



The site for the proposed coal-fired power plant at Gondamara of Banskhali upazila in Chittagong. S Alam Group is developing the site. Four people were killed and at least 30 injured in a clash between police and locals in the area on April 4 over setting up the plant there. Right, the area where the clash took place. The photos were taken on Monday.



PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

FLAWED CONSTRUCTION

Four sued in Chuadanga

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A case has been filed against four people in connection with substituting iron rods for bamboo sticks in the construction of a government-funded biological research centre in Damurhuda upazila of Chuadanga.

The accused are Moni Shing, managing director of Joy Construction Ltd of Dhaka; Abdus Sattar, managing director of Engineering Consortium Ltd of Dhaka; Ayub Hossain, project consultant on purchase of biological research centre and lab; and Kamal Hossain, sub-assistant engineer on project planning and implementation in ICT of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE) in Dhaka.

Joy Construction Ltd was constructing the two-storey building under the supervision of the Engineering Construction Ltd.

Merina Zebunnahar, acting project official and also senior monitoring and evaluation officer of the DAE in Dhaka, lodged the case with Damurhuda Model Police Station on Monday night.

Lykat Ali, officer-in-charge of the police station, confirmed it while talking to this correspondent over the phone.

Sub-inspector Kabir Hossain is investigating the case, the OC said.

Meanwhile, three bodies formed to investigate the incident have visited the spot. Of them, a three-member body headed by Soumen Shaha, director of the biological research wing of the DAE in Dhaka, submitted a report to the agriculture ministry on Monday.

Sources said the case was filed based on the report.

The DAE of Chuadanga last year got a fund of Tk 2.41 crore to build the research centre and lab in Darshana of Damurhuda.

So far, 65 per cent work has been done. The building was scheduled to be handed over to the DAE in June.

On Thursday, some local youths came to know about some gross anomalies in the work.

Workers were then forced to break a louver only to reveal bamboo sticks, prompting the authorities concerned to stop the work.

The two other committees -- one formed by the district administration and another by the ministry -- are looking into the matter.

Locals were kept in dark about power plant

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surveyor and the kanungo.

"We might purchase more land there if we need to build other industrial units. But currently we have purchased land for our coal-based power plant, not for other industries," said executive director of S Alam Group.

"So far, we have completed registration of about 655 acres of land and process for another 200 acres is ongoing," he told one of these correspondents over the phone on Monday.

While purchasing the land, he said, they were yet to form the company to implement the power project. So, they bought the land in the name of the two companies.

However, the group has started to develop the land and build site office and other structures for the coal plant.

It also demarcated several hundred acres of khas land to take it in its possession.

People have been staging protests against the move to install the power plant since they saw its signboard on the proposed site two months ago. And one such protest led to a clash with police on April 4, leaving four people killed and many others injured.

The locals, most of whom are farmers, fishermen and salt producers, vowed not to let anyone go ahead with the project "at any cost", saying it would bring an environmental disaster to the area.

They allege S Alam Group misled land owners while buying land. The group had initially said it needed land for textiles and apparel factories. But now it is setting up a coal plant.

Abdul Karim, a protester from

Pashchim Gondamara village, said the land owners agreed to sell land as they were not told that it was for a coal plant.

"We do not have problem if they build other factories here. Many of us would get work. But if they build coal-fired power plant, we would have to leave this place even if they do not drive us away."

Helal Uddin, a land owner, said S Alam Group had already paid him earnest money for his land. Like many others, he was told that it was for setting up some textile units.

These are not the only instances that the group is misleading people.

It has advertised in different Bangla and English dailies, claiming that the Department of Environment issued "primary clearance certificate" in favour of the plant on March 22.

An advertisement published on

April 11 states, "The officials of the Department of Environment visited the project area physically. In the primary clearance certificate issued on March 22 of 2016, the director of Department of Environment said, there is no chance of bad effect to the public health if the project is established in the coastal area. It had been sent to headquarters in Dhaka for Locational Clearance Certificate."

But Mokbul Hossain, DoE director of Chittagong division, said the department has not issued any kind of certificate or site clearance for the power plant in Gondamara.

"Our divisional offices are not entitled to provide such kind of certificate," he told this newspaper over the phone on Monday.

Mentioning that site clearance is mandatory before installation of any

plant, he said, "On March 22, following directives of Department of Environment headquarters, a team from its Chittagong division office visited the site and sent a partial field report to its headquarters after collecting primary information."

Asked about the issue, Raisul Alam Mondal, director general of DoE, said he was just astonished to see such an advertisement.

He added the department would sit in a day or two about clearance of a number of projects. "We have around 100 to 150 applications pending. We may discuss the S Alam Group issue during our meeting."

Asked yesterday what kind of clearance S Alam Group actually got, Subrata Bhowmik said he would call back since he was in a meeting.

However, he could not be reached later.

Pajon aroma

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the three celebrations called Boisabi would be observed today in the CHT region.

"Without Pajon, our celebration of Biju is not fulfilled," said Parul Dewan, a young Chakma woman who is celebrating Biju in Dhaka, but made sure she had all the ingredients to cook the ethnic cuisine.

"The specialty of Pajon is in its flavour," said Parul.

"That particular flavour cannot be found in other mixed vegetable dishes because Pajon is cooked with some rare vegetables, found only during the Bangla month of Chaitra," she added.

"Tara, a vegetable that grows in the hills and has a special flavour, is a must for Pajon preparation," Parul said.

Local vegetables *bedagi*, *hathol dingyi*, *bigol biji* [chakma names], different types of hill potatoes, sweet potatoes, potatoes, beans fry, dried fishes, bamboo shoots, green jack fruits and its ripen seeds and many other popular vegetables are needed to cook Pajon and different types of spices are added to make it tasty.

Mondakini Chakma, an 85-year-old woman, said, "You have to add at least 22 kinds of vegetables to cook Pajon and the more vegetables you add, the better the Pajon will taste.

"You can also add dried vegetables. Radish, beans and bamboo shoots dried for preservation can also be used."

Snigdha Chakma, aged 51, a school teacher by profession, said, "There is a myth that Pajon is good

and helpful for your health and remedial for diseases. If you eat Pajon at least in seven houses on Biju, then you will remain free of illness throughout the year."

Many young people like Dalim Kumar Tanchangya put eating Pajon on top of the to-do list on Biju. He said he will visit at least 20 homes to taste Pajon today.

Vegetables sellers at kitchen market of Rangamati were busy all day selling their products. Many used ingenious techniques to attract customers.

Subina Chakma, a grocer who trades only during market days on Saturday and Wednesday, went to Rangamati Banupura Bazar with her vegetables on a Tuesday, eyeing good business ahead of Biju.

She was shouting "kiranmala misty alu lau" (come buy some kiranmala sweet potatoes).

Subina said she named her potatoes after the popular Indian TV series character Kiranmala to attract the customers.

Her home in Higurmara area of Naniarchhar is an hour away and she has to take a CNG-run auto-rickshaw home after selling her goods.

But the grocer was afraid that she would not make enough to cover her transportation cost as she had to sell many of her vegetables, including green jackfruits, at a much low price than expected.

"Tomorrow [April 13] is Biju and people need to cook Pajon," she said. She too needed to go home and prepare Pajon for her family and celebrate Biju.

Sohag returns after 16 days

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T-shirt -- he wore on the day of his abduction, said Sohag's sister Khaleda Akter.

He was picked up on March 28, hours after he made several phone calls to Tonu's younger brother Anwar Hossain Rubel, whom he saw on television give an interview over Tonu's murder. Sohag studied with Rubel at Kazimuddin Sarker High School in Burichang.

Following the incident, law enforcement agencies in Comilla said they didn't detain Sohag.

Tonu, a second-year student of history department at Comilla Victoria College, was found dead near a bush in Comilla Cantonment on March 20. The killer is yet to be arrested.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Sohag said the kidnappers confined him to a room and kept him blindfolded almost all the time. They would remove the blindfold only for a short time to let him have meals and respond to the call of nature.

He couldn't say anything about the place of his confinement or the abductors, as he had been blindfolded most of the time.

Sohag, however, said his kidnappers didn't torture him, and gave him food timely.

His uncle Tazul Islam told this correspondent that he and several others went out for a morning walk after Fazr prayers yesterday morning and suddenly noticed Sohag wandering aim-

lessly near Sakura filling station.

"We took him home. He could not say anything then," he said, adding that Sohag came to his senses after taking a rest at his house.

Sohag's family members were overwhelmed with joy on his safe return.

Friends, relatives, neighbours and people from nearby villages thronged his house to see him.

Sohag's mother Shaheda Akter told The Daily Star, "We are very happy and grateful that my son has returned home."

"I knew that my son was not at fault," she said.

Sohag's family members were unwilling to comment further on his confinement.



Mizanur Rahman Sohag, friend of murdered Tonu's younger brother, comes home yesterday after 16 days. He was abducted by a group of men posing as law enforcers. The photo was taken at his home in Burichang of Comilla.

PHOTO: STAR

Govt move runs counter to STP

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authority to take measures in planned and coordinated way to build a better transport system for the capital. And according to the law, DTCA should consider STP of 2008 to do the job.

The ministry has sought opinion of the DTCA along with the traffic police and the city corporations on its move. The road transport and bridges minister himself is the chief of the DTCA.

So, in this case, won't it be a conflict of interest if the minister presides over the DTCA meeting to seek its opinion on issuance of new license for CNG-run auto-rickshaws?

The Traffic Division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, in its opinion sent to the ministry, has opposed the move as it thinks allowing more CNG-run auto-rickshaws may worsen the traffic congestion.

They are in favour of increasing public transports as it says one small

vehicle carries 1 to 2 passengers while a bus can carry 40-50 people.

By arguing that four to six CNGs or private cars occupy the space of one bus, the traffic department has proven that it is justified in its opposition to new CNGs. Their position is also in conformity with the STP.

Now, it is the turn of the DTCA to come up with its recommendation. Mayors of the two Dhaka city corporations are also member of the authority alongside other senior officials. What will be the opinion of the DTCA?

The ministry yesterday, however, claimed that it has taken the move following an order of the High Court.

It came up with the claim in a rejoinder to a report on Tuesday in The Daily Star under the headline "Public bus, not auto-rickshaw." The ministry did not refute any fact of the report.

Regardless of its fate, this move however speaks about the ground

reality-- everything is here against smooth flow of traffic and in favour of perennial traffic congestion in the capital city.

The government has been making many efforts to improve the traffic system. There is no scarcity of plans, mega projects and expenditure of thousands of crores of public money to implement those projects. All are aimed at freeing the capital city from gridlock.

At the same time, mismanagement, lack of coordination and corrupt practices exist in the government departments concerned. This has allowed impunity to some transport owners associations, in collaboration with political leaders, to run unfit buses without paying heed to public sufferings.

In recent years, Banani Rail Crossing Flyover, Kuril Flyover, Mirpur-Airport Link Road and President Zillur

Rahman Flyover, Mayor Hanif Flyover and the newest Moghbazar-Mouchak Flyover have been constructed. The Hatirjheel project was also implemented creating lake and express roads, bridges and walkways.

Some more mega projects like construction of elevated expressway and metro rail are in the works for the future.

Construction of new flyovers is benefiting city dwellers to some extent. Overall traffic situation has not improved. Instead, more than 300 new vehicles hit the city roads every day.

In this situation, instead of introducing more public buses, the ministry is favouring allowing more CNG-run auto-rickshaws to add to the current number of around 20,000. This move, if implemented, will worsen traffic congestion without helping commuters in the city.

Transport experts have long been

advocating for modernising the public transport system. Various studies have supported their opinions.

But reality is going the other way. Available information say by 2014, the number of public buses have not increased. Number of private cars has doubled from under 97,000 to a staggering 192,000. Buses now occupy no more than 20 percent of road space and private cars in excess of 60 percent.

All these portray a chaotic picture and poor running of the transport system of the city, which is the heart of the country's economy. Therefore, economic growth will be hampered if the heart-city continues suffering from perennial traffic problems.

The government's efforts to reduce traffic congestion may not yield positive results until the public transport system is improved and use of small transport vehicles are discouraged.

This year's index also points to the strengths of countries beyond the usual suspects. For example, Albania (17th) and Paraguay (21st) boasted fully decarbonised electricity generation, which has been reflected in above average environmental sustainability scores.

The report said the world's largest economies are still struggling to achieve balanced high performance in their energy systems. With the exception of France (4th), none of the 12 largest countries by gross domestic product made it into the top 10 performers.

The EAPI also revealed that diversification of new energy sources is creating new risks and opportunities that would require significant market change and government mechanisms to ensure security of supply and access.

It suggested that governments should be receptive to new opportunities and risks resulting from developments in the energy sector.