

Dhaka, Yangon okay road link route

130km highway to be built, communications ministry awaits funds approval

RAFIQ HASAN

Bangladesh and Myanmar have finalised the route for establishing direct road link between Dhaka and Yangon.

The technical task forces of both the countries have agreed to develop a 130-kilometre road from Ramu in Cox's Bazar to Kyauktaw in Myanmar.

The route would be developed as part of the Asian Highway projects to have road links between neighbouring Thailand, China and other East Asian countries. The Asian Highway would link 42 countries in Asia with Europe via Turkey.

The route for the road between Bangladesh and Myanmar was finalised at a recent meeting of experts from both the countries in Yangon, said sources.

"We have completed all technical aspects of the project, now we need the finance ministry's approval for funds," a communications ministry official, who attended the meeting in Yangon, said.

"If both the countries agree on financial grounds, we can immediately start the construction works of the project. And if everything goes alright, the tender procedure for the project may start from next month," he added.

The roads and highways department has prepared a project concept paper (PCP) for building the road.

According to the PCP estimate, the project would cost Tk 136.34, of which Tk 86 crore would be spent for the Myanmar side and Tk 47 crore for the Bangladesh side. The project cost in Myanmar side would be higher because the area is hilly and the road there would require some long bridges and culverts, the source said.

The new route would bypass the previously considered route

through Mongdu and Buhtidaung, the officials said.

The originally proposed route was cancelled after it had appeared unfeasible to make a road link between Dhaka and Yangon, said a high official who had visited the area.

Out of 130 kilometres of road necessary to establish the link, 43 kilometres would be built in the first phase. Of this, 23 kilometres fall in Bangladesh territory stretching from Ramu to Gundom and the rest in Myanmar from Taungbro to Bawibazar.

Bangladesh would also build at its expense about 20 kilometres of the road in Myanmar side. It decided to assist Myanmar because otherwise the main route of the Asian Highway would go through India bypassing Bangladesh.

Myanmar, however, would conduct the survey and design of

the road on its own. The 24-foot wide road will have two lanes. Bangladesh expects to have the final survey report from Myanmar by next month.

The Myanmar prime minister had laid a foundation stone of the road at Ramu during his visit to Bangladesh in April last year. A memorandum of understanding and a number of agreements to cooperate with each other in this regard were also signed between Dhaka and Yangon on April 4, last year.

The communications ministry has already finalised the papers and documents for the project and those would soon be sent to the finance ministry for necessary fund, the source told The Daily Star.



PHOTO: STAR

The ruling BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami hold separate rallies near Muktagong and Baitul Mukarram mosque in the capital yesterday blocking two busy roads for hours.

Pen-down strike by Khulna journos

Security beefed up for region's vital installations

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Journalists in Khulna observed a pen-down strike and formed a human chain yesterday in protest against Saturday's bomb attacks on the premises of the Khulna press club, which left four newsmen injured.

No issue of local newspapers will come out today due to the strike by the newsmen, who will hold a rally on the Khulna Press Club premises today as part of their two-day agitation programme, reports our Staff Correspondent in Khulna.

Meanwhile, a security blanket has been extended to various important installations -- including TV and

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Khulna too hot for journalists

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Aasiya and Lucy, two reporters from BBC Radio, had flown in from London to do a story on shrimp cultivation, and Khulna, being the hub of the industry, seemed like the best place to interview a journalist who has witnessed and reported on the gradual developments in this fast growing industry.

When we arrived on the afternoon of Sunday, 30 January, I rang up Shaikh Abu Hasan, the President of the Khulna Press Club, and solicited his help. Soon he was sitting in our hotel, listing out several young reporters who have extensively reported on the environmental, social and economical impacts of the industry.

As our conversation proceeded, it became clear that none of the

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Habiganj BNP leader being quizzed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Habiganj district BNP Vice-president and President of Zia Gabeshana Parishad AKM Abdul Quaiyum, arrested in connection with the January 27 grenade attack, was remanded under tight security yesterday.

The law-enforcers questioned Quaiyum, now on an eight-day remand, at the office of the superintendent of police in Habiganj. However, it could not be known what information he gave the police.

Quaiyum, who had recently launched a campaign in Habiganj as the BNP's prospective candidate for the next parliamentary election, was

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FBI INVOLVEMENT

US wants clear govt commitment to solve case

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

The US wants a clear commitment from the government to the effect that it sincerely wants to solve the January 27 Habiganj carnage before committing the FBI to investigate the incident, an American embassy source said yesterday.

America has also made it clear yesterday that the responsibility of the investigation will rest on the government and that the FBI will act within the laws of the country.

Meanwhile, US Ambassador Harry K Thomas called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday at her office and reviewed possible terms of reference for FBI assistance. The home ministry and the US government will now pursue the matter.

The precise parameters of terms of reference are still being worked

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PHOTO: PID

US Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas meets Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

BNP holds AL solely responsible for Kibria's death

Party men took no step for his immediate treatment, says Bhuiyan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday held the main opposition Awami League (AL) 'solely responsible' for the death of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria as, he said, the party leadership took no steps for his immediate treatment.

"Kibria died of bleeding, and Awami League is solely responsible for his death as it neglected his treatment. He might have survived if he was given treatment immediately after the grenade attack, but the party (AL) leadership did not take any initiative for this," he said.

Addressing a mammoth public rally at Muktagong in the capital as part of the BNP's programme of holding rallies in all district headquarters to protest killings, violence, bomb attacks, hartal and anarchy,

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DCCI meets PM, wants Sunday as holiday

UNB, Dhaka

In the wake of growing intolerance in politics, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said political stability and consensus are needed to ensure national progress and prosperity.

Politics will be meaningless if the economy is not convenient, she said and urged the business community to stand united against destructive political programmes like hartal and arson.

"If there is no political stability, foreign entrepreneurs will shy away from investing in Bangladesh," the prime minister said as some business leaders met her following recent disruption in economic activities.

"The culture of hartal and arson, if not stopped, will keep the nation enmeshed in the vicious cycle of poverty and underdevelopment," she told the business leaders.

The prime minister made a call for the business community to unite and sit with all political parties of the country for ensuring stability.

Besides stability, the prime minister also stressed the continuity of politics for development and success of the country's economy.

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AL to join JS to protest 'govt's failure'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) plans to join the current parliament session to stage a strong protest against the BNP-led alliance government's 'failure to run the country', sources of the party high ups said.

The party policymakers believe the party deputies will be able to use the floor to blast the government over the assassination of Shah AMS Kibria and the 'stagnant inquiry' into the August 21 grenade attack.

The ruling parties or the speaker would have no scope to interfere or switch off the microphones of the AL lawmakers, as this time they would be taking part in the discussion on the presidential address. The opposition lawmakers will get at least seven hours to talk as the Business Advisory Committee has allocated 20 hours for discussion on the presidential address.

"There is a possibility of joining the session. If we join, we will strongly protest the misuse of the government," AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta yesterday told The Daily Star.

He said an AL Working Committee (ALWC) meeting with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina in the chair would decide

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ACC in crisis as Miah ponders quitting

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has stumbled into a grave crisis amid conflicts among its core members, one of whom may resign anytime.

"I'll see for a few more days," ACC Member Prof Maniruzzaman Miah told The Daily Star yesterday. "I have not yet taken a decision to resign but if the situation does not improve, I will not hesitate to quit."

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan claims that there are no internal conflicts. But he told reporters, "A vested quarter does not want the ACC to be strong. They want to make it a weak institution."

After its formation on November 21 last year, the ACC became entangled with a series of problems and could not start its functions till date.

Several conflicting issues regarding legal interpretations of the ACC act, absorption of the staff members of the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) into the ACC, and the appointment of Bac's director general MA Matin as ACC secretary caused stagnation in the ACC.

These issues have not only led to conflicts with the government but also resulted in an internal conflict among the ACC chairman and the two commissioners -- Maniruzzaman Miah and Maniruddin Ahmed.

The conflict intensified on February 3, when the chairman issued an office order to virtually strip Miah of his responsibilities. The order says the chairman himself will supervise and control all administrative and establishment related work, which are supposed to be done by Miah.

"I'm aggrieved receiving the order. This seems to be unusual. I don't understand what prompted the chairman to issue such an order. He didn't mention any reason in the letter," Miah said.

On December 22, the chairman had assigned Miah to look after administration and establishment and Maniruddin the task of inquiry and investigation.

The February 3 order does not mention Miah's new responsibilities or explain why the chairman himself will oversee his job. But the chairman verbally said that Miah would look after training, research and

other matters. "I took these responsibilities for a temporary period," explains the ACC chief.

Miah told The Daily Star that the same message was given to him through the letter. "As the chairman says this is for a temporary period, I'll see for a few more days. If I see things are not improving and if this becomes a permanent order, I will have to consider an extreme decision like quitting."

"I think this has been done just to make me inactive. The chairman has talked about re-assignment of the members' responsibilities. But I see that this is only applicable for me," Miah felt.

"If I was not given this task in the beginning, I would not have bothered about this job. But the fact is I was given these specific tasks, and withdrawing this is insulting to me. I cannot stay here in disgrace."

The first disagreement developed between Miah and Justice Sultan over the legal interpretation of the ACC act regarding the absorption of the Bac staff into the commission formation of which had

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GUNMEN PROTECTION

Politicians accept offer, still feel insecure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top opposition politicians and intellectuals accepted government's armed security offer but still wondered whether they can survive under the deteriorating law and order situation.

Many of them fear that such gunman protection will not secure their lives when the overall law and order take a nose-dive.

The government has provided approximately 30 gunmen to top leaders of the opposition, left parties and several intellectuals as of Sunday, amid the volatile political situation that emerged following the killing of Shah AMS Kibria on January 27.

"When we sought protection from the government earlier, they did not provide us with security," said Abdu Shahid, Opposition Chief Whip, in a reaction on the matter. "I wonder how the gunman can secure me in this volatile political situation," he added.

Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, who refused taking any gunman, told The Daily Star last evening that

"providing gunmen to individuals will not improve the law and order situation in the country. The government should concentrate on improving the law and order situation rather than giving gunmen to individuals," he added.

"Besides a gunman does not suit my lifestyle," Choudhury said, adding that police earlier asked him to take a gunman but he refused.

Receiving a gunman on Sunday morning, Manzurul Ahsan Khan, president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, said, "Giving me a gunman proves how insecure our lives have become." The government gave gunmen to certain people before but that did not prevent them from getting killed, he added.

"Without identifying the criminals or catching the killers of Kibria, the government cannot stop grave law and order situation of the country," Khan said.

One of the AL leaders, seeking anonymity, said, "Gunmen will not protect me from police when they will beat me in the procession and strikes."

Yasmeen Ghafoor, Special Superintendent (SS) of Special Branch (Protection) of Police, yesterday told The Daily Star that she has only followed a government order, terming the tagging of the gunmen as a 'continuous process'.

"All the political leaders I approached received gunmen," she said, adding that they will be tagged with the leaders until further orders.

The gunmen, ranging from sub-inspectors to constables ranks, were trained especially for this purpose and will carry small arms. Ghafoor added. The gunmen will follow the orders of the leaders, who can make use of them as they want, she said.

The other intellectuals who were given gunmen are Prof Mohammad Yunus, Dr Anisuzzaman, Sector Commander CR Dutta and Rakanuddin Mahmud.

Rakanuddin Mahmud refused to take a gunman when one was brought to him, but was informed that the decision to provide him the protection came from the

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Ctg hartal partly observed

STAR REPORT

The eight-hour 'token' hartal enforced by Chittagong Awami League (AL) and other opposition parties was observed partially in the port city yesterday.

In Rangamati, police severely beat up the editor of a local daily during a dawn-to-dusk hartal in the district. Shameema Rashid, editor of the 'Parbattya Barta', was taken to Chittagong Medical College Hospital with critical injuries.

Our staff correspondent from

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Opposition to call fresh hartal spell today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All opposition political parties today announce simultaneous movement programmes including another spell of hartal from separate press conferences in the city.

Opposition sources hinted the main opposition Awami League and its left-leaning allies Jatiya

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