

DOWN TO EARTH

When accidents are made to happen

By A S M Nurunnabi

It is sometimes said that road accidents in our country do not happen, rather they are made to happen. Perhaps there is some element of truth in the statement.

Some of the factors commonly identified as responsible for road accidents are rash driving, overloading, ill-trained drivers, violation of traffic rules, mechanically defective vehicles, etc. When these factors are, by and large, overlooked by concerned quarters, it seems natural to think that accidents are made to happen. The disconcerting thing is that such happenings appear to be too frequent. Road accidents have thus become endemic in our way of life.

Let us look at the statistics of road accidents with their casualties within the metropolitan area as collected from relevant sources. During 1991 (upto 15.12.91), the total number of deaths from such accidents was 320, as against 250 the previous year, while that of injured persons was 886 against 666 during the same period. The number of cases filed during 1991 was 587, as against 509 during 1990. We may make allowance for the fact that all accident cases are not recorded. All these figures show an upward

trend during last year. The trend is unlikely to be broken during the current year, judging by the spate of accident reports received so far.

The city's picture of road accidents is part of an identical picture for the whole country. It has been found that the highways of the country were mostly accident-prone. Particularly some of them such as Dhaka-Aricha, Dhaka-Narayan-ganj, Dhaka-Chittagong highways are regarded as sort of death traps. Sometime ago, we heard of a scheme for introduction of police patrol cars along highways to check abuse of overspeeding and other irregularities. We are not aware if such patrol cars operate on any highway; and if not, their necessity in the present situation can hardly be over-emphasised.

Nowadays it has become a normal thing to see newspapers carrying reports of road accidents almost daily. Their frequency has made us somewhat apathetic to the toll in death and suffering that such accidents entail. Recently two road accidents at Muktagacha coming almost in tandem tend to show the extent of anarchy that our traffic system has been suffering from.

The problems of road acci-

dents in the city are different from those in the district regions only in their setting; anatomically they are the same. In most of them, reckless driving, violation of traffic rules, failure of concerned authority to enforce traffic discipline emerge as predominant features.

The recurrent road accidents are a national tragedy. Attempts so far made by administration to tackle the situation leave much to be desired.

In the opinion of many, the situation has deteriorated to such an extent that nothing short of very stringent measures can help improve matters. At the same time there must be sustained determination to enforce those measures. As in many things, discipline does not come easily; it is only through persistent application of rules and regulations that we can hope for possible restoration of traffic discipline.

In this context, certain steps which may help in reducing accidents are mentioned by knowledgeable quarters. First, speed breakers: These may be placed at vulnerable points, particularly near schools and hospitals, whatever inconvenience it may cause to the smooth flow of vehicular traffic. Second, zebra crossings: Although these are meant for pedestrian crossings, the vehicular traffic seem to harbour no respect for them. In fact, these points prove more dangerous for pedestrian crossing. The traffic police should ensure proper use of zebra crossings by pedestrians, and third, overbridges: On account of inordinate growth of pedestrian and vehicular traffic in the city, the existing four or five overbridges seem to be inadequate. The concerned authorities may examine the question of building overbridges at more congested traffic points.

Over and above, a tightening of the road administration authority is the most imperative need. Any complacency in the present circumstances may bode ill for us. Actually the issue is a national one. Considering its magnitude and complexities, it behoves the high levels of administration to adopt remedial measures on an urgent basis.



Bangladesh Army personnel leaving Dhaka yesterday for Cambodia to join the United Nations Transitional Authority to Cambodia (UNTAC). —ISPR photo

Five sessions of ME talks in mid-May

WASHINGTON, Apr 24: The United States and Russia planned to issue invitations today to five sessions of Middle East talks on regional issues next month, despite Israeli threats to boycott two sets of talks, US officials said on Thursday, reports Reuter.

The talks would all take place in the second week of May at senior official level. The five working groups would discuss arms control in Washington, refugees in Ottawa, water resources in Vienna, economic development in Brussels and the environment in Tokyo.

Israel is threatening to stay away from the talks on refugees and economic development because the Russian and American organisers said they intended to invite Palestinian exiles from outside the Israeli-occupied territories.

The Israelis argue that this violates the rules of the Middle East peace process, which restricted Palestinian participation to representatives from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Israelis fear that including exiles opens the door to a discussion on the Palestinian "right of return"

homes they or their families fled in the Middle East wars of 1948 and 1967. Some 700,000 Palestinian refugees are spread around the Middle East, many still living in squalid refugee camps.

The talks are supposed to complement the main Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, which resume in Washington next week. The regional talks were inaugurated by a conference in Moscow in late January attended by the Foreign Ministers of 29 nations.

They included the permanent five of the UN Security Council, many European countries, Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Gulf Arab States, Turkey, North African countries, Canada and Japan, but were boycotted by Syria and Lebanon.

A Palestinian delegation that turned up in Moscow was refused permission to participate because it included representatives of the Palestinian diaspora unacceptable to Israel.

After meeting the Palestinians, Secretary of State James Baker said he would support exiles attending future meetings on refugees and economic development.

Nor'wester may hit 5 dists today

Kalbarshakhi (nor'wester) of moderate intensity is likely to hit one or two places over the regions of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Mymensingh, Tangail and Sylhet today (Saturday), reports UNB.

Met office forecast for the next 24 hours till six Saturday evening also predicted rain or thundershower accompanied by the gusty or squally wind in those places.

Weather, however, may remain mainly dry elsewhere across the country.

Badal murder case: one more arrested

Police Friday arrested one Saidur Rahman alias Rana (32) one of the accused in the murder of Chhatra League (S-A) leader of Dhaka University Moniruzzaman Badal from Kataban area of the city, reports BSS.

Acting on a tip off, a special squad of Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police arrested Rana, a non-student who had been residing in different halls of the University and involved in terrorist activities.

Besides, there are allegations that Saidur Rahman used to forcibly collect tolls from different shops at Nilkhet and Elephant Road.

The Midnight File

Cuban diplomat seeks asylum in Spain

MADRID, Apr 24: A Cuban diplomat in Spain's Canary Islands has requested political asylum, a spokesman for the Interior Ministry said Friday. The Interior Ministry identified the diplomat as Cuban Vice-Consul Felix Juan Portu Martinez, reports AP.

Kohl, cabinet ministers to take 5 pc less salaries

BERLIN, Apr 24: When business is bad, the boss takes a pay cut. At least that's what German Chancellor Helmut Kohl plans to do Kohl announced on nationwide television late Thursday that he and his cabinet ministers will trim their salaries by 5 per cent, reports AP.

Thousands pay last respects to Ray

CALCUTTA, Apr 24: The West Bengal government today observed a state of mourning with national flags atop state government offices and institutions remaining half-mast as a mark of respect to the film maker, Satyajit Ray, reports PTI.

All the state government offices, schools, colleges and other educational institutions remained closed. Ongoing higher secondary examination scheduled for the day, however, continued.

The national flags at the Bangladesh High Commission here also flew half-mast to pay homage to the film maestro.

The West Bengal Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu expressed his deepest shock over the death of Satyajit Ray.

In a condolence message, Basu recalled his excellent personal relationship with the maestro and said his bright contribution to the Indian and international films was undeniable and would be remembered forever.

Reuter says: Thousands gathered on Friday to pay their last respects to Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray, who died on Thursday just three weeks after being awarded an Oscar for life time achievement.

Film stars, politicians and literary figures joined some 10,000 others in a procession as Ray's body was carried to a cultural complex through the streets of Calcutta, the city which inspired many of his films.

Ray died at the age of 71 after being treated for heart ailment in the Calcutta hospital where he was earlier awarded the Oscar.

"It is a magnificent award, certainly the best achievement of my movie-making career,

spanning over four decades," he said in a videotaped message shown at the Academy Awards Ceremony.

"There's nothing more after this."

It was the second time Ray had received a major award in his life. French President Francois Mitterrand personally made him a member of the legion of honour when Ray was recovering from health surgery in 1989.

Long queues formed outside the cultural complex on Friday and many wept as they filed past the body on a flower-decked dais.

Ray made more than 30 films, all in black and white, dealing poignantly with social problems, family conflicts and changing values in modern India.

The films, all but one in his native Bengali language, made little money and did not attract a wide following outside artistic circles. But they impressed critics abroad and made him a cultural icon at home.

"Bengal and India have lost a great son, the world has lost a great humanist," said Nurul Hassan, Governor of West Bengal, who declared Friday a public holiday in the state so people could mourn Ray.

Securitymen wrestled crowds back to let Hassan lay a wreath on Ray's body.

Many in the crowd sang a song by another famous Bengali, poet Rabindranath Tagore who died in 1941: "Oh master, how do you compose your songs, how do you invoke your visions? I wonder and listen to you in amazement."

Ray won a major award at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival for "Pather Panchali" (song of the road). He found the money to make it only after pawning his wife's jewels and selling rare books from his library.

The journey from 'Nandan', the government film centre, to the Keoratala cremation ground was joined by thousands of men, women and children from all walks of life, with Ray's son, Sandip, on the Vanguard.

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Morning News

From Page 1 Col 5 the editorship of Khwaja Nuruddin himself. Soon afterwards it was converted into a daily under the editorship of Mr Mohsin Ali. The same year an edition was brought out from Karachi, making it the country's first and only English-language newspaper to be published simultaneously from both the wings.

After its coming to Dhaka, the Adamjees acquired the majority share in it although Khwaja Nuruddin remained the managing director. The Dhaka edition was closed down after the formation of Bangladesh. The Karachi edition, despite financial difficulties, limped along. Later when the NPT is shedding its burdens, Morning News became a very plausible object of sacrifice, although the NPT authorities never publicly said so. It has been negotiating with the Adamjees to take it back but the latter are said to be yet undecided. The NPT has already stopped publication of Imroze, a Lahore Urdu daily and sister-publication of the Pakistan Times, and a few Urdu and English-language periodicals. It is said the Pakistan Times will not be closed down because the name of the founder of Pakistan is associated with it.

Various professional unions and associations have protested this abrupt closing down of Morning News, urging the government to review the decision.

S G M Badruddin, Hamidullah Hussaini, Mushtaq Ahmad and S R Ghauri have been the other editors of the paper. The current editor was Amanullah Hussain.

Blast kills 12 in Lanka

COLOMBO, Apr 24: At least 12 Tamils were killed and 10 others wounded in an explosion in northern Sri Lanka, witnesses said Friday, reports AP.

Rohingya

From Page 1 Col 4 ladesh side emphasised that the refugees should be repatriated 'as quickly as possible' in view of the coming of monsoon.

The host officials also told the visiting team that it was very difficult for them to refuge such a big number of people and provide other requirements.

Well-placed sources hinted that the Myanmar side appeared to have softened its attitude on the issue.

Both the sides in their formal statements expressed their conviction and desire to resolve the issues amicably and peacefully, sources said.

In his opening statement Bangladesh Foreign Minister recalled the refugee crisis in 1978-79 and appealed for an 'identical' approach to find a solution to the current one.

In 1978, some 300,000 Arakanese crossed into Bangladesh and majority of whom were repatriated after successful bilateral parleys.

The number of Rohingyas refugees has already reached nearly 2,25,000.

They are coming in since March last year and the influx intensified after a Myanmar border guards assault on a BDR post. The attack left two killed and 21 injured.

The Myanmar delegation is scheduled to leave for home Tuesday.

Yangon promises

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The SLORC also announced it would meet with political leaders within two months to discuss the drawing up of a constitution and would convene a national convention to draft the document within six months after that.

It also confirmed that its new chairman, General Than Shwe, had taken the post of Prime Minister.

Editor: S. M. Ali

Executive Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Vegetables rotting

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Because of the transportation problems prices of all vegetables are exceptionally low in this area compared to Dhaka, says Khalilur Rahman, a two-term former Chairman of the upazila.

Further more, he adds, due to a lack of a proper distribution system the traders take undue advantage and short-change the farmers.

Brinjal, which currently sells for a minimum of Taka 5 per kilogram in the city, is sold here for as low as Taka 10 per maund or about 37 kilograms. Pumpkins sell for as little as half a Taka each which would sell for a minimum of Taka 15.

Green chilli, spinach, carrots, bitter gourd, zingna, potato, dherosh and other available vegetables were also selling at surprisingly low prices in the markets located in Chandhor, Jamirta, Shaista and Charigram unions which this correspondent visited.

Muhammad Sonamuddin, a registered 'adarsha krishak' of Charigram village, cultivated pumpkins on 18 decimals of land about five months ago and the output is already quite good. In the beginning, he says, each piece sold for about Taka 4 to 5, but the price dropped to about one taka early this month. "Right now it doesn't even sell at that price," he laments.

Thus, he has decided to store about 1,000 pumpkins in his hut and sell them during the rainy season when the price would be higher and transportation via the river would be cheaper. The pumpkins can be stored for several months, he says.

But storage space is very limited and he ends up feeding several pumpkins a day to his four milching cows at home. He had to incur greater losses from his produce of brinjal and

raddishes, he adds, as he had to dump a large quantity without even bothering to bring it home.

Muhammad Tara Mian of Char Madhabpur village planted brinjal in 65 decimals of land with an investment of Taka 15,000 in seeds and fertilizer. In December, he said, he sold the produce for as much as Taka 250 per maund, but the price fell to Taka 10 and now there are no buyers.

So, the produce was found to be ripening on the plants and ultimately rotting in the fields. "If only there was a proper transportation and distribution system for reaching the produce to Dhaka, I could have made a profit of Taka 50,000," he laments.

According to the Upazila Krishi Officer, vegetable is cultivated on an estimated 2,500 acres out of total cultivable lands of 40,000 acres. All major seasonal vegetables are grown in the region, while the major crops are rice and jute, he said.

The region, according to some estimates, supplies as much as 60 to 70 per cent of the fresh vegetable requirements of Dhaka city.

Realising the contribution and the potential the government has undertaken a poverty alleviation and development project in the area under the Rural Development Project (RD-6) in the region.

The government with the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) has undertaken a project to develop seven wholesale markets as 'growth centres' in the area.

The one located at Char Madhabpur was found to be nearly complete, replete with six multi-purpose sheds, six open sales platforms, a large fish shed, an office, a garbage pit, toilets, drains, parking areas and three tubewells.

The total cost of the project was Taka 28 lakh, according to the site engineer. Such a well-planned and modern kutchha bazaar is hard to find even in Dhaka. But local people feel that the improvements may become meaningless unless a proper distribution and transportation system is set up.



Bus being salvaged from river Dhaleswari which slipped off a ferry late Thursday night. —Star photo

Fenchuganj factory

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plan had to be shelved as funds could not be arranged.

Recently, after going through a number of other options, BCIC came to the conclusion that the 'scrap and build' option would be most viable under which a new unit could be set up by using the existing infrastructure and dismantling the old one.

Accordingly, a Japanese firm was engaged to find out the best suitable option under this plan. After going through four options, the firm concluded that none of the options were economically viable.

Survey on Khulna EPZ

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Apr 24: A two-member delegation arrived here today on a four-day official visit to conduct a preliminary survey on whether an export processing zone could be demarcated here.

The delegation comprises Abdul Kader, Director, Finance and Reazuddin Ahmed, Chief Engineer.

They will work with other officials of the region including the Chief Engineer of the Khulna Development Authority, Additional Chief Engineer of the Power Development Board and the Chief Engineer of the Mongla Port Authority.

Earlier in 1984, a feasibility report was prepared in this regard.

Dhaleswari mishap

Bus salvaged, 1 more body found

The body of a middle-aged man was recovered Friday when Fire Brigade units salvaged the bus which slipped off a ferry into the river Dhaleswari late Thursday night, reports UNB.

Rescuers earlier recovered 10 bodies, including three women and two children, from the sunken bus.

The salvage operation was completed early Friday, and only one dead body of a man, aged about 50, was found inside the bus, Fire Brigade sources said.

The Dhaka-bound bus coming from Mawa with 50 passengers on board plunged into the river due to brake failure while boarding the ferry on the Dhaka-Mawa highway on Thursday night.

Hasina condoles deaths of bus passengers

Leader of the Opposition in parliament and President of Bangladesh Awami League Sheikh Hasina Friday condoled the deaths of 30 passengers of the bus which plunged into the river Dhaleswari Thursday night, reports BSS.

In a statement, Sheikh Hasina said that road accidents had increased in recent time. Negligence and violations of traffic rules were behind the reasons for road accidents, she said.

He also suggested that the government reduce the tax on the gas supplied to the factory. Noting that the gas pipeline network from Rashidpur upto the plant was built from the factory's own funds, he said the gas company should only charge the well price which is less than half the price being charged now.

The BCIC official added that even if the government opted for a plan to set up a new unit under this option the implementation period would take four years.

"So, the key factor is what to do with the staff and employees numbering about 1,200 during the interim period," he asked.

He suggested that skilled employees could be encouraged and helped to find jobs in the Middle East, retain some of them for work during the transition period and encourage older employees to retire on suitable terms.