

Rail crossings turn death traps

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Rail crossings across the city have become death traps for people due to violation of traffic rules and lack of awareness among the city dwellers.

According to Bangladesh Railway data, at least 119 people were killed from January till September 2005 in accidents on the 39 kilometres Tongi-Dhaka-Narayanganj line. In 2004 the number of people killed was 172. Most of the accidents occurred at the level crossings.

The latest victim was Farid Uddin Ahmed, a former additional secretary of the information ministry, who met a tragic end of his life in an accident at Khilkhet level crossing on July 8.

The accident occurred at about 9:00am when Farid, a resident of Uttara, was going to his sister's house at Khilkhet.

Witnesses said the gateman of the rail crossing had lowered the bar several minutes before the train passed through. But Farid's left leg got stuck in between the lines when he tried to cross them.

At present there are 31 authorised and more than 25 unauthorised rail-gates exist across the city, said Anhar Mahmood, divisional manager of Bangladesh Railway.

"Violation of traffic rules by the vehicles and pedestrians in the rail crossings is mainly responsible for such accidents," Anhar told Star City.

Blaming the drivers and pedestrians for taking unnecessary risk, Anhar said the drivers and pedestrians often show poor level of common sense. "The drivers often compete

with the gate-man at the rail crossings during closer of the gates."

"We don't have adequate manpower to prevent the vehicles from such violation of rules. The railway authorities maintain one gate-man in every authorised rail crossing," Anhar said.

"When a train is about to pass a crossing, it's difficult for a gate-man to lower the barrier showing green signal to the train driver and prevent the vehicles and pedestrians from crossing the gate."

The gate-man at Tejgaon link road level crossing alleged that the vehicle drivers often cross the rail tracks using the opposite lane of the road even after closing the gate.

This correspondent stayed at the level crossing for some time and witnessed the drivers' lack of patience and violation of rules while crossing the rail tracks when a train comes.

About the unauthorised crossings, Anhar said: "We put barriers on the unauthorised rail crossings but these are stolen. We can't deploy gate-men for unauthorised rail crossings."

Locomotive master Rahman said: "Driving through Dhaka is very difficult because there are so many rail crossings in the city and people just do not care when a train passes."

"In every trip I found drivers and pedestrians crossing the rail tracks hurriedly and often some of them are found using wrong lane or even crossing the tracks by lifting the barrier."

"Except for whistling frequently, a train driver has nothing to do with these stupid road users," Rahman said.

Moreover, illegal slums beside the rail tracks across the city are also contributing to

frequent accidents.

Under Bangladesh Railway's Dhaka to Joydevpur Dual-Gauge Project the authorities had planned to build protection walls beside the tracks in the densely populated areas. But the project could not be implemented except for a few places in Nakhla para area.

Shahidul Islam, a top official of Bangladesh

Railway, said it is very difficult to implement such programmes due to undue pressure and interference by influential locals.

"The railway authorities have spent a lot of money and energy to restore railway lands by evicting the slums but within a short period of time the influential people rebuild those slums."



The dense population on and along the tracks at Tejgaon crossing caused a number of rail accidents (left), while vehicles and pedestrians crossing the tracks despite the signal down at Mahakhali crossing, to make way for the train to pass by shows lack of awareness among the city dwellers.

Button factory polluting area for 20 years



The exhaust openings of the button factory from where dust and toxic fumes spread across the surrounding areas making life miserable for the neighbours.

STAR PHOTO

IMRUL HASAN

A button factory called A N Industry Limited on 3rd lane in the Gopibagh residential area set up by an influential person is causing serious health hazards for last 20 years as the atmosphere is polluted by toxic chemicals used for button production, alleged residents.

The factory that operates for 18 hours a day, produces dust that mingles with the air and together the noise and dust pollute the environment.

At the beginning of its operations, residents protested the location of the factory, but were unable to do much to relocate it to a non-residential area.

The residents were intimidated by some local musclemen. Those residing closer to the

factory are left biting their tongues, unable to oppose.

"My family members are often attacked by bronchial and allergic diseases, but we can do nothing," said a resident of a nearby house. "Only the authorities can order the shifting of the factory," he added.

"We cannot open the windows of our house facing the factory because of the pungent smell of urine," said a private employee who has been living in the area for almost 25 years. "In fact, we are trapped in our own house," he added.

Another resident said that another button factory set up in the same locality was shifted to Shyampur five years back, for the sake of public interest.

"So, why can't this factory be shifted?" asked the resident. He also claimed that the

factory owner himself moved to Dhanmondi after his son became ill because of toxic chemicals.

S Rahmat Ullah, who lives just next to the factory, showed this correspondent the thick layer of dust on the floor, window frames and furniture in his house. "Apart from all this, I can't even get my computer working because of the dust," he said.

Most of the factory workers are below 16 years of age and are paid only Tk 600 as monthly wages.

When asked why they are working in such a risky environment, Badal (not his real name) said: "We cannot find other job, we are compelled to work here in spite of the danger."

Three years ago Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela), a non-

governmental organisation took an initiative to file a case against the factory but there has been no progress on the case even after a legal notice was sent to the factory owner.

Bela sources said that the two officials working on the matter went abroad and therefore no progress was made.

A Bela official admitting the situation also said that none from the locality came up later to move the matter ahead.

When queried, a resident who was involved in the case from the beginning denied the allegation and said: "We reminded them several times during that period but they didn't respond positively."

"The law prohibits setting up of such factories in residential areas. The Department of Environment (DoE) has to issue

a clearance certificate before any factory is to be established," said Md. Hafizul Islam Khan, a staff lawyer at Bela.

Bela officials said that the factory did not get a clearance certificate from DoE.

Md. Khoka, one of the owners supervising a part of the factory was reluctant to answer any questions and threatened this correspondent to stop digging into the matter.

"Some locals are plotting against us. Such investigations were carried out by other reporters but nothing happened," said Khoka.

"We have been running our factory for 20 years and no one has been successful in making us shift the factory," he said.

"Since a case has been filed, it is now up to the court to make a ruling," he added.

Satisfying your appetite

North Indian food in town

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Stuffed green chillies dipped in gramflour batter, simmered in buttermilk gravy tempered with asafoetida and cumin. They call it Bharri Harri Mirch ka Khaata in North India. Has that got your taste buds tingling yet? Want some more?

Centuries old recipes from the frontier and various regal eras of Punjab, Benaras, Awah, Nizami and Rajasthan are on offer within your reach at the North Indian Food Festival that began at the Radisson Water Garden Hotel Dhaka on July 20.

Featuring mouth-watering delights such as Handiwale Gosht ke Chaap (spicy lamb chops served in a handi) or Murgh Sheora Natwara (chicken leg tikka smoked with clove and marinated with yoghurt and herbs).

The very names like Rasgulle ki Subzi, Paneer ka Malai Pulao and Narangi Gaajar ka Raita are evocative of a rich spread of scrumptious culinary concoctions.

To ensure authenticity of the taste of the North Indian delicacies, two master chefs from Radisson Hotel Delhi, Meraj and



Rajesh Kumar are in Dhaka now cooking at the festival. These two specialists are ready to pamper your palate with a spectrum of flavours and unbelievable blends of exotic spices and curries.

The hotel authorities said that their main objective for arranging such a festival was to offer the city dwellers the taste of unique North Indian delicacy in its original form.

"When it comes down to serving authentic foods of a certain region, the most important thing is to make sure that it is prepared by some native chef. To ensure that authenticity and original flavour we called on two specialist chefs from India," said Asmaul Roxana Sylvia, Public Relation (PR) Manager, Radisson Water garden Hotel Dhaka.

The nine-day long festival has already attracted huge response from the people of all classes.

"It has given us the opportunity to taste the wide range and diversity of North Indian cuisines with fiery and tasty combination of spices and herbs," said Anwarul Islam, a food lover.

Any food lover can experience the true taste of North Indian food at Tk 795 per person at the festival.



Although government introduced compressed natural gas (CNG) run vehicles to reduce environmental pollution of the city, vehicles without proper maintenance continue to produce fumes polluting the environment.

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