

Long tailbacks on Tangail highway

Homegoers spend long, tedious hours on cratered stretches of road

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A dilapidated 10-km stretch of Dhaka-Tangail Highway between Chandra and Deohata is subjecting homegoers to huge tailbacks.

Thanks to the pothole ridden road, hundreds of vehicles had to spend at least several hours since early Monday on the road here.

"My bus was stuck for over three hours on the miles long tailbacks," Saiful Islam, a physician headed to Bhuapur, told The Daily Star.

The situation remained unchanged till noon despite the highway police trying hard to ease the congestion.

"We informed the executive engineers of Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in Tangail and Gazipur about the bad shape of the road," Khalilur Rahman Patwari, officer-in-charge of Gorai Highway Police Station said.

Drivers and passengers said they saw RHD men repairing the road at some points.

"I do not understand what they have done all the year," said a grieving bus driver Rashedul Islam.

Abdul Hakim, a sub-divisional engineer of RHD in Tangail, said they repaired the highway only a few days ago, but incessant rain and traffic pressure damaged the road again.

"Now we are repairing the new potholes created due to the heavy shower and overloaded vehicles," he added.

The highway, known as the gate to the north, has a capacity of about 7,000 vehicles plying in a day, but about 12,000 to 15,000 vehicles of 26 districts, including 16 northern and five south western, use the road every day. The number increases to over 30,000 during the Eid, Hakim added.

Sajedul Islam, a traffic inspector in Tangail, said, "We hope there will be no traffic chaos on the highway during the Eid rush, but the situation may worsen if the rain doesn't stop in the next three days."



Workers from the Roads and Highways Department filling up a pothole with brick chips on the Dhaka-Tangail highway in Tangail Sadar's Shibpur area yesterday. The 50-km stretch of the highway from Mirzapur to Elenga has numerous potholes, causing long tailbacks and accidents. The authorities are plugging some of the potholes to ease the journey of homegoers during the upcoming Eid-ul-Fitr.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

BB moves to stabilise rice market

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank yesterday took two major steps to stabilise rice prices and increase its supply in the local market.

The move comes at a time when price millers are not selling rice to the government as the price of the staple is higher in the local markets.

Yesterday, the central bank issued a circular to all commercial banks directing them to realise the loans given to rice traders and mill owners within 30 days.

The BB officials said the directive has been issued so that the rice millers cannot hoard rice.

In another directive, the central bank told the banks that the importers will be allowed to import rice without making any advance payment.

In the circular, the BB advised the banks to open LC with zero margin in importing rice to ensure adequate supply in the local market. The rice

SEE PAGE 13 COL 4

No sign of stability in rice market

FROM PAGE 1

were opened for import of 2.25 lakh tonnes of rice in the current fiscal year but the private sector imported only half the quantity till mid-June.

Market sources told The Daily Star that though import of more rice is in the pipeline, the importers are making delay in bringing shipments with the hope that the government would soon go for a tariff cut.

With rice prices going up in the global market, local traders are increasingly finding it difficult to make a profit after paying high tariff on import.

Market sources said rice import is no longer lucrative for traders as they have to pay 28 percent tariff on top of high import costs.

They are not showing interest in importing rice though its prices have shot up in the local market (coarse rice Tk 48 a kg). They are still waiting for the government to withdraw the import duty.

PRICES UP IN INT'L MARKET

A food ministry document shows that price of parboiled rice rose to

\$410 a tonne this month from \$384 a tonne in June last year and \$397 in the previous month.

In May-June this year, parboiled rice prices rose by 3.3 percent in India, 5.6 percent in Thailand and 2.4 percent in Pakistan, while the price of Vietnamese white rice (atap) went up by 8.2 percent, show yesterday's data by the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit (FPMU) of the food ministry.

Last month, Bangladesh struck two deals to import 50,000 tonnes of parboiled rice for \$427.85 a tonne and another 50,000 tonnes of white rice for \$406.48 a tonne.

Only two weeks later, it signed a deal with Vietnam for importing 2.5 lakh tonnes of rice (50,000 tonnes of parboiled and two lakh tonnes of white rice) at a higher price. It agreed to pay \$470 a tonne for parboiled rice and \$430 a tonne for white rice.

Food ministry sources said that apart from Bangladesh, at least six other countries sought to import rice from Vietnam in recent weeks, resulting in a hike in demand and the

price.

The six countries are the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Cuba and China.

RATIONALE BEHIND TARIFF

The government didn't have to import rice since fiscal 2011-12 due to successive good yields of rice in harvest seasons.

But taking advantage of the zero-tariff import facility, private importers brought in 3.75 lakh tonnes of rice in fiscal 2013-14 and nearly 15 lakh tonnes in the following fiscal year, flooding the domestic market with cheap Indian rice.

To protect local rice growers, the government imposed a high tariff of 28 percent on rice import in two phases in 2015.

Talking to The Daily Star, agricultural economist Dr Jahangir Alam said import tariff should not be static. The government should adjust it according to the given situation.

Omer Azam, general secretary of Chittagong Rice Traders Association, said rice production is likely to fall

short of the target and the domestic market now requires an increased supply through import for price stabilisation.

But importers are waiting for a government decision on tariff cut, he added.

Though the food ministry has proposed a tariff cut on rice import, the finance ministry is yet to decide on it.

WHY RICE PRICES SOARED?

In addition to open market sale, vulnerable group feeding and other social safety net programmes, the government late last year introduced Tk 10-a-kg rice programme for five million ultra poor.

Over the last one year, many such government programmes have led to the depletion of food reserve with rice stock falling to a six-year low of 1.9 lakh tonnes.

On the other hand, the food department's initiative to replenish rice stock by procuring Boro fizzled out. Millers refused to sell rice to the department for Tk 34 a kg set by the government.

In the first 11 months of this fiscal year, 14.83 lakh tonnes of rice were distributed under various government programmes against 11.75 lakh tonnes in the corresponding period of fiscal 2015-16. Under the fair price programme alone, 6.84 lakh tonnes of rice were distributed.

An unusual early flashflood that struck the haor region in late March caused a loss of Boro rice totalling one million tonnes.

According to market sources, blast attacks (fungi attack) also led to a loss of Boro rice in 19 districts. But the agriculture department claimed that the loss was nominal.

Experts and agricultural economists say the government's temporal inability to go for market intervention due to its current low stock allowed rice millers and traders to hike the prices.

Rice prices would be stable if supply of the staple is increased in the domestic market quickly through imports by both the government and private channels, they noted.

LANDSLIDE

Rail link with Sylhet cut off for 6 hours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Sylhet's rail link with Dhaka and Chittagong that snapped following a landslide in Lawachara National Park of Moulvibazar yesterday morning was restored after around six hours.

Shahabuddin Fakir, station master of Bhanugach Railway Station, said a large chunk of mud fell on the lines in Magurchhara area of the park in Kamalganj upazila, suspending railway communications of Sylhet with Dhaka and Chittagong around 6:30am.

The railway communications resumed around 12:00noon, said Shahabuddin.

Three trains -- Kalni Express, Joyantika Express and Demu Express -- were stranded at Shamsheernagar because of the incident, said Jahangir Alam, station master of Sreemangal Railway Station.

Tabibur Rahman, assistant conservator of wildlife management and nature conservation department in Moulvibazar, said cutting of hills to construct roads and railway tracks and felling of old trees were the main reasons for landslide in Lawachara.

Jabed Bhuiyan, joint convener of Lawachara Bon O Jibo Boichitro Rakkha Andolon, said a syndicate, under the shelter of local influentials, was involved in plundering 100-year-old trees of various species.

Narayan Saha, former head of forestry and environment science department at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, told this correspondent that cutting down of big trees was the main reason behind landslide.

Small trees cannot hold soil properly as roots of big trees are stronger than small trees. So, it is important to save big trees to avoid landslides, he added.



Musa Ibrahim along with other mountaineers at the peak of the Mount Carstenz Pyramid on June 13.

Musa finally rescued

FROM PAGE 16

Kilimanjaro.

He has thanked his well-wishers after his rescue.

In a Facebook status posted at 1:51pm, he thanked, among others, State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahrar Alam, State Minister for ICT Division Zunaid Ahmed Palak and Bangladesh High Commissioner in Indonesia Maj Gen Azmal Kabir.

Earlier around 5:30am, he sent a text message through a satellite phone to his wife and Mohammed Rafah, chief executive officer of Everest Academy founded by him, saying, "Finally helicopter reached at base camp for rescue. great job."

Musa, who started the expedition on June 1, waved the Bangladeshi flag at the peak at 11:45am local time on June 13, according to his Facebook post.

The Carstenz Pyramid, locally known as Puncak Jaya, is the highest summit of Mount Jayawijaya or Mount Carstenz and among the Seven Summits-- the top seven peaks in the world. It is 16,024 feet above

the sea level.

The Carstenz Pyramid expedition is a part of Musa's Seven Summit mission.

He waved the Bangladeshi flag atop the Everest on May 23, 2010 and atop the Kibo of Kilimanjaro on September 12, 2011.

Soon after completing the Carstenz Pyramid expedition, he took no time to dedicate his newest accomplishment to all Bangladeshis.

"Bangladesh's flag is flying at Mount Carstenz Pyramid... I'm dedicating this climb to all Bangladeshis," he said in an 18-second video selfie recorded at the peak and later posted on Facebook.

On May 30, Musa left Dhaka for the "Bangladesh-India Friendship" expedition to scale up the Carstenz. He, Satyarup and Nandita were expected to complete the mission by June 18.

After being trapped at the base camp, Musa used a satellite phone and texted Tahura describing his situation. He also mentioned that one of his fellow mountaineers had fallen sick.

The trio had been starving at the

base camp as their limited food stock ran out. They survived after finding some leftover food, Tahura told The Daily Star.

A team of rescuers boarding a helicopter from Indian tour operator Cox and Kings were supposed to rescue them on Sunday, but the second day's attempt was also aborted due to bad weather.

AWKWARD SITUATION IN TIMIKA Asia One, the helicopter company that rescued the trio, yesterday took away their passports demanding additional money for the failed rescue attempts, Musa wrote on Facebook.

His wife Tahura said the situation was yet to be solved as of 3:30pm yesterday when she last contacted her husband through Facebook messenger.

"He is supposed to return to Bangladesh on Wednesday. If the situation does not favour his return, his arrival might be delayed," she told The Daily Star over phone.

She added her husband was "mentally confident but feeling little tired physically."

Heavy rains

FROM PAGE 1

Her seven-year-old son was half-conscious on a rickshaw behind her. He had a bad injury on his head and needed immediate medical attention.

Kulsum, the mother in her mid 30's, lives in an under-construction building in Nawabpur area with her husband and two children.

Her son, Saad, injured himself while playing in the building

"It takes me around 5-7 minutes to reach the nearby hospital, but today, it took me over 40 minutes to take my son to the hospital," she said.

Senior Staff Nurse Faisal Ahmed of Dhaka Medical College Hospital headed for work from his Mirpur home around noon. He got stuck in traffic at Senpara on Rokeya Sarani which was waterlogged.

He got down from his bus and took a detour via Dhaka cantonment but got stuck at different points along the way.

He could reach only Bangla Motor around 3:30pm.

The journey from Moghbazar to the District Court of Dhaka seemed nothing less than an ordeal. The streets were under water in the morning causing major traffic bottlenecks. The situation did not improve even when there was no rain in the afternoon.

"It took me over two hours to reach the court during the rain and another two hours to reach Farmgate," said Salma Mahub, a lawyer.

"I had to walk from Shahbagh to Farmgate."

Most parts of Bashundhara residential area went under knee-to-almost-waist-deep water within an hour of the torrential rain. The main roads connecting the 300-foot Road to the main gate of Bashundhara and streets of different blocks, especially B, C, D and E, were the worst affected. The streets remained inundated for hours.

Many vehicles, especially auto-rickshaws, broke down on the waterlogged streets triggering traffic jams in the largest private residential area.

A resident of Bashundhara said he had to wait for more than two hours to get a rickshaw, as the roads in Bashundhara went under almost waist-deep water.

People of parts of Indira Road, Tallabagh and West Raza Bazar suffered as streets and alleys went under knee-deep water. Many had to wade through the murky water to get to their destinations.

"The narrow alleys get submerged

easily whenever there is moderate rain, making it difficult to get around. And the water is murky and stinky," said Abdullah of Indira Road.

"No rickshaw puller was willing to go in this water. I had no option but to wade through," he added.

Around 12:30pm, the road between the BGMEA Bhaban and Karwan Bazar intersection was seen submerged. Major thoroughfares like Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, Pragati Sarani, Rokeya Sarani and Gulshan Avenue had standstill or crawling traffic.

According to official sources, the inadequate storm-water drainage system was capable of dealing with only 20mm of rainfall. Streets get waterlogged if the rainfall exceeds 40mm.

City areas lacking adequate storm water drainage facilities went under ankle-to-knee-deep water.

Green Road, parts of Mirpur, Sheorapara, Mohammadpur, Jatrabari, Shahjahanpur, Shantinagar, Khilgaon, Demra, Mohammadpur, Badda and a few other places in the capital were inundated. Parts of Karwan Bazar, Farmgate, Bashundhara, Dhanmondi, Nikunja and Mirpur were under water as well.

MET OFFICE The Met Office recorded 46mm of rainfall in Dhaka city between 6:00am and 3:00pm, said the duty forecasting officer at the Dhaka Met Office.

According to meteorologist Omar Faruk of Bangladesh Meteorological Department, the rain would continue for some time and there was no clear indication as to when the country would see brighterskies in the next few days.

Taslima Imam, an assistant director at Bangladesh Meteorological Department, said heavy rain across the country, including the capital, was forecast until 10:00am today due to active monsoon.

Rangpur, Sylhet, Mymensingh and Chittagong divisions might have heavy to very heavy rain and there was possibility of landslides in some parts of Sylhet and Chittagong regions, she said.

A depression lies over West Bengal and adjoining Bangladesh which extends to the North Bay.

It rained 100mm in Maijdee Court of Noakhali, 90mm in Sandvip, 85mm in Feni, 68mm in Nikli of Mymensingh, and 58mm in Faridpur between 6:00am and 3:00pm yesterday, according to Met office records.