

THIRD BURIGANGA BRIDGE

'Mysterious' deviation stops work

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The first hurdle in the construction of the third Buriganga Bridge in Basila pops up from a 'mysterious' deviation done by the consultant to save an illegal extended part of a local primary school.

Engineers of the Roads and Highways Department (R&HD) and Mir Akhtar Hossain Ltd, the contractor of the Tk 49 crore project had to call off construction work at Basila end until they could formally complete the official procedure to acquire 'more land' for the bridge. The district administration of Dhaka had however completed all land acquisitions for Tk 15 crore in 2005 and 2006.

The project, funded by the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, is now '20 percent complete' and is scheduled to be completed by 2010. The bridge would facilitate creating two more alternative routes to Mawa road in the west and Savar road in the east and connect areas in

Keraniganj and Dohar with Dhaka.

The problem started after the engineers of both R&HD and Mir Akhtar Hossain Ltd recently went to lay the path of the 2,300 feet long and 33 feet wide bridge on the basis of the map provided by the Development Design and Consultant Ltd, the official consultant of the project.

"When we compared the consultant's design sketch with the real situation on the ground we found out that it would be impossible to lay the path of the bridge until we had more land or part of the school demolished," said an engineer of the Mir Akhtar Hossain Ltd requesting anonymity. "Now that we have installed other pillars avoiding the school we have no alternative to acquiring more land," he added. The source also said that they needed an additional 0.1399 acres of land for the work to resume.

The engineer said that the consultant had sketched the path

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avoiding the illegally extended part of the Basila Government Primary School. A source confirmed that the consultant was then asked to officially confirm the 'revision of the project design'.

The project director of the Third Buriganga Bridge Mozammel Haque on February 25 requested the central land allocation committee under the Ministry of Land to expedite the process of land acquisition for the sake of the project time frame.

Mohammad Manik and his family had originally lost their ancestral home to the bridge when the district administration acquired the land in 2005. Now the family is under renewed pressure for parting with whatever they are left with.

"A year ago we gave our ancestral home away. Now all on a sudden they realise that they need the rest of our land," said Manik adding that he and other family members demand why the illegal part of the school was not demolished as it had been

planned.

According to sources the Education Engineering Department (formerly known as the Facilities Department) had built the school and used the additional land beside it illegally to build the staircase of the two-storey structure. The staircase was built temporarily 'without much expenditure' with the idea that one day it might be removed.

"It was all set initially that the illegal part of the school would be removed for the bridge but mysteriously it was never done, now they are targeting us to inflict further loss, which is injustice," said Manik.

Parents alleged that the school staircase is extremely risky and prone to collapse. "Every time children use the stairs, the structure vibrates dangerously," said a resident of Basila.



A mysterious deviation from the original design has forced the engineers to change the course of third Buriganga Bridge. The picture shows this approach road being paved.

Mosquitoes surge uncontrollably



Mosquito eradication drive in the city fails to relieve the city dwellers.

STAR PHOTO

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) fails to check mosquito menace in the city due to inadequate efforts in controlling the increasing mosquito population.

DCC sources said mosquito menace increases during February-April period but the mosquito control activities remained sluggish in the last few months.

Absence of regular spray of larvaecide in the last two months on mosquito breeding grounds in different areas has contributed to the increase of the mosquito population.

DCC still practises unplanned spraying of adulticides and larvaecides by its spray-men, which have been proven ineffective so far. Currently 411 spray men are working in 90 wards using 941 hand-spray machines. The number of Fogger machine

is 297.

Field level employees told Star City that DCC does not provide vehicles for its ward-based employees that is affecting the pace of the work. There is also lacking in the field-level supervision of the anti-mosquito activities.

DCC entomologist Naseem-uj-Seraj said 'Delete 2.5 EC' is being sprayed at mosquito breeding grounds every morning from 8 to 11:00am to eliminated

larvae. In the afternoon they are spraying Tepsi Liquid Spray to get rid of flying adults.

"We are trying our best. But we cannot keep adult mosquitoes in check," Seraj said admitting the fact that the medicine they are spraying is not working to wipe out the swarming mosquito population.

"When we spray the medicine they probably pass out for a while and later gain consciousness. So, the mosquito menace continues," added Seraj.

About the budget, Seraj said for the mosquito control programme DCC gets a total of Tk 16.5 crore, of which Tk 1.5 crore is for the purchase of insecticides and the rests for the purchase of machines, monitoring and surveillance.

Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka said that DCC is currently going through a fund shortage. "DCC did not receive two instalments of its regular allocation from the LGRD ministry", said Khoka.

Mosquito eradication programme is seriously hampered because of this fund shortage, he mentioned.

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High time for Rajuk reform

Rajuk must change its role as a land developer and concentrate on proper planning of the city

TAWFIQUE ALI

It is time the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) ceased acting as a real estate developer and brought out all-out reforms to turn this organisation into a true autonomous regulatory body where participation of professionals and members of the civil society would be ensured, said urban experts.

The reform at Rajuk is long overdue and the demand for change has gained momentum during the present interim government.

According to urban experts, Rajuk should concentrate only on planning, monitoring and regulating housing, real estate and other development work in the capital. Rajuk may at best develop the basic infrastructure of the city, but it should be involved land development.

Eminent environmentalist and trusty chairman of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said Rajuk should to carry out only regulatory functions. Rajuk's predecessor, Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT), used to be a regulatory body only and did very minimal development work.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed of Bishwa Sahitya Kendra, also vice-chairperson of Urban Development Committee, said Rajuk must dissociate itself from the role of a housing plot developer.

"A trusty board with representation from the civil society should govern Rajuk's management," he advised.

Rajuk must strictly play the role of a regulatory body now and not as a development agency at all, he said. If need be, the National Housing Authority could be turned into a corporation to take up comprehensive housing programmes to meeting the growing housing needs of the city inhabitants.

Rajuk has to stop playing the role of a land developer simply because it has to effectively regulate developers to ensuring development of the city in a planned and fair manner, to protect the environment and interests of the city dwellers including the underprivileged, Prof Sayeed added.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said at present, there is no participation of professionals in Rajuk's decision-making process.

Pointing at corrupt practices at Rajuk, he further said any aspiring developer could get a construction plan approved by Rajuk through an underhand deal without taking beauty, safety of the

neighbourhood and the environment into consideration.

Private housing developers extract public money at their will and Rajuk must play a pro-people role to regulate and determine the prices of housing plots and apartments so that the general public is not exploited, Prof Muzaffer suggested.

An ongoing TIB study on overall activities of Rajuk has been seriously hindered due to Rajuk's non-cooperation.

Urban experts suggested that Rajuk charter has to have provisions for coordination with other utility service providing agencies. Planning section of Rajuk must be equipped with adequate number of competent planners. Management body has to be of representative nature. The Rajuk

wetlands and floodplains in and around the capital for developing housing plots, he said.

During the process of reconstitution, all sorts of committees including building construction (BC) committee should be increased with an architect in each committee, Hussain said, Rajuk has to have adequate skilled professionals such as architects, planners and structural engineers.

President of Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (Rehab) engineer M Abdul Awal said Rajuk must be a regulatory authority in the form of former DIT that will have public representation.

Two of the crucial positions at Rajuk -- member planning and member development -- must be

at Rajuk so it can stop illegal real estate companies from destroying the wetlands and floodplains that are clearly earmarked in the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP).

AMA Muhith, founding president of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolan (Bapa), said, "Now, we fervently appeal to the caretaker administration to separate Rajuk from its role as a real estate developer. Rajuk must play the role of a monitoring body, enforce the city planning and design policies."

Filling up of wetlands and floodplains by real estate developers is not only ushering in an imminent environmental disaster, but also consistently choking the capital with perennial water logging and creating a mess in the sewer system, they said.



Rajuk Bhawan: High time for a facelift.

board has to be purged of its bureaucratic nature and must adopt a representative attitude. Rajuk chairman must be a secretary-level respected and competent senior person, who will enjoy full-scale autonomy.

President of Institute of Architect Bangladesh (IAB) Mubasshar Hussain said Rajuk must immediately stop its real estate business for good. "The principal mandate of Rajuk is to control the city development, pass building designs and ensure proper implementation of the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMDP) as per the Detailed Area Plan."

Even though it is the custodian of DMDP, Rajuk is the agency that pioneered in destruction of

headed by a planner, an architect, or an engineer, he said.

"Rajuk must cease to running plot business," said Awal, "In fact, there should be no land development business either in public or in private sector. There should be an end to land development business."

Government should ensure adequate housing facilities together with private sector enterprises.

Rajuk's capacity has to be increased in proportion with the increased population and expanded area of the capital city.

On February 17, urban experts and environmentalists at a discussion on conservation of wetlands at the city's Brac Centre Inn demanded immediate reforms

Adviser to the housing and public works ministry barrister Mainul Hossain said on February 19 that the government has already discussed the issue of reforms at Rajuk. "We have thought of bringing a meaningful reform at the Rajuk's board level to make it participatory with people's representation in the form of the then Dhaka Improvement Trust (DIT)."

"But I have not yet been able to raise it at the council of advisers because we are so preoccupied with other pressing demands," the adviser said.

However, as part of a reform programme and to decentralise Rajuk activities, the government has divided it into four zones, he added.

A CANDLE LIGHT VIGIL



Azam Khan, the legendary pop singer leads a candle light vigil to stop acid throwing on women at the Engineering Institute Auditorium on Wednesday, the night before the International Women's Day.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN