

700 Gulshan phones out of order for three months

The aftermath of the September downpour still hits communication

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

About 700 phone lines of the Gulshan telephone exchange are out of order as downpour in September hit not only the poor but the elite, paralysing the entire communication system.

Gulshan exchange officials said this was a major disaster in the communication sector in recent times.

With water seeping deep into the underground cables and chambers 4,000 lines were disrupted, and authorities have worked on almost 3,300 lines while 700 are still waiting to be restored.

These inactive telephone lines have not only jeopardized the usual phone to phone communication, but also disrupted, fax and dial-up internet connections. Gulshan businesspeople including the phone/fax booths have complained of a back-lag in their businesses because of the

breakdown in the communication system.

Sabur Ahmed, manager of a money exchange booth at Gulshan-2 said he incurred a loss of almost Tk. 75,000 in five days. Travel agencies too voiced similar situations with the handicap of no fax/phone lines in working order losing almost 20 percent of their potential customers.

Residents of road Nos. 113 to 126 reported of situations of emergencies.

"My father collapsed with a heart attack the day after Eid-ul-Fitr. We could not call an ambulance on time and almost lost our father. The phone has been 'dead' for over two months and repeated complaints seemed to have fallen on deaf ears," said Mohaimen Islam, a resident from road 116.

Others complained that linesmen used the opportunity to make an extra buck during this period but were able to get the

lines fixed, but others who failed to pay are left with 'dead' phone lines. "I paid Tk 5,000 to have one of the phone lines in working order," said Ahmed Mansur a resident from road 126.

An official of Gulshan Camp said that all these complaints would be of no use. It was better he said if the subscribers paid the rickshaw fare to the linesmen and had the phones fixed.

"We would generally receive 40 to 50 complains a day, but a week after the disruption of the downpour, we received over 500 complains in a single day. Our resources are limited with only one linesman working in the road 116 to 123 areas. It is not possible for a single man to look after such a large area", the official added.

Telephone officials also mentioned that more telephone lines being provided than the actual capacity. Shortages of cables,

stolen telephone cords are among the other reasons for such disruptions.

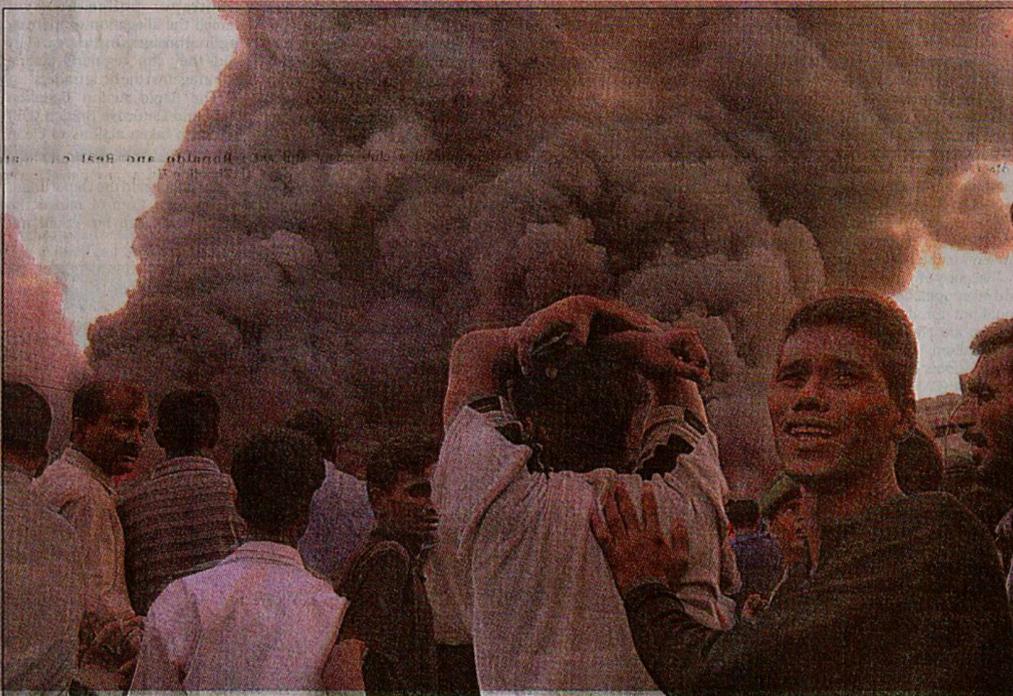
S Wajed Ali, assistant divisional engineer, Banani Camp told the Star City that at least 500 telephone lines would always remain disrupted at all times for some reason or the other.

"It is commonplace scenario where after we have installed a certain number of phone lines and closed up the roadways, other organisations dig the roads up once again to work on their projects, and on the process cut-off the newly installed phone lines," Wajed said.

Abdullah Patwary, assistant divisional engineer Gulshan South, Middle and Badda areas denied that so many lines were disrupted. He said: "We worked hard after Eid and there are now around 100 lines which are not in working order. The others have already been fixed."



A technician working on one of the 'junction boxes' attempting to fix 'dead' phone lines



Businesspeople cannot bite down the disaster and loss caused by the devastating fire that brought down the New Bangabazar to ashes.

New Bangabazar traders reel from fire losses

MANISHA GANGOPADHYAY

The victims of last week's blaze in the New Bangabazar Hawkers' Market, the hundreds of shop-owners who have seen their means to livelihood go up in flames, are fending for themselves outside the marketplace.

The devastating fire forced the lessees of the market to join the vendors on the footpath outside the dark, gated market to sell what little was safely stored away from the site.

From the outside, the area around the market gives the appearance of a bustling shopping centre with vendors shouting out prices. A look at the ground tells a different story -- charred reels of film and refuse are scattered all along the walkway.

"Some of my stock was still at the factory," said Mohammad Yusuf, owner of the Jhumur Store, which was burnt in the blaze. He claims to have lost

more than Tk 5 lakh in merchandise -- mostly jackets and pants for the winter -- in addition to Tk 29,000 in cash to the fire.

"I had to sell land we owned in my village to keep the business going,"

Yusuf, who stayed in Dhaka through Eid to keep his store running during the high-shopping period, went back to his village that fateful morning, only to receive a call from his brother in Sayedabad informing him of the bad news. "I rushed right back," he says.

Jamal had four garment stores in the market. His stores were among the first ones to go up in flames, as they were on the western side of the market. By the time he arrived on site at 9:30 in the morning, all of his goods were reduced to ashes. "I lost Tk 6 lakh in goods."

There may have been a chance for Mohammad Aktar, whose store was right in front on the eastern side. However, his

merchandise could not be removed from his store along with those of others as the market committee chose to keep the gates locked. People watched helplessly as their livelihood was consumed by the fire.

The market committee reasoned that in the chaos created by the fire, opportunists would loot the markets. "The fire looted our garments instead," remarked Aktar, his humour barely masking his disappointment.

Those shopkeepers are not the only ones affected. A footpath vendor laments the loss of his inventory, stored in the warehouse of the market. "I lost about Tk 1 lakh from the garments I kept in the godown," says one footpath vendor.

One shopkeeper claims he lost everything in the fire. "Allah gave and Allah took away," he says, lighting a cigarette he has peddled from a fellow shopkeeper. He still hangs around in

the hopes of hearing something about the government's help.

"The government has made many promises of rehabilitation, but to date, we have not received anything."

A glimpse inside the gated marketplace speaks volume on the general mood of despair. Hawker's market is now a minefield of charred clothing, amongst them a scattered lot of lockboxes, drawers open to reveal burnt notes. Corrugated tin bent out of shape, some standing, some fallen, carry the expression of Van Gogh painting, a twisted moment locked in time.

The scene outside is not so much one of hope, but of resignation. Many of them have chosen to move on, peddling what little is left of what they owned. "I have Tk 10,000 worth of goods that I will have to subsist on," said another trader.

Presumably, many were not as lucky.

Vegetable producers thrive on flood

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

The flood and spell of incessant rain a couple of months ago have turned out to be a positive occurrence for vegetable producers who are hoping to reap bumper crops this winter.

The floodwater flowing in from the Buriganga River usually deposits a huge amount of silt in places like Madartek and Sepoybagh, which makes the soil of areas close to the river very fertile. Over the last six or seven years, many families in that locality have started making a living from growing and selling vegetables.

The trend started when some individuals decided to plant vegetables in the low-lying areas. Their enterprise was soon rewarded with sufficient harvest within a record time.

Currently over three to four acres of land in Meradia, Bashabo, Goran, Madartek or Sepoybagh grow vegetables.

Some families are direct owners of these cultivable fields but the majority of the lands belong to non-resident Bangladeshis.

"Those who had to

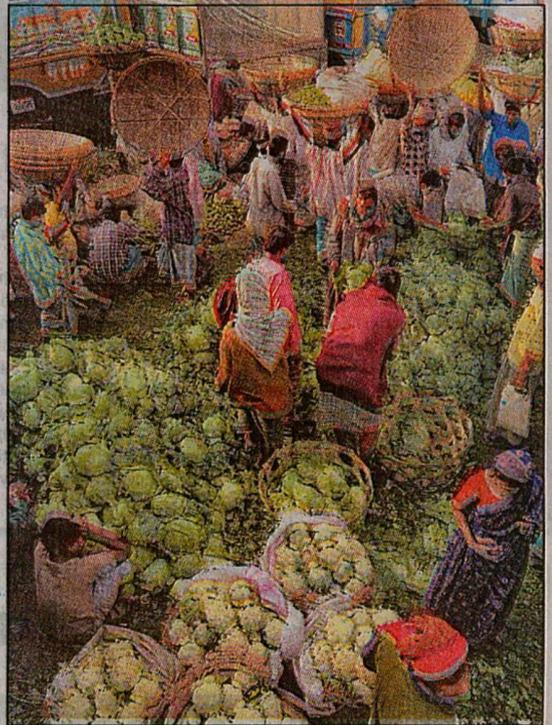
employ caretakers to look after the land did the appropriate thing under the circumstances by letting the vegetable producers cultivate them," said Shamim, a resident of Bhuiyanpara area which is near some of the largest fields.

The cultivable land is extensively used every single season. During summer, rice and *data shak*, after the rainy season *lal shak*, *mula shak*, spinach, during fall brinjal, chili, *shim*, pumpkins and *lau shak* are cultivated. In winter, cauliflower, *shorisha shak*, *mula shak* are produced.

The vegetables grown here are popular items in Nandipara and other adjoining kitchen markets. Some farmers also sell their vegetables at the Gudarghat kitchen market from where the product is supplied to other markets of the city.

On the downside, locals have mixed feelings about this booming venture.

"Although the fresh vegetable is extremely welcome, we are also being constantly affected by the mosquito menace. Mosquitoes breed inside these fields," said one Sepoybagh resident.



AMRAN HOSSAIN

