

USELESS BRIDGE

2 years on, still no approach roads

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patakhali

A bridge constructed over the Rongopaldi River under Galachipa upazila two years ago remains unused due to lack of any approach roads to the bridge.

The authority concerned didn't build an approach to the bridge – which was to connect the two upazilas of Galachipa and Dashmina of the district – due to a conflict over acquisition of land and the situation has remained the same since then.

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) built the 245 meters long and 7.30 meters wide bridge at a cost of Tk 24.50 crore.

LGED issued a work order to a construction firm named 'Mahfuz Khan' in January in 2014 and local lawmaker AKM Jahangir Hossain set the foundation stone of the bridge on March 25. The construction ended in mid-June 2015.

However, the approach road on both sides of the bridge, 232 meters from Galachipa upazila and 477 meters from Dashmina upazila, was built.

This correspondent found a recent visit to the area found a man climbing onto the bridge with a ladder in order

to cross the river.

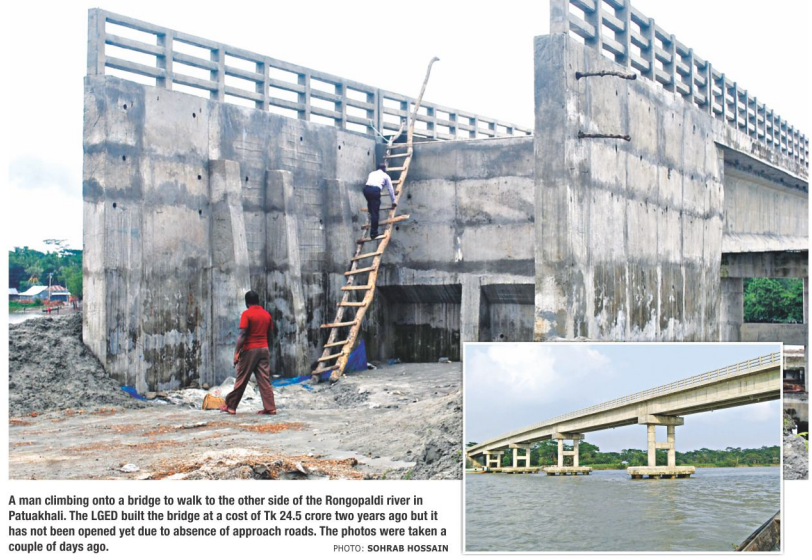
MD Mojibur Rahman, president of Ullania bazaar businessmen association said, there sits two big business spots on both sides of the bridge, in the west at Ullania bazaar and in the east the Rongopaldi bazaar which are unusable to traders directly as this bridge cannot be used.

Golam Mostafa Tito, secretary for Galachipa upazila Awami League, said road communication would be easier between the two upazilas as well as with Patakhali district headquarter once the bridge is made open to the public.

MD Jahangir Alam, Dashmina upazila engineer for LGED, said construction work of the main bridge was completed on time but the approach could not be built as a conflict rose over land acquisition as there are 15 public houses situated on that land.

When contacted Abu Saleh MD Hanif, executive engineer for LGED, said the conflict over land acquisition will be over soon and construction of approach roads on both sides will be completed soon.

He expressed hope that the bridge would be opened within a month or two.



A man climbing onto a bridge to walk to the other side of the Rongopaldi river in Patakhali. The LGED built the bridge at a cost of Tk 24.5 crore two years ago but it has not been opened yet due to absence of approach roads. The photos were taken a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: SOHRAH HOSSAIN

US PRESSURE

UN agrees on deep cuts to peacekeeping

AFP, United Nations

A deal on cutting nearly \$600 million from the UN peacekeeping budget was reached Wednesday following weeks of negotiations over US demands for sharp cost reductions, UN diplomats said.

Under the deal reached by a General Assembly budget committee, the United Nations will spend \$7.3 billion on peacekeeping in the coming year, down from the current \$7.87 billion – roughly a seven percent cut – according to diplomats familiar with the negotiations.

The United States, the biggest financial contributor to peacekeeping, had sought a nearly \$1 billion cut to the bill and the European Union had also pushed for savings to bring costs down to \$7.3 billion.

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Subsidies for banks are to avert disaster

FROM PAGE 1

They demanded that the government allocation for Monthly Pay Order (MPO) system, and improved public health service are increased.

Amidst criticism that there was no good governance in the banking sector, the minister said the government was working very hard to ensure the good governance.

And you all can see the result in the money market...You will also be able

to see its result in the banking sector."

"Currently, there are 58 banks operating in the country. Many may say that having 58 banks is not good for a positive economy. But I will just say that different countries are working in the same manner. There will be consolidation in future and I am waiting for that future."

Muthith then rejected an allegation brought by some MPs that the government was providing subsidies to banks without any reason.

"Banking sector is a sensitive sector. If any disaster takes place in a bank, it puts an adverse impact on all. That's why we take steps," he said.

JPM Nurul Islam Nilam said many relatives of bank directors are becoming directors of the institutions and taking loans.

"The directors are taking loans of over one lakh crore taka and becoming loan defaulters," he said.

He said the sector was being held hostage by the bank owners and the directors.

JPM Kazi Firoz Rashid said, "Public banks have already been looted and now, the private banks are being robbed by the family members [of directors] who are also directors [of

the banks]."

"They are establishing politics of looting in the banking sector," he said.

Independent MP Rustum Ali Faraji proposed formation of a bank commission to "restore" discipline in the sector.

In response to demand for increasing MPO facilities for school and madrasa teachers, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said the government had already formed a committee headed by the state minister for finance to finalise the relevant guidelines.

"I hope the finance minister would work to ensure the allocations on the guidelines to be prepared by the committee," he said.

FOOD MINISTER UNDER FIRE

Qamrul Islam yesterday told parliament that his ministry was collecting quality rice and wheat this time and there would be no questions about their standards.

"This time wheat having the quantity of 12 proteins will be imported. There will be no scope to raise questions about the quality of rice and wheat," the minister said, while responding to cut motions brought by a number of opposition and inde-

pendent MPs over the budgetary allocation proposal for the food ministry in the fiscal year 2017-18.

Qamrul said MPs came down heavily on him due to price hike of rice in recent times.

He said recent flash flood in haor areas damaged at least six lakh metric tons of boro paddy. Besides, blast disease and excessive rain damaged boro paddy in some other places.

"Taking advantage of the situation, a group of unscrupulous businessmen raised rice prices," he added.

"An artificial crisis created today's sudden situation. There is no crisis of rice. We've enough stock. There'll be no more problems as the import duty on rice has been reduced," he said.

The minister also explained why the government delayed reducing import duty on rice saying that the government wanted the farmers to get fair prices. "Had the duty been reduced earlier, the farmers would not get fair prices," he added.

Noting that VGF programme should be scrapped, the minister said the government was providing 150kg rice to those who are ultra-poor. "After all this, what is the necessity of a VGF card?" he asked.

IS caliphate

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The insurgents blew up the medieval mosque and its famed leaning minaret a week ago as US-backed Iraqi forces started a push in its direction. Their black flag had been flying from al-Hadba (The Hunchback) minaret since June 2014.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi "issued instructions to bring the battle to its conclusion," his office said.

The fall of Mosul would in effect mark the end of the Iraqi fall of the IS caliphate even though the hardline group would still control territory west and south of the city. Its capital in Syria, Raqqa, is also besieged by US-backed Kurdish-led coalition.

The cost of the battle has been enormous, however. In addition to military casualties, thousands of civilians are estimated to have been killed.

About 900,000 people, nearly half the pre-war population of the northern city, have fled the battle, mostly taking refuge in camps or with relatives and friends, according to aid groups. Those trapped in the city suffered hunger and deprivation as well as death or injury, and many buildings have been ruined.

Counter Terrorism Service (CTS) troops captured the al-Nuri Mosque's ground in a "lightning operation" on Thursday, a commander of the US-trained elite units told STV.

Civilians living nearby were evacuated in the past days through corridors, he added.

CTS units are now in control of the mosque area and the al-Hadba and Sirikhana neighborhoods and they are still advancing, a military statement said.

US-led international coalition is providing air and ground support to the Iraqi forces fighting through the Old City's maze of narrow alleyways.

But the advance remains an arduous task as the insurgents are dug in the middle of capturing the mortar fire, snipers, booby traps and suicide bombers to defend their last redoubt.

The military estimated up to 350 militants were still in the Old City last week but many have been killed since.

They are besieged in one sq km (0.4 square mile) making up less than 40 percent of the Old City and less than one percent of the total area of Mosul, the largest urban centre over which they held sway in both Iraq and Syria.

Those residents who have escaped the Old City say many of the civilians trapped behind IS lines – put last week at 50,000 by the Iraqi military – are in a desperate situation with little food, water or medicines.

Baghdadi proclaimed himself "caliph," or ruler of all Muslims, from the Grand al-Nuri Mosque's pulpit on July 4, 2014, after the insurgents overran vast swathes of Iraq and Syria.

This speech from the mosque was the first time he revealed himself to the world and the footage broadcast then is to this day the only video recording of him as "caliph."

He has left the fighting in Mosul to local commanders and is believed to be hiding in the border area between Iraq and Syria, according to US and Iraqi military sources.

Russia has said it is seeking to verify whether the IS leader was killed when its warplanes hit the group's leaders in a night air raid in Syria last month.

Islamic State last week broadcast a video showing much of the mosque and brickwork minaret reduced to rubble. Only the stump of the minaret remained, and a dome of the mosque supported by a few pillars which resisted the blast.

Deposits

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Seeking anonymity, a Bangladeshi bank official said the Bangladeshi financial deposits in Swiss banks don't mean that the money flew there only from Bangladesh or those were illegally earned or laundered.

Bangladeshi living abroad also put their money in Swiss banks, not only for tax reasons.

"Bangladesh will be able to bring back any money only if it can prove that the money was siphoned out of the country," added the official.

Speaking at the Latvia Sangsad on June 6, Finance Minister AMA Muthith said it was true that money was being laundered, but it was not possible to stop the outflow of money completely.

"What we can do is lessen the opportunity for siphoning off money. The government is taking steps to stop the generation of black money."

The government is taking steps in this regard, which would be visible next month, the minister said.

Over the last several decades, Switzerland has provided wealthy families around the globe with a convenient and safe place to stash their money.

The country's political neutrality, stability and tradition of bank secrecy have kept their fortunes beyond the reach of national governments and even the most determined tax collectors.

Offshore accounts are not illegal, but many people use them to hide cash from the tax authorities, say experts.

Swiss banks have come under global pressure in recent times, as a number of countries, including India, are stepping up efforts to crack down on black money. A Europe-led clamp-down has also been launched on tax evasion and corruption.

Experts, however, say data from the Global Financial Integrity (GFI), a Washington-based research organisation, gives a comprehensive picture about money laundered out of a country.

Switzerland lost between \$6 billion and \$9 billion to illegal money outflows in 2014, according to a GFI report.

Still relying mostly on force

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let alone only strategy, to defeat an ideology."

Dr. Riaz, a researcher and writer on Islamic education, said in case of violent extremism, force could only be a part of a larger counter-terrorism strategy and to counter the militant ideology it was necessary to acknowledge and address both the drivers of extremism and the enabling environment.

In the fight against extremism, devising a campaign to make people aware of the scourge of radicalisation, how militants distort religion to misguide people, and spreading the real message of Islam is vital, security experts said.

In Bangladesh, an innovative campaign began eight-and-half years ago under the banner of "Committee for Resistance and Correction Militancy".

Different ministries, the police department, all intelligence agencies, Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), Rapid Action Battalion, Ansar and VDP and also the Prime Minister's Office were involved in it. Responsibilities of each ministry and agency had been outlined.

The primary objective of the move was to launch a massive awareness campaign across the country. Films and documentaries were supposed to be released in villages coupled with ad campaigns and discussions. Monitoring of suspects, collecting intelligence and foiling militant's plans were included as parts of the campaign but the moves have faded.

Home Minister Ashraful Khan and Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul Hoque focused on holding discussions with clerics to spread the message that Islam does not support or permit violence or killings.

The discussions began in 2015 but the effort lost momentum.

In the wake of continued attacks on religious minorities, foreigners, intellectuals and secular writers, and just 11 days before the Holy Ayatir attack, a section of religious scholars led by Bangladesh Jama'at Ulema Parishad Chairman Moulana Fariduddin Masud issued a fatwa (religious edict) against militancy.

Prepared in the light of Quran and Hadith and signed by over 1 lakh clerics, the new edict said Islam forbade terrorism and denounced the killing of innocent people in the name of Islam.

ing, "We can't be successful in our fight against religious extremism until we stop radicalisation in society. We need to kill the distorted ideology."

According to Prof Ali Riaz, the most important downside of the fight against militancy in Bangladesh was the absence of a comprehensive counter terrorism strategy.

He said Bangladesh always rejected extremism and the July 1, 2016, attack provided an opportunity to build a comprehensive social movement involving people of various political persuasions.

"Central to the counter-terrorism strategy should be counter-radicalisation programme as well as de-radicalisation and disengagement. These are essential. But those seem to have been either ignored or had received lukewarm support," he said.

The Holy Ayatir attack was a wake-up call for the government to fight militancy in all possible ways. But its efforts, which did not involve force, were largely confined to speeches of some ministers and politicians and issuance of some dos and don'ts.

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Speaking on the fatwa, Masud had then said, "This fatwa is more powerful than 100,000 weapons and would be able to curb terrorism greatly."

The document containing the fatwa was supposed to be distributed across

the country and imams were supposed to mention the fatwa during Jamaat sermons.

The reality was, however, different. The Islamic Foundation, assigned to distribute the document among imams, did not do its job properly.

"It is now at Baitul Mukarram Mosque from where, if anyone wants, can collect. We don't know how many people got the copy and whether it is being used in sermons," said an Islamic Foundation official.

De-radicalisation and rehabilitation of detained militants is another big issue in combating violent extremism and the government is yet to do anything on this front.

Militants need re-education so that they understand that their ideology is wrong, counsel to remove the hatred brewing in them, reconnection with their families, and rehabilitation in society.

Worldwide, militant leaders, who persuade people to join militancy, are kept in separate prison cells and are de-radicalised.

There are intelligence reports on how Anwarullah Bangla Team (ART) chief Jasimuddin Rahmani spread radicalism in prison but there was no initiative in prison to keep those militants separate, according to sources.

Some 20 countries, including Singapore, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Australia, and Yemen have launched programmes for de-radicalising and rehabilitating militants.

Although the effort failed in Yemen due to a lack of political will, Singapore has been reaping great benefits.

The Singapore government, NGOs and religious scholars partnered in a multi-pronged approach under the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG). Formed in 2003, the RRG initially counselled detained members of Indonesia-based militant outfit Jemaah Islamiyah but later broadened its arena to counter misinterpretation of Islam.

The RRG is also reconnecting detainees with their family members and counselling them, which helped de-radicalise the militants and prevent

their families from being radicalised.

Following revelation of involvement of migrant workers in militancy, Singapore put more emphasis on building awareness among all staying in the country through new motivational and recreational programmes.

It also heightened watch on the internet.

So far, Singapore has been able to prevent the rise of militancy and attacks. Instead of devising a long-term comprehensive counter-militancy, de-radicalisation and rehabilitation strategy, Bangladesh came up with a new formula. It asked militants to surrender and promised them of no arrest and a reward of Tk 5 lakh, which many experts say might be counterproductive.

Nowadays, militants largely use the internet to spread radicalism and to communicate. Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, YouTube and Protonmail.com are being widely used to motivate people, train them, and plan operations.

The law enforcement agencies have limited monitoring capabilities of the digital world. They can only shut down secret Facebook groups they discover and digital IDs of militant suspects.

Another problem in the anti-militancy drive is suspects getting released on bail and re-engaging in extremism.

Attorney General Mahabub Alam said they could do little if courts granted bail to suspects. He also put the blame on the police for weak investigation and charges against suspects and failing to provide strong evidence.

He recommended a coordination cell comprising all concerned.

The government has not been able to reveal any major success in preventing terror financing in the country.

Army recovers

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They were recovered from the hideout and the river, it added.

No one could be arrested.

Moslem Islam, officer-in-charge of Longadu Police Station, told our Ranganami correspondent that they were trying to arrest the culprits.