

Under the sky for a year

Students forced to abandon risky school building

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

Students of a government primary school in the district's Rajoir upazila have been having classes in the open for a year now, as the school building was abandoned in June last year after it developed cracks.

But that has led to another problem for them. Every time there is a sign of rain, the school breaks immediately, thus hampering the education of the 226 students of Kamalapur Government Primary School at Bajitpur union in Rajoir.

The school building was once rebuilt in 1995 but several cracks were noticed soon afterwards, teachers and students have said. The building was declared abandoned on June 3 last year after a chunk of the roof came off, seriously injuring a girl student and scaring her classmates.

The school authorities later pulled down the wall on the building's eastern side. Since then classes are being held in the school field.

Sumon Baidya, an assistant teacher, said the school authorities have to struggle to take classes during the hot summer but their sufferings get worse during rainy or stormy

weather.

Even a little rain soaks books and important papers, and the students get drenched, he said.

At such times, classes are abandoned or taken in the library room of the cracked building where the students' lives could also come under threat.

Every year a number of students from this school get scholarships and achieve brilliant results. But their studies have been seriously hampered due to a scarcity of classrooms, teacher Baidya said.

A student, Sumi Bagchi of class-V, said she was seriously hurt after a loosened part of the roof fell on her, as a result of which she was admitted to Rajoir Hospital in a critical state.

Worried at the incident, many parents have stopped sending their children to the school.

Rajoir Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Hayat Ud Daula Khan said the school had been declared abandoned after it turned risky for the lives of the under-age students.

The construction of a new building will start soon.



Students of Kamalapur Government Primary School at Rajoir of Madaripur sit for their exams in the open. They have been having their classes out-doors for a year after their school building developed cracks. The school has to close every time there is rain.

US keeps the pressure on

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collaborative sanctions against Bangladeshi garment.

"The administration will announce a decision on the next steps in the GSP review of Bangladesh by the end of June," said Lewis Karesh, who handles labour issues for the US Trade Representative's office.

Karesh told the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee in the hearing that all options, including possible suspension, limitation or withdrawal of GSP benefits, remained under consideration.

Senator Robert Menendez, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, sounded supportive on the suspension of Bangladesh. He noted that the GSP did not cover textiles, which are by far

Bangladesh's largest export to the US.

"While only a small fraction of Bangladesh's exports would be affected, given ongoing violations of the GSP workers' right criteria, GSP suspension would send a strong signal that the United States is serious about protecting workers and improving workplace safety," Menendez said.

Liberal act, little gain

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When in fiscal 2007-08 and 2009-10, the government gave scope to whiten money via real estate, it did actually cause the prices to spiral somewhat, particularly in urban areas.

A flat that cost Tk 32-35 lakh eight years ago now costs upwards of Tk 2 crore, Mubasshar Hussein, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

"The price of construction materials did not show any significant increase, so the reasons for the phenomenal rise in flat prices are the skyrocketing price of land and the injection of black money to the real estate sector," he said.

In fiscal 2007-08, some 1,651 people legalised their previously undisclosed money by investing in real estate, which raked in Tk 81.70 crore in taxes for the NBR.

In fiscal 2009-10, after the present government assumed power it listed four sectors which included real estate via which amnesty to black money could be attained. A total of 1,320 people availed themselves of the opportunity and NBR received Tk 28.91 crore in taxes.

Since independence, every government has given amnesty to black money, but it did not bring in substantial revenues for the NBR. Between 1971 to April 2013, a total of Tk 13,516 crore of undisclosed money was legalised, against which Tk 1,407 crore was received.

It is often said that black money holders prefer to launder their money abroad instead of availing the government provisions for amnesty.

A report of Global

AMOUNT OF BLACK MONEY WHITENED AND TAX RECEIVED BY YEARS

Year	Money Whitened (in tk crore)	Tax collected (in tk crore)
1971-1975	2.25	0.19
1976-1980	50.76	0.81
1981-1990	45.89	4.59
1991-1996	150.79	15.08
1997-2000	950.41	141.24
2001-2006	827.74	102.77
2007-2009	9,682.99	911.32
2009-April 2013	1,805.01	230.41

SOURCE: NBR

Financial Integrity published in December 2012 estimated that Bangladesh has had an illicit financial outflow of around \$14 billion during 2001-2010.

The report said the most black money flight took place in 2006, 2007, and 2010, with the corresponding figures being \$2,778 million, \$2,737 million and \$2,367 million.

TIB STATEMENT

The provision of legalising black money is an example of institutionalisation of corruption, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) said yesterday.

TIB considers it unconstitutional, immoral, discriminatory and contradictory to the government's election pledge, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of the graft watchdog, said in a statement.

"[The scope for] whitening black money as proposed in the national budget is against the spirit of article 20 (2) of the constitution. It is immoral as it rewards illegal and corrupt behaviour and discourages honesty. It's a clear violation of the government's own electoral commitment."

He said it would also

discriminate against honest customers in the real estate sector and encourage people to earn beyond legal means.

Available evidence, including the finance minister's statement, renders any financial argument illogical and unacceptable for such a provision, as no substantial revenue has been earned as a result of the provision over the years, Iftekharuzzaman continued.

"Politics may indeed be a game of compromise, as the minister told the media, but if the core principles of honesty, constitutionality, equality of all and justice are compromised for politics, then politics will have nothing to do with public interest and democratic values."

TIB is also disappointed that the opposition leaders who have criticised the provision have done so clearly for political mileage as they have refrained from specifically committing what their position would be in this regard if they are voted to power.

He further said the opposition has behaved irresponsibly and immorally by absenting from the session on the budget day.

Fortune Shopping Mall but not of Global Engineers and Developers Ltd, said, "I know nothing about building illegal shops, other directors did it."

The mall, housing various commercial outlets, opened a little over a year ago but the top seven floors are still under construction.

"Some over-enthusiastic directors started building the shops illegally."

"We will soon remove those," he said.

Regarding the buildings approval, he said, "We have the approval but it was not sent to Rajuk for some reason. We will show it if Rajuk asks for it now."

MA Manik, a director of

Rotary peace

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jubilee at a hotel in the capital.

The government, said the prime minister, has consolidated democracy, attached priority to maintaining communal harmony and brought the war criminals to justice to establish peace in society.

Terming the award an honour to the people of the country, Hasina said the recognition of the Rotary International for the peace efforts of the government will inspire her to establish and maintain peace at home and abroad.

The world, noted the prime minister, was now getting engaged with sustainable development, and she strongly believed that sustainable development could be achieved only through ensuring global peace.

In this context, she cited the presentation of her peace model "People's Empowerment and Development" in the UN General Assembly in 2011 to achieve global peace. The 193 member global forum passed the proposal in December last year.

Former deputy prime minister of Thailand and past president of Rotary International Bhichai Rattakul, Rotarian Ishtiaque A Zaman and program chairman Rotarian F H Arif, among others, spoke at the programme.

Hope for award committee said, "Her work restoring the lives of the paralysed here in Bangladesh is truly unparalleled. She has great compassion for the neglected members of Bangladesh's society."

A British-born physiotherapist and humanitarian, Valerie established the CRP in 1979, where around 15,000 outpatients are given medical care every year. CRP also works to reduce accidents and provides schooling and vocational training for patients, read the press release.

This year's award was announced by The One project, a scheme conceptualised and founded by Rotarian David Harilela. It is the first international humanitarian award launched by Rotary International District 3450 in Hong Kong, Macau and Mongolia.

Bangladeshi Rotarian Khondakar Shahidul Hasan, former president of Rotary Club Uttara, was the nominator for Valerie.

"I am so happy that her relentless work has been recognised by a prestigious platform of the Rotarians," said Hasan in the press release.

Govt relies on false gas hope

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Then in August last year, Petrobangla revised the projection further. By this time, it gave up the venture to import LNG, and any new supplies from foreign oil companies. Instead, the Petrobangla chief said that by December 2013, there would be 550 mmcf of gas.

Talking to The Daily Star last week, Petrobangla chairman Hossain Monsur, who is enjoying his contract for the third term now, gave a breakdown that showed a total new addition of 430 mmcf.

Experts now contradict the chairman's claims, saying that by December this year, the government would be able to add 250 mmcf of gas at best while it is practical to expect a maximum of 100 mmcf of gas increase.

"Since I made the forecast, 100 mmcf of gas has already been added to the national network," said Hossain Monsur, referring to gas production from three fields of Titas, Sriakail and Fenchuganj.

In reality, production of gas from these three fields came a few months back with the quantity being half of what the chairman had claimed.

Hossain Monsur also claimed that in June, three gas wells (Titas-18, Sriakail-3 and Titas-20) will produce

between 95 and 115 mmcf of gas. In July, another 75 mmcf will be produced from Bakhraabad and Fenchuganj fields. In December, another 140 mmcf will be produced from five wells in Titas, Begumganj, Fenchuganj and Kailashtila.

But experts rule out his forecast. "In June only Titas-18 would be able to produce 25 mmcf of gas. Russian company Gazprom is dealing with Sriakail-3 and Titas-20. But it is under-performing," said an official of a national gas field.

Bapex's work programme is progressing at a pace where it can add a maximum of 100 mmcf of gas.

"Petrobangla relied on an unsolicited contract with Russian company Gazprom to implement a fast track development of 10 wells by December, and also on Bapex's drilling programmes," he said.

But till now, Gazprom has drilled two wells in Sriakail and Titas, and left them incomplete, as the company has not brought all necessary equipment to start production. The company is importing the equipment. "At this rate, even if it can bring in the equipment by June-July, we don't see how it would be able to complete drilling

four wells this year," the source noted.

Hossain Monsur also expressed his unhappiness with Gazprom. "Gazprom is not working at the pace Petrobangla had hoped. The Russian company was supposed to mobilise all equipment by June 15 to drill 10 wells. But their two rigs are sitting idle for one and a half months (as it did not bring in other tools)," he said.

Fake discoveries

In May last year, through just conducting three-dimensional (3D) seismic surveys, Petrobangla "discovered" oil in decades-old fields of Kailashtila and Haripur fields. While finding some recoverable oil in Kailashtila was something new, finding it in Haripur was a news disclosed twice after three decades.

Then again, experts totally reject discovery claims made on the basis of 3D survey. "Unless you produce the real thing, it's not a discovery. There are instances where seismic survey's indications were proven wrong."

The Petrobangla chairman had, however, taken initiatives to produce oil from Kailashtila, "We had plans to bring an oil well into operation within this year. But this plan has been delayed due to

bureaucratic bottlenecks and difficulties with land requisition."

Earlier in September 2011, at a press conference, he announced "discovery" of an additional one trillion cubic feet (tcf) of gas in the decades-old field of Rashidpur.

Experts argue that one cannot discover anything in an existing field, but "appraise" the field's reserve by periodically studying the field's structure. This is how US company Chevron's Bibiyana gas field's initial recoverable reserve of 2.4 tcf had doubled. Chevron never announced new discovery while doubling its reserve.

But the biggest such claim was made by the Bapex chief who went on record to the media in 2010 saying that on the basis of seismic survey, the company had found gas field in Sunamganj-Netrakona having the potential reserve of 2 to 3 tcf.

Late last year, when Bapex finally drilled an exploratory well there, it found nothing but sand and water.

Since the present government took over, it succeeded in raising gas supply by 500 mmcf. This increase has remained largely unfelt, as there has been a gas deficit of the same quantity.

'Minus two' formula still on

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"These people always wanted to create an abnormal situation, whether through military dictators or unelected governments, to get some power in their hands," she told a views-exchange meeting with grassroots leaders of the Awami League from Shariatpur district at Gono Bhavan.

Hasina, also the president of AL, said democracy would move ahead uninterruptedly and the transfer of power this time would take place under the democratic system as per the constitution.

About the construction of the Padma bridge, she said an international tender would be floated at the end of this month to build the bridge. "We'll, at least, start the construction work. If voted to power again at the next election, we'll complete the job quickly," she added.

The prime minister said it was only for the timely steps of her government which had enabled the country to win the maritime boundary case against Myanmar.

"There is another dispute with India and the verdict in the dispute is due next year. Only if the Awami League government returns to power, will we be able to win that case and retain our rights," she maintained.

Responding to criticism by various quarters, Hasina admitted that the proposed budget for the next fiscal year was highly ambitious. "Of course, we've a high ambi-

tion to change the fate of our country. If we don't want to improve the lot of the people, what's the reason for our politics? Why are we doing politics?" she questioned.

Without mentioning any name, she said the government would punish the culprits who had distorted a picture showing a changing of the Gilaf of the holy Kaaba.

She requested AL leaders and activists to strengthen the party at the grassroots so that the party could return to power at the next general election.

AL leaders Kazi Zafarullah Chowdhury, Satish Chandra Roy, Deputy Speaker Shawkat Ali, PM's Adviser Alaaddin Ahmed, BM Mozammel, MP and Enamul Huq Shamim were present, among others.

RESUBMIT ADJOURNMENT MOTION OVER CG: ASHRAF
Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam yesterday urged the main opposition BNP to resubmit its adjournment motion over the caretaker government system in parliament for discussion.

"The nation's hopes rose after the BNP submitted its adjournment motion [in parliament]. But the party later withdrew it at the directive of its Chairperson Khaleda Zia. It proves that they don't want discussions, rather they want to grab power through conspira-

cies," he said.

Ashraf, who is also LGRD minister, was addressing a convention of non-communal, progressive and democratic activists at the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital.

Regarding the budget reaction by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the minister said Debapriya Bhattacharya had no right to make such comments as he had made under the banner of the CPD.

"Usually, the CPD chief executive makes such remarks after every budget. It's not Debapriya, but Mustafizur Rahman who is the chief executive of the CPD. Debapriya is a former chief executive of the CPD. So, he has no right to make such comments on behalf of the CPD," he mentioned.

He observed that the BNP had failed to come up with any proposal on the proposed budget to make any important changes or insertions in it.

The AL leader said: "Today, it's not the BNP, but the Hefajat-Jamaat has become the alternative to Awami League. Therefore, a vacuum has been created in national politics, which is a bad signal for politics."

He urged the leftist progressive forces to become the alternative to AL.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon MP, CPB President Mujahidul Islam Selim, among others, spoke at the programme.

Probe not done

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1971 Liberation War, a murdat (deviated from Islam) citing his alleged blogposts.

Rajib was hacked to death near his Palash Nagar home in the capital's Pallabi on February 15.

The then President Zillur Rahman on February 25 ordered Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain to constitute the Supreme Judicial Council to investigate the allegation against the judge.

The two other members of the council are Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha and Justice MA Wahhab Miah, judges of the SC's Appellate Division.

On February 28, the three-member council headed by the chief justice issued a notice asking Mizanur to explain the allegation raised against him.

Mizanur -- who was appointed an additional HC judge on July 29, 2002, and his job was confirmed two years later during the last BNP-Jamaat rule -- responded to the council's notice on March 14, according to sources.

This is the second such council to probe allegations against an HC judge.

In 2004, HC additional judge Syed Shahidur Rahman was removed from office on the basis of the first ever judicial council's probe into a judge's misconduct and its recommendations.

Shahidur was charged with receiving Tk 50,000 as bribe to fix bail for an accused in a women repression case.