

INDO-BANGLA MEETING TODAY

Delhi wants 3 more transshipment points

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and PORIMOL PALMA

India wants three more transshipment points in Bangladesh for transporting goods to its north-eastern states, according to the agenda of a bilateral meeting that begins in Dhaka today.

The points are in Munshiganj's Mukhtarpur, Dhaka's Pangaon and Narayanganj.

India will place the proposal at the two-day shipping secretary-level meeting at the InterContinental Dhaka.

Currently, Ashuganj is being used as the only transshipment point in Bangladesh under the River Protocol signed between the two countries in 2010. India began using the port in June 2016.

Bangladesh Shipping Secretary Abdus Samad told The Daily Star that the proposal would be discussed in the meeting.

"Based on their study, India thinks the three new points will ease the transportation of its goods," he told The Daily Star.

Dhaka and Delhi in 2015 inked a protocol allowing India to use four riverways through Bangladesh, which links Kolkata and Murshidabad to Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya.

Since the Kolkata-Ashuganj-Akhaura river route became operational in June 2016, only 13 cargo vessels have used it so far, paying Bangladesh Tk 28 lakh in transit fees.

Shipping ministry officials said Indian businesses were not using the route regularly as the roads and ports needed to use the waterway were not ready yet.

They said India wants to explore new routes for transporting their goods.

The meeting will also finalise the transit fees for using Chattogram and

Mongla Ports by India.

India and Bangladesh signed a MoU on the use of the two ports in 2015 and inked the standard operating procedure (SOP) during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in October this year.

According to the SOP, goods which would reach Chattogram and Mongla sea ports will be carried to Agartala (Tripura) via Akhaura; Dawki (Meghalaya) via Tamabil; Sutarkandi (Assam) via Sheola, and Srimantpur (Tripura) via Bibirbazar.

Roads, railways, and waterways in Bangladesh will be used for transporting the goods, he added.

Samad said the meeting will discuss the transit fees.

Routes will be finalised once the fee is finalised, he said. Under the SoP, India can use waterways, roads and railways, but they will have to use Bangladeshi vehicles in all the cases.

India also wants Bangladesh to use an Indian port, Visakhapatnam, for export and import of Bangladeshi products, instead of using Singapore.

Earlier, Prime Minister's Economic Affairs Adviser Dr Mashiur Rahman told The Daily Star that Indian West Coast has a number of ports and if Bangladesh can use those, its dependence on Singapore port would reduce.

India has prepared an 18-point agenda, while Bangladesh has a 15-point agenda to be discussed in the meeting.

The major agendas of Bangladesh include the joint dredging of 74 kilometres of waterways of the Padma river and making Nakugaon Land Port in Sherpur fully operational.

Nakugaon port was officially opened in 2015, but the business activities there are still thin.



Vehicles are caught in long tailbacks on Tejgaon-Bijoy Sarani Flyover in the capital's Tejgunipara area. Locals said heavy traffic often causes tailbacks on the flyover. The photo was taken around 11:30am yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Poor service

INVESTMENT FOR PROJECTS	Year	Allocation (Tk/crore)	Expenditure (Tk/crore)
	2019-20	12,130.10	722.72 (till Nov)
	2018-19	11,331.48	6,776.94
	2017-18	12,435.90	10,689.77
	2016-17	8,806.84	6,080.06
	2015-16	5,410.53	4,220.26
	SOURCE: BANGLADESH RAILWAY		

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7:00am, whereas he was supposed to reach Dinajpur by 7:30am.

"The train is supposed to stop only at Parbatipur station before Dinajpur, but it stopped at almost every station. I finally reached Dinajpur at 10:30am," he told The Daily Star.

His return journey to Dhaka on Monday was no better. He boarded the same train from Dinajpur at 3:00pm and was supposed to reach Kamalapur at 10:30pm.

But he reached the airport station at 1:00am.

"It was a very tiring journey. Besides, the train was very dirty, with cockroaches everywhere," he said.

This was even more worrying because the BR had launched the train only in May. The state of disrepair had set in in only a few months.

Abu Sadiq, however, was lucky in one way; he had booked his tickets online.

Unlike him, many people in district towns fail to buy tickets online and have to resort to scalpers, where tickets are sold at higher mark ups.

"Most of the time, I have to buy tickets from touts and have to pay them Tk 100 to Tk 500 more," said Mohammad Jahid, who hails from Jamalpur and works in Dhaka.

Additionally, except the Tista Express, all trains that operate on the Jamalpur-Dhaka route suffer delays of about two hours, passengers claim.

"The condition of the carriages and toilets is very pathetic and, in many cases, it is not possible to use the toilets," he said.

HUGE INVESTMENT, HUGE LOSS
After decades of neglect, the railway started getting increased allocations when the Awami League-led alliance assumed power in 2009.

In the last five fiscals, including the current one, the government allocated Tk 50,114.85 crore from different development and technical assistance projects. But BR could spend Tk 28,489.75 crore until November this year, according to its data.

Currently, BR is implementing 36 projects involving Tk 1,347.67.51 crore, their documents show.

Experts, however, alleged that the government was focusing more on developing infrastructure, including railway lines and stations, instead of ensuring proper maintenance and creating skilled manpower.

Even though the number passengers increased over the years, the railway is facing growing losses.

The number of passengers was 77.80 million in the 2016-17 fiscal, while it was 90.05 million in 2017-18, according to BR.

Conversely, the BR incurred a loss of Tk 1,432 crore in fiscal 2017-18, which shot up to Tk 1,738.37 crore in 2018-19.

Transport expert Prof Mizanur Rahman, also the director of Accident Research Institute (ARI) at Buet, blamed lack of professionalism,

manpower, and proper monitoring for the poor rail services in most of the routes.

He said willingness of railway officials and proper monitoring could change the situation.

Another transport expert, Shamsul Haque, however, said giving proper services to passengers was not possible under the current system.

He said the government should allow private investment to change the situation.

"The government can build necessary infrastructures, but if you want proper service, you have to involve private service providers and the authority could just monitor them," Shamsul, also a former director of ARI, said.

WHAT THE AUTHORITY SAYS

Asked about the continuous losses, Md Shamsuzzaman, director general of BR, said the railways were a state entity and not a business organisation.

"... there might be a loss or profit. If we want to make it [railways] profitable, we have to increase fare. The train fares in our country are a lot lower than that of many other countries," he said.

The DG, however, said they would work to seal the "leakages" causing losses and reducing their revenue.

About the train delays, he said there was no scheduling problem in the eastern zone or for those operating within the western zone, such as trains on the Khulna-Rajshahi route.

He, however, admitted that most of the trains running in the country's northwestern and southern regions from Dhaka face delays mainly due to inadequate railway lines from Joydebpur-Ishwardi, which connects the capital to the western zone via Bangabandhu Bridge.

Projects for doubling the lines from Joydebpur-Ishwardi and a new rail bridge over the Jamuna have already been undertaken. The work for them is to start soon, he said.

The DG also blamed the delays on speed restrictions on the Bangabandhu Bridge. "It would take time and major investment to change the situation," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Shamsuzzaman also said there was a huge difference between the demand and supply of train tickets, which lead to ticket shortages.

Asked about the black-market for tickets, he said they would take strict action if allegations of such practice was brought before them and hold their staffers accountable if they were found involved.

The DG also admitted that there were problems in the catering services, because the recruitment process of service providers was "defective".

"We are trying to regulate them," he said.

Shamsuzzaman said they had undertaken several projects to improve services and once they were implemented, things would get better.

Prices unusually high but why?

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Tk 29,000 and Tk 45,000.

Classes at the government medical college started on January 10, 2018 with 50 students. It now has 150 students.

In May 2018, Dr Md Abu Sufian, acting principal of the college and chairman of a six-member tender committee, called for bidding in two national and one local dailies for the purchase of various appliances including furniture, fixtures, books, journals, computers, printers and other education materials.

The committee included the then civil surgeon of Habiganj Dr Suchinta Chowdhury and acting deputy director of the district's Population Planning Department Dr Nasima Khanam Eva.

According to the civil surgeon, he was not called in for any of the meetings relating to the tender.

Seven companies participated in the tender, and Nirjhora Enterprise of Dhaka's Shyamoli and Punam Trade International of Motijheel were selected for supplying the goods at a meeting of the committee, college sources say.

Dr Suchinta Chowdhury said after he was sent the minutes of that meeting for signing it, he wrote to the principal questioning the request.

The rest of the committee members signed the minutes of the meeting where the decision to award the work to Nirjhora and Punam was taken.

But Dr Nasima claimed she was not on the committee. Asked about her signature on the minutes, she admitted to signing it later "out of official formality but she did not go to any meeting".

"I won't take responsibility for corruption, if there was any," she said.

Dr Shahin Bhuiyan, president of another committee, formed to check the suppliers' quotations with the market prices, said, "Since the purchase was completed in June [last year], the last month of the fiscal year, we did not have enough time to check the price of all the materials."

He, however, did not say which prices he checked.

Dr Abu Sufian did not receive phone of this correspondent. However, in a press release issued on November 26, he claimed, referring to the entire purchase process, that "an audit with no objection was completed last year".

A project involving around Tk 15.50 crore was taken up last year to make purchases for the college. Of the fund, Tk 1.61 crore was deposited in the public treasury for VAT and

ITEMS SHOWN IN THE BILLS	PER UNIT PRICE SHOWN IN PURCHASE DOCUMENTS	PER UNIT PRICE FOUND ONLINE OR AT SHOPS
Anatomical charts	Tk 7,800	Tk 496 on daraz.com \$8 to 25.95 (Tk 672 to Tk 2,179) on amazon.com
79-inch interactive board 'Starboard' Hitachi	Tk 15.35 lakh	\$1,499 on hitachistarboard.us.com Tk 1.35 lakh in Habiganj's electronic shops
Digital weighing machine for lab use	Tk 6.40 lakh	\$700 or Tk 59,500 on amazon.com
Lenovo laptops (Model 110 Core i5 8th Generation)	Tk 1.48 lakhs	Tk 39,000 to Tk 42,000 in Habiganj shops
HP Colour Printer (Model Jet Pro M452nw)	Tk 2.48 lakh	Tk 29,000 and Tk 45,000 in Habiganj shops
Steel Almirah	Tk 55,000	Tk 20,000- 26,000 in reputed furniture shops
Advanced multifunctional child nursing manikin (unisex)	Tk 6.14 lakh	Rs 78,000 or Tk 95,500 on Indiamart website Rs 95,475 or Tk 1.13 lakh on Spectrum Impex website
Carl Zeiss Primo Star Binocular Microscope	Tk 3.25 lakh	\$1,659 or Tk 1.4 lakh on USA based microscope central website

income tax and Tk 13.87 crore spent on procurement.

But in reality, the value of the goods is not more than Tk 5 crore, says a source involved in the tender process.

The Daily Star obtained purchase documents and bills submitted to the college showing the questionable prices.

The issue first surfaced in local newspapers after senior journalist of Habiganj Shoeb Chowdhury applied for the documents using the Right to Information Act on October 15.

Deputy Commissioner of Habiganj Mohammad Kamrul Hasan said, "I have come to know the matter from different sources. Action will be taken on the basis of investigation."

Tofazzal Sohel, coordinator of Habiganj Sankhubdho Nagorik Andolon, a civil platform, alleged that the college principal is involved in the corruption and he has also grabbed land near the Khowai river. Locals now demand judicial inquiry into the allegations, he added.

None from the Nirjhora and Punam could be contacted despite several attempts.

ACC BEGINS PRIMARY INQUIRY
Yesterday, the Anti-Corruption Commission in Habiganj started a primary inquiry into the alleged

irregularities in the purchase process of medical and other equipment and materials of the college.

Kamruzzaman, deputy director of ACC in Habiganj, said, "We started our primary inquiry on Tuesday morning and visited the spot. Then, we will send a primary inquiry report to our head office in Dhaka to make a complaint in this regard."

He said, the final inquiry will start only after approval from the head office.

Also on Monday, Medical Education and Family Welfare Division under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare also formed a one-member committee to investigate the alleged corruption.

"A one-member committee was formed to investigate the corruption in Sheikh Hasina Medical College on Monday after we came to know about it from different media. The committee has been asked to report within the next 15 days," Secretary Sheikh Yusuf Harun of the division said.

Azam Khan, join secretary (construction and maintenance unit), has been made chief of the committee, he added.

Azam said, "After checking the documents of Sheikh Hasina Medical College, I will visit the college."

'Unknown person gave me IS cap'

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produced before the court along with six other accused in a case filed under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

The case was lodged following police action at a militant den in the capital's Kalyanpur on July 26, 2016.

Replying to a query, Regan said he took the cap and wore it as it was inscribed with words of the Kalima, the declaration of Islamic faith.

Responding to another question, he said he himself gave a cap to Jahangir Hossain alias Rajib Gandhi, another death-row convict in the café attack case, court sources said.

Rajib was seen wearing a similar cap in the prison van on their way back to jail from the court on November 27.

Yesterday, police did not allow journalists in the courtroom amid outrage over the militant wearing the cap in court.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday said the militant wearing the IS cap was nothing alarming as they had always said this was their ideology, reports UNB.

"We're always saying there's no IS in our country and they're homegrown militants. They always wanted to be connected to IS and it was even confirmed by the terror organisation itself," he added.

Earlier, the prisons and the police authorities apparently traded blame over how the militants got the caps.

On November 28, in their primary

probe, police found that the caps were brought from jail, while prisons officials on November 30 said the caps were handed over to the militants at the court.

Regan, Rajib, and five other militants were handed death penalty for their involvement in the 2016 café attack in the capital's Gulshan, which left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead.

As soon as the court completed judgement delivery, Regan wore the cap inside the dock.

KALYANPUR DEN
Apart from Regan, accused Salah Uddin Kamrun, Abdus Sabur Khan, Aslam Hossain Rash, Hadisur Rahman Sagor, Mamunur Rashid Ripon, and Shariful Islam Khaled were produced before the court in the Kalyanpur militant den case.

Two other accused -- Abdur Rouf Proddhan and Mufti Moulana Abul Kashem alias Boro Huzur -- are on bail.

Another accused Azadul Kabir alias Heartbeat is on the run.

The court directed the authorities to publish a wanted ad for Azadul within 10 working days and fixed December 19 for the next hearing.

On July 26, 2016, police stumbled on to a militant hideout where nine suspects were killed after a fierce gun battle. Regan was captured with injuries while he was trying to flee.

On April 10 this year, Inspector Jahangir Alam of Counter Terrorism

and Transnational Crime unit of police submitted a charge sheet before a Dhaka court against 10 suspects.

On this day in 1971

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establishments in Dhaka and Chittagong. Dhaka experiences enormous amount of dog fights between Pakistan and Indian fighter jets.

Dhaka was the actual base of Pakistan Air Force. Most of their fighter jets were stationed in Dhaka. The PAF had two squadrons of jets, 28 fighter planes -- 14 Chinese Mig-19 and 14 US-made Sabre F-86. Before the Indo-Pak war broke out, President Yahya ordered the Migs to return to Pakistan, but the Sabres remained in Tejgaon airport.

Almost half of the squadron of those Sabres was damaged in the Indian airborne attack. President Yahya Khan addresses the nation via radio.

He declares war against India saying that Pakistan has tolerated for long enough. The time has arrived to strike back the enemy.

The Pakistan army will not only drive the Indian force out of "Pakistan soil" but also hurt them in their own boundary. Yahya orders his army to enter India.

A government spokesperson says that both parts of Pakistan are experiencing heavy conflicts. Indian pressure in East Pakistan is dealt with equal aggression. China promises firm support to Pakistan.

Mother, child killed in crash in Joypurhat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman and her seven-year-old daughter were killed in a road accident in Joypurhat Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

Rifa Akhter, 32, wife of Nur Alam of Sundarpur in the upazila, was taking her daughter Anika Akhter to school, said police.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) Shahriar Khan of Joypurhat Police Station said a truck at speed rear-ended the battery-run-three-wheeler the two were travelling in in Helkunda area around 10:00am.

Locals got the two out of the wreckage and send them to Joypurhat Modern Hospital where doctors declared them dead on arrival, the OC said.

The bodies were handed over to the family, he said, adding that they seized the truck but its driver and helper had managed to flee the scene.

Let Rohingya children attend schools outside refugee camps

HRW urges Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Human Rights Watch has called on the Bangladesh government to lift the restrictions which are "violating the right to education" of Rohingya children.

In a report released yesterday, the New York-based rights body said about four lakh Rohingya children could not enroll in or continue their education at private or public schools outside the refugee camps.

The 81-page report, "Are We Not Human?": Denial of Education for Rohingya Refugee Children in Bangladesh," said there was no secondary-level education for the refugee children.

"...depriving children of education just compounds the harm to the children and won't resolve the refugees' plight any faster," said Bill Van Esveld, associate children's rights director at Human Rights Watch (HRW).

"The government of Bangladesh saved countless lives by opening its borders and providing refuge to the Rohingya, but it needs to end its misguided policy of blocking

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OFFENSIVE AGAINST ARAKAN ARMY

Myanmar army shelling kills 3 in Rakhine

REUTERS, Yangon

Shelling by Myanmar's military killed a woman and two infants, and wounded six others in Rakhine State on Monday, according to residents and a lawmaker in the town of Mrauk U, where security forces are fighting against an ethnic militant group.

The army unleashed a counter-insurgency campaign against the Arakan Army, which recruits from the region's mostly Buddhist ethnic Rakhine population, almost a year ago.

The militants are fighting for greater autonomy from the central government, and authorities cut internet access to most of the region in June.

Tens of thousands of people have been displaced across Rakhine since clashes began in December last year, bringing fresh chaos to the region, from which more than 730,000 Rohingya Muslims fled a military crackdown in 2017.

Two military spokesmen did not answer phone calls from Reuters seeking comment, while a spokesman for the Arakan Army also blamed the army for the shelling, saying there were no clashes involving its fighters in Mrauk U.

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Karate brings glory

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and concentrate on studies. But now he is very happy. He even said yesterday that he expected me to bring a gold home from these Games," said Priya.

Both girls said that they were disappointed after Monday's results but Al Amin's win in the morning gave them belief and pushed them to go for glory.

It was a glorious day indeed for Bangladesh's karate, which helped the country equal their gold tally of the previous edition as early as the second medal-deciding day.

There were two more bronze medals from karate while two silver medals in shooting, one silver each in athletics and wushu helped Bangladesh's medal tally reach 27 -- four gold, six silver and 17 bronze medals.

There were wins for the women's cricket team and a fighting draw for the men's football team on a day that was made golden by karate.