

# Bangabandhu Tunnel awaits inauguration; toll rates finalised

September 24, 2023

**Online Desk:** The Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel, running beneath the Karnaphuli River in Chattogram, is now awaiting inauguration, with the primary construction phase successfully concluded. The main tunnel is fully equipped and prepared for vehicular movement. This historic project marks the country's first-ever underwater tunnel, and preparations for its grand inauguration are underway.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the tunnel in Chattogram on October 28. Marking the occasion, the prime minister will address a rally at the Anwara end of the tunnel. Commencing from the following day, the tunnel will be open for vehicular traffic, providing a significant transportation milestone for the region.

In this regard, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said the primary construction phase of the tunnel has been successfully concluded. "Presently, the focus is on resolving technical matters within the tunnel. The inauguration of this remarkable project heralds Bangladesh's entry into the era of underwater tunnels," said Quader. This 'monumental achievement' will usher in a new era of communication within the country, marking a source of immense national pride, he added.

The Bridges Division Secretary Md. Manzur Hossain told UNB that the primary tunnel is fully ready for vehicular traffic. "Ongoing efforts encompass various aspects, including the establishment of essential infrastructure such as fire service and police station buildings. The overall progress of the tunnel project stands at 98 percent," he said. "Our activities will continue even after the inauguration. It has been discussed to establish a police station, a dumping area, and a station, and the space is available for that. Those who are involved in the operation and those who will perform maintenance will have their own vehicles," he added.

The secretary said that the traffic division has devised a dedicated plan for managing the flow of traffic both within and around the tunnel area, aiming to ensure seamless transportation. Inside the tunnel, vehicles will be able to run at a speed of 80 kilometres per hour. It has been decided which vehicles will run in the tunnel. Tolls have also been fixed, said the Bridges secretary (see below).

"The concept of the tunnel is new to us. That's why it has some challenges. It is different from other bridges or roads. In that case, we have to make sure that the tunnel will be safe and those who use it will also be safe," said Hossain, adding, "From that perspective, I don't think it's safe for two- or three-wheelers at the moment."

Harun-ur-Rashid, project director of the tunnel, told UNB that the scope of Chittagong city will increase once the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman tunnel is opened. "Chittagong city marks one end of the tunnel, while the other end leads to Anwara Upazila. The development of tunnels is transforming Anwara into a burgeoning city. Concurrently, the land prices in Anwara Upazila have seen a substantial increase."

Numerous industries, both large and small, are emerging on both sides of the road leading to the tunnel's terminus in Anwara Upazila. When the tunnel becomes operational, it will reduce the Karnaphuli River crossing time to just three minutes.

As time is of the essence, the economy is expected to thrive. The tunnel is poised to bring about a transformative change in road connectivity between the capital, Dhaka, and Chittagong city, as well as the tourist destination of Cox's Bazar. The main tunnel spans a length of 3.32 kilometres, with each of the two four-lane tubes measuring 2.45 kilometres.

Additionally, there will be a 5.35 km link road at both the west and east ends of the main tunnel, along with a 727-metre-long flyover at the Anwara end. The tunnel is situated at a depth ranging from 18 to 31 metres beneath the Karnaphuli River.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina initiated the commencement of boring for the first or northern tunnel from Patenga to Anwara on February 24, 2019. The loan agreement had been signed on June 30, 2015, following a feasibility study of the project in 2011 and a Memorandum of Understanding in 2014. Construction work officially began on December 5, 2017, following the appointment of the contractor.

This project is jointly funded by the Governments of Bangladesh and China (G2G), with a total cost of Tk 10,698 crore. The construction work for the tunnel is being carried out by the China Communication and Construction Company Limited (CCCC). The Government of Bangladesh is executing this project with the aim of creating a 'One City Two Towns' concept, similar to Shanghai in China, on either side of the Karnaphuli River.

A total of 12 types of vehicles will be subject to toll charges when using the 3.43 km long Bangabandhu Tunnel. The minimum toll fee has been set at Tk200, applicable to private cars. Pickup trucks will also be charged Tk200 for each crossing, while microbuses will be charged Tk250. Buses with fewer than 31 seats will incur a toll of Tk300, while those with more than 32 seats will pay Tk400. Big buses with three axles will be charged a toll of Tk500.

The toll for trucks capable of carrying goods up to five tonnes has been fixed at Tk400. Eight-ton trucks will have to pay Tk500 and 11-ton trucks will have to pay Tk600. A three-axle container trailer will cost Tk800. A four-axle trailer will cost Tk1,000. However, an additional Tk200 will have to be paid for each additional axle. The toll rate will come into effect on the day the tunnel is opened for vehicular movement.