



PLASTIC WASTE

a prevailing threat to port city

Around 54.66 percent of water stagnation is caused due to plastic waste, which also leads to water pollution, death of aquatic animals and health hazards.

SIFAYET ULLAH

A new study found that Chattogram city produces 3,000 tonnes of waste every day, of which, 249-tonne is plastic waste.

Around 56 percent of this waste remains uncollected and is eventually dumped in water bodies and rivers, according to the study titled "Creation of awareness to reduce waste plastic and waste polythene alternatively used in road construction".

Pial Barua and Al Amin, students of civil engineering at Chattogram University of Engineering and Technology (Cuet), presented their research findings during a seminar at Chattogram Press Club recently.

The research was conducted from August 2021 to August 2022 in Chattogram's low-lying areas experiencing water stagnation, among 75 retailers, 75 waste pickers and a few manufacturers in the port city.

"With rapid growth and urbanisation,

Bangladesh faced a sharp increase in both plastic use and pollution," Prof Swapan Kumar Palit of Cuet's civil engineering department and also the supervisor of the study, told this correspondent.

The study showed that of the 249 tonnes of plastic waste, 140 tonnes cause water stagnation.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

Around 54.66 percent of water stagnation is caused due to plastic waste, which also leads to water pollution, death of aquatic animals and health hazards.

"Of the plastic waste, the most used products were sachets, one-time used utensils, and personal care products," the study added.

The study also predicts that the port city will generate 428 tonnes of plastic waste in 2052.

Prof Swapan Kumar Palit said neighbouring countries like India introduced the use of recycled plastic use in road construction.

"If the authorities conduct a thorough research and find a way to implement it, we will benefit in the long run," he said.

Bangladesh -- the world's first country to ban plastic shopping bags through a regulatory order in 2002 -- has now ranked 162nd out of 180 countries as the most

polluted countries, according to the 2020 report of the Environmental Performance Index of Yale University.

The Jute Packaging Act 2010 for six essential items (paddy, rice, wheat, maize, fertiliser, sugar) promoted an alternative to plastic packaging.

In 2020, a High Court directed the concerned authorities to ban single-use plastic in coastal areas and all hotels and motels across the country.

However, that alone has not been able to put a stop to plastic pollution.

Prof Idrish Ali of Govt Haji Mohammad Mohsin College's chemistry department said plastic often ends up clogging rivers, sea and other water bodies and degrades over time into microplastics that are released into the environment

"This poses threat to humans and the entire ecosystem," he added.

Meanwhile, people of the port city continue to suffer from water stagnation for over a decade, largely due to plastic pollution.

The government has taken a series of projects to eradicate the perennial problem in Chattogram.

On August 9, 2017, the government undertook "Canal re-excavation, renovation and expansion to eradicate water stagnation in Chattogram", a mega project, at a cost of Tk 5,616 crore. The project is being implemented under Chattogram Development Authority and supervised by army.

Contacted, Morshed Alam Chowdhury, additional chief cleaning officer of Chattogram City Corporation, said they collect waste from door-to-door on a regular basis to keep the city clean.

However, it is not possible to get rid of this plastic menace if the residents are not aware of the consequences, he added.

EASTERN ZONE

Railway's earning increases by 55pc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After witnessing a massive shortfall in revenue because of the pandemic, Bangladesh Railway's eastern zone has improved its position in the 2021-22 fiscal year.

It has earned a total revenue of Tk 493.75 crore in 2021-22 against the Tk 318.22 crore during the previous fiscal year, thus registering a 55 percent rise. It carried more than 34.37 crore passengers during 2021-22.

Nazmul Islam, chief commercial manager of the BR (east zone), told The Daily Star, "Passengers can reach their destination faster than before... The ticketing process has also been simplified. Intercity train tickets are being sold online, so passengers can book tickets from the comfort of their homes. Apart from this, tickets (forwarding tickets) for all destinations of intercity trains have been opened at all stations."

He claimed, "Passengers are flocking to railways because of overall improvement in service quality, and thus revenue is increasing."

Earlier, passenger services were badly hit during the lockdown. Amid the pandemic, the number of railway passengers decreased in the 2020-21 fiscal year.

Whatever BR generated revenue during the



lockdown was mostly from freight services. The amount of goods carried by freight trains rose by 71.39 percent during the pandemic, sources said.

However, despite the growth of railways, the state-owned institution is still incurring huge losses allegedly due to poor services, corruption, and a lack of proper management of assets.

It posted a Tk 1,384 crore losses for the 2020-21 fiscal year, shows a railways ministry document.

The railway continued the poor show although the government is providing it with increased funding both for operation and development budgets.

Around 5,000 acres of railway land was grabbed by illegal occupants. If the land can be recovered and used for commercial purposes, railway can earn crores of taka, but there are no serious attempts to recover the land.

Mentionable, the BR has been receiving investments since 2009.

Md Mozammel Haque Chowdhury, secretary general of Bangladesh Passengers Welfare Association, said, "Corruption and ticket scalping have not stopped yet in the railway sector. Revenue should have increased further since railway was made a separate ministry. But the revenue growth in the passenger sector is not promising. The Ministry of Railways should focus on increasing revenue to reduce the burden of losses."

Jahangir Hossain, general manager of BR (eastern zone), said they are trying to make the railway profitable amid the crisis.

The railway now operates 394 passenger and freight trains on its 3,093km network across the country.

For the love of books

How a footpath library cultivates reading habits

ARUN BIKASH DEY

When Arko Dutta, a fourth grader, was returning from school with his mother, he noticed a library near Dr Khastagir Government Girls' High School in Chattogram's Jamal Khan intersection.

He stopped to scroll through the pages of different books, which were on display at the footpath library, set beside a passenger shed.

Noticing his enthusiasm, his mother asked the library man about the rules for borrowing books.

This is how the library, which was inaugurated last Friday, is cultivating a love for reading books in kids, and young people in general.

The Sheikh Russell Smriti Pathagar library has over a hundred books on different categories, including novel, poetry, science, autobiography, political essay and literature, said Shaibal Das Suman, ward-21 councillor, the chief patron of the library.

He said he took this initiative so that people, specially the youth, could be interested in reading books.

"There are a number of schools and educational institutions in Jamal Khan area and guardians often allege that their children are getting dependent on electronic gazette," he said.

"I wanted to set an example for others to follow. If libraries are set up in all the 40 wards, we will get thousands of new readers in the city," said Suman.

Monifa Sultana, a tenth grader, was returning from school with her three friends. They were also seen talking to the library man asking about the formalities of membership.

Hailing the initiative, Monifa said she felt interested to be a member of the library as the rules for borrowing books are simple.

Just like Monifa and her friends, many students were seen flocking to the library while returning home from school.

Gokul Nandi, the library man, told The Daily Star that anyone can be a member of



the library by paying Tk 100 as registration fee.

"A member has to pay Tk 20 per month and can borrow one book a week," said Gokul, adding, the library remains open between 10:00am - 2:00 pm and between 4:00pm and 9:00pm.

Guardians were also all in for such initiatives.

"The habit of reading books is almost non-existent among our children now-a-days," said Anupam Barua, a resident of Jamal Khan area.

"Setting up such libraries is a positive initiative in such circumstances," he added.

Tk 2,675cr road turns into truck stand

SIFAYET ULLAH

Built at a cost of around Tk 2,675 crore, when the under-construction, 15.2-kilometre Chattogram City Outer Ring Road opened for vehicular movement in 2021, city dwellers and experts believed it would be a blessing for mitigating traffic congestion.

They thought that the road, built along the Bay of Bengal, would offer tourists a chance to take in the beautiful, uncharted vista of the bay on the stretch from Patenga to Foujdarhat area, opening a new horizon for tourism.

But in a tragic turn of events, this very road has become a source of traffic jam and public sufferings, after apparently being turned into a truck stand.

During a recent visit, this correspondent found that trucks and covered vans were parked all over the place on a part of the road in Halishahar Chowdhurypara area.

The situation was almost identical in Chowchala, Anandabazar Ghat, Akmal Ali Road, Khejurtala, Patenga Housing Colony, and Patenga sea beach, areas the road goes through.

Faruk Hossain, a



truck driver, said, "We are forced to keep vehicles on this road as there isn't any public truck terminal in the port city."

Not only parking, but the road is also regularly used for repairing trucks.

Amzad Hossain, a local resident, said, "We thought the road would change our fate, but instead, it turned into a truck stand."

Subash Barua, a transport expert, said, "The road was built using crores of public money, but it will go to waste if it is overtaken by unlawful parking."

In 2006, Japan Bank for International Cooperation recommended improving coastal trunk-road connectivity to address communication problems and ensure future

sustainable connectivity in Chattogram.

As per the recommendation, Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) undertook the Outer Ring Road project.

The Tk 2,675.95-crore project was approved by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) in 2013, following which construction works began that very year.

Although the project was expected to be completed in 2019, work on two feeder roads is still pending. Despite this, the road was opened for vehicular movement in 2021.

Kazi Hasan Bin Shams, project director and chief engineer of CDA, agreed that the road is not benefiting everyone due to the truck stand.

"The maintenance of a clear roadway for vehicular traffic is the duty of the traffic department. We have verbally requested the traffic division to take the truck stand off the road," he told The Daily Star.

Tarek Ahmed, deputy commissioner of Chattogram Metropolitan Police's (CMP) traffic department, said drivers park their vehicles illegally in absence of strict monitoring. "We don't generally allow any vehicles to park on the road."

