

Rangamati-Bandarban road link snapped for three months

No respite for local people in sight

A CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Road communications between Rangamati and Bandarban has been cut off for three months following the collapse of a Bailey bridge in Kawkhali upazila of Rangamati, causing sufferings to thousands of people in the two hill districts.

The bridge in Bogapara area of Ghagra union collapsed on April 14 when an excavator of Icon Engineering Ltd, a private construction firm, was crossing it, said Md Solaiman, an engineer at the firm.

The excavator was heading for a project site at Betbunia Satellite Earth Station in Kawkhali.

Locals have placed a bamboo stair on the broken bridge to cross it on foot, but it becomes very risky to use during rainfall.

Visiting the area on Wednesday, this correspondent saw hundreds of farmers crossing the bridge on way to the weekly market at Ghagra to sell their produce. They were facing difficulties to reach the market.

Students and commuters have been suffering also as no transport can cross the bridge. Locals said all modes of transport on the Rangamati-Bandarban route have stopped operation since the bridge collapsed.

Local resident Sukh Lal Tanchangya, 38, said people of more than 20 villages of Ghagra union depend on the bridge for communications. "If the bridge is not repaired immediately, things will get worse during the monsoon," he added.

Md Nurul Amin, a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver, said they on behalf of local drivers demanded the Roads and Highways Department take up the repair job.

Anil Tanchangya, a seventh grader at Ghagra High School, said a light rain submerges the bridge and students find it very difficult to reach the school.

Md Abu Musa, sub-assistant engineer at Roads and Highways Department in Rangamati, said no fund was allocated for repairing the bridge. The repair work would begin once the fund is available.



Farmers use a makeshift bamboo structure, built on this collapsed Bailey bridge, to carry their produce for sale in Kawkhali upazila of Rangamati recently. Road communications between Rangamati and Bandarban remain snapped for the last three months since the bridge collapsed. The authorities concerned are yet to take any step to repair it.

PHOTO: STAR

Worried yet rallying for Bangladesh

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continues. "Hopefully it'll choose the path of solidarity and peace; but I'm beginning to think the future is increased violence and the end of secularism."

Tim no longer feels comfortable to wander. "I don't venture to remote places anymore," he says. "I like to stay close to home where I'm known."

Ying is more philosophical. "I'm cautious but believe in fate," she says. "It's easy to be afraid. My love of living is stronger."

All share concerns about the effectiveness of security. Some worry about low levels of general competence. They complain security checks in the diplomatic zone are lax with police at times asleep on the job.

There has been frustration about the government's delay and unwilling-

ness to clearly state there is a problem. "I've heard many times there is no problem," says James. "There is a problem, a big problem!"

However, admiration for the courage of the police who risked and sacrificed their lives during the recent attacks was unanimous.

"A few things need to happen," says John. "There should be collaboration across political parties, better coordination between security agencies and enhanced international cooperation. Security checks should be sincere, while officers should deal with the public politely. There needs to be better social media analysis to identify potential attackers early."

"Despite concerns, I want to praise security forces for effectively nabbing many ill-minded people before they did harm," he adds. "They work with

limited resources."

"I hope that eventually days will return to normal, though with a bitter taste," John reflects, having lost a friend in the Gulshan attack. "For now I'm cautious about what programmes I join. This insecurity will definitely cause many to leave and fewer to come."

"The expat community is quite small and highly visible," says James. "We make easy targets. The question is: What would you risk to get a coffee? I hope I don't become a prisoner in my apartment."

"The government often dismisses our concerns," says John. "They say attacks happen elsewhere. The government needs to understand that the foreign community is so small here and quality of life is actually quite limited. It's the unity among expats

and the peace in Bangladesh that attracts us. If fear makes life suffocating very few foreigners will stay."

It seems likely John and his family will leave. "We're lucky. We have a choice," he says. "We can invest time somewhere more peaceful."

"Holey Bakery is a monumental change," says James. "It may prompt us to leave."

Driven by his family's wishes, Tim won't consider leaving. "I'll stay," he says, "but security has become a big problem."

"If anything happens to me," says Ying, "I want my family to know I had a nice life; that I chose Bangladesh. They will find it hard to accept, but that's how I feel."

(Names have been changed. Those interviewed did not wish to be identified).

Aromatic cheers

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variety after six years of hybridisation process applied to different locally available rice breeding lines.

"This rice [new variety] has long and slender grains with wonderful aroma and can be grown in both Aman and Boro seasons with five and six tonnes yield potentials respectively. Unlike most of the hybrid rice varieties, which are susceptible to lodging, this one has an erect plant type having non-lodging habit," Dr MA Khaleque Mian told The Daily Star.

Dr Ivy said the newly developed hybrid aromatic variety is also rich in high zinc and iron contents. It has got 22mg/kg zinc and 10mg/kg iron compared to 15mg of zinc and 7/8mg of iron in most other available rice varieties.

Zinc deficiency causes stunting, while iron deficiency is a leading cause of anaemia. More than one-third of under-five children in Bangladesh are stunted, while more than 43 percent women of reproductive age are anaemic.

Since release of the world's first zinc-enriched rice -- BIRRI dhan62 -- in August 2013, Bangladeshi rice breeders have so far developed four high-zinc rice varieties. The BU Aromatic Hybrid Rice-1, however, is the first fragrant rice that is rich in both zinc and iron contents.

In Bangladesh, farmers mostly cultivate low-yield traditional aromatic rice varieties like Kalijira, Kataribhog, Rasulbhog, Badshahbhog, Chinigura, Basmati, Dulabhog and Radhunipagol. These are grown in Aman season. The only Boro season aromatic rice variety -- Banglamoti (BIRRI dhan-50) -- developed by the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BIRRI) has gained huge popularity among farmers for its fragrance and high productivity.

Dr MA Khaleque Mian and Dr Nasrin Akter Ivy said BU Aromatic Hybrid Rice-1 can be grown both in Aman and Boro seasons with a prom-

ise of high productivity.

The scientists got the funding from the Sponsored Public Goods Research (SPGR) programme under the government's National Agricultural Technology Project (NATP).

The GETCO Agro Vision Ltd, a private agribusiness company, has recently struck an agreement with BSMRAU for seed developments of BU Aromatic Hybrid Rice-1, GETCO's Chief Operating Officer Md Abdu Samad Mondal told The Daily Star.

"We've grown the variety in last Boro season in our research station in Bogra and got 6.4 tonnes [per hectare] of production. The rice quality is fine, fragrance is excellent and tastes good as you consume the cooked rice," said GETCO's Head of Rice Research and Development Dr Md Ali Azam.

Dr Azam, who previously served Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA) and led breeding of some of Bangladesh's best performing rice varieties Binadhan-7, 9 and 14, expressed the hope they would be able to produce seeds of the new aromatic rice variety starting later this year.

Talking to this correspondent, Bangladesh Rice Exporters Association (BREA) President Shah Alam Babu said farmers' income would boost up from aromatic rice cultivation if they get more yield per hectare. "Besides, we'll be able to source aromatic rice in a competitive price and be able to increase export."

Babu, who exports aromatic rice to the USA, said Bangladesh has lost several traditional markets to competitors when the government banned rice export in 2008. After export resumption in 2012, the flow of aromatic rice export is gradually peaking, he added.

Export market apart, a good quantity of aromatic rice is also consumed at home as people cook Polau Biryani, Khichuri, and Kher delicacies as well as plain rice with the fragrant varieties.

Nibras was in a Jhenidah mess

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Some of the youths in the neighbourhood, who often played football with Nibras, identified him from the pictures of the Gulshan café attackers published in the media.

They said that they were shocked to learn that the young man was capable of committing such butchery.

On July 6, law enforcers raided the two rooms, but all the tenants had left the day before, said Bilkis.

A couple of hours after searching the two rooms, around 10-12 members of Rapid Action Battalion and police picked up Bilkis' husband Kausar Ali, 50, a retired employee of Bangladesh army, and two sons -- Binsar Ali, 24 and Benjir Ali, 22, according to Bilkis.

Her neighbours said the law enforcers also picked up Sonalipara mosque imam Md Rokonuzzaman, who helped Nibras rent the mess, and a villager named Abdur Rob.

However, police and Rab officials denied detaining any of them.

Of the eight tenants, five had left the house around 20 days ago and the rest a couple of days after the terrorist attack in Gulshan, Bilkis said.

Earlier on February 8, Nibras and three to four of his accomplices managed to avoid arrest in the capital, according to police.

On that day, police were conducting a drive in Shahbagh area on information that some suspected militants were plotting to carry out subversive activities there, according to the documents of a case filed with Shahbagh Police Station against 12 people,



The house in Jhenidah where Nibras Islam, one of the Gulshan café attackers, along with seven other youths lived for four months before the attack. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

including Nibras, on February 9.

Law enforcers arrested three suspected militants from in front of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, but three to four, including Nibras, escaped, it said.

The arrestees are Raiyan Minhaz, Ahmed Shammur Raihan and Touhid Bin Ahmed.

The case statement said the social media accounts and emails of the accused could lead to vital information on militant activities in the country.

On July 1 night, armed terrorists attacked the upscale Gulshan eatery and butchered 20 hostages -- nine Italians, seven Japanese, two

Bangladeshi, one Indian and one Bangladesh-born US citizen.

The 11-hour hostage situation ended when army commandos stormed the café in the high-security diplomatic zone around 8:00am on July 2. In the operation, codenamed Thunderbolt, five militants were killed.

Claudia

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doctors, staff and patients who she helped will remain forever grateful," said Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of all burn units across the country.

Claudia's husband Gian Galeazzo Boschetti, who was involved in garment business in Bangladesh, was a good friend of Sen.

The couple were together at the restaurant, but Boschetti managed to escape. He is the only Italian to have survived the attack. He has flown to Italy after the deadliest and the first hostage situation in Bangladesh claimed by the Islamic State.

The terrorists killed 20 hostages, 17 of them foreigners, and two police officers.

Sen said he got acquainted with Claudia from the Italian city of Turin when collaborating with Interplast, an

international voluntary association of plastic surgeons, in Bangladesh in 2004.

That year, a team of 12 to 13 Interplast experts visited Bangladesh.

Plans were set for them to stay at hotels that would cost a huge sum of money. But Claudia came up with the idea that the doctors should stay at her place in Baridhara and save the hotel bills so that the money could be spent on medicines for the poor, he said.

"This was the start. Since then, she accommodated many Italians at her place to save money for the poor," Sen recalled.

If she failed to accommodate all the persons, she managed rooms at neighbours' houses. In addition, she arranged their food and transport.

She also helped get clearance for the

medicine and other aids at the airport and from the National Board of Revenue.

"This she did singlehandedly and out of passion," said Sen.

In an article published in this paper on Tuesday, Blerta Cela, head of Partnerships, Results and Resource Management of the UNDP Bangladesh, recognised her as a good friend who was involved in, among other works, fundraising for Italian doctors who came to Dhaka to help poor people.

Assistant Prof Nashir Uddin of the DMCH burn unit said Claudia was a generous person.

"Whenever I contacted her for official purposes she spoke with fondness and behaved in the manner of a noble person," Nashir said.

Ibrahim Mollah, a support staff at

the burn unit, said Claudia was ever helping and caring to burn victims.

When other people stayed away from deep-burn victims, Claudia got closer and even hugged them to encourage them.

"It is hard to believe that she was killed in such a brutal manner," said Ibrahim.

Interplast is providing free plastic and reconstructive surgery worldwide, for people who do not have access to the otherwise costly treatment.

According to Sen, the organisation has been working with the DMCH burn unit over the last two decades.

In each visit, its team provides treatments, mainly plastic surgery, to about 100 patients for free. It has also been providing aids like medicines and medical equipment and also training to burn and plastic surgery doctors.

Manpower export

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are interested to hire them," he told journalists after a briefing about the overall progresses and challenges of the manpower sector at the ministry's conference room.

About the incident of imprisonment of four Bangladeshi workers by a Singapore court for financing terrorism on Tuesday, he said it is an isolated incident and stressed that there is no apprehension of the reduction of demand for hiring workers from the country.

The Bangladeshis were jailed for two to five years. The four are among the eight Bangladeshis arrested on April 26 in Singapore.

On July 1, some militants stormed Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka and took the diners hostage. They killed 22 people, including 17 foreigners. In another attack, four people, including two policemen, were killed near Sholakia Eidgah where hundreds of thousands had gathered for Eid congregation on July 7.

However, the minister, government officials and the manpower exporters ruled out any negative impact of these incidents on the country's manpower sector.

Expatriates' Welfare Secretary Begum Shamsun Nahar told journalists that they are considering the security issues for the manpower

export to some risky countries like Iraq where militant attacks are frequent.

Abul Bashar, outgoing president of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agents (Baira), told The Daily Star that the government must increase vigilance activities so that no suspected people linked with radicalism or militancy can leave for the foreign countries under the guise of migrant workers.

"Militancy is not only a problem for Bangladesh but also it is a global problem. But it is essential to take preventive measures for our own sake," he said.

REACTION OVER HRW REPORT
Asked about the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on Bangladeshi migrant domestic workers "trapped" in Oman, he said, "There was no formal complaint in Oman in this regard."

Expatriates' Welfare Secretary Shamsun Nahar said the government would soon send two teams to Saudi Arabia and Lebanon to assess the overall situation of Bangladeshi workers there.

The HRW in a report on Wednesday said many migrant domestic workers, including Bangladeshis, are trapped in abusive employment in Oman with their plight hidden behind closed doors.