

# Road of much importance remains in sheer neglect

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

Run-down Sylhet-Sunamganj road remains a nuisance for users while the Tk 302 crore project for upgrading the important road to a national highway has been pending for approval from the planning ministry for the last 11 months.

The road now gives a pitiable look as the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) could not do much repair work due to the stalemate.

Innumerable potholes and cracks have developed on it and several small and narrow bridges turned risky, especially for loaded trucks.

In addition to regular traffic, several hundred trucks and pick up vans ply the road every day for transporting stones, sand etc to different places of the country.

Vehicular movement on the road has seen a sharp rise in recent years with the increased activities at Barchhara land customs station and quite a few stone quarries near the Meghalaya borders, where hundreds of stone crushing plants have been established.

In view of the rising importance of the road, the RHD prepared the project, got it approved by the communications ministry and then sent to the planning ministry for approval in December last year, sources said.

"Although the communications ministry earlier



PHOTO: STAR

**This risky, dilapidated bridge on Sylhet-Sunamganj road bears the testimony to the pitiable condition of the much important road in the region.**

approved the project, things have remained hanging in balance with the planning ministry. We will be able to start the work upon approval from the latter," said Shah Mohammad Musa, superintending engineer of RHD, Sylhet.

The prime minister had announced upgrading the road to a national highway at a public meeting at Tahirpur upazila headquarters on November 10 last year, he said.

According to the project, the road is to be made 24-foot-wide in place of the existing 18-foot one

and will directly benefit people of several districts including Sunamganj, Habiganj, Sylhet, Netrakona and Kishoreganj.

"The busy road has to bear the load of stone and cement laden trucks, in addition to other vehicles. Often accidents take place on the narrow road that cannot cope with the rush of vehicles. Chhatak Cement Factory and Lafarge Surma Cement Factory are located at Chhatak upazila headquarters," the official added.

However, works on a

separate programme will start soon for reconstruction of the 11 bridges on the road with JAICA funds under Eastern Bangladesh Bridges Improvement Project, he said.

Demanding improvement of the busy road, locals on Sunday staged demonstration in Sylhet city as well as different upazila headquarters under the district and handed over memorandums to the authorities.

"We have long been demanding for widening the road and reconstructing the small culverts on the road, which plays a

vital role for transporting from the stone quarry and others. But the concerned people have no care although number of accidents on the road got a rise in the recent years," said Chhatak upazila parishad Chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury.

Back in 2000, a Tk 180-crore project was taken up for the same purpose but it did not see implementation even after approval from communications and planning ministries and the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council.

4 HEALTH CENTRES IN BOGRA, SIRAJGANJ

## Fake bills made for unfinished job, says probe report

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

A few construction firms withdrew Tk 1.32 crore through preparing fake bills with the connivance of officials against construction works of four health centres in Bogra and Sirajganj districts from 2003 to 2005.

The office of the chief engineer of Construction Management and Maintenance Unit (CMMU) under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare confirmed the matter after an investigation led by Anwar Ali, executive engineer of CMMU, Bogra office.

He started the investigation on August 17 and submitted the report on September 29. The CMMU, Bogra office sent a copy of the report to Dhaka office next day.

"Former executive engineer in Bogra ASM Saidul Alam signed the fake bills prepared by the contractors who did not complete the assigned work," Shah Md Hannan, superintending engineer of Bogra, said quoting the investigation report.

Contacted over cell phone on October 3, ASM Saidul Alam, however, denied the allegation, saying, "Some CMMU officials prepared the false report to harass me."

According to an estimate prepared by the local CMMU office following instruction of the chief engineer, Tk 3.48

crore would be needed to complete the remaining works of the incomplete health centres, said sources of CMMU Bogra office.

Kit-way Pack started construction work of Santahar 20-bed hospital at an estimated cost of Tk 3.33 crore on January 14, 2005, in Adamdighi upazila of Bogra district. The contractor withdrew Tk 2.73 crore against the bills of 80 percent construction work whereas the firm completed 60 percent of the total work and left the construction work about five years ago, says the investigation report submitted by Anwar Ali.

CMMU now needs Tk 3 crore to complete the construction work of the hospital, CMMU Bogra office sources said.

M/S Azad construction withdrew an amount of Tk 4.32 crore, 98 percent of total amount mentioned in the work order, although it had completed 80 percent of the construction work of Aliarhat 20-bed hospital in Shibganj upazila of Bogra district.

CMMU further selected M/S Kabir Traders as contractors and paid more than Tk 45 lakh for the remaining work. But, the department again estimated Tk 20 lakh to complete rest of 20 percent works. M/S Azad construction started the work on March 7, 2005. CMMU chief engineer's

office sources said at least Tk 50 lakh were misappropriated through preparing fake bills.

Another contractor, M/S Md Azizul Islam withdrew Tk 34.47 lakh for 'total construction' of Gunahar Union Health Centre in Dupchanchia upazila of Bogra district but the firm had completed only 70 percent of the work.

CMMU official paid the construction firm an additional amount of Tk 2.4 lakh against the work order amount without assigning any reason, sources said.

The contractor started the construction work on July 23 in 2003 and left the work about five years ago after withdrawing total work order amount, goes the investigation report.

Now the department needs Tk 14.99 lakh to complete the remaining works, according to the recent estimate.

M/S Abdul Wahab Sarker withdrew about Tk 30 lakh as the bill for 90 percent construction work of Brammagachha union health centre in Raiganj upazila of Sirajganj district.

But the contractor, who started the construction work on July 23 in 2003, completed only 75 percent of the total work and left the site about five years ago. According to the estimate, the department needs Tk 13.61 lakh to complete the work.



PHOTO: STAR

**Wreaths were placed on the newly built memorial for martyrs at Chararhaat killing spot in Nawabganj upazila of Dinajpur district yesterday.**

## Memorial for martyrs after long 40 years

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Chararhaat mass killing spot in Nawabganj upazila of Dinajpur district has got a memorial for the martyrs 40 years into the incident.

According to the witnesses, Pakistani occupation army with the help of their local collaborators killed at least 98 people at this place on October 10 in 1971.

Professor AAMS Arefin Siddique, vice-chancellor of Dhaka University inaugurated the memorial as chief guest yesterday morning.

Professor M Afzal Hossain, vice-chancellor of Haji Danesh Science and Technology University, cultural personality and one of the leaders of Bangladesh Sector Commanders Forum M Hamid, and Nawabganj Upazila

Parishad Chairman Shibli Sadique were present as special guests.

Financed by local philanthropists, Dinajpur chapter of Bangladesh Sector Commanders Forum built this memorial on the mass killing spot.

Speaking at a discussion at the mass killing site, Prof Arefin Siddique said such massacre spots across the country will remain as evidence of brutal killing of unarmed and innocent people by Pakistani occupation army and their local collaborators.

"We should preserve these spots to project the real pictures of genocide carried out by Pak army during the Liberation War before our next generation," he added.

Syed Mokades Hossain Babul, general secretary of Dinajpur chapter of Sector Commanders Forum and

commander of Dinajpur District Muktijoddha Sangsad, Nawabganj Upazila Chairman Md Shibli Shadique also addressed the discussion meeting chaired by Abul Kalam Azad, chief of Dinajpur chapter of Bangladesh Sector Commanders Forum.

The speakers urged the government to take steps to persevere the mass killing spots across the country.

Md Mozammel Haque, one of witnesses to the killing, said Pakistani occupation army and their local collaborators picked up at least 67 people from Prankrishnapur village and 31 people from Andagram village of the upazila in the early hours of October 10 in 1971.

They took the villagers to Chararhaat, lined them up and shot them dead in the morning, he added.

## 50 hurt as villagers clash in Sylhet

UNB, Sylhet

At least 50 people, including 5 policemen and a local journalist, were injured in a clash between two groups of villagers over a trifling matter in Dakkhin Surma upazila on Sunday night.

Witnesses said Bappi, 17, son of Siraj Mia of Kodomtoli village hit Zahed, 18, son of Mokles Mia, of Mominkhola village with his bicycle at 6:30pm near local Anis Complex triggering a scuffle between them.

As the news spread, people of both the villages equipped with lethal weapons and brickbats attacked each other. On information, police rushed to the spot but failed to bring the situation under control.

During the two-hour long clash, 50 people, including a local newsman and five policemen, were injured and 10 shops and a private car vandalised.

Riot police rushed to the spot, fired some blank shots and charged batons on the feuding groups.

Later, Dakkhin Surma upazila chairman Moulana Lokman Ahmed, Kuchai union parishad chairman Abul Kalam and former Boraikandi union parishad chairman Haji Rois Ali went to the spot to bring the situation under control.

Riot police and Rapid Action Battalion personnel have been deployed in the area to avert any further clash.

Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmad Kamran and high police officials visited the spot.



PHOTO: STAR

**Hilsa fishing goes on in different rivers of Patuakhali district despite an 11-day ban. This photo was taken from a river in Nimdi area of Baufal upazila at around 10:00am yesterday.**

## More offenders punished for defying hilsa ban

STAR NATIONAL DESK

Law enforcers in separate drives have seized more hilsa, arrested and fined fishermen and traders for defying the 11-day ban on the fish.

A coastguard team in Chandpur during raids from midnight to 5:00am yesterday seized 96,000 metres current net and 250 kg hilsa from the Meghna River, reports our correspondent.

In Bagerhat, a mobile court on Sunday night fined two fish traders and a truck driver.

They were arrested with a hilsa-laden truck at Badhal Bazar in Kachua upazila of the district, reports our correspondent.

Besides, another team raided a house at Rayenda Bazar in Sharankhola upazila yesterday and seized

50 kg hilsa. The team also fined one person for the offence.

At least 121 fishermen were sentenced to jail in 12 upazilas of Barisal division in the last five days for fishing hilsa violating the ban that started on October 6.

Bankim Chandra Mondol, deputy director of fisheries directorate, yesterday said in first three days of the 11-day ban, his office conducted 108 drives, seized 9.37 metric tonnes of hilsa and 3.65 lakh metre fishing nets, realised fine over Tk 90,000 and jailed 114 fishermen for one to two months and lodged 40 cases in the division.

A mobile court led by Ahsan Habib, Hizla upazila nirbahi officer (UNO), jailed seven fishermen for violating the ban on Sunday, reports UNB.

Rafiqul Hossain, officer in-charge of Hizla police station, said the seven were arrested while fishing in Meghna and Arial Kha rivers under the upazila.

Local administration and law enforcement agencies have launched drives to execute the 11-day fishing ban to facilitate safe spawning of hilsa fish, officials said.

Under the fisheries ordinance amended in October 2005, any fisherman or trader who violates the ban may be fined upto Tk 1,000 with six months' imprisonment for the first time while the punishment would be double if the same offence is repeated by the same offender, they said.

The restriction imposed by the directorate of fisheries on catching hilsa will be

in force till October 16.

"This time we have slapped the ban not only on netting hilsa in certain rivers and coastal areas, but also on marketing, sales and transportation of the fish across the country," Bankim Chandra said.

A total fishing ban has been imposed on 7,000 square kilometres of hilsa breeding zones at four points of seven coastal districts, including Barisal, he added.

Meanwhile, the fisheries directorate has launched a campaign to make the 11-day restriction a success through creating awareness among fishermen, fish traders and the consumers.

The directorate also urged people to refrain from consuming hilsa during the spawning season.