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TO KNOW
Russia's war
economy is sustained
by revenues from
fossil fuels. It is time
to turn off the tap.
Ursula von der Leyen
European Commission
president

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CTG-COX'S BAZAR HIGHWAY

Expansion to put wildlife in peril

Warn environmentalists, Forest Department

SIFAYET ULLAH, Ctg

The Roads and Highways Department's move to expand the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar highway running through the Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary could spell disaster for wildlife habitats and disrupt several key elephant corridors in the ecologically sensitive area, warn forest officials and environmentalists.

RHD plans to expand a 63km section of the 148km-long two-lane highway into a six-lane one. Wild animals are already in danger of being struck by vehicles, as well as trains running on Dohazari-Cox's Bazar route, while crossing a 10km stretch of the sanctuary, according to forest officials.

"If the highway becomes wider, it will be nearly impossible for wild animals to cross the stretch... We strongly oppose any road expansion that will further endanger the sanctuary. It cannot withstand another blow in the name of development," said Abu Naser Mohammad Yasin Newaz, divisional forest officer of Chattogram Wildlife Division.

Chunati, a major habitat for Asian elephants in southeastern Bangladesh, is home to at least 372 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, according to a 2022 biodiversity assessment by conservation groups Nishorgo and Aranyak Foundation.

Among them are several endangered species such as hoolock gibbon, leopard cat, and Asian black bear.

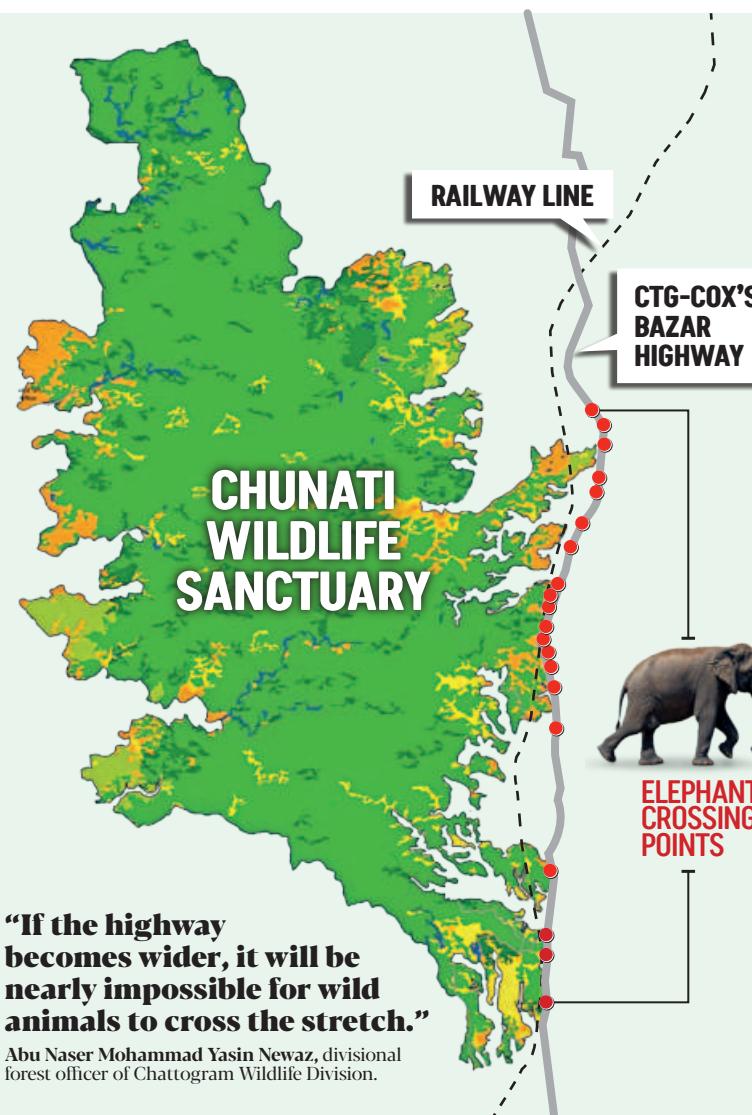
The forest area, spanning 7,764 hectares of land between Chattogram and Cox's Bazar, was declared a sanctuary in 1986.

On July 23 this year, RHD wrote to the Forest Department, seeking its opinion on the road expansion plan.

RHD maintained that the project is necessary to cope with the rising passenger and freight traffic in the region and to reap the full benefit of Matarbari Deep Sea Port, scheduled to begin operations in 2030.

In its reply to RHD, the Forest Department warned that the project would significantly increase the risk of roadkill or wild animal

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KEY POINTS

- RHD plans to expand a 63km section of the 148km-long two-lane highway into a six-lane one.
- The highway will cross a 10km stretch of Chunati wildlife sanctuary.
- Chunati is a major habitat for Asian elephants and home to at least 372 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.
- There are 20 key elephant crossing points in and around the sanctuary.
- Forest Dept recommended building a flyover over the 10km stretch of the sanctuary to facilitate the movement of wild animals.

METRO LINE-1

DHAKA AIRPORT TO KAMALAPUR

- DURATION: Sept 2019 -- Dec 2026
- ORIGINAL COST: Tk 53,977cr
- JICA FUNDING: Tk 39,450cr
- Govt financing: Tk 14,527cr

METRO LINE-5

HEMAYETPUR TO BHATARA

- DURATION: July 2019 - Dec 2026
- ORIGINAL COST: Tk 41,288cr
- JICA FUNDING: Tk 29,117cr
- GOVT FINANCING: Tk 12,121cr

Costs of 2 new metro lines set to soar

Taka devaluation puts strain on projects; govt in talks with Japan to adjust terms to keep them affordable

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and
ASIFUR RAHMAN

The cost of two metro rail projects — Mass Rapid Transit (MRT)-1 and MRT-5 — is projected to rise sharply, mainly due to the taka's devaluation against the dollar. This has raised doubts about their financial viability under Bangladesh's current financial arrangement with Japan.

When the two projects, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), were approved in 2019, their costs were estimated at Tk 95,000 crore. Since then, the taka has lost over 40 percent of its value against the dollar, meaning the costs will be revised up significantly.

According to an estimate by a consultant appointed by Japan, the total cost is now expected to double.

"Japan's consultant has given a revised cost, which has jumped significantly from the original. We are now trying to reduce this revised cost," Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed told The Daily

Star last week following his recent visit to Japan.

The ballooning costs highlight the strain Bangladesh's weakening currency is placing on large infrastructure schemes,

Japan's consultant has given a revised cost, which has jumped significantly from the original. We are now trying to reduce this revised cost.

SALEHUDDIN AHMED
Finance Adviser

particularly those reliant on foreign loans. While Japan remains Dhaka's largest development partner, officials say the government may have to explore alternative financiers if Tokyo is unwilling to

adjust terms to keep the metro projects affordable.

"If the cost is too high, we will have second thoughts. Then, we will think about alternatives," Salehuddin said.

JICA is also financing MRT Line-6, which has yet to be completed, though its major portion from Uttara to Motijheel is already in operation.

An indication of the possible rise in costs came from bidders' proposals for implementing one of the 12 packages under the 31.24 km MRT-1 line, which will connect Dhaka airport with Kamalapur.

An official associated with MRT-1 recently informed Dhaka Mass Transit Company Limited (DMTCL) — the implementing authority for metro rail projects — that the cost of Japan's funding package would rise to Tk 75,649 crore from Tk 39,450 crore, while the entire project was initially estimated at Tk 53,977 crore.

The official noted that it is not possible to calculate the costs of all packages at this moment,

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BNP's survey-based nomination plan vexes grassroots

SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Ignoring its own constitution, the BNP has begun selecting nominees for the upcoming national election through surveys conducted by its central leadership, a move that has left many grassroots leaders anxious and dissatisfied.

District-level leaders say they no longer trust this system, recalling that candidates were previously chosen through multiple surveys in past polls.

They fear bypassing grassroots opinion will fuel internal discord and weaken the party ahead of the election.

The BNP's constitution stipulates that its Standing Committee, acting as the Parliamentary Board, must nominate final candidates from panels formed by ward, union, upazila, thana or district committees.

Moreover, section 90B(iv) of the Representation of the People Order (RPO) requires grassroots participation in nominating parliamentary hopefuls.

Leaders, and political analysts, questioned how the party can follow its charter and election laws after the schedule is announced if it does not practise these itself.

Md Abdul Alim, a member of the Election System Reform Commission, said, "Instead of coming from the grassroots, candidates are being selected from the central level. Intra-party democracy is not being practised."

BNP leaders at the local level complain that this process has been sidelined. At least two dozen grassroots figures told The Daily Star they are in the dark, as surveys ordered by acting chairman Tarique Rahman's team now appear to determine nominations.

Manikganj BNP's former secretary SA Jinnah Kabir, seeking nomination from constituency-3, said, "Earlier, union and upazila BNP presidents and general secretaries

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APBn to resume security duty at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Armed Police Battalion (APBn) will resume security duties inside Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport as soon as possible, as decided at a meeting held at the Chief Adviser's Office on Wednesday.

The decision was taken to resolve the year-long dispute over security duties at Dhaka airport between the APBn, a specialised combat unit of the Bangladesh Police, and Aviation Security (AVSEC), a division led by the Bangladesh Air Force.

It was also decided that both APBn and AVSEC would carry out their respective responsibilities at the airport as mandated and that the BAF task force, currently deployed there, would withdraw as soon as possible, according to meeting notes on airport security and policing.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the meeting notes yesterday.

The meeting was chaired by Lutfe Siddiqi, special envoy to the chief adviser on international affairs. Among others, Civil Aviation Ministry Adviser SK Bashir Uddin, Civil Aviation Secretary Nasreen Jahan, Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam, Chief Adviser's Office Secretary M Saifullah Panna, CAAB Chairman Air Vice Marshal Md Mostafa Mahmood Siddiqi, Additional Secretary (Home) Faisal Ahmed,

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Discarded lifeboats -- salvaged from decommissioned ships -- are being repurposed into fishing vessels. Each boat sells for between Tk 15,000 and Tk 1 lakh. The photo was taken recently in Bhatiari of Sitakunda upazila, Chattogram.

'TK 568CR SCAM' BTRC sues Beximco and IGW top brass

MAHMUDUL HASAN and
EMRUL HASAN BAPPI

The telecom regulator has filed a case against Beximco Group Chairman Ahmed Sohail Fasihur Rahman, Vice-Chairman Salman Fazlur Rahman, CEO Shayan F Rahman, and 22 current and former members of the IGW Operators Forum (IOF), accusing them of embezzling over Tk 568 crore.

The case also brings charges of fraud, violation of licensing and contractual conditions, and criminal breach of trust, according to court documents.

The others accused in the case include current IOF executive members AKM Shamsuddoha, Mohammed Abdus Salam, Brig Gen Md Abdul Hannan, Gazi Md Saluddin, Hafizur Rahman, Khalid Islam, Md Zainal Abedin, Nadir Shah Qureshi, and Nazrul Islam.

The accused also include former IOF members, said an official of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), requesting anonymity. They are Syed Moinul Haq, Ashik Ahmed, Imran Karim, Kafil HSMueed, Md Mahatul Amin, Mir Nasir Hossain, Mohammad Azizul Haque, Mohammad Sarwar Hossain, Abul K Shamsuddin, SM Ashikur Rahman, Sohel Sharif, Tareq Ekramul Haque, and Tajin Alam.

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