

# Railway limps along on loss

SHAHIDUL ISLAM

vacant," labour leader Siraj Ullah said.

Vacant also are 1,000 posts of stationmasters, over 250 of drivers (loco master) and 500 of security guards, he said.

He said Bangladesh Railway once had 65,000 permanent posts. "During Ershad regime it was reduced to 52,000 and BNP rule in 1991 it came down to 40,000, but now we have around 35,000 permanent posts," he said.

In such a situation, the justification of continuing the golden handshake or terminations of employees and workers have raised questions among many and this discontent may lead to an outburst of agitation anytime, sources added.

Railway employees and workers staged a series of demonstrations in the Central Railway Building (CRB) and the eastern zone headquarters in Chittagong, protesting the terminations.

At least 12,000 railway employees have been terminated so far under the golden handshake programme. There has not been any recruitment since 1986. Besides, about 2,000 employees go on retirement each year. And all these factors for years together have reduced the number of staffs to almost half.

About 5,000 employees more might have been served with the termination notices soon according to the suggestion of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) that can fuel the general sentiment of the workers and employees, sources said.

Meanwhile, leaders of trade unions in this sector urged the government for positive approach, upgradation of services and modernisation of railway to make it a profitable organisation.

Bangladesh Railway has been limping along on the continued financial loss and shortage of staffs and huge rears.

The situation is going from bad to worse due to poor passenger service and deplorable condition of trains.

The gigantic public organisation has been burdened with a loss of around Tk 15,000 crore accumulated during the last 33 years, Railway sources said.

In addition to this, different organisations owed nearly Tk 20,000 crore to the railway, amassed over the years for taking its services.

Organisations such as Chittagong Steel Mills, Adamjee Jute Mills and Amin Jute Mills topped the list of defaulters followed by Food Department as they didn't pay arrears to railway for taking the facility of 'Siding Line'.

The officials concerned are indifferent to realising the amount, but the most unfortunate thing is that is the employees not the officials always face the music for this.

A large number of vacant posts at different railway tiers and 'unplanned' terminations in the name of golden handshake are also responsible for the situation, officials and trade union leaders said.

Shortage of staffs has already left at least 20 railway stations across the country, of which 13 are in the Chittagong region, inoperative for quite a long period.

"At least 10,000 posts are lying vacant till date and 4,000 important posts of way-men that are needed so badly for smooth functioning of the organisation have also fallen



Fragile rail tracks, left, and the ramshackle shuttle train, right, on CU-Chittagong city route stand testimony to the poor condition of the Railway. (File Photo)

## Bahir Sangha - a hope for the deaf

SHAHADAT HOSSAIN RIAD

Parvez Sheikh, a deaf since his birth, now considers himself a self-reliant man -- a symbol of success to the members of Chattogram Badhir Unnayan Sangha, an association of the deaf.

Parvez, who read up to class seven, became a member of the organisation when he came to the port city from Khulna in search of a better life in 2002.

Parvez, now a young man of 24, works at Fobian Industries Limited, a garments factory, at Agrabad in metal zipper section. He earns around Tk 3,000 a month with four-hour overtime duty.

"Bahir Sangha imparted me some basic trainings and helped a lot to get this job and now I am a complete self-reliant man. I deposit Tk 1,500 with a bank every month after meeting my mess rent and other expenditures,

Parvez said.

Established in 1998 at a tiny thatched house at city's Jamal Khan, the Badhir Sangha has now 150 members, including 50 women. It has no permanent structure of its own.

Firoz Ahmed, one of the founders of the association and also a deaf, donated a piece of land to the Sangha to begin its activities with view to making the deaf self-reliant.

The Sangha bought two sewing machines recently from its own fund, but those could not be set up in the office as it is a thatched house. Now some members are using these machines at a mess. They make clothes, including shirt, pant and dress for children.

On the other hand, some make handicraft, showpiece, cane and bamboo goods and some do painting. Two women members of the Sangha -- Baby

and Baly -- received Bangladesh Women Association (BWA) prize last year for their outstanding performance in making clothes for kids.

The organisation also took part in different fairs in last two years in the port city to promote their products.

"We set up stall in the Independence Day fair last year and earned around Tk 10,000 selling out our own products. Besides, we took part in the largest fair in the port city -- Chittagong International Trade Fair this year and earned around Tk 25,000. Chattogram Badhir Unnayan Sangha General Secretary Neemai Banik said.

"Apart from this, we also took part in the Bangladesh Institute of Small and Cottage Industries (BISIC) fair twice and earned nearly Tk 10,000. We hope we will be able to build a semi-pucca house on our own land soon, Neemai added. He works at a jewellery shop in

the city.

Ershad Hossain Rasel, Md. Mohi Uddin and Mir Mosharraf Hossain of the Sangha became champions in chess, carom and badminton competitions organised by Chittagong Deaf Sports Organisation on the occasion of the International Day for the Challenged.

"But it is very sad that neither the government nor any other non-government organisations are coming to the aid of the Chattogram Badhir Unnayan Sangha, Neemai said.

He said that some local NGOs, working with the disabled people, had deprived them of getting foreign as well as government aid.

He sought cooperation of the social welfare ministry as well as government and non-government organisations working for the disabled to run the Sangha smoothly.



With the renovation work of century-old Kalurghat bridge beginning on July 1, road communication between the southern region of greater Chittagong and other parts of the country will mainly depend on outdated ferry service as traffic on the bridge is likely to be suspended for the next six months and a restriction on the movement of heavy vehicles on Shah Amanat Bridge has long been in place.

### Investment needs security

People's capacity for investment has increased and now security of the investment has to be ensured. It also needs to speed up customs and port services and make them easier as well.

Bangladesh Tariff Commission (BTC) Chairman Professor Mohammad Ali Taslim said this while he was exchanging views with Chittagong Chamber President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury here on Thursday.

Chittagong chamber president told the BTC chairman that business was not possible without a trade policy fixing reasonable tariff in all sectors.

### Exporters of Agro products urged to follow WTO measures

ITC Consultant Digby Gasquoen urged the exporters in Bangladesh as a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to follow its Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures introduced during exports of food and agro-products.

Digby Gasquoen was addressing an international seminar on export of agro-products here on Saturday.

ITC, EU and Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) jointly organised the seminar titled "Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures" at the

CCCI auditorium.

The ITC consultant also underscored the need for government's steps for introducing required law and set of rules in this regard. He also stressed the need for increasing lab facilities for standard testing and administrative skill side by side with creating awareness among the concerned businessmen.

CCCI President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury made address of welcome at the seminar. CCCI Vice-President Monzoor Ul Amin Chowdhury, MA Latif, Mazharul Haq Shah, Mahbub Alam, Zahurul Haq, Professor Abul Kalam Azad, Professor Md. Hossain Jamal and Md. Shahadat Hossain of Chittagong University, Commodore (Retd) Nizam and Rafiq Sarker also spoke.

### Rly employees submit memo

Bangladesh Railway Employees League, Central Railway Building unit, submitted a memorandum to the director general (DG) of Bangladesh Railway through the general manager (East) on the concluding day of its demand fortnight here on Tuesday.

The memorandum contains demands, including formation of a permanent pay commission with effect from July 1, implementation of Laksam-Dhaka Coal railway, laying of rail tracks on the proposed Padma Bridge, measures for assembling railway coaches at railway workshops in the country and raising pension to 100 percent from 80 percent.

The BREL CRB unit leaders submitted the memorandum in procession that followed a rally on the CRB premises with the unit president ABM Ehtesham Uddin in the chair.

Abu Taher Khan, AKM Aabul Wadood, Md. Salim Patwary and Md. Shahidur Rahaman also spoke at the rally among others.

He urged the persons concerned to discharge responsibility with utmost

sincerity for implementation of these programmes.

Divisional Commissioner, Chittagong Md. Ashraful Maqbul, Department of Social Welfare Director Md. Abu Taher, Additional Director Noortaz Ali and Deputy Director Syeda Ferdous Akter also spoke at the seminar with Deputy Commissioner, Chittagong Md. Shafiqul Islam in the chair.

### Involve disabled in dev work

Minister for Social Welfare Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahidi said the disabled who form 10 per cent of the country's total population should be involved in the mainstream of the development work.

He said this while he was speaking as chief guest at the concluding session of a seminar on rehabilitating acid-burnt women and physically disabled persons at the Chittagong chamber auditorium on Friday.

The Department of Social Welfare, Chittagong organised the seminar.

He said, different measures such as small loan and quota preservation as well as various package programmes were taken for the disabled.

He urged the persons concerned to discharge responsibility with utmost

rights organisation.

The biennial election of Bangladesh Steamer Agents Association (BSAA) was held at the association office here on Tuesday.

Tareq Anis Ahmed-led Samilita Parishad won 12 posts while Abul Awaled panel got six posts.

The Samilita Parishad candidates won 10 posts out of 12 in the ordinary group. In the associate group Awal-led panel got four posts out of six.

Dr. M Parvez Sajjad Akter of Bengal Bay Agency got the highest 56 votes.

The BSAA chairman will be elected from the ordinary group winners while the vice-chairman from the winners in associate group.

### Ship-breaking Social Forum formed

An 18-member Ship-breaking Social Forum was formed here on Tuesday to pursue development of ship-breaking industry and rights of those working there.

The forum was formed at a view exchange meeting on "Development of Ship-breaking Industry and Human Rights" at Madambirhat Shahjahan High School at Sitakunda upazila on Tuesday.

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### Steamer Agents

The speakers at the meeting called for recognising ship-breaking as an industry and resolving the problems and protecting rights of the workers engaged in ship-breaking under the rules of the industry.

The members of the forum are Ashish Kumar Das, Bachchu Lal Nath, Quazi SM Isha Siddiqui, Md. Abul Kalam Azad, Md. Fazilul Kader and Mohammad Hossain.

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A training and resource centre, first of its kind in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, is being set up in Bandarban to make the disabled self-reliant and trained up ones.

Bandarban District Council Chairman Mamaching laid the foundation of the training and resource centre, also the second of its kind in the country after Chittagong, on Wednesday.

The centre will be set up near Meghla Vocational Training Institute at a cost of Tk 5 lakh.

Bangladesh Pratibandhi Kalyan Samity (BPKS), Bandarban will implement the project financed by Australian Agency for International Development (AID).

Bandarban District Council Member Bishwajit Tangchha, local press club President Badshi Mia, District Council Land Officer Abu Ahmed Siddiqui and BPKS, Bandarban Co-ordinator Chhagho Chuk were present.

Youth Power in Social Action (YPSA) organised the meeting under a project - advocacy for a public policy to ensure human rights in ship-breaking industry, run by Manusher Jonny - a human

rights organisation.

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