

Havoc on rivers for faulty

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Moreover, the alignments of two bridges -- Chawai Bridge in Panchagarh and another in Dinajpur's Parbotipur -- were found faulty, it added.

Pillars of some bridges have a 2.5 metre diameter that has shrunk the river flow. If the pillars had been built in an elliptical shape, instead of round, the river's flow area would have shrunk less.

The authorities should consider this before building bridges in the future, it added.

Under the Tk 2911.75 crore project, the RHD is building 82 bridges in 26 districts between October 2015 and June 2022. The IMED, in its report, feared that the project authorities may not be able to meet the revised deadline.

In November 2015, the government took up the Western Bangladesh Bridges Improvement Project to build 61 bridges aiming for safe, reliable and efficient transportation for people and goods. Japan will provide 65.43 percent of the total cost.

The project was scheduled to be completed under five packages between October 2015 and June 2020 at the cost of Tk 2,911.75 crore.

But in 2019, 22 more bridges were added to the project, resulting in an extension of the deadline till June 2022, a project official said.

However, the project cost remains the same as the construction of one major bridge in Narsingdi was dropped and its budget was repurposed for the 22 smaller bridges.

A total of 25 bridges, which were built under three packages, were inaugurated in March last year while works of other bridges under four other packages are now underway.

WHAT THE IMED REPORT SAYS

A bridge with 80-metre span was built over Gabura Gorbheshwari river in Dinajpur's Rajapur upazila.

Citing field visit information, the report said the guide bank of the bridge partially occupied the river and as a result, the river in the upstream is dying.

Besides, an attempt was made to preserve the riverbed with cement concrete (CC) blocks but there has been no application in this regard, it mentioned.

About the bridge on Atrai River in Madarganj of Dinajpur, it said that not only was the guide bank occupying a part of the river, the alignment of the

previous bridge there was "perfect" but the alignment of the newly-built bridge appeared to be faulty. As a result, this is causing river erosion downstream, said the report.

An RHD engineer said a river usually changes its path and a bridge guide bank is built for river training so that water flows beneath the bridge and cannot damage the banks near the bridge.

DELAY IN PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at a programme in September last year said the authorities of this project have been able to save Tk 286 crores and also proposed building 10 more bridges under their ongoing project as they were able to save.

IMED, however, reported that project authorities may not be able to complete the project work within the deadline. Issues about new bridges were not mentioned in the IMED report.

In its report, IMED said the project authorities were supposed to use Tk 1855.36 crore by June 2020 (63.71 percent) of the total amount but was able to use Tk 442.69 crore till June last year.

The project saw 59.13 percent financial progress till April 2021.

As per the report, the construction of 25 bridges has been completed while 35 more are now near completion (98%). But construction of the rest has started and has seen only 20 percent progress.

"So, construction of the 22 bridges and other works would not be completed within June 2022," reads the report.

WHAT THE RHD SAYS?

The RHD's Chief Engineer Abdus Sabur said they have been implementing the project following the feasibility study. "There is little to no scope for deviation [from it]."

Sabur was the immediate past project director.

The Daily Star could not reach the current project director, Khan Md Kamrul Ahsan, over the phone despite several attempts.

Asked about IMED's observations, Sabur said, "We had a meeting with them and we have already given our own observations."

About the fault in alignment, he said they had tried to adjust the approach road with the limitations.



Soldiers and police patrol on a beach to check people are following new measures to curb the spread of the Covid-19 coronavirus in Seminyak on Indonesia's resort island of Bali yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Free media the answer to disinformation

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is new is that digital technology has enabled pathways for false or manipulated information to be created, disseminated and amplified at scale by various actors for political, ideological or commercial motives.

"Diverse and reliable information, digital literacy, smart social media regulation and free, independent and diverse media are the obvious antidote to disinformation," the Bangladeshi lawyer told the UNHRC.

Disinformation, interacting with political social and economic grievances in the real world, is undermining freedom of expression, polarising public debates, fuelling public distrust and endangering human rights, democratic institutions, public health and sustainable development, she said.

"The impact on individuals, communities and institutions is real and deeply disturbing. The imperative and urgency to address the problem is clear," she said, adding that the responses of the states are problematic.

Some states have resorted to disproportionate measures such as internet shutdowns and vague and

overly broad laws to criminalise, block, censor and chill online speech and shrink civic space, and compel social media platforms to remove lawful content without judicial process.

"Some governments have used these laws against journalists, political opponents and human rights defenders."

Not only are such measures incompatible with international human rights law, but they also do little to combat disinformation.

On the contrary, by discouraging the flow of diverse sources of information, they hamper fact-finding, feed rumours, foster fear and undermine trust in public institutions. By compelling social media platforms to police speech, they create a risk that companies will zealously over-remove material and undermine free speech.

Algorithms, targeted advertising and data harvesting practices of the largest social media companies are largely credited with driving users towards "extremist" content and conspiracy theories, undermining the right of individuals to form an opinion and to freely develop beliefs and ideas.

"Company responses to disinformation have been largely reactive, insufficient and opaque," she said, while calling upon the social media companies to review their business models and ensure that their business operations, data collection and data processing practices are compliant with international human rights standards.

She warned that "old ingrained sexist attitudes with the anonymity and reach of social media" were being used to launch gendered disinformation campaigns against women journalists, politicians and human rights defenders to push them out of public life.

She called on states and companies to ensure the safety of women online and offline.

Khan went on to call for proactive engagement of states, companies, international organisations, civil society and the media.

Tackling disinformation requires multidimensional multi-stakeholder responses that are well-grounded in the full range of human rights, she added.

Locals come to helpless

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became crueler for her.

The crematorium gate was shut and the heavens opened up all of a sudden.

To prevent her beloved husband's body from getting drenched in the pouring rain, she dragged the body by herself to the nearby Gopalpur Government Primary School, where she took shelter the whole night as thunder and rain provided the soundtrack.

At last, in the morning, she was able to perform the last rites of her husband -- thanks to the help of local Muslims.

"I somehow came to know that the woman was waiting with the body at the school balcony," Lincoln Biswas,

Mirpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He straightaway called the municipal mayor and local councillor and requested measures to cremate the body.

Zahidul Islam, local ward councillor, rushed to the spot and without further delay arranged for the cremation of the body with the help of local Muslims.

"The victim's family members could not come as they all had Covid-19. And their other relatives did not come for fear of getting infected," Islam told The Daily Star.

Contacted, the victim's eldest son Ananda Karmakar said they could not go to the crematorium as they were infected with Covid-19.

Doctors find injury marks

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court order.

Khurshid Jahan, head of the gynaecology department at the hospital, said a report was submitted to the court.

Hospital Director HM Saiful Islam said after examining the woman on Friday, the report was sent to the court in a sealed envelope on Saturday.

He said he didn't know what was in the report.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the report.

The report, signed by Prof Mohsena Akhter of the hospital, mentions that injury marks were found in four places, including joints of both hands and neck. The incident took place at 10:00am on July 1, the report added.

Maruf Hasan Khan, superintendent of Barishal police, said after receiving the court order, they formed a probe committee, led by Barishal range

Superintendent of Police Kazi Shoab Ahmed. The body would submit its report within the next three days, he added.

Earlier, investigation officer of the case Mainul, inspector of Ujirpur Police Station, denied the allegations brought against him.

On June 26, Ujirpur police recovered the body of vegetable vendor Basudeb Chakraborty in Jambari village.

The victim's brother Barun Chakraborty filed a murder case against the woman the next day.

Police arrested her on June 30 and produced her before a court that placed her on a two-day remand.

After her remand, she was again produced before the court on Friday and she then brought allegations of sexual harassment and torture during her remand.

Regime shelling kills 9 civilians in NW Syria: monitor

AFP, Iblin

Seven children were among nine civilians killed by Syrian regime artillery fire Saturday in the northwestern rebel stronghold of Idlib, a war monitor said, as a UN agency condemned the "tragic" deaths.

The shelling also wounded around 15 others in several locations of the Jabal al-Zawiya area in the south of the stronghold, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

It killed five members of the same family -- a man, his wife and three of their children -- in the village of Iblin, two children in Balyun, and two girls in Balshun, it said.

In Iblin, an AFP photographer saw the bodies of the family arrive at a health dispensary, wrapped in woollen and cotton blankets.

Nurses and others prepared the bodies for burial, cleaning the bloodied corpse of a young boy before swaddling it in white fabric, he said.

The Idlib health directorate said the man killed in Iblin along with his family worked for its local branch.

The United Nations children's agency, Unicef, said the attacks were "just tragic" and "the worst" since a ceasefire brokered in March last year.

"An escalation of violence will only result in cutting short the lives of more children," Unicef said.

Two of the girls killed were the daughters of a member of the White Helmets rescue group, UNICEF said, adding they were aged seven and 14.

"Last year alone, 512 children were verified killed in Syria, the majority in the northwest home to 1.7 million vulnerable children," Unicef said.

Production to start in December

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in phases."

He claimed that they have completed more than 80 percent work of the unit and are almost ready to commission test run.

In 2016, the World Heritage Committee (WHC) of Unesco slapped a set of conditions on Bangladesh government, saying it should not proceed with any "large scale industrial or infrastructure developments" before completion of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the country's southwest zone.

They also threatened to cancel the World Heritage status of the Sundarbans if the government did not comply with the conditions. The WHC is going to review the situation at an upcoming meeting slated for July 20.

The Rampal power plant authorities want to start test run before the WHC meeting if the Covid situation permits.

"We were supposed to start the test run a few months back but it got delayed as technical support staffers

who would help with the test run of machinery could not arrive from India due to the pandemic. They will be able to come after July 14 if the border opens," he said.

Asked about the import of 3,200 tonnes of coal from India, the managing director said those will be used for constructing the floor of the coal shade of the plant. Those will not be used for generating electricity. The power and energy ministry also issued a circular in this regard.

He said they will only use high-grade coal imported either from Indonesia, South Asia or Australia, not any low-grade Indian coal.

Voicing concern over the development, environmentalists say the government was supposed to complete the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), not the plant, as per the conditions given by the WHC.

At its 44th session starting on July 20, the WHC is supposed to review the government's progress in completing the assessment, said Sharif Jamil, general secretary of the Bangladesh

Poribesh Andolon (Bapa).

"The government recently scrapped 10 coal-fired power plant projects. It should have also cancelled the Rampal power plant because the Sundarbans is our saviour. No project that could harm it should continue."

It carried on the construction of the Rampal power plant though it is yet to complete the SEA.

"And it is importing coal through the Sundarbans, making the vulnerable mangrove forest even more susceptible... Unesco should play a role in saving the Sundarbans," noted Sharif.

Contacted, Deputy Conservator of Forest Zaheer Iqbal, who is overseeing the preparation of the SEA, said, the Covid pandemic has hampered their work.

"We hope to complete the draft of the SEA by the end of this month. We will share it with different government agencies, environmentalists, members of the civil society and the media. It will take a few months to complete the assessment," he said.

Salam Salam Hajar Salam

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Mohammad Ali Siddiqui, Rabindranath Roy and Apple Mahmud were amongst the few who gave voice to his lyrics.

Kamal Dasgupta, Azad Rahman, Subal Das, Abdul Ahad, Satya Saha and Debu Bhattacharya, among other music composers, worked with him throughout his illustrious career.

In 1963, Fazal-e-Khuda was listed as a lyricist for radio. After a year, he became a listed lyricist for television. He was also the regional director of Dhaka Betar.

In a 2006 survey by the BBC, his song "Salam Salam Hajar Salam", voiced by his dear friend Abdul Jabbar, made it to the 20 best Bangla songs of all-time.

Fazal-e-Khuda was renowned for his patriotic, modern, folk, and Islamic songs.

Some of his notable songs include "Je Deshete Shapla Shaluk Jhiler Jole Bhashe", "Bhalobashar Mullo Koto, Ami Kichu Jani Na", and "Kolshi Kaandhe Ghaate Jai Kon Rooposhi", among others.

Eminent singer Rafiqul Alam said, "He was a great man. I did many songs with him, among which 'Tomakey Jeno Bhuley na Jai' became very popular."

Elocutionist Ashrafal Alam, who is a Shadhinata Purashkar awardee and Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendra artiste, spoke highly of Fazal-e-Khuda.

"He was extremely creative, and was always busy with his work," he said, adding that Fazal was the founding director of Shapla Shaluk, an organisation dedicated to children and teenagers.

"During his Betar days, Fazal alone published three magazines, among

which one was in English! I hope he rests in peace," Ashrafal further said.

Eminent Gono Sangeet artiste Fakir Alamgir posted his anguish on Facebook.

"We've seen many people achieve the Shadhinata Award and Ekushey Padak, ones who were against our freedom in the first place," he wrote.

"It is extremely tragic that a dedicated artiste like Fazal-e-Khuda received neither of these awards. May he rest in peace."

Besides Fakir Alamgir, various cultural personalities expressed their condolences on the departure of the great artiste.

Fazal-e-Khuda is survived by three sons and his wife, who is also under treatment at a city hospital.

He was buried in the capital's Rayer Bazar Graveyard yesterday.

45 killed in Philippines

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were seen jumping out of the plane before it hit the ground and exploded into flames, said Major General William Gonzales, commander of the Joint Task Force-Sulu.

It was one of the country's deadliest military aviation accidents.

"This is a sad day but we have to remain hopeful," Gonzales said in a statement.

"We enjoin the nation to pray for those who are injured and those who have perished in this tragedy."

Among the dead were 42 soldiers and three civilians, according to the Armed Forces of the Philippines. Forty-nine military personnel and four civilians were also injured and taken to hospital.

Five members of the military are still missing.

Photos of the crash site released by the Joint Task Force-Sulu showed the damaged tail and the smoking wreckage of the fuselage's back section laying near coconut trees.

Images published by local media

outlet Pondohan TV on its Facebook page showed the wreckage engulfed in flames and a plume of thick black smoke rising above houses located near the site.

Armed Forces Chief General Cirillito Sobejana said the aircraft was carrying troops from Cagayan de Oro on the southern island of Mindanao when it "missed the runway" as it tried to land on Jolo.

The plane tried to "regain power but didn't make it", he told local media.

Rab sues 149

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28, and Sattar Mia, 32, with 100 grams of heroin, 235 yaba tablets, and Tk 281,170 in cash.

As the Rab members were leaving the scene, locals attacked them with weapons yelling they were robbers. Two members of the Rab team -- ASI Bokul Hossain and Nayek Md Touhidul Islam of Shayestaganj Camp -- were injured.

Dhaka's power

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the British High Commission in Islamabad.

Statements by Britons and groups of Bangalee sympathisers living in London were directed toward fragmenting Pakistan, the note said.

Pakistan particularly complained of a speech delivered on June 21 by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas Home, who said aid to Pakistan should be withheld pending a political settlement for East Pakistan.

INDIRA GANDHI ASKS FOR END TO PRESSURE

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi appealed today to other leaders of her Congress Party to stop pressuring her to recognise Bangladesh or to go to war with Pakistan over Bangladesh.

"It is not right for the government to be pushed into a position regarding the recognition of Bangladesh until it is convinced on its own," the prime minister told the 25-member executive committee of Congress Party members in the parliament.

For the second time in a week, Indira Gandhi also rejected a suggestion from some party members that India should go to war with Pakistan to help an estimated 7 million Bangladeshi refugees return home.

The prime minister also said she had no information that the Soviet Union had supplied arms to Pakistan following the outbreak of war in East Pakistan on March 25.

The right-wing Hindu nationalist Jana Sangh Party announced yesterday night that it would launch a mass civil disobedience campaign in New Delhi on August 1 if the government had not recognised Bangladesh by then.

KISSINGER ARRIVES IN INDIA

Henry Kissinger, US President Richard Nixon's security adviser, arrived in India today to discuss the "Bangladesh problem". He was greeted by assault on American policy which, according to Indian government opinion and informed public opinion, betrayed promises to New Delhi and violated basic moral principles by allowing military equipment to be shipped to Pakistan and leaving the door open to give it more economic aid despite the suppression of Bangladesh.

The Times of India said, "The sharp divergence now revealed between Indian and US viewpoints vis-a-vis the developments in East Bengal scarcely permits a meaningful dialogue."

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Astronauts edit

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genome editing technology to create precise damage to DNA. Scientists can then study the repair mechanisms in better detail than would be possible using radiation, which is harder to use in targeted ways.

The technique focuses on double-strand breaks, which are one of the most harmful types of DNA damage as they can cause cell death.

The yeast cell experiment was the first time an organism had its genome edited, the DNA repaired, and then sequenced, all in a spacecraft environment. Future research could build on these methods to better mimic complex DNA damage -- leading to new ways to protect spacefarers -- as well as investigations into other long-term space exposure and exploration.

"It's not just that the teams successfully deployed novel technologies like CRISPR genome editing, PCR, and nanopore sequencing in an extreme environment, but also that we were able to integrate them into a functionally complete biotechnology workflow applicable to the study of DNA repair and other fundamental cellular processes in microgravity," said Sebastian Kraves, senior author of the study which was published in Plos One.

"These developments fill this team with hope in humanity's renewed quest to explore and inhabit the vast expanse of space."

Developments to help astronauts survive better in space are being made in a number of areas. A sunscreen made of skin pigment is being developed to shield them from lethal x-ray radiation, using a material that has never been found to exist in nature.

It was also recently discovered that sperm can survive in space for 200 years without damage to its DNA, which will help scientists plan for mammals -- including humans -- reproducing outside of our own planet.