

DHAKA IN MOTION

Views from a Metro Ride

JANNATUL BUSHRA

Have you ever felt a sense of stillness when riding the metro in Dhaka? No, not the kind that implies silence or rest -- Dhaka doesn't allow for that -- but a quieter hum, like the city holding its breath? I am sure you did, if you somehow managed to take a ride during a less crowded hour, since it's hard for anyone to even breathe inside during the rush hour!

From the elevated tracks, you will see Dhaka's contrasts coming alive. This chaotic city goes silent inside the metro couches. The noise of the streets fades behind the glass, and all that remains is a quiet theatre of sights -- a sprawling megacity revealing itself in fragments, each more vivid and contradictory than the last.

From Motijheel to Uttara North, the first thing you might notice is the majestic Baitul Mukarram National Mosque, standing there as a timeless sentinel of a bygone age on one side. On the other, you may see the glinting high-rises heralding the city's aspirations for

The juxtaposition is striking — a reminder that Dhaka's soul resides in its ability to embrace the old and the new with equal fervour.

As the train glides past Sochibaloy (Secretariat), your gaze is irresistibly drawn to the Chummery House and then the bold red Curzon Hall, commanding attention with its unique charm and profound historical significance.

Further along, the lush canopy of trees in Suhrawardy Udyan offers a soothing contrast to the urban hustle, while the solemn Mausoleum of Three Leaders stands



quietly among the greenery, reminding of the sacrifices that shaped the nation. Swadhinata Stambha (Independence Monument) says hi to you in between, another poignant reminder of our independence. The Mukta Mancha seems actually mukta (free) from above here. The journey will start feeling like a theatre show at this point.

But the clatter of steel wheels against tracks and the sudden screech as it slows into the station, along with the occasional announcements, might pull you out of your thoughts. And when another metro rushes past on the opposite track — a sudden blur of motion — it can make your heart skip a beat. So be aware!

As the metro snakes through Shahbagh and beyond, you will see the new, wellfurnished

corporate or commercial high-rises adjusting with the old ones. The city seems like a jungle of concrete here.

However, before you reach Bijoy Sarani, the Parliament House's stunning greenery neatly kept parks and manicured lawns — will surely calm your eyes, offering a brief reprieve from the urban sprawl.

The landscape views shift from here to Uttara North, much like the traditional bioscope imagery. You will see a series of buildings, new and old, then a series of plains; especially after crossing the Pallabi station, the tight embrace of concrete loosens here, and you might feel like crossing the middle of nowhere.

As you can see, the Dhaka metro doesn't merely traverse geography; it encapsulates time. The stations, with their clean lines



PHOTO: JANNATUL BUSHRA

and utilitarian designs, speak of an attempt to order a city that resists neat narratives. Outside, the city is a storyteller — its rooftops hung with laundry, its streets alive with people and traffic, its walls splashed with murals, graffiti, and posters proclaiming political manifestos. Even the passing skies play their part. In this elevated world, Dhaka seems gentler.

The Metro here is more than its architecture of steel and concrete. It is a mirror, reflecting a city that is never still, never silent, always in motion.

Nowfel gained

FROM PAGE 1 Esse and Oris, investigations by both The Daily Star and NBR found.

Fakhrul Mohammad Alam, head of the NBR investigation, submitted a 111-page report on his findings late last month.

Of the 20 firms making counterfeit cigarettes, Bijoy International Tobacco and Tara International Tobacco are by far the biggest, says the report submitted to NBR Chairman Abdur Rahman Khan.

The firms -- both owned by Tara Group -- import raw materials by lying on documents and produce counterfeit cigarettes in their factories in Kishoreganj and Chakaria Upazila of Chattogram, says the report.

newspaper found that previously counterfeit cigarettes made by these companies were sold in different parts of the country.

Liton and his brother Abdul Mannan Khokon are owners of Tara Group.

Although the company's sales were reported in audit reports at Tk 48.48 crore from July 2020 to June 2024, the CIC found evidence suggesting that the amount is 802.17 crore. This was done to evade taxes.

 $The investigators\, analysed$ nine bank accounts of the group.

Mohammad Fakhrul Alam, convener of the committee, said, probe 'A few individuals control the market. They make fraudulent documents about shell companies to conceal their activities. "We looked at bank

transactions of all these [20] companies and discovered

that the Tara Group was Chowdhoury withdrew Tk 3 linked to at least 10 of them. The former education minister, a councillor, and his brother are involved in

illegal cigarette distribution." He added that Bijov Tobacco's International factory in Chakaria was built on land owned by the three

of them. "We have found evidence of illegal cigarette production and marketing. saw suspicious transactions at Tara Group's bank accounts. The former education minister used

Premier University's bank accounts to receive his cuts.

filing criminal individuals several organisations.'

account with Commercial October 1 last year.

information

Iftekhar Monir replied, "University Trustee Board Chairman Mohibul Hassan

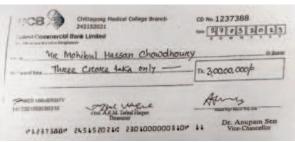
work of the university. However, he deposited the same amount of money from an account of Tara Group to the university's account as the work was not completed.' Monir also mentioned

crore in cash for development

that Tara Group and the Premier University are not related.

When contacted, Monir said, "We have no additional comments other than what we have written Ito the NBR].

Liton and Nowfel had gone into hiding after the Awami League government



recommend and departmental cases against and

University's Premier United Bank's Chattogram Medical College Branch received Tk 3 crore from an account of Tara Group with the same bank's Jubilee Road Branch on

The CIC on October 23 this year wrote to the university's registrar seeking about this transaction.

Four days later, Registrar

fell amid a mass uprising on August 5.

officials Several Tara Group, requesting anonymity, said Liton was in Dubai and Nowfel in India.

Liton told The Daily Star on WhatsApp in November this year that Nowfel owned 40 percent shares of Bijoy Tobacco in early 2018.

"He sold his shares to me and my brother around 2020. Since then, there has been no further transaction with him. All of this is a conspiracy against me."

When asked about the ownership of the land and transactions in the Premier University's bank account, he said, "If you have documents, why are you asking me?'

CJ appointment

The reform commission recommends permanent attorney services for moving chief justice free from the cases on behalf of the government at the apex and district courts without any political influence, and the formation of an independent investigation body in the criminal justice system. It also advocates swift justice for the common people at a minimum cost.

The government had constituted the eight-Division judge Justice Shah in its report. Abu Naveem Mominir Rahman, on October 3 to propose necessary measures.

On December 11, the commission sent a copy of its preliminary report to Environment, Forest and Climate Change Adviser Sveda Rizwana Hasan, who is coordinating all the reform commissions, to apprise her of their progress.

The commission will submit its final report by January 15, 2025, its member and senior SC lawyer Tanim Hussain Shawon told The Daily Star on December 20.

A total of 12,721 people, including common citizens, lawyers, judges and courtrelated support staffers, have given their views to the commission through its website until December 10. A significant number of people also weighed in through emails and letters. Tanim added that the acceptable proposals will be included in the commission's final report after they are examined.

The preliminary report states maintaining the judiciary's independence and impartiality, and ensuring its effectiveness largely depend on the chief justice as the leader and top figure of the judiciary — a reality "partially" reflected in article 48 (3) of the constitution.

This article states the president can take a decision for the appointment of the chief justice alone, without consulting the prime minister or anyone else, according to his own wisdom.

"However, past experience shows that in several cases, the executive authority has exerted influence in various ways on the appointment of the chief justice. As a result, the independence, impartiality and effectiveness of the judiciary have been compromised at various times," the preliminary report says.

"In the above situation.

the appointment of the authority, there should be a to the effect that the president shall appoint the most senior judge in the Appellate Division as the chief justice.

"That is, the president exercise his cannot discretionary power or apply any other method in the member reform commission, appointment of the chief state that the president headed by former Appellate justice," the commission said may ask the appointment The report

> number of judges in the and other duties. Therefore, or the original one. it recommends certain provisions instead of article 94 (1) of the constitution. The proposed provisions number of judges in the Appellate Division shall be seven and more judges shall be appointed as required of the chief justice". The also stipulate that the "necessary number of judges shall be appointed in the High Court Division from time to time as per the requirements of the chief

the "Supreme Court Judges of Dhaka district; and Appointment Commission", the reform commission states that, besides the chief justice, the other two most senior Appellate Division judges, the two most senior judges of the High Court Division, one retired judge of the Supreme Court, the attorney general, the president of the Supreme Court Bar Association and another lawyer of the Supreme Court.

The opinion of the appointment commission prevail will in the appointment of SC judges.

The reform commission ordinance

on the matter, prepared in light of articles 95 (1) and (2) of the constitution, to the Law and Justice Division. The

appointment commission will invite applications from candidates with the prescribed qualifications, which the the preliminary report says.

review of applications, which students.

the commission believes will be made public so that that in order to make the people may send their objections or reservations. The shortlisted candidates influence of the executive will then be invited for an interview, following which provision in the constitution the commission will select candidates through secret ballot after discussing suitability of the candidates. The president will then appoint the judges according to the recommendation of the commission within 15 days.

The proposed provisions commission to reconsider for doing so, but the Supreme Court remains commission will not be an important issue in the obligated to change its list. It smooth discharge of judicial may send back a modified list

Currently, the president appoints judges of the Appellate Division and the High Court Division stipulate that the "minimum in consultation with the chief justice in line with the constitution.

The reform commission has held meetings and as per the requirements exchanged views with diverse stakeholders, including recommended provisions the chief justice, the law adviser and the attorney general, before making the preliminary report.

It also sat the chairman of the Crimes International Tribunal; public prosecutors About the formation of and government pleaders representatives from Open Society Foundation, USA; Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association; Dhaka eight members will include District Bar Association; Bangladesh Judicial Service Bangladesh Association: Judicial Employees Association; Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries: United Nations Development Programme; Cooperation International Agency; American Department of Justice; Carter Center; National Bar Association; and Law and

Justice Reform Forum. Besides lawyer Tanim, has already sent a draft the members of the reform commission are retired High Court judges Justice Haque Emdadul Justice Farid Ahmed Shibli; former district and sessions judge and former registrar general of Bangladesh Supreme Court Syed Aminul Islam; former district and sessions judge Masdar final report will elaborate on, Hossain; Dhaka University associate law professor Kazi A shortlist of candidates Mahfuzaul Haque Supan; will be prepared based on a and a representative from

ACC to probe Hasina

FBI confirmed the matter through their London representative and found evidence that serious financial irregularities and money laundering crimes had been committed there," the source said.

"Linda Samuels, Senior Trial Attorney of the Department of Justice (DOJ), contacted Special Agent La Private and found that \$300 million was deposited from Bangladesh to various bank accounts in the United States," the source added.

Earlier on December 17, investigation into allegations that Hasina, Joy, Hasina's sister Sheikh Rehana, and Rehana's daughter Tulip Siddiq, a British lawmaker, embezzled Tk 80,000 crore from nine priority projects.

Speaking about this

case in a views exchange programme with journalists at the ACC headquarters yesterday, the commission's Chairman Mohammad Abdul Momen said, "Many of the things we know are true. We will provide more information when we have more data.'

ACC BOSS'S ASSETS In the meeting with reporters, ACC Chairman Momen revealed his wealth statement.

According to Momen, he owns a 1,500-squarefoot apartment combining two 750-square-foot units the ACC decided to launch an at Bosila in the city's Mohammadpur. He is in the process of acquiring an additional 700 square feet around Tk 5 lakh. there.

has a five-katha empty plot lakh and another three-

Momen was allocated an 1.25-katha share of a 10-katha plot. He has not gained possession yet after receiving the allocation in 2007.

He had deposited Tk 75,000 for a RAJUK plot, but no resolution has been made until now. "For some reason, the government did not allocate it to me. I will apply again. Apart from this, I have no other immovable assets."

Momen's movable assets include 25 shelves filled with books of various sizes, including many valuable ones. He has furniture and electronic items

He has a five-year savings Together with his wife, he certificate worth TK 30

Provident Fund money, which amounts to Tk 17 lakh. Answering to a journalist's

question, Momen said, "It is our expectation that corrupt individuals are not spared. But our expectations are often not met for various reasons. Perhaps the cases we file are weak. "While it's not appropriate to criticise the

judiciary here, questions do arise about whether justice is served. However, holding the ACC solely responsible for ensuring justice would not be fair.' Commissioner ACC

(Investigation) Mohammad Ali Akbar Azizi in Purbachal American City.

As a member of the BCS monthly savings certificate secretary in the law ministry. it will no anyone."

Administration Committee, not withdrawn his General a permanent prosecution system and creating a Bangladesh Attorney Service Directory was prepared at that time. The law was drafted as well.

"However. subsequent political governments did not pursue the ordinance, and it remained stuck Bringing in senior and qualified lawyers into the commission's permanent prosecution would require better remuneration, which will take some time."

Commissioner ACC (Inquiry) Brig Gen (retd) Hafiz Ahsan Farid said. "The ACC's professional foundation is strong. Ever after the commission was said, "The ACC does not yet non-functional for 42 days, have its own prosecution its officials and employees rules. During the 1/11 worked tirelessly. The ACC is government, I was a deputy committed to ensuring that secretary in the law ministry. it will not be subservient to

Admin officials protest

Currently, the promotion ratio between administrative cadres and other cadres for the deputy secretary position is 3:1. However, the Public Administration Reform Commission recently proposed changing this ratio to 1:1, sparking dissatisfaction among administrative cadre officers.

The protesters voiced

warning of potential legal action if their demands were not addressed.

Mokhles assured that the delegation the commission would reasonable present recommendations the government. He also emphasised that further discussions would be held to resolve any confusion

Meanwhile, officials from other cadres have

over the matter.

their concerns to Mokhles, announced a one-hour

offices today in opposition the commission's to proposal. They argue that promotions to deputy secretary should be based entirely on exams and merit, without considering what cadre an official

belongs to.

strike across government

"We want promotions to be solely merit-based. This government came to power through an antiquota movement, and we don't want another

movement over issue," said Muhammad Mofijur Rahman, a leader "Discrimination of the Eradication Council" representing 25 cadres.

An additional secretary, 3:1 ratio. The officer added Bangladesh that the Administrative Association, represents deputy

for harm caused by predatory

The Press Council is a

Saki,

of

journalism.

Zonayed

coordinator

this commissioners from all 64 districts, would sue the commission for contempt of court if it violates this precedent.

In a statement issued Wednesday on speaking on condition of Bangladesh Administrative anonymity, stated that Service Association also a court ruling supports protested the commission's promotion recommendations. They argued that the proposed changes would fail to Service create a "people-oriented, which efficient, impartial, and modern administration."

Commission to pitch for new law

security for journalists. He said there should be a minimum floor wage for all journalists, ensuring fair compensation not just for those based in Dhaka but for professionals throughout the country.

"In many cases. particularly outside of Dhaka, a journalist wears three hats simultaneously the hat of a journalist, the hat of an advertisement procurer and the hat of a salesperson. But a journalist should not engage in advertisement collection, because that opens the door to corruption." he said.

Shafiqul Alam, the chief adviser's press secretary, also recommended replacing the journalists' wage board with a floor wage. "Then this needs to

be enforced strictly. If an

organisation does not pay

the journalists the minimum

not be allowed to exist," he said.

Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, the founder of Digitally Right, said, "The labour law needs to be strictly enforced so that journalists are paid duly and on time. If a media organisation is not financially viable and cannot pay its journalists, then it should be allowed to close down. Those who truly want to run a media business for the sake of doing journalism will then thrive."

"Most of the journalists in Bangladesh get less than Tk 10,000 per month. Local journalists often do not get paid at all. How do you expect the highest journalistic standards from journalists who are struggling to survive?" questioned journalist Masud

They also spoke about the

Kamal.

wage, the organisation will failure of journalists' unions in upholding the rights of journalists.

politicisation The unions interferes with their capacity to negotiate with the management of media organisations on behalf of journalists, said Abu Sayeed Khan, advisory editor of the Samakal. "Depoliticisation of unions is a tall order because journalists themselves are politicised.' "The unions used to work

as a pressure group at one point, but they fail at their ob now," said MA Aziz, former secretary general of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists. Speakers at the dialogue stressed the need for

accountability of the media in Bangladesh and the role of an independent Press Council that is not operated by government puppets. They said that citizens have a right to seek redressal

Bangladesh Sangstha, said that the Press Council must run like a civil court.

justice can be served."

Mahbub

Professor SM Shameem Reza of Dhaka University's mass communication and iournalism stressed the need for a

universal code of conduct for journalists and regulation in the industry using methods like accreditation.

dysfunctional and failed institution. We need to figure Qadaruddin out how to enable the Press editor of AFP Factcheck, said that it needs to be Council," said Masud Kamal. chief considered whether media houses intentionally Ganosamhati Andolan, said, spreading misinformation 'The Press Council must or disinformation can be keep watch on whether taken into account without standards of journalism impeding the freedom of are truly being upheld. The expression. Council must be allowed Zillur Rahman, executive

quasi-judicial powers so that director of CGS, said, "In the last few years, journalists Morshed, managing director and chief editor of the staterun national news agency Sangbad

have been harassed and the media has become a puppet to the government. Matiur Rahman

Chowdhury, editor of the Daily Manabzamin, warned against excessive government intervention, saving that the fear of media houses being shut down and journalistic voices being silenced in the department name of reforms cannot be discounted.