



## FARIDPUR-MAGURA RAIL LINK

# Poor monitoring to blame for slow pace

### IMED report blasts BR

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

After observing the slow pace of a project under which rail tracks are being laid on a 19km stretch between Faridpur and Magura, a report prepared by a government body has accused the railway authorities of serious lacking in their monitoring.

The revised deadline for the project is June 2024, but it has seen around 40 percent progress so far, indicating that there is little chance it would be completed on schedule.

The long delay in land acquisition is also hindering the implementation of the Tk 1,202.49 crore project, the report said.

The in depth monitoring report of the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) recommended preparing a time-bound action plan and ensuring proper monitoring and reinforcement.

The project authorities said the contractors have slowed down the work over their unmet demand for adjusting the price of construction materials following the sharp hike in the global market.

Project Director Ashadul Haque told The Daily Star yesterday that they have already written to the authorities concerned to solve the issue.

In May 2018, the government approved the project for constructing a rail line from Faridpur's Madhukhali to Magura even before carrying out a feasibility study.

The project was supposed to be completed within April 2022. But its physical work started in June last year, as the authorities had to finish a feasibility study and a detailed design before beginning the physical work.

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Later, the project deadline was extended to June 2024.

Bangladesh Railway appointed two China-Bangladesh joint venture companies as contractors.

The project saw a 41.37 percent progress till this June, which is only a 3.85 percent rise from June last year, shows BR's monthly progress report.

IMED, which published the report recently, also said 20 meetings of Project Implementation Committee (PIC) and Project Steering Committee (PSC) were supposed to be held in the last five years, but only six were held.

"There is a weakness on the part of Bangladesh Railway and the Railways Ministry in project monitoring," reads the report.

"PIC, PSC, Bangladesh Railway and the Railways Ministry should have taken the cost management issues seriously," it added.

Asked about the matter, PD Ashadul admitted that the project could not make the expected progress.

He said following the decision of the PSC, they wrote to Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) seeking its opinion regarding contractors' demand to adjust material prices, but the CPTU has not responded yet.

The IMED report said 112 acres of land would have to be acquired in Magura for laying an 11km rail line there, but the land acquisition work saw no major progress there.

BR sources said the project authorities have handed over Tk 155 crore and Tk 40.21 crore to Magura and Faridpur district administrations for land acquisition.

However, it was later discovered that Magura actually required Tk 114 crore, while Faridpur needed Tk 80 crore.

As a result, Magura needs to send back Tk 40.22 crore to the Faridpur district administration.

The mismatch in fund allocation is also causing a delay in land acquisition.

Asked about IMED's allegation of poor monitoring, the PD said the organisation might mean the delay in settling the contractors' price adjustment claim, but it is not possible to solve the problem by the railways authorities alone.

Several government agencies are involved and it will take time, he added.

## UNIVERSAL PENSION

# 4 schemes to be on offer

### Finance ministry prepares draft rule

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The finance ministry has prepared a draft rule for the Universal Pension Scheme (UPS) delineating four separate schemes for both local and non-resident Bangladeshis.

The schemes – Probash, Progoti, Surokkha and Samata – can be availed by everyone except government employees.

There will be different ceilings in the Probash scheme, which is for non-resident Bangladeshis. The instalments can be paid in dollars.

The Progoti scheme is for private sector employees and will be similar to the provident fund. Employees will pay a certain percentage of their basic salaries towards the scheme and their employers would be putting in the same amount.

The Surokkha scheme was designed for those in the informal sector. There will be different instalment ceilings. The instalment amount will not be dependent on basic salaries.

Samata scheme is for the poor, with the government bearing half the instalment amount.

The detailed mechanisms of the schemes will be defined elaborately by separate rules

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**Pedestrians, especially school-goers, are facing difficulties crossing the Jahangir Gate area as construction materials for installing sewerage pipes have been left on the pavement. The photo was taken yesterday.**

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

## Sudan faces 'full-scale civil war'

### UN warns as air raid kills 22 civilians, injures dozens

AFP, Wad Madani

Conflict-torn Sudan is on the brink of a "full-scale civil war" that could destabilise the entire region, the United Nations warned yesterday, after an air strike on a residential area killed around two dozen civilians.

The Ministry of Health reported "22 dead and a large number of wounded among the civilians" from what it described as an air strike Saturday on Khartoum's sister city Omdurman, in the district of Dar al Salam, which means "House of Peace" in Arabic.

After nearly three months of war between Sudan's rival generals, the air strike is the latest incident to provoke outrage.

Around 3,000 people have been killed in the conflict, survivors have reported a wave of sexual violence and witnesses have spoken of ethnically targeted killings. There has been widespread looting, and the UN warned of possible crimes against humanity in the Darfur region.

A video posted by the health ministry on Facebook showed apparently dismembered bodies lying partly covered on the ground after the air strike. Several women were among the victims.

The paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), fighting the regular army, claimed that the "air strikes" killed 31.

Residents contacted by AFP also confirmed an air strike but yesterday, the armed forces released a statement "clarifying that the air

**Around 3,000 people have been killed in the conflict so far.**

force did not deal with any hostile targets in Omdurman yesterday [Saturday]."

Since the war began, paramilitaries have established bases in residential areas, and they have been accused of forcing civilians from their homes.

Witnesses reported more air strikes near the presidential palace in central Khartoum yesterday, as well as machine gun clashes and artillery fire in the city's south.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres yesterday condemned the air strike in Omdurman, which he said "reportedly killed at least 22 people" and wounded dozens, his deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said in a statement.

Guterres "remains deeply concerned that the ongoing war between the armed forces has pushed Sudan to the brink of a full-scale civil war, potentially destabilising the entire region", Haq said.

Sudan, in northeast Africa, borders other impoverished countries which have a history of unrest.

Nearly three million people have been uprooted by Sudan's fighting, among them almost 700,000 who have fled to neighbouring countries, according to the International Organization for Migration.

The UN and African blocs have warned of an "ethnic dimension" to the conflict in the western region of Darfur, where the United States, Norway and Britain have blamed the RSF and allied militia for most of the widespread violations.

## Ancient society's 'Ivory Man' was an 'Ivory Lady'

AFP, Paris

The "Ivory Man", whose remains were found in an opulent tomb in Spain in 2008, is believed to have been the most powerful and influential person of his ancient society nearly 5,000 years ago.

There's just one problem: the remains are of a woman, scientists have revealed. They have renamed her the "Ivory Lady".

Human remains are one of the only ways to understand the balance of power between the genders in ancient societies.

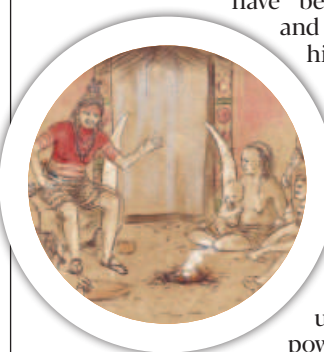
But it is often difficult to determine whether poorly preserved skeletons are those of men or women.

At a vast archaeological site at Valencina, near the southwestern Spanish city of Seville, several large and sophisticated tombs have been unearthed. They date back to 2,900–2,650 BC, in a period known as the Copper Age.

Mass burials were the norm for this ancient Iberian society but in 2008 archaeologists discovered a tomb containing just one person.

A standard physical examination at the time determined the person was a male between 17 and 25 years old, according to a study published in the journal Scientific Reports on Thursday.

Lavish artefacts were found at the person's side. They included a large ceramic plate which showed chemical traces of wine and cannabis, a complete elephant tusk and many objects made of ivory – earning the person the nickname the "Ivory Man".



**Vehicles damaged in crashes have been left on Dhaka-Chattogram highway in Narayanganj's Kanchpur even though there is a designated spot near Kanchpur Highway Police Station to keep those. Occupations of road space in this manner disrupt traffic. The photo was taken yesterday.**

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## The admin sees another reshuffle

### 10 districts get new DCs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government appointed new deputy commissioners to 10 districts yesterday, just three days after appointing nine new DCs and transferring one.

The public administration ministry issued a gazette notification in this regard yesterday.

The move is considered significant as the DCs will act as returning officers during the next general election, likely to be held in late December this year or early January next year.

Of the 10 newly appointed DCs, five are from the 27th batch of Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS). They were recruited during the tenure of the Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government. They got appointments in 2009 when the Awami League was in power, officials said.

Two of the new DCs are from the 25th BCS batch and three from the 24th BCS batch.

Law minister's Private Secretary Nur Kutubul Alam has been made the DC of Patuakhali, the private secretary to state minister for shipping, Abraul Hasan Mojumder, has been posted as the DC

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