

Scarcity of stones hampering RHD projects

This crisis may push deadlines further, fear officials

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A scarcity of stones, a crucial construction material, is seriously hampering construction work of different development projects of Roads and Highways Department (RHD). This problem may very well cause delays in meeting project deadlines.

RHD officials and contractors are blaming the rise in cost of stones, due to various reasons, and interruptions in their transportation from a major source in Bhutan.

Although the scarcity has been prevailing since late last year, it intensified in the last two to three months, they said.

As a result, works of several foreign-aided projects – including SASEC Road Connectivity Project-2, Cross-border Road Network Improvement Project, and Western Bangladesh Bridge Improvement Project – have slowed down.

Under these projects, more than 200 km of four-lane roads and dozens of bridges are being built.

Besides, many government-funded projects, especially those being implemented in the country's western part, are facing difficulties to continue work, they said.

If the situation does not improve soon, it would ultimately push project deadlines even further. This is bad news, because many of the projects are already running behind schedule.

RHD is currently implementing 185 projects, including 22 foreign-aided ones, and Tk 19,656 crores were allocated under Annual Development Programme (ADP) for this fiscal year. **WORK SLOWED DOWN** The SASEC-2 is one such project facing difficulties.

RHD is implementing the Tk 1,666.238-crore project with a loan from Asian Development Bank (ADB) to make the 190-kilometre Elenga to Rangpur highway have four lanes. The deadline was revised to December 2024 from August 2021.

Explaining the problems, SASEC-2 project director (PD) Waliur Rahman said contractors



ISSUES

- Stone scarcity intensified in last few months
- Works of several projects slowed down

used to get stones from three sources – Bhutan, India, and Madhyapara granite mine in Dinajpur.

But, supply from Bhutan remained almost halted for the last four to five months, while the price of “Pakur” stones from India also rose, he told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Madhyapara mine cannot supply sufficient stones, leaving project implementers in trouble.

The Cross Border Road Network Improvement Project is another one that is in crisis.

Under the Tk 3,745.51-crore project, RHD is building 17 bridges along with 11.27 km connecting roads, with a loan from Japan.

Its PD, Shyamal Kumar Bhattacharyya, said they were facing issues for the last two months, as contractors are not getting sufficient stones, which is ultimately slowing down work.

The project deadline has already been extended to December 2023, one and a half years more than the original one.

Under the Western Bangladesh

Bridge Improvement Project, RHD has already built 61 bridges, and construction of 21 is ongoing.

Its PD, Khan Md Kamrul Ahsan, said they have been facing problems since October last year, and one of the two contractors have already sought for a time-extension, citing shortage of stones, among other reasons.

The current deadline of the Japan-funded Tk 2,911.75 crore project is June.

Concord Pragatee Consortium Ltd (CPCL) is a Bangladesh firm involved with all three projects.

Mrittunjoy Ghosal, director (projects) of CPCL, said, “We are facing severe problems in project implementation due to stone shortage.”

“The problem started in July last year, and intensified recently. We are not getting stones even after paying higher prices,” he told The Daily Star.

The construction season for road and highway development starts in October and ends in March or April, depending on rainfall. “We are losing the ideal time for work due to the shortage,” he added.

Md Moniruzzaman, additional chief engineer (ACE) of RHD's Rangpur, said they are implementing 18 projects. “We are facing some problems over shortage of stones, and

if the situation lingers, the problems will intensify.”

ACE of Rajshahi and Barishal zones also echoed him.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? Mrittunjoy Ghosal said Bhutan was a major supplier of stones, but supply through the Burimari border of Lalmonirhat came to an almost halt for the last few months.

Sources at RHD said the Indian authorities have set up an axle-load control centre on the road that connects Bangladesh with Bhutan through India. As a result, heavily loaded trucks are not allowed to use the road.

Before, a truck used to carry 34 tonnes, but now, is only allowed to carry 17 tonnes.

So, transportation costs rose sharply, and therefore, suppliers almost stopped supplying, said a top RHD official.

In this situation, Indian suppliers have also increased stone prices, he said.

However, the increase in transportation costs due to fuel price hike, and rise of dollar exchange rate are also to blame for more expensive stones, said another RHD official.

The price of per tonne of “pakur” stone of India was around Tk 3,250 in

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‘Rehab had no clearance, licence’

Charge sheet submitted against 15 in ASP Shipon murder case

CHAITANYA CHANDRA HALDER and EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

The hospital – where assistant superintendent of police Anisul Karim Shipon was allegedly tortured to death on November 9, 2020 – had no government clearance and licence, found a police probe.

The authorities of Mind Aid Psychiatry and De-Addiction Hospital did not appoint any expert psychiatrists to treat patients, the investigator mentioned in the report.

After a year and four-month probe, inspector Faruk Mollah of Adabor Police Station on March 9 submitted the charge sheet to Dhaka's chief metropolitan magistrate's court.

The charge sheet states that National Institute of Mental Health and Hospital (NIMH) registrar Dr Abdullah Al Mamun and 14 others were responsible for the ASP's death. The hospital was set up only to earn illegal money through fraudulent treatment.

The 14 others are hospital directors Fatema Khatun Moyna, Abdullah Al Mamun, Sakawat Hossain Remon and Sazzad Amin; marketing manager Arif Mahmud Joy; coordinator Redwan Sabbir Sajib; kitchen staffer Masud Khan; ward boys Jobayer Hossain, Tanif Mollah, Sajeeb Chowdhury, Asim Kumar Pal and Saiful Islam Palash; guard Liton Ahamed; and pharmacist Tanvir Hasan.

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Buet plans to introduce on-campus jobs for students

SIRAJUL ISLAM RUBEL

Authorities of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) are planning to introduce on-campus jobs for students.

Buet authorities said on-campus jobs can help towards lessening students' dependence on private tuition. They will also create scope for students to work on software development, programming, data analysis, digitalisation and automation process.

“We have formed a committee to detail out how many students will get on-campus jobs, what will be their pay,” Vice Chancellor Prof

Satya Prasad Majumder told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the university authorities used to get all these works done from people outside the campus and now students will do those.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, director of Students' Welfare, said, “We have seen that students who are providing private tuition have negative impacts on the academic results. Many students also earn money by providing private tuition to meet the education expense.”

As Buet teachers are involved in various

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PRAYER
TIMING
MAR 11



	Fazr	Juma	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	5-05	12-30	4-30	6-12	7-30
Jamaat	5-40	1-15	4-45	6-15	8-00

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

‘Govt to follow Delta Plan as guideline’

Says state minister for planning commission on water management

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite “loopholes” pointed out by experts in the Delta Plan – that was drawn for 100 years – Shamsul Alam, state minister for planning commission, yesterday said they will follow it as a guideline to deal with Bangladesh's water management.

The minister said this at a seminar organised by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) to invite opinion from experts on the book “Water Development in Bangladesh: Past Present and Future” authored by S Nazrul Islam, chief of development research of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

Nazrul Islam in his book shed light on the dissimilarities between plan and project in the plan, saying there was no coherence between the two.

“The plan does not reflect the project,

which was taken from other ministries and mostly from the water development board. The projects were repetitions of an earlier policy, which took a toll on our water management for not being inclusive and participatory,” he said.

In the book, he presented the devastating situation due to the cordon off approach to deal with tidal water. He underlined the need for an open approach for Bangladesh being a deltaic country.

“The lessons from the past were not learnt,” Nazrul alleged.

Nazrul Islam also said the country's river has been facing two threats. The global threat stems from climate change, while the regional one is the diversion of water by upstream countries. However, Shamsul Alam disagreed with the author, saying their plan was participatory and they took lessons from their past experiences for water management.

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On a warm, sunny morning, a third-year fine arts student of Dhaka University sits on a bed of dry leaves near the faculty, totally engrossed in painting her next work of art during a practical class. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN