

Heavily loaded vehicles threaten Teesta Barrage

Weighbridge 'kept inoperative' for eight months

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Movement of heavily loaded vehicles makes the country's largest irrigation project Teesta Barrage across the Teesta River at Dowani in Hatibandha upazila vulnerable as the weighbridge beside the barrage toll room has remained inoperative for the last eight months.

After a crack developed in gate No 32 of the barrage, a three-member expert team of Bangladesh Water Development Board (WDB) led by its Chief Design Engineer Saidul Islam visited the barrage and examined the crack on Tuesday noon.

"A little crack is found in gate No 32 and it is repairable. The deck slab of the gate is okay and so, there is no cause for panic," Saidul Islam said after examining the crack.

During a visit to the barrage, this correspondent saw that vehicles exceeding 20-tonne limit move on the barrage in absence of a functional weighbridge.

There are allegations that the lessee for tolls collection from Teesta Barrage allows heavily loaded vehicles on the barrage in exchange of additional toll money.

The harmful act in violation of government restriction as a section of officials of Bangladesh Water Development and police turn a blind eye to the matter due to alleged bribe taking from the leaseholder.

On an average 1200 vehicles including trucks, buses, motorcycles and auto rickshaws move on the barrage, sources said, adding that 250 to 300 of them are trucks loaded with 30 to 40 tonnes of goods especially stone bolder, coal and other com-



PHOTO: STAR

A signboard at the entrance of Teesta Barrage in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat district displays the authorities' order banning plying of vehicles exceeding 20 tonnes of load but the restriction is hardly maintained as operation of the weighbridge there has remained suspended for eight months 'due to lack of permanent staff'.

modities from Burimari land port. These are allowed to cross Teesta Barrage, whereas the rule allows only vehicles loaded with below 20 tonnes of goods to cross the barrage for toll of Tk 500 each.

"The employee recruited by leaseholder at Teesta Barrage took Tk one thousand as toll money to allow my truck loaded with boulders weighing above 40 tonnes to cross Teesta Barrage," said truck driver Abdul Jalil from Mymensingh.

A few locals said Tk 5 lakh is exchanged every month for allowing over-loaded vehicles to cross the barrage by 'keeping the weighbridge inoperative'.

"Teesta Barrage is our national asset but it is now under the threat of collapse as hundreds of heavily loaded vehicles move across it regu-

larly," said local schoolteacher Mamotaz Uddin.

The weighbridge at the northern end of Teesta Barrage in Dowani area of Hatibandha upazila started in December 2009 to scale vehicles and prevent over-loaded ones from plying the barrage, said WDB officials at Dalia.

Since then, the weighbridge continued operating properly but authorities suspended its operation early February this year due to 'lack of permanent staffs' to operate the machine.

Ruhul Amin, section officer of the weighbridge, denied the allegation of taking bribe from the leaseholder.

Manager of Teesta Barrage toll room Shamim Hossain also denied taking additional toll for allowing over-loaded vehicles across the barrage.

Asked why the weighbridge

at the barrage has remained inoperative, he said it is a matter of WDB officials.

The officer in charge of Dowani sub-police station ASI Mohammad Ali said WDB officials, not police, are responsible for checking over-loaded vehicles at the entrance of the barrage.

Nikhil Ronjon Som, executive engineer (Mechanical) of WDB at Dalia, admitted that movement of heavily loaded vehicles on the barrage is causing harm to it.

"I have already written to the higher authorities for recruiting permanent staff to operate the weighbridge of Teesta Barrage. Hopefully, the weighbridge will be operated properly from January next year after recruitment of a machine operator, a record keeper and a peon," he said.

Enclaves start agitation today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

People of all the 162 enclaves inside Bangladesh India and will begin a 10-day agitation programme today demanding early implementation of the enclave exchange deal between the two countries.

The programme includes human chains, mass signature campaign, processions, 'Nishprodiip Raat Japan' (spending night without lighting lamps), bi-cycle processions, torch processions and campaign for creating public opinion at villages and in towns adjacent to the enclaves in favour of the demand.

Earlier on September 15, India-Bangladesh Enclave Exchanging Coordination Committee, announced the programme at a press conference in Indian enclave Dashiari Chhara at Phulbari upazila of Kurigram district.

Md Golam Mostafa, general secretary of Bangladesh unit of India-Bangladesh Enclave Exchanging Coordination Committee, said the people of 51 Bangladesh enclaves inside India and 111 Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh will observe the programme to press home the demand.

The enclave exchange deal signed on

September 6 by India and Bangladesh did not mention any specific time frame for its implementation, he said, adding: "We want a specific time for early implementation of the deal."

Mostafa said the governments of India and Bangladesh should feel the pain of the enclave people and start the exchange procedure as early as possible.

One hundred and eleven Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh are situated in Panchagarh, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram and Nilphamari districts while all the 51 Bangladeshi enclaves are in Indian Cooch Behar district.

Pirates kidnap 15 more fishermen, loot trawlers

UNB, Bagerhat

Pirates kidnapped 15 fishermen and looted valuables worth Tk 5 lakh from 15 trawlers in coastal Vedakhali area under Sharankhola upazila here on Wednesday night.

Witnesses said, a gang of 20/25 pirates of infamous Raju Bahini swooped on the fishing trawlers and looted fishing nets, fishes, leaving 10 fishermen wounded at around 8:00 pm.

They kidnapped 15 fishermen along with one trawler and demanded Tk 50,000 as ransom for release of each fisherman.

The pirates also threatened to kill the kidnapped fishermen if their demand is not met within a week, Sundarbans east zone divisional forest officer (DFO) Mihir Kumar Desai.

The kidnapped fishermen hail from Bagerhat, Barguna and Bhola districts.

Earlier, on September 10, infamous Al-Amin Bahini kidnapped 45 fishermen along with seven trawlers and looted fishes and fishing nets from 50 trawlers worth about Tk 25 lakh from Fearway Boya, Meher Alir Char, Kochikhali and Narikelbaria areas under the upazila.

6 held on rape charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Six people were arrested on charge of violating a 7-year-old girl at Pachpirdanga village under Sadar upazila early Wednesday.

The arrestees are Aminul Islam, 31, Roshidul Islam, 22, sons of Azizur Rahman, Abdul Aziz, 35, son of Abdul Jabbar, Abdul Latif, 52, son of Joynullah, Anarul Islam, 34, son of late Monsur Ali of Pachpirdanga village and Anis-ur-Rahman, 32, son of Azisuddin of Shantinagar village.

Police said on 10 September at about

12:30pm when the girl came to play with Aminul Islam's daughter, Aminul violated the girl leaving her injured.

Later when the incident came to the light, a village arbitration tried to settle the matter.

But on 20 September, a local journalist placed the matter at a meeting of the district law and order committee held at the Deputy Commissioner's office.

Later, police raided different village areas and arrested accused Aminul Islam and those five who tried to settle the matter locally.

Hospital without water for 5 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Water supply to Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital has remained stopped since Sunday evening as earthquake caused damage to two pump machines of the hospital.

As an unhygienic condition is prevailing at the hospital, patients are seen leaving the hospital and taking treatment at different private clinics in the town.

Hospital authorities have engaged five to six people to supply water to the patients from a tube-well on the hospital premises. Relatives are also collecting water in plastic bottles from the tube-well for their patients. But these are not enough to meet water needs.

Patients alleged their attendants are becoming sick as bad smell coming from toilets has made the hospital atmosphere stinky.



PHOTO: STAR

Volunteers collect water from a tube-well on the premises of Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital for supplying to the patients as two water pumps of the hospital went out of order during the strong earthquake that hit the area along with the whole country on Sunday evening.

Abdul Majid, 40, a patient of the general ward, said, "We are not getting water since Sunday evening. Our attendants collect water in plastic bottles from the tube-well, but it isn't sufficient for us."

Ataur Rahman, 45, told this correspondent that he took admission to the hospital with stomach pain on Sunday noon and took release order yesterday. "It is difficult for me to stay at the hospital without water,"

he added.

Contacted, Civil Surgeon (CS) Dr Jahangir Alam Sarker said they have repaired the damaged pump machines and water supply to the hospital will restore today.

HOUSEWIVES MURDERED FOR DOWRY

One exhumed, another found in septic tank

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Body of a housewife was exhumed while the body of another was recovered from safety tank on Wednesday.

Body of a housewife, allegedly poisoned to death by her husband for dowry in 2010, was exhumed at Goadanga village in Assassuni upazila of Satkhira on Wednesday following a court order, reports our correspondent.

Police quoted local people as saying that Ariful Islam, son of Nesar Ali of Godara village, married Farida Parvin, 18, daughter of Hazrat Ali of the village two years ago, concealing his first marriage.

Soon after the marriage, Ariful demanded dowry from Farida's father who failed to meet the demand. Ariful used to torture Farida as she could not bring the money.

Farida fell sick and was admitted to

Assassuni health complex on June 20 last year. On June 24, she was taken to her father's house where she died on the same day.

Farida's mother Momena Khatun filed a case with Satkhira Judicial Magistrate's Court on March 9 this year, accusing four people including Ariful and his first wife Mahmuda Khatun.

In the case statement, Momena alleged that her daughter was poisoned to death by the accused.

The court asked the officer-in-charge (OC) of Assassuni police station to record the case. The police station recoded a murder case on March 13 the same year.

After hearing, the court on September 18 asked the district magistrate to engage an executive magistrate to exhumate the body.

In Dinajpur, decomposed body of a


housewife was recovered from a septic tank at Dakkhin Bashudevur village in Hakimpur upazila on Wednesday afternoon, reports our correspondent.

Police said victim Murshida Begum, 25, who earlier 'went missing' on Monday, was wife of Mohammad Babu of the same village.

Police suspect that Babu, now on the run, suffocated her to death following a quarrel on Monday night and dumped the body in the septic tank.

Shombhu Das Gupta, officer in-charge (Investigation) of Hakimpur police station said police recovered the decomposed body of Murshida from the septic tank near their house at around 2:30pm on Wednesday.

Police quoting villagers said that Babu used to torture her wife for dowry.




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Director Administration
Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST)
Telephone: 9013166/ 8000266

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