

Helping kids with cleft lips speak

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A few community health workers' voluntary long-term work with children born with cleft lips and palates has helped the little ones develop their speech capabilities remarkably in several northern districts.

Cleft lips and palates are the most common congenital problem children across the globe suffer from, said Sushma Kanan, speech therapist lecturer and acting head of speech and language therapy department at Bangladesh Health Profession Institute of Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed.

In such cases children are born with either a cut lip or a cut palate, often with both, she said, adding, in most cases the children grow with a speech problem and many people cannot understand their words.

She said around one in 500 children is born with such abnormality and only a few of them receive treatment. The visible defect aside, they cannot eat, smile or speak properly. Most never go to school and end up having a life of isolation.

To fight this challenge, community health workers of several NGOs in Dinaipur and its surrounding districts received training from the Centre for

Disability in Development to improve the speech of such children.

However, taking long-term care of the children is voluntary for the workers.

Shoilen Chandra Roy of Dinaipur and Safiqul Alam of Nilphamari have been working with children with such challenges for the last seven years.

"It is a long-term process to improve the speaking ability of these children," Safiqul Alam told The Daily Star.

Shoilen said Md Johnny, an eight-year-old boy from Raniganj village in Dinaipur, was unable to utter a word when he was three. Now the boy was a student of class-III at Kanaibari Govt Primary School, he added.

Shoilen said he had been able to help with the speech of at least 100 children in the last five years.

Monowara Begum, grandmother of Johnny, said her grandson had gone through a surgery without any improvement. "His condition improved dramatically after receiving the speech therapy," she added, saying Johnny wants to continue studying.

The Centre for Disability in Development and the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed had recently organised a five-day workshop in Dinaipur to further improve the capabilities of the health workers.



Along with their parents, community healthcare workers bring in children with cleft lips and palates to give them speech therapy at the auditorium of Palli Sree NGO in Dinaipur. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

11-minute trip project ignored

FROM PAGE 1

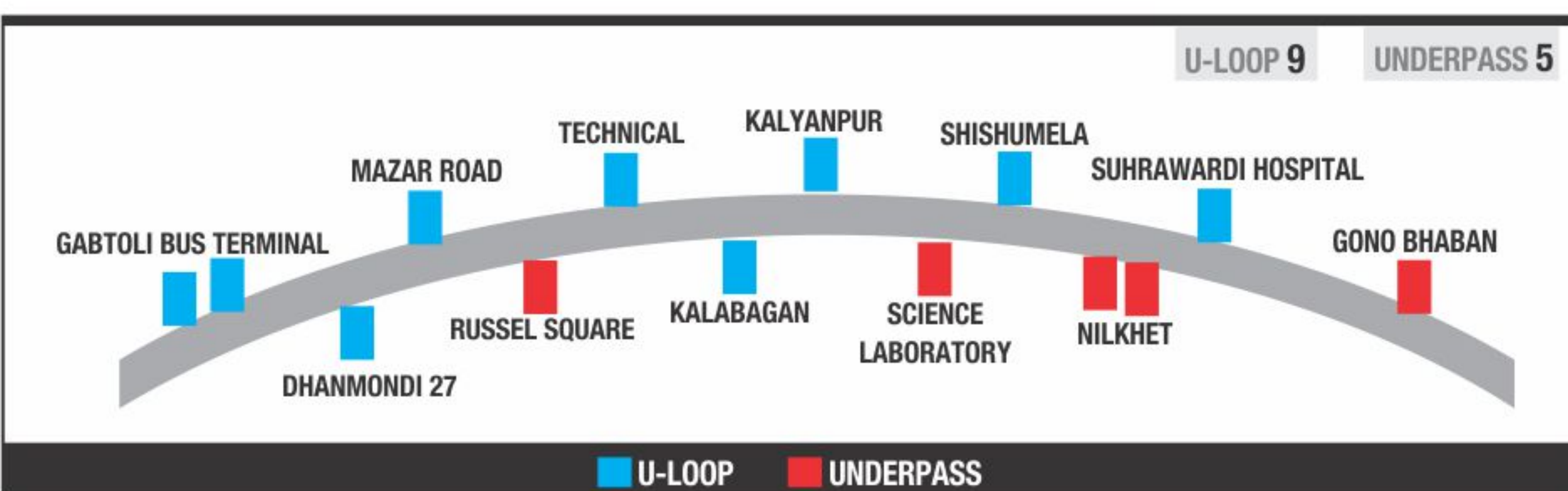
The project was included in the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Cell, and the Prime Minister's Office in March last year asked the Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) to implement it. But the project has been gathering dust

won't be surprised if the government goes ahead with this expensive project as we have seen before. It'll involve crores of taka and take years to complete and be less effective in easing congestion."

According to the experts, the

Rokeya Sarani. Vehicles en route to Gabtoli from Rokeya Sarani and Agargaon were to use a loop near Shishu Mela.

Those driving from Mohammadpur, Lalmatia and Dhanmondi areas would use another



there for a year now.

"I don't find any reason behind dumping one of the best projects," regretted an engineer of DSCC, who was involved in the project. "The project is highly feasible and the investment can be pulled back in three years."

AL lawmaker Aslamul Haq's company, however, submitted a proposal for building a four-lane elevated expressway from Amin Bazar to Azimpur, with an estimated cost of Tk 4,000 crore.

"Recently, we got a letter from the LGRD ministry to appoint a consultant to conduct a feasibility study and prepare a design," said DSCC Town Planner Sirajul Islam, adding that Buet experts would prepare the necessary documents.

Aslam said he would go for a joint venture with a Chinese company to implement the project. "The Chinese firm will arrange the money," he told The Daily Star.

Contacted, a Buet expert said, "We

Bangabandhu Corridor will not only have eased traffic on the Mirpur Road but also helped vehicles crossing the road from both sides. Now vehicles are stopped at the set of lights and have to wait for minutes before making right and U-turns, causing congestion.

THE CORRIDOR

Under the plan, two elevated U-turns (loops) were to be built at the heavily congested Gabtoli Bus Terminal to help buses enter and exit from the terminal without getting in the way of other vehicles.

Another loop was planned at Mazar Road intersection for traffic heading towards Mirpur-1, 2 and 10 from the south. Traffic from Mazar Road and Mirpur-1, 2 and 10 would get an elevated U-turn at Technical intersection for a smooth flow towards Gabtoli.

One other U-loop was supposed to be constructed over the Kalyanpur canal for easy exit of vehicles coming from Shyamoli Link Road and New Market and heading for Agargaon or

loop to enter Suhrawardi Hospital or to head for Bijoy Sarani and Farmgate using an underpass at the Gono Bhaban intersection.

Vehicles on Crescent Road and Bijoy Sarani could use the underpass to go to Mohammadpur or Gabtoli-Shyamoli areas, while traffic from Manik Mia Avenue could have a loop at Dhanmondi 27-Mirpur Road intersection to go towards Dhanmondi 27 and Lalmatia areas.

Two underpasses at Nilkhet intersection would ensure a smooth exit of vehicles to and from Azimpur and Science Laboratory ends.

Similar solutions were planned for vehicles from other roads going in different directions.

Traffic system expert Prof Moazzem Hossain of Buet's Civil Engineering department, who was involved in the planning and designing of Bangabandhu Corridor, said, "The low-cost project is more cost effective. Unfortunately, it wasn't implemented."

Nasty blow for democracy

FROM PAGE 1

country's electoral system, a method for enabling the electorate to make democratic choices.

The way the electoral system has been bulldozed through in the just concluded upazila parishad elections by the ruling Awami League men's widespread rigging has clearly exposed the fragile state of the country's democracy.

Though assigned with ensuring an atmosphere conducive to fair polls, the administration has been a mere spectator in the upazila elections. None other than the ruling party, hell bent on securing victory in the polls, carried out the assault on the electoral system.

In this process, the inefficiency and failure of the Election Commission in delivering on its constitutional mandates has had no limit. It did nothing significant to protect the electoral system and people's voting rights from being crushed.

In the midst of the staggered upazila elections, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmed left the country on March 3 for the United States for an indefinite period. His action left the EC bereft of leadership.

In another whimsical move, he personally empowered Election Commissioner Abdul Mobarak to carry out his "routine work".

The story did not stop here. Mobarak has had the EC mired in

more controversy through making ridiculous comments regarding the mode of the upazila elections.

The prevailing situation clearly hints at why the AL-led government picked Rakibuddin, Mobarak and three other election commissioners in February 2012 to constitute the EC.

The EC's activities have proved that the AL-led government did not want to constitute a strong EC by appointing individuals with leadership skills and courage.

The current EC first served the government and ruling AL by holding the controversial and voter less January 5 parliamentary election, which allowed the AL to retain power.

And then the upazila parishad elections came. The EC could not make any difference this time too.

In the upazila elections, the EC might have forgotten its constitutional functions to supervise, control and direct each and every step of the process to ensure that the polls were held in a free and fair manner.

The unfair polls have damaged the EC's credibility and people's confidence in the country's electoral system and the EC as well. Neither had ever faced such a critical situation over the past two decades since the restoration of democracy after overthrow of the Ershad-led autocratic regime in 1990.

The herculean task, accomplished by the past Election Commission led

by ATM Shamsul Huda during the past caretaker government's tenure restored people's confidence in the electoral system. Their efforts also had taken the EC to new heights while it was mired in controversy under the leadership of Justice MA Aziz who was made the CEC by the previous BNP-led government in 2005.

But all achievements were buried in the upazila elections, exposing again an ugly face of democracy.

It takes a long time for the evolution of the electoral system in a country. It evolves from continuous care of some major forces, including the government, the election commission and the political parties.

But when these major forces stand in the way of an improvement of the electoral system, democracy cannot flourish in the country.

Article 11 of the constitution notes that the Republic shall be a democracy ... and in which effective participation by the people through their elected representatives in administration at all levels shall be ensured.

The upazila polls however have triggered crucial questions. Can we still claim that ours is a democracy in the true sense? And have the upazila elections ensured people's effective participation in the upazila administration through the chairmen and vice-chairmen who, ironically, won the polls by rigging?

Delectably different

FROM PAGE 1

served his upazila people for five years without taking remuneration or conveyance cost from the government.

The people of the upazila acknowledged his philanthropic work and the fact that he keeps his promises and they elected him chairman again in the polls to the upazila parishad on March 31.

A garment businessman by profession, he did not take the fuel allowances allocated to him and opted for his personal driver to drive his official vehicle.

By adopting such measures, he saved over Tk 20 lakh that went back to the government exchequer.

Mohammad Khalequzzaman, upazila nirbahi officer of Louhajang, said Osman throughout his tenure as the chairman did not receive his monthly remuneration of Tk 20,000 and thus saving Tk 12 lakh.

A chairman is entitled to 180 litres of fuel per month for conveyance.

Osman over the last five years did not take the fuel, which saved Tk 8.80 lakh more, added the UNO.

"Some people want to be elected as a public representative to pursue their own interests but only a few want to serve the people and the society. Osman is among the few," said social worker Masud Khan.

According to cultural personality Sadananda Biswas, Osman never said no to any good initiative and never hesitated to give away money for a good cause. "He [Osman] gives stipends to meritorious students in the district from his own money. The students are selected by exams," he added.

Osman has also been giving stipends to 300 students in the district through the Friends Foundation, a local organisation.

Talking to The Daily Star, Osman said when he was elected chairman of Louhajang upazila parishad five years

ago, he had pledged to people that alongside implementing the government's development projects he would work for them spending his own money.

"Accordingly, I have started the construction of a five-storey building for Louhajang University College. Construction of two floors has already been completed," he mentioned.

He has donated Tk 60 lakh to GRSH Medical College at Shimulia of the upazila as one of its founding members.

Locals say that he even pays for the weddings of women whose father cannot afford to pay for the ceremony.

Salma Akter, lecturer at Baliganj Haji Amjad Ali College, said Bangladesh needs people like Osman who would help develop the country selflessly.

According to the affidavit submitted to the Election Commission, Osman, managing director of Vertex Group, exports garment and jute products.

Self-healing muscles

FROM PAGE 16

Engineers measured its strength by stimulating it with electric pulses, which showed that it was more than 10 times stronger than any previous engineered muscles.

The team, lead by biomedical engineering Prof Nenad Bursac, discovered that the optimum environment for creating muscle growth required two things — well-developed contractile muscle fibres and a pool of muscle stem cells, known as satellite cells.

The scientists found that the muscle was able to repair itself when damaged with a toxin found in snake venom.

They also found that it was able to

integrate into mice quickly, and demonstrated the ability to heal itself both inside the laboratory and inside an animal, when it was implanted into live mice.

The study, conducted at Duke University, involved inserting the lab-grown muscle into a small chamber placed on the backs of the mice.

The chamber was then covered by a glass panel. Every two days for two weeks, the scientists imaged the implanted muscles through the window to check on their progress.

By genetically modifying the muscle fibres to produce fluorescent flashes during calcium spikes — which cause muscles to contract — the researchers could watch the flashes

4 killed

FROM PAGE 16

investigation officer Jashimuddin.

Saidul Islam Chowdhury, the grieving son of victim Abdul Quddus, told The Daily Star that his father was a Biman official. "He was going to the Biman medical centre in Ashkona as he was feeling sick, when the accident happened."

Bilkis Begum was a cook in Tongi, while Tajuddin Ahmed was a driver.

Meanwhile, another road crash

killed a woman in Banani. She was crossing the road in front of Maasranga television office around 11:30am when a rushing pick-up slammed into her.

Police immediately seized the pick-up and arrested the driver, said a duty officer of Banani Police Station.



The wreckage of the bus and the three-wheeler at airport intersection in the capital yesterday after the bus rammed the auto-rickshaw and ploughed on to a pavement killing four people. Inset, the body of one of the deceased.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH