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BJMB to boost economy: Hashimoto

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yoshikazu Kaneko, who attended the gala opening of Bangabandhu Bridge as special envoy of his country's Prime Minister, enthralled the audience by presenting a message in Bangla, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto sent the message welcoming the opening of the bridge, to which Japan made a major contribution.

In his message, the Japanese Prime Minister mentioned that in 1973, Bangabandhu had discussions with the then Japanese premier about construction of a bridge over Jamuna.

"The inauguration of the bridge after 25 years of Bangabandhu's visit to Japan and talks in this regard is a joyous incident," said the message read out by Kaneko.

Audiences at the colourful ceremony applauded Kaneko as he was reading the message in clear Bangla.

The message said the bridge is a realisation of the dream of the people and the government and a new symbol of cooperation towards Bangladesh by its development partners.

The Japanese Prime Minister said that the Bangabandhu Bridge will play a significant role in communication sector and boost economic activities.

Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan contributed 200 million US dollar for the bridge.

World Bank and Asian Development Bank each contributed the same amount for implementation of the project.

The ceremonial opening of the bridge was also addressed by WB Country Director Pierre Landel Mills, ADB Vice-President Bong Sale, and DG of OECF Kenji Yoshira.

Ministers from different countries who attended the colourful ceremony included A H M Fowzie, Transport and Highway Minister of Sri Lanka, Dr M Thambi, Surface Transport Minister of India, Sardar Yaqub Khan Nisar, Rail Works Minister of Pakistan, Vijaya Kumar Gachadar, Works and Transport Minister of Nepal, Kang Yeon Me, Deputy Minister for Construction Affairs of Republic of Korea.

Maria Engenia Coumel, Economic and Commercial Counselor of Spain, also attended the function.



Schoolchildren performing a dance during a function at the western side of the Bangabandhu Bridge after its inauguration yesterday. — Star photo

Nation's dream comes true

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Bangladesh thanks to a live broadcast on television and radio, the ceremony was full of dreams and of stories on how the expensive dream came true.

Named after the man who spoke of the bridge 25 years ago and began hunting for money, the awesome structure not only matches the gigantic personality that he was but also pays a terrific symbolic tribute to one who led this nation to Liberation.

A recorded 1973 speech by him at a public meeting in Sirajganj was played at the opening ceremony. "We have to build a bridge on the Jamuna," Bangabandhu was heard announcing amid jubilation from the crowd.

His dream to build the bridge, his discussion with the Japanese prime minister in 1973, the subsequent Dhaka-Tokyo declaration, the first feasibility study, the first budget allocation by the then finance minister Tajuddin Ahmed, the commitment expressed in a press conference by the finance minister and the then communications minister Mansur Ali were all gratefully and tearfully remembered by the ministers and others.

Under a huge canopy overlooking the bridge, the two-hour formal opening ceremony was attended by some 2,000 guests who included communications ministers from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and a special envoy of the Japanese prime minister.

Most of the guests and a large team of mediemen travelled in a convoy from Dhaka. Besides, distinguished personalities from northern districts were also present on the occasion.

Billion-dollar dream

The nation with its 35 billion US dollars economy spent close to a billion dollars for the dream project.

Of the total 962 million dollars (Tk 3850 crore) revised project costs, 34 per cent or 362 million dollars (Tk 1450 crore) came from the state coffers; the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund of Japan, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank contributed 200 million dollars or 22 per cent each.

River training works took the biggest chunk — 323 million dollars or 35 per cent of the total cost — followed by the bridge and viaducts with 28 per cent (269 million dollars).

Consultants cost to the tune of 33 million dollars or three per cent, roads and embankments 71 million dollars, land, resettlement and environment 67 million dollars.

Roughly one per cent or 13 million dollars was spent on the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority establishment.

Split into several contracts, the physical implementation of the project began in October 1994. The original cost, when the contracts were awarded in March that year, was estimated at less than 700 million dollars.

Ensuring dividends

The prime minister called it "an important milestone in the history of social and economic prosperity of Bangladesh."

The bridge is supposed to serve for a century, and she issued a reminder to all that getting the maximum out of it would be vital.

"It is now essential to get the best dividend and return from the huge investment made in the Bangabandhu Bridge project," she told the opening ceremony, pointing to the bridge's strategic location and calling for national unity to exploit economic potentials.

"The location of the Bangabandhu Bridge is vitally important for the Asian Highway and the Trans Asian Railway. The bridge will play a very effective role in expediting the regional and the international communications as part of the Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development Project," she said.

"The government has taken an appropriate plan to expedite the country's economic growth through proper harnessing of the potentials and prospects of the north-western region of the country," Hasina added.

"This great bridge will take care of the last missing link in the Asian Highway and the Asian Railway projects. One should now be able to drive across the great Eurasian landmass from Paris to Hanoi and beyond without any major interruption," said Finance Minister S A M S Kibria.

The prime minister, the finance minister, Communications Minister, and others.

More or less, every post-1981 government has contributed to it," the communications minister said. But Nasim was blunt in blaming Ziaur Rahman who he said had killed the plan.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina crossing the Bangabandhu Bridge by a special train yesterday. — Star photo

History

For Bangladesh, the present Awami League government and the party, there could not be a more significant day to open the Bangabandhu Bridge. For them, the day is marked by both pain and pleasure.

Exactly 241 years ago this day, on June 23, 1757, the Bengalis lost the battle at Plassey. This day in 1949, the Awami League was born. Two years ago on the same day, the party took the reins of the government after 21 years when the prime minister promised to open the bridge in two years.

Her personal attention may have pushed the work to finish ahead of schedule.

One small failure, non-completion of the gas line, was

there for which senior officials offered apologies to the prime minister. "We sincerely apologise for having failed to fulfill our commitment," said Abdul Muveed Chowdhury, secretary at Jamuna Bridge Division.

To make it all a memorable event, the postal department released a commemorative stamp and the central bank issued a special coin.

Senior representatives of donor agencies also spoke.

Launch dacoity in Patuakhali

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL June 23: A group of armed dacoits swooped on a passenger launch near Hazirchar in Tetulia river under Dashmina thana of Patuakhali district yesterday evening.

According to police and witnesses, the dacoits came in a trawler and intercepted the Patuakhali-bound launch from Barisal near Hazirchar.

They boarded the launch and looted money and other belongings of the passengers at gun point.

The dacoits also beat the passengers leaving 30 injured.

The dacoits left the launch ML Munni, after an hour-long operation and fled away.

Train's speed won't exceed 35 km per hr

By Staff Correspondent

Laying of the railway track on one side of the Bangabandhu Bridge has caused "eccentric loading" on the bridge, said an official in the Prime Minister entourage that travelled by the train over the bridge after its inauguration yesterday.

The train crossed the bridge at a speed of about 10-15-km, said official sources.

"The usual speed of train over the bridge will not exceed 35-km," an official said.

"The distance between the electric pole and railway carriage is very marginal," said an expert who was in the PM's entourage. "It is now essential to examine the impact of movement of train at high speed over the bridge," he added.

A railway official, when asked why the speed of the train was so slow over the bridge, said "We were over conscious as the Prime Minister and her entourage of dignitaries were travelling."

The government is yet to take a decision when regular movement of train over the bridge will start, the sources said.

A 19-kilometre new rail track has been laid on the bridge and its both sides to enable trains run over the bridge.

Of the 19-km new rail track, five-kilometre over the Jamuna Bridge have been constructed to accommodate both broad gauge and meter gauge trains.

Buses will prefer using Dhaka-Aricha route

By Naimul Haq

All buses plying between the capital and the northern districts will continue to use the Dhaka-Aricha route despite opening of the Bangabandhu Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge, owners and employees of transport companies said yesterday.

"Though the bridge has been opened, we will continue to use the Aricha route as the new road from Nabinagar to Tangail is not fit for heavy traffic," Zubair Naim, joint convener of Inter-district Bus Owners Committee told this correspondent at Gatabal bus terminal in the city.

This correspondent talked to owners and employees of different transport companies to know their preparations for using the bridge.

Aminul Islam, a bus driver said, "The road from Nabinagar to Tangail is in a very poor condition. It is too narrow for heavy traffic. At least 11 small culverts need repair. The single-lane road may cause serious traffic congestion."

The manager at the counter of Hanif Enterprise said, "All night coaches leaving for Natore, Chapainawabganj, Joypurhat and Dinajpur tonight (Tuesday night) will use the Dhaka-Aricha road. The newly-built Dhaka-Aricha road is safer. We are not certain about the condition of the road upto the bridge. So, we have decided to continue using the Aricha road."

Owner of Delta Transport Saiful Islam said, "I don't see any benefit in using Jamuna Bridge right now. The link road between Nabinagar and Tangail is not good."

But all of them said opening of the Bangabandhu Bridge has created tremendous enthusiasm among people. Thousands of phone calls were received from enthusiastic travellers at different ticket counters at the terminal yesterday. They asked if the buses would be using the BJB. "Many passengers became disheartened and cancelled their trips hearing that buses would not use the bridge," said a manager at the counter of Nabil Paribahan.

Meanwhile, some leaders of Bangladesh Inter-district Truck Drivers' Union while talking to this correspondent said truck drivers will refrain from using the BJB unless the toll rate is less than the ferry charge of Tk 700.

"Though we have withdrawn our strike, most of the drivers will prefer using the Dhaka-Aricha route instead of BJB," Ismail Hossain Rafu, a leader of the Union said.

India-NZ tie rained off

COLOMBO, June 23: Heavy rain in Colombo forced the umpires to call off play in the 3-nation triangular series match between India and New Zealand on Tuesday, reports AP.

Needing 220 for victory, India was 131 for 2 in 24.2 overs when rain inundated the ground.

According to tournament rules, a minimum of 25 overs must be bowled for a result.

The two teams share the two match points.

BNPPP meets today

A meeting of BNPPP will be held at 2 pm at Sangsad Bhaban today, reports UNB.

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia will preside over the meeting, said a press release.

Bomb blast kills four in Mumbai

NEW DELHI, June 23: Four people, including two policemen, were killed and eight others injured today when a bomb exploded in the Indian city of Mumbai, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports AFP.

The PTI said the bomb, hidden in a bag, went off when policemen tried to snatch the bag from two people in the northern part of the city.

It said one person was arrested and two policemen were critically injured.

Festive look all around

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guard all along the road.

On arrival at the eastern side of the bridge, hundreds of these guests — ministers, MPs, diplomats, senior government and military officials, public representatives of the locality, journalists and political leaders — were led into a massive pandal decorated by huge portraits of Bangabandhu and the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The sandy pandal area overlooked the splendid bridge in the near distance with colourful flags all around. A smartly dressed band played folklore tunes near the toll plaza.

The souvenir key rings, T-shirts, porcelain mugs and the pens commemorating the historic event, had mostly disappeared from the seats. Those were offered free to the guests. One organiser blamed 'over enthusiastic' collectors for it.

At around 10:30 am, Sheikh Hasina arrived with the foreign dignitaries. Emotion choked speeches by ministers, bridge officials and representatives of the donor agencies marked the moment. The most remarkable part was the speech by the special envoy of the Japanese Prime Minister in flawless Bangla.

After her speech, the Prime Minister officially unveiled a plaque, cut the ribbon and switched on the electricity line at the foot of the bridge near the toll plaza. A bunch of gas balloons with a bannered message was released into the sky. Soon, the Bangabandhu Bridge was officially opened.

Formalities over, Sheikh Hasina started to walk towards the bridge with photo-journalists all around her.

Hundreds of cars slowly followed Sheikh Hasina as she mounted the slope and kept walking on the bridge towards the western side.

After walking for about quarter of a kilometre, the Prime Minister and her entourage boarded their vehicles. Hundreds of vehicles slowly joined the column of vehicles that grew larger and larger.

People in their thousands watched from large country boats in the river Jamuna as the convoy proceeded towards the western bank. In the distant villages thousands more could be seen lining up to have a glimpse off the ceremony.

At one stage, the convoy of vehicles became so long that it seemed to have covered the whole stretch of the 4.8-km bridge.

On the Serajganj side, army personnel had set up several anti-aircraft batteries on the nearby sandy terrain on both sides of the approach road.

Further down the road, few thousand people waited patiently. As soon as the Prime Minister sat down on the huge dais built in the shape of a boat, school children in colourful dresses danced to the tune of popular Bangla songs played by a group of musician nearby. Foreign and other guests were seated under a pandal that looked filled to the brim. Many were seen desperately looking for water in the sweltering heat.

Just behind the guests' pandal, facing the boat-like dais, thousands of people stood under the scorching sun. A bamboo barrier had kept them apart from the dignitaries. Some of them said they had come from Rajshahi and had been waiting since early morning to see the ceremony.

A few people from behind the bamboo barrier asked the on-duty security men to let them drink water from a tubewell which was inside the cordoned area.

When some were allowed, hundreds more crushed the



The democratic-flare is flying real high!

Padma bridge

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"I already talked to the Japanese government regarding this during my visit to that country," she said. "Insha-Alah, we'll succeed in construction of Padma Bridge too."

PM: N-region

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and hoped that agro-industries would flourish in the northern region of the country.

"Our government has taken various steps for overall development of the northern districts. New power plants will be installed immediately for rapid industrialisation," she said.

On the collapsed gas pipeline, she said, it will be installed in six months and "I will inaugurate the line."

Addressing the cheering people from a boat-shaped huge dais, Sheikh Hasina said: Your days of sorrow are over. The gap caused by the Jamuna is no more. A new horizon in the national life has been ushered in.

Amid tight security, people coming on foot and in boats started thronging the meeting venue since early morning. Streams of people continued till the rally was over.

The public meeting began with a colourful display by the students of a local school.

BNP to urge

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will force them out," she said.

The opposition leader said the government has not done anything good to the people during its two-year rule. It is now clear to the people that the misrule of the ruling party has increased their woes and hardships.

Begum Zia directed the party workers and leaders: "The movement will go on until the government is dislodged. Prepare yourselves for it."

Criticising the government for claiming the entire credit for the Jamuna Bridge, Begum Zia said, "even a madman will not believe that Awami League government has built the bridge within its two-year rule."

They are taking credit by only cutting the red ribbon of the development projects started during the BNP regime, she said.

The former Prime Minister said it was her government that had proved the feasibility and viability of the bridge to the donor agencies. It took two years to convince World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Japan who financed the project, she added.

She said the major portion of the construction work including foundation laying was done during BNP regime.

Begum Zia alleged that former president Ershad had siphoned off a huge amount of money from the Jamuna Bridge project fund collected from the levies during surcharge and levies during the nine years of his rule.

"There was no money in Jamuna project fund when Ershad was deposed in 1990," she added.

PM's visit

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Daily Star that the Pakistan visit of the Prime Minister would more or less be similar in nature as that to India.

"We would like to discuss the situation that has arisen out of the nuclear tests. We will give our views and hear theirs."

The official talks between the two prime ministers will also cover bilateral regional and international issues, the foreign secretary said.

Diplomatic sources said that Sheikh Hasina and Nawaz Sharif are also likely to discuss about making the forthcoming SAARC summit in Colombo "effective in reestablishing a climate of confidence" in South Asia following the changed scenario.

When contacted, Pakistan High Commissioner in Dhaka Karam Elahi said, "We welcome the visit of the Bangladesh premier."

"We want to discuss why it (the nuclear tests) happened and what is the background. You cannot cure a disease without finding its cause."

The envoy said, "Pakistan seeks the good offices of all friendly countries for resolution of problems."

He added that the Kashmir issue is central to all mediations between India and Pakistan.

Italy

From Page 1

gang Feiersinger and Ivica Vastic.

Vieri was a constant threat to the Austrian defence until he was replaced by Inzaghi after 61 minutes.

Austria went close to equalising after 66 minutes when Heimo Pfeifenberger, forced goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca into fine double-save from an overhead kick.

But overall the Italian defence, in which skipper Paolo Maldini and veteran substitute Giuseppe Bergomi were in great form, put out a formidable barrier at the back.

Bergomi came on after only four minutes for Alessandro Nesta who injured himself in a tackle with Pfeifenberger.

That tackle set the tone for the match which was never pretty to watch but at least for the Italians gave them the satisfaction of qualifying for the next stage.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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