

Teesta bridge threatened

Part of protection dyke collapses

S DILIP ROY, *Salmonirhat*

The newly constructed 750-metre Road bridge over the Teesta river in Salmonirhat Sadar upazila is at risk of damage as a large portion of its protection dyke collapsed in the last three days due to strong currents in the trans-boundary river.

Suruz Miah, executive engineer of the Roads and Highways Department in Salmonirhat, said they were working to ensure protection of the Tk 111 crore Road bridge, opened to the public in September 2012, as it was now under "high threat".

Locals have blamed the use of sub-standard materials for the collapse of the protection dyke of the bridge that has linked Salmonirhat and Kurigram with the southern part of the country. The construction firm, however, has denied it.

Suruz told The Daily Star that they were dumping concrete blocks in the vulnerable points to stop further collapse as well as protect the bridge.

Locals said a heavy flow of water from the upstream was creating strong currents in the river in this rainy season and it caused the damage to around 100 metres of the 300-metre dyke.

They alleged that the construction firm -- Amin-Delim Construction Firm -- had used substandard materials in building concrete blocks. These blocks and poor quality geotextiles were used to construct the dyke on the bank of

the river.

"We, the local people, strongly protested when the construction firm used low quality materials in 2012. But the roads and highways authorities didn't pay heed to the matter due to unknown reasons," alleged Mahidul Islam, a local.

The construction of the 750 metres long and 12.11 metres wide Teesta Road bridge began on September 7, 2006 and was completed in the first week of September in 2012. Around Tk 111 crore was spent to build the main bridge, approach road and the protection dyke.

The protection dyke was built at the same time. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina opened the Teesta Road bridge to the public on September 20, 2012.

Anwar Hossain, a sub-assistant engineer of the Roads and Highways Department, said reserved concrete blocks were being dumped in the vulnerable spots. "These blocks had been manufactured by the construction firm for using during the crisis period."

But both officials of the Roads and Highways Department declined to make comments over the allegations of using substandard materials in building the protection dyke.

Shafiqul Islam, an engineer of the construction firm, told this correspondent on Saturday night that they had



PHOTO: STAR

Strong current damaged around 100 metres of the dyke of the Teesta bridge road in Salmonirhat.

constructed the bridge maintaining all rules and regulations and used "proper

quality products".

The dyke might have collapsed due

to strong currents in the river and it is not unusual, he said, adding that they

had built these blocks as reserve to deal with this type of problem.

Petition

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capacity or conduct of a judge and recommends to the president, and then the president can order for the judge's removal.

In the petition, Eunus said the government had reportedly decided to bring amendment to the constitution for empowering the parliament to impeach the SC judges.

If parliament is given power to impeach the judges, the independence of judiciary will be damaged and the judges will remain under pressure, he said, adding that independence of the judiciary is one of the basic pillars of the constitution.

Article 94 (4) of the constitution declares that the chief justice and other judges of the Supreme Court shall be independent in the exercise of their judicial functions, he said.

Eunus prayed to the court to issue a rule upon the government to explain why the government's decision to amend Article 96 of the constitution should not be declared illegal.

Law secretary and cabinet secretary have been made respondents to the required rule.

Eunus told The Daily Star that the HC may hear the petition within a few days.

Ambassador

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who was hurriedly sent to Beirut.

The foreign minister said enquiries into allegations of irregularities had been done and Gousal Azam was alerted many times to uphold Bangladesh's image in Lebanon. But he could not improve the situation.

He said DG, who was sent to Beirut, had already been taken over the assignment and discipline had been restored at the embassy.

Diplomatic sources said Lebanon had asked Bangladesh to take appropriate measures as the expatriate Bangladeshi blockaded the embassy several times in connection with various allegations against Gousal Azam.

This is the sixth incidence in which a Bangladeshi envoy had to be called back from abroad for their alleged involvement in corruption, mismanagement, abuse of power, misconduct, and inability to run a mission.

The government in recent months had called back Mujibur Rahman Bhuiyan from Japan, Mazeda Rafiqunnesa from the Philippines, Hasib Aziz from Uzbekistan, Mosud Manna from Germany and Ashrafuddin from Egypt.

Runway

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The airport will be closed till 3:00pm today, said an official of the civil aviation authority. Because of the closure, the schedules of two cargo and a passenger flight have been postponed.

"We have sent an engineering team from Dhaka to repair the aircraft," said Kamrul Islam, assistant general manager; marketing, support and public relations of United Airways, last evening.

After the incident, the aircraft wobbled and many passengers cried out in fear, said one of the passengers of the aircraft.

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (Caab) had allegedly refused to renew the private airline's licence due to arrears of Tk 84.19 crore and detection of safety flaws during inspections.

It later renewed the licence following a court order.

Khaleda, Tarique

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Khaleda's entourage that witnessed the reunion told The Daily Star over the phone that the mother and son got emotional when they saw each other at the VIP lounge of the airport.

This was the second reunion of the two in the last six years. The last one was in May 2011 during her visit to London, where Tarique has been living since 2008.

Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko, his wife and two daughters were also supposed to meet her at Saudi Arabia. But Koko could not make it for reasons unknown.

After their reunion in Dubai, Khaleda along with Tarique and his family members boarded an Emirates flight for Saudi Arabia.

They reached Prince Mohammad Bin Abdulaziz International Airport in Madina around 3:30am (local time).

A number of leaders and activists of the party's Saudi chapter welcomed the family at the airport, Khaleda's press

secretary Maruf Kamal Khan Sohel told The Daily Star from Madina.

Later, they drove straight to a five star hotel where they will be staying during their Madina tour.

Tarique was arrested on March 7, 2007 on graft charges by the military-backed caretaker government.

Released on bail in 2008, he along with his family went to London.

During their stay in Saudi Arabia, Tarique and Khaleda will talk about various crucial issues like the party's reforms, councils and strategy for the post-Eid movement.

They might also discuss the fate of BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, who has been holding the "temporary" position over the last three years. Tarique is very much unhappy with Fakhrul's poor performance in the anti-government movement before the January 5 election, party insiders say.

Khaleda is expected to return on July 26.

Criminal killed in 'gunfight'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bagerhat*

An alleged robber was killed in a "shootout" with police in the east Sundarbans under Sharankhola range of Bagerhat early yesterday.

The dead, Namir Talukdar, 38, was a member of robber gang, Rezaul alias "Shirshi Bahini", according to police.

He was son of late Sultan Talukdar in Arjunbazar village of Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

Namir was accused in at least eight criminal cases, including robbery and murder, police said.

Kazi Abdus Salek, officer-in-charge of Sharankhola Police Station, said police arrested Namir from Arjunbazar Bazar on Saturday evening.

During preliminary interrogation, Namir gave information to police about a large arms cache and police went to the east bank of the Bhola river to recover the firearms around 4:00am yesterday, he said.

Sensing the law enforcers' presence, Namir's aides opened fire. Police returned fire, triggering a "gunfight" between the robbers and the law enforcers.

Namir was hit by bullets during the "gunfight" and died on the spot, said Salek.

A firearm and four bullets were recovered from the spot, police claimed.

The body was sent to Bagerhat Sadar Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

However, Namir's wife Parul Begum claimed her husband was not a robber.

At least 81 people were killed in "shootouts" with law enforcers across the country from January to June this year, according to Ain O Salish Kendra.

Fire kills 5

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fire, locals said.

Police said an electric short circuit might have caused the fire.

Claiming to have seen a burnt gas cylinder at the kitchen, police said no neighbours heard any explosion.

14 policemen

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his motorcycle, as he failed to show any documents of the vehicle.

After an altercation with the police, he refused to let go of his vehicle and police took him and two of his men to the police station.

As the news spread, Chhatra League men along with Jubo League and Awami League men surrounded the police station and then vandalised a police barrack and an office of the traffic police near the police station.

Later, the town AL unit brought out a procession led by the unit President Mojibur. They vandalised an ATM booth and some vehicles.

To bring the situation under control, police opened fire which left at least 15 people, including 10 pro-AL activists of the town injured.

The situation calmed down after Hima's release two hours later.

Following a meeting between the deputy commissioner of the district, police and district AL leaders on July 19, a one-member committee was formed to probe the incident.

District BCL secretary Abu Taher Azad said, "A team from BCL's central unit would arrive in Cox's Bazar tonight [last night] to find out if BCL members were at fault."

Hasina is expected to return home on July 24.

Wife sues Mirpur cops

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others, including officer-in-charge of the police station Salauddin Khan.

The case was lodged under the Torture and Custodial Death (Protection) Act-2013. The case was the first under the act which has provisions for the death penalty, court sources said.

The complainant said around 9:00am on July 13, Jahid took her to the room of the OC where the OC told her that her husband was sick and had been admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

As she requested to see Sujan at DMCH, the OC told her to sign on a blank piece of paper before she left. "I refused to do so and the OC offered me a glass of water. After drinking it, I felt dizzy and I signed the paper," she said in the case statement.

The OC, however, refuted the allegation, saying that he had her sign a bond as per procedure.

Lucy was notified of Sujan's death around noon. The OC had told journalists that he had been notified of Sujan's death at 5:27am that day.

Responding to the case and Lucy's case statement, the OC yesterday said those were "evil intentions to establish lies".

Sujan's mother claimed that OC Salauddin had tried to negotiate with the victim's family regarding the blank piece of paper.

"We tried to know what was written in that paper afterwards, but the OC refused to show us the paper," she said, adding that she wants to see the OC brought to book.

Lucy accused Assistant Sub-Inspector Rajkumar, constables Asad and Rashedul of Mirpur Police Station and five police sources -- Mithun, Nasim, Sheikh, Faisal, Khokon and Palash -- of torturing Sujan to death.

She said at their Shankar home, Jahid with the help of Rajkumar gagged Sujan with a towel, cuffed his hands and tied his legs and body with ropes.

Constables Asad and Rashedul and

Enforce safe food

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The HC passed the order after examining a government report on its progress in implementing the law and setting up a food safety authority.

The HC bench of Mirza Hussain Haider and Justice Muhammad Khurshid Alam Sarkar gave the directives after hearing a petition by Legal Action Bangladesh Foundation.

The petition was filed on May 21, seeking the court's directives on the government to ensure safe food.

The petitioner said the House already passed the Safe Food Act 2013, but it was yet to take effect.

Under the act, the government is supposed to form a 30-member National Safe Food Management Advisory Council headed by the food minister to coordinate the actions and decisions of the safe food authority.

Following the petition, the HC on May 26 issued a rule asking the government to explain why it should not be directed to enforce the law by issuing a gazette notification.

It also ordered the food secretary to submit a progress report before it.

After taking time from the court on four occasions, the food secretary yesterday submitted a report to the HC through Deputy Attorney General Al-Amin Sarker.

In the report, the secretary said they already drafted the rules for enforcing the law and sent those to the law ministry for vetting.

Citing the report, the DAG said the food ministry sent a proposal for constituting the safe food authority to the public administration ministry for its consent. The ministry is also to fix the salary, allowance, benefit and other terms of services of its chairman and members.

The public administration ministry has consented to the proposal on certain conditions, and then it has been sent to the finance ministry for vetting.

The safe food authority will be constituted upon the finance ministry's consent, the report said.

However, the report added there was no budget allocation in this financial year for the office of the food safety authority. A letter has been sent to the Directorate of Food to allocate space for the offices of its chairman and members.

After completing these processes, the Safe Food Act 2013 will be enforced, the food secretary added.

The petitioner's counsel, Syed Mohidul Kabir, told the HC that the government made no significant progress in implementing the law even after the court ruling.

In April, in another ruling the HC ordered the government to check food adulteration.

Early this month, the court directed the authorities to set up check posts at the ports to prevent chemically treated food from entering the country.