

Elevated expressway awaits green light

The proposed highway with exit, entry and a revised route is said to have a permanent solution to traffic congestion

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The project concept paper completed by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) on a 20km elevated expressway in the city awaits the approval of the communications ministry.

The highway with exit, entry and a revised route is said to have a permanent solution to traffic congestion.

The cost of the project is estimated at Tk 2,000 crore and the funds will be loaned by Thailand as part of financial and technical assistance to Bangladesh: 60 percent from Thai Exim Bank and other 40 percent by the Thai government.

Two Thai companies have already submitted a feasibility report on the expressway. The report shows the

expressway route from Jatrabari to Sonargaon crossing. The government considers aligning the expressway to connect the two flyovers, which include the one at Mohakhali.

"We have revised the project concept paper of the expressway to maximise facility at low cost," said Idris Miah, RHD's superintendent engineer.

The project is planned to include two flyovers. A connection to the Mohakhali flyover will have a 10km expressway aligning Old Airport, the Sonargaon crossing, New Market, Nilkhel and Fulbaria and will join the Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.

The RHD made a change in route of the original expressway plan by the Thai companies. The original had a 10km elevated way to the left of Sonargaon crossing which included Maghbazar, Malibagh and

Kamalapur to Sayedabad.

The route now runs from Sonargaon crossing to Old Airport Road, Jahangir Gate and Shaheen College to connect Mohakhali flyover through Banani rail crossing, Kemal Ataturk Avenue to Pragati Sarani.

The expressway will facilitate north-south communication instead of a circular connection.

The expressway will go over the existing roads of the city and there will be only six junctures where traffic could change tracks. The six junctures are Kemal Ataturk, Jahangir Gate, Rangs intersection, Sonargaon crossing, New Market and Fulbaria.

The Thai Exim Bank has offered 5 percent interest on the loan but the government wants to negotiate a less interest rate.



STAR PHOTO

A new garment factory complying with the Factory Rules of 1979 works in full swing, yet awaiting the global challenge ahead.

NOISE POLLUTION CONTROL RULES

Final version fails to please green group

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A government decision to exclude *milad* and *waj mahfil* from the noise pollution control rules, announced on February 15, might have pleased ruling coalition partners but drew flak from environment groups.

The primary version of the draft states that people must obtain permission from authorities for wedding ceremonies, *milad* and *waj mahfils* (religious gatherings), political rallies, sports competitions and cultural programmes and fairs in open or partly open places.

But the environment and forest ministry erased religious gatherings from the final version as State Minister for Environment and Forest Zafrul Islam Chowdhury insisted on dropping the 'sensitive issue' fearing criticism from the Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ), BNP-led ruling coalition partners.

The ministry held several meetings with home, public works and housing, local government, religious affairs and information ministries, the Election Commission and environment experts to scrutinise the draft before it was announced to cut noise pollution.

Environment and Forest Minister

Shahjahan Siraj told Star City: "Tens of thousands of *mahfils* are organised a year across the country. If we include them on the list, it will create complication."

The draft earlier said authorities such as municipalities, city corporations and Rajuk would permit using loudspeakers or amplifiers up to five hours, but the religious congregations could now go indefinitely.

"What if somebody arranges a *mahfil* near hospital? Who will take action then?" said a high official close to the meeting, who did not want to be identified.

Abu Naser Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, an environment group, said: "It's a sensitive issue, we understand. But the ministry could have relaxed the conditions for religious gatherings instead of excluding."

The latest draft will not apply to Eid jamaat, prayers, *iftar* and *sehri* siren during Ramadan, hospital, ambulance, natural disaster, temple, church and armed forces vehicle.

On the January 25 meeting where the minister and the state minister exchanged views on the change in the draft, a ministry official said asking not to be named: "The minister wanted to keep religious gatherings in the policy, but the state minister disagreed."

The official quoted Zafrul Islam as

telling the meeting: "We made a mistake (allowing alcohol sale) that drew criticism. We don't want to repeat it as the issue is sensitive."

Asked to comment on it, Shahjahan Siraj said: "It has been passed with everybody's support."

According to the draft, noise pollution victims are not allowed to file charges against violators but can only inform the Department of Environment verbally, in writing or by phone.

Environment activists think people should have the right to go to court if their rights are violated.

"We have long been fighting for this right. If we complain to the department, it will side with the government and try to manipulate it," Naser said.

Shahjahan Siraj said, "We have to see whether the allegation is true or not. Individual charge is not necessary, as we consider the victim's complaint as a charge."

"We have just announced the rules. We will now consider people's and environment groups' opinions," he said.

Bapa will review the environment rules and send its recommendations to the ministry by next week.

Equipping the forex earner for tough global challenge

SILVERINE SHRIKANTHAN

The readymade garment sector, Bangladesh's largest foreign exchange earner, has a long way to build a pool of trained personnel for a sustainable business model.

Bangladesh Institute of Fashion and Technology, funded by Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, is the lone institution working to bring out professionals for better service to garment manufacturers.

Although some other institutions are out there in Dhaka home to about 2,600 garment factories, they did not hit the limelight.

"We have to gear up for tough global challenges ahead," said the Merchandising Manager of Karstadt Quelle, a multinational buying house.

The SEDF conducted a survey identifying training needs of local RMG consultants and is ready to launch a "training of trainers" programme for local consultants working on RMG, staff and students.

He underscored garment technology application for software solutions, management and workplace training for garment and household textile manufacturers and workers, training in dummy fittings, in-house testing facilities and understanding lab-test reports.

The manager has also emphasised proper planning and layout of factories for efficient, risk-free run of business.

Managed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a wing of the World Bank Group, Southasia Enterprise Development Facility (SEDF) has been working for the development of small and medium enterprises in Bangladesh.

"Although there are about 200,000 registered private companies in the region, their ability to grow is constrained by a less than

supportive business environment, weak business support and difficulties in accessing long-term funds. Local small and mid-sized businesses are unable to reach their potential as source of job creation and poverty reduction," SEDF/IFC General Manager Anil Sinha said.

"The SEDF offers a broad range of support packages to facilitate some of the gaps these firms face in the local market, drawing on IFC's extensive prior experience with similar SME initiatives in other regions and its access to small business-friendly policy reform expertise as a member of the World Bank Group," he said.

"We work in various sectors giving prominence to RMG (readymade garment)," SEDF Project Officer Raihana Rabbany said.

The SEDF conducted a survey identifying training needs of local RMG consultants and is ready to launch a "training of trainers" programme for local consultants working on RMG, staff and students.

Highlighting the need for trained personnel, the SEDF requested proposals from organisations for the programme.

SEDF's activity on RMG is three-pronged -- a) launching training/consulting programmes through local service providers b) training local service providers for implementing such programmes and c) offering technical assistance to RMG companies on a cost-sharing basis.

"Our strategy is to work through local service providers by facilitating them to develop a sustainable business model to better serve the local garment companies on a commercial basis," said Deepak Adhikary, project manager

of the SEDF Business Development Services.

"Most factories continue production without safety measures. Proper planning, designing and layout of ethically compliant factories will reduce risks of fire," said the factory-in-charge of an under-construction factory in Gazipur.

"We will certainly comply with Clauses 37 to 52 of the Factory Rules of 1979 which made it mandatory for us to take measures against fire," he added.

Seventy-eight garment workers died in stampedes triggered by fires from 2000 to 2003 in the city and its suburbs.

Some high-profile garment manufacturers have now hired personal consultants to take care of the areas. A few firms are now providing these services to factories willing to provide their employees with training.

Says Aminda Athanayake, managing director of Spectrum Lanka Technology Solutions Limited that offers such training: "If the garment sector is not braced for the global challenge from 2005, most small manufacturing units will not survive. The competition will be sharp and will be a matter of survival of the fittest."

At present, manufacturers are protected by the quota system -- a system compelling buyers to go to them. After 2005 the market will be open allowing buyers full control.

"If the SEDF facilitates such training programmes and provides international expertise, the local companies will have to see the value of such programmes," the head of a garment factory said.

"But the majority of garment manufacturers are not aware of such training."

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