

Saifur condemns hartal on foundation-laying day

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 10: Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman condemned the opposition for calling hartal on the memorable day of the laying of the foundation of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB), a dream of millions of people, aimed at bridging the two isolated parts of the country, reports UNB.

He called upon all to shun hartals, strikes, blockades and other anti-development activities in the greater national interest.

Addressing the foundation-laying ceremony at Syedabad on the western bank of the Jamuna river this morning, the Finance Minister said it was an historic event in the development history of Bangladesh because, the long-awaited Jamuna Bridge is going to be a reality, burying all confusion and differences of opinion.

"As the Finance Minister, my first task was to prove the feasibility of the Jamuna Bridge to the donors. We succeeded in proving the feasibility beyond doubt, as well as our strong resolve to go ahead with the bridge."

The Finance Minister said on construction of the bridge, the economy of the northern region would gain dynamism, production would increase and marketing would become easier.

Saifur Rahman assured those people whose lands have been acquired that they would be properly rehabilitated and receive adequate compensation.

Aminul Huq

State Minister for Establishment Aminul Huq, who hails from northern Bangladesh, said a particular political party called the hartal to mar the memorable occasion.

The hartal had frustrated the people because they could not reach the venue due to the shutdown. "Lakhs of people from Pabna, Bogra and Rajshahi might have come to join this historic event," he said.

Representatives of donor agencies at the foundation-laying ceremony congratulated the government for venturing to undertake the gigantic project so courageously and hoped it would be implemented

smoothly.

Willoughby

Today is the outcome of a century-old demand. The World Bank is happy to participate in the project. It's the largest project of the WB in Bangladesh," said World Bank Resident Mission Chief in Dhaka C R Willoughby.

"We have looked into every aspect of feasibility of the bridge and then taken decision to finance it," he added.

He hoped that the bridge would have a long-term and large-scale impact on the national economy.

Willoughby noted with satisfaction that a national consensus had emerged on way to implementation of the JMB project and expressed his optimism that such consensus would also be created for development of the country.

Thomson

Senior Vice President of the Asian Development Bank W R Thomson said the ADB took honour in joining the JMB project and expected the bridge to be built in time.

This is the highest-funded project of the ADB in the world since its inception. Thomson said and added the people of this region would be benefited and their socio-economic condition improved following implementation of the project.

The ADB would closely monitor the implementation of the project, Thomson said, and assured that his bank would assist and continue cooperation in development projects of Bangladesh.

Shigeo Takenaka

Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Shigeo Takenaka said the Jamuna bridge had long been a dream of the people of Bangladesh, but, it is now coming true.

This is the highest-funded project of Japan in the country, he said, adding the people of Bangladesh would get a fresh opportunity of economic development.

He hoped that the JMB project would be implemented as safely, efficiently and expeditiously as possible.



Braving the scorching Chaitra sun, a large number of men, women and children thronged to Syedabad, six miles from Sirajganj town, yesterday to attend the founding ceremony of the Jamuna Multi-purpose Bridge. — Star photo

A red-letter day

By Asiuzaaman

SHYAMSHOI, Tangail, Apr 10: Today has been a red-letter day for more than five lakh people of Kalihati and Bhupur thanas as Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia formally unveiled the foundation stone of the long-cherished Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB).

I am happy that the bridge is finally being constructed. Abdul Baril Talukder, a peasant of the nearby Sharifabad village told The Daily Star.

"We've heard about the bridge for years but now the bridge is going to see the light of day," he said.

At the same time he called for timely resettlement of the affected people, as, promised by the government.

Despite the opposition-call for a hartal, men, women and children gathered at the meeting venue at Shyamshoi village where a huge canopy was erected for the foundation-laying ceremony.

Jubilant and enthusiastic people broke a security cordon and took their seats under the canopy to see the charismatic Prime Minister.

"I am here to see the Prime Minister who will give us the Jamuna Bridge," 12-year-old Selina told this correspondent.

Elderly Mati Mandal's reaction was a bit different. He said "All the people of the country will be benefitted, so the question of my happiness is immaterial."

The hartal did not affect anything today an this desert-like vast charland.

Even opposition MP Shahjahan Siraj of the Ganj Forum went to the area and helped in organising the programmes for the function.

"It was like an Eid for the children," said a woman who declined to be named.

Beside the historic occasion, a five-helicopter fleet, which carried the Prime Minister's entourage, was an additional attraction for the village people who had braved the scorching sun and waited patiently for hours to be present at such a momentous occasion.

Azizul Hoq MP

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upheld the cause of the people and worked for the consolidation of democracy in the country, he added.

Prime Minister and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia last night also went to the Dhanmondi residence of Azizul Hoq to pay her last respect to the late parliamentarian.

Begum Zia spent there for some time and consoled the members of the bereaved family.

In a condolence message she said in his death the country had lost a prominent parliamentarian and the BNP a very sincere and dedicated politician.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali, BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar, ministers, members of Parliament, a large number of leaders of various political parties also went to the residence of late Hoq.

Hoq was born at village Dewgaon under Kahalu police station of Bogra district on July 1, 1931. He passed matriculation examination from the Bogra Coronation Institution in 1946 and studied in the Rajshahi Government College. He was the chairman of the Rupali Bank.

He was the vice chairman of the Bogra Municipality from 1965 to 1970. He was also the Managing Director of the Readylight Battery Industry of Bogra from 1964 to 1970.

Hoq was elected a Member of Parliament in 1979 and 1991 as a BNP candidate.

He is survived by his wife, two sons, four daughters and a host of relatives and friends to mourn his death.

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JMB nation's symbol of hope

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Dhaka C R Willoughby, vice-president of the Asian Development Bank W R Thomson, Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Shigeo Takenaka, local MP's Shahjahan Siraj and Abdus Salam Pintu and the Executive Director of the JMB, Mohammad Ali spoke on the occasion, attended by ministers, diplomats, chiefs of the three Services, MPs and senior government officials.

The Prime Minister said, "I thank Almighty Allah for giving me the opportunity to lay the foundation of the bridge. On this historic occasion, I extend my heartfelt greetings to all my countrymen."

She expressed gratitude to all friendly countries, international agencies and individuals helping Bangladesh in implementing the gigantic project.

Begum Zia said, necessary arrangements have been made to compensate and rehabilitate the people to be affected by the construction of the bridge.

To face the challenge of a new century, the world at large has adopted a new strategy for development. The gateway to competitive market-economy has been thrown wide open. All countries of the world are today united on the universal agenda of democracy and market economy, she said.

"We cannot remain isolated from this global trend. The 21st century will be a century for survival of the fittest."

The implementation of the Jamuna Bridge will carry forward the endeavours of development further, she said, seeking cooperation from all for timely implementation of the project.

Talking to The Daily Star, a senior JMB official said, the actual construction work of the bridge was expected to start later this year after issuance of our transport sector when this

bridge is completed, she added.

"With the supply of gas through the bridge, the felling of trees would stop which would help maintain the environmental balance. Besides, this bridge will act as a development catalyst for the entire economy of the country."

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the work orders to the foreign construction firms.

Hyundai of South Korea will construct the bridge and approach viaduct. Hamvanordac of the Netherlands will complete the river training works and reclamation while two approach roads in east and west will be constructed by another South Korean firm, Samwhan Corporation.

Meanwhile, the rehabilitation of the eastern flood embankment-cum-access road has already been completed by a local firm in August last year.

The project would need the acquisition of 5,680 acres of land along both banks. Of this, 3,800 acres have already been acquired by the government after payment of proper compensation. The JMB has allocated Tk 36 crore for this purpose and payment is being made on the spot by the Sirajganj and Tangail district administrations.

Some 72,000 people of 12,000 families would be displaced from the construction work and the JMB has taken up a resettlement programme 46 million dollars for the affected people.

It may be recalled that deposed president H M Ershad had laid a foundation stone a few kilometers from the present site on February 1, 1988 at a time when the project was far from being finalised. At that time, not a fraction of foreign financial assistance was committed by the donors.

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Hartal paralyses normal life

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were seen proceeding on foot to their places of work. Attendance in government offices and in the Secretariat, was rather poor. Many officers of the Secretariat had to stay overnight at their offices.

The authorities deployed hundreds of riot police, Ansars and para-military Bangladesh Rifles to guard important offices and maintain security.

A member of processions were brought out in the capital. The processionists should "Down with Khaleda Zia ... Unseat the BNP."

Three people were injured when a pro-Awami League Chhatra League (BCL) procession came under attack by a rival student organisation near Section-11 bus stand at Mirpur at 11 am.

Police picked up Nazrul Islam, a BCL leader of Dhaka College, from a procession at about 12:45 pm near the New Market.

At 11:35 am police arrested Faruk, Samad and Abul Hossain — three Awami League workers — from Tejgaon.

An attack on an Awami League procession at Kalachandpur, near Gulshan at about 10 am left four people injured.

Abul Hossain, a member of the BCL, was arrested by police.

Many others were either beaten up or detained by police, they said.

Our correspondent said at least 20 of their activists were seriously injured during attacks on processions by police.

Awami League sources say that the police had been deployed to disperse the procession.

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