

## SONAHAT BRIDGE IN KURIGRAM

# Work drags on for five years

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

The construction of the 655-metre Sonahat Bridge over the Dudhkumar river in Bhurungamari of Kurigram remains incomplete five years after work commenced in 2019.

The bridge, intended to connect to the Sonahat Land Port, was scheduled for completion by 2021 at a cost of Tk 133.33 crore. However, contractors MM Builders and Engineers Limited and National Development Engineers Limited have managed to complete only 55 percent of the work, while the delay has escalated costs by another Tk 6 crore.

Locals continue to suffer immensely due to the prolonged construction.

As the bridge remains inaccessible, both commuters and trucks bound for the land port are compelled to use a dilapidated and abandoned rail bridge over the river.

Every day, around 160 to 170 goods-laden trucks ply this precarious route, while residents of Bangasonahat, Baldia, Char Bhurungamari, Andharihar, and Tilai unions in Bhurungamari upazila, as well as Kachakata, Kedar, Ballabherkhas, and Narayanpur unions in Nageshwari upazila, are forced to rely on the same bridge to reach the district town.

The old rail bridge is unfit for vehicular movement, yet truck drivers have no alternative, said Tajul Islam, a 50-year-old driver.

Farhad Uddin, a local resident, alleged that negligence by the contractors and the Roads and Highways Department has caused the sluggish progress of construction.

Aminul Islam, assistant director of Sonahat Land Port, said trade activities at the port have failed to meet expectations due to the poor connectivity caused by the delayed bridge.

Akmal Hossain, president of Sonahat Land Port C&F Agents Association, echoed similar concerns, adding that truckers are demanding higher fares due to the hazardous conditions of the rail bridge.

Nazrul Islam, executive engineer of RHD in Kurigram, said the contractors have been urged to complete construction by June next year.

He attributed the delay to repeated cancellations of the bridge's design, which stalled work for nearly two years.

Shamim Reza, project manager of the construction, claimed the project would be completed by December this year, stating that almost 80 percent of the main infrastructure and 60 percent of the 2,300-metre connecting road have been completed.



People try to salvage whatever they can from the rubble after a fire broke out at the Karail slum in the capital's Mohakhali early yesterday. Eleven fire engines completely doused the blaze around 2:30pm. The cause or extent of the fire could not be known yet. No casualties were reported so far.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Students demand arrest of attackers at Kuet

## Stage protest on campus, send letter to CA

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Students of Khulna University of Engineering & Technology (Kuet) staged a protest yesterday demanding the immediate arrest of those responsible for the recent attack on students.

The protest march began at 12:00pm from the Student Welfare Centre and passed through several halls, including Dr SM Rashid Hall, Shaheed Smriti Hall, Fazlul Haque Hall, Ekushey Hall, and Khan Jahan Ali Hall, before returning to the starting point.

During the demonstration, students chanted slogans such as "Break the shackles of student politics," "Beware of political agents," and "Education and terrorism cannot coexist."

At a brief rally following the protest, students voiced their frustration over the lack of action even after four days since the incident.

They expressed concern over their security, with many afraid to

leave the campus. They also criticised the university administration, saying that the advisory committee had yet to engage with them or offer any resolution.

A student of civil engineering said, "We urge the chief adviser to take



immediate action and ensure our safety so we can resume our studies without fear."

Meanwhile, the protesting students sent a letter to the chief adviser, demanding the removal of Vice-

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# DEVIL HUNT 769 more held across country

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The joint forces arrested 769 more people across the country in the last 24 hours till yesterday afternoon as part of the "Operation Devil Hunt", according to the Police Headquarters.

With the latest arrests, the total number of people arrested in the operation since its launch on February 8 has risen to 8,079 in the past 15 days.

Additionally, 572 others, who were either accused or wanted in previous cases, were also arrested in the last 24 hours. Law enforcers also recovered a gun and eight sharp weapons.

The government launched the operation on February 8 to restore law and order following an attack on "students and people" in Gazipur.

# KOCHOPATRA RIVER Damaged sluice gate leaves farmers in peril

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The six-vent sluice gate in Chakamaia union of Kalapara upazila, Patuakhali, has remained unusable for years, causing suffering to farmers.

Constructed in 1965 over the Kochopatra river, the sluice gate was meant to prevent saline water from entering agricultural lands in 50 villages in Patuakhali and Barguna.

However, decades of neglect and lack of maintenance have left the structure in a fragile state.

A recent visit revealed crumbling concrete pillars with exposed rusted rods, while the corroded gates remain permanently open, allowing continuous saline water intrusion. The guide wall has long eroded into the river, and illegal fishing nets were hanging over each gate.

As a result, around 30,000 farmers along the riverbanks face uncertainty over their cultivation.



"Since the sluice gate cannot be operated, saline water continuously inundates our croplands," said Abdul Malek, a local farmer.

A road built over the sluice gate is also in a dilapidated state, disrupting communication.

"With the gates damaged and left open, water flow remains uninterrupted. As a result, around a 200-metre stretch of three sections of the embankment on the west side has been washed away, while the only road along the canal is also eroding," said Motaleb Howlader, another farmer.

According to the Water Development Board, the sluice gate underwent only minor repairs since 1965. No substantial repair has ever been carried out to it.

Locals also alleged that certain groups with political backing earn Tk 5,000-20,000 daily by setting fishing nets in front of the sluice gate, often leading to conflicts.

Abdur Rahman Bhuiyan, sub-divisional engineer of WDB's Kalapara Circle, said at least Tk 8 crore would be required to renovate the sluice gate. "A proposal requesting necessary funding has been submitted to higher authorities. Renovation will commence upon approval and allocation of funds."



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