



Left, a severely damaged section of the Meghakhali Bailey bridge on Kalihati-Borochowna road in Kalihati upazila. Right, a vehicle passing a subsided section of Haripur bridge on the same road.

PHOTO: STAR

Three crumbling bridges posing threat to community

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

The three out of the five Bailey bridges, constructed in the 90s, on Kalihati-Borochowna road in Kalihati upazila are now in a ramshackle state.

Around 3,000 vehicles of all sorts, from motorbikes to heavy trucks, cross the bridges every day. Moreover, several thousand students from at least 12 educational institutions, including Kalihati RS Pilot High School and Shahjahan Siraj College, use these bridges several times a day.

A fatal accident is waiting to happen any moment and the authorities need to take swift measures to repair the bridges urgently, said concerned citizens in the area.

One of three dilapidated bridges is in Meghakhali area, built on the Jhinai river in Sadar upazila. The other two – in Haripur and Rajafoir -- are also on the same river.

The steel span of the Meghakhali bridge is damaged in at least three places, while that in the Haripur bridge caved in at several spots. Almost half of the joints holding the metal sheets on the Rajafoir bridge are falling apart.

Tailbacks near the bridges have become a common occurrence during most parts of the day as vehicles have to move at an exceedingly slow pace while crossing those.

During a recent visit, this correspondent saw long queues of vehicles, including cargo vehicles loaded with essentials and agricultural goods, on the three risky bridges. A large number of pedestrians were also seen crossing the bridges.

Mohammad Rezwan, a resident of Pachh Joair village and a seventh grader at Kalihati RS Pilot High School, said students of his school have to use the bridges when the school is open.

It is a frightening ordeal to cross the risky bridges and the students often get late for their class due to traffic congestion on both sides of the bridges, he also said.

Battery operated auto-rickshaw driver Abdul Halim said the condition of the Haripur bridge is the worst.

On many occasions, passengers of his vehicle have to get off and push the vehicle when it gets stuck in the subsided sections on the bridge, he added.

The bridges were repaired a few times before, but their condition deteriorated again. Now minor accidents are happening on the bridges every now and then, but a fatal one might happen any moment, said Mohammad Helal, a resident of Rajafoir village.

Truck driver Nazrul Islam frequents the bridges to deliver different goods in the region. He said people have to risk their lives as well as

property while crossing these bridges.

The bridge at Haripur ran down a while ago and the other two, at Meghakhali and Rajafoir, became rickety not too long ago, he added.

Rice mill owner Abdul Jabbar said mill owners and rice traders in the area have been facing difficulty in hiring transportation for their goods at reasonable rates as most truck operators are reluctant to risk their vehicles due to the deplorable condition of the three bridges on the route.

All the three bridges now need to be replaced with modern and wide concrete bridges in the greater interest of people's safety and development of the region, he also said.

Contacted, Zahir Mehedi Hasan, engineer of Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED) in Kalihati, said they have been unable to repair the three bridges due to unavailability of spare parts and supplies required for a Bailey bridge.

Despite the fact, the LGED will seek support from Roads and Highways Department for the repair work as soon as possible.

In the meantime, the LGED has sent a proposal to the authorities concerned for the conversion of 19 Bailey bridges, including the three on Kalihati-Borochowna road, in Kalihati upazila into concrete bridges, he added.

Illegal structures on govt canal

Drainage problem feared at Kartimari Haat in Kurigram's Roumari

S DILIP ROY, Back From Roumari

A local Awami League (AL) leader is building illegal structures, filling up about 20 decimals of land of a government canal at Kartimari Haat, a village market in Jadur Char union under Kurigram's Roumari upazila.

The villagers and traders said they dared not protest the act of the alleged perpetrator, Suruzzamal Sarker, upazila unit AL's religious affair secretary, while the local administration is not taking any effective action even after being informed of the matter.

The government canal is the only way for drainage of water at Kartimari Haat, locals said, adding that if the illegal structures are constructed and the canal is filled up, the drainage system will be disrupted and there will be water stagnation in the market area, especially during the monsoon.

Suruzzamal had been cultivating fish in the canal for a long time without any valid papers and lately he started filling the canal with earth and building illegal structures there, showing political power, they said.

Contacted, Suruzzamal Sarker said, "I am the owner of the canal and I have all the valid papers. I am filling my canal with earth for building some shops but some people are hatching conspiracy against me."

Mosharaf Hossain, a trader at Kartimari

Haat and also president of Jadur Char union unit of Jubo League, said he and 53 other local traders have set up shops along the canal after taking permission from the authorities concerned.

The canal is a public property and it serves as the only way for drainage of water from the market area, he said.

Sohrawardy Hossain, an advisor to upazila unit AL and a resident of Kartimari area, said, "We do not have the courage to speak out against Suruzzamal Sarker. The government authorities should take action to save the canal for ensuring proper drainage of water during monsoon."

Golam Mortuza, assistant land officer of Jadur Char union land office, said Kartimari Haat and the canal connected with it are owned by the government.

"The canal was not leased to any person. If anyone builds structure by filling up the canal, it is illegal. I will inform the authorities about the matter after investigation," he said.

Rowmari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Al-Imran told The Daily Star, "I have heard the matter. I will take necessary action after visiting the spot. No one will be allowed to fill up the government canal and build illegal structures there."

Locals demanded that the government authorities take necessary steps to save the canal, the only way to drain the water in Kartimari Haat from the illegal occupation.



PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

Illegal structures being made, virtually killing this canal on a government at Kartimari Haat, a village market in Jadur Char union under Kurigram's Roumari upazila.



PHOTO: SOHRAH HOSSAIN

Land grabbers have made this ridge on the western bank of the Sheakathi river in Jainkathi union of Patuakhali Sadar upazila to get the area filled with sand, which is dumped there through a pipe after digging out from the river by a BIWTA dredger.

Land grabbers feast on riverbank as admin busy to tackle Covid-19

SOHRAH HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

While the administration is struggling to check the spread of Covid-19, some unscrupulous people did not miss the 'opportunity' to occupy land on the western bank of the Sheakathi river on Patuakhali-Galachipa route in Phedainagar area of Jainkathi union of Patuakhali Sadar upazila.

During visit to the spot a few days ago, this correspondent found that five locals are getting a portion of the riverbank area sand-filled after making an earthen ridge with an excavator.

They have continued filling the area with the sand extracted by a dredger of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) for around a month, said residents of the area.

BIWTA has arranged dredging of the Sheakathi river in the area as part of an initiative to maintain navigability of Galachipa-Dhaka river route via Patuakhali.

But the riverbank area is getting filled up as the extracted sand is dumped through a pipe just at the spot where the five alleged grabbers made a ridge.

Md Bulbul Ahmed, operator of the BIWTA dredger, said, "Dredging is going on as per the government directive, and we are dumping sand on the riverbank as there is no other suitable place for it."

One of the occupants, Alamgir Mridha said they want to build houses after filling the riverbank land which is in front of their ancestral land.

Another occupier, Monir Mridha said they are filling up their own land.

Asked how the riverbank can be their land, he said, "We regularly pay revenue to the government. Therefore, we are the real owners of the land in front of our property."

Meanwhile, another earthen barrier has been made with a soil-cutting device to separate around five acres of land beside the bank outside the embankment.

This correspondent saw that polyethylene sheets were set to keep the dumped sand inside the ridge area to fill it up.

"Some locals have occupied hundreds of acres of land along the river at Sheakathi and Bholkhali villages. Existence of the river will be under threat if the unscrupulous act continues," said Abul Hossain, a resident of the area.

The administration should take action to keep the river flowing, he said.

Jainkathi union parishad Chairman Md Firoz Alam said the matter will be brought to the notice of the upazila administration for taking action.

Contacted, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) Md Mamun Ur Rashid

said, "Now we are too busy with works to check the spread of coronavirus and the issue of river land occupation did not come to our notice."

"The government is committed to protecting the normal flow of the river. We will take action against occupiers after investigation," he added.

Poverty forces them to net fish amid Covid-19 shutdown

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Poverty has forced hundreds of fishermen to catch fish in the Brishakhali and Sugandha rivers of Jhalakathi amid the ongoing countrywide shutdown to combat Covid-19.

Many fishermen said they are yet to receive any relief from the government.

During a visit, this correspondent found a huge number of fishermen netting fish in the rivers on small and large boats.

The fishermen said they are bound to catch fish in this time of coronavirus, a deadly new contagious disease, amid vigilance by Bangladesh Coast Guard as they have no food in their house.

They are struggling to feed their families in this time of crisis as there is not enough food in their house, said Abu Hanif, a fisherman of Nalbungia village in Nalchity upazila, adding that finding no other alternative, they were catching fish putting their lives at risk in this time of coronavirus outbreak.



PHOTO: STAR

Poverty forces hundreds of fishermen to catch fish in Jhalakathi amid the ongoing countrywide shutdown to combat Covid-19. A boy helps his father to net fish in the Bishkhali river.

"If we don't go for fishing, we have to stay in house without food," he said.

Hanif further said the price of fish has fallen drastically in the local bazars as customers and traders in the district cannot go outside home due to the Covid-19 shutdown. So, their income has gone down.

"I used to earn Tk 700 to Tk 1200 a day on average selling fish before the crisis time, but now I earn Tk 200 to Tk 300 only," said Shahidul Islam, another fisherman

of Badurtola Bazar in Rajapur upazila.

"It is very difficult to maintain my seven-member family with the small income," he added.

"Every day I have to incur loss as the number of customer has dropped drastically due to coronavirus fears," said Hasib, a fish wholesaler of Badurtola Bazar.

As the transport services have been suspended during the shutdown, he cannot send the fish to different district towns, said Hasib, adding that, he even cannot

store it due to lack of ice.

Nurul Alam, a member of Ranapasha Union Parishad in Nalchity, said hundred fishermen live in his ward but the authorities are yet to send any aid for them.

There are 5265 registered and 5000 unregistered fishermen in Jhalakathi, according to the fisheries department in the district.

Babul Krishna Ojha, deputy director of fisheries department in the district, said the fishermen are not given any food in this time of crisis, but 1500 families of fishermen are given 40 kg of rice a month each during the ongoing ban on jatka netting.

Hilsa catching is suspended from November to June to facilitate breeding of the popular fish.

Md Johor Ali, deputy commissioner (DC) of Jhalakathi, said the most affected people in the district have been given relief during the ongoing countrywide shutdown, but he is not aware that the poor fishermen are yet to get any aid.

They will take immediate steps to provide food to the fishermen, said the DC.



Underprivileged Mahali community of Mahalipara in Dinajpur's Phulbari upazila are facing a tough time as they are yet to get any relief during the countrywide shutdown amid the ongoing spread of highly contagious disease Covid-19. The photo taken a couple of days ago shows two members of the small ethnic group preparing bamboo-made items although there is not much hope of selling of their product during the stagnation in social and economic activities.

PHOTO: STAR