

Essay on Asian Highway Transit and Bangladesh

Introduction: The Asian Highway (AH) project, also known as the Great Asian Highway, is a cooperative project among countries in Asia and Europe and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), to improve the highway systems in Asia. It is one of the three pillars of Asian Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) project, endorsed by the ESCAP Commission at its forty-eighth session in 1992, comprising Asian Highway, Trans-Asian Railway (TAR) and facilitation of land transport projects.

Bangladesh on July 5, 2009, signed the instrument of accession relating to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network. According to the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, two routes are considered the international trade routes that cross more than one sub-region under the Asian Highway connecting Bangladesh,

India and Myanmar. These are a 495-kilometer road, marking its entry point in Benapole, connecting Dhaka, Sylhet and Tamabil and another 805-kilometer road originating from Banglabandha of Panchagarh, and connecting Hati-Kamrul of Sirajganj, Dhaka, Kachpur and Tamabil.

The highway will open up the continent for the movement of people and goods to the European countries. Bangladesh cannot remain aloof in the age of globalization. It has to go forward with the network in the interest of the socio-economic development of the country. Bangladesh has already agreed to the Asian Highway Transit and negotiations are going on between the neighbor countries- India, Myanmar, and China.

Agreements have been signed by 32 countries to allow the highway to

cross the continent and also reach Europe. Some of the countries taking part in the highway project are India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, China, Japan, South Korea, and Bangladesh. A significant part of the funding comes from the larger, more advanced nations as well as international agencies such as the Asian Development Bank. The project is scheduled for completion in 2010.

The project aims to make maximum use of the continent's existing highways to avoid the construction of newer ones, except in cases where missing routes necessitate their construction.

The Asian Highway routes link Bangladesh to India and Myanmar and link the major seaports of Chittagong and Mongla with the capital, Dhaka. The construction of the Bangabandhu (Jamuna) Bridge, access roads to the bridge, Dhaka eastern bypass and other toll roads are major initiatives to improve road transport. Along with AH1, the Government is planning the Padma Bridge, which will remove another missing link in the network.

Although road development is hampered by regular floods and seasonal cyclones, the Government is working to complete the priority highways, develop five arterial corridors linking the ports to the major cities, and formulate the legal and policy framework to attract the private sector.

Tourism Spots Along the Asian Highway:

Dhaka: Dhaka is a blend of old and new architecture, the center of industrial, commercial, cultural, educational and political activities. Motiheel is the main commercial area. The major Waterfront, Sadarghat, on the bank of the river Buriganga bustles with country boats, motor launches, fishing boats, and paddle steamers.

Chittagong: Chittagong is a major port and country's second largest city. Major attractions include the panoramic Foe's Lake, religious shrines of Bayazid Bostami and Shah Amanat Shah, an ethnological museum, and a World War II cemetery. The beach on the Bay of Bengal and the Temple of Chandranath on the Sitakunda Hills are worth visiting.

Sylhet: Lying between the Khasia and the Jaintia hills in the north, and the Tripura hills in the south, Sylhet is rich with terraced tea gardens, rolling countryside, and exotic flora and fauna. Thick tropical forests are home to many species of wildlife, scented orange groves, and luxuriant pineapple plantations.

Cox's Bazaar: Cox's Bazaar boasts of the world's longest unbroken beach (120 kilometers). Along the beach are attractions such as the conch shell market, tribal handicraft markets, and salt and prawn cultivation farms. It is also famous for colorful pagodas, temples, and tribes.

Some negative sides: Short-sighted poorly visional Bangladesh Government for several years remained in a dilemma whether or not to sign Asian Highway Network Agreement mooted by ESCAP. They for a while preferred a link with autocrat Junta ruled Myanmar to a link with much stronger and more influential SAARC neighbor India risking the possibility of getting bypassed. Bangladesh relation with Myanmar could not earn them any favor from that country. Rather agitated India squeezed Bangladesh in many different areas.

Asian highway isn't a need for Bangladesh. It is a political plan made by America and India. India wants to control her state which is on the other side of Bangladesh and she wants to use Chittagong port. It is a risk for Bangladesh because a lot of Indian mafia dons can be using it for arms and drugs.

90% people of Bangladesh want the route AH41 that is Benapole-Dhaka-Yangoon via Teknaf. Because people of Bangladesh never accept the routes AH1 & AH2; actually, all these routes will be part of Indian Highway for transit from the mainland to North-Eastern states (Seven Sisters).

Some positive sides: Bangladesh, one of the most thickly populated country of the world surrounded by massive India from sides finally made up its mind to join Asian Highway. It is a geographical reality that the road may get into Bangladesh from India to get out on the other side to India. Consequently, India may indirectly get the benefit of transit. But by that Bangladesh gets linked with the rest of Asia and the rest of the world.

It is a healthy sign that Bangladesh government has finally decided to link Bangladesh to 27 countries through the proposed Asian Highway network.

If the project comes to fruition, Bangladesh will be connected with many countries including Japan, South Korea, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal, the Philippines, China, Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Bhutan, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Laos, and Malaysia. In a recent cabinet meeting held on 16th June 2009, Bangladesh decided on principle to sign an agreement to link it with the Asian Highway network which is due to connect Asia and Europe and includes 32 countries. When complete, the Asian Highway Network's 141,000 kilometers of roads are to link Japan and Bulgaria.