

Mohammadpur in total mess

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"May be another three months," said one of the contractors as a group of thin tired-looking men were removing mud from one side to another at the site near Shia mosque following rains.

Five contractors are at work on this portion of the storm sewerage project being implemented by Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority, better known as Wasa. Workers have dug the earth up to a depth of 25 feet to lay pipes as big as 3,000 mm in diameter.

The project is for the benefit of local residents. But the work is so slow and shabby that the would-be beneficiaries are fed up and complaining.

The road is now closed to traffic. Residents, including mothers with school children, are forced to walk through this part of the unusable road. And it takes a lot of hard work and skills to walk through the piles of dirt, boulders and digging equipment of contractors. Rains compound the plight.

"I've two children to take to school," said Shammi Ara Mahbub, a resident of Mohammadpur Housing Kallyan Samity, the hardest hit block. "But now I can take only the elder boy to school, leaving the younger one home."

She went on, "When it rains, it is like crossing the pul sirat. I can carry one of the boys in my lap, but not both. Each time I cross this road my clothes get stained with mud."

Urmi Akhtar, another resident of the area, said she now needs to detour a long way to take her children to school by car. "It used to take only 10 minutes by car to reach my children's school... Now it takes more than 35 minutes because of detour through a traffic-congested alternative road."

Small convenience shops

by the side the street are losing business.

Jahirul Islam, owner of Wadud Tyre and Battery Shop near Shia mosque, said his income has gone down as buyers avoid this hazardous road.

Besides the plight, residents of the area are living under a bigger threat: a fear that their houses can collapse due to the digging.

ARM Salar-e-Jahan, president of Mohammadpur Housing Kallyan Samity, said at least 40 multi-story buildings on both sides of the road are threatened by the digging.

He said the Wasa contractors are digging about 14 feet to 25 feet deep, and the pillars of nearby buildings also has the same depth, making them vulnerable.

"We fear that heavy rains may wash away or erode earth at the site of the digging and may affect the buildings nearby."

He echoed the feelings of the city dwellers when he said this work should have started before the onset of the monsoon. "Now that the monsoon is about to begin, we are in trouble," he said.

Safety measures like supporting the earth by wooden planks are not enough, he said.

The Kallyan Samity, he said, has complained to Wasa about of the lack of proper safety measures.

Digging roads by the city's utility services is not an exception. It's rather a pattern in Dhaka and other major cities. Residents wonder why such work has to start just before the monsoon when rains cause not only public sufferings but also delay the projects and raise their costs.

Currently, diggings have rendered a good number of roads in Mohammadpur, Mirpur, Uttara, Pallabi Extension, Siddheswari, and some other parts of the capital unfit for traffic com-

pounding the sufferings of residents.

But the authorities have braved the public criticisms and media scrutiny with the same old replies -- funds are approved late, it gets further delayed as the tender process is cumbersome. The excuses, mostly lame, go on and on.

Wasa Deputy Managing Director (operation and maintenance) Liakat Ali is no exception.

He said Wasa tried to start the work in Mohammadpur area much earlier but was unable to do so as it took longer to complete the tender process.

Ali Hossain, one of the five contractors, had the same excuse. He said they wanted to start the work in January but it was delayed due to the lengthy process of getting work order.

Wasa said it got approval of cutting the road from Dhaka City Corporation on March 29.

The delay, he said, means the contractors will lose about Tk 10 lakh for disruption of work due to rain.

He said extra money is spent to clear the rain water that fills the channel.

Another major reason why such work gets delayed and sometimes lousy is that contractors often subcontract the work to politically-connected individuals having little experience or capacity to deal with such projects, sources close to the process said.

The sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said there was more delay in completing the tender process this year due to application of the new Public Private Partnership (PPP) rules.

Shahid Uddin, subcontractor for a portion of the work, said though the authorities normally set a 60-day deadline to complete such a work, it takes at least four months.

Historic deals

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meeting where issues including security, land border and its management, connectivity, cooperation in water resources, power and trade and commerce sectors, status of projects under the \$1 billion Indian loan and Manmohan's visit were discussed.

Rao said the water resources ministries of the two countries are working on the details of the Teesta water sharing and a deal to this effect will be signed when Manmohan comes to Dhaka.

She, however, would not disclose the percentage of the water to be shared, saying the issue will be resolved at the highest level, meaning by the two prime ministers.

"I won't discuss the framework or percentage of the water share Bangladesh will receive from the Teesta river. But don't think I'm trying to hide something. This is a very sensitive issue," Rao said.

The Indian foreign secretary also said the Joint Boundary Working Group is working with an intention to reach agreements on demarcating the 6.5-km border, transfer of enclaves and adversely possessed territories.

On killing of Bangladeshi nationals by Indian border guards at the border, she said they are concerned about it and a way will be worked out to stop it.

"We are strongly against all sorts of violence and killing in the border. We condemn whether an Indian or a Bangladeshi is killed. Most of the killings take place at night and citizens of both the countries losses their lives, which is very unfortunate."

The Indian side has decided to use non-lethal weapons to stop loss of life in some areas on experimental basis.

Asked about the \$1 billion loan under condition that Indian companies will supply 80 percent of the project materials, she said there is still scope to discuss it as "we want to help Bangladesh with open heart and see the prosperity of the Bangladeshi people."

Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes said Dhaka has offered a regional transit, not a bilateral one, so that Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan can all gain from it.

Regarding charging India for using Bangladesh territory, he said the fees will be settled when both the sides agree and that they are working on it.

On settlement of maritime boundary, Quayes said the matter will be resolved through discussion and legal procedure, and neither side will go for exploration of oil and gas in the deep sea before settlement.

Jupiter robbed Mars of mass and built the asteroid belt

THE DAILY MAIL ONLINE

Scientists have long puzzled over why Mars is only about half the size and one-tenth the mass of Earth.

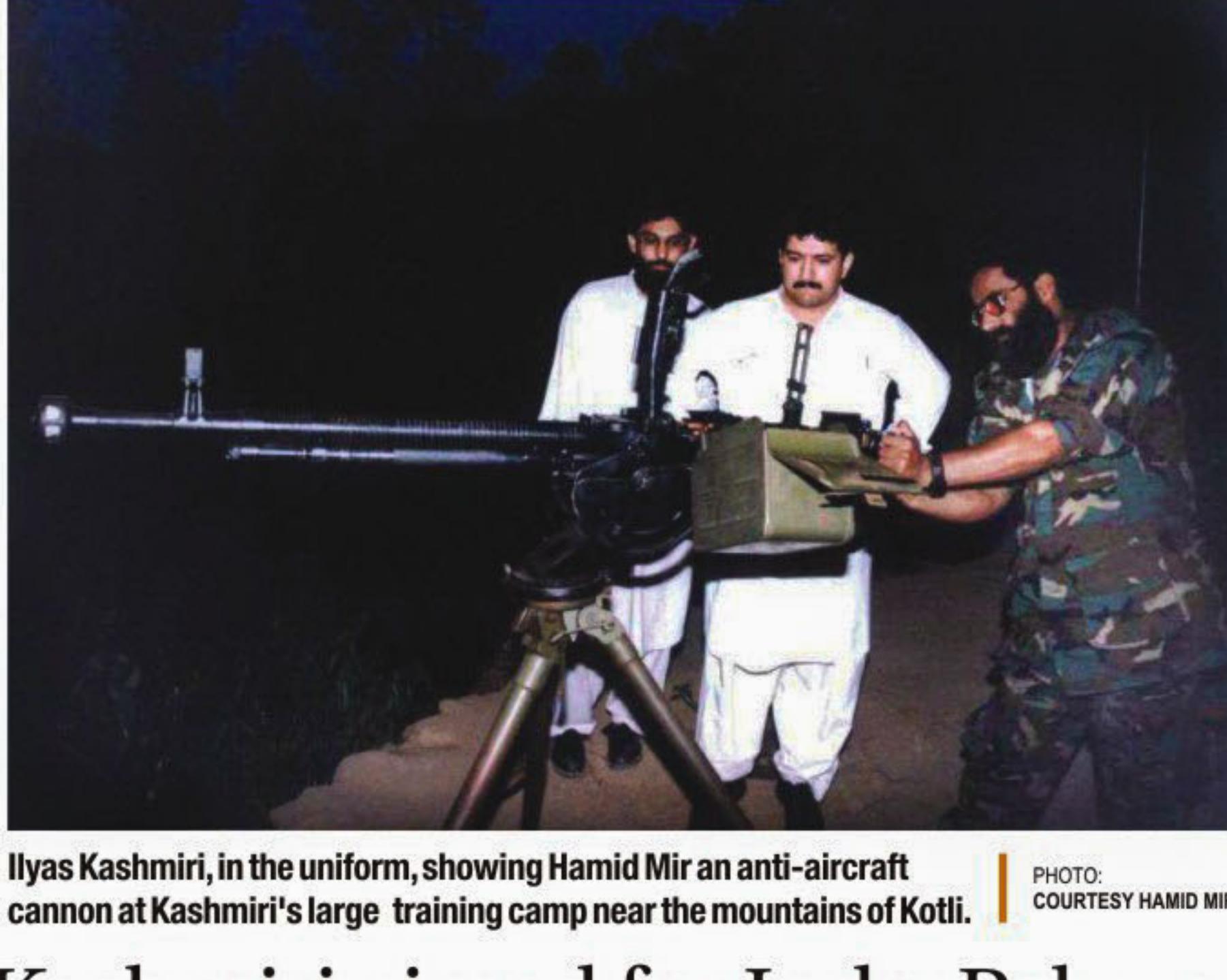
As next-door neighbors in the solar system formed about the same time, they might be expected to be more similar - by rights, Mars should be as big as Earth and Venus.

But a paper published this week provides an explanation and also reveals why the asteroid belt is such a strange assortment of rocks and ice.

While the solar system was forming, a process which began approximately 4.6 billion years ago, the gas giant Jupiter went wandering in towards the Sun, on the way dragging comets from beyond the asteroid belt as Jupiter moved inwards towards Mars.

It then moved out again to gravitate towards another gas giant, Saturn, as it formed, this time dragging dry rocks from inside the belt as it moved back outwards again.

But we acknowledge the fact that the reporter could not prove well beyond doubt that the trees shown in the photo were chopped down illegally.



Ilyas Kashmiri, in the uniform, showing Hamid Mir an anti-aircraft cannon at Kashmiri's large training camp near the mountains of Kotli.

PHOTO: COURTESY HAMID MIR

Govt eyes

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Tax free income for general category is likely to be set at Tk 1.8 lakh from 1.65 lakh. The limit for women and elderly people may be extended further.

Tax on mobile phone SIM card may be cut and VAT on liquid petroleum (LP) gas may be withdrawn but tax on brokerage houses may go up slightly. Tax on cigarette is likely to be increased by 10 percent.

Prices of new and reconditioned cars may also go up.

Meantime, the government is under heavy pressure to allow whitening of black money amid civil society's call against such practice.

The decision on this will be taken at the last moment, sources said.

Muggers

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cash from a bank at Motijheel when a gang of six to seven muggers waylaid their vehicle around 1:00pm near Chhayanir Bhaban, said Shafiq, 30, driver of the car.

The gang closed on them and fired several shots on the car's windshield. The three employees ran for their lives, leaving the money behind in the vehicle.

Suspecting foul play, Yunus Badal, the factory owner handed them over to the police for interrogation, said Rezaul Karim, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

Armed gangs kill

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impossible to verify. Syria does not allow foreign journalists to report on events.

But Syrian state television said hundreds of gunmen had taken over Jisr al-Shughour, which lies about 20km from the Turkish border.

It said "armed gangs" ambushed police and 20 officers died. It said another 82 personnel were killed when the town's security headquarters were overwhelmed, eight in a bomb attack on a post office and 120 overall.

Opposition activists said there had been fighting but the situation was unclear and they feared the government was simply setting the stage for a new onslaught.

One told the Associated Press news agency that dozens of people had been killed in the past 24 hours. "A mix of civilians, police and security forces", it's Kotli."

Kashmiri developed distance with Pakistani establishment when he was asked to join Jaish-e-Muhammad of Maulana Masood Azhar. I met with Kashmiri in Islamabad many times after he grew differences with Pakistani establishment. He had more than two offices in Islamabad and his frequent visitors were many known religious clerics of the capital. But he disappeared one day.

He decided to take revenge for Pakistan but today the Pakistani establishment is trying to arrest all those who were close to him. The fate of Ilyas Kashmiri is a lesson for many "good Taliban" as well as the Pakistani establishment. The first lesson is, Pakistani establishment used thousands of youngsters in the name of Jihad and liberation of Kashmir but it can change its policy anytime under foreign pressure. They are not reliable. Secondly, Pakistani establishment must realize that creating private armies is a violation of the constitution. They must not create private armies and even if they had, they shouldn't mishandle them. They can become genies like Ilyas Kashmiri.

State television says many civilians from the town have fled to nearby Latakia, and it carried interviews with people calling on the army to clear Jisr al-Shughour of "armed gangs" they said had been terrorising the place.

However, in messages posted on Facebook, residents appealed for help from the outside world, saying the "regime's gangs" were preparing to move in.

Our correspondent says one video posted on YouTube appeared to show the town square with a huge message written on the road saying "Jisr al-Shughour doesn't want the army to come in".

The government admitted it had lost control for "intermittent periods of time".

But Interior Minister Ibrahim Shaar vowed: "We will deal strongly and decisively, and according to the law, and we will not be silent about any armed attack that targets the security of the state and its citizens."

An Islamist uprising in Jisr al-Shughour in 1980 against the late President Hafez al-Assad was brutally crushed with scores of deaths.

Meanwhile, France says it is ready to ask the UN Security Council to vote on a draft resolution condemning Damascus, despite a likely Russian veto.

Home probe finds

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But Limon claims he was shot in the leg point-blank by a member of a Rab team. Limon's injured leg had to be amputated.

Following the shooting incident, the home ministry assigned a one-member probe committee of Mohammad Shawkat Akbar, additional divisional commissioner of Barisal, to investigate the matter.

On May 19, while the investigation was still on, Prime Minister's Defence Adviser Maj Gen (retired) Tarique Ahmed Siddique at a media briefing claimed that both Limon and his father have been members of Morshed Jomaddar's criminal gang.

Later Rab echoed Tarique's claim at another media briefing.

Home Minister Sahara Khatun also defended Tarique's statement on May 22, saying his remark was a government statement.

Now the government probe report contradicts those claims of Limon's criminal affiliation.

The probe report however said there is no proof of a point-blank shooting in the first medical report.

According to arms experts, if Limon was shot point-blank in the leg, a portion of his leg would be severed immediately leaving marks of burn at the entry point of the bullet wound, but no such burn mark was found in his leg, the report added.

The home ministry source said, according to the report, Limon was shot from behind.

When some reporters

yesterday asked State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku about the probe report, he declined to make any comment.

Rab filed two cases against Limon, one for allegedly possessing illegal firearms, and another for allegedly obstructing law enforcers from carrying out their duties and attempted murder.

Limon's mother filed a case against the Rab personnel who went to Limon's village to hunt the gang led by Morshed.

Morshed however managed to escape, but Limon, who was in the area, was shot in the leg by a stray bullet, the report said adding that whose gun fired the bullet could not be ascertained.

Shawkat in the report recommended a ballistic test of the bullet to find out which gun it came from.

The report also said accounts of the incident described by Limon, his mother, and Rasul Mia differ from each other. Rasul Mia, 12, is the lone witness of Limon's shooting, according to the victim himself.

Meanwhile, doctors at the National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (Nitor), where Limon is being treated, asked him yesterday to collect his release letter from the hospital at a convenient time.

Being refused, Morshed's men ransacked his house on February 8, 2010.

Police also denied giving Azad security when he sought legal help, the case statement added.

Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Shahjahan Kabir recorded Azad's statement and will pass order on the issue today.

When some reporters

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The Tangail Forest Division also acknowledged that by saying that "Through joint drives by the district administration and the forest division, all remaining illegal saw mills will be

taken away in broad day light."

So, we stand by our report.

But we acknowledge the fact that the reporter could not prove well beyond doubt that the trees shown in the photo were chopped down illegally.

OUR REPLY

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