



Nostalgia on wheels

RBR

My first ride in a Murir Tin bus was when I visited my grandfather in Bheramara, Kushtia, in the late seventies. The mere mention of this old mode of public transportation caught my fancy. As a child, the explanation of being rattled like puffed rice in a bus almost the size of a Jolly Tin Box naturally excited me.

And yes, the thrills of that first ride were nothing less than a roller coaster. Unexpected road bumps, worn-out suspensions, engine vibrations, and the driver's favourite tactics of frequent acceleration and braking gave the Murir Tin bus its name.

Jolted and tossed around, it was the jerky, vibrating sensation that made up the idea of enjoying such broken-down bus rides. There is another equally



PHOTO: STAR

exhilarating ride called Chander Gari in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Dhaka streets also have these amusement rides in public transport packages; I don't have to go out of the city to enjoy being rattled.

There is no sarcasm. I do love the excitement and thrill of such rides. I had to take trips from Farmgate to Azampur, Uttara, so I know what I am talking about.

The toiling mass of Dhaka knows even better. If not in structural frames, but in thrills, Dhaka's public minibuses are like yesteryear's Murir Tins.

My second similar ride, if not the exact Murir Tin, but on a Dhaka local bus near the Bahadur Shah Park Panir Tanki on Old Dhaka's Johnson Road,

was almost like a scary amusement ride.

I always park my car in the parking lot of Azad Cinema Hall, opposite the lower courts in Old Dhaka. I take a battery-rickshaw or hop on a minibus to manoeuvre better in those traffic-crammed, narrow lanes.

But thrills aside, it is the colour and décor that hold my attention. Ever since the early 1900s, art has adorned the bodies of trucks, buses and rickshaws in South Asian streets.

Today, when I see Dhaka in my imagination, these vibrant, over-the-top, kitsch rickshaw, baby taxi and truck colours come to mind.

Such art on old Bedford trucks and

buses, from the British rule over South Asia to Dhaka's current battery-driven trishaws, has become the backdrop or canvas of our physical city.

Urbanisation didn't erase these colours; instead, the palette's vibrant and exuberant hues in boisterous designs on the body of our public transport have seeped into our fashion, our festivals, and even our interiors.

The actual Bedford Murir Tin buses, since the early 1990s, no longer ply the streets of Dhaka. They were the first public transport. These buses had wooden plank benches, started with a crank, and used a rubber bulb horn for signalling.

The vehicles were mostly leftover army trucks from the post-World War II era, sold in auctions and retrofitted by local businessmen who purchased them. Their wooden structural frame was bound in tin, thus the simile of the bus resembling a tin container, and a crowd of passengers compared to puffed rice (muri) stuffed inside the tin.

As an ode to the iconic, clunky local buses and the recent jumpy rides in stressful traffic, Coke Studio Bangla's Season 2 song "Murir Tin" is a fun and high-energy tribute to the colours and thrills of Dhaka.

The term Murir Tin is now used as a symbol of dilapidated nostalgia, thrilling public rides, and the colours of the city.



APBn to resume

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CAAB Member (Security) Air Cdre Md Asif Iqbal, and Group Captain M Kamrul Islam, director, CW&IT, Air Headquarters, were present.

In his opening remarks, Lutfe Siddiqi underscored the importance of inter-agency cooperation, noting that all government departments are working towards the same goal.

The Civil Aviation secretary and the CAAB chairman gave separate PowerPoint presentations on CAAB's functions and the current security and policing arrangements at airports.

The inspector general of police informed the meeting that prevention and detection of crime are legally the responsibility of the police, and no other agency is authorised to carry out those duties.

After the discussions, the meeting took six decisions, which include that all agencies operating within airports will function under CAAB, ensuring unified command, regulation and control.

The IGP and the CAAB chairman will engage in regular discussions to minimise operational challenges.

It was also decided that weekly security meetings must be held at every airport.

For long-term reforms, the civil aviation ministry may recommend ways to restructure CAAB to separate its roles as operator and regulator.

For almost a year, APBn and the Air Force-led AVSEC had been locked in a dispute over security responsibilities inside the airport.

After the change of government in August last year, many Ansar personnel left their posts, prompting the temporary deployment of the BAF task force. At the same time, APBn was barred from securities duty inside the airport.

Later, APBn alleged that AVSEC members had removed office materials from its airport office, prompting the battalion to file a general diary with the Airport Police Station.

Stray bullet

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group took control of several villages, including Birgaon.

According to a witness, some two dozen men arrived in Birgaon on two boats yesterday. The witness said the men were supporters of Kaiyum, as she recognised two of them, while the rest had their faces covered.

As soon as the armed men entered the village, they began shooting indiscriminately, during which one stray bullet hit the victim on the lower part of her face, killing her on the spot, the witness said. Locals claimed both groups maintained ties with Awami League.

As of last night, no case was filed. Additional SP Sujon Chandra said police had been deployed at the spot and the situation was under control.

Contacted, Shah Alam, convener of BNP's Alokali union unit, said, "On Friday afternoon, Kaiyum, along with Awami League leaders and activists, arrived at Birgaon village on speedboats and shot at the houses of BNP activists."

Denying the allegation, Kaiyum said, "Local Awami League leaders killed her [Ferdousi]. Neither I nor my men were involved. On Thursday, my supporter Idan Miya was killed. To shift blame onto us, they have staged this killing."

Expansion to put wildlife in peril

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vehicle collisions and cause permanent harm to wildlife habitats.

"If the highway is expanded, elephants and other wildlife will need more time to cross it. In the future, an increased volume of traffic will further obstruct the movement of wild animals, resulting in habitat fragmentation and disruption to their natural way of life," it said in a letter to RHD on August 25 this year.

The letter also referred to the recently built Chattogram-Cox's Bazar railway line, 10km of which cuts through the sanctuary, and said that Asian elephants and other wild animals are already at risk of being hit by trains while crossing the track.

The Forest Department recommended that RHD build a flyover over the 10km stretch of the sanctuary to facilitate increased vehicular traffic, avoiding further disruption to the movement of wild animals.

It also identified 20 key elephant crossing points in and around the sanctuary and suggested construction of additional overpasses and underpasses to facilitate their safe movement.

However, RHD officials said the construction of a 10km-long flyover would substantially raise the project cost, estimated at Tk 21,754 crore in 2023.

Jahid Hossain, superintendent engineer of the RHD Chattogram Circle, said it is not financially viable to build such a structure.

"Nevertheless, we are in favour of building a 700-metre-long flyover from Jangalia to Satgarh within the sanctuary, along with several

underpasses and overpasses at key locations," he said.

Last year, RHD signed a memorandum of understanding with Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to conduct a survey on the highway's expansion from Shiklabaha in Chattogram to the bridge over Matamuhuri River in Cox's Bazar.

When contacted, Bashir Ahmed, a member of the JICA survey team, said, "The one-year survey, launched in October last year, is scheduled to be completed this month. However, that won't be possible as the stakeholders -- RHD, the Forest Department and JICA -- are yet to reach a consensus on the proposed Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Highway Improvement Project (Phase-2)."

He hoped that the survey will be completed by December this year.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Experts warn that if the highway expansion project is implemented, it could severely obstruct elephant movement across three major corridors, including the Chunati-Satgarh route.

Sanjida Rahman, an environmental activist and coordinator of Chunati Rokkhay Amra, said the highway's expansion would jeopardise the elephant corridors.

She urged the RHD to consider constructing a flyover for the 10-km stretch of the sanctuary or upgrading the Chattogram-Banskhali-Pekua road as an alternative route for better connectivity between Matarbari Port, Cox's Bazar, and Chattogram.

MA Aziz, professor of Zoology at Jahangirnagar University, said government agencies in Bangladesh

often cite financial constraints as a justification for neglecting conservation priorities. But budgetary concerns cannot be used as an excuse when it comes to protection of critical elephant corridors.

"Development must be balanced with ecological responsibility. Government agencies must not be allowed to construct roads that would inflict irreversible damage on protected forest ecosystems," noted Aziz, also a member of Asian Elephant Specialist Group of the IUCN, a global organisation working in the field of nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources.

THE RAILWAY LINE

There was an outcry from conservationists in October last year after an elephant was killed by a train operating on the Chattogram-Cox's Bazar rail line that went into service on December 1, 2023.

They pointed out a lack of safeguards for elephants and other wild animals in the sanctuary.

Forest officials said that when Bangladesh Railway took up the project, it had pledged to construct "sufficient" overpasses and underpasses for elephants to safely cross a 10km stretch of the 103km rail line from Dohazari to Cox's Bazar. But only three such structures were built, with one of them unusable because of design flaws.

To facilitate the project, the government in 2018 revoked the protected status of 207 acres of forestland. Later, around 240,000 trees were felled, and several hills were razed, according to Wildlife Division data.

BTRC sues Beximco and IGW top brass

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In addition, IOF Chief Operating Officer Mushfiq Manzoor and directors of Beximco Computers Limited, a Beximco Group concern, have also been accused.

Toufeequl Islam, senior assistant director of BTRC, filed the case with Gulshan Police Station on Thursday under sections 73, 74 and 76 of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulation Act, as well as sections 420 and 406 of the Penal Code.

Yesterday, Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Nazmin Akter fixed October 20 for submission of the probe report.

In Bangladesh, IGW operators handle international incoming calls -- a task earlier performed by mobile operators.

In 2014, a group of IGW operators proposed an experimental model called the IGW Operator Switch, which gave them control of a common switch for call termination

and interconnection.

That year, the BTRC approved the model without amending its policy, and in 2015 the government endorsed it. After the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5 last year, the BTRC moved to reform the arrangement.

According to the case documents, the IOF formed a Market Development Fund (MDF) under the agreement on the system.

The alleged embezzlement from the MDF took place between December 20, 2015, and August 4, 2024.

The case statement said the IOF raised Tk 631.15 crore from IGW operators for the fund, but around 95 percent of the amount was routed through a single account under Beximco Computers Limited.

BTRC's investigating officer Toufeequl stated that he found the accused individuals colluded to embezzle these funds instead of

using them as Market Development Expenses (MDS) and submitting reports to the BTRC on the expenses.

The commission cited a lack of transparency in handling the money and referred the matter to the Anti-Corruption Commission for investigation.

Syeda Nasrin, lawyer for the IOF, told The Daily Star last night that if embezzlement did occur, those who bore the costs of the MDS should be treated as the actual victims. "In that case, how can they be accused?" she asked.

She argued that the BTRC could have informed the IOF, allowing the operators who bore the MDS expenses to file their own case to recover the money.

"Neither BTRC nor the government has any interest in this money. What happened took place entirely under BTRC's contractual supervision," she added.

'Govt negotiating with BNP in secret'

Allege Jamaat leaders; party hold rallies in 7 cities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jamaat-e-Islami leaders yesterday alleged that the government, bowing to BNP's pressure, is secretly negotiating with the party over elections, ignoring reforms.

The government's stance has forced Jamaat and like-minded parties to take to the streets, they said while addressing rallies in seven divisional cities -- Chattogram, Sylhet, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barishal, Rangpur, and Mymensingh.

The rallies were part of the party's ongoing programme to press home its five-point demand, including holding the next national election in line with the spirit of the July Charter.

Reiterating their call for introducing the proportional representation (PR) system in elections, they said this method would prevent anyone from "turning into a fascist."

Addressing a rally at Rangpur Public Library ground, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar said, "On one hand, you [the interim government] announce the July Charter, while on the other hand, you secretly negotiate with the BNP. This won't be allowed. Be neutral. Accept our five-point demands. And only then will we step back from the movement."

He said, "Of the 31 parties, 25 have agreed on the PR system. But the BNP is opposing it, because if PR is introduced, their nomination trading and muscle power will come to an end."

At another rally in Sylhet's Bandarbazar area, Jamaat Assistant Secretary General HM Hamidur Rahman Azad said, "The government announced the July Charter, but instead of upholding its spirit, it is implementing the agenda of a particular section."

At the Barishal rally, Jamaat Naye-e-Ameer Prof Mujibur Rahman demanded a referendum on the PR system, while in Chattogram, Assistant Secretary General Rafiqul Islam Khan echoed the same.

Jamaat, along with six other parties, recently announced a three-day protest programme. The other parties are Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, Khelafat Majlis, Nezame Islam Party, Bangladesh Khelafat Andolon, and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (Jagpa).

BNP's survey-based nomination plan

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gave their opinions to the central leadership. That is no longer happening. Now Tarique Rahman's team is conducting surveys, and two rounds have already been completed."

Similar frustrations were voiced by a senior leader from Munshiganj and a Shariatpur district leader, both of whom requested anonymity.

The leader from Munshiganj said the party relies heavily on the high command, sidelining local leaders, and treating the high command's decision as final could have serious consequences.

The Shariatpur district leader, said he is a candidate from the area but the party is ignoring grassroots input.

"How can we trust this survey process? Even as a leader, I have the right to know what procedure is being followed, but I don't know what is happening inside the party."

Sylhet district BNP president Abdul Quyum Choudhury, an aspirant from constituency-3, echoed the concern. "I have heard surveys are underway, but I don't know how they are being done or what the results are." He urged Tarique to ensure nominations follow the party's constitution.

Zakir Hossain Sarker, member secretary of Kushtia and an aspirant for constituency-3, warned that if someone from another party, often described by the grassroots as "hybrid" activists, "buys" a nomination, the grassroots will not accept it.

Cumilla South District BNP's former convener Amin-ur-Rashid Yasin defended the survey-based

process, saying, "There was never any system to nominate through grassroots panels."

BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed also defended the survey-based process. "We are not doing just one survey. We are doing multiple surveys from two or three angles. Professional organisations conduct these surveys, not political people. This is a combined effort, and no decision is made based on a single survey," he said.

Asked about violating the party constitution, he added, "The instructions of the Election Commission will be followed. There is still time to do these."

Election experts, however, warn of risks.

Election expert Alim said that after the July uprising, people expected political reform and positive change, but "nothing is visible yet, and if this continues, no change will come".

Political analyst Prof Mojibur Rahman said the process appears to be based in London, where Tarique resides. "The connection between local people and the high command, the bridge, the link, the tuning is not happening properly," he observed.

He also pointed out that survey predictions have often proven unreliable, citing the recent student union polls at Dhaka and Jahangirnagar universities, where BNP's student wing Chhatra Dal suffered heavy defeats.

"If decisions are forced from the central to the grassroots, it will be bad for the party," warned Mojibur.

Costs of 2 new metro lines

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the tender process has yet to be completed.

Referring to the reasons behind the cost hike, the project director said that at the time of the initial estimate, the exchange rate was Tk 84.5 per dollar, which now stands at about Tk 120. An escalation in land acquisition costs was cited as another reason.

Besides, rising inflation has driven up construction material costs and local and international labour wages, transport and logistics expenses have also increased.

The cost increase will be similar for the 20km MRT-5 line that will link Hemayetpur with Bhatara via Gabtoli, Mirpur, and Gulshan.

The project, divided into 10 packages, was initially approved at Tk 41,261 crore. However, the latest estimate shows it will require Tk 15,527 crore to implement just one package, which was originally calculated at Tk 3,968 crore.

Officials at the planning ministry and DMITCL said the costs of all the packages would see similar hikes, making the projects too costly for Bangladesh to afford.

They added that the costs of the two

projects, approved during the tenure of the previous government, were much higher than those of similar projects in many other countries. Negotiations are underway with the Japanese authorities to rein in costs.

During his visit to Japan from August 23 to September 5, the finance adviser held talks with Japan's finance and trade ministers and also with JICA officials. They told him that the costs of Japan-funded projects are higher than those financed by other countries due to their high quality of work.

"It is true that their quality of work is high... But we must ensure that the projects don't become a burden for us," Salehuddin told this newspaper.

"We told them that we will review the costs with the help of our experts. JICA may also do the same," he added.

Seeking anonymity, a ministry official told The Daily Star that a team of experts and high officials, led by the Chief Adviser's Special Assistant Sheikh Moinuddin, has been tasked with reviewing the costs of the projects.

The team is expected to submit its report soon, the official added.