

Oli blamed

FROM PAGE 1
Benapole-Jessore-Kanchpur-Dhaka-Sylhet and Tamabil, and AH2 passing through Banglabandha-Hatikamrul-Dhaka-Kanchpur-Sylhet and Tamabil. Both international sea ports -- Chittagong and Mongla -- are connected to AH1 and AH2 by AH41, so the ports may also serve the regional trade needs.

Bangladesh initially offered four entry/exit points for AH including two at the north-east corner of the country, when UN-ESCAP in 1993 asked member countries to indicate which roads of their national networks could become parts of the network.

One of the two entry/exit points in the north-east of the country was at Tamabil and the other was at Astagram, both of which are in Sylhet. The route through Astagram was much shorter for linking Tamu of Myanmar with the AH network through Imphal, the capital city of the Indian state of Manipur. Tamu is a border point between India and Myanmar, which the latter offered for AH connection.

But in 1995 the then communications minister Oli Ahmed scrapped the proposed route through Astagram, and retained only the route through Tamabil in the north-east.

"The Tamabil route is about 600 kilometres to Imphal from Sylhet. It was a suicidal decision for Bangladesh," said Dr M Rahmatullah, former director (transport) of UN-ESCAP.

"There was no reason for choosing this route, since the other route through Astagram could have been much shorter with a distance of only around 200 kilometres."

Showing maps and documents, the transport expert said the only route now chosen in the north-east, passes through a mountainous region across four Indian states, through which travel is time consuming and costly.

Sources said the Tamabil exit/entry point is neither suitable for India and Myanmar, nor for Bangladesh. When countries submitted their route proposals in response to UN-ESCAP request, India proposed a route through Karimganj of Assam into Bangladesh via Astagram.

An independent study of UN-ESCAP also found the Astagram route as the most suitable. "But the then Bangladesh authorities were unable to understand it," said Rahmatullah, now transport policy adviser for the Transport Sector Management Reform (TSMR) Programme of the Bangladesh Planning Commission.

He said the only reason for not choosing the more viable route through Astagram, was the then government's bias against anything proposed by India.

"I heard some communications ministry top policymakers saying: since India had offered the route, it must have some vested interest in it...so, we couldn't go for it," he told The Daily Star last week.

The present route-related trouble of Bangladesh, where the country is wanting to change the proposed routes once again, but being vetoed by India, has been the outcome of the wrong decision taken in 1995, Rahmatullah said.

In 1998 the last Awami League government tried to revert the route proposal, and offered Astagram as the entry/exit point again, but failed to get India on board.

Later the successive BNP-led four-party alliance government offered a completely new route through Teknaf, but failed to get any attention from any member country.

Rahmatullah said Bangladesh could still resolve the route dispute by becoming a member of the network through signing the AH agreement, which it has been putting off for decades now.

For amending the proposed route, Bangladesh now must convince both India and Myanmar, he added.

Asian Highway, a proposed international network of 1,41,000 kilometres of standard highways criss-crossing Asian countries with links to Europe, was conceived in 1959 with an aim to promote regional cooperation among the main land countries of Asia.

Once Bangladesh becomes a part of this global network of roads, it will be connected with countries located both on the east and the west. The transnational highway will also open up enormous economic opportunities for Bangladesh.

OLI'S REBUTTAL
Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed vehemently denied that he had chosen Tamabil as the entry/exit point. "Rather it was Rahmatullah and some officials of the World Bank, who tried to push the route through that point, with a vested interest of keeping all entry-exit points only with Bangladesh."

About the current proposed routes on the book, he said UN-ESCAP finalised those not any Bangladesh government. "Asian Highway can never enter from and also exit to the same country. It must connect capitals of multiple countries," Oli asserted.

He said Bangladesh has always been trying for a route through Chittagong-Cox's Bazar to reach Gundum of Myanmar, which complies with all criteria for the network stipulated by UN-ESCAP. In November 1996, the then Awami League government also proposed the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar route in a meeting held in Japan, but that was not accepted, he added.

Parties asked

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(CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda told reporters replying to a question at the commission secretariat.

Huda, however, said the commission would consider time if any political party submits application seeking time for submitting its permanent constitution.

Replying to another question, the CEC said the commission has a plan to hold Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) election at the end of December this year and necessary laws would be enacted in the current session of parliament.

The commission would be able to fix the exact date for the DCC polls after having the laws in place, Huda said.

About the union parishad elections, the CEC said elections would be held division-wise next year.

About expenditure in making the voter list and national ID card, he said, "A total of Tk 380.73 crore has been spent on preparing the voter list with photographs and Tk 37.17 crore on making the national ID cards," adding that the national committee had recommended Tk 384 crore 3 lakh and 96 thousands for preparing the voter list and Tk 46 crore for national ID cards.

The CEC said the commission has already started updating the voter list with photographs which would cost Tk 30 crore.

The commission may seek the help of the Army and Air Force in updating the voter list in hilly areas while that of Navy in remote coastal areas, he said.

Election Commissioners M Sohel Hussain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain, EC Secretary M Humayun Kabir and project director of the voter list preparation committee Brig Gen Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury were, among others, present at the press briefing.

Dutch support

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Khandaker at his office yesterday.

During the meeting, the minister and the envoy discussed on various issues including different aspects of the budget, freedom of newspaper, river excavation and river training, poverty reduction strategy, five year plan, amendment of purchase policy of the government.

Khandaker said the navigability of the rivers would be restored as well as huge quantity of arable lands recovered through river excavation and river training.

Tipai dam

FROM PAGE 16
Prof Muzaffer criticised the government and NGOs for remaining silent on the issue. He also questioned why international organisations could not be approached for help since India's proposed dam project is in breach of several international treaties.

The environmentalist expressed doubt about patriotism claimed by lawmakers and ministers who were advocating for Tipaimukh dam though it was against national interests.

He called on the prime minister to protect the country from the catastrophes that this dam would bring.

Assistant Professor of Chittagong University Geography Department Kazi M Barkat Ali presented the keynote paper at the seminar, organised by 'Movement to Protect Surma-Kushihara-Meghna', citizens' forum.

Former secretary Mohammad Asaf Uddowah said if an upstream country wishes to build a dam on a river, it needs to take consent from the downstream nations, which India is not doing.

The Tipaimukh dam would be catastrophic, he said. Retired BDR chief Maj Gen ALM Fazlur Rahman, former secretary Mohammad Asaf Uddowah, Engr Dr SI Khan and Prof Dr Mahbub Ullah, among others, addressed the seminar. Convener of the forum Abdul Qayyum Chowdhury was in the chair.

The next day he was admitted to Naogaon Sadar Hospital and was released on June 13 after treatment. As he fell sick again on June 14, he was first admitted to Naogaon Sadar Hospital and then taken to the RMCH where he died four and a half hours later after his admission at 1:30pm, the release said.

His death certificate cited 'irreversible cardio-respiratory failure with haemorrhage and ARDS' as the cause of his death, it said.

The body will be sent to his home by BDR, it added.

Another BDR

FROM PAGE 1
Belal was taken to the battalion headquarters at Naogaon on instructions of the authorities on June 2 as he continued to suffer from fever and was under treatment of the sector medical officer till June 9.

The next day he was admitted to Naogaon Sadar Hospital and was released on June 13 after treatment. As he fell sick again on June 14, he was first admitted to Naogaon Sadar Hospital and then taken to the RMCH where he died four and a half hours later after his admission at 1:30pm, the release said.

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Govt's rules change

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finance minister, the planning minister and the prime minister's finance and planning adviser.

On May 25, the World Bank in a letter for the first time expressed its concern about the proposed amendments and after official meeting with the ERD secretary, the second letter was sent.

Government officials said the amendments are being made mainly for awarding contracts for work, through lottery and without pre-qualifications, to ruling party activists and people close to the party.

They also said the lottery system opens the door for corruption. The specific envelope that contains the bid of the favourite contractor is marked in a specific way so that it could easily be picked. The envelopes are sometimes kept in a fridge to make it easy to pick.

The World Bank issued the letter after detailed discussions with government officials concerned. The letter also mentioned the government logic behind the probable amendments and the bank's rationale behind opposing them.

The proposed amendments say that no pre-qualification (professional and technical qualification) and work experience is required for getting contracts worth under Tk 2 crore, the World Bank said, adding that as qualification requirement is a fundamental criterion in any competitive bidding, this change would undermine some key principles of the procurement process such as fairness of the process and the equitable treatment of competitors. It would introduce too much discretionary handling, it said.

The government says that as a result of the articles, new contractors can participate in the bidding at the district/upazila levels but others cannot compete. Another finalised amendment said for jobs up to Tk 2 crore, if the quote is five per cent above or below the official estimate, it will be rejected and the bid security will be forfeited.

The World Bank said, "The core reason is to put an end to bidders' malpractices. Therefore, the bank thinks that this amendment, a governance and anti-corruption risk mitigation, should not be addressed through additional provisions in the procurement framework, rather through a firm handling of the bidding process."

In support of the proposed amendment the government said if there were a provision of such limit, it would allow the bidders to quote within a reasonable limit. The amendment provides that for equipment/vehicle purchase, brand names and/or country of origin will have to be mentioned.

The World Bank opposes the amendment saying to promote wider competition it is essential that technical specification of equipment be prepared taking into account the critical performance characteristics. For public procurement, use of brand names

Asian Highway

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meeting, Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Abul Kalam Azad told reporters after the meeting.

Meeting sources said the cabinet initially emphasised the importance of the third route to avoid controversies. They said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government held three cabinet meetings on the issue but failed to make any decision, which the cabinet yesterday termed very unfortunate.

The decision will be made into a bill and placed at the parliament for its verdict. During the meeting, held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Hasina wanted to know from the communications minister and secretary whether Bangladesh has any option to negotiate the proposed routes. They replied that becoming member is a prerequisite to negotiating for route changes.

"We cannot remain aloof in the age of globalisation. We have to go forward with the network in the interest of socio-economic development of the country," Abul Kalam told newsmen quoting Sheikh Hasina as saying.

The cabinet also approved in principle the Islamic University (amendment) Act, 2009, and the Government Water Body Management Policy, 2009.

As per the Government Water Body Management Policy, 2009, fishermen will get lease of government water bodies. Azad said there are 28,879 government water bodies and 25,674 of them are smaller than 20 acres.

He said the Upazila Water Body Management Committee would deal with the smaller water bodies while the district committee will deal with water bodies larger than 20 acres.

and/or country of origin will restrict competition and will be discriminatory.

The government rationale behind it is that in order to ensure quality of equipment/vehicles, it would be helpful if brand names and/or country of origin were mentioned.

The amendment also says that no representative of the FBCCI would be included in the review panel for complaints received against any bid. Instead a firm would be included.

Before sending any proposal to the purchase committee the ministry concerned can have opinion of the experts. However, a source concerned said it is not proper as the ministry can have opinion from an expert of its choice to influence the purchase committee.

RMG worker

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Rakib's co-workers found his body around 10:00am and instantly informed the factory management and later the police.

Sub-inspector (SI) Abdul Kuddus of Khilgaon Police Station said they reached the scene around 11:00am and found the body hanging with a belt from a ceiling fan. The family of the deceased were allowed to see the body around 2:30pm before police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), he added.

Jalal Uddin Bapari, the deceased's uncle, said Rakib went to the factory at 8:00am and his suicide news came two hours later.

He alleged that the factory authorities kept them from going upstairs from 10:30am to around 2:00pm.

He added that Rakib was suspended from the factory for one and a half months and was reappointed two months ago after repeated requests.

Rakib's mother who is also a worker of the factory was not present at that time since she had night shift that day.

An unnatural death case was filed with the Khilgaon Police Station yesterday.

Meanwhile, Pallabi police recovered a body of a boy when some volunteers from Lalmatia brought him to DMCH early yesterday.

The deceased Rubel, 17, was son of late Abdul Kader of Tinshe colony at Bawnia in Pallabi.

SI Mohammad Yaqub of Pallabi Police Station told The Daily Star that locals rushed Rubel to DMCH after they found him lying with fatal head injury and broken right leg around 3:00am near an under-construction building at block-E, road No-11 in Lalmatia. The doctors declared him dead, he added.

Police could not ascertain any motive behind Rubel's murder.

JS to get

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Suranjit criticised the last interim administration also for filing 'false cases' against politicians including Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Workers Party lawmaker Rashed Khan Menon said Muhith was not party to the supplementary budget as it was formulated by the caretaker government.

He however should have spoken about the misrule over the two years to last December, added Menon, also president of the Workers Party.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal lawmaker and President Hasanul Haque Inu proposed that the parliamentary standing committee examine the current year's budget before its passage.

Ruling party lawmakers Zillul Hakim, KM Khalid and Mahbub Ara Gini were among those who came down hard on Muhith for not mentioning in budget speech the 'misdeeds and wrongdoings' of Fakhruddin Ahmed-led administration.

Govt footing

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while Deputy Director Alamgir Kabir estimated that the daily eviction cost in the Shitalakhyia is Tk 2 lakh.

The expenses for the eviction drive include day labourers' wage, fuel for tugboats and other costs.

BIWTA Senior Deputy Director Md Abu Zafar Hawlader said the ongoing drive in the Shitalakhyia is the seventh in a sequence since 2001. The drive was conducted twice in 2007 during the caretaker government rule.

BIWTA first launched a drive against river encroachers in 2001 following a High Court direction for a work plan, though it had prepared a list of encroachers on the foreshores long ago, said Alamgir Kabir.

"We had a list of at least 3,100 structures built encroaching on the Buriganga river. And it cost Tk 14 lakh to demolish around 1,000 structures under several drives," he said.

A high official speaking anonymously said BIWTA has so far filed five or six cases with police against the river grabbers on charge of criminal offence since 2001, but the cases are still pending.

BTMA favours

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purposes or to conceal and devalue property and imported goods.

Terming the budget disappointing, Sarker said this budget would not help the textile and ready-made garment (RMG) sector grow as this vital sector was bypassed in the stimulus package.

The BTMA chief also said the government should not allow the scope of money whitening for three years; it should be one year and for some selected sectors.

He urged the government to identify the gainers of the proposed stimulus package of Tk 5,000 crore, as it was not mentioned in the budget speech of Finance Minister AMA Muhith.

Sarker said the government had earlier pledged that textile sector would be included in the interim stimulus package, which was declared in the last quarter of the previous fiscal year, but it was not done ultimately.

"That means, we are left out of both interim and budgetary stimulus packages, which is disappointing for us. We need a share of the stimulus package for our sector's survival and if we survive employment generation will be well supported," Sarker said.

He mentioned that country's textile and RMG sectors have been losing competitiveness due to irregular supply of gas and power during the economic recession.

So, the government should ensure proper supplies of gas and power and incentive for the growth of the primary textile sector (PTS), he added.

JS body

FROM PAGE 1
to get the work order but the work order was cancelled without showing any reason.

"Former adviser MA Matin excelled in rhetoric, but he could not protect himself from the greed of money," Nazrul Islam Babu, ruling Awami League lawmaker and a member of the sub-committee, told reporters.

The former adviser however rejected the allegation of corruption against him.

Flour mills

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directors Akkas Ali, Md Alamgir Hossain and other officials coordinated it.

Zafar said the drive went on well, and the work as the structures were close to each other. "But a problem we are facing is that steel rope used for pulling down strong pillars and walls using tugboat sometimes snaps, and we are to carry on with the job manually," he added.

The authorities engaged 150 labourers, a tugboat and two trawlers in the drive yesterday.

Meanwhile, portions of four multi-storied buildings including three garments factories and a six-storey house and nine semi-concrete structures including four salt factories are among the illegal ones already knocked down.

The drive is to continue today.

Executive Magistrate of Narayanganj Abdul Hai decided to go for fresh marking of portion of Chand Flour Mills that encroached upon the Shitalakhyia, and knock it down this morning.

The flour mills which were demolished partially yesterday include Shitalakhyia, Madina, Rashid and Narayanganj flour mills.

However, with the logistics at their disposal the authorities are unable to remove any of the heavily built retaining walls and foundations of the structures being pulled down under the ongoing drive.

And taking advantage of this, encroachers might come back with makeshift structures at a later stage, sources pointed out.

CALL TO SAVE RIVERS
Meanwhile, Paribesh Bachao Andolan (Save Environment Movement) and Work for a Better Bangladesh (WBB) Trust yesterday demanded urgent measures to demarcate river boundaries and save rivers from pollution.

They made the demand at a press conference on the bank of the Turag after witnessing demolition of illegal structures.

With his songs, noted baul (folk) singer Abdul Kuddus Boyati urged people living on the Turag to save the river.

Chairman of Paribesh Bachao Andolan Abu Naser Khan, Programme Manager of WBB Trust Syed Mahbubul Alam, and Prof Nazrul Islam of Geography and Environment Studies of Jahangirnagar University were present there among others.

Abu Naser said the initiative to recover encroached land is laudable but the debris of the dismantled structures is being dumped into the river, which is reducing navigability.

"We want the drive to continue and at the same time we want a committee to be formed comprising fresh people from different organisations for demarcating river boundaries," he said.

Speakers at the conference said the eviction expense should be charged as fine or damages from the polluters and encroachers.

They also urged to take immediate steps to stop ongoing waste dumping into rivers.

Peace term

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also stripped it of all sovereignty attributes, transforming it into a protectorate of isolated cantons," said Yasser Abed Rabbo, a senior aide to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas.

"Netanyahu is defying the world. The international community should reply by pressure to isolate Netanyahu and his policies and force Israel to submit to the peace process," he said.

Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians recognise Israel as a Jewish state in a final deal -- something they have long refused to do -- "scuppers the possibility for peace."

"No one will support this appeal in Egypt or elsewhere," the state news agency MENA quoted the leader of one of only two Arab countries to have signed peace treaties with Israel as saying.

State media of Israel's arch-enemy Syria also blasted Netanyahu saying he "torpedoed" peace efforts.

A Palestinian recognition of Israel as a homeland of the Jewish people, would mean effectively giving up on the right of return, a cherished dream among the 4.6 million Palestinian refugees scattered around the Middle East.

The Palestinians also slammed Netanyahu for not heeding the US call to halt all settlement activity, something they have demanded in order to relaunch negotiations that the two sides revived at a US conference in November 2007 but that were suspended during the Gaza war earlier this year.

Asked in an interview with

NBC News on Monday about his refusal to freeze construction in existing settlements, Netanyahu evaded the question, stressing instead his pledge not to authorize new settlements.

"I think (US) President (Barack) Obama and I are trying to reach a common understanding on this," he told the US network.

In Israel, the Ynet news website said the speech amounted to "the same old babble," while Ayoub Kara, an MP with Netanyahu's Likud party, termed it "a pain killer to stop international pressure."

While agreeing to a Palestinian state may have been difficult for the leader of the right-wing Likud party -- one daily said he "vomited the words" -- the move was mostly aimed at pleasing Israel's main ally, they said.

Obama's administration has vowed to vigorously pursue the hobbled Middle East peace process as part of a changed approach to the region, and has repeatedly called on Israel to stop settlements and accept a Palestinian state.

The blunt talk from its main ally has raised fears inside the Jewish state that Washington may ease its support as it tries to improve its relations with the Muslim world.

The White House termed Netanyahu's speech an "important step forward."

On the domestic side, Netanyahu drew criticism both from within his hawkish coalition, where many felt he went too far, and from the left which considered he didn't go far enough.

Iranian election

FROM PAGE 16
into central Tehran in defiance of an interior ministry ban on them.

Iran's supreme leader has ordered a top regime body to look into the complaints raised by the moderate Mousavi, as Iran faced a growing international backlash over the validity of the election and the subsequent crackdown on opposition protests.

Ahmadinejad has defended the results of an election that gave the combative hardline another four years in power, denting Western hopes of a change in domestic and foreign policy of the oil-rich Shiite-dominated nation.

As riot police looked on, demonstrators, some wearing the green of Mousavi's campaign colour, streamed into central Tehran despite the ban, raising the possibility of tense confrontations.

"No authorisation for a march or gathering has been issued and any kind of gathering or march is illegal," an interior ministry spokesman said.

State television said supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had told Mousavi to pursue his complaints against the most hotly-disputed election in the Islamic republic through legal and peaceful means, state television reported.

The former wartime premier lodged a formal appeal on Sunday for the cancellation of the results, which stoked the worst unrest in the Islamic republic for a decade.

Former president Mohammad Khatami, a key Mousavi backer who was succeeded by Ahmadinejad, wants the results of the vote cancelled and a new election held, his brother said.

Khamenei said the 12-member Guardians Council had been advised to "precisely examine" Mousavi's letter. A spokesman for the body said it would announce its decision in 10 days.

European governments complained about the tactics used against protestors and added their voices to US doubt over the election outcome, with the EU calling on Tehran to launch a probe into the results.

Monday's opposition demonstration comes a day after Ahmadinejad himself addressed a victory rally of vast crowds of supporters in Tehran to defend the results, saying the passions aroused by the results were like a football match.

"Elections in Iran are the cleanest," he said. "Today, we should appreciate the great triumph of the people of Iran against the united front of all the world arrogance (the West) and the psychological war launched by the enemy."

The authorities have warned that they would crush any "velvet revolution" in Iran and police said they have rounded up 170 people over the protests, including a number of reformist leaders.

Relatives of those arrested protested outside Tehran's main revolutionary court on Monday. "You can beat us as much as you can, but take us to our children," shouted one woman as a policeman nearby beat a man in order to disperse the crowd of around 200.

Germany -- Iran's most important Western trading partner, along with Britain and France -- joined the Islamic republic's arch-enemy the United States and Israel in questioning the results of the vote.

The very serious doubts that have been raised about the free and fair nature of the

election counting process are obviously of major concern to many people in Iran," British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier described the action of the security forces as "completely unacceptable."

US Vice President Joe Biden said on Sunday there was "an awful lot of doubt" about the vote, but nevertheless reiterated Washington's willingness to engage in talks after three decades of severed ties.

Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak, whose country Ahmadinejad has said should be wiped off the map, said during a visit to France that his return to power was "bad news."

The Iranian authorities have also cracked down on local and foreign media, with Mousavi's own newspaper reportedly suspended and international outlets reporting the arrest and harassment of their journalists.

Telephone and Internet services have also been disrupted.

On Saturday, Tehran witnessed widespread clashes