

Tailback to snarl

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likely to cause the holidaymakers to suffer.

Our correspondents travelled to Chittagong and Mymensingh on Wednesday and our Barisal and Tangail correspondents filed the following reports on road conditions ahead of one of the largest festivals in the Islamic calendar.

DHAKA-CHITTAGONG

The gruelling pain of leaving Dhaka by road starts from Gulistan.

It could take up to three hours to negotiate the five kilometres through Joy Kali Mandir, Syedabad, Jatrabari and beyond the wholesale fish market.

According to bus drivers and travellers, sometimes the chaos is so severe that it takes more time to cross this tattered road than it takes to cross the rest of 242km distance to Chittagong.

"The rush of vehicles leaving the capital during the Eid holidays will surely turn this exit into a nightmare, unless drastic steps are taken to discipline it," said Sobhan Mollah, a bus driver on the Chittagong-Dhaka route for 20 years.

The traffic-jam-prone spots on the highway begin from Comilla-Brahmanbaria intersection in front of the Comilla Cantonment at Moinamati.

Hundreds of vehicles get stranded often for hours. Trucks, easy bikes, microbuses, rickshaws and vans are seen parked on the highway, reducing a third of the road width.

Travellers and transport workers pleaded for immediate removal of the illegal parking to ease traffic movement.

The same anarchy on the busiest highway of the country was found at Poddar Bazaar, Choddogram Bazaar, Barokunda, Sitakunda, Mirsarai, Feni Bus Terminal and at the Baroiarhat Bazaar, infamous for jams.

"The regular tailbacks at Barokunda, Choddogram Bazaar, Sitakunda, Mirsarai and Baroiarhat Bazaar are mainly caused by the pockets of dilapidated roads in these areas," said Sirajuddin, owner of a departmental store at Baroiarhat intersection.

"For the last five years, the highway has remained in a dilapidated state and tailbacks could stretch for miles on both directions," he added.

In order to bring some discipline, the authorities recently built bus bays on the above-mentioned vulnerable areas.

But as soon as the bus bays were created, CNG-run three-wheelers, rickshaws, vans and easy bikes moved in to make the bus bays their parking space.

Thanks to the unusable bus bays, the main highway has now been significantly narrowed down, creating long tailbacks to the delight of dozens of vendors selling anything from bottled water to hot puffed rice to the stranded people.

"In addition to repairing the pockets of pitted roads, the government must use any means to keep the highway free from these unacceptably defiant encroachments, which is causing suffering to thousands and inflicting irreparable damage to our economy," said Kamal Uddin, a shopkeeper at Choddogram Bazaar.

Two other traffic-jam-prone spots have recently surfaced on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

On the Gumti and Daudkandi bridges, every vehicle is forced to slow down to crawling speed to negotiate the widening gaps between the bridge segments.

This too creates tailbacks on the vulnerable bridges.

DHAKA-MYMENSINGH

Compared to the condition of the highway last year, the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway is almost free of pot-holes.

Over the months emergency funds have been poured into the job of patching up the tattered highway.

The appalling state of

the road had caused an outcry throughout the country last year, forcing even pro-Awami League transport workers to cancel all bus services on the route.

The ride on the 116km-long highway is now more or less smooth, with patch-up work dotting the highway. At places, the scratchy patch work, however, looks vulnerable to rain.

The 50km stretch from Mawna towards Mymensingh is bumpy and narrow at several places, with road-widening work and muddy diversions for construction of around half a dozen culverts.

Md Ershad, a driver who operates between Dhaka and Netrakona and Modanganj through Mymensingh, said all vehicles slowed down on the 50km stretch due to ongoing road-widening work and construction of culverts.

Md Ibrahim Hossain, a ticket counter clerk at Mohakhali Bus Terminal, said the danger during Eid rush lies in long tailbacks caused by haphazardly parked lorries.

"Last year it took 28 hours to travel from Bogra to Dhaka due to bottle-necks created by haphazardly parked vehicles," Ibrahim said.

Abul Kalam, president of Mohakhali Bus Terminal Sharak Poribahan Owners' Association, said police and relevant district administrations must ensure smooth traffic flow in their areas along the highway.

"They have to ensure that the highway through Ashulia Baipal to Chandra and Tongi to Gazipur Chowrasta is free from haphazardly parked vehicles, illegal bazaars, shops and vendors," Abul Kalam pleaded.

"Otherwise we are looking at increased suffering for millions of Eid holidaymakers," he added.

DHAKA-BARISAL

Once one has successfully negotiated the notorious jams of Naya Bazar and crossed the second Buriganga bridge, then the Padma river on a ferry, one should be able to reach Bhanga smoothly.

The remaining distance to Barisal from Bhanga is 120km.

The road to Khulna and other south and southwestern regions from Bhanga is rated to be the best in the country. But turning towards Barisal could be perilous.

At least 35km of this 120km-stretch road became unusable last year due to the appearance of large potholes everywhere.

The authorities over the last few months have patched it up. But heavy downpour during the ongoing monsoon has taken its toll on the patches, hastily completed to counter the countrywide outcry of 2011.

Dipak Das, vice-president of Barisal Bus Owners Association, claimed that at least one fourth of the Barisal-Bhanga highway had again become unfit for vehicles.

"More than 30km of the highway in Barisal at Kashipur, Rahmatpur, and Ichhladi, Gournadi, and Vurghata points are now potholed and pitted dangerously," Dipak Das added.

Shams Mokaddes, executive engineer of Roads and Highways Department Barisal, said they had already started repairing the highway and the work would be completed before the Eid rush.

Sources in the Roads and Highways Department said there were three traffic-jam-prone spots between Bhanga and Barisal.

Parking of buses, trucks, tempos, human hauliers, easy bikes, rickshaws and vans regularly causes tailbacks.

"During Eid, the on-duty traffic and police personnel are reluctant to maintain discipline as they openly extort money from all sorts of commercial transports plying the

road," said a source requesting anonymity.

As the highway snakes its way through Tekerhat, Gournadi and Bhanga, tailbacks are often created due to lawlessness.

DHAKA-TANGAIL

The condition of the Dhaka-Tangail highway, the gateway to the north, has improved significantly over the months.

But indiscriminate construction of speed bumps everywhere on the highway will certainly slow down the traffic movement and cause congestion during the rush days of Eid when thousands of additional vehicles will be shuttling.

On a single stretch of 45km on the Dhaka-Tangail highway, 30 speed bumps have recently been constructed without any regard for smooth traffic flow.

Encroachments of roadside parking spaces by all sorts of vehicles and illegal shops force many vehicles to stop on the highway and create severe tailbacks.

Exit towards Tangail from the capital is also riddled with similar chaos at Ashuliya and Chandra which might take hours to cross.

The 90km distance between Dhaka and Tangail could be extremely arduous. Travellers say that crossing 45km to Chandra on the Dhaka-Tangail highway often takes up to three hours.

"It takes about an hour to cover the remaining 45km," said a traveller hailing from Tangail.

DHAKA-SYLHET

At least an 8km stretch of road from Chandipul to Tuberbar on the Dhaka-Sylhet-Sunamganj highway is in dilapidated condition.

The 37km road between Sylhet and Companiganj and Bholaganj is also an example of sheer negligence since there have been no effective steps to keep the road usable.

Every day at least 2,000 trucks use this road for transporting stones from the country's biggest quarry at Bholaganj.

Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil road is also in a bad shape. Sufferings will mount for Eid holidaymakers.

Japan mulls to bring S Korea to int'l court

AFP, Tokyo

Japan could ask the International Court of Justice to settle a bitter row with South Korea over a disputed island group, Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba said yesterday.

It comes a day after South Korean President Lee Myung-Bak made a surprise visit to the islands, known as Takeshima in Japanese and Dokdo in Korean, in the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda said the trip was "extremely deplorable".

"We must consider measures to peacefully resolve the dispute based on international law, including filing a suit with the International Court of Justice," Gemba told reporters.

"We would like to take the step in the not-too-distant future. Until now, the Japanese government has considered what impact such action may have on Japan-South Korea ties," Gemba said.

"But the president's visit to Takeshima made such considerations unnecessary. We must present Japan's position to the international community."

Gemba made the remarks after meeting Japan's ambassador to South Korea, Masatoshi Muto, who was recalled to Tokyo after Lee's trip to the islands, which lie at the centre of a decades-long dispute.

Many Koreans resent Japan's brutal colonisation from 1910 to 1945. Historical disputes continue to mar relationship, despite close economic ties and shared concerns over North Korea's missile and nuclear programmes.

THREAT TO NHRC CHIEF

GD filed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A general diary (GD) was lodged yesterday in connection with the incident of threatening to kill National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) Chairman Mizanur Rahman.

Kazi Arefin Ashik, personal secretary of Mizanur, filed the GD with Dhanmondi Police Station around 10:00am.

The NHRC chairman has been receiving the threat from an unknown caller for the last several days. The caller had threatened to kill him within seven days.

Dhanmondi Police last night said they are probing the incident.

Eid vacation

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August 9 was a public holiday preceding the two-day weekend and there will be public holidays on August 14-16 followed by the weekend and Eid holidays till August 20 or 21 without any break.

"Public holidays before two consecutive weekends created scope for many of my colleagues to send their families to their village homes well ahead of the Eid holidays," said Golam Kibria, a government official.

Thousands of others are likely to do the same, resulting in decreasing rush of home-bound people before the Eid, he said.

While visiting the capital's Gabtoli and Mohakhali bus terminals yesterday, this correspondent saw no rush of passengers.

"This is quite unlikely. Before the Eid in other years, pressure of passengers was very high," said Noor Alam, manager of SP Golden Line, at Gabtoli Bus Terminal.

He said that in the previous years, they used to charge the government-fixed fare of Tk 613 each for Dhaka-Jessore service well ahead of a week of the Eid day. But this year, they are still selling tickets at Tk 450-500 each due to less rush of passengers.

Shahid Uddin, manager of AK Travels, said due to media publicity, people are now quite aware of the possible Eid rush, and they try go home as early as possible.

"Eid seasons are our peak business seasons, but this time we are not having good business," he added.

Abdur Rouf, a staffer of North Bengal-bound Sarker Travel, said there might be an increased rush as many traders and garment workers go home on the last days before the Eid.

Khaleda

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spending a huge amount of public money on the unnecessary London trip, meeting sources said.

The opposition leader alleged that the prime minister had actually gone there to attend her son's birthday using government funds.

"Just days after returning from London, she has again decided to go there. This is nothing but a waste of public money. It's her habit to go abroad spending state funds," a meeting source quoted Khaleda as saying.

At the standing committee meeting, the BNP outright rejected the PM's proposal for a small cabinet to oversee the next parliamentary election.

Hasina made the proposal in an interview with BBC during her London visit in July. She said the opposition might join a small cabinet that would act as an interim government during the next parliamentary polls.

Hasina's son Sajib Wazed Joy had joined her on last month's London trip. There, he celebrated his birthday with his mother.

The prime minister also attended a reception hosted by the Queen for the special guests attending the Olympic ceremony.

Appeal to 'Spread the Smile'

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in orphanages to senior citizens in old homes, countless people in institutions spend a time of happiness isolated from the celebrations rampant in the rest of the country.

If we can't send a gift, or find a lot of time in our day to bring our happiness to these people, we can at least send them a wish. It is with this idea that The Daily Star and HSBC Bangladesh have organized the "Spread the

RAMENDU MAJUMDER

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nobody pays a visit or cares to remember them on Eid days," said noted cultural activist Ramendu Majumder.

"The Daily Star and HSBC's Spread the Smile initiative is hence outstanding and I feel honoured to be with the effort," he said.

He proposed that The Daily Star urge different organisations before Eid to donate the money they spend on greeting cards. With the contribution, gifts can be bought for underprivileged children to bring their precious smile back.

SELINA HOSSAIN

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out of their social responsibilities to make those love-thirsty children smile.

Expressing her gratitude to the organisers, she said, "It will be a noble gesture if we get involved with this initiative."

Smile" campaign, with the desire of making sure that everybody smiles this Eid.

Today, on the 12th of this month, readers of Dhaka and Chittagong will receive a blank Eid card with every copy of The Daily Star. Write your message in the appropriate box and drop it at the locations printed on the envelope in the "Spread the Smile" drop box. Tomorrow, readers outside Dhaka will receive a blank Eid card with every copy of The Daily Star.

NASIRUDDIN YUSUFF

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this campaign, said eminent dramatist and cultural activist Nasiruddin Yusuff Bachchu.

The rich often forget the fact that thousands of poor children pass the Eid day in sheer disappointment and tears, he observed, adding, "If we remember this we will be able to do something for orphans in future."

Bachchu believes sending Eid cards to orphans may seem a small initiative but it would leave a lasting impression. He hoped that the initiative would turn into a social movement.

AHMED SAIFUL ISLAM

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HSBC family was delighted to be a part of the initiative through which it would be able to make the orphans happy, no matter how little, he said.

Saiful Islam wished all the success of the initiative.

It will be stamped and addressed to an orphanage. Write your message in the appropriate box and drop it at your nearest post office.

A simple gesture on your part can make somebody's day a little more special and make Eid mean more not just for the recipient but also for you.

Your card can make one more person smile this Eid.

MahfuzAnam

Editor-Publisher

ANISUL HAQUE

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the campaign, said Anisul Haque, deputy editor of Bangla daily Prothom Alo.

The culture of exchanging Eid cards might revive through this initiative, he said, adding, "We must take the opportunity to greet the less fortunate, especially the orphans, senior citizens in old homes and the war-maimed freedom fighters."

The campaign would not only create scope for the The Daily Star readers to greet these people but also give the opportunity to think about them, he said adding, "...and it will be awesome if someone inspired by the initiative comes forward to do something for these people in distress."

He hoped The Daily Star through the campaign would be able to make many children smile and honour injured freedom fighters and family-detached senior citizens.

No int'l treaties

FROM PAGE 1

Bangladesh signed to join the Trans-Asian Railway network, to the Parliament Secretariat for placing those in the House.

The official said they moved to have the treaty placed in parliament but the government did not allow it to be placed in the House.

The present government signed several treaties with different countries in the last three and a half years. Bangladesh and India on November 30, 2010 signed a crucial deal to allow heavy Indian equipment to be transhipped through Bangladesh territory to India's landlocked north-eastern state of Tripura for a proposed power plant.

Six months earlier, the two nations signed an agreement declaring Ashuganj as a new port of call for transporting heavy Indian consignments for its Palatana Power Project in line with an earlier decision taken during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's India visit in January 2010.

Bangladesh inked the land boundary agreement with India in Dhaka in September last year formalising a 1974 treaty between the two countries for exchange of enclaves and land in adverse possession.

During Hasina's visit to Turkey this year, Bangladesh and Turkey signed several agreements to boost bilateral

trade and investment on April 12. They include agreement on reciprocal promotion and protection of investment; agreement concerning mutual abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic, official and special passports; and agreement on customs cooperation.

But none of those was placed in parliament.

When his attention was drawn to the indifference to the constitutional provision, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shafique Ahmed defended the government's stance of not placing the treaties in parliament.

"No treaty signed earlier is worthy of being placed in parliament as none of them was international treaty," he claimed.

Asked why treaties are not placed in parliament for discussion, former law minister Moudud Ahmed said it happens for lack of the government's seriousness about exercising the provision.

"I think some treaties include points that the government does not want to reveal," said Moudud, who held the law portfolio during the tenure of the last BNP-led government.

"It is our failure and we have undermined the constitution by not placing the treaties in parliament."

Fazle Rabbi Mia, chief of

parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry, said it should be a routine work to place in parliament the international treaties that Bangladesh signs with other countries.

"People could have known about the treaties had those been placed in parliament. The constitutional provision could have been honoured," said Rabbi, lawmaker of ruling Awami League.

"But as far as I know, no international treaty was placed in the House since the second parliament in 1979."

Rashed Khan Menon, chief of parliamentary standing committee on education ministry, said if the provision was exercised it would have ensured transparency in government activities.

"We have demanded many times that the treaties be placed in parliament. But no government responded to our calls," said Menon, also chief of Workers Party.

Former law minister Abdul Matin Khasru said discussions on international treaties should be held in parliament after they are placed in the House.

"The aim of placing a treaty in parliament is to let people know about it. People can understand them better if discussions are held," said Khasru, also chief of parlia-

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at least a dozen of the injured were in a critical condition.

There were anguished scenes as families came to claim the bodies of the victims. Many of the dead had boarded the 42-seater bus when their own bus broke down, locals told AFP.

Some of the bodies were taken away by their families for cremation while the state government brought in four truckloads of wood to cremate other victims at the accident site.

The cause was not immediately known but some witnesses said that the driver lost control of the vehicle on a sharp bend.

The accident occurred in the morning near Chamba town, about 190 kilometres from the state capital Shimla. The area where the accident happened is treacherous and known for zig-zag turns.

Villagers were the first to reach the accident site and frantically struggled to pull the dead and injured from the twisted wreckage. Later, emergency crews arrived, covering the dead in white sheets.

The bus had been on its way to Chamba from Dulara when it flew off the road. Thirty-nine people were killed instantly while the others died on the way to hospital, Chaudhary said.

India has the highest annual road death toll in the world, according to a 2009 World Health Organisation report, with accidents caused by speeding, careless driving and treacherous roads.

Himachal Pradesh's Chief Minister Prem Kumar Dhimal offered his "heartfelt condolences to the families of the dead" and said the next of kin would get 100,000 rupees (\$1,800) from the government.

"The state government has ordered an inquiry into the accident," Dhuma said.

The Chamba district borders Indian Kashmir and has been lashed by heavy monsoon rains in the past few days.

Grameen

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to choose the bank's managing director, sidelining other GB board members.

The post fell vacant after Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus was forced to step down as its chief executive by Bangladesh Bank in May last year.

Nine women directors, elected by 84 lakh members of Grameen Bank, control its key ownership, reads a statement signed by the distinguished personalities.

"The government has taken an injudicious step to curb the elected board's power in appointing a person as managing director and to vest power in its nominated chairman."

The cabinet division has already approved the changes to the ordinance, which will put the existence of the bank in danger, the signatories said in the statement. They added that politicisation and nepotism would devour the bank founded by Prof Yunus. It was a reflection of what was being done in other government organisations.

The bank will lose the power to take decisions independently if government control is established over Grameen Bank, the statement says.

"The government's corrupt policy-makers will play ducks and drakes with the hard-earned deposits of the poor."

The signatories include Prof Emajuddin Ahamed, Justice Abdur Rouf, Prof Moniruzzaman Miah, Prof Talukdar Moniruzzaman, Sadek Khan, Prof SMA Faiz, Prof Abu Ahmed, advocate Mahub Hossain, Mohammad Asafudowlah and Shawkat Mahmud.

They urged people to come forward to protest the move, saying

Grameen Bank, built through decades of efforts made by Prof Yunus, has been facing destruction since it fell prey to the wrath of the government.

Govt to build

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Tk 5,000 crore as soft loan. The existing bridges will also be maintained with the loan, said communications ministry officials.

The existing bridges have two lanes and cannot handle the heavy traffic flow on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, considered to be the country's economic lifeline. Constructed in the mid 1980s by Japan, the old bridges have become so vulnerable that they are to be repaired soon. The government has taken up a plan to this effect. It goes underway on September 1.

For the new bridges, a team of experts from Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) is now conducting a survey at the existing bridge sites and their surroundings.

They will come up with a final report in December.

"We expect to complete the loan negotiation process with Japan by March next year, following which we will float tenders for the construction of the bridges," said Aminur Rahman Laskar, chief engineer of Roads and Highways Department (RHD).

He said construction of

the new bridges would take around two and a half years. "We will complete all the formalities fast so that we can start the construction work in mid 2013," he told The Daily Star.

REPAIRS OF BRIDGES

The poor condition of the existing bridges is the result of serious damage to the decks and riverbed scouring around many piers.

Negligence in maintenance and continuous plying of overloaded vehicles has caused the damage to the decks of the bridges. The bridges had no weight measuring machines for years until recently. The machines now are allegedly not operational in most times.

The government has initiated a Tk 150-crore project to repair the three risky bridges. The Bangladesh army will do the job.

The ministry officials said the repair work of the existing bridges would be done on a temporary