

Commendable job by girls

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Female students of a high school in Bhaluka upazila have repaired the dilapidated portion of a road to get relief from sufferings they were facing on their way to school.

The students of Dhamshor Halimunnesa Chowdhurani Memorial Girls High School worked for the whole day on Monday to mend around half a kilometre of the brick road, said sources at the school and locals.

It is the link road of Bhaluka-Mollickbari-Shakhipur road. Heavy vehicles like truck and pickup were plying on the road, damaging it severely. In the rainy season, it became unfit for use, but was not repaired.

Students, teachers and villagers were suffering much due to the battered road, said sources.

Anwara Nina, headmistress of the school, said as the schoolgirls had

been facing serious difficulties in going to their school for the last four months, she decided to repair the road in her own efforts.

She also said around 1,000 schoolgirls have to use the road to reach their institution. But as the road became muddy, they had to suffer much.

"I informed Kamrul Ahsan Talukder, Bhaluka upazila nirbahi officer, about the matter, and he allocated two trucks of sand for repairing the road," said the headmistress.

As only the sand was not sufficient for the repair work, she herself spent Tk 10,400 to buy bricks and sand. The students, led by the school scout team, helped her mend the road, Anwara added.

Riya Rani, a class-X student and also a scout member, said they enjoyed the work with other students as the link road is used by several hundred students and villagers.

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Students of Dhamshor Halimunnesa Chowdhurani Memorial Girls High School repairing a road on their own in Bhaluka upazila of Mymensingh on Monday.

PHOTO: STAR

No threat to Sundarbans

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Minister: Thousands of ships are plying the oceans. Are not the sea and marine lives harmed? There are some island nations in the oceans that are also harmed.

TDS: Can the oceans and the Sundarbans considered the same?

Minister: It is the same. I'll say the whole earth is being harmed and for this reason, climate conferences are being held and measures have been recommended. Developed nations are now pledging to reduce activities harmful to the environment. They are also promising to help the developing countries to cope with climate change aftermaths.

We are paying attention to the discussions and criticisms centering the project.

The head of the government will consider these opinions but she will also have to lead the development of the country.

For industrial development and growth, we need a stable supply of electricity. But that does not mean the government has already decided to go ahead with the project no matter the harm to the Sundarbans. The head of the government has not made any such pledge.

TDS: So, will the government consider relocating the Rampal power plant if the Sundarbans were harmed?

Minister: The head of the government or those who run the country do not take a decision and stick to it no matter what.

TDS: Can it be said that the government is considering relocating the power project from Rampal?

Minister: National and international studies could not specifically say that the Sundarbans will definitely be harmed if the plant is built at Rampal. Rather, they said there are probabilities of harm and made some recommendations and wanted answers to different questions.

TDS: Would the Sundarbans be affected when a lot of mother vessels and lighterage vessels start plying through the forest carrying coal?

Minister: Coal will be transported by rail.

TDS: But the government EIA does not say that coal will be transported via rail. Rather, it noted the possibility of damages from coal transported by the Passur river.

Minister: The impact studies are using available statistics and figures. At the same time, the government is working in its own way. Only the Prime Minister will know about them. She is overseeing the whole issue. So, I can firmly say that the coal might come through rail route.

TDS: There are other options too. If we can import coal then we can also import eco-friendly gas for the power plants.

Minister: You should talk to the state minister for power about the government's plan to transform Maheshkhali into an energy hub. The crude oil we import today will be brought through the energy hub. Gas will also be brought through the hub. Gas is still needed for industries.

TDS: A coal-fired power plant at Rampal will emit various toxic gases that will spread throughout the Sundarbans. It will also generate fly-ash and toxic effluents will go to the Passur river that will ultimately harm the forest.

Minister: This has been discussed at the highest level of the government. Fly ash also helps make our soil fertile.

TDS: Various industries are being set up around the Sundarbans. The environment ministry has given approval to some 150 industrial units there. These industries are being set up there because of the Rampal power plant. There is the grain silo. Then there is the Rampal power plant. Won't these development projects destroy the Sundarbans? Why are the ministries approving these factories?

Minister: We are not renewing any licenses that have expired. It is a significant number. A portion of the global climate change funds will be used to increase the efficiency of factories that will reduce harm to the environment.

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TDS: Don't you think that the Sundarbans will be affected if the power plant is built with the existing technology?

Minister: Can you kindly show me any study or document that specifically says the Sundarbans will definitely be affected? We shall conduct studies to assess whether the Sundarbans will be affected or not.

Be assured that the head of the government, whose family made highest sacrifices for the country, won't do anything that will harm the country and I, without speaking to her, can assure that.

TDS: What would be done if there were risks?

Minister: There is no absolute proof that it will be harmful. Those who are concerned about the project did not come up with any specific point.

TDS: Why are we not amending our law like India that no power plant would be allowed within 25km of the Sundarbans?

Minister: Do you think the Sundarbans on the Indian side would be unaffected if it were harmed here? If yes, neither India nor we'll do that. But we have a need for electricity. We shall have to save the environment and at the same time we have to carry out development works.

TDS: Can't we construct gas-based or other kinds of power plants than this coal-fired one near the Sundarbans?

Minister: Why are you leaving out the option of coal-based power plants?

TDS: Does the Rampal power plant have to be built near the Sundarbans? Why not elsewhere?

Minister: It is not proved without a doubt that the place is risky. If it is proved [risky] though studies and after studies, then our head of government would certainly not do it. But till today, there is no report which definitely said it [risky].

TDS: But common people are worried about the Sundarbans. How will you address their concern?

Minister: If the government is convinced that the people have a legitimate concern then it will address it. This is a political government, not a government of technocrats. So the government of

the people will speak people's language.

TDS: Why is Bangladesh intent on building the power plant at Rampal?

Minister: Why are you thinking the power plant must be set up at Rampal? Why are you not thinking it will not be set up there? If it is proven that it will cause harm, I firmly believe the chief executive of the government would not do it.

TDS: What do you say about UNESCO's concern?

Minister: UNESCO did not express any specific concern. It rather recommended to the government to look into some matters related to the environment. Which bank would come forward to invest money on the Indian company that would jointly implement the project if it were risky?

TDS: It is heard that coal would be imported from India for the power plant.

Minister: The quality of Indian coal is not good as its sulfur content is higher than coal of other countries like Indonesia. We shall buy coal where it is cheap and of a better quality. This country belongs to all of us. Our generation will not do anything that will harm the country and its people. Be assured of it.

TDS: Will the ministry of environment take initiative to conduct any such study?

Minister: As far as I know, three ministries—power, environment and shipping—will sit together and prepare a report and then we shall sit with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Ministers' Office. He will listen to the three ministers and take notes for the PM.

Those who are opposing the Rampal power plant want good for the environment and the country and we, the government can't go against that. This is not West Pakistan and East Pakistan era. This is Bangladesh and we all should build it together.

TDS: How will you manage fly-ash, which an expert say will fall into the Passur river?

Minister: Have you been to Munshiganj where every house is coated white with fly-ash from nearby cement factories? Does anyone want no development to take place in the country?

TDS: Do you think those who are protesting the plant are doing it from an anti-Indian stance?

Minister: The answer is no. They are Bangladeshis and they are showing concerns out of patriotism. I won't presume that foreigners are giving money to them. Let us have an open mind. Neither they nor we are influenced by foreign countries over the project.

TDS: Will it be possible to increase the numbers of tigers as Bangladesh promised in a global tiger conference few years ago if the Rampal power plant is constructed?

Minister: Two tiger cubs have born already. Salinity is rather of more concern to us. If we can't stop salinity in the Sundarbans, the deer will die and tigers will leave. Where would the tigers go? The Indian part of the Sundarbans is also affected by salinity.

TDS: Now it seems that the government will certainly implement the project as the BNP has extended support to the movements against the project.

Minister: The number one in the government has not taken it personally. She does not take any emotional decision being influenced by anyone's position or acts.

Zika infects 10 Bangladeshis

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constantly updated.

Reuters reported that the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said Singapore was the only Asian nation with an active Zika virus transmission.

Officials in the city-state, one of the world's largest financial centres, reported the first locally transmitted infection on Saturday.

Of the 115 cases discovered so far, 57 were foreigners who live and work in Singapore.

The foreigners include 23 Chinese, 15 Indians, 10 Bangladeshis, six Malaysians, and one each from Indonesia, Myanmar and Chinese Taipei, said Singapore health ministry officials.

Singapore authorities detected infections in people living outside the initial outbreak area and have identified a potential second cluster. A pregnant woman was among the victims, they said.

"Over time, we expect Zika cases to emerge from more areas," Singapore's Minister for Health Gan Kim Yong said in a statement on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Malaysia reported its

first case of Zika yesterday. A woman tested positive for the mosquito-borne virus after she visited neighbouring Singapore.

The Zika virus, which has spread through the Americas and the Caribbean since late last year, is generally a mild disease but is a particular risk to pregnant women. It has been linked to microcephaly -- a severe birth defect in which babies are born with abnormally small heads and underdeveloped brains.

In Brazil, Zika has been linked to more than 1,800 cases of microcephaly.

NO WORRIES FOR BANGLADESH
Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) yesterday said Bangladesh does not have any reason to be worried about Zika virus.

"There is nothing to worry about..." IEDCR Director Prof Mirjahi Mehjabin Flora told new agency BSS.

She said all required steps, including installation of thermal scanners at international airports, have been taken to detect incoming Zika-inflicted passengers.

She said they would immediately

quarantine any passenger infected with Zika.

AKM Shamsuzzaman, director (communicable diseases) at the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), said they have conducted a survey to detect Zika in February this year and found none infected.

Bangladesh High Commission in Singapore has already informed the health ministry about the infection of some Bangladeshis.

"We will conduct medical checkups for incoming passengers at the airport. If anybody is suspected to have been infected, we will keep them under observation at a special unit in Kurmitola Hospital," Shamsuzzaman said.

Meanwhile, the United States, Australia, Taiwan, South Korea and Indonesia have warned pregnant women not to travel to Singapore.

Malaysia and neighbouring Indonesia have stepped up preventive measures following the Singapore outbreak, intensifying checks on people arriving from Singapore, introducing thermal scanners and posting paramedics at airports and border checkpoints.

They violated oath

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said the SC in its full judgment in the contempt of court case against the two ministers.

According to a constitutional provision, by taking oath, a minister enters his office to preserve, protect and defend the constitution.

"The respondents [two ministers] have scandalised the Supreme Court in a highly motivated manner in order to influence the judgment of the court. This is gross criminal contempt and a violation of the provisions of the constitution," it asserted.

The contemnors deserve no sympathy other than the lenient view taken in awarding sentence, which has already been expressed in the short order passed by this court on March 27, it noted.

"We are in no doubt that the respondents have intentionally made the utterances as reported and have indeed expressly admitted their guilt."

In their exuberance, they have undermined the sanctity of the institution of the judiciary by questioning the justice delivery system, the apex court said.

In early March, Both Qamrul and Mozammel made headlines by coming down hard on the chief justice for two days in a row.

They criticised the CJ after the country's top judge expressed dissatisfaction over the "poor performance" of the prosecutors and investigators of the International Crimes Tribunal in dealing with the war crimes case against Mir Quasem Ali.

Qamrul demanded formation of a new bench, keeping the CJ out of it, for hearing Quasem's appeal afresh. Mozammel went on to say that the CJ should not deliver the verdict on the appeal.

When they made the comments, the verdict in Quasem's case was pending, and the SC on March 8 sentenced the Jamaat leader to death.

On March 27, an eight-member SC bench, headed by the chief justice, convicted the two ministers of contempt of court after refusing to accept their unconditional apologies. The two ministers were present at the court.

The court said it could not accept their apologies as their comments had maligned and undermined the office of the chief justice and interfered with the administration of justice. Also, their statements were highly derogatory and contemptuous.

The apex court ordered the ministers to pay the money to Islamia Eye Hospital and National Liver Foundation of Bangladesh within a

week. They complied with the court's order, as in case of failure, they would have to serve seven days in jail.

This was the first time the SC sentenced two sitting ministers for contempt.

In the full judgment, the apex court said the utterances of the contemnors have clearly shown their wish to remove the CJ from the bench hearing the appeal in question.

Their further utterance that they must have their expected judgment shows their utter indifference to the SC's authority to act independently. It also shows their utter disregard for the rule of law, it observed.

The judgment said the constitution gives the SC the authority to deliver judgments in accordance with law, but the ministers wished to dictate what decision should be acceptable to them.

"The said utterances show an intention to divert the course of justice in a particular way, come what may, which is contrary to the mandate of the constitution, which requires that every citizen should enjoy the protection of the law and be treated in accordance with law."

Three judges in the eight-member bench, however, didn't agree with it that the two ministers have violated their oath of office. They came up with opinions differing from the majority view.

In their views, it was not an issue in the proceeding to adjudicate whether the ministers acted in breach of their oath of office or not.

All the judges were unanimous in the judgment that found the two ministers guilty of contempt of court.

DEBATE OVER MINISTERS' FATE
Jurist Shahdeen Malik is of the opinion that the two ministers should resign following the release of the full judgment.

"They have been found to have violated their oath of office. So, they have no legal and moral reason whatsoever to continue in their posts," Malik told The Daily Star yesterday.

"I expect them to resign today," he said.

Khurshid Alam Khan, an SC lawyer and editor of Dhaka Law Reports, echoed Malik's view.

The two ministers cannot hold the office or make any decision or enjoy any facilities or benefit from the state after the SC judges signed the verdict, he told this newspaper.

"The Supreme Court judgment is binding on the government under article 111 of the constitution, and therefore, both the ministers should

resign immediately without hesitation," said Khurshid.

Malik said the two ministers' conviction and subsequent punishment for contempt of court have already disqualified them from holding the office of ministers.

In support of this, he referred to the Public Servants (Dismissal on conviction) Ordinance 1985.

According to section 3 (2) of the ordinance, a public servant loses job for committing offences punishable with death, transportation or imprisonment for a term exceeding one year or with a fine exceeding Tk 10,000 or with both.

The ministers, who are also public servants, were punished with a monetary fine of Tk 50,000 each.

Earlier in 2004, Inspector General of Police Shahudul Haque lost his job after his conviction for contempt of court. He was punished with a fine of Tk 2,000.

At that time, a public servant would lose job if slapped with a fine exceeding Tk 1,000, which was raised to Tk 10,000 in 2009, in line with the ordinance.

Malik mentioned that Pakistani Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani had to step down after he was convicted of contempt of court.

Gilani committed the contempt by refusing to carry out an order of the Pakistan Supreme Court. For this, he was punished with a 30-second jail term.

Jurist Shafique Ahmed, who was law minister of the previous Awami League-led government, said the constitution doesn't specifically say anything about the fate of a minister if he or she violates the oath of office.

BNP leader and former law minister Moudud Ahmed said it is not only a legal issue, but also a moral issue. "I think they should now voluntarily resign from their posts."

Contacted, Attorney General Mahubey Alam refused to make any comment on the issue, saying he was yet to go through the SC judgment.

Asked, the food minister said some of the judges gave observations, not directions, about their violation of oath.

"I made a criticism and I was convicted. The court verdict has already been executed. The violation of oath is not an issue now," Qamrul claimed.

Asked, the Liberation War affairs minister said he was yet to read the full SC verdict.

"Once I go through the full verdict, I will consult my lawyers and then decide the next course of action," said Mozammel.

The end of colourful peafowl

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eyespot at the peak of each tail feather.

I grew up fantasising those flawless feathers and became a birdwatcher. But I was utterly disappointed when I came to know that the Indian Peafowl is no more in our country. My long-cherished hope to watch the glossy

green train of elongated tail with black-centred ocelli at the tips vanished with the disappearance of the bird. The last one was seen in early 1980s in our deciduous forest (Bhawal area) of Dhaka. This highly adaptive species, which can successfully survive in fairly degraded habitats, possibly

faced extinction from our country due to continuous hunting. We have lost many species from our land and today many more are heading towards extinction and we will keep shouting that they are disappearing and will be gone if we can't save our last forests, wetlands and all other natural habitats.