

Bangladesh rail network up for a make-over

Neglected for long, Bangladesh's railway is up for a make-over to cope with the growing need for connectivity within the country and to prepare for joining the Asian rail network.

Collaboration with [New Delhi](#) is likely to be high on the agenda during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's forthcoming visit to India. She has said she is in touch with Indian Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Dhaka is shedding its earlier reservations and reversing its policy to join the Asian rail grid. All South Asian neighbours would need to adjust their tracks and other infrastructure to connect with it.

A full-fledged ministry will govern the railway if the government accepts a unanimous resolution passed Sunday recommending that it should be separated from the communications ministry, where it operates as a department headed by a director general.

The idea is to upgrade infrastructure and to make its running cost-effective, Sheikh MUjibur Rahman, a ruling Awami League lawmaker who heads the committee, told media.

The railway sector, which has enormous potential, has long been ignored forcing it to shut many of its routes. Railway reforms would help ease the existing transport problems.

'Turning railway into a separate ministry is in every way feasible. It would help make the sector dynamic and commercially viable,' Golam Mowla Rony, a member of the committee, told New Age newspaper Monday.

British rulers introduced the railway in undivided India in 1853. In 1947, the present Bangladesh Railway inherited a truncated portion of the British-Indian Railway network which was designed to feed [Kolkata](#) at that time.

'Lack of patronage over the years has put railway development on hold. The present government is keen about improving its infrastructure and services to ensure a comparatively cost effective, safe and reliable transport,' said the lawmaker.

After incurring losses for long, Bangladesh Railway attained its revenue target in the 2007-08 fiscal year. It also reintroduced a cross-border train service with India the same year.

The state-run railway has 34,168 regular employees and its network covers 2,855 km.

The government had earlier taken up a scheme supported by the Asian Development Bank for modernisation of the railway. ADB consultants have also suggested running Bangladesh Railway as an independent division. The communications ministry has been scrutinising the proposal for the last six months.

(© IANS / India eNews)