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BANGABANDHU TUNNEL UTILISATION

Narrow highway may serve as a bottleneck

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN

The narrow Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway may pose an obstacle to reaping the benefits of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel under the Karnaphuli, which will be opened on October 28 this year.

The overall progress of the tunnel's construction work is almost 98 percent. The approach road, the cross bridge related to the toll plaza and the two tubes for easy vehicular movement have all been completed, said sources at the Bangladesh Bridge Authority, the project's implementing agency.

The government has already announced the toll rate of the tunnel. This is the first tunnel in Bangladesh and the first ever under river tunnel for road communication in South Asia. It will connect Chattogram with Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, and Matarbari through an alternative route, which will also reduce the distance between Chattogram and Cox's Bazar by 40 kilometres, said Bridges Division officials.

But communication experts think the two-lane Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway, which is merely 18 feet wide, cannot take the increased pressure of traffic flow when the tunnel opens.

They think vehicles that will use this tunnel to arrive in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban are very likely to increase the traffic flow on the highway.



When the deep sea port at Matarbari in Cox's Bazar, the power plant in Moheshkhali and the economic zone in Mirsarai will start operation, the highway will face further traffic flows.

"If the highway is not of the same quality as the access provided by the tunnel, productivity of journey will be very negligible. Quality of service of the highway is worse than the local roads in some places. Therefore, the situation will be the same even after widening the road," Buet's transportation engineering expert Prof Shamsul Haque told The Daily Star yesterday.

However, Roads and Highways Department officials of Chattogram have said a project has been underway to widen the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway to tackle the increased traffic flow after opening the tunnel. The length of the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway is 148 kilometres. The ongoing RHD project is increasing the width of the highway from 18 to 36 feet.

Asked about how much time this project requires, RHD officials have said the ongoing project to turn the highway four-lane will be finished by 2026. They have also said the traffic flow is unlikely to rise on the highway till 2026 as the mega projects in Cox's Bazar will not be completed before that time.

Referring to an internal study, RHD officials have informed that the four-lane highway is enough to tackle the heavy traffic till 2040. Out of

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Tonnes of rice, paddy, and farm produce stored in barns were damaged by the recent floods and waterlogging in Chattogram division. In the photo taken yesterday in front of a beach resort in Satkania, Chattogram, a man is loosening up rice clumped during the inundation. Farmers in the area say they only hope to salvage half the foodgrain they had in storage.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

NUMBER OF STUDENTS GOING ABROAD

Triples in 15yrs despite sprouting univs

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The number of students going abroad for higher studies has tripled in 15 years even though opportunities for higher education within the country increased significantly.

Experts say that despite the number of universities doubling in the 15 years, the flow of students leaving could not be ebbed for several reasons, including the lack of quality in higher education, political uncertainties, and limited scope of employment opportunities in the country.

In 2022, at least 49,151 Bangladeshi students went abroad for studying in 58 countries, according to the latest Unesco data.

The number was 24,112 in 2013 and 16,609 in 2008.

Since 2008, the government established 25 new public universities and approved 56 private universities to meet the growing demand for higher education.

At present, 44 lakh students are enrolled in 53 public and 111 private universities and their affiliated colleges in the country.

However, educationists say the majority of the new institutions lack the necessary

infrastructure, skilled faculty, and research facilities to ensure quality education.

Dil Afroza Begum, an ex-member of the University Grants Commission (UGC), said the rising number of universities would mean little if the quality of education is not ensured.

"We are focusing on the construction of buildings, but not paying attention to what is needed for ensuring quality education — recruiting better teachers, research facilities, modern laboratories and others," Dil Afroza told The Daily Star recently.

There is no mechanism in place to measure the quality of education at universities here. But at international rankings, Bangladeshi universities perform dismally.

According to the 2023 Times Higher Education World University Rankings, Dhaka University and North South University were ranked between 601 and 800. Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU), Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, and Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (KUET) were ranked between 1,201 and 1,500.

The rankings, based on 13 performance

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SSIB LAUNDERING CASE

11 more assets in S'pore linked to suspects

THE STRAITS TIMES, Singapore

Eleven more properties were issued with prohibition of disposal orders in the billion-dollar anti-money laundering case involving foreigners from Fujian, said the Singapore police yesterday.

This takes the total number of properties issued with prohibition of disposal orders in the case to 105, after 94 properties were earlier issued with the orders. The orders mean the suspects cannot sell the properties.

The 105 properties, estimated to be worth S\$831 million, include seven detached bungalows at Sentosa Cove and 79 condominium units, 19 of which are under construction.

Another 19 commercial or industrial spaces were issued with the prohibition of disposal orders. The police said the properties are owned by the individuals under investigation.

They include the 10 who have been charged, other individuals wanted by the police, their spouses, or companies linked to these people.

The good class bungalows (GCBs) where the foreigners from Fujian were arrested in the islandwide anti-money laundering blitz on Tuesday are not owned by them, said the police.

The GCBs are not part of the 105 properties issued with prohibition of disposal orders. The police said they have neither seized nor issued prohibition of disposal orders against any GCBs in relation to the case.

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BTI pesticide importer blacklisted by DNCC

DIPAN NANDY and MD ABBAS

Dhaka North City Corporation has blacklisted Marshal Agrovet Chemical Industries Ltd over anomalies in importing BTI pesticide used in anti-mosquito drive.

It also cancelled the purchase order that was awarded to the company for importing the pesticide, known as Bacillus Thuringiensis Israelensis (BTI), Selim Reza, DNCC chief executive officer, told The Daily Star.

In reply to the show-cause notice from DNCC asking the source of the pesticide, the company claimed that the pesticide was imported from Singaporean company Bestchem.

The DNCC rejected the explanation and formed a three-member body, led by Additional Chief Engineer Mohammad Sharif Uddin,

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A baby sleeps inside a tiny mosquito net placed there by her homeless mother as a bite of an Aedes mosquito can cause dengue. The total number of confirmed cases of the disease this year reached 95,877. The photo was taken from a pavement in the capital's Khilgaon yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DENGUE OUTBREAK

More cases now outside Dhaka

YEAR	IN DHAKA	OUTSIDE DHAKA
2023 (till date)	46,933	48,944
2022	39,220	23,162
2021	23,617	4,812
2019	51,810	49,544

SOURCE: DGHS

HELEMUL ALAM

For the first time in the country's history, dengue cases outside Dhaka district have outnumbered cases inside the district, raising an alarm that the situation may worsen outside Dhaka.

Cases have now been reported in all 64 districts. Chattogram district came in second, after Dhaka, with 3,164 cases among the districts until yesterday morning.

Among others, 1,867 dengue patients were hospitalised in Chandpur, 1,743 in Laxmipur, 1,677 in Pirojpur and 1,426 in Barishal till yesterday morning.

Bangladesh witnessed the first dengue outbreak in Dhaka in 2000. Since then, the total number of cases in a particular year had never been higher outside Dhaka than inside.

Dhaka, however, has seen the highest 343 deaths out of the total 453 reported this year till yesterday.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), at least 1,565 dengue patients were hospitalised in 24 hours preceding yesterday morning, including 761 outside Dhaka.

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