

Costs go up for eastern bypass

Project waits for green light

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With every passing month, the estimated expenditure to construct the multi-dimensional Dhaka eastern bypass is increasing and experts involved in the project fear that work might not start before 2010.

The Dhaka integrated flood control dam-cum-eastern bypass project from Tongi to Demra was undertaken in 1999 and the cost was estimated at Tk 2,475.82 crore. However, at a recent meeting, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said that the present cost would not be less than Tk 3,000 crore.

The project was submitted to the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) meeting for approval in April but the finance minister sent it back.

“The amount is huge. We need to conduct more studies on whether we have the capacity and other regulatory measures to carry out the work,” said Saifur Rahman.

Any additional cost has to be managed by the government as the development partners, the World Bank in particular, have not revised their contribution. The partners were supposed to provide Tk 821.65 crore while the rest Tk 1,654 .16 crore was to be arranged from local sources.

“The World Bank is continuing to put pressure on the government for quick implementation of the project but they have not revised their previous budget. That has pushed the government on back foot regarding a positive decision,” said a high official of the Economic Relations

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Division (ERD), an implementing partner of the project.

Although a high-powered 25-member committee had been formed in September, it is difficult to see any significant moves by the committee during the remaining duration of the present coalition government.

“During its present tenure, the government has not taken any pragmatic step to implement the project. Therefore, any progress in the last year of this government is also unlikely,” said a concerned government official.

“Even if the next government is sincere about the project, it would not start before 2010 as the project is very complicated. By that time, the implementation cost would cross Tk. 3,500 crore,” he added.

The committee headed by the finance minister was formed under pressure from the World Bank, which asked for a separate authority to implement the project.

The committee will form a detailed plan of the project mentioning scope of work, objectives, components, financing and implementation methodology.

Five cabinet ministers, Dhaka City Corporation mayor, two state ministers and principal secretary to the Prime Minister along with nine secretaries of different ministries and heads of Rajuk, Roads and Highways, Dhaka Wasa, Local Government and Engineering Division, Forest and Environment Department, CEO of DCC and the DG of the Water Development Board form the committee.

After the unprecedented floods in 1998 the project was outlined to protect some 124-square kilometer area on the eastern fringe of the capital. The proposed dam-cum-road stretching 42.50 kilometers from Kanchpur Bridge to Tongi in Gazipur would also help reduce traffic congestion of the city and would improve the city’s drainage system.



These two minibuses race each other along the Bangla Motor road. This type of reckless driving gives way to most automobile accidents.

Minibuses most reckless

MOON MOON SULTANA

The Society of Human Endeavour of Broad Achievement (SHEBA) for Bangladesh in a roundtable recently revealed that buses and trucks cause 57 percent of road accidents in the country with most mishaps happening in Dhaka.

According to DC Traffic (North) sources, 594 accidents took place last year with 297 caused by minibuses and buses. Minibuses were involved in 157 accidents while large buses in the rest. There were 26 microbus accidents, 23 by motorcycles, 93 by heavy trucks and 177 by cars in 2004.

“In most accidents in the capital, minibuses are responsible. It happens because of reckless driving of the drivers and since minibuses are

the main mode of transportation for the middle and lower income groups, people travel risking their lives,” said a police official.

The drivers meanwhile, claim that they drive recklessly under pressure from the owners.

“We are compelled to drive fast in order to make more profit as the owners put pressure on us,” said Rahmat Ali, a bus driver on the Farmgate-Azimpur route. “We also have to make optimum use of the fuel and that is why we speed up,” added another driver Salam.

Shah Alam, a helper of a bus pointed at passengers.

“Who wants an accident? Everyone blames us for the mishaps but sometimes passengers force us to drive fast during office hours.”

Amir, who drives a bus on the Motijheel-Kakrail-Maghbazar route, said sometimes they had to drive fast just to evade corrupt police sergeants and constables.

“The police in the name of checking documents, demand bribe. They also threaten to file cases if we refuse,” he said.

Traffic sergeant Alamgir Hossain contradicted the allegation. “Most local buses are driven by unlicensed helpers. They often race to see who can go faster and pick more customers. That is why there is a tendency to escape from the police.”

Rony, a driver on the Farmgate-Shamoly route admitted that helpers are involved in driving.

“Earlier I was a helper but for the last four months, I have been driving

as per my owner’s wish. I can drive faster and can make more money for the owner that way.”

Traffic police officials said that there would be more systematic checks in the future to prevent unlicensed drivers or helpers from taking the wheels.

“The traffic police usually avoid rush hours for checking,” said Md. Feroz Al Mujahid Khan, DC Traffic (north) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police. “The DTCB (Dhaka Transport Coordination Board) is now constructing bus stoppages. As soon as the work is done, traffic police will check vehicles at the bus stops,” he added.

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