

INT'L ROBOTICS CHALLENGE

Bangladeshi students win 6 medals in S Korea

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three Bangladeshi students won six medals, including a gold and a bronze, in the Robo Scholar Challenge Category of the International Robot D Challenge in South Korea.

The three-member Bangladesh team winning the medals at the two-day event is a prestigious achievement for the country, said Dr Lafifa Jamal, president of Bangladesh Robot Olympiad.

Rafihath Saleh Chowdhury, student of Jalalabad Cantonment English School and College in Sylhet, won the gold medal on Saturday, while the other two -- Quazi Mostahid Labib and Tafsir Tahirim, students of Chittagong Grammar School (Dhaka) -- won technical awards in the same category.

About 500 students from across the globe participated in the competition. Yesterday, the second and final day of the event, Labib won a bronze medal, while his two teammates won two technical awards.

The Technical Award is for the fourth position after gold, silver and bronze, which is also important in such an event, said Lafifa, also the chairperson of the Department of Robotics and Mechatronics Engineering at Dhaka University.

She said Bangladesh achieved



The three Bangladeshi students who won six medals at the Robot D Challenge. PHOTO: COLLECTED

tremendous results in the Robot D Challenge as this was the first time the country participated in the competition.

"Our young stars are very creative and that's why they did a fantastic job over there," said Lafifa.

Labib and Tahirim were the first Bangladeshis to win gold medals at the International Robot Olympiad last year. This is the second such international success for the country, Lafifa added.

She further said that Bangladesh will partake in the 21st international Robot Olympiad to be held in Thailand from December 16 to 20 this year. The achievements from the Robot D Challenge will give a moral boost to the Bangladesh team.



A man sets up shop right beneath a sign which prohibits such illegal structures in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday. Vendors returned to their makeshift shops mere hours after a drive against illegal structures by the Dhaka North City Corporation in the area on Tuesday, bringing into question the effectiveness of such actions. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

DU fires 2 teachers for not returning from study leaves

DU CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Dhaka University last night fired two assistant professors for not joining work at the end of their study leaves.

The decision was made at a meeting of the DU syndicate, the highest governing body of the university, with DU Vice-Chancellor Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman in the chair.

Assistant Professors Nafiz Zaman of information science and library management department and Md Ahsanul Akbar of clinical pharmacy and pharmacology department went

on study leave but did not return to their posts within their deadlines, Associate Professor Humayun Kabir, a syndicate member told The Daily Star.

They were also asked to return the financial benefits they had received from the university during the period, he said.

An office staffer of social welfare and research institute was also sent on forced leave following allegation of theft.

A three-member probe body, led by Treasurer Prof Kamal Uddin, was formed in this regard.

Man was abroad

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treatment abroad during that time. How could I gather in Pallabi and carry out subversive activities?" Fakku, president of the Urdu-Speaking People Youth Rehabilitation Movement Bangladesh, asked while talking to The Daily Star.

He alleged that police framed him in the cases in an attempt to gag him as he raised voice against a local influential quarter who had been trying to evict their community from Mirpur.

Fakku came to know about the cases and charge-sheet submission recently when a policeman told him that he was wanted in both the cases filed under the Explosive Substances Act and the Special Powers Act.

He has already secured bail from a court to avoid arrest.

Earlier, dozens of cases were filed in the months before the December 30 election where dead men, bed-ridden patients, and expatriates were accused of different crimes.

Several media outlets reported on the "ghost cases" that sparked outrage. Fakku blamed Pallabi Police Station Officer-in-Charge Nazrul Islam for inserting his name in the charge sheets.

"Though I am not involved in the BNP, I along with 50 other Bihari people, was implicated in another

political case filed on December 23, just days before the last general election," he said.

Fakku said he visited Pallabi Police Station at least five to seven times this year but no police official informed him about the cases and allegations against him.

He also said he had participated in a programme on law and order situation held at the police station days before the Holey Ashura observed on September 10 this year.

Referring anonymity, a mid-ranked official at Dhaka Metropolitan Police said, "Names can be added mistakenly in a case, but those are usually dropped before submission of the charge sheet."

"An officer can include new names in the charge sheet, but he needs to have evidence," he said.

Hearing Fakku's incident, the official said his name might have been included with ill intention.

Contacted, OC Nazrul denied the allegation brought against him.

The charge sheet was prepared based on information found during the investigation," the OC said.

The correspondent called Arif Hossain, investigation officer of the cases, yesterday afternoon.

A man received the call and said Arif was currently visiting India for treatment.



Sadaqat

Drive against

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adding that the government has taken the measures to remove this disparity from the society.

Hasina said the government has rolled out a huge fiscal budget and taken up massive development programmes. But, she noted, that if every taka of these development projects was spent properly, then Bangladesh could have developed a lot more.

"Now, we have to find out where the loopholes and lapses are...."

The PM said she had directed the authorities concerned to find out those involved in corruption.

"By this, we'll be able to stamp out corruption and dishonesty and save the society and future generations."

Hasina added that the drive against drugs would continue.

She said the power of the people is the main power and her party believes in that. She mentioned the AL has a specific economic policy, and Bangladesh witnessed stunning development whenever it came to power.

As the people got their desired development under the AL government in the past, they kept their trust and confidence in the party, she said.

The PM described steps of her government for improving people's living standards.

Coming down heavily on a section of intellectuals, she said they never find anything good in the work of her government.

In her speech, Hasina urged the expatriate Bangladeshis to invest in Bangladesh for further development of the country. "We're setting up 100 economic zones, if you want you can invest there also."

The PM highlighted the long political struggles and sacrifice of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Earlier, a minute's silence was observed in memory of the martyrs of the Language Movement, Liberation War, the Father of the Nation and others who died in the August 15 massacre.

Corruption marred flood relief delivery

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Around 98,688 families were directly affected by the floods, while 13.60 lakh families were affected partially by the floods.

Moreover, 34,999 houses were completely damaged and 5.47 lakh houses were damaged partially.

The main objective of the survey was to identify the institutional limitations in the government's planning of relief distribution, rehabilitation programmes, emergency response and overall preparedness for such a disaster, said TIB.

In the study, the anti-graft body said the lack of allocation for meeting miscellaneous expenses led to corruption.

For example, the study said the transportation cost for relief material was met through corruption as there was no allocation for it.

Besides, TIB also said the expenses of ministers' visits to the flood-affected areas was met from the relief fund.

Enamur Rahman, the state minister for the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, however, told this newspaper that TIB's allegations were baseless.

"I went to visit the flood-affected areas using my own vehicle. In case of waterways, the respective deputy commissioners arranged speedboats. In case of food, the respective MPs, DCs or union parishad chairman arranged meals for us," he said.

About taking political affiliation into consideration when distributing relief, the state minister said there was no question of it happening.

COST ESCALATION		
Project approved in principal	December 26, 2005	Tk 1,699 crore
Main DPP	January 30, 2008	Tk 2,168.38 crore
First revision of DPP	January 10, 2010	Tk 2,382.17 crore
Special Revision	December 18, 2012	Tk 2,410.17 crore
Second revision	March 3, 2013	Tk 3,190.29 crore
Third revision	March 9, 2016	Tk 3,816.94 crore
Final expenditure	Tk 3,439 crore	SOURCE: IMED

The TIB study also said lists of those affected in different unions were prepared by dropping names of victims in order to include relatives of union parishad chairmen.

Besides, relief items were distributed among close relatives of UP chairmen and members, with political identity being a factor, thus leaving out a number of affected people.

The local representatives also influenced relief distribution violating the local administration's direction, said the study.

The TIB found that in 73 percent of the cases, three to eight kilograms of rice was distributed per person instead

TIB FINDINGS	
Each family got Tk 4 to Tk 76 in seven days	
Tk 20 to Tk 772 was given for rebuilding a house	
Neptism, political influence corrupted the list of flood victims	
Public representative's failed to play their role	

of 10kg. Twenty-three percent of the respondents said their names were not included in the victim's list because of "political" reasons.

Thirty-two percent said nepotism was rampant in preparing lists of flood victims, as well as in terms of relief distribution.

Besides, a certain family was favoured when distributing relief items, depriving real flood victims.

Pointing to inadequate allocation for flood victims, TIB said each family got on only Tk 4 to Tk 76 in the seven-to-eight-day long flood, which was insufficient.

During the floods, a flood-affected family was provided with a minimum of 2kg to a maximum of 68kg, which the TIB said was inadequate.

It also said Tk 20 to Tk 772 was given to flood victims for reconstruction of each completely damaged house.

The study said authorities of the respective unions didn't visit the affected areas while preparing the list of statistics of damages due to flood.

In its report, TIB said the respective local administrations didn't give due importance to the risk of flood and didn't take the necessary preparedness programme.

It also said 91 percent of the respondents said they didn't get any flood warning, although the disaster management department claimed that they announced the warning at least 24 hours ahead of the flood.

Ninety-four percent of the respondents said the local administrations didn't take measures to relocate them to shelter houses.

The respondents identified various problems in the shelter houses, including inadequate facilities for overnight stays, no rooms separated by gender and lack of drinking water.

Despite the negative aspects, TIB said there were positives to how the government tackled the flood situation. These included uploading flood related information on the relevant website on a regular basis, and allocating and distributing rice, dry food, tents, and food for livestock at a limited scale.

While addressing the programme, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said, "People expect a lot from public representatives during a natural disaster such as a flood. But they [public representatives] have failed to meet the people's expectations."

TIB also made several recommendations for better management of flood preparedness, which includes building necessary flood shelter centres considering local geographical features and population.

Example of wasting

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unexpected," Prof Shamsul Haque, former director of Accident Research Institute at Buet, told The Daily Star on September 8.

Reports of Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the planning ministry and a special committee of Road Transport and Highways Division (RTHD) also shed lights on the poorly-planned construction work.

Besides, the highway has no separate lane for slow-moving vehicles, and the absence of underpass or foot bridge on important points increase the risk of road crashes, according to an IMED report.

EARLY DAMAGE

To speed up traffic flow between the capital and the port city, RHD went for the project covering the stretch from Cumilla's Daudkandi to Chattogram City Gate, costing Tk 2,168 crore. The project was supposed to be implemented between 2006 and 2012.

But the physical work of the project started in 2010 with the project amended thrice raising the cost to Tk 3,439 crore -- which means 58 percent cost escalation.

To deal with the pressure of vehicles and minimise people's sufferings, the highway was opened in some sections since 2013 before its formal completion in June 2017.

In October last year, the RHD proposed another Tk 900-crore project for maintenance as 10-12mm deep ruts had developed on the fast lanes of the highway. Small cracks and potholes have also appeared at several points, said a report of IMED last year.

Following the planning ministry's recommendation, RTHD in January this year formed a committee to visit the highway and give suggestions.

The government allocated Tk 793 crore for repair and maintenance against the proposal for Tk 900 crore based on the recommendation of this committee.

NO FEASIBILITY STUDY

In its final report on effect evaluation released in June this year, IMED said

no feasibility study was conducted before taking up the project and there was weakness in the process of DPP formulation resulting in several amendments and cost escalation.

The report said the project failed to make proper traffic forecast.

In 2006, the highway was designed forecasting six percent traffic growth. But it is more than 10 percent traffic growth this year.

The report also said the surface of the highway was constructed taking 10.2 tonnes as the maximum load for two-axle vehicles (six wheelers), which is much lower than the government-set limit of 15 tonnes.

The previous IMED report, which was released last year, said about 32,000 vehicles used the highway every day. During the launch of the project in 2006, the authorities estimated 16,485 vehicles would use it daily.

OVERLOADING 'LEGITIMISED'
An RHD official working in its road design circle, said poor forecast about traffic may be a factor behind the early damage but the main reason was continuous overloading.

"Overloading was major problem for the highway but the government decision to increase the maximum weight limit of goods-laden vehicles worsened the situation as it gave overloading a sort of legitimacy," he said, wishing anonymity.

At present, two-axle vehicles (six wheels) can carry maximum 22 tonnes, three-axle vehicles (10 wheels) maximum 30 tonnes and four-axle (14 wheels) maximum 44 tonnes all over the country.

However, as per the global standards, the limits are 15.5, 22 and 32 tonnes respectively.

The authorities for the first-time had imposed fines for overloading in August 2016. But on the very first day, transport owners and workers damaged the weighbridges in Manikganj and Chattogram.

The government was then forced to increase the maximum weight limit of goods-laden vehicles from November

2017. Two of the three existing weighbridges are situated at two points of Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

IMED, in its latest report, also mentioned that the existing load limit is not consistent with the international standard. Besides, in many cases, heavily loaded vehicles are being operated giving fine, it said.

Talking to The Daily Star on September 2, Nazrul Islam, secretary of the division, said the maximum weigh limit was increased in a "special situation". Vehicles carrying even 40 tonnes of goods had operated on roads, but now the highest limit is 22 tonnes.

"But it is not for an infinitive period. We will maintain the international standards once the new weighbridges are established. We will also bring down the maximum limits to 16 tonnes for the existing ones."

The RTHD-formed committee, led by Zakir Hossain, joint chief of the division, also recommended controlling overloading following global standard.

A member of the committee also said the wearing course (60mm top layer) of the highway was mainly damaged because the bitumen, which was used for highway, cannot bear such load capacity.

He added that 60-70-grade bitumen was used for the highway. "Modified bitumen is used worldwide if the highway has to bear more than 50 million axle loads."

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Haque, however, said like overloading, failure to ensure quality construction is also a problem for the highway.

The highway was not damaged equally everywhere, means the sections that lack quality works were damaged. So overloading and poor traffic forecasting should not be blamed squarely, he said.

"The government can stop overloading if it wants but there are faults in the construction. So, there is doubt whether maintenance will be affective," said Prof Shamsul.

WHAT RHD SAYS?

Talking to this correspondent on September 15, RHD's Chief Engineer Ebne Alam Hasan said overloading is one of the main reasons behind the early damage of the highway.

The highway was designed with 98 million standard axle load capacity for 10 years, but the limit crossed within three years, he said. "The traffic growth is higher than we have assumed."

Asked about the issue of feasibility, Ebne Alam, also the project director between February 2012 and December 2015, said, "It is a fact that no feasibility study was done [before the project]. But I don't know why."

The chief engineer, however, refuted allegations of substandard work on some parts of the highway.

Heartburn drug

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It is popular for reducing the production of stomach acid in patients with conditions such as heartburn and stomach ulcers.

Experts say patients can consult a doctor who would prescribe alternatives to ranitidine.

The drug administration in a press release said ranitidine products should be recalled and quarantined immediately.

On 13 September, both the US Food and Drug Administration and the European Medicines Agency published their decisions to review the presence of N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA) in medicines containing the drug ranitidine, BBC reports.

NDMA is classified as a probable human carcinogen (a substance that could cause cancer) on the basis of animal studies.

Indian companies Saraka Laboratories Ltd and M/S Dr Reddy supply the raw materials for ranitidine, according to the DGDA release.

On September 19, the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines (EDQM) suspended the certificate of suitability for Saraka Laboratories Ltd.