

Still no replacement for risky rail bridge

Construction of new one over Teesta in Lalmonirhat in limbo

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

It has been two decades since the longevity of Teesta Railway Bridge in Lalmonirhat's Sadar upazila expired. But till this day, hundreds of people cross the bridge daily, risking their lives.

Known as the gateway to Lalmonirhat and Kurigram from Rangpur, the structure was constructed as a 2,100-foot-long railway bridge over the river in 1901, with an expected lifespan of 100 years, according to officials of Lalmonirhat Railway Division, adding that at least 10 trains use the bridge every day.

Earlier, heavy vehicles like buses used to ply the wooden docks installed on the bridge. But a separate bridge was constructed beside the railway bridge in 2012 for vehicles, as the latter was in a vulnerable state.

Five years ago, the railway ministry said that a project was finalised to construct a new railway bridge over Teesta river considering the risks attached with the present dilapidated bridge.

Confirming the development, in 2019, then railways minister Nurul Islam Sujan visited the expired bridge and assured everyone that a new bridge with broad-gauge track would be constructed soon. The current bridge was built with metre-gauge track.

Design of the broad-gauge railway is being prepared, railway sources confirmed. But even after five years, the construction is yet to begin.

The spans of Teesta Railway Bridge have become vulnerable. The bridge vibrates while the trains move. Conductors fear a terrible tragedy may occur any time.

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This bridge in Lalmonirhat's Sadar upazila was constructed in 1901, with an expected lifespan of 100 years. But even two decades after its expiration, authorities have done little to replace this structure, and so, commuters have no choice but to use this structure to cross Teesta river. This photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

UNDERGROUND METRO RAIL

Physical work now set to start on Feb 2

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The date for starting the physical work of country's first-ever underground metro rail line has been deferred to February 2 from January 26.

ABM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of Road Transport and Highways Division, and MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd, confirmed the date with The Daily Star last night.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was supposed to open the works on January 26, but she will be occupied with a prior programme on that day. Therefore, she will open the construction works on February 2, said Nuri.

DMTCL, the implementing agency of the metro rail project, has already signed a contract with Japan-Bangladesh joint-venture firm to develop the depot.

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Ishraque gets bail in arson case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to BNP leader Ishraque Hossain after his surrender before it in an arson case filed in November 2020.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Arafatul Rakib passed the order after Ishraque, also a former mayoral candidate of Dhaka South City Corporation, appeared before the court and sought bail.

On December 5 last year, another Dhaka court cancelled his bail and issued arrest warrant against him as he remained absent and submitted a time petition through his lawyer.

Ishraque was arrested on April 6 last year in the same case while distributing leaflets protesting the price hike of essentials. He was released on bail on April 12 the same year.

The prosecution alleged that a group of leaders led by Ishraque gathered in front of Bangladesh Bank Colony intending to carry out subversive activities in the city's Motijheel area on November 12, 2020. Later a case was filed against Ishraque and 31 others.

PRAYER TIMING
JANUARY 23

Fajr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
AZAN 5:30	12:45	4:15	5:43	7:15
JAMAAT 6:05	1:15	4:30	5:47	7:45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Tea estate ignites wildfire, kills scores of animals



In an attempt to clear their leased land, authorities of Hatimara Tea Garden set trees in the area ablaze. Eventually, the fire spread over to Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary, killing dozens of wild animals. Despite such a devastating occurrence, the tea estate kept on setting trees on fire. Many of the burnt animals took shelter at local households while many that perished were buried. Some of the images obtained by this newspaper were too graphic to publish.

MINTU DESHWARA

Hatimara Tea Garden took lease of a land near Rema-Kalenga Wildlife Sanctuary in Habiganj's Chunarughat upazila some years ago. The place was a safe habitat for wildlife and hosted century-old trees... up until January 19, 2023.

All hell broke loose on the day when the tea estate decided to expand their garden in the most heinous way possible, according to locals and environment activists.

To clear their leased area, authorities of the estate set the trees ablaze, basically igniting a wildfire that spread over to

the sanctuary – killing dozens of animals. The uprooted trees, helpless screams of wildlife, and burnt corpses of animals could not stop the tea company. It was still "clearing the land", still setting trees on fire, as of filing this report yesterday evening.

As shocking as it may sound, local administrations have not intervened even though three days have passed since this started, signing the death warrants of countless wild animals in the process, locals alleged.

Visiting the area yesterday, this correspondent saw charred bodies of capped langurs, barking deer, Indian civets, hilly

mynas, squirrels, herons and countless other wildlife lying in different places of what was once their homes. Locals buried many of them in the last three days.

Besides, around three hectares of forestland have been burnt to ashes, while animals were spotted running here and there frantically.

"Some of the animals took shelter in our homes," said Nanu Mia, a local. "A monkey entered my house on Sunday at noon. The animal was scared as its tail was burnt."

Seeking anonymity, another local said, "We didn't see any official from the local administration or forest

department at the spot in the last three days to douse the fire or take action against the perpetrators."

The tea estate has uprooted at least 140 trees from the forest during this time, the locals added.

Biswajit Bhattacharjee Bapan, coordinator of Mita Foundation, an environmental organisation, said, "The abandoned land where Hatimara Tea Garden is expanding its estate was a sanctuary for barking deer. Deer love eating the fruit of a tree called aula. Trees of this species have also been cut down."

"As 140 trees were cut down and set on fire, several species of monkeys, apes, deer and pigs lost

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

TAMBRU BORDER

Rohingyas passing days under open sky

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The Rohingyas driven out of their homes near Tambru border in Bandarban's Naikhongchhari upazila have been spending the last five days under the open sky in a schoolyard in Konarpara.

Last Wednesday's violence broke out between two armed Rohingya factions at the border camp, leading to one refugee being killed.

The refugees claimed that Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) and Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO) were behind the violence, both of which were trying to take control of Konarpara Rohingya Camp. The camp straddles the border on the no man's land, run by the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Following the shooting which lasted over two hours, Rohingya homes in the camp were set on fire, causing several hundred Rohingyas to cross the barbed-wire fences and flee to Myanmar. The Myanmar military pushed them back in response, leading them to take refuge again in Bangladesh, in schoolyards and rice fields of Ghumдум union.

A 46-year-old refugee named Mohammad Amin said, "When they burnt down our homes last Wednesday, we broke through the barbed-wire fences to seek shelter in Myanmar. But just one day later the Myanmar military forced us to leave and re-enter Bangladesh. I don't know what will happen to us – we have no food, no water, no homes."

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31 Jamaat, Shibir men held in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Police arrested 31 Jamaat-Shibir men on charge of "subversive activities" in Dinajpur town yesterday morning.

Police also seized bus in connection with the incident.

Tanvirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dinajpur Sadar Police Station, said a bus carrying the Jamaat-Shibir men came to Station Road area in the town around 7:00am. Getting off the bus, they gathered in the station area.

Being informed, a police team raided the spot and arrested them. Police produced them before a court yesterday afternoon, which sent them to jail.



A woman along with her child crosses the shaky bamboo-made bridge over the Kabodak river at Jalilpur village in Jhenidah's Moheshpur upazila, risking their lives.

PHOTO: STAR

Makeshift bamboo bridge only option for Jhenidah villagers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

People of six villages in Jhenidah's Moheshpur upazila have been suffering for years in absence of a permanent bridge over Kabodak river.

As there is no alternative, about 25,000 residents of the villages have to cross the river using a makeshift bamboo bridge in Jalilpur-Jughuda area.

Locals said earlier, villagers used to cross on boats, but they have been using the bamboo bridge, built by the community, for the last 25 years.

In absence of a permanent bridge, farmers have been incurring losses, as they cannot carry their produce to nearby Jalilpur Bazar.

Mentionable, locals rebuilt the makeshift bridge last year, as it collapsed while authorities were re-excavating the river.

Thousands of people of Jalilpur, Jughuda, Kadamtala, Saratala, Nimitla, and Berermath villages are compelled to use the unsafe bridge.

Hundreds of students also use the bamboo bridge every day as there is a college, a primary school, a secondary school and two madrasas in Jalilpur area.

MA Asad, a lecturer at Moheshpur Paura Women's College, said it is quite difficult for students to go to the institution during monsoon. Elderly Shefali Begum said she trembles in fear every time she uses the bamboo bridge.

Moheshpur Municipality Mayor Abdul Rashid Khan said the risky bridge often leads to severe accidents.

Moheshpur Upazila LGED Engineer Sayed Sahrar Akash said they have sent a proposal to the ministry concerned to build a 100-metre-long concrete bridge in Jalilpur area.