

Lighting project GOES DARK

CCC's second extension ends with zero implementation; now seeks for the third one



Wishing anonymity, some CCC officials said the project work could not be started on time due to some other reasons. It took more than eight months to complete the capacity survey (pre-quality) process conducted by Exim Bank of India.

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN AND ARUN BIKASH DEY

A project for lighting various roads in the Chattogram City Corporation areas has not seen a single percent of progress in three and a half years.

Due to the multiple reasons, including delays in tender procedures, negligence of CCC officials and allegations of tender manipulation, the project has come to a halt. None of the seven packages have yet seen initiation.

The project, with a one-year tenure and cost of Tk 261 crore from Indian funds, has already been revised for the second time after three and a half years.

CCC – the implementing agency of the project – has not been able to appoint a contractor yet.

CCC has asked for a third extension (one year) after the expiry of the second edition, according to the documents of Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) of the planning ministry.

"It is a failure of the concerned officials of

the city corporation," according to a planning ministry official.

The project, titled "Modernisation of City Street Light System at Different Areas under CCC", was approved at the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council on July 9, 2019.

After the implementation of the project, the electricity bill of CCC will be reduced by half and a smart management system would be introduced instead of the manual process, said Abdul Bari, executive engineer (electrical) of CCC.

He said around 500 switches for lamp-control will be replaced by only four central server stations. The LED lamps will be controlled by timers and magnetic control systems.

According to CCC sources, there are lights on a total of 1,043 kilometres of roads in the city. Among them, sodium lamps cover up a total of 890 kilometres of roads and LED lamps cover up 153 kilometres.

Meanwhile, if the project is implemented, 467 kilometres covered with sodium lamps

will be replaced by LED lamps.

According to CCC officials, there are about 51,573 sodium lamps in the city streets. These lamps are switched on and off from 1,534 switching points in different mosques, temples and social organisation offices.

A total of 1,534 imams, muazzins and priests are engaged in this work at each point. CCC has been paying an honorarium of Tk 2,500 to each of them annually, and Tk 38.35 lakh in total.

Asked about the zero percent progress in over three years, project director Jhulan Kumar Das said they could not continue the project due to the pandemic.

However, wishing anonymity, some CCC officials said the project work could not be started on time due to some other reasons. It took more than eight months to complete the capacity survey (pre-quality) process conducted by Exim Bank of India.

Besides, contractors were not appointed as per law, they alleged.

Meanwhile, a bidder contractor also submitted a written complaint to the IMED of the planning ministry, saying the project director is involved with tender manipulation.

When asked, Jhulan Kumar declined to comment on the issue.

"The Indian government will verify the papers and approve of the matter soon," he said.

"The tender process has already started. The companies approved by the Indian government would take part in the tender immediately after we get the approval papers by the Indian government," he said.

Contacted, CCC Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said the project had been initiated before he took the office. "There were some complications initially, but I have taken stern steps to gear up works," he added.

The project was scheduled to be completed by June 2021. Besides, the revised implementation period of the project was extended by one year till June 2022.

However, no decision has been taken on whether the cost of the project will increase with the deadline extension.

GULIAKHALI BIODIVERSITY AREA

A ray of hope for wildlife

SIFAYET ULLAH

The coastal forest department of Chattogram has proposed to establish a special biodiversity area on 6,507 acres of forest land at Sitakunda's Guliakhali area to save hundreds of species of wildlife and birds.

According to the forest department data, the 6,507-acre mangrove forest land, one of the oldest and most enriched forests in the country, is home to 108 species of wildlife, 98 species of birds and 21 species of trees.

Md Abdul Rahman, divisional forest officer of the coastal forest department of Chattogram, said, "We have already sent a proposal to the higher authorities of the forest department in this regard, including the detailed data."

"Due to the construction of an industrial city on 23,500 acres of forest land in Mirsarai upazila, hundreds of animals have been displaced. They are currently living in this proposed forest land. The special biodiversity area has been proposed mainly to protect these animals," he added.

Bipul Krishna Das, conservator of the forest of Chattogram region, told The Daily Star that the proposal to form Guliakhali special biodiversity area has already been sent to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

"A committee headed by an additional secretary of the ministry has started work on the project. The committee has already organised a meeting where we presented our plans," he said.

"We hope that Guliakhali will be declared as a special biodiversity area by the Ministry of Forests soon," added Bipul.

Wildlife experts have praised the Forest Department's initiative to create a special biodiversity area at Guliakhali.

They said a special biodiversity area means a site that contributes significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. This implies that the site contains many unique species.

Farid Ahsan, a wildlife specialist and former professor of zoology at Chittagong University, said, "Biodiversity is essential for the processes that support all life on Earth, including humans. Without a wide range of animals, plants and microorganisms, we cannot have healthy ecosystems that we rely on to provide us with the air we breathe and the food we eat."

Mentionable, Guliakhali Sea Beach, which is located in Sitakunda upazila, was declared a reserved area for tourism on January 10 this year.

The civil aviation and tourism ministry made an announcement in this regard, bringing 259.1 acres of the beach under its protection as khas land.

SITAKUNDA SHIPBREAKING YARD

Waste treatment plant still a long way off

SIFAYET ULLAH

The government enacted the Bangladesh Ship Recycling Act in 2018 and asked the authorities concerned to build a Treatment Storage and Disposal Facility (TSDF) within 3 years for the safe disposal of hazardous waste.

However, five years have passed since then. The construction is yet to be completed.

The Ministry of Industries has already taken up a project to conduct a feasibility study to construct the long-awaited TSDF.

Under the project, the ministry has earmarked 20 acres of land in Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila for setting up the TSDF.

Md Zafar Ullah, director of the TSDF Feasibility Study project and additional secretary of the ministry, said the project study has been completed, at a cost of Tk 4 crore.

The project will cost around Tk 500 crore and negotiations to fund it with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) are currently underway, he said.

He also mentioned that the pandemic

was the main reason behind the delay.

"We have already applied for site clearance and initial environmental examination to the Department of Environment," he added.

Ferdous Anwar, deputy director of the DoE Chattogram district office, said, "The project is appealing but there are errors in the application."

"We have already sent a letter to the project authorities and will approve the amended application once we receive that," he added.

Mentionable, a World Bank study estimated that 79,000 tonnes of asbestos, 240,000 tonnes of PCB (harmful chemical compound), 19,78,000 tonnes of organic liquid waste, 775 tonnes of inorganic waste and 2,10,000 tonnes of ozone-depleting substance would be deposited in the soil and water of the Sitakunda coastal belt from 2010 to 2030.

The High Court ruled in 2009 that no ships could enter Bangladeshi territory without first receiving a pre-cleaning certificate from an organisation that will ensure the ships are free of hazardous



waste.

Abu Taher, president of the Bangladesh Ship Breakers and Recyclers Association (BSBRA), said in the absence of a central sewage treatment plant, waste

from the ship-breaking industry is scattered everywhere, resulting in severe environmental pollution.

"We have repeatedly requested the Ministry of Industries to construct the

treatment plant," he added.

Ships were mostly disassembled in Europe and the US up until the 1970s. As social and environmental protection legislation became more stringent in those regions of the world, the business moved to developing countries with lax legal systems.

Roughly 800 ships reach the end of their useful life and must be dismantled and repurposed each year. Around 70 percent of these ships wash up on the beaches of Alang in India, Chattogram in Bangladesh and Gadani in Pakistan.

According to the recyclers association, the shipbreaking industry started to take shape in Sitakunda in the 1960s.

Around 40 to 50 percent of the world's old ocean-going ships have been dismantled in shipbreaking yards in the past two decades.

However, accidents involving workers and environmental degradation have been increasing due to a lack of a policy in the country.

The government passed Bangladesh Ship Recycling Act, 2018, in the face of domestic and international pressure.

Eyes might deceive one into believing this serene beauty is a part of a seaside scene. However, it is a vast ocean of clouds in reality, from high above the ground, on a hill where the waves these clouds make are endless. The photo was taken from Bandarban's Nilachol recently.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN