The Karnaphuli river’s tunnel boring work will start by September this year, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader told parliament on Thursday.

In response to lawmakers’ queries, he also said the tunnel boring machine (TBM) has already been manufactured in China and it will reach Bangladesh by May this year.

In a scripted answer, Quader informed the House that setting up of camps and housing facilities for the construction crew and other facilities including batching plants and deep tube wells have already been completed.

A tunnel boring machine is used to excavate tunnels with a circular cross section through a variety of soil and rock strata.

The tunnel, which is a first of its kind in Bangladesh, will improve the Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox’s Bazar highway network. It may later be linked to the proposed Asian Highway Network, enabling road communications with Myanmar and India.

Obaidul Quader in his reply told the House that during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina’s visit to China in June 2014, an agreement for the tunnel project was signed between the communications ministries of the two countries.

In 2015, a commercial agreement was signed with a Chinese company nominated by the Chinese government to construct the tunnel on government to government (G2G) basis.

Quader also said the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) on November 24, 2015 approved the much-hyped multilane road tunnel project under the Karnaphuli River.
Besides, a loan agreement was also signed with the Chinese government and its first instalment, US $141.16 million, has already been paid to the construction company, added Quader.

According to the officials concerned, the length of the tunnel will be 3.40 kilometres with an approach road of 4.89 kilometres alongside 800 metres of bridges linking the main city, port and western side of the Karnaphuli along with the heavy industry-prone eastern side of the river.

The tunnel is also considered essential because heavy siltation on the Karnaphuli river bed has been a main problem for proper functioning of the Chittagong Port and also for building new bridges. The tunnel will also create scopes for establishing newer industries on the eastern side of the river.

Replying to another query, Quader informed the House that the government has sought monetary assistance from development partners to construct the second Padma bridge at Aricha-Daulatdia point. But the government is yet to get any response from the development partners.
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