



New Road Bypasses Dangerous Ferry in Indonesia

LAMNO, Aceh—The line to board the Lambeso River ferry is crowded, and the four-car limit makes a long wait under the Acehnese sun almost a certainty. Adul Puteh, a merchant transporting goods from a traditional market in the north to his store in Calang, stands in the shade. Patiently, he passes time talking with other drivers and smoking kretek, the pungent Indonesian clove cigarette.

“We have no choice,” says Pak Adul. “The ferry is dangerous, but without transporting my goods, I cannot feed my family.”

Pak Adul’s problem is about to be solved. In mid-April, a temporary bypass for the national road will be officially opened and the Lambeso River ferry rendered obsolete.

The bypass is part of USAID’s \$245 million plan to rebuild roads and bridges in the Western Sumatra province of Aceh, where more than 200,000 died in the December 2004 tsunami.

The usual wait of one to four hours will be shortened to a 20-minute journey; most important, the simple journey across the Lambeso will again be safe.

The tsunami that hit Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, the Maldives, and Somalia ripped through Aceh and destroyed much of the region’s infrastructure. Many bridges were swept away along the 240 km road from the provincial capital Banda Aceh to the trading hub of Meulaboh.

The loss of the Lambeso River Bridge interrupted commerce up and down the coast. To close this gap, a makeshift ferry to cross the Lambeso was established.

The small, floating wooden barge is made of planks, many rotting from exposure, that were tied, nailed, and wedged together to form an improvised deck. The structure creaks under the weight of trucks, cars, and people.

Men dangle from the side, and women carrying babies hang on for their lives, as the barge makes its journey from bank to bank. Fear of capsizing is on everyone’s mind. A truck has already fallen off.

Teuku Umar, a local vendor, contemplates the crossing while adjusting his intricately woven green, black, and gold topi, the traditional head cover worn by men in Aceh. He said: “Inshallah [God willing], the ferry will safely arrive. Catastrophe is not in our hands, but finding a better way to cross is.”

USAID/Indonesia Mission Director William M. Frej said, “Reconstruction of the Banda Aceh to Meulaboh Road is progressing. This is a small, but important step forward. The road to Meulaboh is long, and the challenges are many, but the U.S. project will be completed in the anticipated three-year reconstruction period.”



Jeff Borda, IRG

Indonesians anxiously cross the river on an old ferry. Ferries were not used often, as people took a nearby road. But for the past year, the road was closed because of damage it suffered during the tsunami. USAID has now helped repair and reopen it.



The new road bypass built by USAID is a safer land based option that is expected to decrease travel time across the Lambeso River by over three hours.

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