



The dried-up river bed is being used as cropland. The photo was taken from Golchokkor area under Katulee union in Tangail Sadar upazila recently.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

## Once turbulent Dhaleswari now cropland

MIRZA SHAKIL

The dried-up bed of once turbulent Dhaleswari river at different places in Tangail is being used for cultivation. Local farmers are using the river beds for cultivating different crops including paddy and vegetables.

In some places, there is still some flow but it is so polluted that it cannot be used for any purposes including irrigation to crop fields.

Vehicles, including sand-laden ones, are seen plying on the dried-up riverbeds.

The Dhaleswari river is a 160-kilometer-long distributary of the Jamuna river. It starts off the Jamuna near the northwestern tip of Tangail district.

After that it divides into two branches; the north branch retains the name Dhaleswari and merges with the other branch, the Kaliganga river at the southern part of Manikganj district. Finally, the merged flow meets the Shitalakshya river near Narayanganj district. The combined flow goes southwards to merge into the Meghna river.

During a recent visit, it was seen that the bed of the once turbulent Dhaleswari river has turned into a green pasture with crops-- including paddies, mashkalai, and peanut etc-- at different places in Sadar and Delduar upazilas.

Several villagers including Saiful Islam of Char Pakulla and Jahangir Alam of Mahmud Nagar said once upon a time, the depth of river was lot; boats used to ply during the dry season also. But now the river has almost dried due to siltation and lack of water from upstream. Water remains on the river only during the wet season for three to four months.

As a result, the local people cultivate paddies and vegetables on

its dried-up bed, they said.

Not only Dhaleswari but also most of the rivers in the district show similar pictures during the dry season as silting and pollution are leading them to gradual death.

Most of the rivers in Tangail district are heading towards the same destiny as the riverbeds remain waterless for nearly half of the year.

The main rivers in Tangail district are Jamuna, Dhaleswari, Jhenai, Bonshai, Louhajang, Elengiani and Bairan.

The rivers were full of a variety of fish while ships, launches, big merchant boats piled the rivers that had strong flow throughout the year only about four decades ago, said several senior citizens.

River ways were used as means of easy and cheap transportation of goods to from and the district, they said.

Big merchandizing boats laden with thousands of maunds of jute from different districts came to the ghats of different rivers in the district, including Elasin Ghat on the Dhaleswari river in Delduar upazila and Nolin Ghat on the Jamuna river in Gopalpur upazila as many governmental and non-governmental jute purchase centers were set up there.

But all these are past stories and now boats can ply on the rivers during the rainy season. As only a little water is available during half of the year, the river transportation system in the district is in a disarray.

International water expert engineer Si Khan, a resident of Basail upazila in the district who had worked at the United Nations, said that the amount of water flow in Jamuna River has reduced a lot due to withdrawal of water from the upstream.

The situation affects other rivers in

the district including the Dhaleswari that has also silted up and as a result, their water containing capacity has greatly reduced, he added.

Riverside fishermen and boatmen communities, who are mainly dependent on the rivers for their livelihood, are the direct victims of drying up of the rivers during the ongoing dry season.

The rivers now see very little fish resources as their sanctuaries have been destroyed.

Syed Irfanul Bari, general secretary of Bangladesh Chapter of the International Farakka Committee, also blamed withdrawal of water from upstream by constructing dams including at Tibet by China and at Assam by India for the sorry state of the domestic rivers.

He also said although most of the rivers in Tangail are drying but no step is yet to be seen to save them. Besides losing navigability, the rivers are victims of mindless pollution and grabbing by the influential quarters.

Sanowar Hossain, lawmaker in Tangail Sadar, said they have already talked to the Water Resources Ministry in this regard. The several rivers including Dhaleswari, Louhajang and Jhenai were divided in three categories--A, B and C. The Dhaleswari river was kept in A category.

The excavation of the river and also the works to construct the bank protection embankment will be done as soon as possible, he said.

Goutam Chandra Chanda, a senior research officer of Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA), however, said the main problem is restraining water flow on the upstream. The river also needs excavation and it is so costly.

## Big slice goes to non-poor

FROM PAGE 1

The spending had reduced the number of people living in extreme poverty (less than \$1.90 a day) by 36 percent on average in the countries examined by the WB.

Bangladesh's spending was higher than the amount spent by Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bhutan but lower than the South Asian mean of 0.9 percent of GDP. It was also lower than the average of 1.5 percent of GDP by the developing countries, the study found.

In short, even though the proposed social safety net budget for the incoming fiscal year is an increase of 12.5 percent from this year's, Bangladesh's poor -- and also the new poor from the pandemic -- would not be proportionately benefitted.

Although the government has increased the allocation for social protection, it is still insignificant and inadequate, said Selim Raihan, executive director of South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM), a think-tank.

In fact, the allocation for social protection was low even before the pandemic.

"We cannot include pension and interest on savings certificate under the social safety net programmes as those are not counted internationally. Even when the WB and the Asian Development Bank do the analysis, they also exclude these from the safety net schemes," he added.

Given the devastation of the pandemic, the government proposed to expand the safety net coverage by bringing around 14 lakh new people under social protection.

However, the allocation per beneficiary would not go up in terms of amount.

The old-age allowance is the case in point.

Though the beneficiaries will increase to more than 57 lakh, they will get only Tk 500 every month. The expenditure in Bangladesh's old-age allowance scheme, introduced in fiscal 1997-98, is one of the lowest in the world.

So is the case of the allowance for widows and deserted women.

They will get a monthly cash allowance of Tk 500, although the government proposed bringing more than 4.75 lakh more beneficiaries in fiscal 2021-22.

Launched in fiscal 1998-99, the monthly allowance under the scheme was initially Tk 100 and raised to Tk 500 three years ago.

In India, the elderly allowance (aged 60-79) is Tk 720 (Rs 600) and those aged over 80 get Tk 1,200 a month. In Delhi, the allowance for a widow is Tk 1,000 per month.

On average, a person needed Tk 1,862 every month to maintain a minimum standard of living in 2016, according to a survey of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The economists said the amount of both the schemes is insignificant considering inflation and the price hike of essentials.

"Although the prime minister increased the amount, it is still very insignificant given the inflation. For years, it has not been revised," said Raihan, who teaches economics at Dhaka University.

### CHALLENGES THERE TOO

Economists maintained that delivering the support to intended beneficiaries is the main challenge as there were previous examples of irregularities like the inclusion of ineligible beneficiaries with political connections, leaving many genuine ones out.

In September last year, a Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) study found that 65 percent of the fund from the government's social safety net programmes went to the non-poor owing to nepotism, corruption and political consideration in selecting beneficiaries.

Titled "Efficiency of Delivering Social Protection Programmes in the North-West Region", the study conducted by the CPD said the safety net programmes can only cover a fraction of the total poor population as just 32.5 percent of poor households received some form

of assistance.

Raihan suggested that the government should prepare the database of the beneficiaries in a transparent manner with the involvement of the local administration, local public representatives and non-governmental organisations.

"There were allegations against some elected representatives that they incorporated names of people of their choice. So, we must have a cross-checking system in place so that people in need get the benefits," he added.

Another aspect of the proposed allocation for the social safety net is that it did not have anything about the "new poor" who have lost their jobs during the pandemic.

The economic shock induced by the pandemic has pushed 2.45 crore people, 14.75 percent of the country's population, into poverty in one year, according to a survey of the Power and Participation Research Centre and the Brac Institute of Governance and Development.

This would imply that beyond the 20.5 percent of the population officially recognised as poor, there is a group of "new poor" representing an additional 22.9 percent of the population that needed to be brought within the discussion on poverty.

But the government has been denying that there is any new poor in the country.

"Since the government keeps denying having new poor, they would not feel the urge to increase the coverage. That's what has reflected in the budget," Raihan said.

Speaking to this newspaper earlier this week, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said: "We don't know new or old poor. The government will provide assistance to whoever is poor."

About the listing of beneficiaries, he said a team led by the deputy commissioner and comprised of UNO and local representatives are preparing the list of real beneficiaries.

## Unholy nexus giving gas connections

FROM PAGE 12

Kamruzzaman, special superintendent of CID (Dhaka Metro), told The Daily Star yesterday.

The arrestees are: Habibur Rahman alias Anowar, 24, Saiful Islam, 32, and Nazrul Islam, 32. The CID said they were involved in the fraud for at least five years.

A CID team also recovered ID cards of Titas employees, a file with details of 500 Titas subscribers and money receipts from the arrestees.

Kamruzzaman said they made the arrests on June 7 following a complaint by a Titas subscriber in the capital's Moghbazar area.

The subscriber got gas connections to 32 flats in 2016. He, however, was never asked to pay bills by Titas, which stopped providing new connections immediately after the subscriber had it.

Suddenly, last year, members of a syndicate contacted him and asked him to pay a huge amount of money. At one point, the gas connections to the flats were cut off.

In January this year, the syndicate

members, wearing Titas ID cards, appeared before the subscriber's building with a pick up and reconnected the gas line after they were paid Tk 1 lakh, said Kamruzzaman.

The syndicate members then asked for Tk 19 lakh from the subscriber, promising him that they would settle all the issues over the payment of due bills. The subscriber then paid Tk 15 lakh to arrestee Habib and his accomplices.

Taking the money, the criminals, however, stopped receiving the subscriber's phone calls.

In May, the subscriber went straight to Titas office, where he came to know that he was defrauded and that Titas had nothing to do with the syndicate, said the CID official.

"The victim then came to us. A case was filed with the Hatirjheel Police Station," Kamruzzaman said, adding that law enforcers were investigating the matter.

The CID official said the syndicate members had been working with Titas employees since 2014. They have

machines needed to fix and set up new gas connections.

"We have already got the names of some former and current employees of Titas by interrogating the arrestees. We're now verifying the information," he said.

"We would definitely interrogate those officials if we find their links with the crime. We will write to the Titas authorities soon," he said.

Each syndicate, which has eight to nine members, is involved in giving illegal connections in Dhaka's Demra, Banani, Mohakhali, Kakali, Keraniganj and Uttara areas, said the official.

"We are now conducting drives to arrest the absconding members," Kamruzzaman said.

He, however, refused to disclose the names of the Titas employees, saying that the investigation was still underway.

Ali Iqbal Md Nurullah, managing director of Titas Gas, told The Daily Star that they were yet to be communicated by the CID. He said they would cooperate with anyone who would come to them with specific complaints.

### Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh Office of the Superintending Engineer Roads and Highways Department Bridge Construction and Maintenance Circle Sarak Bhaban, Tejgaon, Dhaka- 1208, Bangladesh



Memo No. 35.01.0000.152.14.058.2021-226.

Date.16.06.2021

#### Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI)

Request for Expressions of Interest (REOI) for Consultancy Services for Feasibility Study and Detailed Design of Construction of 2<sup>nd</sup> Sultana Kamal Bridge over the river Shitalakshya on Tarabo-Demra Regional Highway (R201) including Upgrading of Tarabo Intersection on Dhaka-Sylhet Highway (N2) and Kanchpur Intersection on Dhaka-Chottogram Highway (N1) under the Roads and Highways Department, Bangladesh.

- The Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (GOB) will provide fund from operating budget (all payments regarding consultancy services will be made in Bangladeshi Taka) towards the cost of consultancy services for "Feasibility Study and Detailed Design of Construction of 2<sup>nd</sup> Sultana Kamal Bridge over the river Shitalakshya on Tarabo-Demra Regional Highway (R201) including Upgrading of Tarabo Intersection on Dhaka-Sylhet Highway (N2) and Kanchpur Intersection on Dhaka-Chottogram Highway (N1) under the Roads and Highways Department, Bangladesh" by engaging consulting firm(s).
- The scope of the Consultancy services primarily includes preparing the feasibility study, the detailed engineering design, traffic study, hydro-morphology study, geotechnical investigation, environmental and social impact assessment, land acquisition plan, resettlement plan, economic study and the bidding documents for above mentioned services. The proposed 2<sup>nd</sup> Sultana Kamal Bridge will be an aesthetically pleasing bridge (4-Lane or more) with a length more than 1000 meter, preferably having longer span to minimize interference with water flow and water traffic. The scope will also include advanced highway interchanges to ensure seamless traffic movement at the two intersections. Hence, the consulting services comprise the following components:
  - Task-1.** Conduct all studies including Traffic Survey, Topographic Survey, Geotechnical Investigation, Road Condition Survey, Bridge Condition Survey, Meteorology, Hydrology & Morphology Study, Environmental & Socio-Economic Survey, Video Survey, Road Safety Audit, Economic and Financial Analysis and other related surveys that are required for the project.
  - Task-2.** Prepare detailed analysis, plan and assessment for Financial and Economic Analysis, Mathematical Modeling based on Hydrology and Morphology Study, Environmental Assessment, Socio-Economic Assessment, Environmental Management Plan (EMP), Environmental Monitoring Plan (EMoP), Land Acquisition Plan, Resettlement Action Plan, Traffic Model, and other related studies as per requirement of Procuring Entity.
  - Task-3.** Prepare Detailed Design such as Geometric/Structural Design of the Road and Bridge Alignment, Pavement Design, Bridge Design, Interchange and Intersection Design, Toll Plaza Design, Road and Bridge Furniture Design, Bank Protection Design, Drainage System Design, Axle Load Control Station Design and other related designs based on study as per requirement of the Procuring Entity.
  - Task-4.** Prepare bidding documents and provide supports to the procurement for civil works upon the request of the Procuring Entity.
- The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) (Executing Agency) under the Road Transport and Highways Division (RTHD), Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges (MRTB) now invites Expressions of Interest (EOI) in English from reputed consulting firm(s) either as individual firm or in Joint Venture/Association for short listing of Firm(s) for the captioned services.
- Consultants will be selected under Quality and Cost Based Selection Method (QCBS) in accordance with the procedures set out in the Public Procurement Rules, 2008 (PPR 2008) considering all subsequent Amendments.
- The interested consultants must have following experiences of rendering consulting services within last 10 years:
  - Experience of at least 01 (one) detailed design of multi-span 4-lane pre-stressed concrete/steel, cable-stayed/suspension/arch river or sea bridge(s) not less than 1000 meter in length with the largest span not less than 120 meter;
  - Experience of detailed design of at least 01 (one) grade separated interchange (such as trumpet, cloverleaf, diamond, directional, etc.);
  - Satisfactory completion of study and design consultancy services at least 5 kilometer road section including Traffic Survey, Topographic Survey, Hydrology Survey, Axle Load Survey, Geotechnical Investigation, Socio-Economic Survey and Economic and Financial Assessment etc.
- The EOI should especially include (along with certified English Translation if not in English):
  - The firm's registration certificate, Legal Entitlements of the Firm (Trade License, TIN, VAT, Registration, etc.);
  - Company profile: including management, personnel (especially key personnel regarding consultancy services), firm's specialty, performance;
  - The latest annual report;
  - General and overall experience of firm(s) (limited to 3 pages) and Experience of similar nature of services in last 10 years including procuring entity's name, nature of services, contract amount, person-months, duration of the services with commencement and completion date;
  - Summary of permanent professional employees with key qualifications;
  - Audited financial statement (Balance sheet, Profit & Loss Account and Cash Flow Statement) for last 3 (three) years; and
  - Average annual turnover in last 3 (three) years.
- Interested applicants may obtain further information by applying to the undersigned during normal office hour or through email.
- With all supporting documents, the EOI must be submitted to the signatory addressed at or before 2.00 pm (BST) on 20.07.2021 in sealed envelopes (One original and One copy) marked with "Consultancy Services for Feasibility Study and Detailed Design of Construction of 2<sup>nd</sup> Sultana Kamal Bridge over the river Shitalakshya on Tarabo-Demra Regional Highway (R201) including Upgrading of Tarabo Intersection on Dhaka-Sylhet Highway (N2) and Kanchpur Intersection on Dhaka-Chottogram Highway (N1) under the Roads and Highways Department, Bangladesh". Any late submission will be rejected.
- The Procuring Entity shall not be responsible for any costs or expenses incurred by the firm(s) in connection with the preparation or submission of the EOI. The Procuring Entity reserves the right to accept or reject all the Expressions of Interest (EOI) without assigning any reason.

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16.06.2021  
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