

# Karnaphuli Tunnel costs nearly twice its earnings : Minister to JS

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**Online Desk :** The operational and maintenance costs of the Karnaphuli Tunnel in Chattogram are more than double its monthly toll earnings, with the government spending nearly Tk 6.95 crore a month against an average monthly income of Tk 3.37 crore from toll collection, Parliament was told on Monday. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Shaikh Rabiul Alam disclosed the information while responding to a starred question from NCP MP Md Abul Hasnat of Cumilla-4 in the tabled question.

He attributed the higher expenditure to the need for uninterrupted power supply inside the tunnel, lighting, ventilation, fire safety systems, CCTV surveillance and traffic management. Rabiul Alam said immediately after the tunnel was opened, its daily operation and maintenance cost was around Tk 37 lakh. However, through the government's austerity measures and efforts by the Bangladesh Bridge Authority to reduce less essential expenditures, the daily cost has now been brought down to around Tk 22-23 lakh.

He also informed Parliament that the government has taken several initiatives to make the tunnel financially viable. Responding to another question from reserved seat MP Mosammat Nazmun Nahar, the minister said the government plans to launch the country's first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service along the 20.5-kilometre corridor from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport to Shibbari in Gazipur to ease traffic congestion.

He said the government is considering ways to improve the project further to ensure maximum public benefit. On measures against unfit vehicles, the minister, replying to a question from Narayanganj-4 MP Abdullah Al Amin, said vehicles whose fitness certificates expired more than 10 years ago and have not been renewed are being removed from roads and their registrations cancelled.

Vehicles whose fitness certificates expired five years ago are being targeted for renewal, while lists of both categories have been sent to police and notices issued to owners, he added. Replying to Bhola-4 MP Mohammad Nurul Islam, Rabiul Alam said the government has undertaken an initiative to install GPS devices in all public transport vehicles to improve highway discipline, ensure passenger safety and monitor vehicle movements.

The system will enable authorities to take legal action against drivers and owners of vehicles exceeding the prescribed speed limits, he said. On the proposed second Jamuna Bridge, the minister told Parliament, in reply to Jamalpur-3 MP Md Mostafizur Rahman Babul, that the process of appointing a consultant to conduct a feasibility study is underway. Negotiations with the selected consulting firm have already been completed and the agreement is expected to be signed soon, he said.

The minister said three possible alignments are under consideration: from Sariakandi in Bogura to Madarganj in Jamalpur, from Balashi in Gaibandha to Dewanganj in Jamalpur, or another suitable corridor. Responding to reserved seat MP Selina Sultana on battery-powered rickshaws, Rabiul Alam said the government is preparing regulations requiring the vehicles to operate on local feeder roads instead of highways, making registration compulsory, requiring drivers to hold licences and introducing strict route control for three-wheelers and similar vehicles.

Meanwhile, replying to reserved seat MP Nipun Roy Chowdhury, the minister said Bangladesh Railway, with technical support from BUET, has launched a pilot project to install automatic barriers at three separate level crossings in Dhaka. Based on the results, similar systems will be introduced at all important authorised level crossings. The government also plans to install cameras and smart gate systems at major level crossings in the future, he added.

