

Incomplete water supply facility now a 'tourist spot'



Without any boundary fence around, the large open pits of the incomplete water supply facility, for Neelachal tourist spot in Bandarban, can turn fatal for any of the curious passersby any moment. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

SANJOY KUMAR BARUA, Bandarban

The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) spent around Tk 2.25 crore to construct a facility for supplying fresh water to Neelachal, a tourist hotspot in Bandarban, and areas surrounding it.

But ironically, the structure itself -- left unprotected and incomplete over the last several years -- has become an attraction for tourists.

While visiting the site, a good number of younger visitors were seen loitering around the facility and taking photos of themselves beside large open pits.

According to a plaque placed at the site, the foundation stone of the water supply project for Neelachal tourist spot, under the district administration, was laid by the then state minister for Chattogram hill tracts affairs ministry on October 31, 2014.

Asked why necessary measures were not taken to safeguard the establishment as well as to ensure the safety of the public, a DPHE staffer, Korshed Alam, said, "We had put up barbed wire fence for the safety

of tourists, but the barbed wire got damaged within a few days."

As to why the facility is left in an abandoned state, a few DPHE officials seeking anonymity said the officials who were involved in the project misused the funding. But in papers, they showed that all the money was used up before its construction was complete.

Manjil Hossain, an engineer who worked under the project, denied the accusation and said, "The entire fund of Tk 2.25 crore was spent only to implement the project."

Bandarban DPHE Executive Engineer Sarmishtha Acharyee said an additional Tk 1.47 crore would be needed to finish the project and they had sought the funding by writing several times to the higher authorities concerned.

Contacted, DPHE Chief Engineer Saifur Rahman said in response to DPHE's request for additional funds, the finance ministry asked them to conduct a field visit to the site and file a report, stating whether or not the fund for the project was used for

the purpose.

Executive Engineer Sarmishtha said that so far no progress was made on the matter although several teams visited the site already.

Jahir Uddin Dewan, superintendent engineer of DPHE's Chattogram circle, said, "We will investigate whether there was any misuse of the project's fund."

"The water crisis is really acute at Neelachal tourist spot. If the DPHE water supply project could be implemented properly, the crisis in the area would definitely be solved," said Zakir Hossain, Nezarat Deputy Collector (NDC) of Bandarban.

Regarding the breach of public safety at the project site, the NDC assured of immediate steps.

Photo: Sanjoy Kumar Barua

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600 families still living on embankment

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"The cyclone had damaged everything and rendered us homeless. We are now living here," he added.

His two sons -- Kartick Bain and Biswajit Bain -- used to work as day labourers and seasonal fishermen. But they are now jobless and passing idle time.

"We do not know when we will be able to return home. Our sufferings have now become unbearable," he said.

When Amphan hit the coastal area, around 120-kilometer area in 64 points of the 1,645-kilometre-long embankment in Khulna and Satkhira districts were breached.

A vast area of Khulna and Satkhira districts was inundated as water entered into the localities after breaching the embankment.

People of Khulna's Koyra upazila as well as Satkhira's Shyamnagar and

Ashashuni upazilas are the worst victims of the cyclone.

Over 4.5 lakh people of the three upazilas were affected by cyclone Amphan that damaged around 6,500 hectares croplands, over 1 lakh households, and fish enclosures covering around 17,000 hectares of lands, said Ashim Boran Chakraborty, vice chairman of Ashashuni upazila parishad.

Saline water has entered the area causing serious damages to farmlands. Even, people are suffering from acute scarcity of drinking water.

Locals demanded the government's immediate initiative to repair the embankment so that they can return their home.

"Hundreds of people are enduring immense sufferings and passing inhumane lives. Locals are trying to repair some points by their initiatives using their traditional knowledge. But it needs

the government's initiative to have a permanent solution," said SM Shafiqul Islam, chairman of Koyra upazila parishad.

Contacted, Mohammad Abul Hossain, superintendent engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Khulna, said they have already temporarily repaired many portions of the embankment spending around Tk 608 crore.

But this is not enough. Rather, two mega projects have already been designed to permanently repair the dam, he added.

The proposal for the two megaprojects, which may roughly cost over Tk 2,200 crore now remains at the Planning Commission for scrutiny, he added.

The embankments were constructed in 1960 along with coastal rivers to protect households and farmlands of the region.

'Selective genocide' continues

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350-metre medium wave every day at 8:30am, 12:30pm and 7:00pm. The duration of the broadcasts would vary between half an hour and an hour. [Hindustan Standard, March 29, 1971]

PAK ATROCITY CONTINUES

On March 28, 1971, American Consul General in Dhaka Archer K Blood sent a telegram to Islamabad and Washington captioned "selective genocide". He reported that they are "mute and horrified by a reign of terror by the Pakistan military" in East Pakistan. Pointing towards various evidences Blood suggested that Awami League supporters and Hindus were being systematically targeted by the martial law administrators.

A situation report sent by American Consulate in Dhaka on the same day informed that despite Radio Pakistan's announcements, life had not returned to normal in Dhaka. Earlier, Tikka Khan said in Dacca that "complete peace has been restored and life is returning to normal in East Pakistan". Apparently, large-scale looting, pillaging and murder on part of non-Bangalee people against Bangalees were taking place and the army was standing by watching, it said.

It was further reported that a curfew was re-imposed at noon but lifted shortly thereafter. Army checkpoints being set up at several intersections in the city. The tightening of curfew seemed designed to facilitate Pakistan military search and destroy

operations. There was a continuous flow of people streaming out of the city carrying meagre possessions.

Pakistan Observer and Morning News appeared today for the first time since March 25. Except for mastheads, both papers in their one-page format carried the same content -- on the front, text of President Yahya's March 26 broadcast and text of Zone B Martial Law Orders 117 to 134, and on the back a full-page ad of National Shipping Corporation. Censorship obviously in effect, commented the situation report. | Archer K Blood, The Cruel Birth of Bangladesh, UPL: 2006, pp. 200-01]

According to an American missionary who lived near Shankhari Bazar, machine guns were placed at the ends of the street and soldiers attacked the entire Bazaar area without warning on the morning of March 28, 1971. Not a sign of life remained in the once busy Bazar area; corpses remained unburied on the street and inside gutted homes. Parts of three-storey buildings had completely collapsed from the ferocity of the attack and shell holes marked heavy armament attacks.

CONCERN IN INDIA

The situation in Bangladesh was causing mounting concern in India. The Indian Army Commander-in-Chief, Gen Manekshaw, rushed to Delhi for consultations at the Cabinet level. India's own crisis ridden state of West Bengal, bordering Bangladesh, was still chronically unstable and

under president's rule direct from Delhi. There were fears that the wave of Bengali nationalism sweeping through the eastern half of the former state of Bengal might have serious repercussions on the Indian side. [Daily Telegraph (London), March 29, 1971]

However, on the previous day, the Indian Government decided to provide relief -- shelter, food and medical -- to the Bangladeshi refugees who had begun to trickle in soon after the crackdown. The cost would be borne by the central government. The governments of Indian states bordering Bangladesh were enjoined to operate the relief programme, and a branch of the secretariat of the Ministry of Rehabilitation was set up in Kolkata to direct these efforts. [Srinath Raghavan, 1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh, Permanent Black, 2013, pg.75]

Largely attended public meetings in support of the freedom struggle in Bangladesh were held today in Kolkata, Delhi and elsewhere in India. Speakers belonging to almost all shades and colours, unanimously demanded that the Government of India should come forward to recognise the provisional government of Bangladesh, the setting up of which was announced by the Swadhin Bangla Betar. [Hindustan Standard, March 29, 1971]

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Century-old haat plagued with problems in Pirojpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Over a century-old Atghar haat under Nesarabad upazila in Pirojpur remains plagued with manifold problems.

Water supply and sanitation system are in miserable condition as well as the sheds made for the temporary traders have also been damaged.

As a result, the businessmen of the haat have to face untold sufferings to run their business.

Although the haat sits on Fridays and Mondays year-round, during the guava and hog plum season it sits daily.

The area is well known for cultivation of guava and hog plum.

On the other hand, the haat is situated at the border of Pirojpur and Jhalakathi district. As a result, people from both two districts come to the

haat.

"The haat is in poor condition for years. But for the last ten years, it has remained in the worst condition," said a trader of the haat, Mohammad Kabir.

There is no arrangement of sitting for the fish traders and other temporary businessmen who come to the haat from different areas, he also said.

Besides, there is no good source of drinking water here, he added.

Younus Ali Mollah, another trader of the haat, said the public toilets in the haat are not usable as they have been damaged for long.

"We have urged the local public representatives again and again for the development of the haat. But the situation has not been changed," he said adding though the government

earns revenue from the haat, it is not taking any care of it.

Locals have also said that huge number of people comes to the haat daily. Even, during the guava season the area remains crowded with the presence of tourists from different parts of the country.

Contacted, Mosharef Hossain, upazila nirbahi officer of Nesarabad, said that he is aware of the problems of the haat.

"The haat is very important and we have a plan to develop it," he said.

The problems of the haat will be addressed soon, he added.

Caption: The sheds at Atghar haat in Pirojpur's Nesarabad upazila made for the temporary traders have been lying broken for long, thanks to the authorities' negligence to the matter. Photo: Star

Ramshackle bridge lying unrepaired for 5-yr in Jhenidah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A bridge for pedestrians and vehicles on the Begbati river at Defolbari village of Jhenidah Sadar upazila has remained at risk of collapse for the last five years.

This bridge lies on Begbati river on Kotchandpur-Jhenidah via Paglakanai area which is densely populated.

Locals said that this bridge has been lying in this broken state for five years.

The plaster has fallen off and parts of it are falling down. Two cracks have appeared on the bridge and the lower portion of the bridge is on the verge of collapse.

It might collapse if it is not renovated as soon as possible, they said.

Dilip Kumar, a trucker of Jhenidah, said that he crosses the bridge risking his life. This bridge may collapse at any moment as its lower portion is about to fall down, he added.

Tarikul Islam of Defolbari village said it is a busy road where hundreds of vehicles ply on the bridge carrying huge loads. The bridge is a lurking danger for the people, he also said.

Jahir Raihan of Kumrabaria village



said around two lakh people of eight unions use the road. Besides, heavy vehicles including CNG, auto rickshaw, and human hauler ply on the road. It may collapse any time if it is not repaired soon.

Kumrabaria UP Chairman Ashrafur Islam said he is trying his best to get it

repaired as it is posing risk to the people.

He has communicated the matter with the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) in this regard, he added.

Sadar upazila LGED engineer Ahsan Habib said he has made an estimate of the renovation cost and forwarded it to the concerned authority.

Covid cases jump 85pc in a week, deaths 42pc

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three and half months.

According to Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) data, a total of 201 Covid-19 patients died in seven days ending yesterday while the number of casualties was 141 the week before.

Meanwhile, the total number of new confirmed cases was 23,100 in the same time period, while it was 12,470 in the previous week.

Yesterday, a total of 34,664 samples were tested for Covid-19 across the country. Of those, 14.90 percent (3,674) were positive. This positivity rate was also higher than the previous day's 13.69 percent.

With the latest count, the total number of Covid-19 deaths has risen to 8,869 and the total number of confirmed cases to 5,91,806.

At least 5,33,922 people have recovered from the disease so far.

Amid the rapid transmission of the lethal virus that began a global pandemic, hospitals are also struggling with the rising number of critical patients.

"It is very clear the transmission trend

is sharp upward and it is rising steeply -- faster than the trend during March-April last year. The pace of the rising transmission is alarming," Dr Mushtaq Hussain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said it is urgent to detect infected cases, isolate them and ensure that everyone is maintaining health safety guidelines, which are not being maintained.

"Unless active measures like those of last November and December are taken, the transmission will continue rising," he added.

Prof Ridwanur Rahman, an infectious disease specialist, told The Daily Star, "With the rising number of patients, hospitals are now overburdened. Unless we implement transmission control measures actively, it is not possible to reduce burden on the hospitals."

As of 12:00pm yesterday, only five ICU beds out of the 103 in 10 government Covid-19 dedicated hospitals or units in Dhaka city were vacant.

In the nine private Covid-19 hospitals in the capital, a total of 45 ICU beds out of 188 were empty.

According to the DGHS, there are 574 ICU beds across the country.

Across the country, a total of 348 Covid-19 patients were undergoing treatment in ICUs.

Of those who died yesterday, 24 were males and 15 were females.

Three of them were aged between 31 and 40, one between 41 and 50, ten between 51 and 60 and 25 were above 60.

Experts apprehended that the transmission will continue rising in the coming days thanks to people not maintaining health safety guidelines.

Since the DGHS reported the first three cases on March 8 last year, the novel coronavirus infection reached its first peak in June and declined in October last year.

Later in November and December, the country saw an upward trend, which came to the lowest during January and February.

Since March 9, it continued rising again.

Myanmar forces kill 114

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He reiterated a promise to hold elections, without giving any timeframe.

Demonstrators turned out yesterday in Yangon, Mandalay and other towns, as they have done almost daily since the Feb. 1 coup that ousted elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Myanmar Now news portal said 114 people were killed across the country in crackdowns on the protests.

In a warning on Friday evening, state television said protesters were "in danger of getting shot to the head and back". It did not specifically say security forces had been given shoot-to-kill orders and the junta has previously suggested some fatal shootings have come from within the crowds.

At least 40 people, including a 13-year-old girl, were killed in Mandalay, and at least 27 people were killed in Yangon, Myanmar Now said. A boy as young as five was earlier reported among the dead in Mandalay but there were conflicting reports later that he may have survived. Another 13-year-old was among the dead in the central Sagaing region.

"Today is a day of shame for the armed forces," Dr. Sasa, a spokesman for CRPH, an anti-junta group set up by deposed lawmakers, told an online forum.

A military spokesman did not respond to calls seeking comment on the killings by security forces, the air strikes or the insurgent attack on its post.

"They are killing us like birds or chickens, even in our homes," said Thu Ya Zaw in the central town of Myingyan, where at least two protesters were killed. "We will keep protesting regardless... We must fight until the junta falls."

The deaths would take the number

of civilians reported killed since the coup to over 440.

'TERROR AND DISHONOUR'

US Ambassador Thomas Vajda said on social media: "This bloodshed is horrifying," adding "Myanmar's people have spoken clearly: they do not want to live under military rule".

British foreign minister Dominic Raab said the killing of unarmed civilians and children marked a new low, while the EU delegation to Myanmar said Saturday would "forever stay engraved as a day of terror and dishonour."

News reports said there were deaths in Sagaing, Lashio in the east, in the Bago region, near Yangon, and elsewhere. A one-year-old baby was hit in the eye with a rubber bullet.

The military has said it took power because November elections won by Suu Kyi's party were fraudulent, an assertion dismissed by the country's election commission. Suu Kyi remains in detention at an undisclosed location and many other figures in her party are also in custody.

RUSSIA 'A TRUE FRIEND'

New US and European sanctions this week increased external pressure on the junta, but the condemnation is not universal.

Russia's deputy defence minister Alexander Fomin attended the parade in Naypyitaw, having met senior junta leaders a day earlier.

"Russia is a true friend," Min Aung Hlaing said.

Diplomats said eight countries - Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos and Thailand - sent representatives, but Russia was the only one to send a minister to the parade on Armed Forces Day, which commemorates the start of the resistance to Japanese occupation in 1945.

Support from Russia and China, which has also refrained from criticism, is important for the junta as those two countries are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and can block potential UN actions.

Facebook

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Contacted yesterday, Post and Telecommunications Minister Mustafa Jabbar said his ministry had not shut down Facebook. "It is not our decision. It has been done by the law enforcement agencies for national security reasons."

In response to a question from The Daily Star, Facebook in a statement shared the through its public relations agency, Benchmark PR, said, "We're aware that our services have been restricted in Bangladesh. We're working to understand more and hope to have full access restored as soon as possible."

Elahi Chowdhury, who uses Facebook and Messenger for work, said he has not been able to communicate at all using Facebook.

Sumon Ahmed Sabir, chief technical officer of internet service provider Fiber@home Global, said his office did not get any official instructions.

"Somewhere this problem is more acute, somewhere less so. Not everyone has the same degree of problem," he said.

The restriction also affected Facebook-based startups.

Nasima Akter Nisha, joint secretary of e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB), said she understood the importance of security and added that businesses based on the social media had been suffering for the last two days.

"We hope the government will open Facebook very soon," she said.