

Better hospitality on the cards?

Railway to form company for catering, tourism services

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The railway authority is on its way to form a separate company to improve and professionalise catering and hospitality services on trains.

A committee led by an additional secretary of the rail ministry has already held its first meeting to draw an outline for the company, likely to be named “Bangladesh Railway Catering and Tourism Company Ltd.”

Currently, Bangladesh Railway (BR) provides catering services to a handful number of passenger trains under a small cell, “Bangladesh Railway Catering and Tourism Cell”, formed in April, 2019. Meanwhile, private operators provide the services to most of the other trains.

But for both cases, complaints about quality and price are rife among passengers who board the around 350 passenger trains run by BR.

Despite securing a huge investment in the last decade and a rise in the number of passengers, the sector has failed to achieve expected service quality, experts said.

Moreover, the state-run transport agency

- BR provides catering, tourism services under small cell
- Understaffed “Catering, Tourism Cell” limited in scope
- Most services leased out to private operators
- Compromised food quality, overcharging a recurring issue
- New company likely to be named “BR Catering and Tourism Company Ltd”
- BR currently has one affiliate company

remains a losing concern, with its losses increasing steadily over the years.

Although the ministry approved recruitment and management guidelines for its catering service cell last October, the authorities are yet to deploy dedicated staffers for it, which is run under the railway’s marketing department.

This is why the cell can only serve four to five new trains, hiring staffers on a temporary basis and outsourcing food services.

As a result, private operators, taking lease from BR, provide catering services to most of the passenger trains, often violating prices fixed by the railway authorities and compromising on food quality to enhance their profits.

It is worth mentioning that in India, a separate company takes care of catering and tourism services on trains, stations and other locations.

Started in 1999, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC) even promotes domestic and international tourism through the development of

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Used during the lockdown to obstruct vehicular movement, this barricade is still lying on one side of the Postogola flyover. Protruding out into the road, it carries risk of major accidents, especially for a spot vehicles usually pass by at high speed. This photo was taken yesterday.

COURT CORNER

Health worker sent to jail for embezzling Tk 2.58 crore

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A Khulna court sent health worker Prakash Kumar Das to jail yesterday in a case filed for embezzling Tk 2.58 crore from corona sample test fees of foreigners at Khulna 250-bed General Hospital (Sadar).

ACC filed a case against technologist Prakash on November 18. According to the case statement, Prakash collected a fee of Tk 4.24 crore from the Covid tests from July 2020 to July 2021. But he deposited Tk 166 crore in the government treasury.

Man to die for killing wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A court in Chattogram yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing his wife in 2014 in port city’s Patenga. The accused is Riaz Uddin.

Judge Ferdous Ara handed over the verdict. According to case statement, Riaz strangled his wife Ruma Begum to death over a family feud on January 9, 2014.

ICT Case: Verdict on Shahidul Alam’s petition today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will deliver its verdict today on a petition filed by internationally-acclaimed photographer Shahidul Alam -- challenging legality of a case filed under Section 57 of ICT Act, 2006, in which he was imprisoned for 107 days.

The bench of Justice JBM Hassan and Justice Razik-Al-Jalil set the date yesterday. Lawyers AF Hasan Ariff and Sara Hossain appeared for Shahidul.

UNPROTECTED AND RISKY

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

The canals and drains of the port city have become death traps.

Owing to the negligence of authorities concerned, most of these canals and drains don’t have retaining walls or protecting slabs, posing a risk for fatal accidents.

Moreover, most of the canals and drains are filled with plastic waste, as they’re not cleaned regularly. This is why when someone falls into them, it’s immensely difficult to swim ashore, or for rescuers to come in for the save.

All of this results in an alarming frequency of fatal accidents.

Just last Monday, 12-year-old Kamal fell into a roadside drain in Sholashahar Railway Station area and couldn’t get up. After 68 hours of search operations, his body was found in a canal in Mirzar Pool area.

Earlier in August, 55-year-old Saleh Ahmed, a vegetable trader, slipped into the same drain at Muradpur Intersection. He has been missing ever since.

On September 27, university student Sehrin Mahbub Sadia fell into another drain at Agrabad area. Fire service divers recovered her body four-and-a-half hours later.

For all these incidents, locals and fire service officials said the thick layer of plastic and other waste that fills up the drains made rescue operations difficult.

Farid Ahmed, sub-assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, led the operation to rescue Kamal. He said this thick layer of waste made it difficult for their divers to search for the boy immediately.

“We had to clean the drain first before the divers could start their work. You can understand how much time this wasted,” he told this correspondent.

Locals in the area said many of them also tried to rescue Kamal as soon as they heard about the incident, but they couldn’t jump in for the same reason.

“When children fall into a water body in our village, we don’t have to think twice before diving into the clear water,” said Ali Akbar, a resident of the slum in Sholashahar area where Kamal’s family lives.



A series of fatal accidents have drawn attention to the unprotected drains and canals in Chattogram city. But even with anger brewing among citizens, the city authorities are yet to do anything substantive to safeguard the canals and drains, which suffer from the additional trouble of getting clogged by plastic waste. These photos were taken from Muradpur and Chaktai Khal (bottom-left).

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

After Sadia’s death in September, Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) Chief Engineer Rafiqul Alam had told The Daily Star they’re taking steps to build the walls around all risky canals and drains of the city.

But during a visit on Friday, this correspondent found a number of canals and drains the same way they always were -- open, unprotected, risky.

This was seen in the Chaktai Khal in Chawk Bazar Kitchen Market and KB Aman Ali Road areas, another canal in Jamal Khan-Chatteshawri Road, and the Birza Khal in Rahattar Pool.

Locals alleged that CCC workers do not come to clean the canals regularly.

“We have not seen them in the last six months,” said Tawhid Chowdhury, a resident of Chawkbazar Phooltola area.

Moreover, Trishna Dutta, another local, said, “As the canals aren’t cleaned regularly, they’ve become a safe haven for mosquito breeding.”

Contacted, Morshedul Alam Chowdhury, CCC deputy chief conservative officer, denied the allegations and said though they clean up the canals regularly, they become clogged after a few days due to garbage dumping.

Talking to The Daily Star, CCC Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury said they could not build the retaining walls as the Chattogram Development

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LABOUR LAW VIOLATION

HC stays case against Dr Yunus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday stayed for six months the proceedings of a criminal case filed against Nobel Laureate and Grameen Telecom Chairman Prof Dr Muhammad Yunus on charge of violating the labour law.

The court also issued a rule asking the state to explain why the case proceedings against Prof Yunus should not be scrapped.

The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) filed the case on September 9 with a labour court in Dhaka, saying that a DIFE team went on an inspection to Grameen Telecom and found evidence of the violations, as it did not regularise 101 staff and did not establish a welfare fund for the labourers.

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A group of load-workers secured a job to transport 4,000 bricks from the capital’s Basila to Kamrangirchar by the waterway yesterday. For this, they would get around Tk 4,000, though one truck of bricks are sold for around Tk 25,000, a major chunk of which would be kept aside by the broker who hired them, they said. After transportation costs, the 5-6 workers will have Tk 500-600 each for their long day of back-breaking and hazardous work.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Country needs sustainable agri system: speakers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh needs a green, affordable and sustainable agricultural system, which can produce quality crops without hampering biodiversity while keeping the environment safe, speakers said at a roundtable discussion yesterday.

The discussion titled “Agriculture and Climate Crisis” was organised by Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) at The Daily Star Centre.

“We are using 70 percent of our drinkable water for cultivation, that’s why the water level is decreasing,” said Md Iftekhar Ali of RIB while presenting his paper.

“The quest for greater productivity -- overuse of chemical fertilisers and pesticides are killing the soil,” he added.

Md Shamsuddoha, chief executive of Center for Participatory Research and Development-CPRD, said, Bangladesh needs to raise the issue of compensation for climate change, which was not fulfilled in the COP26 conference.

“A farmer’s crisis is never-ending...,” said Md Mazid, a farmer from Bagura’s Shariyakandi.

“Farmers need more engagement with science and technology for better farming to deal with the crises,” said Prof Md Shahidur Rashid Bhuiyan, vice-chancellor of Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, while addressing as the chief guest of the programme.

“We need more research and development on this front,” he added.

The roundtable was chaired by Dr MM Akash, professor of economics at Dhaka University, and participated by Meghna Guhathakurta, executive director of RIB, among others.