

Unskilled drivers cause accidents

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Unskilled drivers possessing fake licence are driving buses and trucks in the city causing frequent road accidents.

A survey of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) shows a total of 594 accident cases were filed with 22 police stations in the city during 2004.

Buses, minibuses and heavy trucks caused 390 accidents while private cars only 177, says the survey report.

"Most of the drivers are unskilled and they do not have valid licence. They lack knowledge about traffic rules," said Shahidul Amin, a resident of Shewrapara who commutes regularly to Motijheel.

The commuters allege that many drivers take alcohol or drugs and fail to manage the vehicles causing accidents.

These type of drivers were responsible for the tragic deaths of people like schoolboy Aumi and Dhaka University student Happy, said Mahbubul Alam, a resident of Mohammadpur.

Moreover, sometimes drivers let their helpers drive the buses.

When asked, minibus driver Jamir Sheikh said they do not allow helpers to drive all the time. But sometimes they do when they are too tired.

His assistant Salimuuddin said, "How can I learn to drive if ustaad (boss) does not allow me. It is not possible for me to go to a driving school."

According to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), some 4,000 buses and minibuses ply the city roads. However, Dhaka Urban Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) and



STAR PHOTO

This driver who plies daily along the Gulistan-Mirpur route looks too young to handle a heavy vehicle.

DMP say the number is about 6,000.

ASM Ahmed Khokon, treasurer of Dhaka Road Transport Association DRTA), an association of transport owners, said at least 3,000 minibuses are in operation on various routes of the city.

Sources in BRTA said so far they have issued 4,134 licences to drivers of heavy transport vehicles (HTV) such as bus, truck, tank lorry.

Another 1,109 licences were issued for medium transport vehicles (MTV) such as minibuses.

However, a high official of BRTA admitted that it does not ensure that all the licensees are skilled drivers as the proper pro-

cess of issuing licence is never maintained.

According to Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983, there is no scope to apply for a professional licence to drive HTV directly. One has to have the licence for light transport vehicles (LTV) and after driving LTV for three years he becomes eligible to apply for a licence to drive MTV. After gathering three years experience of driving MTV, he can apply for HTV licence.

"But these rules are never followed. They manage to receive HTV licence directly," the BRTA official said.

Since 1991, orders were issued to grant licence under spe-

cial consideration to those having unrecorded or fake license, the official said. "In most cases transport workers' leaders persuade high-ups in government or threaten to begin transport strike on the licence issue," he said.

However, most of the drivers blamed corruption in BRTA for preventing them to opt for legal licence. Many of them get licence from outside Dhaka.

The BRTC officials strongly denied the allegation and said the applicants make such allegations only when they fail driving examinations.

Pollution threat for Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant

KAUSAR ISLAM AYON

The DND canal which supplies untreated water to the Sayedabad Plant has become extremely contaminated as local people use the canal for their everyday purpose and also dump waste in it.

The 4.5km long canal was dug to channel water to the plant from the river Sitalakhya. It is also the only source of water for the plant that supplies around 22 crore litres of water for the city dwellers.

The canal is strictly prohibited for public use but thousands of people who live around it fish, take bath, wash clothes and livestock there. Even the sewerage lines of many residents are connected to the canal.

"We have no other alternative as almost eighty percent of this

area is deprived of Wasa's supply," said Hasanul Islam, a resident of Matuwalli Konapara.

The water of the canal looks clear near the Demra Ghat which is half a kilometre from the source, The Sitalakhya. However, the more the canal gets closer to the plant, its water becomes distinctly darker and smelly. The colour is almost pitch-black at Mridhabari which is also the end point of the canal.

Wasa had fenced off both sides of the canal when it was dug in a bid to prevent the public from using it. But the iron grills of the fence on the northern side is almost gone, either stolen or damaged. On the southern side, nearly half of the fence is missing.

"The fence was removed by local people within six months of setting up. The authorities never repaired it," said Nasir Badsha of

Matuwalli. However, locals have built around 70-80 concrete landings (ghats) to facilitate bathing on either side of the canal. Besides, there are atleast 250 temporary ghats there.

"We have built the ghats without facing any objection from the authorities," claimed Nizam Uddin, a resident of Matuwalli Konapara.

Fishing is a common sight here. Hundreds of people can be spotted with fishing rods on both banks. Some bushy spots on the southern side are used as open toilets by floating people.

Officials of Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant said that without the cooperation from the locals it is impossible to protect the canal.

"With our limited manpower, it is not possible to look after such a large area," said Abdul Wased, executive engineer and in-

charge of the DND canal maintenance cell.

Wasa officials said they had several meetings with the people of the area and their representatives on this issue but the end results have not been encouraging.

"We had set up a number of tubewells beside the canal so that the locals can use them. But that initiative has not changed the scenario," admitted ANM Akteruzamman, managing director of Dhaka Wasa. He added that without creating more awareness among the locals, it was very difficult to stop them from polluting the water.

The locals meanwhile alleged that the Wasa's tubewell initiative was a mere eyewash.

"WASA never set up tubewells here. It only built some concrete bases and nothing more," claimed Ajmat Ullah, a resident of Mridhabari.

Putting public health at risk, locals bathe and wash clothes in the 4.5km long DND canal, a major source of the Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant.



ANSUR RAHMAN

36 community toilets to open next month



STAR PHOTO

Modern toilet equipped with commodes, squatting pans, urinals, breast-feeding and dressing room facilities in Motijheel.

IMRUL HASAN

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is going to open 36 community toilets to the city dwellers next month, DCC officials said.

The toilets built under the Urban Primary Health Care Project (UPHCP) have modern facilities for the use of people,

especially female.

The DCC signed an agreement with UPHCP in October last year to construct 45 community latrines by June this year. DCC sources said they have already completed construction of 34 latrines.

"We will construct another two toilets soon. Construction of nine latrines has been suspended due

to land dispute and objection from influential people," a source at the DCC said.

The toilets are equipped with high and low commodes, urinals, basins. Besides, there are breast feeding and dressing rooms and separate entrance for men and women," said Sultan Ahmed, executive engineer, UPHCP.

The project is being imple-

mented at a cost of around \$1 million. Asian Development Bank (ADB) has provided grant to bear 66 percent of the expenditure and the rest comes from the government.

"We have faced many problems to set up these community latrines. The major problem was to manage land. In some areas, local leaders and ward commis-

sioners forcibly stopped our work," said Sultan.

UPHCP officials said three types of latrines were set up under the project. Type A latrines are built on 372 square feet space with two low and two high commodes, one standing and one flat urinal, five basins and a dressing room.

Type-B is about 649 square feet equipped with three low commodes and two high commodes, two standing and three flat urinals, five basins and a breast-feeding and dressing room.

Type-C toilets are built on 837 square feet space with four low and two high commodes, two standing and five flat urinals, six basins and a breast-feeding and dressing room.

City dwellers, especially working women, hope that the community latrines will be very useful for them.

"I have to stay in my shop for long time every day. I hesitate to breast-feed my child in open space," said Shahida Jaman, mother of a one-year-old baby, who runs a grocery shop in Mohammadpur Town Hall Market.

Habibul Bahar works in private office at Karwan Bazar. He has to go from one place to another for official work. But he does not find any suitable public toilet in the city as most of them are unusable.

"DCC should set up more such toilets in the city," Bahar said.

Sources said LGRD ministry, donor agencies and the mayor of DCC have asked UPHCP to give the final touch to these latrines by this month so that the latrines could be opened by end-July.

"DCC has already floated tender to lease out the maintenance of these latrines," said a high official of UPHCP.

A sexually abused minor cries for justice

Sultana Rahman

A six-month old foetus was brutally terminated inside the womb of a minor girl who was tortured during the process and suffered severe injuries.

The mother to be alleged that she was ripped open with sharp instruments and the foetus was removed from the cervix (birth passage) in separate pieces leaving the young girl bleeding profusely and in utter pain.

The gruesome incident took place on June 6, where 15-year old Nahar (not her real name) from the village of Araihaajar in the Narsingdi district, was held hostage and forcefully cut open by a traditional birth attendant (TBA/midwife) with a pair of scissors.

The girl was ripped from the vagina up to the birth passage in the midwife's successful attempt to terminate the pregnancy causing serious injuries external and internal to the lower part of the minor's body and reproductive system, leaving her profusely bleeding round the clock.

The girl is now fighting for life at the Dhaka Medical Hospital (DMCH), having developed 'recto-

vaginal-fistula (RVF), meaning the most painful physical disorder that requires multiple surgeries to heal and stitch the ruptures at the points of the birth and excreta outlet passages.

Nahar narrated her woeful tale to this correspondent. She said she was sexually abused by a relative from the same village, and eventually became by pregnant. Fearing social stigma, Nahar concealed the pregnancy and the incidents that led to it from her family. However, with passing time, her condition was revealed.

"After months of refusal to marry me, the accused relative agreed. He seemed quite serious about the whole issue, leaving no indication that his plan was to abort the baby," said Nahar.

"On June 6, he asked me to elope with him agreeing to marry me," she continued. "He along with his accomplice Jabbar bound me with wires. As I cried for help a dai (midwife) came over, ripped me open and cut out the foetus part by part," she said shuddering at the thought of the horrifying incident.

The termination of the pregnancy was so painful that Nahar was successful in breaking the jute ropes but failed to free herself

from the wires. The long hours of scuffle to free herself left deep scars on Nahar's arms and limbs. She had also been gagged to prevent screaming. The teenager was left unattended in an abandoned place close to her house.

Ten days after of the dreadful incident, Nahar's condition deteriorated and required immediate medical attention. On June 16 her mother Helena rushed her to DMCH.

Dr Farhana Dewan, associate professor and also acting head of Gynaecology and Obstetrics Department said that the girl required at least four months to recover from the injuries. "She is now undergoing conservative treatment for the infections. In fact, the unsafe and forceful abortion has put her at risk," the doctor said. Nahar's family declined to make any complaint for fear of being attacked by the accused relative's family members.

Helena alleged that the accused visited the hospital several times after Nahar's admission in a bid to obtain a signature from her daughter on a blank paper.

Repeated attempts to contact the said relative proved futile.