

# Tragedy of illegal bumpers



Clockwise from top left: Dr Shajahan Ali on his wedding day; the front bumper attached to the front of the seized car; the back bumper had apparently been removed just before seizure; the young doctor's grieving family.

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The government has warned of stern action if motorists fail to remove illegal bumpers mounted on their vehicles by July 10.

The decision followed the tragic death last Tuesday of Dr Shajahan Ali, who was killed when his motorbike collided with a car and his leg became entangled with the back bumper.

Instead of stopping, the driver dragged the young doctor over one kilometre from Sobhanbagh to Panthapath and abandoned the vehicle in front of Samarita Hospital. The driver remains at large, although Dhanmondi police have seized the vehicle and Mohammadpur thana is investigating the case.

According to police sergeants illegal bumpers are regularly causing accidents in the city. Cases of rickshaws getting trapped by these bumpers, dragged or overturned occur daily, said a sergeant at Panthapath. There are also instances of pedestrians being hit by the exposed, toughened and unyielding steel bars fitted at front and rear of many vehicles.

Motorists pay between Tk 2,000 and 5,000 to install the illegal bumpers claiming that they protect against rickshaws, scooters and other vehicles causing damage. More than 90 per cent of vehicles in the city are fitted with such bumpers.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials said that they did not issue fitness certificates to vehicles having

such bumpers. But some years ago the government said to 'overlook' them and issue the certificates.

"We were told not to worry about the bumpers, even though we had warned the authorities about the dangers of installing such additions to vehicles," said a BRTA source at Mirpur.

Any modern vehicle is designed around the priority of saving pedestrians should they get hit, said the source. "When a vehicle hits, a modern car is designed in such a way that the victim is likely to roll up and over the car body falling behind it rather than in its path."

The BRTA source also stressed: "The manufacturers' legal bumpers are of special materials both strong and flexible, so if the vehicle hits a person, it absorbs much of the shock rather than hitting back too forcefully. With the illegal bumpers, however, a pedestrian stands little chance of surviving an accident without serious injury, if at all."

Traffic sergeants in different parts of the city said that after the July 10 deadline they will impose a Tk 1,200 penalty for ignoring the directive.

"It is already illegal under the Motor Vehicle Ordinance to install such parts onto vehicles so it will not be difficult to book the offenders under the existing law," said a traffic sergeant requesting anonymity.

"We are in fact waiting for instructions from senior authorities on how to handle the situation after the deadline is over. After all the owners of vehicles are powerful people of the city."

## city express

The latest crop of words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.



"The government believes in the freedom of speech, but everybody should be alert to see whether there was any misuse of the right."

-- Iajuddin Ahmed

President While inaugurating the fourth private television Channel, ntv, on 3 July 2003

"If such allocations are allowed in exchange of money how can hooliganism be rooted out?"

-- SA Khaleque

BNP Lawmaker Accusing State Minister for Communications, Salahuddin Ahmed, of taking Tk 25 lakh in bribes from a ward commissioner to set up a CNG station in Mirpur, in answer to Ahmed's similar allegations against him

"How will the image of the country be protected, when a ruling BNP MP charged a minister in parliament for taking bribe and the minister in turn accused the MP of grabbing land in Mirpur?"

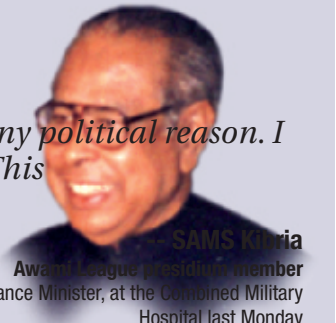
-- Sheikh Hasina

Opposition Leader Referring to the above incident while inaugurating the biennial conference of the Jatiya Samik League at the Paltan Maidan on 3 July

"This will revolutionise police work. The laboratory will first deal with cases of violence against women, then expand to other crimes."

-- Dr Mizanur Rahman

Associate Professor at the Forensic Department, Dhaka Medical College Speaking about the first DNA testing laboratory in the country, a milestone in pursuing criminals



"I did not go there for any political reason. I know him since 1950. This was just a social visit."

MD. SAIFUR RAHMAN, Finance Minister, at the Combined Military Hospital last Monday Having visited M Saifur Rahman, the Finance Minister, at the Combined Military Hospital last Monday

# Nightmare of family's loss

When the driver hit Shahjahan riding on his motorbike, he was dragged over a kilometre to certain death

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Eight-year-old Saiq could not understand the gravity of the situation and simply made some queries, typical of every child his age. "Why was there so much blood on the street? Why did they cover my father with a white cloth?" he asked. But nobody was courageous enough to answer and make him understand the harsh truth of life.

Dr Mohammed Shajahan Ali, a vivacious young man with all aspirations in life, was killed in a road accident in the city last Tuesday: a car hit

Shahjahan riding his motorbike and dragged him over one kilometre to a horrific death.

A brilliant student from his childhood, Ali studied under scholarship in Bonpara Missionary School and then in Rajshahi Government College. He was a student of the first batch of MBBS at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

He proved his merit in every exam and was scheduled to sit for the second year final examination of a three-year MS course on July 20. But all came to an end with his death.

"One cannot imagine how helpful he was to people," said Sabina Yasmin,

Ali's sister-in-law. "He was an altruist by nature," she said. Ali worked in the government hospitals in Lalmonirhat, Kaliganj and Pabna after he got through Bangladesh Civil Service exams. "He used to pay for medicine for the patients, let alone asking for consultation fees," Sabina said.

Ali's memory did not disappear from the memory of the people in Pabna and Kaliganj. There was a stream of visitors and numerous phone calls from people of those places when they read the report of his death in newspapers.

"Ali never discriminated between the rich and the poor or the known and the unknown," one of his relatives

sobbed. "He behaved equally to all," he added. "It is a great loss for us that he left us so early."

It would be impossible for Shahina Yasmeen, the doctor's wife, to come out of the nightmare sketched deep in her memory. The incident of her husband being dragged by a car to a sure death took place in front of her.

"Imagine how frantic and helpless she felt when she could do nothing to save her husband," said Tahera Sultana, her sister-in-law. She said that nothing could ease Shahina's pangs. The memory of Dr. Ali she married in 1991 is the only prop for her to live by.

"We cannot call it an accident," said

Tahera. "This was a simple case of murder," she said, eyes full of tears. She said Dr. Ali would have suffered some minor injuries if the killer driver had not dragged him a long way.

So many cars were running parallel to the killer car but no-one tried to block its way, she said. "It seems people are devoid of feelings or compassion these days," she said out of frustration.

Dr. Ali, who lost his parents in childhood, was brought up by his only brother 18 years older. The shock of losing the younger brother is hard to absorb. Ali's body was sent to his native village in Natore, where he was laid to rest beside his parents' graves.

# The story of a murder Criminal courts, no police force

A young man is killed, but what is the story behind the headlines?

SOHEL ISLAM

'Eskey' Noor Palash, known among the city's underground network and friends simply as SK, never passed primary school. According to his friends, he only knew how to sign his name.

Many of his co-football players now play for the national team, and SK himself was also selected for the national team.

One of SK's neighbours said that the gangster was extremely ambitious in life and gave utmost priority to earning

famous for his defiant attitude. Although he was involved in several cases of killings, extortion and other unlawful activities he managed to escape many of the cases except one, according to close associates.

He is the main accused in the Shibly Sadique murder case, which was committed in 2000. The case is still pending in court.

A good number of garment factories are located on Elephant Road, close to his residence. In the mid-nineties, he became an activist of the Awami League. From those days he dominated the business of garment *jut* (spare garment material) in his locality.

He also developed intense rivalry with other factions operating around the area. It was in 1999 when Sujon's group, his main opposition gang, first tried to kill him. During *Ramadan* in that year, members of Sujon's group shot him in his own house just after *iftar*.

Fortunately, he managed to survive and thus continued his criminal activities. "The following year, Sujon was gunned down in the Mohammadpur area and the members of this group joined SK's group. After the death of Shibly Sadique and Sujon, SK was left without any rival and ruled the area like a king," said another of his friends.

Many in the area believe that SK had been behind Sujon's killing, but was not made a suspect in the murder case.

"He tried to mend his ways, but still could not survive. That is the consequence that must be paid for extortion and killings," said a residence of the locality.

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The three courts of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) are functioning without any designated police force.

"Although this is a criminal court, surprisingly no police force is employed here," said a magistrate.

Some claim that local police do not co-operate when they are requested.

"Police officials of the stations close to Nagar Bhaban refuse to carry convicted persons to the central jail. Whenever we ask the Ramna, Kotwali or Lalbagh police stations for help, they decline to assist under different pretexts," said an official of the legal section of the DCC on condition of anonymity.

"Sometimes, magistrates have to wait up to 9-10pm for prisoners to be transported to jails although they are supposed to leave office by 4 pm," he added.

When asked, one of the duty officers of Ramna Police Station shifted the blame on the courts.

"If the DCC courts seek our assistance in writing, then we are obliged to transport prisoners to the jail. But usually we don't receive written requests," he said

Each of the three DCC courts dispose off at least fifty cases every day.

Most of the cases are related to violation of food standards, illegal occupation of pavements and trade licences and its renewals.

The monetary punishment for those who breach food standard range from Tk 200 to Tk 400. On the other hand, squatters and violators of the license fees could end up paying up to Tk 10,000 as punishment.

"Although imprisonment is an option, we however, aren't able to go for it most of the times because of the unavailability of police force. Therefore, rather than sending anyone to prison, we put emphasis on realising money from the convicted," said another magistrate.

The DCC officials claim that they have repeatedly requested the home ministry for a permanent police force but nothing has been done yet.

"We require at least eight police personnel including a Sub Inspector. If the government provided the necessary police officials, we could have ensured smooth functioning of the court. It's been a year after our last request, but the home ministry haven't taken any decision" said a highly placed source of the DCC.

## CITY SIGHTS

Bimal, a 48 year-old baul singer from Magura, came to Dhaka to spread baul songs. "I thought it was a great chance for me if a company can bring out my cassette," said Bimal. "I will be very happy if it happens since I want to spread the name of Sajji (Lalon Sha)," he added. Bimal believes that bauls have no caste or religion. So he does not like to give his surname, Biswas. "Most of the people of Magura call me 'Bimal Baul'," he noted. Bimal's father Mukunda Biswas was a Gazi singer who sang Gazi songs for 37 years. "I feel at peace to sing. I have been singing for 27 years," Bimal said.



Noor's wife weeps in a relative's arms after his murder on Saturday morning.

A group of five unidentified gunmen gunned him down on Saturday at about 10 in the morning near his house at Elephant Road near Bata Signal. He was chatting with his elder brother Ganja Noor when the gunmen struck.

In the early nineties, SK earned a name as a promising football player.

money at any cost. "His involvement with football waned quickly and the young footballer started indulging in extortion, killings and other antisocial activities," said one of his friends, on condition of anonymity.

Within a few months, SK became