



Installation of metro rail tracks begins

Quader opens the work in Diabari; 8.5km of 20km-long viaduct now visible

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday inaugurated installation work of the tracks of the country's first-ever metro rail.

He also inaugurated the overhead catenary system, which would be used to supply electricity to trains.

"This is a milestone for the dream project," Quader, also the general secretary of ruling Awami League, said at the inaugural event, held at the metro rail's depot in the capital's Diabari.

Around 8.5 kilometres of the 20.10km-long viaduct is now visible, Quader said, adding that they hope to open the metro rail in December next year.

The construction work of the Tk 22,000 crore Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) Line-6, which began in 2016, has made 40 percent progress as of December last year.

Once completed, the rail service, which has 16 stations, will be able to carry 60,000 passengers per hour, reducing travel time from Uttara to Motijheel to at least less than an hour from the current two hours.

Initially, the authorities started installing "test track" inside the depot, which the trains would use for trial runs before going to the main track,

an official said.

The Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL), a government-owned company, is implementing the projects.

Quader said the government aims to build six metro lines in the capital and its adjacent areas by 2030, mainly to reduce traffic congestion and air pollution. He said 175km rail lines would be constructed under these six projects.

The minister said physical work for MRT-1 and MRT-5 (northern route) would start soon as the project has already been approved by Ecne and there is no complexity regarding those.

According to DMTCL documents, the physical work of MRT-1 will start in December this year.

Mass Rapid Transit-1 (MRT-1) from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Kamalapur Railway Station would be built at a cost of Tk 52,561.43 crore.

This will be the country's first underground metro rail system. The 31.24km route will have an elevated section from Natun Bazar to Purbachalm expected to be completed by 2026.

Work for basic design of MRT-5 would start in March this year. The route -- from Hemayetpur of Savar to Bhatara via Gabtoli, Mirpur and Gulshan -- would be built at a cost of Tk 41,238.55 crore.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Govt to help ease case backlog: law minister

Over 35 lakh pending in courts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the government will take initiatives to settle pending cases so that at least five to six lakh such cases can be cleared from the existing backlog within this year.

"It's not possible to dispose of all the 31 lakh pending cases within a year, but it's possible to reduce the number by five to six lakh," he said.

"The government will take necessary programmes and increase manpower in this regard. I have already talked to the chief justice about this issue," the minister said.

Anisul Huq made the remarks while talking to reporters after attending the inauguration of a training course for assistant judges at Judicial Administration Training Institute (JATI) as chief guest.

As of March 31 last year, a total of 35,82,347 cases were pending with the courts across the country.

Around 30.53 lakh cases were pending with the lower courts, some 22,000 cases with the Appellate Division and 5.06 lakh with the High Court Division till March 31 last year, according to a Supreme Court report.

Yesterday, the law minister told reporters that the government will also take initiatives so that more cases are

Modi, Hasina exchange new year's greetings

STAR REPORT

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday called his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina to extend the new year's greetings.

Modi phoned the Bangladesh prime minister at 12:20pm, said PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim, reports UNB.

Extending her greetings to Modi, Hasina asked him to convey her good wishes to the people of India. The conversation lasted for about 15 minutes.

Our New Delhi correspondent adds, the Indian prime minister also congratulated Hasina on being reelected the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Focus must not shift from Rohingya issue

Says new foreign secretary

UNB, Dhaka

Newly-appointed Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen yesterday said the ministry's focus this year will be to keep the global focus on Rohingya issue unchanged for their early repatriation.

He made the remarks when members of Diplomatic Correspondents Association, Bangladesh (DCAB) met him at his office congratulating him on his appointment.

Masud said they will spend much time in public diplomacy, so that the global attention to the Rohingya issue does not shift.

He said the issue draws international attention and all parties -- including media, NGOs, INGOs, civil society and think tanks -- will have to work together to keep the focus unaffected.

The foreign secretary termed Rohingya repatriation a "medium-term to long-term" situation, as it will take time to repatriate

all Rohingyas even if the repatriation begins soon.

"How we manage the situation depends on how quickly we can begin. We need to start, even if on a small scale."

"Our key target is to make sure Rohingyas return to their homeland voluntarily and with dignity," he said.

The foreign secretary said there is a separate dimension of accountability -- confidence-building measures -- which will help expedite the repatriation process.

He termed China's engagement in the repatriation process a kind of extension of bilateral engagement, and also to some extent trilateral approach in which Asean and Myanmar's neighbours may come into.

Responding to a question on Bhasan Char relocation plan and its inclusion in the 2020 Joint Response Plan (JRP), Masud said discussions are going on.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1

'Joining city polls to expose vote fraud'

Says Mirza Fakhurul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhurul Islam Alamgir yesterday said their party is taking part in the upcoming city polls to "expose further that no credible election is possible under Awami League."

"Many ask us one question: why we're joining the polls. First, when we had boycotted the 2014 election, it was said we made a mistake. We took part in the 2018 election to prove we didn't make a mistake in 2014, as no fair election can be held under Awami League," he said.

"Now, we're asked again why we're going to join the city corporation elections. I would like to say we're taking part in the polls to expose once again that no fair and credible election can be held under the Awami League."

Fakhurul's remarks came in reaction to Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader's question about the reason behind BNP's participation in the city polls, since the party has no confidence in the Election Commission.

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal arranged the event at Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, marking its 41st anniversary.

Fakhurul said Chief Election Commissioner Nurul Huda himself admitted that the commission could not ensure free and fair election, while another commissioner Mahbub Talukder clearly said this EC is not capable of holding a credible election.

Magnets to smuggle yaba!

Detectives seize 50,000 pills in small packets attached to truck's body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The detective branch (DB) of police seized a consignment of 50,000 yaba pills at the capital's Baridhara area on Tuesday night, in small packets attached to out-of-view parts of a truck's body with powerful magnets.

Two alleged drug traders who were in the truck -- Khairul Bashar (36) and Saizuddin (22) -- were arrested and the vehicle was seized.

Drugs smugglers are always finding innovative ways to carry the "crazy pills". They sometimes swallow small packs of pills, conceal them in fruits, fuel tanks or even mobile phones to dodge law enforcers. But this method is a new one, detectives said.

Tipped off that a gang of yaba traders are heading towards Kuril through Pragati Sarani with a consignment of pills, a team of DB (north) intercepted the truck around 11:20pm.

After a thorough search, DB members found 13 packets of yaba pills at different

areas of the vehicle.

"The drug traders put powerful magnets in each packet to keep them attached to the truck's body," Deputy Commissioner (north) of DB Mashiur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

The seized pills are coloured light orange and is of high quality, each pill going for around Tk 300, he added.

Mashiur said the traders have been collecting yaba pills from Cox's Bazar's Teknaf, the gateway for smuggling the drug into Bangladesh, and supplied them to the capital and other parts of the country.

He said the arrestees admitted that they collected the pills months back and planned to sell them ahead or during new year celebration.

After the seizure, a case was filed under the narcotics act with Gulshan Police Station.

The arrestees were produced before a Dhaka court yesterday with 10-day remand prayer for each. The court granted two-day remand for each of them.

Syed Tanveer passes away



CITY DESK

Former secretary Syed Tanveer Hussain passed away on Tuesday from prolonged illness, says a press release. His namaz-e-janaza was held on the same day and he was laid to rest alongside his parents and brother.

Syed Tanveer served as the secretary to the ministries of planning, housing, textiles, and environment and forests, according to his

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Arambagh's Inner Circular Road is blocked by lines of sewage pipes. Locals say they've been here for around 3 months. In addition, no safety barricades can be seen even though the area is rigged with holes from ongoing road construction works.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



On the first day of new year, four job seekers start their hunger strike with a demand for extending the age limit to 35 from 30 for entering government jobs. This photo was taken in front of Jatiya Press Club.

PHOTO: STAR

Environment confce opens in city Saturday

Bapa, BEN to organise the event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) and Bangladesh Environment Network (BEN) will organise a daylong conference on environmental movement at Stamford University in the capital on Saturday.

A total of 31 research and non-government organisations and 18 universities will support the event, where several academicians, researchers and environmentalists will share their thoughts and expertise.

The organisers made the announcements at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity yesterday.

Bapa President Sultana Kamal said they set the title of the conference as "Political Effectiveness of Environmental Activism in Bangladesh: Challenges and Way Forward", because politics plays a vital role in almost every decision-making process in the country.

"Bangladesh's environment is endangered in many ways. I invite people from all walks of life to participate in the event and share their opinion," she added.

Presenting a keynote paper, BEN founder Nazrul Islam said various topics -- including how political parties give priority to environmental issues and how political interference affects green activism in the country -- will be discussed at the programme.

Bapa Executive Vice President Abdul Matin and General Secretary Sharif Jamil also spoke at the press conference.

DHAKA TODAY

FAIR

Dhaka International Trade Fair
Organiser: Ministry of Commerce and Export Promotion Bureau of Bangladesh
Venue: Agargaon
Time: 10am

PROTEST

Demanding Justice for Ducus VP
Nurul Haque Nur
Organiser: Santrash Birodhi Chhatra Oikya
Venue: TSC, University of Dhaka
Time: 11am

PERFORMANCE

Open Mic
Venue: Jatra Biroti, Banani
Time: 7pm

MUSIC

Mehfil-e-mosiki
Venue: Shilpakala Academy
Time: 6pm

EXHIBITION

Flash on Rohingya Genocide
Venue: Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy
Time: 10am

