

Runaway road corruption

Tk 210cr spent from repair funds in 3 years, still Dhaka roads covered in 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 Sadeque Hossain Khoka said a major reason for the runaway 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 Moinuddin 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 specified for repair or road construction, leaving very little for real work.

The corrupt DCC officials,

specially 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, 24, the judge also fined him Tk 50,000 payable to the victim.

According to the prosecution, Swapan Gazi of Auchpara in Tongi threw acid on the face of his young wife Monira Begum, a student of Class III, on March 5, 1998 for her refusal to go with him. The acid damaged her eyes and ears, making her blind and deaf.

Local people caught Gazi and handed him over to police.

Neighbours said Monira's parents agreed to give their daughter in

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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.

It said four people who gave the suspects refuge were arrested.

Riyadh said last week it had arrested 16 militants planning more attacks and seized a huge cache of arms and explosives.

It said then that Saudi security forces were chasing other militants linked to the cell but did not identify the 16 suspects or say what their targets were.

Western sources in Saudi Arabia say the authorities are cooperating closely with US investigators in tackling Saudi-based members and financiers of al Qaeda.



PHOTO: STAR

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 brigade 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.

Jahangir said shoddy construction of buildings without proper

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2 marines die in new Baghdad attack

Hunt on for Saddam

REUTERS, Baghdad

A grenade attack in downtown Baghdad Monday wounded and may have killed two US soldiers in broad daylight, the latest in an increasingly bold and deadly guerrilla campaign.

Fueling 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.

Another death would push the number of soldiers killed since the

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Two killed in city road mishaps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were killed and a poultry trader was injured in road accidents at Paltan and Sutrapur yesterday.

Tasmeri 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.

Tasmeri was the wife of Jane Alam of Banasri, Rampura.

Motijheel police seized the bus but the driver managed to escape.

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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 fulfilment 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 the committee also reviewed the progress in implementation of the assurances given by the land minister. The next meeting of the committee will be held on August 11.

Meeting sources said 13 ministries and the Election Commission Secretariat sent reports to the committee in due time. The ministries are establishment, food, religious affairs, jute, cultural affairs, industries, fisheries and livestock, land, energy, power and mineral

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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 Raozan yesterday, police held Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury, Paroiyakora-11 union parishad (UP) chairman, from Patiya for questioning.

Earlier, Habib Ullah, elder brother of Selim, Noor Banu, sister-in-law of Nasir and a house tutor of Nasir's house were arrested Sunday for questioning.

Top criminal Gittu Nasir, BDR Selim, Habib Khan and two UP chairmen of Fatikchhari and Satkania may be involved in the abduction, police suspect.

Nasir was sentenced to death and Habib was given life imprisonment.

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PM asks to ensure passengers' safety

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed the law enforcers to immediately stop harassment of transport owners, workers and passengers as well as illegal toll collection in the transport sector, particularly at terminals.

She gave the directive while presiding over a high-level meeting to evaluate the progress of development programmes taken by the government in the communication and transport sectors.

The meeting, held at the Prime Minister's Office, decided to form a 10-member committee to ensure a healthy atmosphere in the transport sector.

The committee comprising Communications Minister

Barrister Nazmul Huda, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Dhaka City Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka, State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Maj (ret) Qamrul Islam Chowdhury, State Minister for Labour and Employment Aman Ullah Aman, State Minister for Home M Lutfuzzaman Babar, Golam Mohammad Siraj, MP, SA Khaleq, MP, and BIWTC Chairman Advocate Shamsur Rahman Shimul Biswas, will coordinate all the activities and regularly monitor the progress.

The prime minister expressed the hope that the committee, with the cooperation of all concerned, will take legal measures quickly to stop all sorts of illegal activities in the transport sector.

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 Mirebagh in Keraniganj.

Thirty-five-year-old Shohrab 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 Mirebagh at 7:30am and shot a sleeping Shohrab 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 posi

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