



PHOTO: MD. MOAZZEM MOSTAKIM

“What allows us, as human beings, to psychologically survive life on earth, with all of its pain, drama, and challenges, is a sense of purpose and meaning.” — *Barbara De Angelis, American author*

**SNAPSHOT**

**MAILBOX**

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**Justice Delayed, Justice Denied**

The collapse of Rana Plaza is the deadliest structural failure in the modern history. 1,129 people were killed under the rubble of the nine story commercial building and at least 3,500 people were injured. I learned from the article titled “How Much Is a Worker’s Life Worth” that the High Court has stated this tragic incident as a manmade disaster. It is a verdict that paved the way to get justice for thousands of unfortunate victims. After this verdict, the main culprit Rana, the owner of the faulty structure can easily be brought to book for homicide. When Rana was arrested from the Benapol border, we all hoped that he would be given exemplary punishment as no lawyer agreed to work for him. However, it is a matter of great regret that four years have passed since the incident and his arrest, but no significant improvement has happened in the judicial process to try Rana. There are examples in our country where justice could not be guaranteed only because of the procrastinated judicial process. We should take lesson from these examples and speed up the trial of Rana so that tears of thousands of victims and their family members do not go in vain. *Sayek Ahmed Sajib*  
Department of English, University of Rajshahi



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

**Hatirjheel Stinks!**

Hatirjheel project has been a very popular recreational place for Dhakaites. There are very few places in Dhaka city where people can go for a nice afternoon walk. With beautiful lighting, spacious pavements with benches, a nice view of the lake and availability of snacks, Hatirjheel attracts a lot of people particularly in the weekends. However, Hatirjheel has already lost much of its charm due to huge traffic congestion and mushrooming of food carts that have been polluting the

place by throwing away garbage here and there. Due to constant pollution and lack of water treatment facility, during every dry season, Hatirjheel Lake turns blackish and the odour of the black water, filled with rotten food wastes, becomes unbearable for the local residents. I would like to appeal to the concerned authority to take immediate steps to revive the beauty of Hatirjheel so that people of Dhaka can visit the place for recreation and the local residents can live in the area in peace. *Md Zonaid Imran*  
Rampura, Dhaka

The opinions expressed in these letters do not necessarily represent the views of the Star Weekend.

**STAR WEEKEND**  
**CALLING OUT TO JOURNALISTS RESEARCHERS WRITERS**

Do you have a story that needs to be told? The Star Weekend supplement of The Daily Star is looking for pitches from contributors. Send us your story idea in a nutshell at thestarmagazine@gmail.com.

What we are looking for in pitches:  
a) Topics which are relevant to the interests of The Star Weekend  
b) Feature, investigation, opinions (we might take the occasional profile too).

**CITY**

When the whole city is caught up in the debate of whether local or sitting service is more conducive to commuters, 37-year-old businessman Mohammad Rafiqul Islam takes the commuter train every day to travel from his home in Shibbari, Gazipur to Karwan Bazar for work. In the process, he succeeds in avoiding hours of traffic and harassment that is an inevitable part of bus journeys.

“I always try to catch the Turag Express at 7.30 am from Joydebpur station and it takes only 45-50 minutes to reach Tejgaon station with a fare of Tk. 15,” informs Rafiqul. “But if I would commute in buses, it would take at least 3-4 hours in the morning, depending on the traffic and cost at least Tk. 55. Also, most of the time, I cannot manage any seat during the rush hours and need to hang onto the door for a long hour in this hot weather,” he adds.

While returning home, Rafiqul waits for the same train at Tejgaon station, which leaves Kamalapur at 5.20 in the afternoon. Most of the time, the train reaches Tejgaon within 15 minutes.

41-year-old Mohammad Maqsudul Haque, who works as a merchandise manager at a knitwear company at Chashara, Narayanganj, also uses commuter trains from Gandaria station to reach his work every day. The journey costs Tk. 15 – an important factor for him, since the bus ride to his workplace from Gulistan costs Tk. 35. “Besides,” Maqsudul adds, “commuter trains are far less risky compared to buses which are prone to accidents.”

Like Rafiqul and Maqsudul, a huge number of regular commuters – businessmen, professionals and students – use the Kamalapur-Joydebpur and Kamalapur-Narayanganj train routes every day. Since the service is regarded as the cheapest and most efficient means of transport in areas near Dhaka, the commuter trains have become popular amongst the middle and lower income groups. As a result, their demand is increasing day by day.

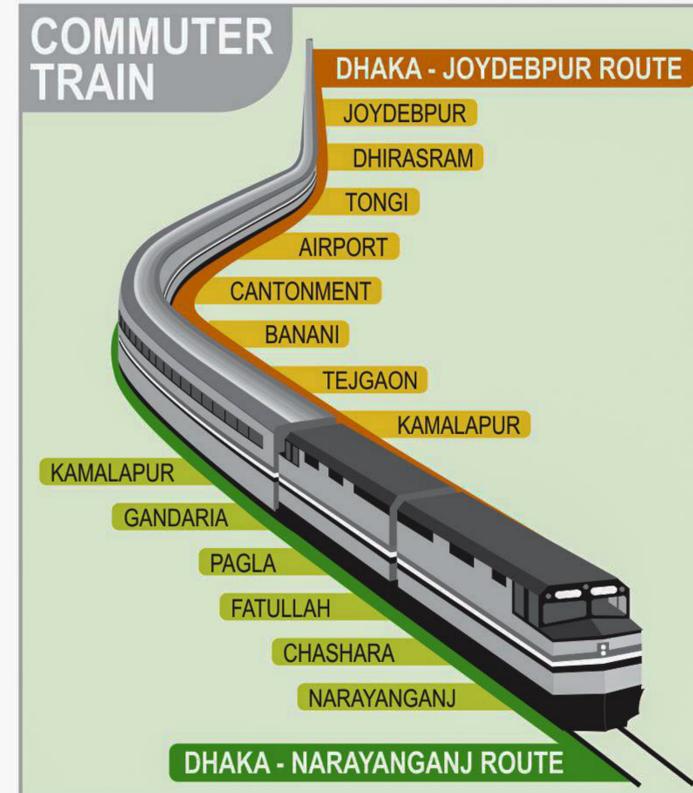
However, the authorities have not been able to keep up with the increasing demand and maintain a quality service for commuters of all social classes.

For the regular commuters of the Kamalapur-Joydebpur route, there are four trips by government-owned trains – nicknamed DEMU trains (Diesel Electric Multiple Unit) - in addition to the privately owned commuter Turag Express.

People from Joydebpur, Dhirasrom, Tongi, Airport, Cantonment, Banani and Tejgaon can avail these trains. In

**CAN COMMUTER TRAINS BE A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO ROAD TRANSPORT?**

NILIMA JAHAN



addition, 50 up-down trips run on a daily basis through the Dhaka-Rajshahi and Dhaka-Mymensingh railway route via Joydebpur junction. These are all standing tickets though.

On the other hand there are 32 up-down commuter trips, along with six DEMUs, from Kamalapur to Narayanganj every day for the commuters of Gandaria, Pagla, Fatullah and Chashara and Narayanganj.

On average, around 3000 commuters

come to Tejgaon and Kamalapur station from Joydebpur, Dhirasram and Tongi every day. Had these people used the bus services, the city would need at least 60 extra buses, which would create more traffic congestion in bus routes.

However, for train service to become a viable alternative to road transport and attract more commuters, it needs to be developed further.

“Some extra bogies could be helpful for us, so that more commuters could use

these trains at a time, and it would also create a balance between the bus and train commuters in the city,” says Rafiqul.

The government had declared a plan to double the capacity of the Kamalapur-Narayanganj, Kamalapur-Tongi and Tongi-Joydebpur lines. “Currently, we are working on implementing the project and have already announced tenders,” argues Anwarul Haque, the chief planning officer of Bangladesh Railway. He could not however, provide details about the timeline.

Commuters also highlight concerns about their security during rush hour or after night falls, since the compartments become overcrowded and some of them don’t have lights.

“Very often, the ticket checker uses his cell phone to check the tickets at night,” says 27-year-old service holder Aminul Islam Shohag, a regular commuter of Fatullah-Kamalapur route. “With no lights in the bogies, we become victims of pick pocketing and feel insecure to commute on trains. In most cases, finding the railway police when needed is very difficult,” he adds.

The commuters also claimed that some people try to get room on the roof of trains or the space between two bogies, which sometimes result in serious accidents.

Responding to these allegations, the Dhaka Railway Thana officer in-charge Yasin Faruk Majumder informs that since they don’t have booths, camps or outposts in every station, apart from the important ones like Kamalapur, Tejgaon, Joydebpur or Narayanganj, they have to depend on the cooperation of station masters in case of any untoward occurrence.

“Our platform duty personnel are given instructions not to allow anyone on the roofs. But sometimes, especially during rush hour, we fail to control the situation,” he admits.

The commuters note that the general environment of the compartments is dissatisfactory. Some of the compartments of the commuter trains have no lavatories, and the ones that do have it, are in deplorable conditions. Apart from the DEMUs, many of the compartments of the other commuter trains have no fans.

It is high time that the concerned authorities consider commuter train transport as a viable alternative to road transport to ease the suffering of the public. But it would require long-term vision and commitment on the part of the authorities which, at this point, seems to be missing. ■