



Lack of maintenance and mindless abuse quickening the decay of age-old MT Hossain Institute in Lalmonirhat.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

# Age-old MT Hossain Institute lies in neglect

S DILIP ROY

Cultural workers and civil society members are ringing an alarm as the age-old moveable theatre stage ‘MT Hossain Institute’ of Lalmonirhat is being pushed to the brink of further destruction even though it was supposed to be protected as promised.

Railway staffers have started taking away the rails from in front of the institute.

‘Lalmoni 71’ was the last theatrical presentation by Bangladesh Poribesh Theatre (Bangladesh Environmental Theatre) held on the stage on October 29. Since then, there has been no activity centring the site as it lies empty and unattended.

Bakul Miah, a railway employee, said that they were taking away rails from the MT Hossain Institute as per the order of the authorities. ‘We are working the way we have

been instructed to,’ he said.

The institute was built during the British rule in 1934 on 2 acres and 73 decimals of railway land on Fire Service Road in Lalmonirhat town. It became an epicentre of literary and cultural practice. Poets, litterateurs and theatre personalities from Bangladesh and West Bengal of India frequented it.

Political personalities from different places also used to come here. Even after the independence, this institute played a crucial role in literary and cultural activities for some period. Even ten years ago, the condition of this traditional theatre was not so dilapidated.

The institute is being destroyed due to a lack of maintenance.

Several attempts have been made to occupy the land in collusion with a section of unscrupulous railway officials but those were foiled due to the vigorous movement of literary and

cultural activists.

The land grabbers became desperate to take possession of the land in November 2017. At that time, the movement also became strong. Many national and local literary and cultural organisations including Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, International Theatre Institute, Department of Theatre and Performance Studies of Dhaka University, Bangladesh Pathonatak Parishad and Aranyak Natyadal demanded that the heritage site be preserved.

Sufi Mohammad, founder and director of Lalmonirhat Cultural Centre, said that the then Railway Minister and Railway GM, who came to Lalmonirhat in January 2018, told that MT Hossain Institute would be preserved and its original design would be restored. Railway officials and employees were also instructed to maintain the traditional theatre

properly. ‘But there is still no implementation of that promise,’ he said.

However, Idris Ali, a senior sub-assistant engineer in Lalmonirhat railway division, said that since the rails outside the institute were being stolen, they are taking these elsewhere. They have not yet received any instructions from the higher authorities to maintain the site.

‘I have heard that the MT Hossain Institute will be restored to its previous design but it is up to the higher authorities of the Bangladesh Railway,’ he said.

Lalmonirhat Railway Divisional Engineer Anwar Hossain said they have not yet decided on the fate of MT Hossain Institute. For the time being, the institute’s lines are being preserved to prevent theft. They were vigilant so that no land grabbers could take the land of the institute, he added.

# Slain Pirojpur JL leader Shuvo had a close shave earlier

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pirojpur

Jubo League (JL) leader Faisal Mahbub Shuvo who died after receiving bullets in a clash between supporters of two rival chairman candidates in Shankarpara Union Parishad (UP) elections in Sadar upazila of Pirojpur had a close shave earlier.

In a Facebook post on July 18, Shuvo said that he was targeted by miscreants. He uploaded some photos of bullets and bombs which were reportedly used to kill him. But he narrowly escaped the attack as the bullets missed the target and the bombs did not explode. The incident took place near his office at Ukilpara in Pirojpur town, Shuvo claimed in the Facebook status.

In another development, police have arrested ten accused in the murder case including the prime accused Md Nasir Uddin Matubbor, AL rebel chairman candidate of the union. Md Mojammel Hossain Mollik Tapan, brother of Shankarpasha UP Chairman Md Tofazzel Hossain Mallik Swapan, filed the case accusing 36 named and 120-130 other unnamed on November 8 with Pirojpur Sadar Police Station.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

Slain Faisal Mahbub Shuvo

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# School closes after three teachers get Covid

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Authorities of Rajnarayanpur Government Primary School, located near Nagarbari port area in Bera upazila, stopped all academic activities after three teachers of the institution were tested positive for Covid-19.

The school authority has also asked the teachers to gather information about health conditions of the students, who attended their classes recently.

Coronavirus infected Shamima Akter, 32, Mohabbat Ali, 35 and Iffat Ara, 38, are currently being treated under home quarantine.

Bera Upazila Primary Education Officer Mohammad Kofil Uddin said they closed the school for the student’s safety after three teachers were infected with coronavirus.

He said they will reopen the school only after the health condition of all the students are found all right.

# Mercury dips in N-districts

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Cold accompanied with thick fog started affecting the normal life in the northern districts as mercury dipped to 15.2 degree Celsius in Dinajpur yesterday.

According to Dinajpur Met Office, the temperature in Dinajpur recorded yesterday was 15.2 degree Celsius, the lowest in the country so far this winter.

Tofazzal Hossain a meteorologist at Dinajpur Met Office, said due to light fog the sky remained overcast till 11:30am.

Cold started intensifying in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh since the end of October, he said.

# Chaos all day long

FROM PAGE 1

“The airport has turned into a chaotic place because there aren’t adequate facilities for the passengers,” Jebel Mia, a UAE-bound passenger, told The Daily Star recently.

Alamgir Hossain, 70, who was sitting on the floor and waiting for his flight to Saudi Arabia, said, “I have been waiting for more than two and half hours for a place to sit.”

His flight to the KSA for Umrah was to depart hours before the flights to the UAE.

The airport has seating arrangements only for 250 to 300 departing passengers, airport sources said, adding that it has about 2,000 luggage carts.

Md Selim, who was heading for Turkey, said, “The airport has become a chaotic place, like Sadarghat Launch Terminal.

“The main gateway of the country cannot be like this,” said Khalid Hossain, who was heading for Kuwait.

Several staffers at the airport said they were finding it difficult to manage the crowd inside the airport.

They added that the situation turns chaotic after 1:00pm and continues until all UAE flights depart in the evening.

Wishing anonymity, a member of the Airport Armed Police Battalion said it was hard to deal with the chaos as five-six UAE flights depart one after another. At that time, 1,600 to 1,700 passengers enter the terminal, said the APBn member.

The UAE had imposed a flight ban from Bangladesh on May 12 following a huge spike in Covid-19 cases there. The ban was lifted in August but the Gulf state made it mandatory to have Covid tests done six hours prior to departing.

Following this, the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh gave permission to six healthcare service providers to set up labs and sample-collection booths at the airport. It had asked for the labs

and collection booths to be set up in the car park on the north-east end of the airport.

The service providers had then said having the lab outdoors could compromise the testing process.

The testing and 12 sample-collection booths began operating inside the departure area in late September.

Contacted, Group Captain Touhid-Ul Ahsan, executive director of HSLA, said they were trying to relocate the sample-collection booths to the car park’s roof as soon as possible.

“The airport has turned noisy and chaotic due to the Covid-19 sample collection inside the airport,” he told The Daily Star.

Seven airlines, including Biman, have direct flights to the UAE from Dhaka. They carry around 20,000 passengers a week to the Gulf country, airport sources said.

The Daily Star tried to contact three of the healthcare service providers but they did not respond.

# Two killed

FROM PAGE 12

“The car is owned by Fahmid’s family and he went out early in the morning with the driver. Fahmid was driving,” he said.

The accident took place in front of RAOWA Club around 5:00am, said the OC.

He said apart from the professional driver, there were five people in the car. The driver was in the back seat.

“The car was at speed and it hit the flyover pillar. An investigation is going on,” he said.

The injured were taken to a hospital in the capital, the OC told The Daily Star.

Two cases were filed with the police station and Harun was the complainant of one case.

# Govt to form

FROM PAGE 2

The meeting, which Hasina joined virtually, was held at the planning ministry.

In response to a question, Sharifa Khan, member (Secretary) of the industry and energy division of the planning commission, said they initially planned to build a small jetty there for small vessels, but are now trying to make the channel usable for deep-sea vessels.

“In the original plan, the channel was supposed to be 3km long, 250 metres wide and 15 metres deep. Now, we plan to make it 14.3km long, 350m wide and 18.5m deep. If we implement it, we could make a deep-sea port there.

“Our neighbouring countries will also be able to use the port,” she added.

Planning Minister MA Mannan said there will be a development hub in the areas of Matarbari and Sonadia island, which will create a competitive environment there.

A planning ministry source told The Daily Star that there will be 37 development projects in those areas.

At the Ecneec meeting, a government funded project, worth Tk 3,490 crore, was taken up for the “Development of Elevated Way and Infrastructure” in Haor areas, including Sunamganj and Netrakona.

Under the project, a 10.8km elevated road, a 97.86km all-season upazila road, and 20.27km union road will be developed by the local government division.

Another Tk 5,883.74 crore project was approved in the meeting to establish 109,244 broadband and user connections, 10,000 digital labs, 57 specialised labs, a central cloud platform and frontier technology centre of excellence, IT infrastructure in district, and upazila complexes and training facilities across the country.

# Covid strikes hard

FROM PAGE 12

has failed to ensure expected service quality, experts said.

**LOSSES PILE UP**

BR earned Tk 1,125.8 crore in the 2019-20 fiscal year, while total operating expenses were Tk 31,88.9 crore, according to BR’s Information Book-2020.

Covid-19 hit Bangladesh in March last year and the operation of passenger trains remained suspended for over two months from March 23 to curb the spread of the virus.

The effect of this suspension was visible in the financial report.

BR transported 63.99 million passengers in the 2019-20 fiscal year, compared to 92.71 million the previous year.

Even though all passenger trains -- around 90 percent of the railway fleet -- remained suspended for more than two months, operating expenses saw a rise in the 2019-20 fiscal compared to the previous year.

The total operating expenses for 2019-20 amounting to Tk 3188.9 crore, was a 4.34 percent increase compared to the expenses of 2018-19 amounting to Tk 3,050.6 crore.

Although the operation of freight trains continued amid the pandemic, the number of goods transported by BR reduced significantly in the 2019-20 fiscal.

The freight carried was 3,179.68 thousand tonnes in 2019-20 against 3,959.25 thousand tonnes in 2018-19, shows its books.

On the report on 2020-21 fiscal year, a top official of BR, who deals with finance-related issues, said, “... the preliminary report shows BR will incur further losses in the 2020-21 fiscal year. But, it may not be as big as the 2019-20 fiscal year, because of the rise in income from the operation of freight trains.”

After the second wave of Covid-19 in March this year, the operation of passenger trains remained suspended again for a long time.

**WHAT DO EXPERTS AND AUTHORITIES SAY?**

Transport expert Prof Md Hadiuzzaman said the government was investing a huge amount of money every year but it kept the losing concerns like other public entities, which was very unfortunate.

“Because they [BR officials] lack accountability. There is a lacking of professionalism in their service and they failed to create a culture that requires to give people proper services,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Why will railway continue to incur losses when the demand for railway services is rising sharply?” he questioned.

Contacted, Sardar Shahadat Ali, additional director general (operations) of BR, said around 80 percent of the earnings of BR come from passenger trains.

“So, suspension of passenger trains amid the pandemic hit the railways income hard, which continued in the last fiscal year too,” he told this newspaper yesterday.

He said income from freight trains suffered as there were less than expected imports from India at that time. However, it has bounced back in 2020-21.

Asked about the allegations of poor service and lack of accountability, Shahadat said this was a “policy issue” and he was not the competent authority to respond to the particular question.

BR’s Director General Dharendra Nath Majumder could not be reached for comments over the phone. Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon and Rail Secretary Salim Reza are now abroad.

# Bangavax

FROM PAGE 12

the company announced that its first vaccine candidate had shown promise in pre-clinical trials on mice. Researchers initially named it Bancovid but later renamed it Bangavax.

Then on January 17, Globe Biotech submitted the protocol for the first and second phase human trials of Bangavax. On February 9, the BMRC asked for additional information on more than 100 issues of the proposed trial. The information was furnished eight days later.

# USA, UK call

FROM PAGE 12

steamer. The jetty was also damaged.

In Kushtia district, Mukti Bahini ambushed enemy platoon at Maheshkundi today inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy.

Mukti Bahini encountered Pak troops near Tilakpur today killing 17 enemy soldiers.

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# Morocco says 147 African, Asian migrants rescued at sea

AFP, Rabat

Morocco’s coast guard rescued more than 140 African and Asian migrants in difficulty aboard makeshift boats early Monday, a military source said.

The 147 migrants were from sub-Saharan Africa and from 10 Asian countries, said the source quoted by the official MAP news agency.

The source did not specify the location of the rescue operation but said the migrants received first aid at sea before being handed over to police “for the usual administrative procedures”.

Migrant departures from Morocco’s coast have increased, with most boats aiming to reach Spain’s Canary Islands, despite tighter controls.

# Trial seems never-ending

FROM PAGE 12

Police did not implement the court’s orders, Assistant Public Prosecutor Rehana Akter told The Daily Star, adding, “Most of the witnesses are not coming to the court because of safety concerns as the accused are influential people.”

On December 22, 2013, AKM Mohsin Uzzaman Khan, an Inspector of Criminal Investigation Department of police, pressed charges against Tazreen Fashions owner Delwar Hossain, his wife Mahmuda Akhter, and employees Abdur Razzak, Shahiduzzaman Dulal, Mobarak Hossain Monju, Dulal Uddin, Mahbubul Morshed, Hamidul Islam, Md Al Amin, Al Amin, Anisur Rahman, Md Rana, and Shamim Mia.

The court framed charges

against them on September 13, 2015. Of the 13 accused, Monju, Rana, Al Amin, and Shamim are on the run. Dulal is in jail and the rest are on bail.

Labour rights campaigners and legal experts say the accused have managed to evade justice due to lengthy legal process and the culture of impunity.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Supreme Court lawyer Jyotirmoy Barua said, “The trial in such cases usually gets delayed as the prosecutors and police fail to bring witnesses before the court in time.

“Sometimes such cases are not properly investigated because the accused are influential and rich. Besides, witnesses, being influenced by the accused, do not

appear before the court to testify.”

**VICTIMS’ FRUSTRATION**

Mosammat Yeasmin is losing hope of ever getting justice. A survivor of Tazreen Fashions fire, she feels forgotten.

“A long time has passed. I do not believe we will ever get justice,” said Yeasmin, who was a sewing machine operator at the factory.

Yeasmin’s frustration is shared by many other victims.

Hasan Mia Akash was a line supervisor at the factory. He suffered severe injuries to his spine, head, and arms. He cannot work because of his injuries.

“I don’t think our lives will ever be the same again. Justice could be the only solace, but we don’t know how many years we have to wait for that,” said Akash.

# Farmer killed in Munshiganj

FROM PAGE 12

after the autopsy report is done,” the doctor said.

According to the victim’s father, supporters of Bazlur threatened Sattar some days ago.

Imran Kabir, member candidate for ward-8 demanded a proper investigation into the murder.

Contacted, Bazlur denied the allegations and said, “My supporters were not involved in the incident.”

Sumon Dev, additional superintendent of police (administration and crime), said

they were investigating the incident.

Meanwhile, in Bogura’s Dhunat upazila, two election campaign offices of an AL candidate were vandalised and set on fire early yesterday.

The AL chairman candidate Shah Alam of the Gopalnaga union alleged that activists and supporters of the independent candidate Anarul Islam vandalised his two offices at Mohishura and Kalitala bazar areas around 1.00am and set those on fire.

Asked, the independent candidate Anarul Islam refuted the

allegation and said, “Shah Alam’s people vandalised their own offices and blamed me.

“On Sunday night, Shah Alam and his people vandalised my publicity mike and also insulted my officer.”

Kripa Sindhubala, officer-in-charge of Dhunat Police Station, said, “The AL candidate Shah Alam has given a written complaint in this regard. We will investigate it and take action accordingly.”

*Our Munshiganj and Bagura correspondents contributed to this report.*