

Shah Amanat Bridge: A death trap

SHAHIDUL ISLAM
The Shah Amanat Bridge on the river Karnaphuli has turned into a death trap.

Vehicular movement on this all-important bridge, which connects the vast southern region of Chittagong, is now a matter of fear for commuters.

Millions of people from Anwara, Patiya, Dohazari, Chandanais, Satkania and Lohagara upazilas of the district and Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts travel to and from Chittagong city over the bridge.

At least three accidents occurred on this bridge in a span of two weeks till September 14. Three heavy trucks with goods caved in as the fragile wooden-decks of the bridge failed to withstand the heavy loads. Fortunately, no one was hurt as no passenger vehicle was involved with the accidents.

The accidents, however, caused great problems for all other vehicles. Traffic movement was suspended for hours



(Right) A truck on Saturday night gets its wheels stuck in the broken wooden deck while trying to pass illegally through the Karnaphuli Shah Amanat Bridge. (Left) For lack of the wood required for repair work, the deck is fixed with the previously leftover or rejected wood..

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creating unbearable gridlock on both sides of the bridge.

The Roads and Highway (R & H) engineers and employees are seen everyday on the bridge repairing the dilapidated and broken-down wooden decks amidst movement of vehicles. The authorities had to repair and change, on an average, at least 10 decks daily to keep the bridge in operation.

Worst still, the supply of wood from abroad, which is required to make the decks, was suspended for over a week. This shortage of imported woods now makes the situation terrible these days for safe movement of vehicles.

Sources said most of the 7,000 decks are not in a good shape. As a result, about a dozen cracks and holes developed on the bridge in the last few months and these can cause casualties at any time.

Although the bridge is allowed for light vehicles with maximum three-ton limit, the heavy trucks with five to ten tons are regularly plying on it in pres-

ence of law enforcers. It is learnt that the drivers of heavy vehicles pay a toll to the traffic police regularly to use the bridge.

The R & H authorities took up a Tk 5.6 crore project last year to repair the bridge, replacing the worn-out and risky decks, and a contractor for the work was also appointed. The contractor had duly opened an L/C for importing high quality wood from Brazil.

The decking wood was supposed to arrive this September, said Engineer Firoz Iqbal.

But the consignment is yet to reach the port city and the authorities concerned couldn't tell exactly when they would arrive here.

Shah Amanat Bridge (locally known as Karnaphuli bridge) was constructed in 1990. It linked south Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Bandarban with the other parts of the country and brought about a remarkable change in road communication in this region, reducing both the distance and time of journey.

Where mobile courts are not active

Students take unhygienic and dirty foods from mobile shops in front of schools

DWAIPAYAN BARUA

Unsafe, unhygienic and dirty foods are being sold in open spaces in front of the schools in the port city, posing a health hazard to the young and teenage students when the countrywide drive against the adulterated food in the hotels, restaurants and bakeries is going on.

The teachers and guardians expressed concern and urged the authorities for immediate action against the freestyle selling of these unsafe food items in front of the school gates or on the premises.

The mobile vendors sell so-called mouth-watering chatpatty, fuchka, chop, chips, different types of pickles (achar), singara, samucha and ice-cream in open spaces, bothering little with the fact that dirt and 'unwanted' germs can easily collect in these foods.

School going children,

mainly the students of primary and secondary schools, frequently take these adulterated foods, which cause different types of diseases.

Lipi Das Gupta, a student of class nine of Dr Khastagir Girls High School, was taking such kind of chatpatty on the footpath in front of her school in the presence of her mother.

When asked her mother said Lipi takes chatpatty very often.

"I don't give her anything for tiffin because the school provides it," the mother said. She, however, said these open foods are not good for health.

Chandni and Choity, students of class ten, were quite aware of the bad affect of these 'popular' items. They urged the Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) mobile court to launch immediate drive against the mobile vendors in and around different city schools.

"It is hard for minor students

to resist the temptation once these foods come to their sight. It would be better not to allow the vendors in front of the schools," they added.

Sharmin Akhter, a guardian of St. Mary's School, said she had to buy some achar or chocolate everyday for her son, a student of class two. "He creates an unexpected scene on the street if I don't oblige to his request," Sharmin said.

Moin Bhai is a popular name to the students of Chittagong Collegiate School for his decade-old van-shop named "Choice." He sells his 'famous' chatpatty and ice-juice from the mobile shop.

He showed a large register (writing pad) where the names and signatures of the former students of the school are preserved, who recommended his chatpatty positively.

Although Moin Bhai claims his items are safe and hygienic,

the reality gives rather reverse impression. This correspondent found that flies were flitting over his uncovered chatpatty. Moreover, he washes the dishes in dirty water throughout the day and never feels the necessity to change the water.

The scenario is common in most of the schools in the city. The school authorities expressed their inability to take action against these vendors.

"The vendors sell those foods outside the school compound, so how can we resist them," they said.

Headmistress of Dr. Khastagir Girl's High School Hasmat Jahan said they do not let their girls go out of the school as they keep the gate closed during the school hour and the tiffin period.

She said the students might have bought those food items during the break between the morning shift and the day shift.

"We have no authority to control the vendors outside the school compound. We request the police to take action against the vendors and they take action accordingly but the vendors return to their business after police action as usual," Hasmat Jahan said.

She said mobile court action is needed to stop such selling in front of the city schools.

Md. Aziz Uddin, Headmaster of Chittagong Collegiate School, echoed the sentiment.

When contacted CCC magistrate Shafiqur Rahman said the vendors are mostly poor and it is usually their only source of living. "So, it's very difficult to drive them out although we are quite aware of these unsafe hazards to the students," he said.

Shafiq, however, said they will take initiatives to stop the selling of such foods in and around school premises.



Students take food from a mobile shop in front of Dr Khastagir (Govt) Girls High School.

the week that was



Children perform dance at the Aakash Utsab, a festival where the beauty of the sky was portrayed through dance and songs. Fulki, an educational and cultural organisation of children, organised the festival on the institute premises on Thursday.

Create awareness about HIV/Aids

Speakers at a discussion meeting on Wednesday called for creating awareness about HIV/Aids and encouraging people, particularly youths, in religious activities to prevent the onslaught of the

fatal diseases. Nonggar Samaj Unnayan Sangstha, a non-government organisation, organised the discussion titled "Youth Society and Aids" at the Alhaj Yakub Ali Girls School and College auditorium at Pahartali in the city.

Dr Mohammed Rezaul Karim Chowdhury, deputy director of the department of health in Chittagong division, was

the chief guest at the seminar and Health and Education Officer Khairul Bashar Chowdhury and Thana Youth Development Officer Mohammed Rezaul Karim Bhuyan were special guests.

NSUS Director ASM Jamal Uddin presided. Mohafimud Gius Uddin of YPSA and local Ward Commissioner Kabir Ahmed also spoke.

Save Ozone Layer

Speakers at a seminar here on Friday called for forging campaign to save the Ozone Layer as its damage could bring about a massive environmental disaster.

They made this call at a seminar organised by Young Geographers' Environmental Forum (YGEF) at Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) Teachers Training Centre on the occasion of the World Ozone Layer Protection Day.

Prof ATM Saleh Zahur, eminent geographer and chief education officer of the CCC, was present as the chief guest at the seminar while Prof Shamsuddin Ahmed, Vice Principle of Chittagong Commerce College, was the special guest.

Prof Mohammed Abdul Hoque of Chittagong University presented the keynote paper. Chief Advisor to the Forum Dr Mohamed Shahidul Islam moderated the seminar.

30 students get scholarship

Alhaj Mostafa-Hakim Welfare Foundation distributed textbooks free of costs and awarded full free scholarships to 30 students of class XI at Alhaj Mostafa-Hakim Degree College in the city on Saturday.

Founder of the college Alhaj Monzurul Alam, on behalf of Alhaj Mostafa-Hakim Welfare Foundation, handed over the textbooks among the students in honour of 25 politicians, journalists, social workers and academi-

cians. Abu Sufian, President of Chittagong Press Club, was present as the chief guest with Fazlul Kader Chowdhury, Principle of the college, in the chair.

Sultan Ahmad Chowdhury, former chairman, Mohammed Imam Uddin Chowdhury, Alhaj Keramat Ali Chowdhury, Alfaj Uddin Chowdhury, Birendra Lal Dey and Badsha Alam addressed the session.

Reception to CCCI director

Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and

Industry (CCCI) on Saturday accorded a reception to its director Amirul Haq for being elected one of the directors of Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI).

CCCI President Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed congratulated Amirul Haq, also a successful shipping businessman, and hoped that his dynamic leadership will benefit the highest apex body of the country's business community.

"Besides, we also expect him to work for the development and interests of the port city," Javed said.

CCCI Vice President MA Latif and directors Mahfuzul Haq Shah, Ershad Ullah and Syed Jamal Ahmad also spoke

at the function.

IUB forms welfare society

Former Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury on Thursday called for taking sustainable development projects in the country's neglected areas and timely their implementation.

He was addressing as chief guest the projection meeting of the newly formed Social Welfare Society of Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), Chittagong centre at the university.

Khosru said the organisation will achieve its goal and set an example of helping the distressed people in the country.

IUB Vice-Chancellor Prof Dr Bazul Mobin Chowdhury presided over the ceremony. PHP Group chairman Sufi Mizanur Rahman and IUB, Chittagong coordinator Syed Saifdarul Hoque also spoke.

Later, Khosru handed over a sewing machine to a woman on behalf of the newly formed Social Welfare Society.

Price hike of edn materials protested

Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) Chittagong University unit brought out a procession on the university campus on Saturday, protesting price hike of education materials and proposal for increasing tuition fees.

BCU brought out the procession on the occasion of the Education Day.

Later, the leaders at a rally said the price hike of papers and other education materials was to discourage the study of poor students.

They threatened to go for tougher movement unless the price of education materials was brought down immediately.

BCU General Secretary Suchanda Chowdhury, Kamrul Hasan, Monty Nondy and Maksud addressed the rally with Vice President Amzad Hossain in the chair.



Visitors at an exhibition of graphics image of 13 foreign artistes organised by Alliance Francaise at its auditorium on Thursday.