



Villagers in Dilpashra union under Pabna's Vangura upazila endure perennial suffering due to the absence of a paved road in the village. PHOTO: STAR

No road for 20,000 villagers

Residents of Betuan village in Pabna's Vangura upazila have to walk miles to go to the upazila headquarters and other destinations

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Over 20,000 residents of Betuan village of Dilpashra union under Pabna's Vangura upazila have to undergo perennial suffering due to the lack of a paved road in the village.

There are five primary schools, a high school, a college, two madrasas, 12 mosques, a temple, an Eidgah and a community clinic in the remote village but there is no road link with these institutions.

"Due to the lack of road communication, we have to go to school traversing the residences of others, fields and canals in the village. When it rains, we often do not go to school," Md Rubel, a fourth-grader, said.

Due to the absence of the road, villagers have to go to the upazila headquarters and elsewhere on foot, they said.

"Due to the lack of road communication, there is no vehicular movement in the village. Villagers often go to upazila headquarters or other areas of the upazila on foot. It takes one hour to one and a half hours to reach the main road," said MdHumayun Kabir, a resident of the village.

"When most of the rural areas are getting rapidly changed due to the development initiative of the government, Betuan village remains backwards because of the absence of road communication," Humayun said.

Hasina Khatun, an elderly woman of the village, said that although the male

members of the village can move to other places crossing hurdles, it is the women who suffer the most.

Out of desperation, the villagers started filling up a canal in a bid to establish road communication on their own. However, the local administration foiled their attempt as it is an illegal act to fill up the government canal.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Vangura Md Ashrafuzzaman said that as the villagers started to construct a road on their own filling up a canal, their attempt was foiled.

"There is no scope to fill up a waterbody in this way. Although the villagers need a road badly, we cannot allow them to fill up a canal for road communication. Public representatives in the area are trying to solve the long-standing problem of the village," the UNO added.

Ashok Kumar Ghosh Prono, the chairman of Dilpashra Union Parishad, however, said that over 20,000 people living in the village have been immensely suffering for many years due to the lack of road communication.

"As there is not enough land in the village for road communication, we are facing difficulty to implement any project. We have already discussed the matter with the local lawmaker. We are trying to establish road communication in the village giving utmost priority," the chairman also said.

Not always going

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Corporation (DSCC) allocated Tk 6.2 crore in 2016-17, Tk 6 crore in 2017-18, Tk 7 crore in 2018-19, Tk 11.6 crore in 2019-20, Tk 2.97 crore in 2020-21, and proposed Tk 4.9 crore in 2021-22 for the fund.

Sources say the funds often end up in the pockets of well-off individuals.

Minu Rahman has been the councillor in the capital's Arambagh twice. She visited her children in the US at her own expense in mid-2019. But in March this year, she got Tk 2 lakh from the discretionary fund of DSCC for the medical treatment of her husband Mizanur Rahman, former vice-president of Motijheel Awami League.

Several months before receiving the fund, she became a member of DSCC's standing committee for social welfare, which is supposed to look after the underprivileged constituents.

In March this year, Nargis Mahtab, councillor of Kalabagan and vice-president of Jubo Mohila League, got Tk 2 lakh for her daughter's treatment.

In her affidavit, Nargis mentions owning two katha of land on Free School Street in Kathalbagan. This correspondent found a seven-storey building there. Her office is on the ground floor.

On the other end of the spectrum is Ali Hossain, a vendor of scrap metal in Lalbagh. He received Tk 1 lakh for the treatment of his daughter after she lost her right arm and leg by electrocution in

November, 2017.

He needed Tk 3 lakh to buy prosthetics for his 19-year-old daughter. "I applied [to the DSCC] for Tk 3 lakh but got Tk 1 lakh," he said.

"My daughter was in the ICU of Dhaka Medical College Hospital for six months and 22 days. I spent all my savings on her treatment," he said.

Records show Tk 3.06 crore was spent from the DSCC Mayor's Discretionary Fund between July 2020 and the first week of August this year. Of the amount, Tk 60.25 lakh was donated to councillors and members of Jubo league, Jubo Mohila League, Swachhasebak League, Awami League's ward and thana committees, and Tk 23.75 lakh was distributed among people who are not members of any political party.

The rest of the money was spent on constructing mosques, buying gifts for imams and muezzins and handing out cash to the poor who suffered during the Covid-induced lockdown.

The majority of the individuals, who received the donations, are residents of Dhaka-10 constituency. The DSCC mayor was a lawmaker from that seat.

The Daily Star could not find out the identities of the beneficiaries of the DNCC mayor's discretionary fund.

"Local MPs or politically influential people often recommend names of individuals and the mayor gives them money from the fund,"

said a DNCC official.

"There are no rules specifically stating who will get the money and what will be the criteria," said a former chief accountant of a city corporation, adding that the predecessors of the current mayors also arbitrarily used the social welfare funds.

WHAT DOES THE LAW SAY?

Section 75 of the Local Government (City Corporation) 2009 Act says that on special purposes, upon the sanction of allocation by the government, a mayor could carry out emergency work in public interest without causing hindrance as much as possible to the regular work and spend from the funds allocated for the corporation.

Section 11 of the sixth schedule says rules can be formed on the "Custody, investment, operation, regulation and application of corporation fund; establishment and maintenance of sinking funds [a special fund to pay off loans] and other special funds".

But no rules have been formulated on the Mayor's Discretionary Fund.

The current DSCC mayor took an initiative to formulate a policy on the fund on October 27 last year. A draft was placed at a board meeting, but it was not finalised, say officials of the Social Welfare and Slum Development Department of DSCC.

Contacted, DSCC Chief Accounting Officer Munan Howlader said the corporation's budget and expenditure are done as per the law.

East Bengal can't remain united

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tension on its border with Pakistan for long. In an interview on French TV, she said, "I feel I am sitting on a volcano." "India will do everything to prevent war," she added.

Questioned on the possible breakup of Pakistan, she said, "I don't think any country in its right mind would want its neighbour to disintegrate. We have enough problems of our own besides having a weak neighbour. But it is our assessment that East Bengal

can't remain united with Pakistan ever again in the same way as it has been."

WORLD PEACE COUNCIL FOR INDEPENDENCE

World Peace Council stood for independence of Bangladesh, Lucio Luzata, a member of the presidential committee of the council, said at a press conference today. He informed that the Council had formally condemned massacres perpetrated by the Pakistani Army against unarmed civilians in East Pakistan.

Libya FM suspended days before int'l conference

AFP, Tripoli

Libya's presidential council suspended Foreign Minister Najla al-Mangoush from her duties Saturday days before an international conference is to make a new push to restore stability to the war-battered nation.

The council opened an inquiry into alleged "administrative

breaches" by Mangoush, spokeswoman Najla Weheba told the Libya Panorama television channel.

The El-Marsad news website, which is close to eastern-based strongman Khalifa Haftar, said that the council accused her of taking foreign policy decisions without consulting it.

A decree from the council

ON THE WAR FRONT

Mukti Bahini today blew up one Pakistani Army Jeep by exploding a mine in the Jashore district. In this action 3 enemy soldiers were killed. Another group of Mukti Bahini raided the Pakistani Army position in the Rasikpur area and killed 15 enemy soldiers. They also destroyed 5 bunkers of the enemy.

Mukti Bahini encountered Pakistani troops at Shahbazpur in Pabna district today killing 3 and injuring 3 enemy soldiers. On the

same day, Mukti Bahini killed 3 enemy soldiers in an ambush in the Kajalighi area.

Mukti Bahini fired today on Pakistani troops resting in the Koteswar area of Cumilla district. In this action, 20 enemy soldiers were killed.

Mukti Bahini raided today Dakhingul Tea factory, a camp of occupation troops, and killed 13 enemy soldiers. *Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com*

An 'aide'

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local correspondent.

Iqbal Hossen, who was arrested for placing the Holy Quran inside a puja mandap, the incident that led to communal violence in several districts, said Babu was among the instigators of the attacks in Cumilla, according to police.

Babu is known among locals as the personal secretary to the Cumilla mayor. Sakku, however, had earlier said he did not have a PS but admitted that Babu often accompanied him.

Apart from Babu, police earlier arrested two others -- Roman Hasan, joint secretary of Cumilla city Swachhasebak Dal and Rabiul Islam -- in connection with the cases.

2 men killed

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Later on the day, Nazmul's brother Shamsul Haque filed a murder case with Kamalganj Police Station, naming 14 people and 4-5 unknown persons.

Tofael and Shahid were accused in the case lodged over the murder of local business leader Nazmul which took place on October 31.

Chasm

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momentum for climate action" including "commitments on ending our reliance on coal, increasing climate finance, tackling deforestation and plans to cut emissions."

But experts say there is actually a glaring disconnect between what some called "inflated, reshaped pledges" and genuine progress on reducing fossil fuel emissions.

END OF COAL?

On Wednesday, for instance, COP26 president Alok Sharma announced: "A 190-strong coalition has today agreed to phase out coal power".

Khaleda home after 26 days

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said her medical board has suggested taking her abroad for better treatment.

"The medical board this time too has suggested that she be taken abroad for smooth treatment and follow-ups. She needs good quality medical treatment," AZM Zahid Hossain, her physician, told journalists.

He said the BNP chairperson expects better treatment and she sought prayers from the people of the country for her sound health.

Speaking to journalists, Fakhrlul said, "She is well now."

Khaleda was admitted to Evercare Hospital on October 12. Her temperature had started fluctuating a few days before that.

After admission, she underwent several medical tests.

On October 25, AZM Zahid told reporters that a lump was found in her body and it was sent for biopsy. The

hospital later confirmed that the lump was non-cancerous.

Khaleda has long been suffering from arthritis, diabetes, as well as dental and optical issues.

She was infected with Covid-19 this April and underwent treatment at home. However, due to other health complications, she was admitted to Evercare Hospital on the 27th of that month.

She was kept in the coronary care unit and remained there for almost two months. She went back home on June 18.

The BNP chief was sent to jail on February 8, 2018, in a corruption case. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, on March 25 last year, she was granted temporary release on certain conditions. The term of her release has been extended four times so far.

Khaleda's family has appealed to the government for her to be sent abroad for medical treatment. However, there has been no response in this regard yet.

New dinosaur

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Cold Bone belongs to a group of long-necked dinosaurs called the sauropodomorphs, which includes the sauropods.

Some of the largest terrestrial animals of all time later evolved from this group, including diplodocus.

An international team of palaeontologists from Brazil, Portugal, Germany and Denmark have detailed the species in a study published in the journal Diversity.

"Compared to the long-necked dinosaurs that came after, Issi would have been a very small animal," said study author Victor Bennari at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Portugal.

"Some sauropods could reach over 80 feet in length and weigh more than 65 tonnes."

Govt has

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The Gonoforum chief also urged the government to take effective measures to control the soaring prices of daily essentials.

He voiced deep concern that people went through immense suffering due to the transport strike in protest against the fuel price hike.

"The government is not taking any step to assuage the sufferings of people and protect them from the increased prices of commodities in the market since it is an unelected regime."

On Wednesday, the government raised the prices of diesel and kerosene at the retail level.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) said the petroleum prices have been readjusted against the backdrop of the price hike of petroleum on the international market.

Accountability at the core

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economic targets.

Citing a commentator's view on China, he said, the country aptly brought out the contrast in the structure of performance incentives under democratic and authoritarian regimes -- in democracy, politics is interesting while bureaucracy is boring. In China, the reverse is true.

"Bangladesh at the moment may represent a mix of the two."

Economists and policymakers such as the Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Adviser Mashiur Rahman, Centre for Policy Dialogue Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan, Centre for Urban Studies Chairman Professor Nazrul Islam, Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) Executive Chairman Hossain Zillur Rahman, CPD Distinguished Fellows Debapriya Bhattacharya and Prof Mustafizur Rahman were also present at the event, which was moderated by BIDS Director General Binayak Sen.

In his lecture, "Rethinking Economics from a Developing Country Perspective: Some Exploratory Ideas", Wahiduddin pointed out various inadequacies in economic discipline and the contemporary global economic order characterised by instability and unprecedented inequality amidst plenty.

And it is posing a threat to the very sustainability of the global environmental habitat.

He said economics as a discipline is derided, rightly or wrongly, for seeming to lend legitimacy to this market system that lacks compassion and is prey to private corporate interest.

"Students and policymakers are also increasingly becoming frustrated by a visible disconnect between real-life happenings and the economics they study or the economic policy advice they get.

"These concerns have led to a rethinking of economics as a discipline, but much of it has arisen in the context of the Western economies."

His lecture was based on his recent book "Markets, Morals and Development: Rethinking Economics from a Developing Country Perspective".

Wahiduddin said his objective behind the book was to add a developing country's perspective that is largely missing in debates regarding new economic thinking.

He said knowledge in development policy analysis, as in economics and other disciplines generally, originates from rich-country institutions and added that economics textbooks originating from the West are full of examples of US families, firms, labour unions and government activities.

"For the developing country students, this is certainly not the ideal way of relating textbook economics to real life experience," he said, adding that students cannot relate

economics to their socio-economic contexts.

He also said the performance of an economy depends, to a large extent, on whether markets work badly or efficiently.

"And the functioning of markets, in turn, is determined not only by the quality of the regulatory framework under which they operate but also by the socio-cultural institutions in which they are embedded," he added citing examples such as mixing water in milk to increase amount and using calcium carbide in fruit for early ripening.

In this regard, he said, self-seeking behaviour depends on the socio-cultural settings into which the system is embedded.

Wahiduddin also brought the issue of fairness of the global economic system and added that market transactions between parties with unequal economic power may be regarded as "exploitative".

He said the proponents of globalisation typically argue that poor countries would be poorer without freer trade.

Critics, on the other hand, point out the various biases in the global arrangements, such as under the World Trade Organisation, in favour of richer and more powerful countries.

"The biases are reflected, for example, in the way patent rights are enforced or in selective liberalisation of global markets in which exports from industrialised countries have more to gain, while keeping restrictions on items of interest for less developed countries."

The economist, also a former professor of DU economics department, also spoke about inequality and wealth concentration.

"One of the major sources of discontent with the discipline of economics is that it has not got much to say in its theoretical constructs about justice and fairness in income distribution at a time of unprecedented concentration of wealth in the global economy."

Citing Cambridge Economist Sir Partha Dasgupta, he raised the moral case for income redistribution.

"No country is so poor that it does not have the means to provide for the basic well-being of its entire population," he said citing Partha.

BIDS DG Binayak said it is possible to eliminate extreme poverty if 3-5 percent of the national income can be distributed among the poor.

PPRC's Hossain Zillur Rahman said Bangladesh's economy is growing and it is necessary to know the pathways toward prosperity.

He also questioned the much-talked about word "resilience".

"The poor have been given the task of being resilient without support," he said citing the lockdowns imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus and higher labour for less pay.

[Find full text of the lecture online]