounded in the clash at a farm in Qassim province, the ministry said in a statement read on Saudi television. Qassim is a heartland of militants in the country's northeast.

Saudi Arabia has intensified a hunt for militants since three bombings in Riyadh in May killed 35 people, including nine Americans.

The United States and Saudi Arabia blamed Saudi-born Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network for the attacks.

"The security forces besieged a farm in Qassim after information that a number of wanted men were hiding there. The suspects were asked to surrender, but they responded by firing at the security forces and also tossed hand grenades," the statement said.

"The operation led to the killing of six suspects and the wounding of one of them. Two security men were martyred and eight others were slightly wounded," it said.

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Two killed in city road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were killed and another was injured in road accidents at Paltan and Sutrapur yesterday.

Tasmer Begum, 65, was critically injured when a passenger bus knocked her down as she was crossing the road in front of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at around 1:00pm.

Locals rushed her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where she succumbed to her injuries at about 4:00pm.

Tasmer was the wife of Jan-e-Alam of Banasri, Rampura.

Motihel police seized the bus but the driver managed to escape. A

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Abducted Ctg businessman not rescued yet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Abducted businessman and Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Jamal Uddin Chowdhury alias JU Chowdhury could not be rescued till yesterday.

Raiding different areas of Fatikchhari and Raazan yesterday, police held Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury, Faroykora-11 union parishad (UP) chairman, from Pattiya for questioning.

Police arrested three persons on Sunday in this connection.

Top criminal Gittu Nasir, BDR Selim, Habib Khan and two UP chairmen of Fatikchhari and Sakania may be involved.

Nasir was sentenced to death and Habib was given life imprisonment in the Principal Gopal Krishna Ahuri murder case.

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2 more Marines killed in Iraq

Hunt on for Saddam

REUTERS/AP, Baghdad

The military reported the deaths of two US soldiers in separate attacks yesterday in a continuing upsurge of violence against the American occupation force.

The deaths brought to 50 the number of soldiers killed in a guerrilla war since May 1, when US President George W. Bush declared an end to major combat in Iraq. In all, 165 US soldiers have died in combat in Iraq, 18 more than were

killed in the 1991 Gulf War.

Fuelling a nervous cycle of fear and resentment between the American occupiers and ordinary Iraqis, people in Baghdad accused jumpy US troops of killing five passers-by Sunday in what looked like a botched raid in the hunt for Saddam Hussein. US spokesmen refused all comment on the incident.

The US commander in Iraq, Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, warned it was becoming a "terrorist magnet" for foreigners

and said attacks were getting more sophisticated.

Monday's was simple, but devastating -- someone dropped a grenade from a bridge onto a Humvee passing below. Reuters journalists saw at least one soldier who appeared dead and another who looked badly wounded. There was no official word then.

Those behind the attacks remain largely unseen and US commanders have been playing down the possi-

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21 ministries, deptts fail to report on ministers' pledges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Government Assurances has decided to ask 21 ministries and some departments to explain their failure to send 'status reports' on fulfillment of ministers' commitments made in the seventh and eighth parliaments.

The decision was taken at the second meeting of the committee held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan yesterday.

Meeting sources said the committee urged the land ministry to take steps to evict illegal land encroachers on both sides of the Buriganga.

According to an assurance by the prime minister, the land ministry in collaboration with the youth and

sports ministry had leased out khas wetland areas to unemployed youths across the country. The committee asked the land ministry to submit a report explaining how much wetland areas have been leased out and who are the lessees.

Chairman of the committee and Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Moulana Abdus Sobhan said the committee on June 10 asked all the ministries and departments concerned of the government to submit reports within July 24 on the progress on the ministers' assurances given on the floor of the eighth Parliament. Some ministries responded and some did not, he added.

The committee extended the time for submitting the report till August 15. At yesterday's meeting

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Extortionists gun down trucker in 2nd attempt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Extortionists gunned down a truck owner yesterday in the second attempt within a month while he was sleeping at his residence at Mirerbagh in Keraniganj.

Thirty-five-year-old Sohrab Hossain, who drove his own truck, was killed as he refused to pay money, family members said.

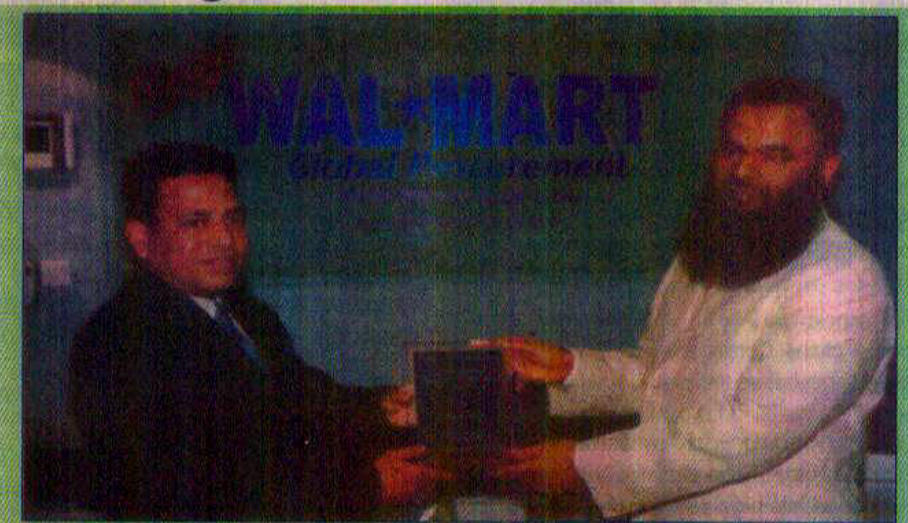
A gang stormed into his apartment on the second floor of Lehaj Uddin's house at Mirerbagh at 7:30am and shot a sleeping Sohrab indiscriminately. Two bullets hit his forehead and three his right hand.

While leaving, they threatened the family members of dire consequences if they took him to hospital and disclosed their identity.

Going down, the gang took pos-

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