



BANGABANDHU SHEIKH MUJIBUR RAHMAN TUNNEL

PHOTOS: RAJIB RAIHAN

The inauguration of South Asia's first underwater tunnel

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In a remarkable feat of engineering and vision, Bangladesh is set to unveil the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel proudly. Spanning under the Karnaphuli River, it stands as the very first tunnel in Bangladesh's landscape and the first-ever under-river tunnel for road communication in South Asia. The journey of the tunnel commenced in 2016 and is being inaugurated today, on October 28, 2023, by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Starting the next day, the tunnel will open for vehicular traffic.

It is truly transformative for its capacity to forge an alternative route, connecting Chattogram to the destinations of Cox's Bazar, Teknaf, and Matarbari. In doing so, it will reduce around 40 kilometers of the existing distance between these bustling hubs.

The main tunnel extends for 3.32 kilometers, featuring two four-lane tubes, each spanning

2.45 kilometers. Complementing this, two 5.35 km link roads at the tunnel's western and eastern termini, along with a 727-meter flyover at the Anwara end, are expected to elevate regional connectivity. The tunnel will allow vehicles to run at a maximum speed of 80 km. Impressively, the tunnel resides at depths ranging from 18 to 31 meters beneath the Karnaphuli River.

This project, supported by the governments of Bangladesh and China, received a total investment of Tk 10,689.71 crore. The Bangladesh government is providing BDT 4,619.70 crore in financing, with the remaining BDT 6,070.01 crore being funded by the Exim Bank of China. The China Communication and Construction Company Limited (CCCC) is responsible for the tunnel's construction. Bangladesh government envisions a 'One City Two Towns' concept, akin to Shanghai's, on both banks of the Karnaphuli River.

The Tunnel will yield the Financial and Economic Internal Rates of Return (IRR) at 6.19% and 12.49%, respectively. It is forecasted to boost Bangladesh's GDP by 0.166%.



The inception of the Karnaphuli Tunnel will undoubtedly alleviate the traffic scene at the port city. Currently, connecting the banks of Patenga and Anwara poses a formidable challenge. The only

passage is the Karnaphuli Bridge at Kalurghat, leading to increased travel distances and exacerbated traffic congestion. Travelers to Cox's Bazar face similar detours, compounding congestion woes,

both intercity and intracity. But with the tunnel, movement across the river will become smooth, and travellers will be able to reach Cox's Bazar and Bandarban swiftly. It will also eliminate the need to

cross the Shah Amanat Bridge over the Karnaphuli River.

The Bangabandhu Tunnel will be a key link for the Marine Drive Road from Chattogram to Cox's Bazar, unlocking tourism potential in South Chattogram and Cox's Bazar. It facilitates easy access to attractions like Parki Beach in Anwara, ultimately enhancing the region's tourism appeal.

The Karnaphuli River, with its vital maritime access to the Bay of Bengal, is essential for Chattogram Port, local industries, and the Bangladesh Navy. Building a tunnel was the only solution to preserve these crucial assets while addressing the city's transportation challenges.

The tunnel is expected to provide support to the Korean EPZ and the under-construction China EPZ. Furthermore, several major industrial groups have secured land for future factory development. New efforts are underway to construct 80 industrial facilities, spanning

textiles, shipbuilding, food processing, steel, and cement, along the Karnaphuli River. This will accelerate economic progress, raising living standards and employment opportunities in the southern region.

Adding to the list of positive impacts of the tunnel, it will connect to the Asian Highway network, enabling cross-border movement of goods between India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. This, along with enhancing Chattogram port efficiency, will greatly boost road-based cross-border trade. Being a part of the China Government's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative will also provide a key link in cross-country transport corridors.

The tunnel serves not just as a transportation route or boon to the economy but as a symbol of the nation's progress and development. With great expectations towards the engineering marvel, the country is ready to dive into the mighty river of opportunities.

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