

High Commissioner speech on the Contracts Signing Ceremony for the Work Packages (WP-01 and WP02) and Project Management Consultancy Service Package for Improvement of Ashuganj River Port-Sarail-Darkhar-Akhaura Land Port Road as 4 Lane National Highway Under the Second Indian Line of Credit

(23 January 2020, Dhaka)

H.E. Mr. Obaidul Quader, MP, Hon'ble Minister, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges of Bangladesh,

H.E. Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Secretary, Road Transport and Highways Division,

Mr. Md. Ashraful Alam, Chief Engineer Road and Highways Department,

Mr. Arun Alo Chakma, Project Director,

Representatives of AFCONS Infrastructure Limited (Contractor) and Consultants RITES Ltd and Modern Engineers Planners & Consultants Ltd, Bangladesh,

Friends from Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely happy to join the contracts signing ceremony for the Work Packages (WP-01 and WP02) and Project Management Consultancy Service Package for the project "Improvement of Ashuganj River Port-Sarail-Darkhar-Akhaura Land Port Road as 4 Lane National Highway" under the Second Indian Line of Credit of USD 2 billion.

2. Development cooperation is an important aspect of India-Bangladesh relations. From modest beginnings in the years after Bangladesh's liberation, India's development cooperation with Bangladesh has grown in size and coverage. Over the last few years, India has extended Lines of Credit of USD 8 billion for various socio-economic and infrastructure projects in Bangladesh that dovetails with its development priorities. Out of a total LOC portfolio of USD 27.11 billion extended to 63 countries by the Government of India, the largest development partnership is with Bangladesh. Indian credit lines are amongst the most concessional credit provided to Bangladesh by its development partners.

3. Both GOI and GOB have identified 46 numbers of projects for financing under the Indian LOCs. The projects covered under the LoCs focus on infrastructure development in Bangladesh and improving connectivity within Bangladesh and also between the two countries. The Railways sector has got maximum projects 17 projects among all the sectors covered, followed by Road Transport (8 projects), Port/Shipping (5 projects), Power transmission (3 projects) and rest other projects including social and infrastructure sectors like Education/ Health/ ICT/ Renewable Energy etc.

4. Hon'ble Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has on more than one occasion mentioned that she would like to see all pre-1965 train connections restored between India and Bangladesh. At present, there are four rail links between India and Bangladesh on which passenger and freight trains are running. Apart from that, Chilahati (Bangladesh) -

Haldibari (India) rail link work is in progress and likely to be completed soon. Under Line of Credit, 9 railway projects have been completed including construction of Bhairab and Titas bridges. We are also working on several other projects including Shahbazpur (Bangladesh) - Mahisasan (India, Assam); Khulna-Mongla Railway Line project; Dhaka-Tongi-Joydevpur Railway Line project; Khulna-Darshana Railway Line project; Parbatipur-Kawmia Railway Line project; Saidpur Railway Workshop project; Bogra to Shaheed M Monsur Ali Station (Sirajgonj) Railway Line project and Akhaura-Agartala rail link which is a grant project;. Promoting economic integration and fostering linkages and connectivity between our two countries through cross-border transport and trade is a policy priority for us.

5. The project “Improvement of Ashuganj (Riverport)-Sarail-Dharkhar-Akhaura Land Port Road as 4-Lane National Highway” comprises various components, namely, Improvement of 50.58 km National Highway from Ashuganj River Port to Akhaura Land Port with Slow Moving Vehicular Traffic (SMVT) Lane at both sides, Construction of 02 Railway Overpass, 16 Bridges, 36 Culverts, 03 Underpasses, 10 Foot Over Bridges and other necessary works. After completion, it will improve the connectivity between Bangladesh and North-eastern States of India. I have also been told that this project is a part of BIMSTEC Corridor (BRC-1) which crosses through Bangladesh and India. It will also provide swift connectivity with the Asian Highway Corridor and Chittagong Port and Tamabil Land Port.

6. Apart from LoC projects, Government of India has also been undertaking various High Impact Community Development Projects

(HICDPs) in Bangladesh as grant-in-aid projects, as a contribution to taking socio-economic development to the grassroots of Bangladesh. India remains committed to continue development cooperation with Bangladesh and fully support Bangladesh's vision of becoming a middle income country by 2021 and a developed country by 2041.

7. We have made huge strides forward in our respective efforts at achieving development and growth. Today, India and Bangladesh have come a long way since 1971. Both the countries are fast growing economies. Our bilateral relationship today is at an all-time high. There is a great degree of commitment between the leadership of both countries which is demonstrated in their frequent meetings where they review all aspects of the bilateral relations - security, business, connectivity, defence, development cooperation, energy, education, youth, etc. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, 7 agreements were signed and both Prime Ministers also inaugurated three bilateral projects. Our neighbourhood policy follows our Prime Minister's vision of 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas' which implies that we prosper together. The Government of India accords top priority to its relations with Bangladesh, for us 'it is neighbourhood first and in the neighbourhood it is Bangladesh first'. Today our relation is multi-faceted and our cooperation covers not only traditional areas like trade, commerce, security and border management but also new areas such as IT, space, nuclear science, etc. At the recently concluded visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India, both the leaders reaffirmed their mutual commitment to strengthen bilateral relations for the benefit of the entire region. We share a bond which transcends strategic relationship.

8. As Bangladesh gets ready to celebrate Mujib Borsho, we look forward to participating in celebrating the life and times of Bangabandhu with whom India has a very special and unique bond.

9. I wish all the best for timely execution of the project. I am sure, that upon completion, this Project will enhance the quality of life of citizens and would be another success story of strategic partnership between India and Bangladesh.

Thank you
