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**Lives, livelihoods lost to Jamuna**

## 13 RAILWAY PROJECTS

# Cost overrun up to 260pc, time 9.5yrs

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Railway in October 2007 took up a project to construct a new station building in Khulna and enhance the operational capacity of the Benapole Station.

The initial cost was set at Tk 40 crore and the estimated time for completion was two years.

However, when the authorities declared completion in December 2018 – a whole nine and a half years after the original deadline – it was found that some works still remained incomplete.

In the meantime, the project cost escalated to Tk 93.90 crore – 113 percent higher than the original estimate.

This is not a lone incident of BR's poor performance in project implementation.

As a matter of fact, 12 out of its 13 projects completed in the 2018-19 fiscal year saw time extensions ranging from five months to nine and a half years, according to a government evaluation report.

Four of those projects were for feasibility studies.

Seven saw cost overshoots ranging from 24.73 percent to a whopping 260.81 percent, shows the recently released report by the Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED).

Of the 13, five projects were for laying rail lines and building stations; five for conducting feasibility studies for future projects; one each for installing signals, repairing old carriages and reforming railway policies.

The report attributed the time and cost overruns to complications over land acquisitions, changes in project designs, increase in work scopes and changes in the procurement rate schedule.

However, experts blamed substandard feasibility studies and planning; a lack of BR and its contractors' capacity; and a lack of accountability of responsible BR officials for the poor state of its project implementations.

The IMED report came at a time when most of BR's 28 ongoing projects are behind schedule, with around half a dozen of them delayed for around a decade.

In October 2010, the BR undertook a project to build a 78km rail line from Ishwardi to Dhalarchar via Pabna by June 2015 and at a cost of Tk 982.86 crore.

However, the project saw completion in June 2019 while its cost rose to Tk 1,714.73 crore, the report shows.

IMED, in the report, recommended proper feasibility studies and project designs, while also enhancing the BR's capacity for project implementation and intensifying monitoring by the railways ministry.

In another instance, the BR took up a project in December 2007 to build a second 80.47km-long rail line from Laksham to Chinkhi Astana to improve the capacity of the Dhaka-Chattogram rail corridor at a cost of Tk 501.5 crore.

Originally slated for completion by 2012, it was completed in October 2018 and at a cost of Tk 1,809.48 crore – 260 percent higher than the original.

Then in April 2016, the BR initiated a Tk 5.84 crore project to identify the spots on the Narayanganj-Dhaka-Joydebpur route that need an overpass or underpass. It was supposed to be completed in a year and half but was extended for another year.

The only exception to the trend of poor implementation was the project to repair 100 old carriages. The Tk 58.30 crore project was completed within the stipulated time and cost.

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➔ Total projects evaluated -- 13, including five for feasibility studies

➔ Time extended -- 12 projects (From five months to 9.5 years)

➔ Cost escalated -- 7 projects (From 24.73 % to 260.81%)

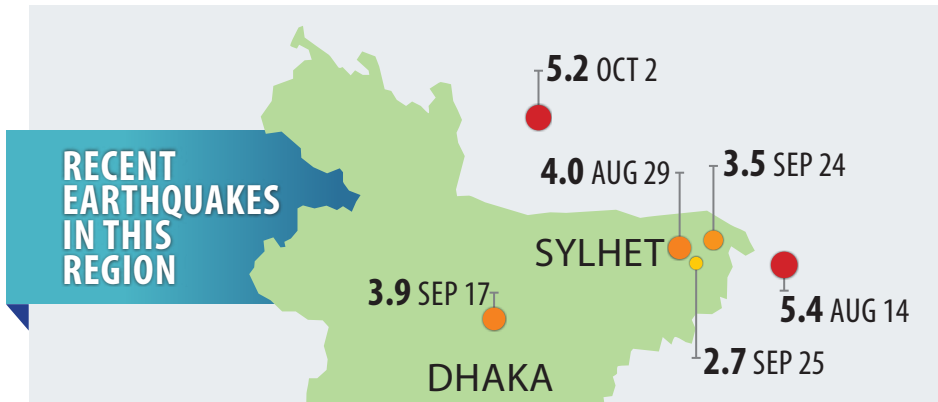


The immaculate floor and eye-catching patterns on ceiling of the third terminal of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. The modern terminal is set to have a soft opening on October 7. Story on page 12.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## An ominous sign: 34 quakes in 2 months

Experts warn of big one coming, stress preparedness



MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

At least 34 mild quakes in and around Bangladesh within the last two months is a worrying sign, experts said.

They said the frequency of such earthquakes increased, which indicates the big one is in the offing.

"A big earthquake can hit Bangladesh anytime and if it happens, rescuing people from the rubble will be a big challenge," Prof Mehedi Ahmed Ansary of Buet's civil engineering department told The Daily

Star yesterday, citing data from the United States Geological Survey (USGS) and India Meteorological Department.

He said that of the 34 minor earthquakes in this region, a handful were felt by people in the country. These foreshocks are indications of a major earthquake.

Earthquakes of 7-magnitude or above usually hit Bangladesh or its surrounding areas every 150 years, give or take a few years, the experts said, adding that the big

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## Little-known Islamist parties gearing up for polls

Major ones plan street demos

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

As some major Islamist parties have made the primary decision to boycott the forthcoming national election, another group of little-known Islamist parties are planning to counter the move by fielding candidates in all 300 constituencies, multiple sources have confirmed.

Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB), Bangladesh Khilafat Majlish, Khilafat Andolan, Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam and Bangladesh Nezami Islami Party have already said they will not join the polls, as they believe that a free and fair election is not possible under this government. Instead, they are demanding either a caretaker government or a poll-time all-party government to administer the election.

Against the backdrop, the ruling Awami League is trying to bring the rest of the Islamist parties to its fold.

These parties – most of them little known – have agreed to participate in the election unilaterally as they want to emerge as the "third force".

An Islamist coalition named Liberal Islamic Alliance comprising six Islamic and like-minded political parties formed on September 1 is going to announce its possible participation in the election, slated for early January, unilaterally in every constituency, according to the sources having direct knowledge of the development.

The six Islamic parties, newly registered with the Election Commission, are Bangladesh Supreme Party led by Syed Saifuddin Ahmed Maizbhandari, Bangladesh Islami Oikya Jote led by Misbahur Rahman Chowdhury, Krishak Sramik Party led by Farhanaz Haque, Aashiqeen-e-Awlia Oikya Parishad led by Alam Noori Sureshwari,

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## Shakib boost for defeated Tigers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will head to Dharamsala to begin their World Cup campaign

against Afghanistan on the back of a four-wicket defeat against England in their second warm-up fixture in Guwahati yesterday, but they will be boosted by skipper Shakib Al Hasan's return to fitness.

Captained by Najmul Hossain Shanto in absence of the injured Shakib, Bangladesh were handed a four-wicket defeat at the Barsapara Cricket Stadium last night. After Bangladesh had scored 188 for nine in 37 overs on winning the toss in the rain-interrupted fixture, the defending world champions were set a revised target of 197, which they chased down in 24.1 overs, despite losing the

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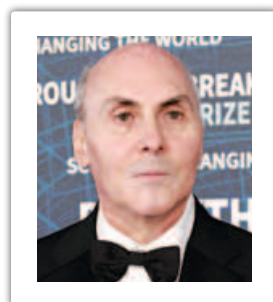
QUALITY TIME WITH MAA ... 10-year-old Sajjad Rahman, from Gandaria, had to visit several hospitals for dengue treatment before he was finally admitted to the DNCC Covid-19 Hospital in Mohakhali, which is now dedicated for dengue patients, two days ago. Since then, he has been feeling well enough to spend some quality time with his mother, which involves a fun game of ludo.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Two pioneers of Covid vaccine win Nobel in medicine



KATALIN KARIKO



DREW WEISSMAN

REUTERS, Stockholm

Hungarian scientist Katalin Kariko and US colleague Drew Weissman, who met in line for a photocopier before making mRNA molecule discoveries that paved the way for Covid-19 vaccines, won the 2023 Nobel Prize for Medicine yesterday.

"The laureates contributed to the unprecedented rate of vaccine development during one of the greatest threats to human health in modern times," the Swedish award-giving body said in the latest accolade for the pair.

The prize, among the most prestigious in the scientific world, was selected by the Nobel Assembly of Sweden's Karolinska Institute medical university and comes with 11 million Swedish crowns (about \$1 million) to share between them.

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