

Govt to finish work on 117 bridges by 2013

Says Obaidul Quader
UNB, Dhaka

Construction and reconstruction work on 117 old bridges in 11 districts will be completed by 2013 with financial support from Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), said Communications Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday.

Obaidul Quader said this after a meeting with a two-member Jica delegation, led by Senior Jica representative Mayumi Endoh, at the minister's secretariat office in the morning.

These old 117 bridges, including 63 of above 30 metres, are either being reconstructed or repaired on six national and 13 regional highways at a cost of Tk 691 crore. Of the amount, Tk 502 crore is being provided by Jica while the rest comes from the national exchequer.

An agreement to this effect with Jica, an important development partner of Bangladesh, was signed in February this year.

During the meeting, the minister and the Jica delegation discussed the progress of works on the bridges.



Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pankaj Saran presents his credentials to President Zillur Rahman at Bangabhaban yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Form single authority to protect rivers

Urge environmentalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environmentalists at a press conference yesterday demanded the government form a single national river authority under a stringent law to save the country's rivers.

They also demanded immediate cancellation of India's projects on river-linking and Tipaimukh dam and China's plan to build a dam on the Brahmaputra river.

"A specific law (to save rivers) must be enacted otherwise it will be impossible to save the country from a catastrophe," said Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) President ASM Shahjahan.

Bapa and Jatiya Nodi Rokkha Andolon organised the press conference in the city's Dhaka Reporters Unity.

Noted columnist Syed Abul Maksud said the government must take up the responsibility to save the rivers.

A Bapa report, "State of Bangladeshi Rivers Report-2011", was revealed yesterday. Bapa General Secretary Dr Abdul Matin said there are internal and external reasons behind the destruction of rivers.

Bapa placed an 18-point demand which includes-- stopping river grabbing and pollution.

AKHAURA-AGARTALA RAIL LINK

India announces take-up connectivity project

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India yesterday announced taking up the rail connectivity project linking Agartala, capital of the northeastern state of Tripura, with Akhaura in Bangladesh in a bid to improve ties between the two countries.

The proposal to take up the Agartala-Akhaura rail line project, envisaged in the joint communiqué during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Delhi in January, 2010, was made by Indian Railways Minister Dinesh Trivedi.

Presenting his ministry's budget in Parliament yesterday, he said, "To have cordial and improved relations with the neighbouring countries, Indian Railways takes up projects to provide rail connectivity to such countries."

"This year, it is proposed to take up a project to connect Agartala with Akhaura in Bangladesh."

This will also help establish connectivity with inaccessible areas in the northeast as the journey from Kolkata to Tripura via Bangladesh will result in significant savings in time and distance travelled, he added.

Agartala is 1,650km from Kolkata and 2,637km from New Delhi via Guwahati, capital of Assam state, and

West Bengal, whereas the distance between the Tripura capital and Kolkata through Bangladesh is just about 350 km.

Under the railway budget proposal this year, India will build a 15km railway track linking Agartala with Akhaura, which is also an important railway junction connected with Chittagong port, Sylhet and Dhaka.

Trivedi, in his budget, did not mention how much money would be earmarked for Agartala-Akhaura link but the total cost of the proposed project is estimated at Rs 252 crore.

"The Indian Railway Construction Company (IRCON) would lay the new railway tracks on both sides of the border," Northeast Frontier Railways (NFR) Chief Administrative Officer (Construction) Arvind Sewary had told reporters recently.

The project is expected to be completed by 2014.

COMING OUT TOMORROW

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In the list of uninhabitable cities of the world, Dhaka charts at the top, and, to make matters worse, it is now facing an acute water, gas and electricity crisis. *The Star's* Cover Story this week focuses on the people's struggle for these three basic necessities. As violence looms large in our political horizon, we try to find out what lies ahead. The burial (or cremation) of the dead is becoming difficult due to limited space and inadequate facilities, we go beyond the rituals and feature the difficulties that grieving citizens are facing after their loved one dies.

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