

# BATTERED HIGHWAY IN HATIKUMRUL

## Road minister orders engineer's withdrawal

**STAR REPORT**  
 Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday directed the authorities concerned to withdraw Executive Engineer Abu Hena Mostafa Kamal of Roads and Highways Department of Sirajganj for his alleged neglect in road management.

He also asked show-cause notices to be served on Rawshan Ali, additional chief engineer of RHD of Rajshahi zone, and Habibur Rahman, superintendent engineer of Pabna zone, on the same grounds.

Obaidul Quader gave the directives while visiting Hatikumrul area on Dhaka-Rangpur highway yesterday. Abu Naser, senior information officer of the ministry, told The Daily Star over phone.

The directives were issued for their 'neglect' in managing the roads on west side of Bangabandhu Bridge to Hatikumrul Point, he said.

The action came amid media reports on bad condition of the road

that caused huge traffic jams and immense sufferings to passengers.

A 10km stretch of the road from Hatikumrul to Nalka point on the highway remained badly damaged for the last couple of months. Besides, reconstruction of a roundabout at Hatikumrul intersection is also causing traffic jam.

The minister's reports, our Pabna correspondent said.

It has been taking around two hours to cross 32km from the west side of Bangabandhu Bridge to Hatikumrul intersection for last couple of months. We are suffering regularly with bad condition of the road," said Mirza Azad, a resident of Pabna town who travels to Dhaka every week.

Farak Hossain, a bus driver, said the road from Hatikumrul to Nalka point is in a very poor condition since the last couple of months.

The RHD has been repairing the road for last one month, but their action was limited to dumping bricks into the potholes further hampering



**Workers of Roads and Highways Department repairing the Dhaka-Rangpur highway at Hatikumrul in Sirajganj recently. These patch ups hardly ever last. The road transport minister yesterday ordered the withdrawal of the Sirajganj RHD chief engineer holding him responsible for poor road maintenance in his area.**

# After murder of daughter, man 'kills himself'

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Palma**

A man allegedly killed himself by jumping under a running train in Sirajganj's Kamaakhanda yesterday, two days after his daughter was murdered.

Saidur Rahman Badal, 40, of Jagatgati village in Sirajganj Sadar upazila, was the complainant of his daughter Sathi Khatun's murder case, police said.

Helal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Sirajganj Sadar Police Station, said, "In primary investigation, we have come to know that the victim family was badly suffering from the burden of loans taken from different people."

"We assume the man might have been killed over the loan issue, and her father might have killed himself to get rid of the loan burden."

The police official said Badal jumped onto the rail tracks in Jamalai Railway Station area around 10:30am when Silk City train, which was heading for Dhaka, was crossing the area. He was killed on the spot, and Sirajganj railway police recovered the body, the OCS said.

# Constable, wife sent to jail 'for carrying yaba'

**POLICE CONSTABLE AND HIS WIFE** have landed in jail after they were caught allegedly with around 8,000 yaba tablets in Teknaf.

Constable Ershad Alam, 32, of Chakaria Police Station, and his wife Kamun Nahar, 23, were detained when they were crossing Hwang Kwang Check Post on SC's Cox's Bazar-Teknaf highway in a microbus around 11:45pm on Monday.

The microbus had no number plate. So, on entry border Guard Bangladesh members stopped it and recovered the tablets, worth around Tk 24 lakh, wrapped in 40 small polythene bags from the vehicle, say statement of a case filed over the incident.

The BCB men caught the couple. The next afternoon, they were handed over to Teknaf police and a BCB member lodged a narcotics case against the duo with the police sta-

# Dredger purchase beats snail's pace

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In 2009, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) submitted a report to a parliamentary committee, depicting the drastic shrinkage of the country's waterway network for a lack of dredging.

Bangladesh is crisscrossed by a network of 24,000km of rivers, canals, creeks and haors. During monsoon, 5 million cusec water and 2.4 billion tonnes of silt flow through its rivers. The world's entire river system carries 13 billion tonnes of silt a year, said the report.

The underlying emphasis was the rivers are undergoing a large-scale dredging so that tonnes of silt cannot deposit on riverbeds, crops are not damaged, lives are not lost in floods and waterways do not shrink any further.

The very next year the government approved the project. But seven years on, a post-inspection implementation status report by the planning ministry said the progress is disappointing.

In August 2012, the project deadline was extended till June 2014. Again, there was not much of a progress and

the new deadline was set for June 2016. The BIWTD missed that deadline as well and got a third extension till December last year.

Late last month, the planning ministry sat with BWDB officials to discuss the project.

At the meeting, BWDB officials said it was taking them this long as they had to float international tenders and those had to be cancelled time and again as they did not get expected response, sources said.

The planning ministry sought an explanation as to why the BWDB could not procure even a single tug boat. In response, the BWDB officials said tender evaluations were underway and, in some cases, the contractor did not supply the equipment on time after getting the work orders.

The meeting also discussed that some of the dredgers were of low quality, and the planning ministry asked the BWDB to inform the ministry what actions followed after suppliers provided such poor quality equipment.

The project saw its directors changed

eight times in the last seven years and five months. This means, on average, one project director (PD) lasted about 10 months, though the government in principle is opposed to transferring PDs too frequently.

In its June letter to the water resources ministry, the planning ministry also noted that 15 projects, taken up under BWDB supervision, are running behind schedules since 2010.

One of them is the Testa Barage project which was taken up in 2006 at a cost of Tk 413 crore. Till February this year, Tk 321 crore has been spent.

The planning ministry has urged the BWDB to implement the projects quickly.

Every year, 3 crore cubic metres of dredging is required to maintain navigability of the rivers but the BWDB has a capacity for dredging 50 lakh cubic metres. Had all the 21 dredgers been purchased, it could dredge 2.21 crore cubic metres a year by now, according to the planning ministry report.

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Karmaker yesterday that they were taking time in unloading the imported rice as they thought the government would lower the duty further.

"We are waiting for a final decision from the government," said Rashedul Islam, a Clearing and Forwarding Agent at Hill Land port.

A number of 138 loaded trucks were parked at the port, said Sohrab Hossain, public relation officer of Panama Port Link Ltd at Hill. Import of rice would go up further once the duty is cut off, he said.

Our Benapole correspondent Mohsin Milon reported that 65 rice-laden trucks are waiting at the port for the government to waive the duty-cut benefit.

Meanwhile, a Thai delegation is due in the city today to sign a government-to-government (G2G) deal with the food ministry for export of the staple to Bangladesh.

The rice ministry sources yesterday declined to reveal the price at which the government is going to buy the rice from Thailand, which in last month had asked for a high price (\$500 a tonne). The price, however, was not agreed by Bangladesh.

Besides, a Cambodian official delegation is also due sometime next week to decide on rice price. Last week, a MoU (memorandum of understanding) was signed between Bangladesh and Cambodia for the import of 10 lakh tonnes of rice from the Southeast Asian country in next five years.

After with Cambodia, if the deal is signed with Thailand today, it would be the third such import deal in two months since the government approved import of 15 lakh tonnes of rice from Vietnam under separate G2G agreement.

Besides, over the past two months, the Directorate General of Food floated seven international tenders seeking to import an additional 3.5 lakh tonnes of rice.

The moves come long after the crop loss in the March flashflood, which ravaged the backwaters in the country's northeastern region where 90 percent of standing Boro crops, totalling over 10 lakh tonnes, were damaged. Fungal attacks in last 11 months had also caused crop loss in the last Boro season.

With the Cambodian deal signed, 8.5 lakh tonnes of rice is now lined up for import, which still falls short of a projected minimum of 12 lakh tonnes. A recent US Department of Agriculture projection, however, put the figure at 15 lakh tonnes in the current fiscal.

The food ministry's move also comes at a time when end-season rice stock and public granaries dropped to six-year low and market price of coarse rice shot up to as high as Tk 48 a kg in June-July. This is a 47 percent rise in the price during the same period last year.

Despite government moves and international import, the private sector, a Trading Corporation of Bangladesh's market monitoring report shows that the price of coarse rice has remained stable at Tk 45 a kg for over two weeks.

# Justice Khairul terms verdict immature

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there in the constitution, he pointed out.

"Is the chief justice a headmaster and are other judges his students that he [CJ] has to control them," he asked.

The Law Commission chairman said the judges are independent under Article 94(4) of the constitution.

"Article 1 of the constitution talks about a people's republic, but this verdict is taking the country towards a judges' republic."

That said, it was reported in the media that the SC sent a letter to the Anti-Corruption Commission, asking it to stop an enquiry about a retired judge.

"How can we rely on them [SC members]?" he said. "We cannot rely on the Supreme Judicial Council."

He said the SC judgment undermined the parliament members.

In the SC verdict, the author judge (chief justice) said the current parliament

is "immature" and also made derogatory remarks about its members, he added.

"If the chief justice says the current parliament is immature, I have to say the Supreme Court judges are immature as they unnecessarily used derogatory and unparliamentary language about the parliament members in the verdict."

"Why irrelevant observations should be made in the apex court verdict. We feel that it should not have been done."

Khairul said it's not right that a constitutional organisation would term another constitutional organisation immature.

The author judge even observed that the parliament members should ponder whether they are qualified enough to be lawmakers, he mentioned.

Khairul, however, said parliament can enact a law but cannot bring any changes to the basic structure of the constitution. "Independence of the judiciary is a basic structure of the constitution, which cannot be changed."

"We have noted that a few judges made derogatory comments about parliament before delivering the verdict."

Therefore, it can be said there was a plan for delivering such a verdict long before the hearing in the case began."

Khairul said he didn't agree with the opinion that independence of the judiciary would be curbed in the absence of the SC.

"The original constitution of 1972 empowered parliament to remove [SC] judges. At that time, we knew that the judiciary was independent. But now it is being said that there will be no independence of the judiciary without the Supreme Judicial Council."

"I think the Supreme Judicial Council doesn't have much to do with independence of the judiciary."

The former chief justice said people are the owners of the republic and parliament represents the sovereign people. "When everyone is accountable to parliament, there is no reason why judges should be an exception to this."

Khairul said that once the judgment of a court is delivered, people have the right to criticise it.

"Nobody is above criticism. Even the Supreme Court is not above criticism."

He wondered where people would go

if the SC makes mistakes.

Khairul said there is no legal bar to criticising judgments from one's perspective, and that the Law Commission organised the press conference to express its impartial opinion.

He further said he went through the 799-page SC verdict and found it was made lengthy unnecessarily by making illogical and irrelevant comments.

On August 1, the SC released the full verdict in which Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha observed that the amendment giving the president powers to have control over lower courts violates the basic structure of the constitution.

In the verdict, the apex court made observations on different issues including democracy, politics, martial law, the Election Commission, good governance, corruption and independence of the judiciary.

The SC was restored through the SC verdict, and it held its first meeting on August 6.

do anyway. This is a small island. There's nowhere to run to," resident James Cruz said AFP.

Experts have long differed over the North's exact capabilities but all agree it has made rapid progress under Kim.

Last month, Pyongyang carried out its first two successful ICBM launches, the first - described by Kim as a gift to "American bastards" - showing it could reach Alaska, and the second extending its range even further, with some experts suggesting New York could be vulnerable.

On Tuesday, the Washington Post quoted a US Defense Intelligence Agency analyst as saying officials think North Korea now has "nuclear weapons for ballistic missile delivery" - including by its ICBMs - making it a potent threat against neighbors and possibly the United States.

"The North's current ability to launch an accurate nuclear strike remains open to question, with analysts suggesting it has yet to overcome some technical hurdles.

US officials have repeatedly said military action against the North was "not an option" in the table," though Tillerson said nothing had "dramatically changed" in the military equation in the past 24 hours.

# End nuke drive or face the 'fury'

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message to Kim, saying his country faced "fire and fury like the world has never seen."

Those comments triggered expressions of concern from China as well as from US allies, and stock markets as the dollar have slipped as investors seek safe-haven investments.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, who has often emphasised the devastating costs any conflict with North Korea could have, delivered a statement that seemed to back up his boss's bellicose language.

He said North Korea must stop isolating itself and "stand down" in its pursuit of nuclear weapons, and Pyongyang "should cease any consideration of actions that would lead to the end of its regime and the destruction of its people."

The Pentagon chief also underscored the reality of North Korea's nascent missile capabilities, saying they are "grossly overmatched" by the US and that Pyongyang would lose any arms race or conflict it started.

Trump earlier had boasted on Twitter that America's nuclear arsenal was "far stronger and more powerful than ever before," after North Korea said it was considering a missile strike

near the tiny US Pacific territory of Guam.

"Hopefully we will never have to use this power, but there will never be a time that we are not the most powerful nation in the world," Trump tweeted.

Analysts reports that Trump's comments have taken his inner circle by surprise. White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the National Security Council and other officials knew the "president was going to respond... with a strong message in no uncertain terms."

Still, Trump's tone was at odds with that of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who said he did not believe "there is any imminent threat" to Guam or other US targets, and hoped that diplomatic pressure would prevail in the crisis.

"I think Americans should sleep well at night, have no concerns about this particular rhetoric of the last few days," Tillerson said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was deeply concerned about the tensions on the Korean Peninsula and was "troubled" by the increase in confrontational rhetoric.

"The Secretary-General welcomes all initiatives that will help to de-escalate tensions and result in a return

to diplomacy," his spokesman Stéphane Dujarric said.

Trump's language has become increasingly hard-edged since Pyongyang carried out a pair of successful ICBM launches in July, which put the US mainland in range for the first time.

Pyeongyang's KCNA state news agency yesterday reported that plans were being drawn up for missile strikes against Guam that could be put into action "at any moment," after Kim gave the order.

Tillerson, who refueled in Guam while flying home from Southeast Asia, said Trump was determined to send an unequivocal message to Kim.

"What the president is doing is sending a strong message to North Korea in language that Kim Jong-Un would understand, because he doesn't seem to understand diplomatic language," he said.

The island's governor Eddie Calvo reassured residents there was currently "no threat" to the territory, which has a total population of more than 160,000 and houses two US military installations.

In the capital Hagåtña, islanders kept their cool.

"It's not like there's anything we can

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orphange via a foreign bank.

Of the six accused, Khaleda, former BNP lawmaker Salmul Haq Kamal and businessman Sharfuddin Ahmed, are on bail while others including Tarique remain absconding.

In 2008, following a bail petition, the HC had granted ad-interim bail to Khaleda and issued a rule asking the ACC to submit a report on 12 lakh tonnes. A recent US Department of Agriculture projection, however, put the figure at 15 lakh tonnes in the current fiscal.

The food ministry's move also comes at a time when end-season rice stock and public granaries dropped to six-year low and market price of coarse rice shot up to as high as Tk 48 a kg in June-July. This is a 47 percent rise in the price during the same period last year.

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