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# BANGLADESH ON THE WORLD STAGE

SEGMENT 1

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## Karnaphuli Tunnel and Padma Bridge construction

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The tunnel development project lacks integration with the twin-town masterplan and does not have a corresponding approach road and connectivity plan with Matarbari and Cox's Bazar. Despite being touted as a groundbreaking development, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, upon completion, reveals itself as merely a river crossing facility with a high cost for road users and severe access restrictions. The objectives and expected returns, including the anticipation of revolutionising transportation, enhancing connectivity, promoting economic prosperity, and fostering regional development by reducing travel time and congestion, seem exaggerated and wishful.

In contrast to these claims, the original objectives, particularly for developing robust connectivity with Dhaka, industrial and energy hubs, and the tourist destination of Cox's Bazar, would have been better

bridge-based crossing facility would have been accessible to all modes of city transport, including pedestrians, bicycles, and various paratransit options such as CNG and Leguna. Moreover, despite the crossing site's channel width being nearly 1km, the adoption of the tunnel configuration necessitated an additional 1.4 km approach tunnel. Opting for a bridge would have allowed for a viaduct, a more cost-effective solution that avoids obstructing beach-bound tourist movements and waterfront-based livelihood activities. The current approach roads at both sides of the tunnel, meeting with at-grade roads, obstruct beach accessibility and create a mismatch in the standard of approach roads with the capital-intensive tunnel investment, resulting in unsafe and low-level service conditions. Given these considerations, the justification for the construction of the tunnel over other sustainable, more cost-effective



By streamlining transportation, the tunnel is anticipated to facilitate trade operations, contributing significantly to overall economic growth. PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN



**To prevent the recurrence of decision failure events like the Karnaphuli Tunnel, it is imperative to adopt proactive measures and strategic shifts in our approach to infrastructure planning.**

A critical examination is warranted to assess whether the Karnaphuli Tunnel can effectively realise its stated objectives and deliver the anticipated transformative impact.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

served by a double-decker 6-8 lane long-span suspension or cable stayed bridge.

Such a bridge could have been seamlessly integrated with a railway/metro system, harmonising with the twin-town land-use and transport master plan. To fulfil the twin-town development objective, the

long-span bridge options raises questions.

### LESSONS LEARNED

The option of a long-span suspension/cable-stayed bridge with no pier in the navigational channel, complemented by viaduct-type approaches, would have been a superior choice. This alternative offers

several advantages, including the absence of sedimentation problems and threats to ship movements. More significantly, it ensures expressway-standard safety and facilitates faster mobility without impeding beach-bound individuals, tourist movements, or elephant pass. This choice would have been in harmony with the goals of twin-city development and the promotion of tourist-friendly coastal activities and business environments.

However, to capitalise on these benefits and align with broader long-term objectives, there is a need for meticulous planning. This includes the formulation of a comprehensive land-use master plan and the establishment of downstream

access-controlled expressway connectivity. This network should strategically link with deep-sea ports, industrial hubs, and Cox's Bazar. Crucially, achieving these goals requires seamless inter-departmental integration facilitated through the active involvement of the planning commission. Only through such concerted efforts can the potential of this alternative be fully realised, contributing to a more sustainable, smart, and developed Bangladesh in the long run.

### WAY FORWARD

To prevent the recurrence of decision failure events like the Karnaphuli Tunnel, it is imperative to adopt proactive

measures and strategic shifts in our approach to infrastructure planning. Drawing lessons from other developed countries, the following initiatives may be proposed:

1. Public hearings for informed decision-making: Emulate the practices of developed nations by instituting public hearings before embarking on capital-intensive infrastructural initiatives. Public engagement ensures a transparent decision-making process, incorporates diverse perspectives, and aligns projects with the actual needs of the community. This participatory approach minimises the risk of decision failures and enhances public trust.

2. Strengthening planning units: All key implementation organisations, including Bangladesh Bridge Authority, Roads and Highways Department, Local Government Engineering Department, RAJUK, and Chittagong Development Authority, should establish robust planning units equipped with enhanced institutional capacities. The focus should be on cultivating in-house expertise for thorough research and development-based planning. Relying solely on external consultants may fall short in ensuring sustainable development within the constraints of limited land and construction resources.

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# Typhoon

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