

Route to Payra in poor shape

SOHRAB HOSSAIN with ANDREW EAGLE

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transportation Authority (BIWTA) hopes to formally inaugurate the Payra seaport established on the mouth of the Ramnabad Channel on the Andharmanik river in Tiakhali union of Patuakhali's Kalapara upazila in the near future.

However, the plans for Payra to be a key transshipment point where cargoes are unloaded for transportation by smaller vessels across the country have hit a snag: many of the waterway corridors that were hoped to be relied upon are suffering from siltation.

Due to alluvial shifts at up to 100 points on at least 10 presumed navigable routes, transportation of goods from Payra might not go ahead as originally planned. Waterway transportation from Payra has become difficult and risky due to limited navigability on these waterways which include some routes to Barisal,

Mirzagonj, Mongla, Bhola, Chandpur, Damudhya in Shariatpur, Lakshimpur and Madaripur.

On February 7, the BIWTA identified these crisis points in a letter to the planning department in the hope that action could be taken to maintain navigability, as at present goods-laden vessels cannot pass by safely.

"Onward transportation of cargo from Payra may be greatly hampered once Payra seaport begins operations," says MA Abdul Hai, director for conservancy and piloting from the BIWTA.

Immediate steps are needed to improve navigability of these routes considering the importance of Payra and the comparative cost advantages of waterway transportation, he says.

BIWTA's Deputy Director Abdur Razzak agrees that navigability maintenance is important for the same reasons.



A vessel goes aground on a char of the Lohalia river between Patuakhali and Galachipa. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: STAR

Bomb attack on Chuadanga Christian family

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Three members of a Christian family were injured when criminals hurled crude bombs at their house in Chuadanga's Damurhuda upazila early yesterday.

The wounded are Alam Mondal, 50, Rony Mondal, 22, and Thandu Mondal, 28.

Of them, critically injured Alam, a cattle trader, is now undergoing treatment at Chuadanga Sadar Hospital. The two others took first aid at Damurhuda Upazila Health Complex.

Liakat Hossain, officer-in-charge of Damurhuda Police Station, told The Daily Star that around 1:30am, a gang of criminals went to Alam's house in Baghdadanga Girjapara village. The family had converted to Christianity from Islam.

Alam was sleeping on the verandah at that time. The gang demanded money from him outside the gate, Alam said.

"As I refused to give them the money, they started hurling bombs into my home," he said.

The attackers hurled six to seven crude bombs into the house.

Alam suffered injuries in his left hand and abdomen. The two others injured were also sleeping on the verandah.

Hearing the explosions, locals rushed to the spot and the criminals fled.

"Criminals might have gone there to rob the house," said Rashidul Hasan, superintendent of police in Chuadanga, who visited the spot.

Police were investigating the incident, he said.

A case was filed with Damurhuda Police Station in this connection.

NIKHIL KILLING

DB detains niece's ex-husband

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

The Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday detained another suspect in connection with the killing of tailor Nikhil Chandra Joardar in Tangail's Gopalpur upazila.

He is Goutam Rudhra, ex-husband of Nikhil's niece Swarna Joardar.

A Tangail DB police team detained Goutam at his home in the capital's Uttara early yesterday, said Mahfijur Rehman Ghulam, officer-in-charge of the Tangail DB police.

Goutam married Swarna two years ago, and they separated a year ago.

"We detained Goutam for interrogation in the killing incident as he had been issuing death threats to Nikhil since the divorce," the DB official said, quoting Nikhil's family.

Nikhil, 50, was hacked to death by unidentified criminals on Saturday near his shop at Dubail Bazar in Gopalpur municipality area.

On Sunday, Gopalpur police detained three people -- Rafiqul Islam Badsha, secretary of Gopalpur upazila unit Jamaat-e-Islami, Maulana Aminul Islam, principal of Alamnagar Madrasa, and BNP activist Jhantu Miah -- for their alleged involvement in the murder.

Aminul had filed a case against Nikhil for "derogatory comments" about Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on May 2, 2012.

The DB police on Monday showed the three arrested in the two cases filed for Nikhil's murder and produced them before the Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court in Tangail with a remand prayer.

The court placed the suspects on six-day remand each.

Singapore detains 8 Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1

DMP Commissioner Monirul Islam said some of the five arrestees were found in possession of Mufti Jasim Uddin Rahmani's books that are known for preaching militancy.

According to investigators, Rahmani is the spiritual leader of banned local militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team.

Sent back on April 29, the five have been identified as Mizanur Rahman alias Ghalib Hasan, 38, of Kasba upazila of Brahmanbaria, Md Rana Mia Pilot, 29, of Gabtali upazila of Bogra, Md Alamgir Hossain, 31, of Gangni upazila of Meherpur, Md Tanjimul Islam, 24, of Matlab upazila of Chandpur, and Masud Rana alias Sontu Khan, 31 Bera upazila of Pabna.

While the eight others were detained on April 26. Singapore's home ministry website said they were aged 26 to 34 and planning to stage terror attacks in Bangladesh.

They have been identified as Rahman Mizanur, 31, Shariful Islam, 27, Mamun Leakat Ali, 29, Md Jabath Kysar Haje Norul Islam Sowdagar, 30, Miah Rubel, 26, Sohag Ibrahim, 27, Sohail Hawlader Ismail Hawlader, 29, and Zaman Daulat, 34.

Members of the so-called ISB, formed in Singapore in March by Rahman Mizanur, had identified several possible targets in Bangladesh, which include lawmakers, ministers, and media personnel, according to a kill-list released in the website.

In a document titled "We Need for Jihad Fight", which was recovered from Rahman, the group also listed military targets such as the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), the air and navy forces and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab).

"He also possessed documents on weapons and bomb making, as well as a significant amount of ISIS and al-Qaeda radical material which he used to recruit ISB members in Singapore from January 2016," it says.

Asked about the militancy links of the eight, the additional DMP commissioner only said the Singapore authorities were interrogating them.

He, however, said the laws of the two countries are different. "If what is considered radicalism in Singapore is to be considered the same in Bangladesh, half the population would have to be in jail."

Of the eight, Rahman Mizanur was an "S-Pass" holder. According to Singapore's manpower ministry website, the "S-Pass" allows mid-level skilled staff to work in Singapore. Candidates need to earn at least \$2,200 a month and have the relevant qualifications and work experience.

The other seven were "Work Permit" holders employed in the local construction and marine industries. These permits allow semi-skilled foreign workers from approved source countries to work in certain sectors.

The ministry said the eight men held in April had intended to join the Islamic State (IS or ISIS) militant group.

But after realising it would be too hard to travel to Syria, they instead planned to return to Bangladesh to overthrow the government and had "identified several possible attack targets".

According to the ISB members, at least two more members of the group are in Bangladesh, said the ministry.

"The ISB members planned to recruit other Bangladeshi nationals working in Singapore to grow the group. The group had also raised monies to purchase firearms to carry out their planned terror attacks in Bangladesh. The money has since been seized," read the ministry statement.

"Several of those detained may be liable for prosecution for terrorism financing."

Rahman "admitted" to investigators in Singapore that he would carry out an attack anywhere if he was instructed by ISIS to do so, it said.

"ISB poses a security concern to Singapore because of its support for ISIS and its readiness to resort to the use of violence overseas."

Meanwhile, Bangladesh High Commissioner to Singapore Mahbub Uz Zaman confirmed that the eight Bangladeshi nationals were detained for their alleged involvement in militancy.

He told The Daily Star that the suspects were detained on April 26 from their respective workplaces in Singapore as part of an ongoing investigation to identify the Bangladeshi who were suspected of plotting attacks on different professionals at home.

"The investigation is going on. We are closely working with the

Singaporean authorities as our government has taken the security issue seriously," the envoy told this correspondent over the phone yesterday afternoon.

The detainees were being quizzed by the Singaporean authorities, he added.

Earlier, Singapore authorities arrested 27 Bangladeshi construction workers between November 16 and December 1 last year for "supporting armed jihad ideology of terrorist groups such as Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda".

Of them, 26 were deported to Bangladesh and local police arrested 14 of them on December 21 after police found their link with militancy.

DB officials then said the 26 deportees had no links to Islamic State or al-Qaeda. But the 14 had links with banned local outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) and its detained spiritual leader Jasim Uddin Rahmani. A case was filed against them under Anti-Terrorism Act of Bangladesh.

"After investigation, those who were not found guilty under Bangladeshi law were freed, but they are kept under surveillance," Additional DMP Commissioner Monirul Islam said back then.

The 14 are in jail and police are yet to submit any charge-sheet against them.

DMP PRESS BRIEFING

Monirul, who is the chief of Counterterrorism and Transnational Crime Unit of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), said they arrested the five during a raid at Banasree area of the capital around 11:30am yesterday.

They were deported on April 29 and were under surveillance. After filing of a case against them, they would be produced before a court with 10-day remand prayer for each of them.

The five went to Singapore between 2007 and 2011 as skilled and unskilled labourers.

Singaporean authorities alleged that these Bangladeshis were involved in terror recruitment and they used to seek financing and assistance in militancy, Monirul said during the briefing at the DMP Media Centre.

In primary investigation, it appeared that they became radicalised during their stay in Singapore and they didn't have any militant connection before leaving the country as workers, he said.

The official added that police are now verifying the allegations made by

DEFENCE MINISTRY-RELATED BUSINESS IN JS

Law minister replaces Ashraf as in-charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Public Administration Minister Syed Ashraf Islam has been relieved as the in-charge of the defence ministry-related business in parliament.

He was replaced by Law Minister Anisul Huq, according to a handout issued by Parliament Secretariat last night. It, however, did not mention any reason for the change.

Ashraf was supposed to place two bills styled Defence Services (Amendment) Bill 2016 and Defence Services (Supreme Command) Bill 2016 before the House last night.

Although his name was mentioned in the printed copy of the day's proceedings, the law minister placed the bills in the Jatiya Sangsad. Ashraf, also the general secretary of the Awami League, was not present in the House at that time.

Soon after the placement of the bills, the handout was distributed among journalists.

Ashraf had been the in-charge of the parliamentary body since the formation of the 10th parliament in 2014.

Ashraf was relieved as the LGRD minister last year and given the charge of the public administration ministry.

BILL PASSED

Parliament last night passed the Defence Services (Amendment) Bill 2016, aimed at making the three services time-befitting.

The JS passed the bill by a voice vote, with Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury in the chair.

Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal placed the Public Procurement (Amendment) Bill, 2016 in parliament, aimed at ensuring transparency and accountability in public procurement, works and services.

The bill proposed raising the ceiling of public procurement to Tk 3 crore from Tk 2 crore under the "limited tender method".

REPORTS ON BILLS PLACED

Reports on four bills seeking increases in remunerations and privileges of the president, prime minister, ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers, Speaker and deputy speaker were placed in JS last night.

Suranjit Sengupta, chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law Ministry, placed the reports in the House.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, in charge of the Cabinet Division in parliament, had placed the bills in the House on January 25.

Better rail link

FROM PAGE 1

The project would be implemented by 2022.

A portion of the rail line will be completed by 2018 so that people can use Padma bridge by both road and rail. The government plans to open the bridge to public in December 2018.

The approval of the rail link project came 17 months after the start of construction of the Tk 28,793-crore Padma Bridge Project.

In January last year, Bangladesh Railway signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China Railway Group Ltd which will finance Tk 24,749 crore. The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the deal in March this year.

"You will see a new Bangladesh once the three projects [Padma bridge, rail link and four-lane projects] are implemented," Kamal told reporters after the Ecneec meeting.

RAIL LINK PROJECT

The project is divided into four segments -- Dhaka-Gendaria, Gendaria-Mawa, Mawa-Bhanga and Bhanga-Jessore rail tracks.

The government made it a top priority to lay the rail track from Mawa to Bhanga in Faridpur so that people can use it from the day the Padma bridge is inaugurated.

Once the track is set up, the bridge will be connected with the existing Bhanga-Faridpur-Paturia-Rajbari rail route.

The remaining segments of the project would be completed in four and a half years.

Bangladesh Army, along with BRTC and Buet, would be appointed as construction supervision consultant for acquiring land and implementing the resettlement plan quickly.

The rail line will connect Chittagong and Cox's Bazar with Kolkata, Myanmar and China in the future and help create a railway corridor between Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar, according to project documents.

The track will go through seven districts of Dhaka division -- Dhaka, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Shariatpur, Madaripur, Faridpur and Gopalganj -- and two districts of Khulna division -- Narail and Jessore.

It will later be stretched to Payra seaport in Patuakhali.

The track will be the most important rail corridor in the country in terms of passenger and goods transportation and help increase internal and regional trade and foreign investment in the country, say the documents.

The Dhaka-Jessore rail line via Mawa has been included in Trans-

4-LANE PROJECT

Length 55 km

Cost Tk 6,252cr

Deadline 2019

Two separate lanes for slow-moving vehicles

Construction of 31 bridges,

45 culverts, 6 flyovers, 4 rail

overpasses and 15 underpasses

Asian Railway network as a sub-route.

FOUR-LANE PROJECT

To ensure smooth vehicular movement on the Padma bridge, the 55-km road from Dhaka to Bhanga via Mawa will be widened to four lanes from two lanes.

The road transport and bridges ministry already gave the task to the army. The deadline for implementing the project is 2019.

Special Works Organisation of the army has prepared the Development Project Pro-forma (DPP) and taken initiative to implement the project.

KAMAL'S BRIEFING

Replying to a query on high project costs, the planning minister told reporters that the price of land is very high in Bangladesh, and this was the reason behind the rise in project costs.

The costs were approved after they had been reviewed by a third party, he said.

River training to be dearer

FROM PAGE 1

worth around Tk 9,400 crore as per the revised DPP (development project proposal).

The Chinese company has been carrying out river training works along a 12.4 km stretch of the river bank at Janjira point and 1.6 km area at Mawa point.

Experts, project officials and road transport and bridges ministry officials believe river training work is now the main challenge for the project as the flow of the mighty Padma is unpredictable.

Project Director Shafiqul Islam said the revised DPP was given the go-ahead keeping in mind that the river might change its course.

"The cost has been hiked as per the revised DPP prepared in November last year," Bridges Division Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam told The Daily Star.

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said his ministry asked the authorities concerned not to increase the project cost further.

About river training work by the army, he said the job was first given to the water resources ministry for protecting the bank at the Mawa point of the Padma. "The water resources ministry later awarded the job to the army."

According to the minister, one-third of the Padma bridge project has been completed until April 20. Twenty-four percent of the main bridge construction work has been finished while 19 percent of river training works, 68 percent of the approach road at Janjira point and 81 percent of the approach road at Mawa point have been completed so far.

Visiting the project site last month, The Daily Star found that construction work of the much-awaited Padma bridge had been going on in full swing. Several thousand workers were busy filling bags with sand and dumping those in the river as part of river training work.

Built over the last few months, thousands of concrete blocks were piled up on the banks. Piers were made at the construction workshop at Mawa.

Quader said the construction work would gather more pace this month as "new technology" will be used to speed up the work.

Many components of the bridge have been built in Beijing, China. When those would reach the project site, people will see a huge progress in work, he added.

The minister hoped the bridge would be open to public in December 2018 as per schedule.

"We have warned the authorities concerned that their work orders

would be cancelled if they failed to complete the job in time. We will not compromise on the issue," he added.

The total cost of the Padma bridge project now stands at Tk 28,793 crore, up from Tk 20,507 crore in 2011.

Italian food

FROM PAGE 16

In 2015, Ostriakov was convicted of theft and sentenced to six months in jail and a €100 fine.

However, his case was sent to appeal on the grounds that the conviction should be reduced to attempted theft and the sentence cut, as Ostriakov had not left the shop premises when he was caught.

Italy's Supreme Court of Cassation, which reviews only the application of the law and not the facts of the case, on Monday made a final and definitive ruling overturning the conviction entirely.

Stealing small quantities of food to satisfy a vital need for food did not constitute a crime, the court wrote.

"The condition of the defendant and the circumstances in which the seizure of merchandise took place prove that he took possession of that small amount of food in the face of an immediate and essential need for nourishment, acting therefore in a state of necessity," wrote the court.