

Unplanned road washed away

Bandarban-Rowangchhari road link remains snapped

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

Road communications between Rowangchhari upazila and Bandarban town have remained snapped since Saturday when a portion of a newly constructed unplanned diversion road over a canal in Kanshama area was washed away by rainwater.

The road is near the sector headquarters of Border Guard Bangladesh in Bandarban.

Officials of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in Bandarban alleged that the road went under rainwater as it was constructed in an unplanned way.

The diversion road was built after a Bailey bridge over the canal collapsed under the weight of an overloaded truck on February 21.

"The authorities concerned did not work properly when they constructed the road. Had it been done in a planned way, it would not have been washed away by rainwater," said local Mong Hla Nue Marma, aged around 70.

Tofail Mia, RHD executive engineer, said, "The road was built at the

cost of around Tk 10 lakh. Unfortunately, it was damaged within three months as water in the canal suddenly rose due to heavy rain."

The road was built according to the standard specified, he claimed, adding that the contractor would repair it.

Repair work of the Bailey Bridge already started, and it would be completed within a week, said the engineer while talking to this correspondent on Monday.

Contacted, Abul Hossain, contractor of the road construction work, said that there had been some flaws in the construction work.

Without mentioning names, Abul claimed that he could not do the work properly as he had to bribe some government officials and local political leaders.

He would mend the damaged road.

Farmers said they were incurring huge losses as they could not transport their vegetables to the district town. Students were facing difficulty reaching their institutions.

Patients endure trouble in going to the district town for treatment from the upazila.



PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

People using a risky bamboo bridge to cross the Kanshama canal in Rowangchhari upazila of Bandarban. Road communications between Bandarban town and the upazila got snapped after a portion of a diversion road over the canal was washed away by rainwater recently. The photo was taken on Monday.

Overhaul is the answer

FROM PAGE 1
a total ban on notebooks and guidebooks.

The education ministry organised the meeting at the capital's CIRDAP auditorium with the objective of finding ways to improve the quality of secondary education.

Almost all participants advocated abolishing the multiple-choice question (MCQ) system in all examinations at the secondary level, saying students don't learn anything from it.

Pointing out that many teachers don't have the capability to prepare creative question papers, the educationists suggested the government rethink about the system introduced at this level in 2010.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, founder and chief executive of Bishwo Shahitto Kendro, said a number of schoolteachers still cannot prepare creative question papers by themselves and depend on guidebooks for that.

"It means we are returning to the notebook era."

He proposed creation of a question bank by experts for all subjects in secondary-level public exams so that the teachers' dependency on guidebooks diminishes gradually.

And if that happens, guardians would no longer need to take their children to private tutors, he said.

Referring to the high pass rate in public examinations, Prof Sayeed said the main objective of an exam is to test one's merit. "Otherwise, what is the need for an exam if everybody passes it?"

"Such a huge pass rate [in SSC] has called into question the entire education system... People are losing faith in the system."

He suggested setting up libraries in all schools to help students get into the habit of reading.

Mohammed Farashuddin, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, said the curriculum of the secondary level is so huge that students don't learn anything properly.

"We need to make the curriculum nice," he said.

Turning to the MCQ system, he said the government should abolish it since students cannot gain any knowledge from it.

He also suggested introducing courses on English and a vocational subject at Qawmi madrasas.

Farashuddin said the government should reduce the gap between public exams and complete those within seven to 10 days.

Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman, a teacher of Islamic history and culture at Dhaka University, said, "We unnecessarily made the textbooks difficult by incorporating some chapters that are not essential for students. That is why they turn to private tuitions."

Echoing his view, eminent educationist and writer Prof Muhammed Zafar Iqbal said science textbooks are so difficult to fathom that even he struggled to understand many things while reading some of those.

"Textbooks should be written in such a way that a student doesn't need private tuition," he said.

Even if the teachers don't teach a student at school, he or she should not have any difficulty in understanding the subject by reading a textbook, he said.

Prof Zafar Iqbal said only good and expert writers should be commissioned to write textbooks in lucid language.

The question papers of public exams are of low standard and full of errors. "Good questions are a must for a good examination."

Teachers are the weakest part in the education system, he noted.

"Not only in schools or colleges, we are not getting good teachers even at the university level."

The country would not get good teachers until the budgetary allocation for the education sector is increased and the salaries of teachers are hiked.

He criticised newspapers for what he said was publishing "guidebooks" in their education pages every day.

Rights activist Sultana Kamal said many of the teachers at the primary and secondary levels came to the teaching profession, as they didn't get a chance to enter any other sector.

Teachers are left with no choice but to work on low salaries and the facilities they get are the lowest compared to those in any other profession.

They remain worried about their future all the time and think of doing something else to run their families. And this is where comes the issue of private tuition, she added.

"If we want to ensure quality education, we have to get good teachers. And for that to happen, investments in the education sector must be increased," said Sultana Kamal, also former adviser to a caretaker government.

She said it is not possible to get quality education with an allocation of only two percent of the GDP for this sector.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education, said the government needs to rethink about the Primary Terminal and JSC examinations, as it not only increases students' dependency on coaching and private tuition but also disrupts the teaching and learning process at schools.

Qazi Kholiuzzaman Ahmad, chairman of Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), said though the budgetary allocation for the education sector has increased over the years, its

share in terms of percentage of the total outlay is actually decreasing.

"We need to increase the allocation for education," he said.

Educationist Prof Quazi Faruque Ahmed suggested forming a taskforce immediately for bringing reforms in the examinations and evaluation system at secondary level.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said his ministry would take its next course of action, keeping the educationists' suggestions in mind.

He said 10 marks would be reduced from the MCQ section of question papers from the next year.

Currently, 40 marks are allocated for MCQs and 60 marks for the written section in every subject.

Responding to the proposal for a question bank, Nahid said the government already decided to prepare a question bank with the help of experts.

"Education in the country has gone far in terms of number over the last five years. Now, we have to ensure quality education."

The minister said they would continue to provide training to teachers.

Education Secretary Sohorab Hossain presided over the meeting.

Additional Secretary (secondary education) Chowdhury Mufad Ahmed made a PowerPoint presentation highlighting the challenges.

The meeting was addressed by, among others, Dr Manzoor Ahmed, professor emeritus of BRAC University; Prof Siddiqur Rahman, former teacher at the Institute of Education and Research of Dhaka University; Prof Mohammad Kaikobad of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology; Prof Fahima Khatun, director general at the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education; and educationist Shyamoli Nasrin Choudhury.

Salim Osman plays religion card again

Keeps smearing Shyamal, blasts health minister for standing by the headmaster

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party lawmaker Salim Osman has once again used religion to defend his action to humiliate Narayanganj school headmaster Shyamal Kanti Bhakta.

At a "view-exchange meeting" at the Narayanganj Club, the controversial MP termed the schoolteacher an atheist and advised all not to call him a Hindu.

He claimed he was a victim of the incident, and became angry when journalists wanted to know what happened that day (May 13).

Pointing at the audience, Salim asked journalists to better ask the people if he had done any injustice towards the headmaster, who is now being treated at Dhaka Medical College Hospital for injuries he suffered from physical assaults.

"Yes, I have made a mistake. I have forced a man to do squats holding his ears. But it is the man who insulted Allah."

"Even if I have to walk the gallows for punishing the person who insulted Allah and for fulfilling the desire of the locals, I am ready to do so," he said.

However, the probe committee formed by the education ministry found no evidence whatsoever that the teacher has said anything critical of Islam or Allah.

In over a three-hour speech in two sessions, Salim lambasted Health Minister Mohammad Nasim for his remarks that the JP MP should refrain

from joining the upcoming session of the House if he had "any shame".

Mentioning Nasim's name several times, Salim said: "I don't know who runs parliament -- Speaker or someone else?"

He said Nasim was like his "elder brother," and added: "I offer my apology to you. But don't ask me to offer an apology to anybody else."

Although it was a "view-exchange" meeting, there was only one chair on the stage and almost everybody in the audience was Salim's man, locals said.

Further defending his action, Salim pointed the finger at Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader. He sought to know how a minister (Quader) could force a CNG-run autorickshaw driver to do squats holding his ears without drawing any public ire.

The JP MP said that Baitaul Aman, Chasara, in Narayanganj was the birthplace of the ruling Awami League where he now lived.

About a press conference that he postponed on Tuesday, Salim said party chief HM Ershad had requested him not to hold the briefing.

"Hussain Mohammad Ershad, whom I honour like my father, had phoned me and said: 'You have become an Oly [a pious man]. Do you know that the people of Bangladesh and crores of people are praying for you in mosques? You don't need to say anything more about the matter.'"

Reel to real

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Barguna tricked Sonu and brought him to Bangladesh from India in 2010. The two sisters have their relatives there.

Case documents show, Sonu is the son of Mehbub of Dilshan Garden area in the Indian capital.

"They [the alleged abductors] used to torture the boy and keep him busy with hard work around the day at my neighbour's house. I informed the police about it around three years ago," Musa told The Daily Star by phone from New Delhi yesterday.

"But police kept mum even after visiting the house," he alleged.

In the meantime, the boy fled the house twice but was taken back by the women's family members.

In December last year, Musa ran into Sonu, when he fled the house for the third time, on the Barguna court premises. He then took the boy under his custody and brought him to Dhaka, and spoke with police officials and rights activists about sending the boy back home.

On their advice, he took the boy to Barguna. There, with the help of the wife of a local lawmaker, he produced Sonu before a court on December 22.

But ironically, as he entered the court premises police detained him for "abducting the boy". He was, however, released upon intervention by the court police who were aware of the matter.

Later that day, the court sent the boy

to Jessore Kishore Unnayan Kendra.

Meanwhile, Rahima, Aklima and their family members filed four cases against Musa and 13 members of his family on charges of abducting Sonu and other charges.

"They [alleged kidnappers] ruined my and my family's life," Musa regretted.

"A disaster fell on me after filing of those false cases. I lost my job as a manager of a private company in Dhaka and I was in jail for 41 days in two phases. My only son and my brother-in-law also served 19 days each."

Nevertheless, he neither lost courage nor hope.

On May 14, he left for India to trace Sonu's family. It was an uphill task. Sonu had only given him a vague address. Even so, after four days' search he traced his family in Seema Puri area in Dilshan Garden.

"His parents were so happy to hear the news of their missing son."

The External Affairs Ministry of India was informed about the whole thing through the local police.

"The media here named me 'Bangladeshi Bajrangi Bhajjaan' and locals call me Bajrangi Bagaban [God]," Musa said.

In a tweet, the Indian External Affairs Minister on May 23 thanked everyone for bringing the matter to her notice and said they already initiated action in this regard.

Md Shahbuddin, an official at the

correction centre, said Ramakant Gupta, first secretary (consular) of the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, visited the centre on Tuesday and Wednesday and spoke with the boy to collect necessary information.

Shahriar Alam, state minister for foreign affairs, said his ministry was already involved in the issue.

"We assured the Indian High Commission that Dhaka will extend all-out support in sending the boy back to New Delhi," he told this newspaper.

The foreign ministry also requested the home ministry to complete all the formalities in this regard in a couple of days.

Contacted, a diplomat at the Indian mission said, "He [boy] is being treated very well at the shelter. The boy wants to go back to his parents and we are trying our best to send him back home as soon as possible."

Barguna police, however, found nothing wrong with the alleged roles of Rahima and Aklima.

The Daily Star could not contact them for comments.

But Jahirul Islam, a sub-inspector of Betagi Police Station, said, "The boy is their nephew. As far as I know, Musa abducted the boy from their house and kept the boy with him for 20 days."

He investigated one of the four cases filed by the two women and their family.

Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge of the station, said he did not know much about matter.

DMP

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(CrPC) dealing with the arrest on suspicion and subsequent remand respectively were not consistent with the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution.

The Supreme Court on Tuesday upheld the HC judgment with some modifications and guidelines.

According to Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court sources, no one was arrested under section 54 in any of the 49 police stations of Dhaka Metropolitan Police in the last two days.

The number of such arrestees was around 300 in the last five months. It was 56, in 48 such cases, from May 1 to May 24. Figures from across the country were not available at the police headquarters.

DMP used to arrest two to four people a day under section 54, officials say.

Section 54 allows police to arrest people without a warrant or an order from a magistrate.

There are instances where innocents were arrested alongside criminals under the section. There has been allegation that unscrupulous law enforcers misusing the provision arrest people and demand money from arrestees for their release.

Earlier on Wednesday, several police officials said the SC judgment would discourage dishonest policemen from making arbitrary arrest and torturing arrestees to extract confession.

N'ganj teacher

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concerned to report what steps had been taken against the people responsible for the humiliation of the teacher.

On May 13, AKM Salim Osman, the lawmaker of Narayanganj-5, was seen instructing Shyamal to do squats holding his ears, a punishment considered humiliating in Bangladesh.

Before that, Shyamal was beaten up by a mob.

It was not the end to the teacher's sufferings as the school committee on May 17 suspended him on the allegation that he had demeaned the religion.

In the report, the probe body said student Rifat Hasan, who claimed that Shyamal demeaned Islam, had made inconsistent statements on different occasions, said Deputy Attorney General Motaher Hossain Sazu who received the report.

The report said the allegation against the school teacher may be considered unacceptable since Rifat's statements before the school committee and the media, and his mother's statements before the media were inconsistent.

The report was signed by two of the three people in the committee -- its chief Prof Yusuf Ali, director of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, and member Abdus Zaman, Narayanganj education offi-

cer.

According to the probe committee, announcements from the horn speakers of a local mosque had incited people against the headmaster and changed the situation.

It said there was a longstanding dispute between the headmaster and the school committee over financial issues and no initiative had been taken to resolve it.

A further probe can be conducted into the financial feud by the people who have knowledge about finance, the report said.

Sazu told The Daily Star that he would submit the report before the HC on May 29, when the court might hold a hearing on the issue.

He said the officer-in-charge of Bandar Police Station has filed a general diary in connection with the humiliation of the teacher and an investigation was ongoing.

The police headquarters had formed another probe committee, led by additional deputy inspector general of police Mahbubur Rahman.

Deputy Commissioner of Narayanganj also constituted a probe body led by an upazila education officer.

Reports on the progress of their probes would be submitted before the HC on May 29, said DAG Sazu.