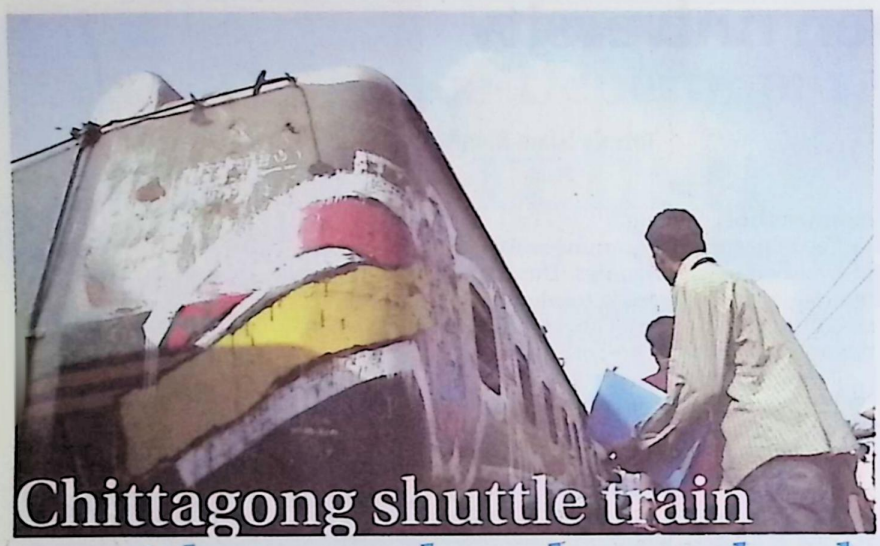




Chittagong shuttle train

A long tea break on wheels

Ehsanur Raza Ronny
Photos: Amirul Rajiv

RAJIV gathered up his photography equipment and raced with another friend to catch the Chittagong University shuttle train. They missed it. They figured they could catch it at the next station in *Sholoshohor* so they waited a little, drank some tea and stuffed themselves into a shared CNG taxi along with three other female students who also missed the train. They reached the next station and still the train arrived five minutes late.

The two trains strictly for the university consist of a decrepit string of bogeys with murals and stylish graffiti plastered along the sides. Inside it is not much different. The students clamour to board the train despite it being in such a sorry, slow state.

So why do the students love it so much except for the fact that it is free? The train and the time spent shuttling across town is considered to be the best 'adda'. None of the students on board mind the sorry surroundings. It is all about the people. They love the ruckus and a ruckus is what they love to make. Friends and strangers join into groups and sing all the way to and fro. Some groups use guitars while others tap out a rhythmic beat on the peeling laminated walls. When popular songs are belted out sometimes an entire compartment joins in the medley. Bands form among the confines. In fact, noted singer Partha was also once such a noisy student. And frankly no one minds. There were times when 7-8 different musical groups would travel on one train performing a joyous cacophony of sounds.

But that is not the only type of relationship. Friendships both platonic and amorous are formed on board. Not only that, it is also one of the best media for political propaganda. You want to get a massage across then plaster it on the walls of the train cars. Almost all the university students will notice. Unfortunately politics, can rear its ugly head and disrupt the fun. The idea is if you stop the train you stop the university from functioning. During political strife, students are often roughed up under any pretext.

The shuttle train journey creates an impermeable sense of intimacy among the students. No wonder they consider this 16-kilometer journey from the central station to the university to be the most enjoyable part of their student lives.



