

Collapsed bridge unrepaired for over a year

Nearly 40,000 people of six villages in Kalapara upazila cross the canal to reach their destinations

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

An iron structured bridge over Pakhimara canal under Kalapara upazila of the district has remained unrepaired after it collapsed over a year ago, causing suffering to thousands of locals.

The 116-metre-long ramshackle iron-structured concrete bridge on the canal collapsed on August 5 last year, but the authorities concerned are yet to repair or replace the bridge.

Due to the collapse of the important bridge, people of six villages under Nilganj union in the upazila virtually remained cut-off from the upazila headquarters and the district town.

Locals said about 40,000 residents of those villages are facing huge communication problem in terms of reaching their desired destinations.

They said even after over a year of the bridge collapse their sufferings haven't reduced after repeated pleas to the authorities concerned.

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) built the semi-concrete bridge on iron beams at a cost of Tk 30 lakh in 2013-14



This iron bridge over Pakhimara canal in Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila remains unrepaired since it collapsed in August last year.

PHOTO: STAR

growers of the six affected villages as huge quantities of seasonal vegetables are cultivated in those villages throughout the year.

Since the collapse of the bridge local farmers facing huge trouble in communication as they have to cross the canal to carry their produce from the field to the Kalapara town every day.

Sulaiman Hawlader, vegetable grower of Kumirmara village, said farmers cultivate different seasonal vegetables round the year, and they have to carry their goods to different markets every morning to sell those.

But since the collapse of the bridge, they are using small boats to carry their produce to Kalapara-Kuakata highway near Pakimara Bazar, and then to Kalapara upazila town on other available vehicles.

Ruhul Amin Mridha, a resident of Kumirmara village, said more than 200 students from six villages on the east side of the canal study in different government schools, secondary

schools and madrasas in Pakhimara area, on the other side of the canal.

After the bridge collapse, villagers built a floating bridge, using hundreds of plastic drums and bamboos, to ease the suffering of the students, he said, adding that the makeshift bridge has also become unusable.

Abdul Hakim of Sonatala village said we requested the local public representatives on several occasions, but their sufferings remained the same.

Local UP Chairman Nasir Mahmud said he repeatedly urged the upazila LGED office to construct a new bridge on Pakhimara canal, but no initiative has been taken yet.

Contacted, LGED Kalapara Upazila Engineer Delwar Hossain said soon after the bridge collapse he sent a proposal to his higher authorities to build a girder bridge there.

Construction work of a new bridge will start as soon the proposal is approved, he added.



fiscal years.

But, due to lack of maintenance and repair work since the construction the iron frame of the bridge started developing rust and suddenly collapsed in the canal last year, snapping communication between Kumirmara, Majidpur, Alempur, Baintala, Faridganj and Sonatala villages and the upazila headquarters.

Mentionable, the bridge is vital for the

Locals blame

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"There were plenty of trees within 10 yards of where the launch was anchored. The staffers could easily throw a rope and tied the launch with a tree. All passengers then could have moved to safety," said Shohag Mollah, one of the locals who rushed to help the passengers that night.

Dalim Begum, wife of local union parishad member Sobuj Khan, said they woke up hearing people's cry for help. "At first, we thought our village was attacked by robbers. I asked my husband not to go out but he rushed outside and saw the launch burning."

Shamim Sheikh, who lives in the char, said, "Had the launch been anchored for 15 minutes, all passengers could have been rescued safely."

He said as the burning launch was drifting back into the river, locals rushed near it with engine boats amid dense fog. "But the rescue work was extremely difficult as the fire was fierce."

Many passengers jumped in the river and were rescued by boats brought by locals, he said.

Later, the rescued passengers were given shelter and clothes in the char, he said.

Meanwhile, another person burnt in the fire died of her injuries at the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery in the capital yesterday evening.

With her, at least 46 people have died in the incident. Several dozens still remain missing.

The dead is Shahinur Khatun Shwapna, 45, a resident of Sharisamuri village in Barguna's Betagi upazila.

Her husband and daughter, who also suffered burns, were undergoing treatment at the burn institute.

New space telescope

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powered in part by solar panels, which Nasa recently said had been deployed successfully. But it also relies on more traditional propellant to allow it to orient itself in space.

Nasa said that the telescope has enough rocket propellant not only for getting to its eventual destination – a point in space known as L2 – but also the various things that will be required of it for a long time. That propellant is used through the life of the mission for what Nasa calls "station keeping" manoeuvres, as it adjusts its orbit, and for other burns that keep Webb the right way up in space.

It has been able to keep that extra propellant largely because of the precise launch of the Ariane 5 rocket that launched the telescope into space on Christmas Day. Because that and the correction manoeuvres that followed had been so accurate, less fuel than predicted was required and more is left in its tanks.

The deployment of the solar array was also able to happen ahead of schedule, Nasa said. The telescope was programmed to deploy them either when it reached a certain angle towards the Sun or after 33 minutes – and because the launch was so accurate, it was able to point the right way more quickly, opening about 29 minutes after launch.

Now that solar array is deployed, the telescope will move to deploy the other parts of the telescope, including the mirrors that will let it look deep into space. All of that should be done by the time it reaches its eventual orbit, which is expected to happen about a month after launch.

The remaining deployments are all human-controlled, Nasa noted, meaning that their timing or order could change.

WHO warns of 'very high' Omicron

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The WHO said early data from Britain, South Africa, and Denmark – which currently has the world's highest rate of infection per person – suggested there was a reduced risk of hospitalisation for Omicron compared with Delta.

But it added that further data was needed to understand Omicron's severity.

And despite those studies, Omicron's rapid growth "will still result in large numbers of hospitalisations, particularly amongst unvaccinated groups, and cause widespread disruption to health systems and other critical services", warned WHO Europe's Covid Incident Manager Catherine Smallwood.

Europe was again one of the hotspots for the pandemic, which is known to have claimed more than 5.4 million lives around the world.

France, Britain, Greece and Portugal all reported record daily case numbers on Tuesday. France reported almost 180,000 infections over 24 hours.

To hold back the tide, many nations on the continent have brought back curbs with heavy economic and social consequences.

Contact restrictions were in place in Germany for the second year in a row heading into the New Year, as Europe's biggest economy shut nightclubs and forced sports competitions behind closed doors.

It also limited private gatherings to 10 vaccinated people – or two households where any unvaccinated people are present.

Finland on Tuesday said it would bar unvaccinated foreign travellers from entering.

Only residents, essential workers or diplomats will be exempt.

The Nordic country, like Sweden, had begun requiring negative tests for incoming non-resident travellers from Tuesday, a day after Denmark applied the same measure.

But the Belgian government's plans to introduce further restrictions were thwarted as a court suspended an order closing entertainment venues.

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo had announced the original measure on December 22 as Belgium saw a sharp increase in the percentage of tests showing the Omicron variant.

The Covid spikes around the world have caused severe disruptions to travel over the holidays, with thousands of flights cancelled worldwide.

They are also threatening sports events again.

England's top football league is grappling with record cases, while China has imposed strict lockdowns on millions of people to control the spread of the Delta variant ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

Mexico City's mayor on Tuesday cancelled the capital's massive New Year's Eve celebrations as a preventative measure after a rise in Covid-19 cases.

The top American sports leagues have also been hit, as the United States battles a surge fuelled by Omicron, as well as large pockets of unvaccinated people and a lack of access to quick and easy testing.

The US Centers for Disease Control has halved the isolation period for asymptomatic cases to try and limit disruptions and mass labour shortages.

No turning back now

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left no doubt that going beyond the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) heating limit envisioned in the Paris Agreement would push Earth into the red zone.

"As a lifelong optimist, I see the Glasgow outcome as half-full rather than half-empty," said Alden Meyer, a senior analyst at climate and energy think tank E3G.

"But the atmosphere responds to emissions – not COP decisions – and much work remains ahead to translate the strong rhetoric here into reality."

The past year also saw Part 1 of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) first comprehensive synthesis of climate science in seven years.

It found that global heating is virtually certain to pass 1.5C, probably within a decade. Meanwhile, ocean levels are rising faster than anticipated, and will do so for centuries.

And forests, soil and oceans – which absorb more than half of humanity's carbon pollution – show signs of saturation.

Then there is the threat of "tipping points" that could see permafrost release massive amounts of CO2 and methane, the Amazon basin transformed into savannah, and ice sheets shedding enough mass to submerge cities and deltas home to hundreds of millions.

"Make no mistake, we are still on the road to hell," said Dave Reay, head of the University of Edinburgh's Climate Change Institute.

"But Glasgow has at least created an exit lane." Part 2 of the IPCC report on climate impacts, seen exclusively by AFP ahead of its February 2022 publication, reveals another yawning gap between the baby steps of COP26 and what is needed in the long term.

Helping vulnerable nations cope with the multiplier effect of global heating on extreme weather could soon require trillions of dollars per year, not the tens of billions put on the table at COP26, a draft version of the report makes clear.

"Adaptation costs are significantly higher than previously estimated, resulting in a growing 'adaptation finance gap'," said an executive summary of the 4,000-page report.

The failure of rich nations to deliver \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help developing countries makes it hard to imagine where these trillions will come from.

Glasgow marked the transition from fleshing out the rules for the 2015 Paris treaty to implementing its provisions.

But unlike the aftermath of other major COPs, the climate crisis will remain a permanent breaking story that is not going to recede into the background anytime soon.

How that saga unfolds will depend a lot on the world's four major emitters, collectively responsible for 60 percent of global carbon pollution.

The United States and the European Union have pledged carbon neutrality by 2050 and recently set more ambitious emission-reduction targets for 2030.

But they refused to set up a fund demanded by more than 130 developing countries to help pay for climate damage already incurred.

China and India – accounting for 38 percent of global emissions in 2021, and rising – have resisted pressure to give up fossil fuels.

Beijing has steadfastly refused to do what scientists say is doable and necessary to stay under 2C: peak their emissions far earlier than 2030.

LACK OF RAINFALL INCREASES PRODUCTION COST

No smile on sharecroppers' face despite expected yield

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Around 90,000 sharecroppers in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts are in a sombre mood despite having an expected yield of Aman paddy as lack of timely rainfall has increased their production cost, farmers said.

Abdur Hossain (55) is a sharecropper. He has no cultivable land except for his homestead of 10 decimal lands.

Abdur Hossain, who hails from Batrish Hazari village of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila, has been cultivating land as a sharecropper for the last 25 years. Like him, RajoniKanta Barman (48), Solaiman Sarkar (52) and Azizur Rahman (48) in the same village have been producing crops as sharecroppers.

This year they have got the desired yield of Aman paddy but they have had to incur loss due to soaring production costs, they said.

According to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), the number of families depending on agriculture in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts is about 2.5 lakhs. There are more than 90,000 sharecroppers in the two districts.

They have been cultivating the land as sharecroppers for many years.

Abdur Hossain said that he has been cultivating six bighas of land as a sharecropper for several years. According to the agreement, the land owner gets one-third of the crop and the sharecropper gets two-thirds. Sharecropper bears all the expenditure for producing the crop.

"We have got a good yield of Aman paddy this year but we are still in a loss. Due to lack of timely rain this year, we had to depend on underground water and it costs more than Tk 1800-Tk 2000 per bigha," said Abdur Hossain.

Azgar Ali, 53, a sharecropper from Gorokmandal area of Kurigram's Phulbari upazila, said, "I have been cultivating eight bighas of land taking from a local farmer but this year the production cost increased due to dearth of timely rain."

Manjurul Haque, deputy director of DAE in Kurigram, said that the sharecroppers have to work hard to make ends meet.

"Sharing of the crop is a personal agreement between the landowner and the sharecropper. We have nothing to do here," he said.



Dearth of timely rain has increased the production cost of Aman paddy in Lalmonirhat and Kurigram. Many sharecroppers have had to incur loss this year despite having desired yield. The photo was taken from Barish Hazari village of Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

Girl confined, raped for a month

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chloroform and abducted her from Amtali's Chowrasta area. They took her to an unknown location, kept her hostage and raped her there for one whole month.

The victim's father said, "The moment our daughter went missing, we lodged a general diary with Amtali police. On the afternoon of December 19, Jisan and his cohorts left her near our house in an unconscious state. We rescued her and took her to Amtali Upazila Health Complex, and then to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital, where she is still receiving treatment."

The girl's mother, who is the plaintiff in the case filed on Tuesday, said, "I want justice for my daughter."

Meanwhile in Kishoreganj's Katiadi upazila, an eighth grader killed herself on Saturday after some youths publicly harassed and threatened her.

The girl's mother filed a case with Katiadi Police Station on Monday, accusing Akash Mia, 25, as the prime accused, and his two friends Arman Mia, 19, and Emon Mia, 20. However, none of them has yet been

arrested.

Md Shahadat Hossain, OC of Katiadi Police Station, said Akash used to harass the minor girl often on her way to school. Her family had informed Akash's father about it, which enraged Akash.

On Saturday, the girl went to school to collect grade nine admission forms. On her way back, Akash confronted her and threatened that if she didn't get into a romantic relationship with him, she would have to face dire consequences.

He also warned her not to tell anyone about his threats, the OC said quoting the case statement.

She immediately called her mother, who came to the spot and took her home. Around 2:00pm, the girl died by suicide.

The news of the incident spread in the area the next day and sparked protests held by locals and her fellow students, who demanded the immediate arrest and exemplary punishment for the accused.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Kishoreganj General Hospital morgue for autopsy. Drives are on to arrest the accused, said the OC.

184 allegations, action zero

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meeting today," he said, adding that the DSHE was also asked to ensure punishment commensurate with the offences.

The ACC secretary said if the government offices take primary actions against irregularities and anomalies, the corruption would be prevented to some extent.

"It will ease our burden and help the commission to focus on major corruption," he said.

Later, Golam Faruk told the reporters that they would comply with the ACC directives.

He claimed they failed to apprise the commission on time due to the pandemic.

A recent study of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) says there were instances where aspiring headteachers or assistant headteachers had to pay between Tk 3.5 lakh and Tk 15 lakh to get the appointments in schools.

Illegal transactions have also taken place for the transfer of teachers, their inclusion to the Monthly Pay Order (MPO) benefits, during schools' academic approval, school

inspections, and more, reads the study titled "Secondary education programme: Governance challenges and way out".

The study also found that while there was an online process for non-government teachers to apply for MPO benefits, they still "had to pay money" at four stages.

Many government school teachers and upazila education officers have been working at the same place for over 10 years using their influence and money.

Many officials of the Directorate of Inspection and Audit (DIA) are also working at the same station for as long as they have scope to "earn money" in those stations, though the corresponding provisions say a person cannot stay at the same station for more than three years.

Pointing out 39-points recommendations, in 2017, the ACC pointed out several scopes of corruption in the education ministry.

It suggested the ministry take initiatives to dispel different irregularities in the education ministry that include procurement, unnecessary visits abroad and expenditure in the name of training.

Taiwan crisis may worsen next year: China

REUTERS, Beijing

China will take "drastic measures" if Taiwan makes moves towards independence, a Beijing official warned yesterday, adding that Taiwan's provocations and outside meddling could intensify next year.

China claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and in the past two years has stepped up military and diplomatic pressure to assert its sovereignty claim, fuelling anger in Taipei and concern in Washington.

China was willing to try its utmost to seek

peaceful reunification with Taiwan but would act if any red lines on independence were crossed, Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman of the Taiwan Affairs Office, told a media briefing.

"If separatist forces in Taiwan seeking independence provoke, exert force or even break through any red line, we will have to take drastic measures," Ma said.

Taiwan has emerged as a key factor in strained relations between China and the United States, the island's most important international backer and arms supplier despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties.