Karnaphuli tunnel project approved

Ecnc okays 12 projects involving Tk 16,978.80cr

STAFF REPORTER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presides over a meeting of the Executive Committee of National Economic Council at the NEC conference centre in the capital's Sherebangla Nagar area yesterday. PID PHOTO

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday endorsed the much anticipated construction of multi-lane road tunnel under Karnaphuli river project in Chittagong at an estimated cost of Tk. 8,446.64 crore. The tunnel is expected to take communication systems of the port city to new heights.
Construction of tunnel was approved at ECNEC meeting held at NEC Conference Room in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar with ECNEC Chairperson and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Planning Minister A.H.M. Mustafa Kamal said that ECNEC approved a total 12 projects at Tk. 16,978.80 crore. "Of the total project cost, Tk. 11,725.19 crore will come from the government exchequer, Tk. 4.92 crore from the organisation's own fund and Tk. 5,248.69 crore from project assistance," said Mustafa.

About the Karnaphuli tunnel, he said it is the government’s dream project, which, once implemented, will improve connectivity with Chittagong and Cox's Bazar. Of the total outlay of Tk. 8,446.64 crore for this project, the government will provide Tk. 3,647.20 crore while the remaining Tk. 4,799.44 crore will come from China as project assistance; he informed.

A Planning Commission official said that the project will serve multiple purposes including making Chittagong the centre of communication, developing communication system of Dhaka-Chittagong-Cox’s Bazar National Highway, creating a link with Asia Highway Network, improving communication on both sides of the Karnaphuli river, reducing pressure of traffic on the two existing bridges and building “One City Two Town” a la Shanghai in China and Hong Kong.

The project will be implemented by June 2020 by the Bangladesh Bridges Authority under Road Transport and Bridges Ministry. Last June, Road Transport and Bridges Ministry had inked a deal with Chinese firm, China Communication Construction Company Ltd (CCCC), for construction of a two-lane tunnel under Karnaphuli river. The official said that the length of the proposed tunnel will be 3.40 km, with an approach road of 4.89 km alongside 800m bridges linking the main city, port, and western side of Karnaphuli along with heavy industry-prone eastern side of the river.

The tunnel is essential also because of heavy siltation on the Karnaphuli river bed which has been a hindrance to proper functioning of Chittagong port. It will improve scope for establishing newer industries on the eastern side of the river. Later, it could be linked with the proposed Asian Highway Network supposed to establish road communication with neighboring Myanmar and India.

Another Planning Commission official said that Bangladesh Bridges Authority, with support from CCCC and Ove Arup and Partners Hong Kong Limited, had jointly conducted a technical and financial feasibility study for constructing the tunnel. Initially, the estimated project cost was Tk. 5,600 crore but following the Pre-evaluation Committee (PEC) meeting on March 22 this year, the DPP was restructured with an estimated cost of Tk. 8,446.64 crore.

The tunnel will be located at the estuary of Karnaphuli for connectivity of Chittagong city with the proposed deep-sea port and Cox’s Bazar, the tourist town along the Bay of Bengal. The multi-lane tunnel route will pass through the river close to Navy College on one side, and Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) and Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company (KAFCO) on the other. It will cut the road distance between Chittagong and Cox’s Bazar, apart from easing heavy traffic on Dhaka-Chittagong Highway entering the port city to go to other parts of Chittagong division.

Apart from Karnaphuli Tunnel, another project titled “Establishment of National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery, Dhaka” was also approved at the ECNEC meeting at a cost of Tk. 522.39 crore.

Under this project, the National Burn and Plastic Surgery Institute will be set up as a centre of excellence at Chankharpul in Dhaka.

The Department of Health under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare will implement the project by December 2018. The main objectives of this project include: providing developed burn and plastic surgery services at affordable cost, building skilled manpower in burn and plastic surgery issues through post-graduation courses and short-term training, and conducting awareness programmes on burn and plastic surgery.

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