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Fairooz Nazifa in all her husky glory

A long stride for rail connectivity

BR set to get 255km of new lines by Oct, link 4 dists and Mongla Port

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Four districts and a seaport will join the country's rail network by October when 255km of rail lines are inaugurated.

This is the first time since the country became independent that rail lines of such huge length is being opened in one go, said officials of BR, the state-run transport agency.

The new lines – three to be opened in full and one partially – will not only boost Bangladesh Railway's capacity to carry goods and people but also improve regional trade.

The Chattogram-Cox's Bazar line will connect the beach town to the rest of the country via rail, the Dhaka-Mawa Bhangra line will connect Munshiganj, Madaripur and Shariatpur to the capital, the Khulna-Mongla line will link the Mongla Port to the rest of the country and beyond. The Akhaura-Agartala line will increase regional trade and possibly people-to-people contact in future.

There would be 23 new stations on the new lines.

"It would be a giant leap for rail connectivity," Shahidul Islam, additional director general (infrastructure) of BR, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are hopeful of making all these four projects ready for opening by September," he said, adding, "Opening of the lines will boost the railway's capacity significantly."

However, all the projects saw cost and time overruns, a very common phenomenon for railway projects. None of the lines will be fully functional on day-1 as some of the work is yet to be completed, railway officials said.

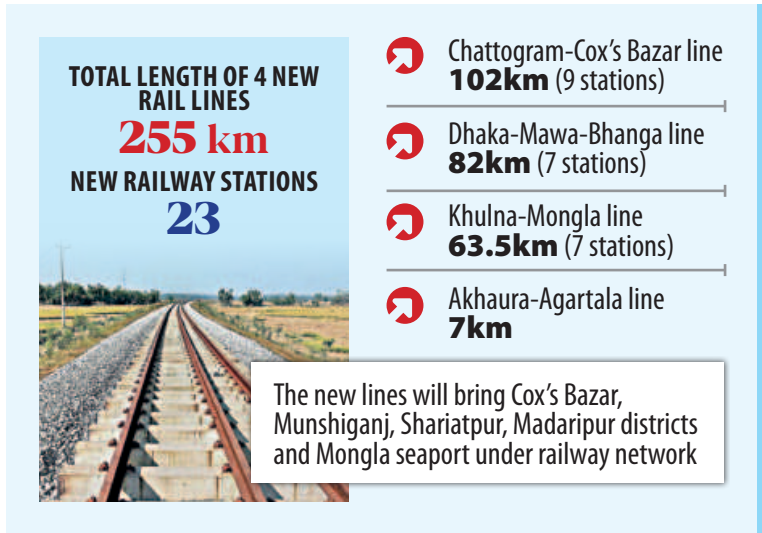
The four rail projects require around 3,500 employees and none of them have been hired yet.

Bangladesh got 2,858km of rail lines when it achieved independence in 1971. The length of lines, instead of increasing, came down to 2,835km in 2009.



This truck stand on a land made by illegal sand-filling on the Turag in the capital's Chhoto Diya Bari Sinnirtek was removed by BIWTA. Two months have passed and things are back to square one. The photo was taken yesterday. *Inset*, the BIWTA drive, conducted on May 23, had also cleared 17 makeshift shops and started reclaiming the river land by excavating earth at that time.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Currently 43 districts are under BR's 3,093.38km rail network.

The revival of BR mainly began after a separate rail ministry was formed in 2011.

Between 2008-09 and 2022-23 fiscal year, the government allocated Tk 1,07,645 crore for BR under the annual development programme (ADP).

However, BR could only spend Tk 71,113 crore, 66.06 percent of the allocation, until October last year.

CHATTOGRAM-COX'S BAZAR

The dual-gauge line from Chattogram to Cox's Bazar will connect the tourist town with the rest of the country by rail. Dhaka to Cox's Bazar train service is being planned.

The 102km line will have nine new stations. The Tk 18,034.47 crore

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JULY 27 GRAND RALLY

BNP fears hostility

Seeks DMP's permission to hold rally at Nayapaltan or Suhrawardy Udyan

STAR REPORT

BNP is expecting violence and aggression over the party's grand rally in the capital on July 27, said Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, the party's secretary general, yesterday.

"You must have noticed that the ministers of this illegitimate government are making serious threats for several days now – special persons in the government are making provocative statements and doing provocative activities," he told reporters after a joint meeting at the party office in Dhaka's Nayapaltan.

On July 22, BNP announced a grand rally on Thursday to press home its one-point demand for the government's resignation.

"Jubo League had a programme scheduled for the 24th of July. After

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AL will not incite conflict

Quader says about July 27 'peace rally'

STAR REPORT

Awami League yesterday said there was no risk of conflict from its side centering the July 27 rallies in the capital and assured the ruling party will not instigate any confrontational situation.

"We will never incite conflict. We are in power and want to run the country peacefully," AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said at a programme at the party headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday.

"Creating turmoil in the country will bring no advantage and would rather be a loss for us. We don't want chaos," BSS reported him as saying.

Quader, also road, transport and bridges minister, however, said if anyone wants to create chaos, the government will ensure protection to people's lives and properties for the sake of peace.

"The people are our strength ... We are not afraid of the BNP's ongoing

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MEETING AT SECRETARIAT

'Watch what you say or do'

Cabinet secy asks top bureaucrats not to do anything that may embarrass govt ahead of polls

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Senior secretaries, secretaries and top bureaucrats were asked not to embarrass the government with their activities or remarks and to discharge their responsibilities wholeheartedly.

They were also asked to be careful and to keep in mind that the next parliamentary election is only five months away, said sources.

Cabinet Secretary Md Mahbub Hossain issued the directives at the meeting of the secretaries' committee on administrative development held at the Cabinet Division at Bangladesh Secretariat yesterday.

The cabinet secretary, the top bureaucrat, asked secretaries to be careful in selecting projects.

When taking on projects, it must be ensured that the costs are not inflated and that there are no cases of oversight in the project proposals. Any leniency about this will not be accepted, sources in the meeting quoted Mahbub telling his colleagues.

He also cautioned that secretaries, as the administrative head of ministries or departments, would be held responsible for any flawed project taken up and that it would be treated as the failure of the ministry concerned, said sources.

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KHADIJA'S BAIL ORDER Contempt petition filed with SC against Shujan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A contempt of court petition has been filed with the Supreme Court against Shushashoner Jonno Nagorik (Shujan) for making a statement about an apex court order that stayed the HC order granting bail to Jagannath University student Khadijatul Kubra.

Shujan's President M Hafiz Uddin Khan and its Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder have been made respondents to the petition.

Khadija has been in jail for over 10 months in two Digital Security Act cases filed for hosting a webinar, in which a guest – retired army major Delwar Hossain – made contentious remarks.

Delwar, who is popular on social media for uploading videos criticising the government, is also a prime accused. But as he is out of the country, he is not having to face the judiciary.

Khadija's bail has so far been rejected or stayed as many as six times, with the latest being by a full Supreme Court bench, led by Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique on July 10, 2023.

Several organisations, including Shujan, had made statements decrying the bail denial.

Four SC lawyers – Mohammad Harun-Or-Rashid, Mahfuzur Rahman Roman, Md Moniruzzaman Rana and Shafique Raihan Shawon – collectively submitted the petition to the Appellate Division of the SC on July 19, saying that Hafiz Uddin Khan and Badiul Alam Majumder

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Two-year-old Riaz's mother holding her baby to provide him some comfort yesterday afternoon. Like parents of all child dengue patients, who struggle with the disease more than adults, she has been worried about her child's health since he was admitted to Mugda Medical College Hospital on Saturday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'Checking Aedes not our job'

Says health minister; 9 more die from dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday said that it is not the task of the ministry to curb the spread of Aedes mosquitoes.

"Our task is to provide treatment to the patients and we have been doing it. But destroying Aedes mosquito [breeding grounds] is not our task," Zahid Maleque told journalists following the orientation of the newly-admitted MBBS students at Dhaka Medical College.

Nine dengue patients died in 24 hours till yesterday morning, all of whom were admitted to Dhaka hospitals.

This year's total number of deaths from dengue fever has risen to 185, according to the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS).

At least 2,293 dengue

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