

EID HOME RUSH

Bottlenecks look ominous

TUHIN SHUBHRA
ADHIKARY

Eid holidaymakers could face long tailbacks at the bottlenecks on two major highways and at the ferry terminals on the Padma river.

The rush home is likely to gain momentum from tomorrow and peak on Saturday.

From Abdullahpur to Joydevpur intersection, a distance of 12km, on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, the construction work of Bus Rapid Transit Line-3 is likely to cause jams like it did in previous years.

On Dhaka-Tangail-Rangpur highway, a 13.5km section from Elenga to Bangabandhu Bridge and a 19km section from the bridge to Hatikamrul area may witness tailbacks due to road expansion work, also like previous years.

Congestion is not uncommon at ferry terminals in Paturia and Shimulia. The Eid rush will predictably multiply the congestion.

It can be particularly worse this time as fewer ferries are running on the Shimulia-Kathalbari route to ensure the safety of Padma bridge pillars.

There are no major bottlenecks on Dhaka-Chattogram and Dhaka-Sylhet highways, but the large number of vehicles combined with possible poor traffic management could create congestions, particularly at toll plazas of bridges.

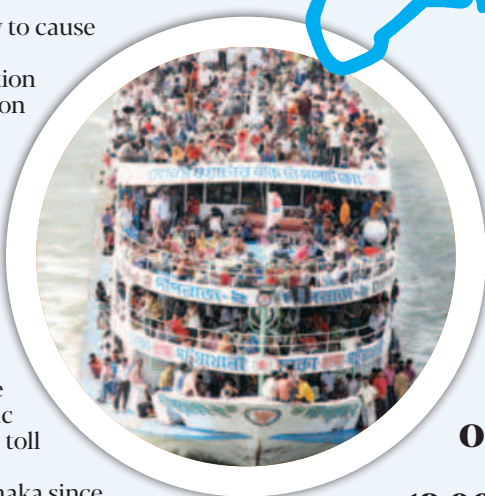
The good thing is, many people have already left Dhaka since the educational institutions closed on April 20.

Trains, especially the ones to north-western districts, are likely to face delays.

However, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate 46 new locomotives today, which are likely to make a positive impact.

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- More than 1.2 crore people are likely to leave Dhaka before Eid
- About 30 lakh people may leave city every day in 4 days preceding Eid
- Transport system has the capacity to carry 16 lakh people daily
- Buses to carry 8 lakh, trains 1 lakh, launches 1.25 lakh, bikes 3 lakh and cars 3 lakh people each day



On an average day, some 18,000 to 20,000 vehicles use Bangabandhu bridge. The number goes up to 50,000 to 60,000 during Eid rush



SOURCE: ARI AND BANGLADESH JATRI KALYAN SAMITY

INDONESIA'S EXPORT BAN

Edible oil supply crunch has begun

MOHAMMAD SUMAN and SUKANTA HALDER

Indonesia's abrupt announcement of a palm oil export ban from tomorrow has sent refiners in Bangladesh into zealous rationing, choking the availability of cooking oil at the retail level at a time when its consumption is high.

About half of the cooking oil used in Bangladeshi kitchens is palm oil, 80 percent of which comes from Indonesia.

The blanket export ban, which comes to secure local supplies as the world's largest Muslim population prepares for feasting during the Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, is expected to be temporary, going up to three weeks at most as the consumption demand is set to normalise after the festive period, according to analysts.

And yet, refiners in Bangladesh are exploiting the situation despite ample reserves.

The country has four lakh tonnes of edible oil, according to data from the National Board of Revenue and commerce ministry.

This is enough to meet the demand for at least the next one and a half months, according to AHM Shafiquzzaman, additional secretary at the commerce ministry.

About 8.5 lakh tonnes of palm oil and 4 lakh tonnes of soybean oil have been imported in the first three and a half months of this calendar year, according to the NBR.

"This is an artificial crisis," said Shafiquzzaman.

The Daily Star visited the wholesale and retail hubs in Dhaka and Chattogram and was met with the chorus of supply crunch.

"I have had no oil in my store for the last five days," said Monir Hossain, a salesman at Jaber Store in Karwan Bazar, the largest kitchen market in the capital.

It is the same scenario all over the country, according to traders.

Over in Pabna, shopkeepers are exploiting the situation by holding back on their stock of bottled and packaged soybean oil, whose labels come stamped with a maximum retail price, reports our correspondent.

They are instead nudging customers towards loose oil, whose price has been hiked.

In Chattogram, consumers are having to pay an additional Tk 8-10 for every litre of non-bottled soybean oil.

To navigate the reduced supplies from refiners, some supermarkets have started to limit the amount of cooking oil customers can buy.

For instance, each customer can buy a maximum of RELATED STORY ON B4 SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

TENTULTALA PLAYGROUND

'Uncle, please stop the work' Childrens' pleas fall on deaf ears

WASIM BIN HABIB

Inside the concrete jungle that Dhaka city has turned into, with buildings frequently sprouting up next to each other, the Tentultala playground has been a breathing space for residents of Kalabagan for decades.

For them, this small piece of land on Kalabagan's Lake Circus Road served as more than just a playground. It is the only open recreational space, covering around one bigha of land, in the area used for social, cultural and religious activities.

It is where locals stand shoulder to shoulder to perform Eid prayers or where they comfort each other during funeral prayers. It is where occasions like Independence Day, Victory Day and International Mother Language Day were celebrated together by them all.

The middle-aged came for their daily walks, teens dribbled the ball amongst themselves, some practised their bicycle skills, while kids from nearby buildings and slums dropped by every evening to live things up further.

NEWS ANALYSIS

But this open space -- a refuge from the daily grind of life -- will no longer be available for the locals as police, despite protests and repeated calls from residents, are continuing their construction of a new building for Kalabagan Police Station.

The police officials have appeared to be so rigid with their plan to occupy the ground that they even detained Syeda Ratna, a leader of the protests to save the Tentultala, along with her 17-year-old son.

The two were released 13 hours later after police faced a barrage of criticism for the detentions.

Eminent citizens, conservationists, green organisations and rights bodies have demanded that the government keep the ground open to all and stop the construction of a police station there.

However, nothing has worked as the construction work continued even yesterday amid police security and barbed wire boundaries.

Due to rapid population growth in the

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Not meant for anything but a playground

Architecture Dept forwarded proposal to the ministry concerned in 1980

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tentultala, the playground in Kalabagan on which the Dhaka Metropolitan Police is currently building a police station, was proposed to be kept as a playground by the Department of Architecture in 1980.

On the suggestion of the then Dacca Municipal Corporation, the department wrote to the Ministry of Public Works and Urban Development to develop a children's park at the Tentultala playground.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the letter which states, "This is a private residential area, has not left any space for common facilities like children's park, playground etc. ... The local people are very much interested in keeping the area as an open area and park for small children".

On January 31 this year, Dhaka Deputy Commissioner's Office handed over the playground to DMP to construct a building for Kalabagan Police Station. For several months, local residents have been demonstrating with the demand to keep it as it is for the sake of children.

According to the Playground, Open Spaces, Gardens, and Water Bodies Conservation Act 2000, no one can change the characteristics of a playground.

Yesterday, DMP said it had all permissions needed to construct the police station on the land.

In a 14-point statement sent to media, they said the government marked the 0.2 acre for sake of "public interest" to construct the police station.

It said the land is a government property and the housing and public works ministry was its custodian. After verifying all aspects, the district administration recommended the ministry of land to acquire the land for the police station.

In the process of land acquisition, they took NOCs from Rajuk and the Department of Environment. A local lawmaker also submitted a DO (Demi Official) letter to the home minister to set up a permanent police station on the playground to

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