

Toll to go up around 17pc

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next year, sources said.

Contacted, BBA Executive Director Abu Bakr Siddique, also the secretary of Bridges Division, said they decided to increase the toll rate "to some extent".

Replying to another question, he said the average rise in toll for Bangabandhu Bridge would be around 17 percent.

He, however, could not immediately recall the revised toll rate of Mukterpur Bridge. "I have to see the documents. However, the rise is likely to be similar to that of Bangabandhu Bridge."

The 4.8-kilometre Bangabandhu Bridge, which was opened to traffic in 1998, on the Jamuna river is a vital strategic economic road, rail, energy, and telecommunication link between the western and eastern parts of the country.

The project was implemented at a cost of Tk 3,745 crore.

Quader on June 6 told parliament that Tk 6,434 crore was collected as toll from vehicles using the Bangabandhu Bridge till May this year since its inauguration 23 years ago.

In his scripted answer to a question from an MP, the minister said Tk 4,104.21 crore was spent as operational and maintenance costs and also for payment of DSL (debt service liability) of the bridge during that period. The loan taken from development partners for the construction of the bridge would be repaid by 2034, he added.

On the other hand, BBA opened 1.52km Mukterpur Bridge over the Daleshwari in 2008. The bridge was built under a Tk 208.35 crore project to connect Munshiganj with Dhaka and Narayanganj.

REVISED TOLL RATE

As per the Bangabandhu Bridge toll rate revised in 2011, a motorcycle now pays Tk 40, car Tk 500, minibus Tk 650, bus Tk 900, small truck Tk 850, and large truck Tk 1,400 for using the structure.

The BBA attempted to increase the rate twice, but in vain. When it placed a revised toll proposal in November last year, the BBA broad did not endorse it considering the pandemic situation in the country.

The toll hike proposal for Mukterpur Bridge was also rejected at that meeting.

As per the present rate, a motorcycle pays Tk 10, an auto-rickshaw Tk 20, a car Tk 40, a minibus Tk 100, a bus Tk 200, a small truck Tk 150 and a large truck Tk 500 to cross the bridge.

Yesterday, the BBA again placed the toll hike proposal before the board. It

proposed raising the toll rate by 10 to 50 percent.

For Bangabandhu Bridge, it proposed a toll of Tk 50 for bike, Tk 550 for car, Tk 750 for minibus, Tk 1,000 for bus and small truck, and Tk 1,600 for large truck.

On the other hand, the BBA proposed a toll of Tk 30 for auto-rickshaw, Tk 50 for car, Tk 150 for minibus, Tk 250 for bus, Tk 200 for small truck and Tk 600 for large truck for using Mukterpur Bridge. It, however, proposed keeping the toll for bikes unchanged.

An official, who was aware of the meeting, said the BBA board discussed the toll issue elaborately and the road transport minister suggested reducing some rates.

Quader also said the revised rate should not be introduced before October this year, the official told The Daily Star wishing not to be named.

WHAT TRANSPORT OWNERS SAY
Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said they were not aware of any move regarding hiking of the toll rate.

"Our business has already taken a hit from the pandemic. Amid such a situation, raising the toll rate without holding talks with us is not appropriate at all," he told this newspaper yesterday.

Rustam Ali Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Truck-Covered-Van Owners Association, said if the operational costs of vehicles go up, the fares of truck and covered van will rise as well.

Asked about the matter, Abu Bakr Siddique said they have to depend on the toll revenue for bearing the maintenance costs of the two bridges, repay loans, and collect funds for two new projects.

"The toll hike proposal was placed before the last meeting [in November 2020]. But it was not approved then and the BBA was asked to place the proposal before the next meeting. So we have placed the proposal before the board meeting today [yesterday] and got the approval," he told The Daily Star.

Although there was a restriction on movement of long-haul buses in the first 24 days of May, a total of 826, 216 vehicles used the Bangabandhu Bridge that month and the BBA collected record 57.68 crore as toll, show documents.

The authority collected 1.72 crore as toll from Mukterpur Bridge last month.



Afghan Taliban hand over their weapons to the Afghan government as they join the peace program in Herat province, Afghanistan yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

They'll get payment after delivering items

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merchants from whom it bought products.

Besides, Evaly owes another Tk 73 crore to customers in their digital wallets. But the company has only Tk 2 crore in deposits in 10 banks.

With its assets, Evaly can repay only one-third of its liabilities to customers.

And the constant rise in liabilities puts the organisation at the risk of collapsing, the report said, while raising concern on nine other e-commerce sites including Alesha Mart and Dhamaka Shopping.

This prompted Brac Bank, Bank Asia and Dhaka Bank to suspend the use of cards for making purchases on the 10 e-commerce sites.

The other sites are E-orange, Sirajganj Shop, Aladiner Prodig, Qoom, Boom Boom, Adyen Mart and Needs.

City Bank, United Commercial Bank and LankaBangla Finance also

notified their customers that they will not be held liable for any fraud while purchasing goods on the e-commerce sites using their cards.

Then in a meeting yesterday at the commerce ministry -- which was attended by representatives of the BB, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission, the National Board of Revenue, home affairs' ministry, the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (e-CAB), MFS operators and banks -- the decision to hold payment came.

The move though can prove to be a hammer blow to the business model of Evaly, which is centred on taking payment from customers in advance.

However, Evaly welcomes the commerce ministry decision, said Mohammad Rassel, its chief executive officer.

The new payment mechanism was a proposal of the e-CAB to curb the anomalies by a section of the

e-commerce platforms in the country, said its President Shomi Kaiser.

The decision will bring back discipline in the sector, said AKM Fahim Mashroor, chief executive of AjkerDeal, a leading e-commerce site.

"However, I think this decision should only apply to companies against which allegations have been made. Otherwise, many good e-commerce platforms will be in trouble."

If it is applied to all, there should be exemptions for certain small amount transactions, he added.

However, no decision was taken at the meeting yesterday of what actions would be taken, if any, against Evaly and the other e-commerce companies, according to Rahman.

Asked why the ministry did not take a call on the 10 e-commerce sites, he said: "The aim of the meeting was to prevent further anomalies by the e-commerce sites in future."

11 nations decline aid to Pakistan

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that nations intend to give Pakistan or its refugees in India. It does, however, hold up several hundred million dollars in development funds on which Pakistan President Yahya Khan's regime had been counting.

In the previous year in which normal aid flowed -- the budget year ending June 30, 1970 -- Pakistan received \$316 million from the donors.

In addition, it was learned, the IMF decided for now against giving the central government a \$250 million package of foreign exchange that the Fund had been considering.

The Paris consensus was reached with the assent of the United States, despite strong urgings to the contrary from some US quarters. Washington's ambassador to Pakistan, Joseph S Farland, was known to believe the donor nations should meet soon to pledge assistance to greater influence the central government and lessen its dependence on China.

But the Paris meeting concluded that no early gathering of the aid

consortium should be held because it would openly confirm the widespread opposition to assistance now.

According to reliable sources, Belgium, Canada and Britain argued strongly in Paris that public opinion in their countries deeply opposed aid to Pakistan and that none should be forthcoming until Yahya's regime reestablished civilian rule in East Pakistan.

CHOLERA CASES AND DEATHS DOUBLED

The World Health Organization said today that there had been 64,924 cholera cases and 10,595 deaths from cholera, throughout the world so far, more than double the figures for the same period in 1970.

The most serious outbreak of the disease is in West Bengal where 24,394 cases and 3,588 deaths were recorded up to June 20 among Bangladeshi refugees.

PROTEST RALLY BEFORE US EMBASSY

A protest rally of Bangladeshis, led by KM Shehabuddin, representative

of the Bangladesh government and former second secretary to the Pakistan High Commission in India, was held in front of the US embassy in New Delhi. The demonstrators handed a memorandum to the US embassy officials. The memorandum urged the US government "to stop ships from proceeding to Pakistani ports and to take back the weapons. We can assure you that by such an act, the great American people will earn the lasting gratitude of our emerging nation at the critical juncture for helping it to protect democracy and the most basic human freedom and the lives of millions".

TAMABIL AND JAFLOM FREED

Two companies of EPR under the command of Subedar Major BR Chowdhury attacked Pakistan army locations at Tamabil and Jaflo. After a fierce fight, the Bangladeshi forces succeeded to free the two important areas. Two freedom fighters embraced martyrdom in the operation.

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Journalist stabbed

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the journalist wrote some reports which reportedly left Mirza, mayor of Basurhat municipality, irked. They alleged that Mirza at a public rally even threatened that he would break Suvash's leg.

The Daily Star could not verify this claim.

Around 12:45pm yesterday, some 40-45 people, all followers of Mirza, stormed into the journalist's home in Sahajadpur village of Companiganj, said the family.

Some of them beat up Suvash with iron rods and some stabbed him.

As Baby and Promit tried to save the journo, they were beaten as well.

As neighbours gathered outside the house hearing cries for help, the attackers left.

Suvash was rescued and taken to Noakhali General Hospital. His mother and son were at the local health complex.

"We have found critical injury marks on Suvash's head, hands and legs," said Syed Mohiuddin Abdul Azim, resident medical officer of the general hospital.

Companiganj Police Station Officer-in-Charge Saif Uddin Anwar said, "We will take legal action after receiving a written complaint."

This correspondent tried to contact Quader Mirza over cell phone repeatedly yesterday, but he did not

pick the calls.

His personal assistant Shadat Shahed said they were not linked with the incident. He said Suvash was a "journalist paid by the Quader Mirza's rival group."

"We have heard that Suvash has come under attack. But we don't know the attackers and we don't have any connection with the incident," said Shahed.

Meanwhile, the upazila administration yesterday enforced section 144 in Basurhat municipality area for 12 hours from 12:00pm as two groups of local AL convened rallies at the same time -- at 3:00pm -- and at the same place -- Rupali Chhattar.

One group is led by Mirza and the other by Mizanur Rahman Badal, organising secretary of upazila unit AL, also a follower of Mohammed Ekramul Karim Chowdhury, lawmaker of Noakhali-4 constituency.

As per section 144, no one was allowed to hold any rally, said Ziaul Haque Mir, upazila nirbahi officer of Companiganj.

Mirza came to limelight after making comments against corruption and misdeeds committed by AL men in Noakhali and Feni a few months ago. He also repeatedly criticised his brother Obaidul Quader and his wife.

This made the political situation in Companiganj volatile triggering multiple deadly clashes.

Complainants have to provide

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a short order following a writ petition filed by a businessman, Ekramul Ahsan Kanchan, who has been implicated in 49 criminal cases, seeking necessary directives to identify the informants and complainants.

On that day, the HC bench has ruled that the informants and complainants must submit the photocopies of their national identity cards and phone numbers to the police stations or courts when they file cases.

The court ordered the Criminal Investigation Department of police to enquire into the 49 criminal cases filed against Ekramul to find the informants and complainants. The CID has also been asked to submit the enquiry report to the HC within 60 days.

Besides, the court issued a rule asking the authorities concerned of the government to explain why they should not be directed to find the informants and complainants of the cases filed against Ekramul.

In the full text of the order, the HC bench ruled that the police officers concerned will follow other relevant procedures of their own consideration to identify the informants if their national identity cards or passports are not available.

The lawyers concerned of the complainants will identify them

(complaints) when they file cases with tribunals or courts if they have no national identity cards or passports, the HC said in the full text of order.

In the order, the HC judges said if the informants and complainants are foreign citizens or expatriates, they must mention the numbers of passports of the countries concerned while filing the cases.

On June 14, petitioner Ekramul's lawyers Zainul Abedin and Enamul Hoque Bosir told The Daily Star that 49 criminal cases have been filed with different police stations and courts across the country against their client Ekramul, a businessman from the capital's Shantinagar, on various charges, including murder, rape, torture of women, extortion and human trafficking, in last 11 years.

Ekramul has been acquitted and exempted of 36 cases and trial proceedings of the rest are running, the lawyers said, adding that their client has suffered in jail for over eight years in connection with 40 cases.

They said Ekramul is now out on bail.

Ekramul told The Daily Star that a group has filed "fake" cases against him in 13 districts in order to grab his land, house and factory. "I don't know the complainants and informants by face," he said.

Slipping back

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He also alleged that the houses were poorly built and the officials have misappropriated the funds.

Fifty-five-year-old Aysha Begum, another resident, said, "If these houses get inundated after a little rain, what will happen during actual floods? Where will we go?"

She added that the inundated toilet and kitchen make it particularly harder for women to live there.

Contacted, Mahmuda Parveen, who was the UNO of Shajahanpur during the construction of the houses, said, "We didn't have any other land where we could build the houses for the homeless. When we constructed the houses, the land was dry. The local chairman told us that they would make system to drain the water from the place."

However, she refuted the allegations of corruption and said the houses were well-built.

Asif Ahmed, who is the current UNO, said, "We arranged a primary school building where the residents will be taken for the time being. There is a canal called Danguli. Locals blocked the canal at seven places... We have cleared the canal. Hopefully, the water will be drained [through the canal] soon."

Man returns

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said Ratan and dozens of his accomplices went to a disputed land in the capital's Hazaribagh area on June 4 and fired three bullets at a man who claims to be the owner of the land.

They were hired by Abdul Hashem, the other man who claims ownership of the land, said the officer.

"In primary interrogation, Ratan and Arman admitted that they took part in the attack," he added.

Police have arrested Hashem and are looking for the others accused in a case filed with Hazaribagh Police Station over the incident.

Officials said Ratan was wanted in at least 25 separate cases.

Saiful Islam, additional deputy commissioner (Mirpur zone) of DB, said in 1996, Ratan hurled a bomb at a procession in Hazaribagh and killed a man named Sanu. Ratan was arrested and convicted.

Soon after he got released, Ratan got involved in extortion and other criminal activities and got arrested by Lalbagh police in an arms case, he added.

Saiful said Ratan got married in 2018 and has two children.

Hubble Telescope

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their vast force, would simply devour everything that came close to it, the accretion of material releases huge amounts of radiation, releasing heat and light.

Scientists put together this image using a composite of light from different parts of the spectrum, which revealed a "fascinating secret". Using Hubble's Wide Field Camera 3 (WFC3), scientists can capture our universe in ultraviolet, visible, and near-infrared light.

This galactic phenomenon is relatively uncommon, though, as Seyfert galaxies only account for ten percent of all galaxies in the known universe.

Hubble's space telescope is not without its own drama, however. Recently, NASA had to restart the spacecraft after a computer glitch put it, and all its scientific instruments, into safe mode.

The main computer stopped receiving the "keep-alive" signal, a standard "handshake" (a way of establishing a connection) between the payload and the spacecraft's main computers. It is set to be soon replaced by the James Webb Space Telescope, which NASA will send into orbit on 31 October aboard an Ariane 5 rocket.

This will give scientists the opportunity to look back 150 million to 1 billion years after time began -- something that has been previously inaccessible to them with Hubble.

Philippines grounds Black Hawk fleet after deadly crash

AFP, Manila

The Philippines grounded its entire fleet of Black Hawk helicopters yesterday after one of the new aircraft crashed during a night-time training flight, killing all six on board.

Three pilots and three airmen died when their S70-i went down near the Crow Valley training range north of Manila on Wednesday, Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana said.

"The entire Black Hawk fleet are grounded while the incident is being investigated," Lorenzana said.

The country ordered 16 of the multi-role aircraft from a Polish firm that made them under licence from the Sikorsky division of US defence manufacturer Lockheed Martin.

Eleven have been delivered since late 2020.

The government bought the Black Hawks to replace the air force's ageing fleet of Bell UH-1H helicopters, commonly known as the Huey. Many of them were acquired as surplus from the United States, Manila's longtime military ally.

Brazil sets record as 3rd wave breaks

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states such as Sao Paulo predicting shots for all adults by September.

The government of President Jair Bolsonaro is under scrutiny for delays and alleged misconduct in obtaining vaccines, having failed to respond to early offers from Pfizer last year.

The government instead struck a deal for more a expensive vaccine made by India's Bharat Biotech.

A Senate committee is probing allegations related to Bharat

amid a wider investigation of the government's response.

A Brazilian health ministry official told prosecutors he faced internal pressure from an aide to then-health minister Eduardo Pazuello to buy the Bharat shot.

In a press briefing on Wednesday, Bolsonaro's Secretary of the Presidency Onyx Lorenzoni said there had been no influence peddling in the Bharat deal and the vaccines were not overpriced.

The ministry did not respond

to request for comment about the allegations.

On Wednesday, the committee also called representatives of Facebook, Google and Twitter to testify before the committee as it weighs possible crimes related to misinformation online about Covid-19.

RUSSIA'S DELTA SPIKE

The pandemic has killed at least 3,893,974 people since the virus first emerged in December 2019, according to an AFP compilation of official data yesterday.