



PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

Level crossing or death trap?

Railway has to construct overpasses at the major level crossings in the built-up areas of the country. The presence of gatekeepers has to be ensured at points, where building an overpass is not feasible.

SUBASH BARUA
a transport expert

SIFAYET ULLAH

Pintu Das (41), a labourer in the port city's Aturar Dipu area, was killed by a speeding train while crossing the railway tracks near Pahartoli Railway Station on July 29.

Like Pintu, many people, including office-goers, tourists and dwellers of informal surrounding settlements, often fall victim to such fatal accidents while crossing the tracks.

The country witnessed one such deadly accident recently on July 29, in Baratakia of Chattogram's Mirsharai, where a collision between a train and micro-bus left at least 11 people dead and multiple injured.

According to Bangladesh Railway, 221 people died in railway accidents from 2014 to 2021. Of them, 187 people died in level crossing accidents.

"Many informal and resettlement colonies are located near railway tracks. A majority of the residents prefer walking to their workplace by crossing the tracks. Often, their unmindfulness becomes the end of them," said Ansar Ali, divisional traffic office (DTO-acting) of railway in Chattogram.

Railway data suggest that the total number of railway crossings across the country is

2,561. Among them, 1,321 are not approved, while 82 percent of these crossings are unprotected.

Officials and experts have identified the shortage and negligence of gatekeepers, unplanned level crossings, illegal movement of pedestrians on rail tracks, and negligence of the drivers (both locomotive and vehicle drivers) as the main reasons behind such accidents.

"It is not possible to post gatemen at all level crossings due to fund constraints and other reasons," said an official, requesting anonymity.

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The projects also include the installation of barriers and the construction of guard houses for maintaining these level crossings.

But many of the crossings are yet unsafe for commuters even after the development.

"If the locomotive driver spots someone on the tracks from a distance, he can somehow manage to apply the brakes. However, it is not possible if the person appears suddenly while the train is at a high speed," said Omar Faruk, a railway loco-master.

According to the Railway Act 1890, walking on the tracks is a punishable offence with two years of imprisonment.

However, pedestrians are seen using the rail tracks as walkways and this has increased the number of accidents, said Abul Kalam Chowdhury, divisional railway manager (DRM) of Chattogram.

"Pedestrians prefer to get down on the tracks and cross over to save time and cut the distance. Despite repeated announcements at the stations asking people to clear the way and not walk on the tracks, commuters refuse to follow the rules," he added.

"The railway authorities should take strong steps to stop setting up more illegal level crossings. It is not only a major cause of deadly accidents but also interrupts regular train speed," said Subash Barua, a transport expert.

"Railway has to construct overpasses at the major level crossings in the built-up areas of the country. The presence of gatekeepers has to be ensured at points where building an overpass is not feasible," he added.

Meanwhile, railway police filed a case against gateman Saddam and detained him from Baratakia area on Friday in connection with the accident. A Chattogram court sent accused Saddam to prison, while the railway authority suspended him for his negligence in duty.

Earlier, railway formed a five-member committee to investigate the cause of the accident. It was directed to submit its report within the next seven working days.

The committee started its work on Saturday. The committee members have also held a meeting, said Ansar Ali, committee convener and divisional transport officer of Bangladesh Railway in Chattogram.

"The reasons behind the incident are being investigated, and action will be taken against those involved as per the investigation report," Abul Kalam Chowdhury, divisional railway manager in Chattogram, told this correspondent.

It's a quadruplet! Ctg zoo welcomes four white tiger cubs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chattogram Zoo has been graced with the birth of four white tiger cubs, born to tiger couple Raj and Pori.

The mother and the cubs have been kept in separate confinements for now, said Dr Shahadat Hossain Suvo, deputy curator of the zoo.

"The cubs and their mother will be provided with intensive care and kept out of visitors' eyes for a while," he said, adding that necessary support will be provided for their health.

The sex of the cubs is yet to be ascertained since the process usually takes a few weeks. After that period, the baby tigers will be given names, he said.

According to the expert, a mother tiger can become ferocious and ruthless after giving birth, which may put the lives of the cubs at stake, even lead to their death.

At present, the number of tigers in Chattogram zoo has increased to 16.

For a white Bengal tiger to be born, both parents must carry the unusual gene for white colouring, which only happens naturally about once in 10,000 births.



On July 19, 2018, Raj and Pori gave birth to the country's first white tiger cub who was named "Shubhra".

Raj and Pori were brought to the zoo in 2016. The white tiger or bleached tiger is a leucistic pigmentation variant of the Bengal tiger, Siberian tiger and hybrids between the two.

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Dark-striped white tigers are well-documented in the Bengal tiger subspecies (*Panthera tigris*) as well as have been reported in several other subspecies, reports UNB.

Beauty of nature through the lens

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With 24 selected images, Anurup Kanti Das' maiden solo exhibition titled "Whiteness of the North" was recently held at Shilpacharya Zainul Abedin Gallery of Zilla Shilpakala Academy, Chattogram, for the visual art lovers of the port city.



Renowned poet and journalist Abul Momen inaugurated the exhibition as chief guest on July 21.

Winter has its unique beauty. Anurup marvelously captured the pristine beauty of nature in an array of images ranging from the snow-covered nature to the Finnish lifestyle, cultural nuances and nostalgia, said visitors.

The showcased images are well-composed with a detailed depiction of subjects, objects, perspectives, colour combinations and a soothing game of light and shade.

The multi-award-winning artist, who currently lives in Helsinki, Finland, also served as a photojournalist in Dainik Purbokone, Dainik Suprobhat Bangladesh and The Daily Star.

MIRSHARAI TRAGEDY

Trauma lingers on for survivors, family

SIFAYET ULLAH

Mohammed Saikat (16), a survivor of the recent Mirsharai tragedy, is undergoing treatment at Chattogram Medical College Hospital. His pain is yet to recede, while the trauma lingers on.

"My right leg is broken. I also sustained injuries on my head and back. The pain and trauma are very much real," he told this correspondent during a recent visit to CMCH.

Eleven people died and seven were injured after a train hit a microbus on a level crossing in Mirsharai upazila on Friday.

Of the seven, five are undergoing treatment in the neurosurgery department of the hospital, while another was in the ICU with critical head and neck injuries.

Junaid Hasan Emon, another injured, is currently undergoing treatment in the surgery ward.

"My son cannot forget the terrible memories of the accident. His tears will not stop," said Emon's father



Abul Kashem. "My son is yet to regain consciousness. We are all terrified for his life," said Abdus Shukkur, father of another injured Mohammad Ayat.

Md Kamal Hossain, assistant registrar of CMCH's neuro-surgery ward, said, "All the injured people are suffering from

poly-trauma. Their mental condition is worse than their physical condition. They need psychological treatment as well as surgeries."

The family members of the victims are also beyond consolation. The air at the hospital seemed to have become

heavy with grief.

On Sunday, the premises of Khandkia Chhamdia Government Primary School in Hatazhari upazila's Jugirhat also became a mourning site as the namaz-e-janaza of five of the 11 victims was held there.

