



The photo on the right shows the Dumni canal being choked by land development near the Purbachal 300 Foot Road in 2012. Five years later, land grabbers have built a wall across the canal, left, blocking water flow completely.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN/FILE

A canal on deathbed

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problem, water will flow anyway. Width of a canal is to be reduced if a structure is built over it."

When asked why filling of the canal was not halted as required by wetland conservation law, Chairman of Rajuk, Md Abdur Rahman, said he would assign a field enquiry to see how the canal is being filled up and

why Rajuk reduced its width with a culvert.

"Then we will take some action," he said.

The canal originates from the Balu River in the north and winds its way through Dumni, Khadaldia and Gajaria villages to converge with the same river in the south, according to local inhabitants.

The DAP map shows that a 1.5-km stretch of the canal would connect water retention areas in the north--Bhotter, Talna, Delna, Bhaturia and Palashia-- to others in Dumni, Boro Kathaldia and Boro Beraid in the south.

A committee comprised of seven ministers later altered the land use in Kathaldia and Beraid, earmarked

as water retention areas in the DAP, to accommodate extension of the private housing scheme of Bashundhara and the area is already filled up.

The affected locals wrote to the environment ministry, police and environment department time and again from 2010 till last year to save the canal. The environment

department filed a case and instituted three inspections but nothing came of it.

Masud Iqbal Md Shameem, director for Dhaka metropolitan area of the environment department, said, "Let me look into the documents and see what we can do."

Dhaka district administration in September last year identified

Dumni as a five-kilometer stagnant canal filled up by Bashundhara housing authority in Kathaldia.

Earlier this month, the High Court directed the government to prepare an action plan with a list of land grabbers and area demarcation by 1 July next year to recover 50 canals in Dhaka city.

FOOD SECURITY INDEX Bangladesh worst in South Asia

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh was 89th in the recently published Global Food Security Index-2017.

General Secretary of Bangladesh Food Security Network Nurul Alam Masud disclosed this at a press briefing at Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday.

Nurul said although Bangladesh became a lower-middle income country in 2015, in case of food security it secured the 89th position, which is the lowest in South Asia.

The organisation made a six-point recommendation, including forming a Food Security Act.

Network president Mohammad Joynul Abedin said most of the countries of the world have right to food law but Bangladesh does not.

"Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina earlier in South-Asian Right to Food Conference assured government's devotion to establish food security in the country. So the government should consider formation of a right to food law on priority basis," he said.

Lalu Prasad convicted in corruption case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A court in India yesterday convicted senior Indian opposition politician Lalu Prasad Yadav in a corruption case. He was promptly sent to a high-security jail.

CBI judge Shivpal Singh in Ranchi, gave the ruling against Yadav, chief of Rashtriya Janata Dal and former chief minister of Bihar state, in the case pertaining to fraudulent withdrawal of Rs 89.27 lakh from government treasury between 1991 and 1994.

The quantum of punishment will be pronounced on January 3.

Lalu Prasad and 15 other convicts were taken into custody immediately after the pronouncement of the verdict.

A charge sheet in the case was filed against 38 people on October 27, 1997. Eleven of them died and three turned approvers while two other accused confessed and were convicted in 2006-07, a CBI official said.

Yadav was found guilty of graft charges in one of the six cases lodged against him in the 1996 fodder scam. The court also found 15 others guilty



in the case.

On the other hand, the court acquitted six others, including former Bihar chief minister Jagannath Mishra.

Of the six cases in the scam, this was the second in which verdict was pronounced. The RJD chief was also held guilty by a court on September 30, 2013, in the first case but the Supreme Court granted him bail in December that year. In the aftermath of the verdict, he was disqualified from contesting elections.

Lalu Prasad and his wife Rabri Devi had ruled Bihar for about 15 years in the past.

Gunmen kill tea vendor in Jessore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A tea vendor was killed as two gunmen opened fire at a member of a rival gang in TB clinic area of Jessore town yesterday noon, police said.

The dead is Tipu Sultan, 22, son of Mohammad Ali of the same area.

The attack was carried out when Tipu was serving tea to some customers, including a local criminal named Sohel alias Tablet Sohel, at his tea stall around 12:10pm, said locals and mother of the victim, Dalim Khatun.

The two assailants came on motorcycles and opened fire at Sohel but the bullets missed the target and hit Tipu in the chest. Both Sohel and the attackers fled.

Tipu was rushed to a local hospital but he was already dead, said Kallol Kumar Saha, who was on duty at the emergency unit at the hospital.

Salahuddin Shikdar, additional superintendent of police in Jessore, said they suspected the attackers belonged to the rival gang of Tablet Sohel.

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3 Indian soldiers killed in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar, India

Three Indian soldiers were killed in Kashmir along the unofficial border with Pakistan yesterday, Indian police said, in the latest skirmish between the bitter rivals in the disputed Himalayan territory.

The soldiers were killed in the Rajouri sector of Indian-administered Kashmir after Pakistani troops started firing across the border, said Shesh Paul Vaid, the director general of police in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.

"Initial reports say three soldiers were killed during (a) BAT operation," Vaid told AFP, referring to the "Border Action Teams" that Indian officials say are made up of Pakistani troops and militants and carry out cross-border attacks.

Vaid added that an officer was among the dead, and another soldier was injured.

There was no immediate response from Pakistani authorities to the incident.

New Delhi and Islamabad regularly accuse each other of firing across the heavily-militarised de facto border in

Kashmir, called the Line of Control.

Kashmir has been divided between the Pakistan and India since the end of British colonial rule over the subcontinent in 1947. Both sides claim the territory in full.

Firing across the Line of Control has killed and wounded dozens of soldiers and civilians on both sides in recent years.

Indian officials accuse Pakistan of conducting such operations to help anti-India militants to sneak across the border to carry out attacks on Indian forces.

Pakistan denies the allegations, saying it only provides diplomatic support to the Kashmiri people in their struggle for self-determination.

Separatist rebels in Indian-administered Kashmir have been waging an insurgency since 1989, with roughly half a million Indian soldiers deployed in the region. The rebels want either complete independence for Kashmir or its merger with Pakistan.

This year has been the bloodiest in a decade for Kashmir, after the Indian military launched a large-scale operation

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'Missing' Kalyan Party

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7, returned home early Friday. His captor released him near the Dhaka airport.

Since August 22, at least 12 people had gone missing from the capital alone. Five of them have since returned while police later said to have arrested four others, including Aminur.

Shaju claimed that Aminur during primary interrogation told detectives that he was in a dark room for all those days. Aminur, however, did not tell anything about the location of the room and whether he was abducted, the police officer said.

The ADC also said they suspected that Aminur might have gone into hiding to avoid arrest.

"We are hopeful to unearth the mystery after investigation," he added.

It was not clear why Aminur would go into hiding as he was not supposed to know that police had found his involvement in the case filed more than two years ago.

Inspector Jihad Hossain of DB police, also the investigation officer of the case, said apart from Aminur, they also arrested four to five people in the case. He, however, could not give details about the other arrestees immediately.

In the remand prayer yesterday, Jihad said they found evidence that Aminur was involved in the crude bomb attack in 2015.

"We need to interrogate Aminur to trace the other accused of the case," the IO mentioned in the remand prayer, adding that 18 people were hurt in the attack.

Contacted, Aminul's brother Mizanur Rahman told The Daily Star that they had gone to police seeking help to find the Kalyan party leader.

"Suddenly around 12.00pm yesterday, we got information that Aminul is in DB custody and they are producing him before a court after showing him arrested in a case," he said.

"I met my brother after so many days. But I could not talk to him properly. All I could do is ask him how he was and introduce him to our lawyer," he said.

Ibrahim, chairman of Kalyan Party, told The Daily Star yesterday that Aminur was abducted to "thwart the progress of the party."

Asked about the police claim that Aminur could have gone into hiding to avoid arrest, he said, "I am convinced that the story which police are trying to feed the nation regarding Aminur is purely a political drama."

Bangladesh

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than 600,000 Rohingyas fled their smouldering villages to avoid being raped and slaughtered by the Burmese army, we are tempted to name next-door Bangladesh as the country of the year for taking in so many of them."

However, the Economist did not eventually select Bangladesh, saying, "Had it not crushed civil liberties and allowed Islamists free rein to intimidate, it might have won."

The magazine picked France instead as its country of the year for Emmanuel Macron's victory in the presidential elections in 2017, defying all expectations.

"The struggle between the open and closed visions of society may well be the most important political contest in the world right now. France confronted the drawbridge-raisers head on and beat them. For that, it is our country of the year," it mentioned.

Centrist Macron's win, without the backing of a traditional party, followed by his start-up Republic on the Move (LREM) movement winning the most seats in the National Assembly, was a "stunning upset".

Macron campaigned for a France that is open to people, goods and ideas from abroad, and to social change at home, the magazine pointed out, adding in six months he and his party have passed a series of sensible reforms, including an anti-corruption bill and a loosening of France's rigid labour laws.

The "country of the year" has been awarded since 2013, going to countries that have notably changed for the better over the past 12 months or made the world brighter.

Govt seeking Japanese fund

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the first meeting of Japan-Bangladesh Joint PPP Platform at a city hotel on December 6, PPPA officials say. The PPPA works under the Prime Minister's Office.

"The Japanese government will give its feedback by March on five to seven projects that they could be interested to work on," a high official of the PPPA told The Daily Star.

The other projects include a 129km ring road around the capital, improvement of the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar highway, construction of Terminal-1 at Payra Port, development of Integrated Township Project at Mirpur, construction of Circular Railway Line around Dhaka city, renovation of Kamalapur Railway Station etc.

During a meeting with State Minister for Power Nasrul Hamid in the city on December 17, Hiroyasu Izumi, ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh, said Japanese companies were interested in investing under the new PPP initiative.

"Real implementation [of PPP projects with Japan] will be visible from next year," he said.

PPPA officials told The Daily Star that Japanese companies were expected to start a feasibility study from next March and come up with exact project cost and revenue generation later.

"We will hold a win-win negotiation with Japan so that Bangladesh is not burdened with expenses while Japanese companies can earn profit," said a high official of the PPPA.

The Joint PPP platform was formed following the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two countries in Japan in June.

Yasuki Kaibori, deputy minister for Japan's land, infrastructure, transport and tourism ministry, and four of his ministry officials attended the December 6 meeting in Dhaka. The Bangladesh side was represented by officials from the PPPA, PMO, and ministries concerned.

THE PROJECTS

Apart from establishing Dhaka's direct communication with the western and south western parts of Bangladesh, the second Padma bridge would also connect the capital with the land ports in Benapole and Darshona, according to the concept paper of the project.

The estimated cost of the project is \$3 billion. It includes land acquisition and resettlement costs.

Earlier, the finance ministry sought fund from several other development partners to build the bridge. But it did not get any response.

"Dhaka Mass Rapid Transit Development Project-2" (MRT Line-2) is dubbed the second metro rail project. The proposed route of MRT Line-2 is Ashulia-Savar-Gabtolli-Azimpur-Buet-Kamalapur. It would cover around 40kms.

"The MRT Line-2 has been conceptualised to meet the huge demand of over 1.1 million passengers every day on the proposed route," says the concept paper of the project.

A land redevelopment project in Old Dhaka was also discussed at the December 6 meeting. The project site is in Bangshal, Babu Bazar, English Road and Hazaribagh areas.

The objective of the project is economic revitalisation of the areas through proper urbanisation and creation of low congestion and pollution free locality.

Under the project, locals would be moved from risky and dilapidated buildings to the environment-friendly and modern high-rises.

More flats would be constructed and the existing roads would be widened as well, said the concept paper.

With an approximate length of 129km, the ring road around the capital would facilitate people to travel from one part of the city to another without having to face much congestion, said the concept paper.

The ring road would have six transportation hubs, including bus terminals, bus depots, passenger transfer and

freight transfer points, and other access facilities. The cost of the project has been estimated at \$2.87 billion.

Improvement of Chittagong-Cox's Bazar Highway is another major project placed before the Japanese delegation.

With an estimated cost of \$1.46 billion, including the cost for land acquisition, resettlement and utility lines shifting, the existing two lane 136km highway would be turned into a dual carriageway with two service lanes on both sides.

Technical feasibility and detailed design for the expansion of the road was done in 2014-15 and some design adjustments would be necessary to improve the road as an access controlled highway.

The other projects include construction of a new Inland Container Depot near Dhirasram Railway Station in Gazipur; development of the economic zone in Araihaazar of Narayanganj; construction of Multimodal Hub at Kamalapur Railway Station, construction of Multimodal Hub at Dhaka Biman Bandar Railway Station, construction of a bridge over Golachipa river in Pataukhali; construction of a bridge over Arial Khan river; and establishment of a medical college and modernisation of Railway Hospital in Saidpur of Nilphamari and Paksey of Pabna.

This move is seen as Japan's interest in investing in Bangladesh's infrastructure projects under the new arrangement where Japanese companies would work under the government-to-government system, said PPPA officials.

Japan has been providing Bangladesh with nearly \$2 billion as soft loans every year since fiscal 2012-13.

Fresh probe

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Additional Superintendent of Police Towhidul Arif.

The IO visited the spot of occurrence and talked with witnesses, he added.

Raudha Athif, 20, was featured as a Maldivian model in a Vogue magazine cover in 2016 and was a 2nd year student at Islami Bank Medical College in Rajshahi.

She was found dead at her college dormitory room on March 29.

Since then, Sub-Inspector Ataur Rahman of Shah Makhdum police and Inspector Rashidul Hasan of Detective Branch investigated her death and gave final reports confirming it as suicide.

On April 10 when Raudha's father Mohammad Athif filed a murder case, Inspector Anwar Ali of Shah Makhdum police investigated the case and also gave a final report.

All three reports confirmed Raudha's suicide but did not mention any reason behind it.

Raudha's father Mohamed Athif, also a doctor, rejected the police findings. He argued he saw finger marks on her neck claiming somebody had strangled her to death.

The Criminal Investigation Department exhumed Raudha's body for a second autopsy.

On October 17, CID Inspector Asmaul Haque submitted the final report terming the murder case a "mistake of facts" and confirming her suicide.

The CID final report said Raudha took her life by hanging herself as she could not endure breakup with her Maldivian boyfriend who was studying in London.

Apart from local police, a Maldivian police team visiting Rajshahi for five days until April 7 also ruled out possibility of murder.

On November 28, when Raudha's father submitted his no confidence into the CID's final report, the court of a metropolitan magistrate asked the PBI to investigate the matter.

"We will look into the death from the beginning," said PBI Additional SP Towhidul Arif. He added they would find out if it was a case of murder as claimed by her father.