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Digital debacle

Govt move to digitalise rural post offices falls flat, finds CAG audit

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MAHMUDUL HASAN

In 2012, the government took on a Tk 541 crore project to convert 8,500 post offices in rural areas to e-centres for the communities.

Six years after its completion, the project appears to have completely failed to achieve its objectives, according to a report of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh prepared by making in person visits to 900 such centres over a five-and-a-half-month period.

The Post e-Centre for Rural Community project aimed to deliver services including internet, e-governance, e-commerce, e-education, e-agriculture, faster disbursement of remittances and allowances.

"All these services had been mentioned in the development project proposal [DPP] only to get the project approval. The overall analysis shows that government funds had

been wasted ...," said the CAG report. No measures were taken to promote the services among the rural population; only photocopying and printing are done there.

Mustafa Jabbar, who has been serving as posts and telecom minister since December 2018, acknowledged the inadequate planning when the project was undertaken.

The initiatives that were taken before 2018 to establish digital post offices were without a proper plan, he told The Daily Star.

"So, we have set up a digital service design lab with the assistance of a2i and conducted a survey suggested by the lab. With the survey, we are trying to identify what type of services should the rural post offices offer."

A DPP is being prepared to digitalise the post offices, Jabbar added.

About Tk 380.68 crore was spent on



Water Development Board workers lining the Jamuna with geo bags -- made of woven polyester and polypropylene fabrics and filled with sand and/or soil to build shore-protection structures -- to stop river erosion at Chitulia village and beyond in Tangail's Bhuapur upazila. According to locals, erosion has been going on for around two months. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: SHEIKH ENAMUL HAQ

UNIVERSAL PENSION

Govt forms Nat'l Pension Authority

Scheme likely to be launched by August

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has formed a two-member National Pension Authority (NPA) to execute the Universal Pension Scheme formulated to provide pension services for the common people.

Kabirul Ezdani Khan, additional secretary of the finance division, has been made the executive chairman of the NPA and Golam Mostofa, another additional secretary of the division, has been made the executive member. The Daily Star has learnt from people familiar with the proceedings.

The authority will initially begin its activities with them. The two will serve the NPA in an additional capacity. The scheme is likely to take off at the end of this month or next month. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate it.

To properly implement the scheme, several rules will be formulated under the relevant law.

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EU DELEGATION

A visit crucial to ensuring polls observers

PORIMOL PALMA

The assessment of the EU exploratory mission, which will visit Bangladesh for two weeks starting July 9, could determine the international acceptability of the next parliamentary election, analysts have said.

The EU is sending the mission to observe the pre-polls atmosphere, and the response will determine whether it would send a team to observe the election. The initiative, the first of this kind with regard to the upcoming polls, in turn would inspire other foreign countries and entities to follow suit -- which would ultimately mean stronger election monitoring.

EU Ambassador to Bangladesh Charles Whiteley said the six-member EU delegation will talk to all the stakeholders -- government, political parties, Election Commission, security officials, the civil society and media. It is an independent professional exercise and not a political EU mission.

"They [the delegates] like any observation mission, have to decide if it is feasible, useful and advisable to deploy a full EU observation mission," he told The Daily Star.

After the mission submits its report, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell will decide if the election observers will be coming to Bangladesh, he added.

M Humayun Kabir, president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), said the EU did not send observers for 2018 polls and the international community was highly critical of the last two elections. Therefore, this election and the coming of the international observers is very important.

He added that international acceptability of the election is extremely important for the country, given the economic and diplomatic challenges in the post-LDC Bangladesh, especially in the changing global geopolitical environment following the Russia-Ukraine war.

Kabir further said trade facilities like the EU's GSP Plus, once the GSP is over, is partly dependent on a free and fair election.

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Govt created atmosphere of 'fear, panic' by using DSA

Opposition MPs say in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party and Gonoforum MPs in parliament yesterday came down heavily on the government for harassing people and journalists using the Digital Security Act and said that it has created an atmosphere of "fear and panic".

The MPs said this while taking part in a discussion on the "Agency to Innovate (A2i) Bill-2023".

The lawmakers said people and journalists are being abused as the law has been weaponised.

JP MP Pir Fazlur Rahman said the digital security law is being used to harass journalists. People are also being made victims and tortured for expressing their opinions. Influential quarters are using this law. People's right to freedom of speech is being taken away. This law needs to be amended urgently, if not repealed, he said.

Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan said, "If we cannot prevent the misuse of digital technology, the law will be of no use. Again, if the law is misused, the goal cannot be achieved. We saw this with the Digital Security Act ... Around 7,001 cases were filed under this law until January 2023. The journalist community has suffered the most due to this law."

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NORTHERN DISTRICTS

Low-lying areas flooded as rivers swell up

STAR REPORT

Low-lying areas in several northern and northeastern districts are inundated as rivers continue to swell.

The Jamuna and the Padma rivers may continue to swell until Friday morning, according to a bulletin of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) released at 9:00am yesterday.

The water the Teesta crossed the danger level yesterday morning, inundating villages in low-lying areas in Lalmonirhat. FFWC forecasts that the flood will not persist for long.

From 6:00am, Teesta water has been flowing 3cm above the danger level at Dalia Point in Lalmonirhat's Hatibandha upazila, officials said, adding that the Dharla was also swelling.

"The ongoing flood situation in the Sunamganj and Netrokona district may remain unchanged and the Dhalai river may cross danger level at Kamalganj point for a short period in the next 24 hours," the bulletin said.

Except for the Khowai, the Someswari and the Dhalai rivers, water levels of major rivers in the north-eastern region of the country are falling, and the trend may continue for 48 hours, said the bulletin.

"Teesta water is rising due to an onrush of water from upstream. All the 44 gates of the Teesta Barrage have been kept open to reduce the pressure of water from upstream," said Shunil Kumar,

executive engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB).

Abdar Hossain, a 64-year-old farmer in Khuniyagachh area of Lalmonirhat, said, "Many of our crop fields and seedbeds have gone under water."

In Moulvibazar's Kamalganj, homes of around 250 families got flooded as the Dhalai river submerged Chandipur, Uttar Alepur, Panishala, Kamalganj Thana Road, and Kamalganj Government High School.

"The Dhalai River may continue rising if it rains further," said Javed Iqbal, executive engineer of BWDB.

In Kurigram, water levels in the Brahmaputra, the Dudhkumar, the Gangadhar, the Teesta and the Dharla rivers are rising, officials said.

In Bogura's Sariakandi, officials said the Jamuna may inundate low-lying areas anytime.

Meanwhile, flood waters continued to recede in Sunamganj although the Surma river was still flowing above the danger level in Chhatak, said BWDB Executive Engineer Mamun Hawlader, adding that the situation is not likely to worsen in the district.

In Netrokona, food waters kept receding yesterday, even though the Someswari was still flowing above the danger level, officials said.

[Our correspondents from Lalmonirhat, Moulvibazar, Bogura, Sylhet and Mymensingh contributed to the report]



With patients continuously pouring in, the dengue ward of Mugda Medical College and Hospital has reached its bed capacity. As a result, patients are having to sleep and be treated on the floor. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

METRO RAIL

Test run from Agargaon to Motijheel in two days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Metro rail authorities will conduct a test run of the trains on the Agargaon-Motijheel section in a day or two (Friday or Saturday), according to officials.

"We will be able to say the exact date and time of the performance test of trains tomorrow [Thursday]. So far, our target is to start the test on Friday or Saturday," MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd, told The Daily Star last night.

"Currently, we are carrying out a physical verification of the rail track. We hope to complete it by Thursday evening. Then we will be able to

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MORE NEWS	Inflation outpaces wage growth PAGE B1	Padma Bridge: automatic toll collection starts on trial basis PAGE 3	265 incidents of violence against women, children in June PAGE 5
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LOGO CHANGE NOTIFICATION

In order to enhance individualised recognition and dissemination of the university's name and fame, and to further improve the overall brand image of the university, the logo has been adjusted as follows




From now on Uttara University will use the new logo and the old logo is gradually being phased out. Thanks for your long-term support and attention.

July 2023
Uttara University