

ELECTRIC TRAIN SERVICE ON N'GANJ-DHAKA-CTG ROUTE FINALLY ON THE RIGHT TRACK

After never-ending revisions, railway to start feasibility study

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Railway (BR) is finally going to start a feasibility study to explore whether electric train service can be introduced on Narayanganj-Dhaka-Chattogram route.

The planning minister recently approved a Tk 15.07-crore project for carrying out a study and detail design to introduce electric train service for the first time in the country.

The development came more than six years after BR took the initiative and over five years after Prime Minister Sheikh

Hasina gave the directive to introduce the system, which is considered cost-effective and environment-friendly.

Now, BR has to conduct the study and detail design within April 2023. If the study finds that operation of such trains is viable, BR would take on another project to electrify the route.

In contrast, the neighbouring country -- India -- will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of the first electric passenger train's introduction in 2025.

Under the system, a railway electric traction system supplies electric power to locomotives, and so, trains do not require any onboard fuel. An overhead electricity line has to be installed along the railway track to transmit energy.

Currently, BR operates diesel-powered trains on its 3,019-kilometre railway network.

According to some BR officials and relevant documents, introduction of electric trains would reduce operation costs by 35 percent and maintenance costs by 30 to 50 percent. Besides, it would reduce carbon emission by 20 to 30 percent.

A PICTURE IN CONTRAST
India's first passenger train started operating on April 16, 1853. After nine years, rail-transport in Bangladesh began on November 15, 1862.

The world's first electric railway was installed in Brighton, England in 1883. The first electric passenger train in India started operating between Victoria Terminus and Kurla in February 1925.

Indian Railway electrified 45,881 km of its rail lines, about 71 percent of its total broad-gauge network, by March this year, according to the website of Central Organisation for Railway



HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

A railway electric traction system supplies electric power to locomotives. So, trains do not require onboard fuel. An overhead electricity line installed along the track transmits energy.

AT A GLANCE

Study project cost Tk 15.07 cr

Deadline Apr 2023

Selected Section N'ganj-Dhaka-Ctg

BENEFITS

Electrification will cut 35pc operation cost

Decrease 30-50pc maintenance cost

Reduce 10-15pc travel time

Lessen carbon emission by 20-30pc

Although initial investment for electric trains is relatively high, its operational and maintenance costs are much lower. The system is also environment-friendly and more reliable.

Prof Hadiuzzaman
Transport expert

Electrification (CORE).

CORE, which is responsible for electrification of railway tracks in India, plans to electrify all broad-gauge routes by December 2023.

WHY ELECTRIFY?

Aside from significantly cutting operation and maintenance costs and carbon emissions, the electric traction system would also cut travel time by 10

to 15 percent, show documents.

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman, director of Buet's Accident Research Institute, said although initial investment for electric trains is relatively high, its operational and maintenance costs are much lower. The system is also environment-friendly and more reliable, he said.

Currently, Bangladesh produces enough electricity, and more power-plants are in the pipeline, so such systems have potential in Bangladesh, he added.

PERPETUAL REVISIONS

In February 2015, BR sent a proposal to the railways ministry on carrying out a feasibility study on electrifying the Dhaka-Chattogram route, BR documents show.

The ministry in June that year asked BR to add Dhaka-Narayanganj route too. Accordingly, BR modified the proposal and sent it to the Planning Commission in August that year.

In January 2016, the commission asked BR to modify the proposal again and fixed the feasibility study cost at Tk 8.12 crore, against the proposed figure of Tk 9.58 crore.

Two months later, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave directives to introduce electric trains on Narayanganj-Gazipur route in the first phase.

Subsequently, in July 2016, Planning Commission asked BR to modify their proposal to conduct a feasibility study on Narayanganj-Dhaka-Joydebpur route, instead of Dhaka-Chattogram.

BR again sent a modified proposal in June 2017, but early this year, the decision changed again, following directives of government high-ups, and

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173 more hospitalised with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 173 dengue patients were hospitalised in the last 24 hours till 8am yesterday of which 34 are from outside Dhaka, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

With this, a total of 5,030 were diagnosed during the running month out of a total 23,227 infected. Of the total, 3,324 are from outside Dhaka.

At least 7,841 were diagnosed in September, 7,698 in August, 2,286 were hospitalised in July, 272 in June while 43 were infected in May and the rest are from January to April.

According to the DGHS, 89 people have died of dengue infection in the country this year -- all in July, August, September and October. Twelve people

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Death toll 89

16 died in Oct so far

23 in Sept, 34 in Aug,

12 in July

173 more hospitalised yesterday

Total infected 23,227

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TIMELINE OF REVISIONS

First proposal sent to ministry for Dhaka-Ctg route
Feb 2015

Ministry asks BR to add Dhaka-N'ganj
June 2015

BR sends modified proposal
Aug 2015

Planning Commission asks BR to change provision
Jan 2016

Commission tells BR to conduct feasibility study on N'ganj-Dhaka-Joydebpur instead of Dhaka-Ctg route
July 2016

Modified proposal sent
June 2017

Decision changed again
Early 2021

Planning ministry gives go-ahead
October 12, 2021

Ensuring nutritious food biggest challenge now

Says agri minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque yesterday said the big challenge for the country right now is to ensure nutritious food for all.

"There is no food crisis in the country. As we are self-sufficient in food grain production now, there was no shortage even during the pandemic," he said.

The minister said this while addressing a meeting virtually to review the progress of the implementation of the Annual Development Program (ADP) from the secretariat, read a press release issued by the agriculture ministry.

The minister, also an Awami League presidium member, said, "One of the election pledges of the present government is to ensure nutritious food for all."

Terming a report published in the media on October 24 as "baseless" and "untrue", the minister claimed that the news

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Dedicated centre for migrant workers in works

Says expatriates' welfare ministry secretary



AT A GLANCE

30 centres to be created across country

To provide support to migrant workers

Female returnees to get priority

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will build a dedicated centre to provide support to both outbound and home-bound migrant workers, said Expatriates' Welfare Ministry Secretary Ahmed Munirul Saleheen yesterday.

"Whether female or male, if they wish to stay at the centre before departure or after arrival... accommodation will be arranged," he said.

The secretary was talking to reporters at the ministry, marking a project agreement between the government and the World Bank.

He said they will build the centre near Dhaka airport, hoping to open it this year.

He added that they are working to develop a type of standard operating procedure to determine, among other issues, whether migrant workers can avail accommodation at the centre by paying a

fee or for free.

At a programme on October 17, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Imran Ahmad said around three acres of land near the airport have been arranged for the centre.

Under the World Bank-funded project, about two lakh returnee migrants, who came home amid the pandemic, are expected to be benefited. The project will be implemented by the wage earners' welfare board (WEWB).

Secretary Saleheen said under the project, about 30 welfare centres will be created across the country to ensure migrant workers' wellbeing.

Each beneficiary will receive Tk 13,500, he said, adding that besides the cash support, the beneficiaries will be provided with various services regarding their reintegration.

An official of WEWB said female returnees will get priority under the project.

GRAFT CASE

Former AL MP Mizanur gets bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to Mizanur Rahman, former Awami League parliamentarian of Khulna-2 in a case filed over amassing wealth worth Tk 1.58 crore illegally.

Judge Muhammed Ali Hussain of the Special Judge Court-3 of Dhaka passed the order after Mizanur surrendered before it, seeking bail in the case. The judge fixed November 21 for the hearing on the charges.

On October 10, Judge KM Emrul Kayesh of the Senior Special Judge's Court of Dhaka took cognisance of charges against him.

According to ACC, Mizanur was accused of illegally obtaining construction work of Khulna City Corporation and other government institutions by abusing his position of power and political identity.

On March 8, 2018, the anti-graft watchdog launched an investigation led by ACC Director Manzur Morshed

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25 wild birds, monkey rescued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Twenty-five wild and migratory birds and a monkey were rescued from four different places in Sylhet city yesterday afternoon. Rab has also detained a wholesaler of wild birds in this connection during a drive.

Of the rescued animals, there are 20 cotton pygmy geese (locally known as Balihash), four eastern great egrets (locally known as Bak), one common hill myna, and one Assamese macaque monkey.

"Social worker Enamul Munir located the four egrets being sold at Mirabazar area, who were rescued with the help of the Forest Department. Later, four pygmy geese and a myna were rescued from a pigeon store at Bharthokhola area," said Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) Sylhet chapter.

The rescued birds were released at Sheikhghat area near the Surma River.

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Across four separate locations in Sylhet city, 25 wild birds were rescued, while an Assamese Macaque monkey was rescued from Bagbari area.

PHOTO: STAR

Concerted effort needed

Says environment minister on preventing land degradation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environment, Forest and Climate Change Minister Md Shahab Uddin yesterday said the Department of Environment has formulated a roadmap to build a country free of land degradation by updating the land use map and identifying the causes and indicators of degradation.

The minister said this while addressing a workshop as the chief guest. The workshop took place at the DoE office in Agargaon.

"Prevention will be possible by coordinating and working at the national and divisional levels," said the minister.

"Along with capacity building, training programmes and scientific research, initiatives will be taken to raise awareness about the financial, social and environmental benefits of sustainable land management policies," he added.

Deputy Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change

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At the mercy of political leaders

Illegal sand lifting continues unabated in Bongshi river

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH, Savar

On over 60 decimals of land stands Yunus Ali's lemon orchard. It's located at the banks of the Bongshi river, falling under Amchirmor village in Dhamrai's Jadavpur union.

His orchard used to be even bigger back in the days. But as a result of indiscriminate illegal sand lifting on the river, he lost around 10 decimals or land over the years.

Yunus' case is far from the only one in the area. In fact, beyond Amchirmor, over a thousand farmers and land owners around the river are similarly affected by the ceaseless dredging using illegal dredging machines, in several areas including Batulia, Kushura, Paragram, Pankatta, and Narsinghapur.

Visiting the areas recently, this correspondent found out that most of the illegal sand lifting is done by local political leaders affiliated with the ruling Awami League or its affiliate organisations.

For example, Yunus' son Ismail told The Daily Star that one Rezwan Hossain, an AL leader in Jadavpur union, uses his dredger to lift sand right beside the family's lemon orchard. In the process, the orchard keeps losing land due to erosion.

"We have requested local political leaders to intervene multiple times. At this point, I don't think anyone is willing to hear our pleas," he said. "This is especially true as the people who are lifting the sand are the same people who are powerful enough to stop it."

He said this illegal practice has been going on



For years, sand has been lifted from the Bongshi river illegally, using illegal dredging machines, which is then sold for construction or renovation works.

PHOTO: STAR

for seven or eight years, but in all this time, no one from the police or the local administration has taken any steps against it.

Dredging sand this way has become quite the lucrative business. "A small dredger can lift up to six or seven thousand square feet of sand every day. It is then sold at Tk 4-6 per square feet," informed dredger worker Billal Hossain.

Billal, who works under AL leader Rezwan, claimed, "Our owner has obtained permission to lift sand for 15 days from the administration

in order to dump sand at local MP Benzir Ahmed's sister's house."

This is an important element to the story. As the MP's sister's house is located at a low-lying area, sand is being dumped there to raise the land. Moreover, during the lockdown, the MP himself set up an orange garden in a similar manner.

The sand is used for other purposes too, such as renovation for government roads and

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Govt to amend law

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

The government has decided to lodge stricter legislation on illegal sand extractors by amending the existing law, keeping a provision of blacklisting contractors permanently and confiscating their equipment along with their lease money for violating the law.

Once finalised, the land ministry will be able to file cases against illegal sand extractors for river erosion, damages to houses, establishments, trees and crops.

According to the proposed amendment of the act, even legitimate leases will be penalised for causing such damages and compensation for the loss will be deducted from their security money.

Although the existing law, passed 11 years ago, has a provision for punishment -- a maximum of two years' imprisonment and a fine of Tk 10 lakh -- the illegal and excessive land extraction could not be stopped, putting lives and properties in many parts of the country in jeopardy.

For instance, in November last year, locals of Sharsi village in Barishal Sadar upazila submitted a complaint to the local police, seeking their help to stop illegal extractors drawing out sand from a ditch surrounding their agricultural lands using dredgers (ships equipped with one or more devices for scraping or sucking sand from the seabed).

Preferring anonymity, a top official of River Security and Traffic Management at Bangladesh Inland Water Transport

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Blacklisting contractors; confiscating equipment, lease money for violating law

Land ministry to be able to file cases for river erosion, damages of properties, trees and crops

Even legitimate leases will be penalised for causing such damages

Barring extraction of sand, soil that causes damages to harvesting lands

Prohibiting extraction causing disruption of river navigability

Embargo on lifting soil from agri lands for commercial use

Authority stated that haphazard setting up of dredgers creates blockage in river routes.

"We often face such problems. They (sand extractors) set up dredgers on launch routes and block the passing of vessels," he said.

On October 21, 2020, the cabinet division formed an inter-ministerial committee for the amendment of Balu Mahal (an area where sand is extracted). The committee comprises members from the land, water resource ministry and environment ministries and the cabinet division. Following their

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