



Construction work of these bridges in Patuakhali's Rangabali upazila remains half done due to alleged negligence of the contractor concerned. PHOTO: STAR

PATUAKHALI'S RANGABALI UPAZILA

Deadline expired, work of four bridges stalled

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

Nearly a year after missing the deadline, construction work of four bridges in Rangabali upazila, located far from the mainland, has remained half done due to alleged negligence of the contractor concerned.

In an attempt to the ease the communication problem of thousands of villagers, Rangabali Upazila Engineering Department (LGED) took the initiatives to construct four separate bridges at different locations in Rangabali Sadar union, spending about Tk 6 crore, in 2022-23 fiscal years.

Local people alleged that the work of the four iron-structured bridges started on time, but got stalled in the halfway due to unknown reason.

Meanwhile, although the deadlines of the construction work expired over 10 months ago, only a few iron poles of one of the bridges have been installed so far.

Moreover, no approach roads have been built, connecting the other three newly constructed bridge, villagers said, adding that work of the four bridges was started to ease their sufferings, but they are yet to get any benefit.

Earlier, Rangabali LGED Office floated a tender to construct four iron-structured bridges in different areas of the upazila at a cost of Tk 5.88 crore.

Pirojpur's ETCL (Pvt) Limited and EFTEE from Bhandaria jointly got the work order.

As per the contract, construction work

of the four bridges started on April 1, 2022, and scheduled to be completed by March 31, 2023.

But nearly a year after passing the scheduled deadline, the work has not been completed yet.

LGED officials, however, claimed that about 90 percent work of all the four bridges have been completed.

During recent visits to different sites this correspondent found construction of the main infrastructure of one of the bridges on Amlabhanga Canal, flowing close to South Kazir Hawla Government Primary School, has been completed.

But people living in nearby areas are not getting its benefit due to lack of approach roads on both sides of the 90-metre-long and 10-foot-wide bridge.

Swapna Akhter, a Class VII student

of Hamidiya Rashidiya Mahila Dakhil Madrasa, said, "As my home is located at South Kazi Howla I have to attend the madrasa by crossing the bridge on Amlabhanga Canal."

But as there is no approach roads on either side of the newly-constructed bridge she still crosses the canal by small country boat, amid risk of accident, Swapna said.

There are no approach roads on either side of another 30-metre-long and 10-foot-wide newly constructed bridge over the same canal near Khalgora Bazar.

Meanwhile, another 42-metre-long and 10-foot-wide bridge, built between two separate bridges on Motherbunia Canal, also have not approach roads that connect the newly constructed bridge.

Moreover, though work of another



Rangabali Upazila Engineering Department (LGED) took the initiatives to construct four separate bridges at different locations in Rangabali Sadar union, spending about Tk 6 crore, in 2022-23 fiscal years.

78-metre-long and 10-foot-wide iron-structured bridge, about three kilometres from the other bridges, was started on time, only seven to eight iron poles have been installed there so far.

Contacted, Gias Uddin, representative of the construction firm, said work of the bridges has been delayed due to shortage of construction workers.

Usually, the area faces severe labourer shortages during the watermelon season, he added.

Rangabali LGED Upazila Engineer Habibur Rahman said about 90 percent work of three out of the bridges have already been completed.

Following request from the contractor concerned, they have extended the scheduled deadline till June this year, the engineer said.

US keeping close watch

FROM PAGE 14
cooperation like economy, climate change."

Ibelle said the US is the number one foreign direct investor in Bangladesh and the number one location for goods and services from Bangladesh.

"I think that is very indicative of the interest of United States and that is also indicative of the fact that we try to partner in the areas in which we have mutual interest."

Asked if the US would withdraw the sanctions against Rab imposed in 2021 December and review the visa policy announced in May last year, the spokesperson said he has no information, but that after the sanctions, the number of extrajudicial killings declined.

"So, we feel the sanctions had an effect on crimes and

extrajudicial killings that were committed by Rab."

On the three-day TechCamp workshop being hosted by the US embassy, he said it aimed to empower 50 aspiring journalists to combat misinformation, fact check, and learn best practices on Artificial Intelligence.

Ibelle said, "Every day, we are exposed to so much information that we can barely keep track of. Oftentimes, we mix rumors with facts and truths. It is really easy to become confused. To deal with this challenge, we need to equip ourselves with critical thinking and the correct tools to identify."

Those joining the workshop can later compete with their ideas on fact-checking, and the best ideas will be supported by the US embassy.

Prof Yunus

FROM PAGE 14

The HC said as the four accused -- Grameen Telecom Chairman Yunus and its directors Ashrafur Hassan, Nurjahan Begum, and M Shahjahan -- are on bail, their sentences will remain suspended until their appeals are disposed of.

The bench issued the rule and order after the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) filed a criminal revision petition challenging the Labour Appellate Tribunal's order, Deputy Attorney General Saifuddin Khaled told The Daily Star.

Md Tariqul Islam, an inspector of the DIFE and also the investigator of the case, filed the petition with the HC on February 4 also praying to it to pass an order so Prof Yunus and three others cannot go abroad without permission from the court concerned until the Labour Appellate Tribunal disposes of their appeals.

During yesterday's hearing, Tariqul's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan told the HC that an appellate court cannot stay the conviction and sentence of the accused by a trial court under the relevant rules of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC).

He argued that the appellate court can only stay a fine order.

Khurshid said the labour court's verdict has become nonest (not existent) in the eye of law because of the stay order by the Labour Appellate Tribunal.

Abdulla-Al-Mamun, lawyer for Yunus and three others, strongly opposed the revision petition of the DIFE.

"The Labour Appellate Tribunal issued the stay order following our [Yunus and three others] applications. If there is any mistake in the order, we would have been aggrieved and moved petitions seeking corrections. The Labour Appellate Tribunal's stay order will remain in force until March 3. But the criminal revision petition was filed by the DIFE against the tribunal's stay order before the expiry of the stay order," he said.

The lawyer also argued that the criminal revision petition was filed with the HC in order to harass the four accused and to obstruct the proceedings of the Labour Appellate Tribunal.

On January 28, the tribunal granted bail to Prof Yunus and three others in the labour law violation case following separate appeals filed by them.

The tribunal accepted the appeals and also stayed till March 3 the lower court's verdict that convicted and sentenced each of them to six months' jail.

What ails the Panama Canal?

FROM PAGE 14

of January. Before these restrictions were put in place, 36 ships used to use the canal on any given day.

The reason?

According to a notice posted on the Panama Canal's official website, the "restriction is in response to the challenges posed by the current state of Gatun Lake, which is experiencing unusually low water levels for this time of the year due to the drought induced by the El Niño phenomenon".

The Panama Canal's engineering is quite unique, as it is one that connects two oceans, yet does not sit on the sea level. The canal uses a lock system to lift huge cargo ships up to 26 metres above sea level, to the elevation of the canal that sits on the ground. This requires a tremendous amount of water to be pumped into the lock chambers, and the main source of that water is the artificial Gatun Lake.

The lake was created by damming the Chagres river, and its water level is vital to the operating capacity of the canal.

The lakes water levels have lowered due to severe droughts, caused in part by El Niño, a weather phenomenon that occurs once every two to seven years. It has a wide ranging effect on global weather, but in the Pacific ocean, it drives temperatures up.

In Panama, this had led to a delayed start for the rainy season in 2023. As a result, freshwater levels in the reservoirs used by the Panama Canal, like Gatun Lake, have stayed low.

Climate change is a highly relevant factor in all of this, as studies have found that El Niño effects are intensified due to climate change. According to the canal authorities, October, 2023 was the driest October on record for the canal watershed.

Other than limiting the number of ships, the canal authorities have responded to this crisis by capping the draft limit of ships that ply the Panama Canal. It means ships that go through this route cannot carry loads at full capacity.

All of this has led to long waiting times for non-booked vehicles, expensive booking rates, and the

authorities auctioning off some booking slots to the highest bidder. As a result, shipping businesses have already started to react to these changes.

Maersk, one of the largest shipping companies in the world, has announced that its cargo vessels headed to and from the Oceania region from eastern North America will be routed using Panamanian ports on the Pacific and the Atlantic, which are connected by rail.

Building another reservoir could be a long term solution to ensuring the survival of the canal.

The Panama Canal Authority has a plan in place to dam the Indio river to create a reservoir to supplement the Gatun Lake. But political support behind this initiative is low, as this will require overturning a law that was passed in 2006 restricting the canal authorities from building another reservoir.

On top of all this, the Panama Canal reservoirs supply over half of the drinking water for Panama's population, so any new infrastructure remains a sensitive topic.

With Panama struggling to maintain its famous canal, other countries in the region like Mexico and Nicaragua are coming up with their own plans to provide alternatives.

But any solution to this current bottleneck in global trade must consider how climate change will continue affecting trade on the seas in the future.

Taylor Swift

FROM PAGE 14

she will release "The Tortured Poets Department" on April 19.

"I want to say thank you to the fans by telling you a secret that I've been keeping from you for the last two years," Swift said as she disclosed the new album, which was made available for pre-sales during the Grammys telecast.

Swift, who is about to jet to Tokyo to resume the world's highest-grossing concert tour, was among the women who swept the major Grammy awards on Sunday.

Protesters rage

FROM PAGE 14

rape incidents on university campuses is a matter of concern," it added.

At JU, students from the international relations department staged a protest in front of the new arts building around 4:00pm, followed by a procession.

Students at Buet held a protest at the university's Shaheed Minar area around 1:30pm, demanding the arrest and trial of all the culprits involved.

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front held a human chain at Raju Memorial Sculpture at TSC in Dhaka University around 4:30pm, demanding a safer campus by removing the terror and violence by the ruling party men.

Around the same time, in Shahbagh, an alliance of progressive students, women, and cultural activists held a rally condemning the incident and demanding justice for the victim.

During a press briefing at the Awami League President's office in Dhanmondi, Obaidul Quader stressed the party's zero tolerance for misconduct.

"Not all party members can be virtuous, but we do not condone wrongdoing. No one has been spared for committing crimes while we are in power."

Meanwhile, the opposition chief whip, Mujibul Haque, urged the government to take the rape case seriously and prosecute promptly.

On Sunday, the victim's husband filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act against six people with Ashulia Police Station.

The same day, four of the accused, including BCL leader and prime accused Mostafizur Rahman, 28, were arrested and subsequently placed on a three-day remand.

Another key accused, Mamunur Rashid Mamun, 44, an outsider and acquaintance of Mostafizur, and abettor Murad Hossain, 22, a JU student, are still on the run.

Following the incident, six students were suspended by the university. They are Mostafizur, JU BCL's international affairs secretary; Shah Poran, one of its vice presidents; Murad, an assistant secretary; and Sabbir Hasan, an executive member.

Blood spills on this side of border

FROM PAGE 1

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) disarmed the Myanmar troops, said a BGB press release last night.

BGB on Sunday said 15 Myanmar Border Guard Police (BGP) personnel had gunshot injuries.

Fighting continued across the Ghumdhum border yesterday as Myanmar junta forces fired mortar shells and bombed Arakan Army positions. Rebels also retaliated, said sources at the border.

Several thousand Bangladeshis in the border areas feel insecure as bullets and mortar shells fired from Myanmar landed in Bangladesh over the last two days, leaving at least four Bangladeshis injured.

Yesterday, clashes spread to Dekibunia area of bordering Myanmar, two kilometres off Tumburu border.

Independent news outlet The Irrawaddy reported that the Myanmar junta lost more bases and 62 troops were killed in the last three days as rebel groups People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) stepped up attacks on regime targets across the country.

Incidents were reported in Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay regions and Kachin and Karen states. The Irrawaddy collected reports of significant attacks by PDFs and EAOs.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has instructed the armed forces and the paramilitary border force to be patient amid the war-like situation in Myanmar.

The minister was replying to MPs questions on the home ministry in parliament in absence the home minister during the question-answer session.

"Bangladesh is observing the situation closely and steps will be taken accordingly," he said.

Anisul said steps have been taken to close schools in the border areas.

Speaking to reporters at his ministry, Foreign Minister Hasan

Mahmud yesterday said Naypyidaw told Dhaka that it will take back its soldiers.

He said Myanmar Ambassador to Bangladesh U Aung Kyaw Moe and Deputy Foreign Minister U Lwin Oo told the foreign ministry that they want to take back the BGP members.

"The two sides are now discussing how they would be repatriated," he added.

The foreign ministry, meanwhile, sent a "note verbale" to the Myanmar envoy in Dhaka, protesting bullets and mortar shells from Myanmar landing in Bangladesh.

"Why should our people be affected by the firing and conflicts inside Myanmar? Myanmar should immediately stop such incidents," a foreign ministry official said.

TWO KILLED

Hosnara Khatun, 45, a homemaker, and an unidentified Rohingya worker, died when a mortar shell from Myanmar landed at the former's house in Jolpaitoli village near Ghumdhum border around 2:30pm, Mahfuz Intiaz Bhuiyan, inspector of Ghumdhum Police Outpost Investigation Centre, told The Daily Star.

Hosnara's grandson, aged about 5, suffered injuries, the inspector said.

He said the Rohingya man was hired as a construction worker.

Hosnara's body was sent to Cox's Bazar Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

PEOPLE WAITING AT BORDER

Some 400 Chakma people were waiting at the border near Ghumdhum to enter Bangladesh, said Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) Mohammed Mizanur Rahman.

"But our border guards will not allow them in," he told this newspaper yesterday.

Locals claimed that a five-member Rohingya family, including three children, entered Bangladesh from Myanmar yesterday through Ulubonia border in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila.

Seeking anonymity, a local union parishad leader said BGB detained the Rohingyas soon after they entered Bangladesh.

Mizanur, however, claimed that BGB foiled the family's attempt to enter Bangladesh.

He also called upon the international community to provide food assistance to the ordinary people in Myanmar who are going through a tough time due to the battles.

This newspaper could not reach Lt Col Abdullah Al Masruque, commander of BGB 34 Battalion in Cox's Bazar, over the phone for comments.

PANIC IN GHUMDHUM

Panic has gripped Ghumdhum. Fearing for their lives, many left their homes on Sunday.

Nargis Akhter, 35, a resident of Konapara village in Ghumdhum, left the area on Sunday. She returned to her house yesterday but she again left to safety amid intense sounds of firing and explosions.

"We left leaving all our belongings. We are worried if those will get stolen," she told journalists.

On Sunday, Arakan Army rebels launched a fierce attack on the Myanmar border post and border guard camp known as the Right Camp, a base of the junta forces opposite the Tambru BGB camp in Bangladesh, local sources claimed.

They said the rebels captured the border post and the Right Camp at night.

The rebels launched a fierce attack around 4:00am yesterday. Around 11:30am, a helicopter of Myanmar targeted rebel positions and bombed and fired at the Right Camp.

FOUR BGP MEN IN CMCH

Four Myanmar BGP personnel, who have taken refuge in Bangladesh, were admitted to Chattogram Medical College Hospital (CMCH) last night with bullet injuries.

Sub-Inspector Nur Alam Ashok, in-charge of the CMCH Police Outpost, said the four were rushed to the hospital around 10:30pm.