

New bridge over Teesta off limits to public transport

Stakeholders demand removal of barrier on Kakina-Rangpur Road in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Sheikh Hasina Teesta Bridge in Lalmonirhat's Kaliganj upazila has remained off limits to public transport and heavy vehicles like buses and trucks since its construction over a year ago, much to the dissatisfaction of the locals. After inauguration of the bridge in September last year, the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) set up a barrier on Kakina-Rangpur Road at the entrance of the bridge, preventing public transports from moving on the route. Despite locals' demand to allow buses and goods carrying trucks for ensuring easy communication between Lalmonirhat and Rangpur city and transport of agricultural products, LGED authorities are yet to withdraw the barrier.

Now only light vehicles are allowed on the route. "We don't know why LGED still keeps the barrier. We have to count additional cost to go to Rangpur city by rickshaw or battery-run three-wheeler," said Nurul Islam, 55, of Kakina village Kaliganj upazila. "The barrier on the road is barrier to

our development as we can't transport agricultural products by trucks on the route," said Nazrul Islam, 60, a farmer at the same village. The 850-metre-long and 9.6-metre-wide bridge over the Teesta river was constructed at a cost of Tk 121.65 crore while Tk 23 crore was spent for the 13-km-long road including 5-km on Lalmonirhat side and 8-km on Rangpur side and six culverts and small bridges to make the newly constructed bridge usable for vehicles plying the road, LGED officials said. Several lakh people of Lalmonirhat's Aditmari, Kaliganj, Hatibandha and Patgram upazilas use the route to go to Rangpur city and other parts of the country as the newly constructed bridge reduces the distance between Lalmonirhat and Rangpur by 50 km. Contacted, LGED's Executive Engineer in Lalmonirhat Ashraf Ali Khan said, "The barrier was set up on the road following the direction of our higher authorities. I sent letter seeking permission to withdraw the barrier a month ago but to no response yet." There is public demand for removal of the barrier, he added.



This barrier, set up by LGED on Kakina-Rangpur Road at the entrance of Sheikh Hasina Teesta Bridge after its inauguration in September last year, is still there, preventing plying of buses and trucks. PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

People suffer for want of a bridge



Local people suffer for long for want of a bridge on the Bangshi river in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila. Finding no other alternative, the villagers cross the river by country boats amid risk. PHOTO: STAR

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

People of at least 15 villages in Mirzapur and adjacent Sakhipur upazila have been suffering for long for want of a bridge on the Bangshi river in Kodalia area. Finding no other alternative, they have to cross the river by country boats amid risk. Especially schoolchildren and patients are the worst sufferers due to the communication problem, said The villages include Kodalia, Solimnagar, Bhorpara, Bandachala, Latifpur, Takia Kodma, Tarafpur and Chhit Mahmudpur. At night, the villagers also face immense problem to cross the river due to shortage of boats, said Abdus Samad, a resident of Kodalia village. Local farmers have to face immense problem to reach the markets of Sadar upazila headquarters with their agricultural products. As there is no bridge at Kodalia, they

have to cross a bridge in Chandpur and another bridge in Mirzapur, six to seven kilometers away from Kodalia area. They have to spend extra money for this. Abdul Mannan of the same village urged the authorities concerned to build a bridge on the river immediately considering the owes of the local people. Boatman Jatin Chandra said each passenger pays Tk 2 as fare while Tk 10 is given for a motorcycle. Shahin Miah, driver of a hired motorcycle, said people's sufferings will end if a bridge is constructed there. Contacted, Mohammad Shamsuddin, a sub-assistant engineer of Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) in Mirzapur upazila, said they have already sent a proposal to the higher authorities for construction of a 300-meter-long bridge on the river at Kodalia. Tender to construct the bridge will be floated after the approval of the proposal, he added.

PADDY PROCUREMENT BY GOVT IN PATUAKHALI

Stringent policy deters enlisted Aman growers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The rice procurement centres of the government are failing to attract their enlisted Aman growers in Patuakhali despite setting a higher price per maund, Tk 1,040, than local markets. An enlisted grower would be allowed to sell between 120 kilograms and three tonnes of paddy at the centres. Over the past 24 days, the centres in the district were able to procure only 50 tonnes of Aman paddy against their targeted procurement of 15,075 tonnes. The government procurement centres started buying paddy on December 4. But "as of December 28, we procured only 50 tonnes due to the reluctance of the growers," said BM Shafiqul Islam, acting food controller in Patuakhali. "Although the information on the launching of the paddy procurement was announced over loud speakers in all upazilas, response that we received from the [enlisted] Aman growers was not according to our expectations." According to a list prepared by the Directorate of Food under the food ministry, 21,930 Aman growers in Patuakhali would be able to sell their produce to the procurement centres set up by the government, he added. Rafiqul Islam, training officer at Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), said after spending Tk 20 for producing a maund of Aman, an enlisted grower can sell the same amount of paddy to government procurement centres for Tk 1,040. The growers would make a higher profit if they sold their paddy at the procurement centres, said DAE Deputy Director Redoyewshor Datta. He also said Patuakhali's primary



Stacks of Aman paddy keep piling up at farmers' yards in Patuakhali, but the government paddy procurement centres in the district fail to attract enlisted Aman growers. The photo of threshing paddy was taken in Basak Bazar area of Patuakhali Sadar upazila on Saturday. PHOTO: STAR

crop is Aman and it is the second highest Aman producing district in the country. A bumper yield of 7.1 lakh tonnes is expected from 2.02 lakh hectares of land in the district this year. However, many enlisted growers pointed out that at least a couple of setbacks is holding them back from selling their crop to the government procurement facilities. They said they prefer upfront cash payment for the goods they sell, rather than receiving the payment later in an account with a particular bank prescribed by the

government. Some of them said they already opened a bank account and taking lessons from that experience, they do not want to go through the same cumbersome hassles over again to open another account with a new bank. Another drawback for the growers is the requirement of selling only dried paddy at the government facilities as the process of drying is not only time-consuming, but also costlier for the growers, said the Aman growers. Enlisted Aman grower Abdul Jalil

Hawlader, from Puran Mohipur village in Kalapara upazila, said he harvested 100 maunds of Aman this year. Even though the rate he got was Tk 550 per maund, it was more convenient for him to sell 40 maunds of wet Aman paddy, just after threshing, at local market for Tk 22,000. He said it would neither be profitable nor worth the effort for him to go through the hassles of drying the paddy and opening a new bank account, just to sell it to the government procurement centre.



The chilling cold during the last few days has drastically reduced the number of tourists in Patuakhali's Kuakata sea beach. The photo was taken yesterday. PHOTO: STAR



Students of Carmichael College in Rangpur bring out a colourful procession on the campus yesterday marking the centenary of the institution. PHOTO: COLLECTED