



## Risky railway

Old engines, rundown coaches offering passengers more shock than service

SHAHNAZ PARVEEN

Bangladesh Railway (BR), still operating with age-old and ramshackle locomotives and coaches, now grapples with increasing number of commuters.

Besides, many of its engines and coaches have already exceeded their average economic life.

The BR now has 286 train engines, of which over 45 percent are 35 years old while the average economic life of a locomotive is 20 years.

About 80 engines, which are still being used, were procured before the country's independence whereas only 79 are less than 20 years old.

Of the 1,400 passenger coaches of the BR, about 70 percent is available for regular use while the rest are left in the yards behind railway depots and workshops awaiting maintenance. Over 20 percent of the existing coaches exceeded their 35-year economic life.

Moreover, the number of locomotives and coaches have decreased since the country's independence while the number of rail users has been increasing every year.

In 1970, the number of locomotives was 486 and passenger coaches 1,643.

BR officials said a well-functioning locomotive is capable of hauling about 24 coaches at a time. But the BR often runs a few local trains with only three to four carriages each due to lack of operable coaches.

BR Director General Md Belayet Hossain said most of the locomotives break down often. They require more 'down time' in workshops than before in recent times putting pressure on the existing fleet.

"The limited number of locomotives and coaches have to endure immense pressure to meet the increasing demand. We often fail to send those to workshops for routine maintenance causing frequent breakdowns of locomotives these days," he said.

Because of the rundown condition, the BR has to spend more money for maintenance of coaches and locomotives with declining average speed, he added.

However, Belayet said there are plans to increase the number of locomotives within the next fiscal year.

"The current government prioritises Bangladesh Railway. There are plans to modernise it. We are trying our best to improve the service," the BR director general said.

The BR procured a total of 10 locomotives last time in 2005 with financial assistance of Economic Development Cooperation Fund of Korea, he said.

Another 11 locomotives will be purchased within the next financial year with the help of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) while the World Bank will give assistance to procure 15 more.

Besides, a total of 260 coaches will be refurbished within the next fiscal year.

The BR currently runs 259 daily passenger train services, of which 68 are intercity, 64 express and 127 local services covering 440 stations in 44 districts. The number of daily freight trains stands at 49. Besides, there is Maitree Express service connecting Dhaka with Kolkata.

The railway carried about 53.8 million passengers last year.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN AND SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

Rundown locomotives of Bangladesh Railway await much-needed repairs in a workshop at Kamalapur station. Picture, inset, shows the weathered seats in a Dhaka-Narayanganj shuttle train.

## JS session resumes today

Speaker misses opposition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Discussion on the supplementary budget for fiscal year 2008-09 begins today as the ongoing budget session of Parliament resumes this afternoon amid the speaker's fresh call for the main opposition to join the House.

Speaker Abdul Hamid yesterday said the House does not become animated without the opposition lawmakers and he becomes very delighted

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## Rejoinder, our reply

The chairman of the Washpur Garden City in a rejoinder says the news item published in The Daily Star on June 8, 2009 headlined "Buriganga artery blocked" does not represent facts.

He says his company is not

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## Govt itself violating building rules

No approval taken from authorities concerned since 1987

TAWFIQUE ALI

No government building including those built by Public Works Department (PWD) has taken approval from authorities concerned since 1987, which is mandatory under the Building Construction (BC) Act of 1952 and subsequent building rules.

The PWD had enjoyed an exemption from such approval till 1987 but an amendment after that made the approval mandatory before construction of a building as it applies to other organisations and individuals.

The government, a year back, delegated the authority to the chief architect of the Department of Architecture to approve only the PWD buildings, but to no avail.

The PWD constructs most of the government buildings under the public works ministry known to be the custodian of the BC act, building rules and Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC).

Public institutions, apart from PWD, that construct buildings on their own include education ministry, universities, CMMU of health ministry, food department, power development board, BTB, youth and sports ministry.

ASM Ismail, chief architect of the Department of Architecture, said that the BC act is applicable to all kinds of constructions.

"The objective of the BC act is to prevent unplanned and haphazard constructions of buildings," said Ismail.

Within Dhaka metropolitan area, Town Improvement (TI) Act of 1953 requires institutions or individuals to obtain clearance for the use of land (planning approval) while the BC act requires them to obtain approval from the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk).

The BC Act does not exempt armed forces but they construct their buildings under the Cantonment Act of 1924 and by-laws of 1985.

At present Rajuk in Dhaka, KDA in Khulna, CDA in Chittagong and RDA in

Rajshahi hold the authority to enforce the BC act while the rest 60 districts have, in fact, no such development authorities to ensure its implementation.

In many cases local government bodies like the municipality approves building construction, he said.

The government of General Ershad by a gazette notification of SRO no344-L/85 on 31st July 1985 made the BC act mandatory for 170 upazilas.

PWD Chief Engineer Rafiqul Islam Chowdhury said, "It has become a tradition for PWD not to take any approval."

There is no record about how many buildings PWD has built so far, he said adding, "Rajuk has also accepted it."

Rajuk Chairman Nurul Huda expressed his ignorance about it saying that he had just taken over the office.

Shahjahan Patwary, chief engineer of education ministry's engineering department, said that they mainly construct academic buildings for school, colleges and universities.

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## FBCCI for scope to whiten money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

FBCCI yesterday lent its support to the provision of whitening of black money in the proposed budget for the fiscal year 2009-10 in exchange for payment of 10 percent tax.

FBCCI said the whitening of undisclosed money would help boost local investment and might play a role in offsetting the adverse impact of the global financial downturn on the domestic economy.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) President Annisul Huq at a post-budget press conference at the Federation Bhaban termed the budget business and industry-friendly.

"We do not support legalising undisclosed money on moral ground but it is necessary to boost investment and employment generation," he said.

"We need more investment and employment generation and on this ground the government can allow whitening of black money," Huq added.

Replying to a query Huq said if any chamber negates the provision it can say so but FBCCI supports the move.

FBCCI suggested that the government should float public private partnership (PPP) bonds on the stock market to raise fund to cover the budget deficit.

Anisul Huq said the private sector might suffer from credit crunch if the government borrows Tk 20,000 crore from the banking sector to cover the deficit in the budget.

"It would rather be wise to raise fund from the stock market through floating PPP bonds which would also help reduce dependency on bank borrowing and foreign aid," he continued.

He thanked the government and the finance minister for the

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Scope means injustice to regular taxpayers

Discussion told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The money-whitening provision would mean injustice to the regular taxpayers and leave them in an uneven contest with the black money owners, said speakers at a discussion yesterday.

Participating in BBC Bangladesh Sanglap, they also observed that the size of the proposed budget is not that big compared to that of the previous one, but its implementation is surely a cause for concern.

MM Akash, a professor of economics at Dhaka University, said the opportunity to legalise the undisclosed money would encourage corruption.

"The budget does not clarify if the money earned through illegal means will be treated as undisclosed money," he added.

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## More fund sought for modernising army

Only 6pc of its allocation spent on defence purchase; 83pc goes to salaries, services, supplies

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Defence purchase of Bangladesh Army is dependent on a derisory 6 percent of the fund allocated for the force while over 83 percent of the share is spent on salaries, allowances, services and supplies.

The acute shortage of fund stands in the way to modernisation of the force, says a report of the army, analysing the allocations and expenditures of the last four fiscal years.

The report was placed before the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry on May 28 for discussion to elicit recommendations to resolve the problem. The Daily Star obtained a copy of the report.

The report says Tk 192 crore has been allocated in the four fiscal years since 2005-06 for procuring armament and ammunition against the army's requirement of Tk 403 crore for purchasing ammunition alone.

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## Newspapers to be in dire straits

Fears Noab as duty proposed on newsprint import

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The budget proposal for levying five percent import duty on newsprint will put the newspaper industry in dire straits, says the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab).

In a statement yesterday, its leaders expressed deep frustration over the proposal. They appealed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to intervene and rescue the industry from financial crisis.

The finance minister's proposed five percent duty will increase to 11.5 percent once VAT and regulatory tax are

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## CTG ARMS HAUL

### Sahab makes confession again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Detained former NSI director Wing Commander (ret'd) Sahab Uddin yesterday gave another confessional statement to a court here in the much talked-about Chittagong arms haul case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbubur Rahman began recording his statement under

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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Mushrooms grow largely around the country as the rainy season begins tomorrow with the Bangla month of Jaishtha ending today.