



CTG-COX'S BAZAR RAIL PROJECT

SECURITY now serious concern

Railway police struggling to set up establishments for the line, as project officials say this was not part of plan

“We have prepared a full-fledged plan to set up three police stations and four outposts. To operate the new offices, we will need around 300 additional officers. We have sought land from the rail link’s project director during several meetings and in letters, but no progress. With the existing workforce, it will be very difficult to ensure safety and security.”

MD HASAN CHOWDHURY
Superintendent of Police, GRP
Chattogram Region

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, CTG

Around 73 percent of the construction work of the 100 kilometre Chattogram Cox’s Bazar rail link had been completed by August. But security arrangements for this route are still in limbo, as railway police do not have the required workforce and infrastructure to monitor this line.

Government Railway Police (GRP) has sought land for its security establishments – which include police stations, outposts and accommodation – from the project’s top officials.

However, according to the officials, that would not be possible as this was not mentioned in the development project proposal.

The single-line, dual-gauge rail link is one of the government’s fast-track projects. Top officials believe this infrastructure will change the whole socio-economic situation of Cox’s Bazar. The highlight is that the rail network will establish connections with the Trans-Asian Railway.

MD Hasan Chowdhury, superintendent of police (SP) of GRP Chattogram Region, has sent several letters and mentioned the lack of security establishments in many meetings, said GRP sources.

According to sources, GRP has finalised a proposal to set up a circle office, three police stations and four outposts. To run the new establishments, Chattogram GRP has sought 300 officers from Police Headquarters.

GRP officials said after inaugurating the rail link, it will become one of the busiest lines, as tourists from all corners will visit Cox’s Bazar by train. With GRP’s existing workforce, it is not possible to provide security for trains and passengers.

The proposal for new establishments is now hanging, due to complications centring land.

Confirming the new proposal, SP Hasan told The Daily Star, “We have prepared a full-fledged plan to set up three police stations and four outposts. To operate the new offices, we will need around 300 additional officers.”

“We have sought land from the rail link’s project director during several meetings and in letters, but no progress. With the existing workforce, it will be very difficult to ensure safety and security,” he said.

According to the proposal, the police stations will be set up in Patiya, Dohazari of Chandanaish upazilas, and Cox’s Bazar. The outposts will be in Satkania, Lohagara, Ramu and Chakaria upazilas.

Besides, the circle office will be installed in Cox’s Bazar to monitor the police stations and outposts. Accommodation will be ensured for the establishments.

According to Bangladesh Railway’s progress report, 73 percent of project works have been completed. Workers have installed railway tracks stretching for 44.2 km along with other establishments. Around 15 km of tracks are being installed through a protected forest. Project officials said 50 overpasses have already been constructed.

Talking to The Daily Star, Project Director Mofizur Rahman said, “They [GRP] told us about their demand, but we have to see what is mentioned in the policy. Who will provide logistical support to the police, the railways ministry or any other body?”

“We have arranged accommodation for Railway Nirapatta Bahini (RNB) and police at the eye-catching Cox’s Bazar railway police station so that tourists and passengers safely move about with their help,” he mentioned.

“If there is any decision from the government in this regard [GRP’s demand], they will get it,” he added.

Seeking anonymity, a GRP official said, “Railway tracks are being installed through hills and forestland. When the route will be opened, criminals will become active and commit crimes like mugging and robbery. The Rohingya issue will be a headache. With no establishments along the long route, it will be impossible to maintain security sitting from Chattogram.”

Contacted, GRP Additional Inspector General of Police Md Didar Ahmed said, “We have sought 1,500 officers [for the country’s railway police] from the ministry via Police Headquarters, and the proposal is waiting for the green signal from the government.”

“Major projects, like the metro rail in Dhaka and rail link in Cox’s Bazar, are being implemented. Once they are completed, duties of GRP will multiply,” he said.

Physical work on the rail link started in March 2018, eight years after it was approved in July 2010. Initially, the government decided to lay 128 kilometres of metre-gauge tracks at a cost of Tk 1,852.35 crore, but in 2014, it decided to install dual-gauge tracks for better connectivity. This raised the total cost tenfold, to Tk 18,034.47 crore.

Authorities then made more changes, like shelving plans to construct the line up to Gundum, near the Myanmar border, from Ramu, due to fund shortages.

After the project’s first revision in April 2016, the deadline was set for June 2022. After a lot of hurdles, workers started installing tracks from Dohazari of Chattogram to Ramu in March 2018.

This is one of the eight fast-track projects. It is jointly funded by the government and Asian Development Bank. Works were suspended for a few weeks last year due to the pandemic and then slowed down due to the absence of Chinese nationals working for the contractors.

International photo exhibition held in port city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

A three-day international photo exhibition featuring Sufi rituals was held at Chattogram District Shilpakala Academy in the port city between Thursday and Saturday.

In a bid to promote the spirit of Sufism through photography, Darul Irfan Research Institute (DIRI) organised an international photo competition. It invited both professional and amateur photographers from all around the world to participate in the competition in January.

A total of 724 photographers from 51 countries submitted a total of 2,578 photos for this competition. From them, 200 photos were selected for the exhibition and 151 photos were awarded in different categories.

The categories were – serenity in nature, Sufi rituals and activities around the world, Sufi shrines around the world and Maizbhandar Darbar Sharif’s rituals and activities.

After the exhibition’s inauguration, an award-giving ceremony was held at Chattogram District Shilpakala Academy auditorium on Thursday, where Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury was present as chief guest.

Sheikh Shakil Mahmud, an organising committee member, said the competition and exhibition’s main goal was to promote the spirit of Sufism throughout the world.

Shyamol Nandi, one of the award winners from Chattogram, said, “I’m proud of myself for being awarded among so many photographers from around the world.”

Shyamol’s photograph was titled “Prayer at Maizbhandar Darbar Sharif”.

Syed Irfanul Hoque, DIRI managing trustee and photographer Shoeb Faruquee spoke among others in the award-giving ceremony with Syed Emdadul Hoque Maizbhandari, a DIRI trustee as chair.



EDU students clean Patenga beach

CITY DESK

Thirty students of East Delta University volunteered to remove garbage such as plastic bottles, polythene bags and similar items from the Patenga Sea Beach area on Sunday morning.

The students, who were all wearing yellow shirts during this time, were from the Social Service Club of the University. The cleansing program was part of a ‘Say no to plastic’ campaign of the club.

Sakif Ahmed Salam, deputy managing director of Asian Group and director of Chattogram Chamber, assisted the students in this campaign. Besides, Asian Group has installed some dustbins at the Patenga beach as part of their commitment to keeping the city clean.

Abad Hasan, president of the social service club, urged citizens to dispose of waste at designated places rather than dumping it all over the sea beach.

He also said the club will continue organising similar campaigns in the future.

WORLD FRESHWATER DOLPHIN DAY

Halda dolphins on the verge of extinction

ARUN BIKAS DEY

Halda is an important habitat for the endangered freshwater Gangetic Dolphin (*Platanista gangetica*). Dolphins are an integral part of the area’s ecosystem and their conservation is vital to the survival of a wide range of aquatic and endangered species, including turtles, gharials and otters.

However, the species has been disappearing from the river at an alarming rate for the past few years. Experts suggest that the Halda should be declared a dolphin sanctuary immediately to save the animals from extinction.

According to data from Chittagong University’s Halda River Research Laboratory, a total of 39 dolphins died in the Halda River in the five years from September 2017 to October 2022. Of those, seven dolphins died this year.

Three dolphins died only in July. A dolphin was found dead in Halda river on July 21, while experts suspect it may have died after being strangled by fishing nets.

Earlier on July 20, another dead dolphin was found which was about seven-feet long

and weighed around 90 kilos. On the 14th of the same month, another dolphin was found in Azimer Ghat area.

Prof Manjurul Kibriya, coordinator of the CU Laboratory, the lab conducted the first autopsy of such a dolphin in February 2018. It was found that the animal died due to injuries caused by the sharp propeller of the boat.

“At that time, we

submitted a six-point recommendation to the authorities, including a ban on mechanised boats in the river, a halt on dredging and netting for fish, and declaring the river a dolphin sanctuary,” he said.

“The authorities implemented most of those recommendations. As a result, the death rate was reduced.”

However, Prof Kibriya said the death



REASONS FOR DOLPHIN DEATHS

- Motorboat propeller strikes, other injuries
- Entanglement in fishing nets
- Illegal hunting

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ban on mechanised boats
- Halt on dredging, netting for fish
- Declaring Halda a dolphin sanctuary

“Expanding the Protected Area System to Incorporate Important Aquatic Ecosystems Project” for the conservation of Gangetic dolphins and Irrawaddy dolphins.

The action plan report states that the Gangetic dolphin is a third-tier animal in the food chain and the species is an important indicator of our river ecosystem.

Although the species is found in almost all the major rivers of Bangladesh, the northeastern regions with some upstream rivers have been a stronghold of the species.

According to the report, it is important to take steps to save the species before it is listed as an endangered species on the Red List of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

Contacted, Forest Conservator Imran Ahmed of Wildlife and Nature Conservation zone, Dhaka, said, “The action plan was approved last year. Since then, we have started the process of undertaking various projects to conserve freshwater dolphins.”

“We are working towards implementing the recommendations of the action plan,” he added. However, he did not elaborate on the details as to how the implementation will take place.

of dolphins in the Halda is increasing due to motorboat propeller strikes or other injuries, entanglement in fishing nets and illegal hunting.

“The rate at which dolphins are dying in accidents in the river is much higher than the reproduction rate. If proper action is not taken in time, they will be wiped out from the river soon,” he added.

In 2019, Bangladesh Forest Department formulated an action plan under