

Patuakhali town protection project uncertain as funds not allocated

WDB executive engineer says preparations were on to begin project work this year



A usual scene in Patuakhali town during high tide in the rainy season.

STAR FILE PHOTO

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Implementation of Patuakhali town protection project has become uncertain as finance ministry stopped funding it in the current financial year (2007-08).

The ministry on October 10 took the decision not to allocate funds for the project in the current financial year, sources in Patuakhali Water Development Board (WDB) told this correspondent yesterday. The project involves over Tk 22 crore.

The project, a long-drawn demand of people of the district, was approved by the planning commission on August 14 this year.

The ministry decision evoked a sharp reaction from different quarters as people of all classes had long been demanding a project to protect the town from flood and tidal surge.

Besides seasonal storms and calamities, the town is regularly inundated during almost every full moon and new moon.

Different professional bodies including the bar association, Patuakhali Chamber of Commerce

and Industry, journalists association and municipal employees faxed memorandums to the water resources ministry on Monday expressing their resentment and demanding steps for immediate implementation of the project.

A project titled Patuakhali Town Protection Embankment-cum-Drainage Project was taken up in 1996 to mitigate sufferings of the townspeople following a visit by the then agriculture Minister Majid-Ul-Haque and WDB secretary to Patuakhali. The project gathered dust in the Water Resource Ministry for 12 years before approval.

The project was approved after Chief Advisor Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed during a visit to Barisal in March this year gave assurance when representatives of different professional bodies met. The Chief Advisor came to Barisal as part of his programme to visit divisional headquarters.

He urged to government to allocate funds for the project in the current fiscal year.

WDB (Water Development Board) sources said, a survey team from the planning commission visited Patuakhali on July 20 this year to examine the proposed project. The team led by Hamidur

this year following a survey report by a team.

The project was designed to protect the town from flash flood, erosion and also to remove stagnant water.

It includes construction of 4.20 kilometers flood control embankment, one kilometre wall, eight sluice gates, 38 outlets and installation of four power pumps.

Talking to this correspondent, WDB executive engineer Jahir Uddin Ahmed said, "We had hoped to start the project work this year but the ministry has stopped funding".

Abu Zafor Samsuddin, acting chairman of Patuakhali Pourasabha, said, "Inundation is a major problem for the townspeople. The government should take steps to implement the project as soon as possible."

He urged to government to allocate funds for the project in the current fiscal year.

After this visit, the water resource ministry approved the project and sent it to the planning commission for approval.

The planning commission approved the project on August 14

Rahman, joint chief at planning commission, visited different points of the proposed project and exchanged views with local people including journalist and district officials.

Hamidur Rahman submitted his report to the Commission in the first week of August.

Another team from the water resources ministry visited Patuakhali in January last year, which also suggested immediate implementation of the project.

Earlier a consulting firm completed a feasibility study on the proposed project in 2006 and submitted its report suggesting implementation of the project.

In 1960s, a project was undertaken to protect Patuakhali town and coastal upazilas of Baufal, Dashmina, Galachipa, Kalapara and Mirzaganj from flood and saline water. Later, the town was excluded from the project.

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