

Expressway unlikely

The Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor

BANGALORE: The road less travelled upon may make eminent sense for expanding horizons of the mind, but not much sense for building fancy corridors resplendent with highways and townships. Estimates of traffic between Bangalore and Mysore show that the success of the Bangalore-Mysore Infrastructure Corridor will depend more on the various townships to be constructed rather than toll revenues from the highway.

Current traffic levels as well as projections of future traffic flows between the two cities do not justify charging tolls on the Bangalore-Mysore expressway, if one goes by World Bank principles on running toll roads.

According to the World Bank, toll roads carry heavy volumes of traffic and are generally in the vicinity of highly urbanised areas. While Bangalore and Mysore fit the bill of urbanised areas, current estimates put traffic between the two cities at 6,000 passenger car units (PCUs) per day, which is expected to grow by 10 per cent per annum. A car is one PCU while a truck would be six PCUs.

According to the World Bank, "As a general rule, however, toll revenues will only cover all costs when: (1) traffic volumes are at least 10,000-15,000 vehicles per day and growing." The traffic flow on the Bangalore-Mysore stretch is obviously far

below average world standards.

The World Bank has also calculated average toll rates to be charged for private vehicles at "\$0.03 to \$0.06 per km." At Rs 42 to a dollar, even the lower rate of \$0.03 per km per vehicle would mean a toll rate of Rs 1.26 per km per vehicle. Compare this to the 50 paise per PCU per km that the promoters of the project, the Kalyani Group, plan to charge and it is evident that costs would not be covered even at higher traffic levels.

The logistics get kinked even further when one realises that there are currently two highways to Mysore, the Mysore road and the Kanakpura road. Over and above, there is an existing railway line. Incidentally, the Bangalore Mysore Infrastructure Corridor, the mother project, has the possibility for setting up an additional railway line between the two main cities of the state.

It may be argued, of course, that the current project does not include the additional railway line and is merely a possibility if and when the need arises. In the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the government of Karnataka, the corridor includes the setting up of five self-sustainable township communities with a population of 100,000, an outer peripheral road for Bangalore city, generation of 400 MW of power and 85 million

GLOBESCAN

Cyclone alert in Bangladesh

DHAKA: Bangladesh on Saturday sounded an alert in coastal areas and shut operations in two major ports following a severe cyclone in the Bay of Bengal. The Chittagong and Mongla ports have been shut and vessels have been asked to move to safety. The official BSS news agency said danger signal seven in a scale of 10 had been put out for the southern cities of Khulna and Mongla while it was at six for the country's main port city of Chittagong in the southeast. The storm was centered 660 km south-west of Chittagong, the BSS said adding it was expected to move in a north-easterly direction. —PTI

5 Tigers killed

COLOMBO: Five Tamil Tiger militants were killed and one soldier injured while three terrorist bunkers were completely damaged during anti-militancy operations conducted by government troops in Sri Lanka's embattled northeast during the last two days, the operation's head...

Habibie probe

JAKARTA: Exactly six months after he took power from former strongman Suharto, Indonesia's current head of state B.J. Habibie on Saturday launched a commission of inquiry into corruption allegations against his predecessor and one-time mentor.

The probe into Mr Suharto's wealth appears to be a major concession to protesting students who have fought bloody street battles with the military to demand that Mr Suharto, 77, be tried for illegally enriching himself and his family during 32 years as President of the south-east Asian nation.

Speaking on behalf of President Habibie, state secretary Akbar Tanjung told reporters the commission would "examine and investigate the wealth of former President Suharto".

Members of the commission have not yet been appointed.