

Trouble in Tongi, beyond

FROM PAGE 1
 on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway is likely to witness severe jams due to the ongoing work of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). The officials involved also expressed concern over the situation of this part.

The holidaymakers of southern districts may not get respite from congestion at Paturia-Daulatdia ferry ghat. It is because hundreds of buses would queue up for only 20 ferries.

Those taking Dhaka-Mawa highway would face problems due to the development work along the highway and at Shimulia-Kathalbari ferry terminals.

The Daily Star visited some highways and talked to transport experts, road safety campaigners, bus operators, drivers and passengers, to get a picture of the key points on five national highways where gridlocks might occur.

Campaigners, bus operators, and passengers say unplanned intersections and illegal roadside markets will be a cause of concern.

Besides, thousands of unfit and overloaded vehicles would hit the streets ahead of the festival. Many of them may break down in the middle of the road, creating tailbacks.

The ministries of home, and road transport and bridges have sat with stakeholders, including police and transport owners and workers, several times and taken steps to make the Eid journey smooth and safe.

The National Committee to Protect Shipping, Roads and Railways says around 1.47 crore people would leave Dhaka, Gazipur and Narayanganj before Eid.

Of them, 55 percent would use the highways, 25 percent waterways and 20 percent railways, the non-government organisation said based on official and private estimates.

Ashis Kumar Dey, general secretary of the organisation, said the journey home would begin on May 30 and continue till June 4.

"Handling the rush in the six days is difficult. Our transport system does not have the capacity either. So, none can assure there would be no sufferings during Eid."

Apart from this, there remains the possibility of bad weather and watery accidents, he said, urging the authorities to attach top priority to proper management.

DHAKA-MYMENSINGH HIGHWAY: BRACE FOR 13KM

The main concern on this highway is the 13km stretch from Tongi Bridge to Joydevpur Chowrasta.

Visiting the areas on Sunday, this correspondent found the four-lane highway from Dhaka has virtually reduced to two lanes at some places due to drainage work.

The work is part of the Greater Dhaka Sustainable Urban Transport Project, also known as Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Under this project, the government would construct a 20.5km dedicated bus lane from Dhaka to Gazipur.

Many points of this part have shrunk because of stinky water overflowing from the under-construction drains, while the absence of footpaths and earth-filling by the roadside force pedestrians to get onto the road, slowing down traffic movement.

"The work has been going on for more than a year with no end in sight, making it hard for us to walk. Things take a turn for the worse when it rains," said Abdul Karim, a resident of Bhogra bypass area.

Besides, this correspondent found many bus drivers picking passengers in the middle of the road, halting the vehicular movement.

There are around 10 junctions on this 13km portion, which interrupt traffic flow. The continuous movement of auto-rickshaws, rickshaws and pedestrians near the junctions also slow down the long-haul buses.

Most buses of Mohakhali Inter-district Bus Terminal use the highway to carry people to Mymensingh, Netrakona, Sherpur, Jamalpur, Tangail, Bogura and other northern and north-eastern districts.

Shahidullah Sadhu, general secretary of Mohakhali Bus Terminal Workers' Union, said if the situation on the highway remains the same, people of the regions will suffer.

He called for suspending the development work on the highways for at least seven days before Eid and deploying a large number of law enforcers to ensure smooth traffic movement.

At an Eid preparatory meeting on May 23, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the overall condition of highways is better than previous years.

However, there is a serious concern over the condition of Dhaka-Mymensingh highway's Tongi-Gazipur Chowrasta section. It takes three to four hours to cross the area, he said.

The minister asked the BRT project director to halt development work for a few days and asked police officials and Gazipur city mayor to keep the road useable during Eid rush.

Sanaul Haque, the BRT project director, said they are doing their work, leaving four lanes of the highway unaffected. "It's not possible to completely halt the work as it is going on under an international tender. However, we have slowed down the drainage work."

Asked about public safety, he said they have marked the construction area with yellow tapes and red flags. **FERRY TERMINALS: VEHICLE NUMBERS TO PUT PRESSURE**

Trips to southern districts via Paturia-Daulatdia Ferry Terminal may not be smooth as well.

The first bottleneck will be at Amin Bazar because of the narrow Gabtoli-Aminbazar bridge. Besides, roadside parking of buses and trucks causes congestion.

Savar Bazar and Nabinagar intersection are two other major chokepoints on Dhaka-Aricha highway. Almost all inter-district buses stop there to pick passengers, especially garment workers, because the two points cover a major industrial belt.

Then comes the ferry terminal. The number of vehicles using Paturia-Daulatdia terminal doubles during Eid, from 3,000 to 4,000 every day now to nearly 7,000. Cars and rented buses of other routes will be adding to the usual traffic.

The vehicle numbers may further go up because the authorities decided on May 13 to divert long-route buses of Khulna and Jashore to Dhaka-Aricha highway due to the development work along Dhaka-Mawa highway.

Drivers fear that sufferings of the people heading to 17 south-western districts would multiply if there is a disruption of ferry services due to storms or other reasons.

"The authorities must ensure proper management of ferries so that no bus driver can break rules," said

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 azaars
- Ensure smooth traffic flow at entry and exist points from Dhaka

LONG-TERM

- Replace intersections with interchanges
- 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 10 days before Eid
- Mobile courts will check unfit and outdated vehicles
- volunteers to help police for traffic management on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway
- Toll plaza booths to remain open for 24 hours
- CNG stations will remain open for 24 hours 7 days before Eid and 5 days after Eid
- 3 vigilance teams to work at 3 major bus terminals in the capital

Mosharrar Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan. The decision to stop ferrying of goods vehicles three days before Eid has to be implemented strictly as well, he said.

Zillur Rahman, assistant general manager of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) at Paturia, said 34 launches and 20-21 ferries would operate every day during Eid, up from 16 ferries currently in operation.

Rifat Rahman Shamim, superintendent of police of Manikganj, said around 500 law enforcers will guard Dhaka-Aricha highway and the ferry terminal to maintain order.

On Dhaka-Mawa highway, gridlocks may occur if ferry and launch management goes away at Shimulia and Kathalbari ghats. Bad weather can be another setback.

Kabirul Islam, upazila nirbahi officer of Louhajang of Munshiganj, said 18 ferries, 87 launches, and 540

speedboats will be in operation on this route.

DHAKA-TANGAIL HIGHWAY: SMOOTHER THAN BEFORE

Taking this highway may be smoother this year because two flyovers at Chandra and Konabari, two bridges, and four underpasses opened on May 25.

Chandra has been the most chaotic place on this highway as vehicles from Nabinagar and Gazipur converge here before moving to Tangail. Vehicles from Gazipur now can easily cross the junction using the new flyover.

Konabari has been another chokepoint because of a big market. Although the expansion of the highway from Gazipur Chowrasta to Elega is still going on, there is no chokepoint on this portion.

But after crossing Bangabandhu bridge, travellers may face difficulties because of a weak bridge in Nalka area of Sirajganj sadar. "A lack of repair has made the Nalka bridge risky. We cannot pass it quickly," said bus driver Md Faruk Hossain.

They also worry about an increase in the vehicle numbers, he said.

Most of Dhaka-Tangail highway is four-lane wide. But the 20km link road after Bangabandhu bridge is two lanes up till Hatikumrul. So, there are chances congestion will occur, said Sayed Shahid Alam, officer-in-charge of Bangabandhu bridge west zone police station.

DHAKA-CHATTOGRAM HIGHWAY: NO MORE BOTTLENECKS

The three bottlenecks ailing travellers on this highway have been removed.

The otherwise dual carriageway between the port city and the capital used to shrink to a single one at Meghna and Gumti bridges. Kanchpur bridge was technically a dual carriageway but it was not wide enough.

Traffic used to come to a halt on the approach roads to the bridges, and if there was a breakdown, it took several hours to clear the nightmarish mess. But things would ease because three four-lane bridges parallel to the existing ones have opened.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the second Kanchpur bridge in March, and second Gumti and second Meghna bridges on May 25.

Mosharraf Hossain, general manager of Hanif Paribahan, said vehicles may slow down at the Meghna bridge toll plaza, leading to tailbacks.

The authorities should take care of the issue in advance, he said.

DHAKA-SYLHET HIGHWAY: IN A BETTER SHAPE

The journey is expected to get better on this route this year.

There are two ways to get to Dhaka-Sylhet highway -- from Dhaka-Chittagong highway via Kanchpur Bridge and through Jatrabari-Demra road via Sultana Kamal Bridge.

Crossing Kanchpur is a lot easier now because the four-lane second Kanchpur bridge has opened to traffic. Moreover, an overpass after the bridge would be available for use before Eid. Jatrabari-Demra road is also in a better shape than last year.

But there may be some problem further down the road.

The construction of a four-lane flyover at Gawsia market in Narayanganj's Bhulta has not finished yet. The work has narrowed down the stretch between Bhulta and Gawsia market.

[Our Manikganj, Pabna, and Munshiganj correspondents contributed to the report]

A loss to learn from

FROM PAGE 1
 expectations from the practice game. India, ranked number two in the world, had played their last ODI on 13 March, which was the third consecutive game they lost to Australia to surrender a series 2-3 at home. They were then outplayed by New Zealand in their first warm-up, and it would have been imperative for skipper Virat Kohli to get to the World Cup with a win under his belt.

Seventh-ranked Bangladesh, on the other hand, had romped to their first ODI multi-team trophy in Ireland just 11 days previously, swatting aside West Indies and the hosts on their way to the title. Understandably, it would not have been as much about getting a win as it would have been about finalising a team combination and a strategy on how to play in these conditions.

Despite them surrendering their last eight wickets for 93 runs, the match was lost when conceding 359 for seven, which would always have been difficult to chase against arguably the best and most varied attack among the 10 World Cup teams.

Bangladesh had started well with the ball after skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza won the toss and chose to field first. Mashrafe and Mustafizur -- who dispatched India opener Shikhar Dhawan in the third over after a rain-delayed start -- allowed just 34 runs for one wicket in the first 10 Powerplay overs. Pacers Rubel Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin then dispatched Rohit Sharma and Kohli respectively to have India on 88 for three after 20 overs. That the Tigers then conceded such a mountainous total was down partly to superb batting from centuries Lokesha Rahul and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, as well as skipper Mashrafe experimenting with his bowlers -- a logical warm-up strategy as, with a more or less settled batting order, it is the bowling lineup that Mashrafe and the team management will have to agonise over ahead of their World Cup opener against South Africa on June 2.

The experimentation was obvious. Whereas in Ireland, specialist spinners Shakib Al Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz were usually brought on within the first 15 overs, Mashrafe bowled all five pacers in the squad exclusively for the first 24 overs. In the last 10, during which India hammered 116 runs, instead of solely employing the pacers in himself, Rubel Hossain, Mustafizur and Mohammad Saifuddin -- as is usually the case with perhaps one or two overs from Shakib thrown in depending on the situation -- Mashrafe bowled part-time leg-spinner Sabbir for three overs, Shakib, Mustafizur and Rubel for two each and Abu Jayed -- who was having a torrid time already -- for the penultimate over which leaked 21 runs.

Not that the experimentation excused the poor cricket that popped

up from time to time. Bangladesh did not manage a single direct hit and the spinners -- usually run containers whatever the condition -- conceded 160 runs from 19 overs for three wickets which were produced by Indian wild heaves in the last 10 overs.

When batting, a 49-run stand between openers Soumya Sarkar and Liton Das -- first-choice opener Tamim Iqbal was rested as a precautionary measure after he experienced some discomfort while taking a fall during fielding practice the previous day -- and a 120-run third-wicket stand between Liton (73 off 90) and Mushfiqur (90 off 94) showed that batting would be easy on the wicket. The batsmen however failed to utilise the opportunity and seemed to be caught between going for a win and getting some valuable batting practice against a good attack. It revealed a lack of planning, because even if going for a win, leaving wickets for a late charge would have been the way to go. Instead, from 169 for two, Bangladesh fell to 216 for eight, effectively ending any chances of an interesting finish. On three separate occasions -- in the 10th over by Jasprit Bumrah, the 32nd over by Yuzvendra Chahal, and the 40th from Kuldeep Yadav -- wickets fell off consecutive deliveries with Shakib, Mohammad Mithun and Mosaddek Hossain all falling for first-ball ducks.

That is something that they will have to remedy soon as unlike against Ireland or eighth-ranked West Indies, the batsmen cannot expect sighters from higher-ranked teams when they go in to bat.

UNHCR, UNDP

FROM PAGE 16
 UNHCR, UNDP and Myanmar's labour, immigration and population ministry -- have reaffirmed their full commitment to the timely and effective implementation of the MoU, it said.

Myanmar and Bangladesh signed a repatriation deal in November 2017, around three months after some 750,000 Rohingya had fled a military crackdown in Myanmar.

Repatriation was scheduled to start in November last year, but the Rohingya did not agree, saying the conditions in Myanmar were not conducive.

Ro Nay San Lwin, coordinator of Free Rohingya Coalition, a worldwide network of Rohingya diaspora, expressed regret that the UN was cooperating with Myanmar, which was not doing anything to improve the conditions in Rakhine.

"The UN agencies have not even consulted the Rohingya, the survivors of genocide," he told The Daily Star from Germany by phone yesterday.

There is no guarantee of safety of the Rohingya and their citizenship. The genocide survivors cannot return to the country under such conditions, he added.

He demanded the UN expose the lack of conducive conditions to the world.

3 hurt

FROM PAGE 16
 while Tamim was still under treatment at Kotalipara Upazila Health Complex.

The incident took place in the old building of the same complex.

Uzzal said, "Tamim, with his aunt Nur Kusum and cousin Sharmin, went to see my brother-in-law at Kotalipara Upazila Health Complex on Monday, as he was admitted there for pain in the stomach. The three were waiting in his hospital room while he was getting tests done. Around 3:30pm, a big piece of plaster from the ceiling fell on them. My son was injured in his head."

Sunity Biswas, a nurse at the complex, said, "After the incident, all patients were shifted to the new building. We are always anxious while working in this old building."

Residential Medical Officer (RMO) at the complex Sushanta Baidya said, "This building was built in 1968. The ceiling of this hospital building is in bad condition. We have closed one ward as the plaster fell around 12 days ago. This time, three people were injured as the plaster fell in another ward. We have shifted all patients to our new building corridor."

He added that Tamim was now out of danger.

Premanand Mondal, upazila health and family planning officer in Kotalipara, said, "The new building of the hospital is still under construction and the old building will be auctioned off on June 17. So, we have a great problem at hand."

2 killed in Japan

FROM PAGE 16
 schoolgirls had to undergo surgery for knife wounds to the head and neck.

"It is a very harrowing case. I feel strong anger," Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said in televised remarks.

"I offer my heartfelt condolences to the victims and hope the injured recover quickly."

A local man living nearby, who identified himself as Matsumoto, 25, said he went outside after hearing screams.

"It's hard to describe what it was like, how it sounded. It wasn't girls having fun, it was a sound that was absolutely not normal," he told AFP.

"I saw a man lying on the street. I also saw a girl hunched over on the ground. There were also five or six girls, maybe they were the ones who screamed... There was blood all over them."

'PRAYERS AND SYMPATHY'

The attack occurred during the busy early morning commute as workers headed to their offices and children to school. Fire department officials said they received the first emergency calls shortly before 8:00 am.

The scene of the attack was still swarming with emergency personnel hours later, with three police vans parked around the spot to block it from view.

Emergency workers set up an orange medical tent to treat the wounded, and ambulances and fire engines were parked nearby.

Teiko Naito, principal of the school's elementary section, said in an emotional, televised news conference: "A man carrying knives in his both hands came from a convenience store and slashed children in the queue one-by-one."

Assistant principal Satoru Shitori,

who was on the scene, said the attacker crept silently up behind the children before launching his attack.

The director of Caritas Gakuen, Tetsuro Saito, said 18 of her pupils were involved.

The bloodshed came as Donald Trump wrapped up a state visit to Japan, and the US president offered his "prayers and sympathy" to the victims as he met troops outside Tokyo.

Standing aboard a Japanese military ship, he said that "all Americans stand with the people of Japan and grieve for the victims and for their families".

STRICT GUN CONTROL

A local resident, who declined to give his name, said children attending the Caritas school lined up for the bus at the site every day.

"If you live in this neighbourhood, everybody knows that these kids are

there," the 66-year-old told AFP.

"I've been in this area for a long time, I cannot believe that somebody targeted this bus and targeted these small children."

Violent crime is extremely rare in Japan, and children often travel to and from school alone.

The country has famously strict gun control regulations and gun crime is unusual, but there have been a few high-profile stabbing attacks.

In 2018, a man was arrested in central Japan after stabbing one person to death and injuring two others aboard a bullet train, an attack that prompted new security measures on the rail service.

And in 2016, a man stabbed 19 people to death at a disability centre south of Tokyo in what he described as a mission to rid the world of people with mental illness.

19 'controversial' leaders

FROM PAGE 16
 drop the "controversial" leaders from its committee, if allegations against them were found true.

Hours later, the BCL general secretary disclosed names of some "controversial" leaders at a press

conference at the AL chief's political office in the capital's Dhanmondi.

DEMO OF POST-DEPRIVED FACTION

Meanwhile, the post-deprived faction of the BCL resumed demonstration on Monday night at the base of Raju

Memorial Sculpture, demanding exclusion of the controversial leaders.

They were staging a sit-in at the venue last night, vowing to continue their agitation until their demands were met.

Contacted, Rakib Hossain,

spokesperson for the faction, said they still could not believe that Rabhani will take steps against the controversial leaders.

He also said they would not stop their demonstration even if the BCL expels the 19 leaders.

Middlemen are the culprits

FROM PAGE 16
 secretary of Right to Food Bangladesh.

Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad, chairman of Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation, said if the government extended the time of its procurement programme, it would help the farmers get better prices.

"Agriculture is still the foundation

of our economy. Therefore, agriculture, farmers, and farmworkers should get top priority in our development plans, which is not the case now," he added.

Md Asaduzzaman, former research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said there was a big gap between prices of paddy and rice. "Why is there such a big gap

and where does the money go?" he asked.

The situation has become this dire because the market is not regulated, added Asaduzzaman.

Anwar Faruque, former agriculture secretary, said good Boro yield was one of the key factors in Bangladesh becoming self-sufficient in food

production.

The government should take immediate measures to solve the problem, he said.

Prof Sayema Haque Bidisha, of economics department at Dhaka University, and Asgar Ali Sabri, director of ActionAid Bangladesh, also spoke on the occasion.

Setback for Mamata

FROM PAGE 16
 to attend Modi's swearing-in ceremony tomorrow, which she has accepted.

"I have spoken to other Chief Ministers also. Since it is a ceremonial program, we thought of attending it. Yes, I will go," Mamata told media yesterday.

CONGRESS PRESIDENT

Putting a temporary end to the unease that had settled over the Congress, Rahul Gandhi has been persuaded to serve as party president for the next 3-4 months, party sources said.

Sources also revealed he will continue as Congress party president till an alternative is found.

Rahul Gandhi has been authorised to make structural changes and rejig the organisation for strengthening the party, reported India Today online.

However, he remains adamant on his decision to quit. According to sources, Rahul Gandhi's decision to quit the post of Congress president remains "non-negotiable".

Rahul had a series of visitors yesterday with his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra as well as Rajasthan's ruling duo Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot calling on him amid rumblings of discontent in the state and his insistence on quitting.

Priyanka Gandhi was present during the discussions, party insiders said. The party's chief spokesperson Randeep Surjewala and general secretary K C Venugopal also met the party president at his Tughlaq Lane home.

It is not immediately known what transpired at the meetings.