

Rough ride ahead

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pressure increases manifold at that time.”
Even the expansion of highways to four lanes from two lanes would be of little help as the vehicles would have to stop abruptly at the intersections, he said.
Prof Shamsul, a former director of

Accident Research Institute at Buet, also blamed toll plazas, where vehicles need to stop, for slowing down traffic on highways and stressed the need for digitalisation of toll collection.
Faruk Talukder Sohel, chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners' Association, said, "The structural flaws of the

highways can't be fixed overnight. But proper and strict traffic management can ease the traffic situation significantly."
Rikta Parveen, a homemaker who wants to spend this Eid in Khulna, is worried about her journey.
"Last year, my family members, especially the children, had a terrible

experience while going home. We don't want any hassle this time," she said.
These correspondents talked to a number of transport experts, road safety campaigners, bus operators, drivers and passengers, and tried to identify and describe the points on the five national highways where gridlocks might be created during this Eid.

[Our Tangail correspondent Mirza Shakil, Manikganj correspondent Jahangir Alam, Gazipur correspondent Abu Bakar Siddique Akand, Jhenidah correspondent Azibor Rahman, Mymensingh correspondent Aminul Islam, Brahmanbaria correspondent Mashuk Hridoy contributed to the report.]

Dhaka-Chittagong highway

City dwellers heading for the port city through the Dhaka-Chittagong highway might face traffic gridlock near the Kanchpur bridge.
Considered the economic lifeline of the country, the highway abruptly narrows down to just two lanes from eight lanes right before the bridge, creating a bottleneck.
Immediately after crossing the bridge, passengers may again get stuck in the intersection from where one highway leads to Chittagong and the other to Sylhet.
Vehicles from the Dhaka-Chittagong highway have to wait there to allow other vehicles from the Dhaka-Sylhet highway to travel towards the capital.
Traffic situation near the bridge often becomes messy during the Eid rush as almost all the vehicles try to overtake each other there, said Faruk Talukder Sohel, chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners' Association.
The homegoers may face a similar situation within 20 kilometres of the bridge. Vehicles move at a snail's pace near the two-lane Meghna bridge during the Eid when a large number of buses and trucks hit the highway.
Chittagong is some 265km away from Dhaka and the travel time should be around four hours. But in reality, it
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Dhaka-Sylhet highway

Holidaymakers leaving for Sylhet from the capital can find themselves in deep trouble from the beginning of their journey. Tailbacks and rundown roads dug for construction work may make the trip extremely awful, say transport operators.
The travellers would have bumpy rides from Jatrabari intersection to Kutubkhali area as the long stretch of the road is riddled with potholes.
Then comes the Kanchpur bridge where they may face a bottleneck.
Their sufferings would increase after they cross the bridge and reach Gawsia market in Narayanganj's Bhulta.
Construction of a four-lane flyover has been going on there over the last two years. Due to the construction work, the stretch of the highway between Bhulta and Gawsia market has become narrow and it takes three to four hours to cross that distance alone, said transport operators and passengers.
Traffic congestion at this point has become a regular phenomenon and it would intensify when the Eid rush begins. Sometimes buses stop to take and drop passengers there and if it goes on that time, the situation would worsen, they said, adding, Eid holidaymakers suffered a lot at that place last year.
They may face another bottleneck
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Dhaka-Tangail highway

Despite being one of the major highways in the country, holidaymakers suffer the most on this road every year, say transport operators.
This time they may have to remain stuck on this highway longer than yesteryears due to the ongoing development work on Joydevpur Chandra-Tangail-Elenga road that connects 16 districts.
Soon after leaving Dhaka, homegoers are likely to face bottlenecks on Gazipur-Chandra and Nabinagar-Chandra roads even though the roads were expanded recently. Due to industrialisation in the area, stationary vehicles keep the outer lanes occupied at different points.
The Chandra intersection also sees severe traffic congestion every year during the holidays. However, the authorities recently constructed an additional brick soling road from Chandra intersection to Kaliakoir High-Tech Park gate for buses, reports our Gazipur correspondent.
Vehicles on the 50-kilometre stretch from Gorai in Mirzapur upazila to Elenga in Kalihati upazila will be forced to slow down due to potholes, reports our Tangail correspondent. However, some of the potholes are being repaired.
The condition of the 7km from
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Dhaka-Aricha-Khulna highway

Trips to southern districts will be distressing too.
Amin Bazar and Savar Bazar will be the major bottlenecks for those travelling to the southern districts. Vehicles will again slow down at Nabinagar intersection.
Then there will be the long delays at ferry terminals that remain the main cause of distress for holidaymakers using this route.
Vehicles using the Paturia-Daulatdia ferry terminal may have to wait for the ferries for hours due to poor management in ferry services.
Drivers fear that the people headed to 17 south-western districts would suffer a lot if there is a disruption of ferry services like last year, when several landing stations at Paturia ferry ghat in Manikganj were eroded by strong current in the Padma river.
"The ferry authorities must ensure proper management so that no bus can break rules. There will be delays as it is not possible for 14 to 15 ferries to carry thousands of vehicles," said a driver of Eagle Paribahan.
Shafiqul Islam, manager (commerce) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), said 19 ferries and 33 launches would be in operation during the Eid.
Besides, goods-laden trucks will not be allowed to cross the river during three
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Dhaka-Mymensingh highway

The main issue on the highway lies on a 12-km stretch from Tongi bridge to Joydevpur Chourasta.
The four-lane highway from Dhaka reduces to a two-lane one there. There were tailbacks in recent years.
Haphazard parking of vehicles and dumping of waste along the highway further narrow down the road, said Shahidullah Sadhu, general secretary of Mohakhali Bus Terminal Workers' Union.
Moreover, there are around 15 junctions on this 12-km road, interrupting the traffic flow, he added. Most of the Mymensingh-bound buses leave from Mohakhali.
"Auto-rickshaws, rickshaws and pedestrians go across the highway near these junctions all the time, forcing the long haul buses to move slowly," he said.
"If the situation remains unchanged, the traffic congestion will undoubtedly prevail," Shahidullah said.
SM Badrul Alam, assistant superintendent of police (highway) of Gazipur Circle, said no goods-laden truck will be allowed to ply Dhaka-Tangail and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways seven days before Eid.
"Wreckers will be put in place at different points," he said.
Besides, several roadside bazaars,
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RECOMMENDATIONS
IMMEDIATE MEASURES
Stop all repair and development works a week before Eid
Ban plying of trucks and three-wheelers three days before Eid
Deploy more law enforcers to check risky overtaking, other irregularities
Place sufficient wreckers for quick rescue operations and clearing off roads in case of accident
Ensure proper management of ferry and launch services
Remove roadside shops and bazaars
Ensure smooth traffic flow at entry and exist points from Dhaka
LONG-TERM
Replace intersections with interchanges
Widen narrow bridges
Increase ferries and landing stations
Digitise toll plazas
GOVERNMENT'S PLAN OF ACTION
Trucks, lorries, covered vans won't be allowed three days before Eid
Orders given to remove roadside kitchen markets
Repairing all highways seven days before Eid
Mobile courts will check unfit and outdated vehicles
Helicopters to be used for rescue operations and clearing off roads
Ansar men to help police for traffic management at entry and exit points of Dhaka
Toll plaza booths to remain open for 24 hours
Wreckers to be placed at different points



People, including children, take shelter at BTV's Rangamati substation as they are left homeless by a devastating mudslide that hit the hill district on Tuesday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Call for rehabilitation

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"We just finished cooking," said Bikram Chakma, 50, who is from Udondi Adam Para.
Many of them said they got no food support from the government for the first three days following the landslide. During the period, they relied on the generosity of the neighbours who were not affected.
Amid such shortage of food, drinking water and medicines, demands for rehabilitation and extensive relief operation have grown louder in Rangamati, with landslide survivors living in dismal conditions in shelter centers for the last four days.
Victims and different groups have also intensified calls for the government to declare the district as a disaster area.
Official death toll in five districts in the region rose to 150 yesterday, with the recovery of four more bodies in Rangamati, the worst affected district with 112 confirmed deaths.
Although many are reported to be still missing, the district administration has wrapped up the search operations yesterday.
The district remains cut off from other parts of the country since Tuesday, when the tragedy struck following heavy downpour overnight.
Talking to The Daily Star, victims said they wanted the government to speed up the relief distribution, saying a disaster of this scale never happened in the hills before.
They also demanded that the government take urgent measures to prevent such tragedies in future.
These correspondents visited seven shelter centers and spoke with over 100 survivors. Most of them want immediate rehabilitation, saying they don't want to live in shelter centres for an indefinite period.
The food is not enough and there is an acute water crisis, they said.
They also need clothes and other necessary items, as they could not bring anything to the shelter centers.
"We have lost everything. Our homes are gone under the mud. I have come to the shelter center with nothing but what I was wearing," said Anu Begum, 60, at Bangladesh Radio shelter center where she now lives with her family.

Kazi Md Nurul Amin of Shimiltoli area called on the government to declare the district as a disaster zone and provide financial and other support so the victims can start all over again. Many echoed his call.
The district administration said they were doing all they could to meet the immediate needs of the victims.
The government has allocated corrugated tins and money for the affected people. But the district administration could not start the rehabilitation work as it is still raining, said Iftekhar Uddin Arafat, an executive magistrate.
"We got 500 bundles of tins and Tk 5 lakh for rehabilitation of the victims," said Iftekhar, also spokesperson of the district administration's disaster control room.
He added Tk 40 lakh and 200 tonnes of rice had been allocated for immediate relief efforts.
Meanwhile, fresh rain starting yesterday poses a risk of more landslides in the district, as the local administration warned people through loudspeakers to evacuate from risky homes at the hill slopes.

Helmut Kohl no more

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chancellor.
Germany's longest serving post-war chancellor from 1982 to 1998, Kohl was a driving force behind the introduction of the euro currency, convincing sceptical Germans to give up their cherished deutchmark.
An imposing figure who formed a close relationship with French President Francois Mitterrand in pushing for closer European integration, Kohl had been frail and wheelchair-bound since suffering a bad fall in 2008.
At home, he is celebrated above all as the father of German reunification, which he achieved after the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall despite resistance from partners such as British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.
He won voters in communist East Germany by promising them "flour-

ishing landscapes".
Shortly after leaving office, Kohl's reputation was tarnished by a financing scandal in his centre-right party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), now led by Chancellor Angela Merkel. Kohl mentored Merkel early in her career, appointing her to her first ministerial post.
Until his death, Kohl refused to identify the donors, saying he had given them his word.

Fresh VAT burden on weavers

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gamchha are likely to get pricier due to the introduction of the new VAT system.
The 49-year-old weaver said many handlooms became inoperative over the recent years due to falling demand for handmade saris which faced stiff competition from machine-made cheap clothes.
He feared the government's latest decision would force many more weavers to quit their profession.
"Why will people buy our saris at higher prices when better finished clothes are available at cheap rates? Where will the century-old handloom sector head for?" he questioned.
FASHION HOUSES TO BE HIT
Weaver Alimuzzaman Ripon of Narayanganj and operators of some local fashion houses are worried that imposition of 15 percent VAT will increase prices of locally weaved clothes and reduce the sale.
However, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) claims that prices will not go up as businesses involved in the supply chain will get input tax credit which is difficult to get under the existing VAT Act, 1991.
To claim the rebate, weavers and firms will have to obtain a Business Identification Number (BIN) online, keep records of their purchases and file returns with the NBR regularly, said revenue officials.
Traders, however, said getting the tax rebate would be tough for small and medium businesses and marginal producers like weavers who work in an informal manner in the rural and suburban areas of some districts, including Tangail, Sirajganj and Narsingdi.
Nilkamal said it would be difficult for most of the little educated weavers in his locality to maintain records and accounts properly to claim the rebate. He feared this might cause harassment to weavers and create panic.
He said weavers usually buy yarn from small sellers who don't have VAT registration. So they will not get VAT invoices.
"I don't understand rebate. I'm a weaver and it is my hereditary profession. I know about yarn and colour. Governments in other countries patronise and nurture traditional products. But here we see attempts being made to destroy those," said an emotional Nilkamal.
Weavers said their fabrics and clothes would face an increased competition from imported clothes as importers would get a rebate for having a VAT registration.
Azharul Hoque Azad, president of Fashion Entrepreneurs Association of Bangladesh, said imposition of 15 percent VAT would fuel prices of locally weaved clothes and affect the sector that grew over the last two decades.
The sector grew due to opening of many new local fashion houses and demands from a section of middle income families.
Azharul, also the owner of fashion outlet Sadakalo, said most of the suppliers of local fashion houses are weavers who don't have VAT registration and usually don't keep records.
"So, we won't be able to claim rebates. Ultimately, the burden of the additional VAT will fall on the buyers. Customers will lose interest in buying local clothes."
Alimuzzaman Ripon, owner of 60 power looms and 40 handlooms, said many weavers would be in trouble if the demand for handloom products plummets.
He said weavers don't have work throughout the year.
Raghunath Basak, a weaver and wholesaler of sari and other fabrics in Tangail, said a section of customers will pick Indian clothes as the local products would get costlier due to imposition of 15 percent VAT.
"This will further affect the local handloom sector. Weavers are already facing a tough competition from traders of Indian saris and fabrics," he told The Daily Star.
He said weavers and people in the value chain of locally made clothes would be benefited if the prices remain low and competitive.
Soumik Das of Rang Bangladesh said the government should focus on widening the VAT net instead of imposing a flat 15 percent across the board simultaneously.
Ashrafur Alam, chief operating officer of the country's largest fashion house Aarong, said there might be some impact on the prices of retail branded garments with the imposition of 15 percent VAT.
He said his company was working to evaluate the probable price impact.
Talking to this correspondent on condition of anonymity, two NBR officials said any rise in prices of handloom products would affect weavers unless they get rebates.
Azharul urged the government to keep handloom products out of the purview of 15 percent VAT to help the tradition continue.
He said the government exempted 1,043 items from VAT. "It will not be a big loss for the state if handloom products are kept VAT free."

IS chief killed in airstrike?

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the military groups of the so-called IS military council, 30 mid-ranking field commanders and up to 300 militants who provided security for them were eliminated," it said.
"According to information which is being checked through various channels, the leader of ISIL Ibrahim Abu-Bakr al-Baghdadi was also present at the meeting and was eliminated by the strike," it said.
ISIL is an acronym for the so-called IS group, also known as ISIS and Daesh.
The US-led coalition said it could not immediately confirm Baghdadi's death.
"We cannot confirm these reports at this time," said Operation Inherent Resolve US Army Colonel Ryan Dillon.
The strike occurred from 2135 to 2145 GMT on May 27 following confirmation of the meeting by a drone. Those killed included the so-called emir of Raqa and the IS security chief, the Russian statement said.
Russia informed the United States about the attack, the statement added.
Elusive Iraqi-born Baghdadi is the world's most-wanted man. The IS supreme has not been seen in public since proclaiming himself "caliph" in the Iraqi city of Mosul three years ago.
His group has earned global notoriety for imposing a headline form of Islam that has included stonings, beheadings and amputations. Its bastion of Raqa became a magnet for would-be jihadists from other countries.
Baghdadi has been rumoured wounded or killed a number of times in the past.
He has been nicknamed "The Ghost" as he has been reportedly spotted around the Syrian-Iraqi border but his whereabouts have never been confirmed.
In March, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson declared that Baghdadi's death was imminent as "nearly all" of his deputies were dead and "it is only a matter of time" before the IS chief himself met the same fate.
Russia in September 2015 launched a bombing campaign in Syria in support of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Its efforts against IS jihadists are separate from those of the US-led coalition, which supports Syrian rebels.
The Russian military said earlier this month that on May 29, its planes struck IS convoys attempting to leave Raqa from the south and heading toward Palmyra, killing 80 militants.
On May 31, Russia struck IS contingents located near Palmyra, firing guided missiles from warships deployed off the Syrian coast.
Russia has supported Syrian armed forces, which entered the province of Raqa June 6 and advanced since then in the west and southwest of the province.
US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces have been pushing into Raqa on three fronts, last Tuesday breaking into the IS bastion from the east for the first time.
Iraqi forces are meanwhile battling IS in Mosul, where the jihadists are confined to just a few neighbourhoods in the west of the city.
The fighting in Raqa has caused alarm at the United Nations, whose investigators this week said civilian loss of life was "staggering" due to "excessive" air strikes.