

A much-used Sylhet road remains in pitiable state

IQBAL SIDDIQUE, Sylhet

The Tk 198-crore project of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) for repairing and upgrading badly damaged Sylhet-Companiganj-Bholaganj road into a regional highway has been waiting approval from the planning ministry for the last nine months.

In view of the rising importance of the road, mainly used for transporting stones from the country's biggest stone quarries in Bholaganj upazila and adjoining areas, the RHD prepared the project and sent it to the planning ministry in December last year.

In addition to the regular traffic, several hundred trucks and pickups ply the road daily for transporting stones across the country but it has remained uncared for as the matter is pending with the planning ministry while the RHD had dropped it from the list of district roads, sources said.

Vehicular movement on the road saw a big rise in recent years with increased activities at Bholaganj land customs station, Bholaganj stone quarry, Uthma stone quarry and Shah Arfin stone quarry on the bordering areas of Sylhet district. Besides, about 500 stone crushing plants have been established on the road.

But a number of potholes and cracks have developed on the road and the small culverts have turned risky for loaded trucks.

During the rains the road becomes almost unusable.

To avoid a badly damaged portion of the road, the locals are now using an alternative dirt road from Kaladsadek border outpost to Bholaganj.

"We cannot proceed much as things have remained hanging in the balance. Following approval from the communications ministry the project was sent to the planning ministry. We would be able to start the work upon approval from there," the superintending engineer of the

RHD, Sylhet region-Shah Mohammad Musa told this correspondent yesterday.

"There has been no major repair on the 37-kilometre road since 2006.

The busy road has to bear mainly the load of stone-laden trucks. Often accidents occur on the narrow road that cannot cope with the rush of vehicles, especially trucks. As per the project, it would be made a 24-feet wide road in place of the existing 18-feet one," he said.

Locals staged demonstration at the upazila headquarters and in the district town and handed over memorandums to the authorities for improvement of the busy road months ago.

"We have been demanding widening of the important road and reconstructing the small culverts on it. But the authorities concerned seem careless despite occurrence of a number of accidents on the road in recent years," said Taiyebur Rahman, chairman of Companiganj upazila parishad.



PHOTO: STAR

A large number of vehicles including stone-laden trucks regularly ply the badly damaged Sylhet-Companiganj-Bholaganj road that turns virtually unusable during the rains. The photo was taken from Bholaganj upazila portion of the road a few days ago.

TALE OF BRUTALITY BY LOCAL INFLUENTIALS

Chumki kills herself failing to stop torture on husband

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narail

Failing to rescue husband from the brutality of some local influential people, a young woman allegedly committed suicide at Borashula village in Narail municipality on Friday night.

The deceased is Chumki Mollah, 23, daughter of Babu Mollah of Borashola village.

The criminals also made Chumki's husband Alamgir Hossain, son of Zahid Hossain of Gopibagh in the capital, bring Tk 20 thousand through relatives. Then the gang snatched mobile sets and Tk 5 thousand in addition to the Tk 20 thousand from them before forcing Alamgir and his relatives to leave the area yesterday morning.

While in service at a garments factory in Dhaka, Chumki fell in love with trader Alamgir Hossain, son of Zahid Hossain of Gopibagh area, and they got married

a few months ago, said sources.

Recently Chumki Mollah went to her village home and disclosed the incident to her grandmother Asiron Begum.

"Responding to Chumki's call through mobile, her husband came to her house during the Eid holidays. But a section of influential villagers grew angry at this and asked whether Chumki and Alamgir were legally married. The couple showed their *kabin nama* (marriage document) but the angry men began to torture Alamgir after tying his hands with a betel nut tree in presence Chumki and me," said a tearful Asiron.

"They also beat Chumki and me when we begged them not to torture Alamgir. The helpless girl killed herself by hanging from a guavatre near their house," she said.

"Local influential people including Mohon, Tunu kha, Tutu Kha, Jamal and Mizan of the same village tortured Chumki's husband. Now they are

threatening us not to disclose the matter. We demand punishment to the culprits," said Chumki's aunt Anoara.

Local sources said three youths of the village who earlier stalked Chumki and even gave her proposal for illicit act, played role behind the incident.

Police sent Chumki's body to Narail Sadar Hospital for autopsy and took injured Alamgir under 'safe custody'.

When contacted, SI Ziaur Rahman of Narail Sadar police station said, "We are ignorant of the incident. We released Alamgir without taking any statement regarding the incident. If the family bring allegation we will take action."

This correspondent saw several injury marks on Alamgir's face and other parts of the body when he met the latter at Narail Sadar Hospital on Saturday.

Chumki's family members said they are too afraid to file any case against the influential criminals.

3 youths held on charge of rape of two sisters

UNB, Panchagarh

Three young men arrested on charge of abduction and rape of two sisters at Prodhanpara village in Atowari upazila were sent to prison when produced before the court today.

Abu Sayeed, father of Sathi and Juthi (not the real name), filed a case with police accusing Abu Sayed, Abu Zahed and Khaleq, aged around 20, and two others of abducting his daughters on their way to maternal uncle's home in adjacent village and raping them.

But witnesses and villagers said younger sister Juthi had love affairs with Abu Sayed. Both Sathi and Juthi went on outing with Sayed and two others to adjacent Sennihari on the Eid day afternoon.

The following morning, four youngsters took Sathi and Juthi to their home in a rickshaw van. The villagers held the young men on charge of abducting the girls. On information, a police team led by SI Montaj Ali rushed to the village and tried to free the youths. But the villagers refused.

The village elders tried in vain to settle the matter imposing fine on the young men. But the father of the girls demanded that two of the youths should marry his daughters.

In the meantime, shamed by the villagers elder Sathi swallowed poison in a bid to commit suicide. She was rushed to Thakurgaon Modern Hospital, where she was improving.

Police said Juthi underwent medical test and made statement to the magistrate. Sathi will also be medically tested.



PHOTO: STAR

Women labourers at work at Teesta Bridge construction site in Lalmonirhat. Like elsewhere, they are still victim of serious wage discrimination.

DISCRIMINATION GOES ON

Work equal, wage half for women labourers

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Women labourers in the district are facing wage discrimination despite daylong hard toil, even sometimes the wage is only one-third than their male fellow workers.

Mostly belonging to poor families, the women workers are engaged in croplands, brickfields, hotels and restaurants, houses, small industrial units, garments factories, bidi factories, construction sites and other places.

Taking the advantage of their ignorance and poverty, local middlemen hire them in exchange for low wage to work in crop fields or other places.

While talking recently with some women labourers working at Teesta Bridge construction site at Teesta village under Sadar upazila, it was found that everyone of them was hired at Tk 100 to 110 per day, while a male labourer was given Tk 250 to 300 per day.

Although the demand for women labourers has considerably increased for their sincerity in work compared to the male

ones, they are being exploited by their employers because of their simplicity, sources said.

Many of the women are working to back their families by supplementing the meagre income of their father or husband.

Despite backbreaking work, these female labourers are cheated in wage by their employers across the district.

On the other hand, the male labourers, often being less active in work, are paid higher and treated better than the female ones, several women labourers alleged.

Salma Begum, 40, a divorcee at Tajpur village in Sadar upazila, said, "I am working at Teesta Bridge construction site for Tk 100 to Tk 110 a day which is too insufficient to maintain my family."

"Nevertheless, I am forced to work here, as there is no scope to work at other places," she went on, adding that they were well aware of cheating by the middlemen but had no way to fight against them because of lack of unity

among the women labourers.

Hazera Banu, 32, a deserted woman, said, "Sometimes I work at mills, sometimes in crop fields and other places. But nobody (middlemen) offers me the wage equal to the male workers although I do the same job".

However, Sohrab Ali, a middleman at Chaparhat under Kaliganj upazila, admitting that the women labourers were more active, said they had to remain satisfied with low wage as they never protested discrimination.

He said that the women labourers would get 'official' wage if mills and factories were set up in the region.

Mili Begum, executive director of Jago Nari Kalyan Sangstha, an NGO in Lalmonirhat, said her organisation was working to make awareness among women labourers in the district.

"We are trying to unite the deprived women labourers against the middlemen in different areas of five upazilas," she said.



PHOTO: STAR

Locals block Dhaka Bypass at Zinda point in Rupganj upazila yesterday by setting fire to tyres to protest against Rajuk move to remove the eco-park, locally called as Zinda Park, from Purbachal satellite town. The protesters allege that Rajuk has floated a tender for leasing out the park.

Two housewives murdered Both allegedly for dowry

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Two housewives were murdered in Pabna and Rangpur districts yesterday and on Friday.

A housewife was murdered allegedly for dowry at Choto Mongolgram village of Atakula in Pabna district early yesterday, reports our correspondent.

The deceased was identified as Rehena Khatun, 32, wife of Hossen Ali of the village.

Police and the family members said, Rehena's husband and in-laws often tortured her for dowry. Rehena brought some money from her parents two weeks ago but her husband started torturing her for more yesterday. Rehena's husband and his family members beat her mercilessly at about 5:30am. She was taken to Pabna Medical College Hospital where the duty-doctors declared her dead.

Police arrested Md. Hassan Ali, elder brother of Hossen Ali from his residence yesterday morning but the rest of the

accused are absconding.

A housewife was killed in Rangpur on Friday night allegedly by her husband for dowry.

Mithapukur police identified the victim as Shuktara Begum of village Khoragachh, reports our correspondent.

Police said accused Khairul Islam was pressing his wife to bring dowry from her parents after he married her about two years ago. Being too poor, her parents failed to provide the money.

On Friday morning, Khairul beat up Shuktara mercilessly. She was rushed to RMCH where she succumbed to her injuries at about 8:00pm.

Another woman, identified as Bhagobati Rani of Chikli Purba Para under Hazratpur union under Mithapukur police station, was seriously injured as her dowry-hungry husband poured hot water over her person.

Police said, Haridas Roy took Tk 1,50,000 as dowry from the victim's parents. But he was recently insisting for Tk 50,000 more.



PHOTO: STAR

Trucks and passenger buses moving from the same direction, as if running in competition, occupy the width of Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge approach road at Gharinda in Tangail Sadar upazila, making passengers as well as pedestrians highly vulnerable to accidents.