

RAVAGED RAMU TEMPLES

Renovation almost done

ARUN BIKASH DEY, back from Ramu, Cox's Bazar

Reconstruction and renovation works of 16 out of 19 Buddhist temples either torched or vandalised in Cox's Bazar last year have been completed.

Project Director Lt Col Siddique Md Zulfiker Rahman said beautification works of the remaining three temples were going on.

"The project is about to be completed," he said, adding, the temples would hopefully be ready for inauguration by mid-July.

The cost of the project was initially estimated at Tk 11.98 crore, which was increased to Tk 20 crore, said Zulfiker Rahman, also the commanding officer of the 17 ECB Battalion of Bangladesh Army.

Twelve out of 19 temples that came under attack in the September 29 mayhem at Ramu in the district were reconstructed, while the other seven were repaired, said Project Officer Major Anwar.

Members of the Buddhist community and the locals in the area said they were

satisfied with the progress and quality of work so far.

Ramu Kendriyo Seema Bihar, a 17th century wooden temple set on fire in September, is a newly-built three-storey concrete structure now.

"We are very happy with the construction works," said Pandit Satyapriyo Mahathero, principal of the Bihar. "It has exceeded our expectations."

Bimukti Bidarshan Bhabona Kendra, a temple at Uttar Mithachhari village in Ramu, was also torched during the September mayhem, said Neetish Barua, general secretary of the temple management committee.

A two-storey concrete structure has been raised at the site.

The temple's Principal Shrimat Karunashri Thero said the quality of construction work was good.

Contacted, Engineer Subhas Barua, structural designer of all the 12 reconstructed temples, said he had visited the temples recently, and was pleased to see the quality of work.



Shima Bihar and Bimukti Bidarshan Bhabna Kendra, inset, in Ramu are being reconstructed under the supervision of army personnel. These were among the 19 Buddhist temples that were torched and vandalised in a sectarian violence on September 29 last year. The photos were taken on June 19.

PHOTO CREDIT: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Youths should take leadership

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Describing social business as a "mind game", he said, "Capital is not important for social business. Rather, new ideas are important."

Crores of young people are unemployed in the world today not because of poverty but because of the system, which the young will challenge and change through social business, Yunus added.

Regarding the cancellation of GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) privileges for Bangladeshi products in the US market, he said Bangladesh had long been manufacturing and exporting readymade garments but was yet to make much improvement in workers' safety standards at workplaces.

Yunus highlighted Bangladesh's geo-political position and said, "We need a deep sea-port to increase regional cooperation with China,

Myanmar, India, Bhutan and Nepal."

Daffodil International University's (DIU) trustee board chairman and president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industries Sabur Khan chaired the programme. It was inaugurated by Hans Ritz, founder of the Germany-based Grameen Creative Lab (GCL).

In the evening, Yunus also spoke at the concluding ceremony of the "Social Business Forum 2013" at North South University in Dhaka.

Bangladesh should be ready to face challenges to take its economy forward, as the growth of the neighbouring economies are very fast, he said.

"Where do we stand today? Where is our economy going? Is it moving at the speed it is supposed to move?"

Bangladesh enjoys advantages of its geo-

graphical position between two giant countries, China and India, who will together equal the economy of the rest of the world.

"If the economies of our neighbours grow fast, we have advantages. We can hinge on those economies and change our economy, as there will be lots of things that they will not be interested in doing any more will pour into Bangladesh, as happened in the case of garment industry."

Bangladesh will have to wake up to live up to the expectation of the people, Yunus said.

"China could not feed people even a few years ago. Millions of people died in hunger. Today, China has completely been transformed."

Yunus said writing checks or doling out payouts to the poor or doing charities were not a solu-

tion, although those were very common in Europe and the USA. That does not help solve the problem.

"Charities and benefits are important items when people are in distress. But at the same time we should be getting ready for the second part of the action -- to help them get out of poverty."

Yunus also called for facilitating smooth movement of people and goods and services among South Asian countries and suggested forming South Asian Union like European Union.

Amin U Sarkar, vice-chancellor of NSU, MA Hashem, former chair of the NSU board of trustees, Ragib Ali, chair of the NSU board of trustees, Abdul Hannan Chowdhury, dean of school of business of the university, and Shihan Ahmed, chief commercial officer of Banglalink, also spoke at the programme.



Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus delivers a speech on social business at North South University in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Probe starts against Jamalpur's Ashraf

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and have already visited some crime spots in Jamalpur," Sanaul Huq, a senior member of the agency, told The Daily Star yesterday.

During a two-day visit to Jamalpur on June 21-22, an investigation team comprising Sanaul Huq and Matiur Rahman visited several mass graves and killing grounds and talked to victims and witnesses of the atrocities allegedly committed by Ashraf.

Matiur, who is also the investigation officer in the case, told The Daily Star that Ashraf was the president of Mymensingh unit Islami Chhatra Sangha, the then student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami, in the first part of 1971 and formed Al-Badr force in Jamalpur.

"It [Al-Badr force] later spread all over the country," the investigator added.

According to historical documents, Al-Badr, an

auxiliary force of the Pakistan army, was responsible for the planned killing of the intellectuals at the fag end of the nine-month-long war.

On the allegations against Ashraf, Matiur said, "We have just started our investigation and have already received information about his involvement in the killings and acts of genocide in Jamalpur."

Ekattorer Ghatok O Dalalra Ke Kothaye, a book containing accounts of the alleged killers and collaborators, is a prosecution document in most war crimes cases which are either disposed of or pending in the tribunals.

The book quoted from a report published in the Jamaat's mouthpiece daily Sangram on September 14, 1971 that Al-Badr force was formed under the leadership of Ashraf Hossain, who was "chairman" of

Mymensingh Islami Chhatra Sangha, after the Pakistan army entered Jamalpur on April 22, 1971.

The International Crimes Tribunal-2 in its verdict in Jamaat leader M u h a m m a d Kamaruzzaman's case observed that Al-Badr was an "action section" and "armed wing" of Jamaat and was formed mainly with the workers of Islami Chhatra Sangha.

As per the verdict, Kamaruzzaman, who was also a top leader of Chhatra Sangha in greater Mymensingh, had played the role of a key organiser in formation of Al-Badr force there.

Matiur said after Ashraf, Kamaruzzaman became the president of Chhatra Sangha in Mymensingh in 1971.

About the whereabouts of Ashraf, Matiur said after independence the war

crimes suspect had left for Pakistan and locals of Jamalpur had "seldom" seen him in the district.

"We have heard he got married in Patna, India, and has been living there. But we are not sure about it," he said, adding that he would visit Jamalpur again next month for further investigations.

Sanaul Huq said they would try to complete the investigation "as soon as possible".

On completion of investigation, they would submit a probe report along with other documents to the prosecution, who, after scrutinising those documents, would press charges against Ashraf.

A top official of the agency said last month they were conducting investigations against 10 other war crimes suspects in different localities across the country.

Voters want

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to see development of our area, its drainage system and the roads," said Mazharul Islam, a resident of Dutta Para, Tongi.

Businessman of Tongi bazar area Nazrul Islam alleged that he had not seen any comprehensive initiative from the municipal authorities for solving the waterlogging problem over the last decade.

One of the major impacts of waterlogging in Gazipur is long tailbacks of transports on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway.

"It took me more than an hour to go about six kilometres, from Vogra to Gazipur intersection. The traffic jam was created mainly due to stagnant water on both sides of the highway," said Kabir Ahmed, an inhabitant of Shalna area.

Meanwhile, electioneering of Ajmat and his major rival BNP-backed mayoral candidate MA Mannan had to go through a tough time due to the rain yesterday.

"We could not go door to door for the rain. Our central leaders, who came from Dhaka to campaign, had to remain indoors," said Amzad Hossain, leader of Gazipur unit Jubo Dal, a pro-BNP student front.

Ataullah Mandal, gen-

eral secretary of Gazipur sadar upazila unit Awami League, said they could cover a small portion of their campaign area owing to the rain.

Asked about the waterlogging problem, Ataullah suggested talking to Ajmat, who could not be reached over the phone.

JAHANGIR ISSUE

Some leaders and activists of Gazipur Awami League and its associate bodies alleged that supporters of Jahangir Alam, who withdrew himself from the mayoral race on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's request, were not working wholeheartedly for Ajmat, the AL-backed candidate.

Ratna Sultana, president of Tongi police station area unit Jubo Mahila League, said: "They [Jahangir's supporters] still seem lukewarm. It would have been better if they and our party-backed candidate's supporters worked together."

An AL leader of Gazipur preferring anonymity alleged that Jahangir's supporters were not sincerely asking vote for Ajmat.

However, Abu Siddique, a supporter of Jahangir, said 80 percent people of Jahangir's camp were active in the field for Ajmat. The rest 20 percent, who joined

them from different political parties, had not been so active.

JATIYA PARTY FACTOR

Leaders and activists of Jatiya Party (JP), a key component of ruling AL-led alliance, have got divided over extending party support to the mayoral candidates contesting the Gazipur city polls.

Monwar Hossain, president of Gazipur city unit JP, on Thursday at a media briefing had announced his support for Ajmat.

But yesterday, at a meeting in the house of Gazipur district unit JP president, the party's city unit general secretary declared Monwar expelled.

Since the beginning of Gazipur city poll campaigns, the JP district unit president and general secretary had been working against the AL-backed candidate. But the Gazipur district AL leaders had been claiming that the grassroots-level leaders and activists of JP were with the AL favourite.

Meanwhile, AL chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Thursday had a meeting with JP Chairman HM Ershad where they discussed various issues, including the Gazipur city polls.

It's not my article

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Bangladesh.

"It's out of the question. I did not send that newspaper any write-up seeking suspension of the GSP facilities for Bangladesh. I am not the author of that article and I have the proof in this regard," Khaleda said while taking part in the budget discussion.

The opposition leader also said she would present the proof in due time in favour of her claim.

"Failing to retain GSP (Generalised System of Preferences) facilities, the government is spreading propaganda to create confusion," Khaleda said in parliament yesterday afternoon.

The article, "ZIA: The thankless role in saving democracy in Bangladesh", appeared in the opinion section of the English daily January 30, drawing huge attention from people at home and abroad.

The much-talked about piece had Begum Khaleda Zia in the byline and "former

prime minister of Bangladesh and current leader of the opposition" as the writer's details at the bottom.

"They [US authorities] also must explain to Ms. Hasina that general preferences for trade will be withdrawn if those who support workers' rights and have political views opposed to those of the prime minister are not now allowed to express their beliefs," the item reads.

In her speech yesterday, Khaleda said, "It was the Aminul murder and the Rana Plaza collapse that brought in the decision of GSP suspension. I would like to urge the government not to shift its failures on to others. Stop such propaganda at this critical stage."

In reply, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina questioned if it was not the opposition leader, then who wrote it?

While Khaleda denied that she did not write that article, Hasina smilingly waved a copy of the article as published in The Washington

Times.

The BNP chief immediately responded, saying "I did not write that, it was not my article."

Hasina during her speech on the budget said, "The language of her (Khaleda) budget speech today and in the article is very much identical."

"You all will get the article available on the internet at present. There can be nothing more shameful and unfortunate than for a person to write against her country," she said amid continuous shouts by opposition lawmakers.

BNP leaders at that point did not deny the article written by the party chief Khaleda. They rather said there was nothing of anti-state interest element in the write-up. They also said it was the then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina who, during the last BNP-Jamaat alliance government, had appealed to the European Union to impose a ban on grants to Bangladesh.

Complaint filed

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American law organisation on behalf of Human Rights and Development for Bangladesh and Bangladeshi-Americans in Greater Washington DC made the complaint before the court.

However, the BBC did not mention when the complaint was lodged or the names of the accused except for Sheikh Hasina.

Quoting the complaint, the BBC said the prime minister was responsible for the killings that took place on February 28, May 5 and 6 and other human rights violations in Bangladesh.

On February 28, Jamaat Shibir activists clashed with law enforcers protesting against the death sentence given to war criminal Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee for crimes against humanity. At least 33 people, including four policemen, were killed and scores more were injured across the country.

On May 5, at least three people were killed when thousands of Hefajat-e-Islam men, instigated and bolstered by Jamaat-Shibir activists, went on the rampage in the capital.

The following day, 27 more people, including three policemen, were killed as Hefajat ran amok in Narayanganj, Bagerhat and Chittagong protesting their ejection from Shapla Chattar in the capital early that day.

Hefajat had earlier promised to hold a non-violent rally at Shapla Chattar to protest what it called were anti-religion write-ups of "atheist bloggers".

Develop skill

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With 500 participants representing 89 countries and seven international organisations, the conference ended amid the convergence that nuclear power remained an important option for many countries to improve energy security, provide energy for development and fight climate change.

Organised by the IAEA and hosted by Rosatom, the conference also emphasized the importance of nuclear safety in the future growth of nuclear power as well as a stronger role of the IAEA.

"The conference has achieved its main goal—to confirm that nuclear energy is an important part of world's energy mix. The innovative character of this type of energy provides us with a sustainable development in the future. Closed nuclear fuel cycle and fusion may open for the humanity absolutely new horizons," noted director general of Rosatom Sergei Kirienko at the conclusion.

"We can look ahead with confidence and optimism to the future of nuclear power in the 21st century," said Yamano adding that following the Fukushima plant disaster of 2011, effective steps were taken to make nuclear power plants safer everywhere.

Obama calls for reforms in Zimbabwe

AFP, Pretoria

US President Barack Obama yesterday called for Zimbabwe's government to stop harassing its citizens and to implement reforms ahead of landmark elections expected later this year.

"Harassment of citizens and groups needs to stop and reform needs to move forward so people can cast their votes in elections that are fair and free and credible," he said during a visit to neighbouring South Africa.

Veteran president Robert Mugabe has set elections for July 31, drawing fierce criticism from his political foes.

Critics accuse Mugabe of attempting to push through a vote before reforms that would clean up the electoral roll, free the media and limit the military's political role.

Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai -- who will face Mugabe in the polls -- has threatened to boycott any unilaterally declared election date.