

43km of horror

Home-goers to face nightmare on neglected stretch on Faridpur highway

HASAN JAHID TUSHER, back from Magura

If you are going home this Eid via Dhaka-Jessore highway, brace for a bumpy ride when you reach the Faridpur-Magura part of the highway. Even the finest driver in the world would find life difficult on that 43km stretch of road. The passengers would be going up and down as well as going side to side.

The road has numerous potholes the size of small meteor craters and cracks on the surface here and there. Even bicycle riders have trouble on that road.

And predictably, the situation would be worse in the coming days when hundreds of vehicles taking millions home for Eid would be on that road connecting 10 south-western districts.

For months has been in this condition the road but Roads and Highways Department (RHD) of Faridpur have paid little attention to it.

Around 20 to 30 thousand people and more than 1,000 buses travel on it everyday; and it would be many times more during the holidays, according to bus operators.

During a recent visit, The Daily Star correspondent found that hundreds of potholes have made vehicle movement hazardous. No one could drive straight.

Vehicles were seen swerving left and right and sometimes going into the incoming lane to avoid potholes.

Vehicles have accidents frequently

causing traffic jams and sometimes they end up in the ditch causing casualties.

"It seems like I am travelling on a tractor, not a bus," said Mohammad Ismail Hossain, a bus passenger who travels frequently between Dhaka and Meherpur.

Kaium Mollah, a bus driver, said tires get punctured often and vehicles go off the road due to the poor condition of the road.

Shafique Sheikh, another driver, said the RHD had repaired the road a couple of days ago in their area but potholes fillers got washed away in the rain.

On several occasions, locals had staged demonstration demanding repairs but the authorities concerned paid little heed to it.

Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, executive engineer of Faridpur RHD, said they have been repairing the roads on a regular basis. "We have all preparation to repair the roads before Eid," he said, adding that the work was being hampered due to incessant rain.

Contacted, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader admitted that potholes have developed on Faridpur-Magura highway. He said the road surface was too old and needed resurfacing and just repairs would not cut it.

The minister said the road would be made into a dual carriageway from Dhaka to Benapole and the work would start next year. He claimed that the condition of roads and highways were better than any time before.



The Faridpur-Jessore highway is left in a dilapidated condition. Numerous potholes have appeared on the 43km stretch of its Faridpur-Magura part. Several points of the highway get muddy whenever it rains. The situation is likely to worsen further in the coming days as hundreds of vehicles, taking millions of Eid holidaymakers home, will hit the highway. The pictures were taken six days ago.

PHOTO: STAR

Exit points home-goers' concern

FROM PAGE 1

see severe traffic chaos, as in the past.

It would take around one-and-a-half hours to cross Joydevpur intersection from Uttara, thanks to traffic mismanagement, haphazard parking and frequent U-turns.

However, once past this point, the passengers are expected to reach Mymensingh in about an hour and a half since the four-lane expansion of the 87-km stretch is nearly completed.

"Expansion of a 12-km stretch of the highway and construction of two bridges are still going on. This might cause some disruptions to traffic," said an RHD engineer.

Similarly, Chittagong-bound passengers may face tailbacks at Kanchpur, Sonargaon, Signboard, Madanpur and Sanarpar crossings after passing congestions at Sayedabad and Jatrabari.

To some relief of the passengers, 70 percent of the expansion work on the 192-km Dhaka-Chittagong highway, considered the economic life-line of the country, is done. However,

repair of a 12-km stretch at the Chittagong end is yet to be completed, which might make the journey require longer than expected.

Journey on these two major highways would have been much more comfortable had the expansion been completed by last June, a deadline set by the road transport and bridges ministry.

Although the two-lane Dhaka-Sylhet highway is expected to provide a smooth journey for the holidaymakers once they exit the capital, which wouldn't be easy.

The most dreadful part of the trip will be the one from Tongi Rail Station point to Narsingdi.

Alternatively, travellers can take the 300-foot Purbachal Road but it's still under construction and vehicles are slowed down by ditches and frequent bumps.

However, no matter what point the Sylhet-bound commuters use to exit the city, they might have to endure the usually chaotic Bhulta crossing in Narayanganj.

The bottlenecks at two points --

Aminbazar Bridge and Savar Bazar -- may make the journeys to the country's southern and northern districts agonising.

A U-turn ahead of Amin Bazar bridge will be another major hurdle.

Though expanded, the Nabinagar-Chandra stretch of Dhaka-Tangail highway might slow down traffic as both sides of the road are occupied by hawkers, parked vehicles and haphazard plying of rickshaws and locally-improvised three-wheelers like nasiman and kariman.

The two-lane Chandra-Bhuapur road near Bangabandhu Bridge may find it hard to cope with the heavy traffic during the Eid rush, as it did in the past years.

The rundown condition of Abdullahpur-Ashulia-Baipail road can add to the miseries of the North-bound people.

However, the newly constructed Birulia bridge and Ashulia-Birulia road, which Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to inaugurate today, may ease traffic on the route.

As for those going to the southern region, crossing the Padma through Paturia-Daulatdia ferry route will be the biggest challenge. They may have to wait for ferries for hours, even if the weather stays clement and ferries operate normally.

Some roads in Jessore, Kushtia, Magura, Faridpur and Chuadanga districts are in a bad shape. This may make the journeys on the other side of the Padma take longer than usual.

Smooth ferry service on Mawa-Kawrakandi river route is also a must for hassle-free journey to Barisal, Gopalganj and Bagerhat districts.

Passengers are likely to face tailbacks at Buriganga bridges at Babu Bazar and Postagola points.

However, journeys of the home-bound people on any route may turn into nightmares if a vehicle breaks down on the road during the Eid rush.

This will remain a major concern for all holidaymakers, as a large number of rundown vehicles take to the streets to carry passengers during the Eid rush.

64 injury marks

FROM PAGE 1

Saudi police detained Kamrul Islam in a suburb of Jeddah yesterday, two days after he left the country. He and some other brutes bludgeoned Rajon to death in Kumargaon Bus Stand area of Sylhet on the morning of July 8.

The boy died of brain haemorrhage; his body bore around 64 injury marks, according to an autopsy report.

The savage torture on Rajon sparked fury also among the Bangladeshi migrants in the kingdom, said Md Altaf Hossain, first secretary (labour) at Bangladesh Consulate in Jeddah.

for help, cried for water and begged for his life. But the group showed no mercy. They laughed, joked and filmed their madness to share it in the social media.

They kept beating him, at times knocking him down to the ground, and asking how he would like to take the beating. "We know all methods of beating," one of them is heard saying.

When Rajon wanted some water, they told him to drink from his own sweat.

After the killing, the culprits were taking his body on a microbus to dump it in a secluded place, but the locals found them and managed to



Bangladesh star cricketer Mushfiqur Rahim holds a placard protesting child abuse.

PHOTO: MUSHFIQUR RAHIM'S FACEBOOK PAGE

"Members of the Bangladeshi community here identified him [Kamrul] and contacted us. Then the Saudi police arrested him based on our information," he told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday evening.

Kamrul was staying at Al-Jamia'ah, where he was caught. Asked whether he would be repatriated, the first secretary said the man is supposed to face trial in the country where he committed the crime.

Working as a driver for years in Saudi Arabia, Kamrul came to his Sylhet home a month ago for Eid. He boarded a Biman flight on Friday from Sylhet Osmani International Airport for Jeddah, said an immigration officer on condition of anonymity.

In another development yesterday, Kamrul's wife Lipi Begum was arrested in Gobinganj area of Sylhet. His brother Muhit Alam, earlier arrested and prime accused in the murder case, was taken on a five-day remand following a Sylhet court order.

Police also detained another suspect, Ismail Hossain, 30, at Kamarkazi in Sylhet Sadar upazila, said Akhtar Hossain, officer-in-charge of Jalalabad Police Station.

The case was filed with Jalalabad Police Station accusing Muhit and Kamrul, their accomplice Ali Haider, 34, watchman Moyna Mia alias Boro Moyna, 45, and seven other unnamed people.

The sickening torture video shook the nation to its core and stirred outcries in the social networks and the mainstream media, with the 28-minute clip and still images going viral.

Kamrul, in a black T-shirt and lungi, was seen hitting the boy with stick in the feet, joints of legs and shoulders and in the head.

Tied to a pole, the boy screamed

catch only Muhit. The police recovered the kid's body from the microbus.

Lubna Akhtar, mother of the victim, said her son left home early in the morning to sell vegetables as his father Sheikh Azizur Rahman, a microbus driver, was out on a trip.

As Rajon did not return home all day, Lubna went to the police station that night to file a general diary. There, she was told about a boy's body recovered earlier in the day. To her horror, she found it was her little one.

Rajon, eldest of Lubna's two sons, studied up to class-IV. After dropping out, he started selling vegetables to support the family in Badeali village under Sylhet Sadar upazila.

OC Akhtar Hossain said the video of torture was not recorded in secret. "The criminals themselves recorded the heinous act and uploaded it online. They got sickly pleasure out of it all," he told The Daily Star.

"Rajon died of brain haemorrhage, and around 64 injury marks were found in his body," he said citing the autopsy report by Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College and Hospital.

Tasmina Islam, a doctor who performed the autopsy, handed the report to the OC around 2:00pm yesterday.

On Sunday night, police formed a special team to find and arrest the culprits.

Headed by Sylhet Metropolitan Police's Additional Deputy Commissioner Rahmat Ullah, the four-member team has already started working.

"None will be spared. The culprits will be tried as per the country's existing law," State Minister for Home Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told reporters at his office yesterday.

Cabinet

FROM PAGE 1

district AL and an ex-lawmaker, is on the list.

"I got a phone call. I have been invited to the Bangabhaban tomorrow [today] evening," he said yesterday.

On the possible reshuffle in the cabinet, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "It is her cabinet. If she wants, she can expand it by inducting new members into it."

Asked, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said he had also heard about a possible cabinet reshuffle.

Sources said the PM has taken the step to make her one-and-a-half-year cabinet dynamic. Two or three ministers, who have been mired in controversies and are unable to perform, might be shown the door.

This will be the first reshuffle in her cabinet formed through the one-sided parliamentary elections on January 5 last year.

Hasina, president of the ruling AL, also plans to strengthen her party through its General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, said AL sources.

Ashraf, who was removed from the LGRD ministry and made a minister without portfolio on July 9, met Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on Sunday evening.

At the 90-minute meeting, they discussed several issues, including ways to enhance party's organisational capacity, said sources.

It was Ashraf's first meeting with the PM after his removal from the LGRD ministry.

Ashraf came out of the meeting with a smile on his face, said a source at the Gono Bhaban.

Hasina asked him to play a more active role in party activities, said sources close to the AL general secretary.

Ashraf told her that he would take initiatives to complete the long-due conferences of the party's district units.

It took the party several years to hold conferences of 53 of its 74 units.

According to the sources, he informed the PM that he would leave for London tomorrow and return on August 1.

Yesterday, Ashraf didn't attend the first cabinet meeting after his removal from the LGRD ministry.

Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat, Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan said the AL general secretary was absent at the cabinet meeting held at the Prime Minister's Office.

Asked whether the former LGRD minister was invited to the meeting, he said, "Try to understand ..."

"It is unclear whether he will attend the next meeting."

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