



"All our freedom depends on press freedom... But in every corner of the world, freedom of the press is under attack."
UN chief Antonio Guterres

The Daily Star

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EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on 'blacklisting' corrupt individuals worldwide



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EXPANDING DHK-CTG HIGHWAY Impasse finally clearing up

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

An impasse over the upgradation of Dhaka-Chattogram Highway seems to be over as the Roads and Highways Department has started working to determine where the road will have six lanes and where it will have eight.

A consortium of consultants from home and abroad has already started a feasibility study and is expected to complete the task in 10 months. It will take another eight months to draw a detailed design for widening the highway, considered the economic lifeline of the country.

The Asian Development Bank is expected to fund the project, which is at its 2025 financing pipeline. A co-financier for the scheme, which will require large sums of money, may be needed.

Indecisions, short-sightedness and piecemeal measures have delayed the upgradation of the 232-km highway for a decade.

Considering the fast growing traffic between Dhaka and Chattogram, the government in 2013 decided to build an expressway. It dropped the plan in October 2019 and decided to widen the existing highway.

- Total length **232km**
- Consultancy fees Tk **44cr**
- Expansion work may start in late 2025
- ADB likely to finance expansion work

But it took three and a half years for the authority to launch the feasibility study.

"The impasse is apparently over. The highway will mainly be a six-lane one. However, there will be eight lanes at some points. The feasibility study will decide which places need eight lanes," RHD Chief Engineer Md Ishaque told The Daily Star yesterday.

There will be service lanes along the entire highway, he added.

Over 90 percent of Bangladesh's \$130 billion foreign trade depends on Chattogram Port and the current four-lane Dhaka-Chattogram Highway.

In 2009, the number of vehicles on the highway hovered between 20,000 and 25,000. Trucks and lorries accounted for 40 percent of the vehicles. By 2030, the number of vehicles may reach 66,000, according to an ADB document.

STUDY STARTS

The RHD on April 16 hired a consortium of five companies led by the SMEC of Australia to carry out the feasibility study and draw the detailed design, said Project Director Mohammad Shabbir Hasan Khan.

As per the contract, the companies will get Tk 44 crore for the tasks, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The feasibility study and the detailed design are being done under an ADB-funded project titled Technical Assistant for Road Transport Connectivity Improvement Project Preparatory Facility.

Whether it will be implemented under the usual financing model or a Public Private Partnership model has yet to be finalised, he said.

The consultants will also recommend the financing modality. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

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Sludge formed from salt, algae and waste at a shrimp enclosure in the Gojalia village of Khulna's Dumuria upazila. Paddies planted on at least 50 bighas of land across several villages in the upazila have been destroyed due to the pumping of brackish water in the nearby Chila river. Alleging that some politically influential locals of Magurkhali union have released the water into the river and secured off a portion there for shrimp farming, many paddy growers have filed complaints to the authorities concerned. However, nothing has been done yet to address their woes. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Govt to amend DSA by September

Says law minister at TIB event on World Press Freedom Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the Digital Security Act will be amended by September -- within the current Awami League government's tenure.

At a programme held by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, he said, "We have almost completed reviewing the technical recommendations on the law sent by the UN human rights wing."

In March, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk had said that his office had "provided detailed technical comments to assist with such a revision [of the law]".

His predecessor Michelle Bachelet had said that when she came to visit Bangladesh last year, her office too had given recommendations for repeal and revision of certain provisions of the act.

Anisul Huq also said a committee -- comprising members of the Legal and Parliamentary Division, and officials from the home and foreign affairs ministries, the ICT Division, and the Law and Justice Division -- is working on amending the law and has met "two or three times".

"Our government is not denying that the law has been misused and abused... However, the DSA will not be repealed," he added.

"While traditional media organisations have to do responsible journalism to maintain credibility with their audiences, online media and social media do not practise [such] responsibility and often indulge in cybercrimes. There needs to be a law to curb this."

He added, "Please do not feel threatened. We are not here to curb press freedom."

Meanwhile, the Press Freedom Index, released yesterday, placed Bangladesh at 163rd position -- down a notch from last year.

MORE STORIES ON PAGE 3

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Suspend DSA immediately, protect media freedom

Six int'l rights bodies urge govt

STAR REPORT

Six international rights bodies have called upon the Bangladesh government to immediately suspend the use of the Digital Security Act pending its repeal or amendment in line with international human rights law.

They also demanded the government conduct swift, impartial, transparent and effective investigations into all acts of violence against journalists and hold any suspected perpetrators accountable in fair trials.

"Drop all charges against all who have been accused simply of exercising their right to freedom of expression. End harassment of journalists and protect media freedom. Ensure that people can voice criticism

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REFUGEE REPATRIATION Rohingya team to visit Rakhine tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A 20-member Rohingya delegation will visit Rakhine tomorrow to see for themselves the facilities arranged by the Myanmar authorities before a planned repatriation of a group of Rohingyas likely by the end of this month.

This is the first time any Rohingya delegation would be visiting Rakhine to assess the situation there as the Rohingyas, since their largest influx in 2017, have not volunteered to return home despite two attempts, arguing that the situation was not conducive and that there was no guarantee of citizenship.

"We have been making such proposals for long as part of confidence building process. Myanmar has agreed on this this time," a foreign ministry official told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Seeing is believing. If they see, they can be convinced to return to the place from where they were driven away," the official said, adding that the repatriation may start with a group of more than 1,000 Rohingyas.

The delegation will visit a site close to the Bangladesh border, where Myanmar's military regime plans to resettle more than 1,000 Rohingyas under a pilot project.

"We will be showing the camps built by the Myanmar government for the Rohingyas. We will see the facilities there," Badliu, a Rohingya community leader and also a member of the delegation, told AFP yesterday.

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Buddha Purnima today

BSS, Dhaka

Buddha Purnima, the largest religious festival of the Buddhist community, is set to be observed today across the country.

On the occasion of the Buddha Purnima, President Mohammed Shahabuddin and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages and greeted the members of the Buddhist community as well as the countrymen.

In his message, President Shahabuddin said Buddha Purnima is a holy religious festival related to the birth and attaining supreme enlightenment and great passing away (Mhapporinirvana) of Gautam Buddha.

Gautam Buddha always sought welfare for mankind and he tried his best to make the whole world peaceful and prosperous. He disseminated the message of equity and friendship during his entire life to establish peace and harmony in the world, the president said.

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Two fathers of SSC examinees play a game of chess while waiting on a road divider near an exam centre in Green Road area. With exams lasting three hours, guardians find ways to keep themselves busy until their children are done with the tests and are ready to go home.

EDN INSTITUTIONS Anti-bullying guidelines issued

Victims now can file criminal cases

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The government on Tuesday issued an anti-bullying policy for educational institutions, with provisions that allow the filing of criminal cases against individuals responsible.

The policy contains the definitions of verbal and physical bullying along with cyberbullying, with a provision for punishing students, teachers, and members of the governing body for indulging in any form of aggressive behaviour that may have negative impacts on the victims.

It also has provisions to form "bullying and ragging prevention committees" in all public and private secondary schools, colleges, universities, madrasas, and technical educational institutions.

Titled "Policy for the Prevention of Bullying and Ragging in Educational Institutions 2023," it was issued by the education ministry and will be applicable to all educational institutions in the country.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Prof Nehal Ahmed, director general of Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, said, "Student can now feel safer at their educational institutions and also gain the courage to speak out against bullying and ragging as the policy will protect them."

The policy comes around four and half years after the

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