

Hardinge Bridge: A hundred-year old structure still stands strong



Hardinge Bridge under construction in 1911 (left); the bridge is standing strong today even after hundred years of service (right).

PHOTO: STAR

AHMED HUMAYUN KABIR TOPU, Pabna

The Hardinge Bridge, which recently recorded 100 years of use and counting, is one of the many structures built by the British Empire during their occupation. The bridge shares a significant history of Bangladesh, and specifically, of Pabna. The bridge is also known as the Paksey Bridge, and it is named after Lord Hardinge, who was the Viceroy of India from 1910 to 1916. The bridge is 1.8 kilometers (1.1 mi) long. According to the International Database for Civil and Structural Engineering (structurae.net), the construction of the bridge began in 1910, though it was proposed at least 20 years earlier. It was completed in 1912.

The construction on the bridge had begun on 1910 under the British Railway Department and it took two years to complete. British Engineer Mr. Gayle was in charge of the bridge's construction. The first train moved on the bridge on January 1, 1915 as an engineering test while the bridge was officially inaugurated by Lord Hardinge on March, 4 that year. Recently in Pabna, the one hundred year anniversary of the historic bridge was observed acknowledging the architectural genius that went into constructing the bridge a hundred years ago.

The bridge stands over the mighty river Padma and also runs between the railway stations at

Bheramara and Paksey. "There is no architectural expected life defined for the bridge but the structural guarantee for the bridge was 100 years according to its engineering study," said Md. Ariful Islam, Bridge Engineer of Railway Paksey Division under the West Zone of Bangladesh Railway. "The



Lord Hardinge, Viceroy of India from 1910 to 1916

bridge is strong enough to perform for the foreseeable future without any change at the moment, but we are conducting a survey to strengthen the bridge in the future," he added. The bridge is regularly maintained by the authority of railway; the bridge is repainted once every 5 years and oiled once every 3 years. A consulting firm has been appointed to conduct necessary soil test and testing of the integrity of the iron. People of the locality celebrated

the bridge's 100 year anniversary on March 4. Local cultural organizations 'Khelaghar', 'Udichi' and 'Spondon' organized programmes that included a discussion event in addition to cultural shows. The speakers shared their views summarizing the value of Hardinge bridge, which is not only limited



Mr. Gayle, Engineer in charge of construction of Hardinge Bridge

to the communication facility but also the social, cultural development among the people of the region. The Hardinge Bridge played a vital role to develop the livelihoods of the people in this region. It was the first infrastructural link between the people on either side of the river in the early 19th century. "The rail link dramatically triggered the growth of towns, helped the north region to develop and even helped augment the relationship between people who

did not know a whole lot about each other prior to the bridge's existence," said Professor Hasanuzzaman, key speaker at the discussion.

The bridge itself was constructed out of fifteen steel trusses that were prefabricated and concrete was used to build the sixteen piers that keep the bridge above water, while the structures above water were constructed out of steel. The original structure was made out of a type of mild steel. "When the Hardinge Bridge was constructed, additional structures were needed below it to keep the river flowing properly. Two guide banks were built on either side, each extending 910 metres (3,000 ft) upstream and 300 metres (1,000 ft) downstream from the bridge that kept the bridge secured," informed Md. Monirul Islam, Divisional Engineer of Railway West Zone.

During the Liberation War of 1972, the bridge was damaged due to air bombing. In 1972, a joint project between the Eastern India Railway and the Bangladesh Railway repaired the bridge, with reconstruction assistance from the Japanese Government. Although the Hardinge Bridge was not constructed using modern engineering techniques, it is still standing strong and the local people hold it in high regard as they have since the first day it became available for transportation.

Primary school in Jatrapur in shambles

ABDUL WAHED, Kurigram

Students from Porerchar Non-government Primary School at Jatrapur union under Kurigram Sadar upazila are facing problems regarding infrastructure, educational equipments and the school's feeding program.

Around 260 students, from underprivileged families in the shoal (char) area, are studying in the school this year, taught by only four teachers.

The school was set up in Muchhuli Para of Porerchar village (an island-char in the Brahmapurta River) of Jatrapur union in 2006, but its educational program started in January, 2008.

These programs are conducted through two shifts in a one-room tin-shed house. Despite being a listed school, the feeding program has not started yet.

The school is listed to be nationalised but this has not taken place yet. Although,

the school students have been given free books by the government, Headmaster Abdul Mannan Mia said to The Daily Star.

"Students of the nearest char areas get biscuits and stipend, but we don't. There are insufficient benches as most of them are broken. All school activities come to a halt during the rainy days as the classroom doesn't have walls," said class-four student Ibrahim Khalil.

"We can't buy blackboards and benches. We haven't been paid any salary for six years. We are expecting donations to buy equipments needed. We do sometimes repair the school and benches when we can with our own money," said the headmaster.

Assistant District Primary Education Officer Shapon Kumar said that some of the third-phase schools have been taken under the school feeding programme and a process of nationalising the third phase schools is currently ongoing.



Students from Porerchar Non-government Primary School at Jatrapur union attending their regular classes.

PHOTO: STAR



Hasmat Ali's strawberry field at Borochara village in Cox's Bazar.

PHOTO: STAR

Strawberries by the sea in Cox's Bazar

BY ANDREW EAGLE

A burgeoning industry elsewhere, strawberry cultivation is relatively new to the coastal strip south of Cox's Bazar town. Last year farmer Hasmat Ali, 34, of Borochara village at Daria Nagar sowed his first crop. Now in his second harvest season, he remains the only strawberry farmer in the area.

"I never ate a strawberry before growing them," he says, describing the flavour as sweet-sour. Indeed he'd barely seen one. Encouraged by Chittagong-based NGO, Community Development

Centre, as part of a climate adaptation project, Ali's training included an exposure visit to strawberry fields in Chakaria in the north of the district.

"It's easier than paddy," Ali says, though there is field preparation work prior to planting, in weeding and taking care of runners in the off-season. The field is also netted to protect the strawberries from birds.

Ali currently rents a modest ten decimals of land at 3,000 taka per season for the crop. From a farming family but with no land of his

own, the father-of-three has attracted the interest of neighbours. "They're curious," he says, "They think it's a good business and are especially interested after eating one. Not everybody has tried strawberries."

The local difficulty is finding suitable land, which has thus far prevented others from following Ali's lead.

Ali's strawberries bear fruit after about 45 days and the season lasts for two and a half months from mid-February. During this time he is able to harvest 7-

8 kg daily which he normally sells at around 800 taka per kilo.

But this year prices are nearly half that due to the low numbers of tourists reaching Cox's Bazar because of transport safety issues.

Still, in the long term Ali's crop has the advantage of numerous nearby restaurants, in both Cox's Bazar and Himchori, as well as the passing tourist trade.

"I'll keep at it," he says, confident strawberries can play a role in his family's livelihood.

Rival AL groups clash over tender in Gournadi

UP office, college, bus counters, shops vandalised in the incident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

At least 10 people, including a policeman, were injured in a clash between two factions of ruling Awami League over sharing of tender for road repair work in Mahilara union of Gournadi upazila beside Barisal-Dhaka highway yesterday.

Local union parishad office, a college, bus counters and shops were also ransacked during the incident.

The injured, including Mojibul Huq, sub-inspector of Gournadi Police Station, were admitted to the upazila

health complex.

Witnesses said Saikat Guha Piklu, chairman of Mahilara Union Parishad, and an activist of the union unit of Jubo League, tried to get a Tk 4 crore work for repairing a road stretching from Mahilara via Sharikal to Nalchira.

On the other hand, Harisur Rahman Haris, mayor of Gournadi municipality, and secretary of the upazila unit of AL, also wanted to do the tender work.

Over the issue, Akbar Hossain Faruk, former president of the upazila unit of BCL, and elder

brother of Haris and Kabir Hossain, an activist of upazila AL, were assaulted allegedly by the men of Piklu at the union parishad in the morning.

The attackers also damaged their motorbike and took away Tk two lakh from them, alleged Haris.

Being informed, over 200 supporters of Haris rushed to the spot, blasted cocktails and vandalised the union parishad office, a degree college, three bus counters and 10 shops at 1:10pm.

At least 10 people, including the SI, were also injured in the attack.

Contacted, Piklu blamed the men of Haris for the attack.

On information, the law enforcers rushed to the spot and fired blank shots to bring the situation under control, said police.

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Pintu Guha, brother of Piklu, along with a pistol in connection with the incident, said Sazzad Hossain, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Additional police personnel have been deployed in the area to avert any untoward incident, said the OC.



The information centre at Mahilara Union Parishad office in Gournadi upazila of Barisal district lies vandalised as two rival groups of Awami League clashed over sharing of tender for road repair work yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR