

ROAD SAFETY WEEK

# City pedestrians face most hazards

Pedestrians in the city remain the most vulnerable to accidents among all others with around 75 percent of all accident fatalities involving them

SHAHZAD PARVEEN

Pedestrians are the most vulnerable road users in Dhaka -- reveals a study conducted by the World Bank.

The study says pedestrians alone make up around 75 percent of road accident fatalities. The next vulnerable group of road users are bicyclists and motorcyclists.

In 2006, there were 404 road accidents that involved pedestrians out of a total 636 accidents in and around Dhaka city. A huge number of these pedestrians, 313 altogether, succumbed to their injuries, according to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

The exact number however is much higher, predict BRTA officials. They said the figure only includes incidents that have been reported to Dhaka Metropolitan Police. There are hundreds of other accidents that go unreported every year.

World Health Organisation (WHO) projects that by the year 2020, road crash injuries will be the third highest threat to the public health, outranking serious health problems such as tuberculosis, diarrhoeal diseases, HIV/AIDS, and lower respiratory infections.

Experts say change in public behaviour is very important to ensure safety. "Jaywalking is a very common practice among the pedestrians of Dhaka city. Lack of awareness about road safety is one of the major reasons for this", said Syed Qudratullah, superintendent engineer of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) engineering division.

Public unawareness is linked with economic hardship. Underprivileged people migrating from different parts of the country know very little about road safety. Use of sidewalks or footpaths is a new idea to them. "Pedestrians do not use the footpaths most of the times and

there is a good reason why. Most footpaths in the city are unusable for lack of maintenance", he added.

Although there have been eviction drives in recent times, many sidewalks are still occupied by street vendors or encroached on by roadside establishments leaving very little room for pedestrians.

Around 70 percent of the sidewalks in the city have turned unusable. In some places, the sidewalks have become death traps for the pedestrians.

In the capital city, there are only three underpasses at Karwan Bazar, Gabtoli and Gulistan. A new one is under construction at Shanir Akhra.

The underpasses now available to the pedestrians are in a terrible state with insufficient lighting and air circulation inside, sewage spilling in while vendors and panhandlers loitering around. Mismanagement and carelessness about pedestrian security has made these under-

passes safe haven for muggers and crooks.

There are 43 foot over bridges in and around the city. Pedestrians still prefer to keep away from the over bridges for crossing the roads. Even on busy thoroughfares, with a foot over bridge available, people are reluctant to use those for similar reasons as for the underpasses.

"For some reason, foot over bridges are not very popular in Dhaka. One of the reasons might be because those are 22 feet high for double-decker buses to pass underneath. Most people take the risk of jaywalking instead of climbing up 22 feet", said DCC engineer Qudratullah.

Bus bay is a must for passenger safety. Most buses drop off and pick up their passengers in the middle of the road, he added.

Violation of traffic signal is one of the main reasons for accidents. There are 68 traffic signals in Dhaka. "Most fatalities occur at intersections when pedestrians cross the road in a hurry without looking out for speeding vehicles or drivers speeding through the intersections violating red signals," said Qudratullah.

Qudratullah also suggested that left-turning points need to be kept free. Vehicles are not clearly visible on many left-turning points. It is important to increase the visibility of pedestrians near these points.

Studies show that the impact of a high-speed crash is much worse than that of a low-speed one. Speed limits should be enforced more strictly to avoid high-speed accidents in the city. Moreover, the limits should be set considering the traffic volume in a particular area since drivers are often not able to anticipate the imminent risks while driving at high speeds in a particular area.

Except for a few areas such as the Cantonment or Manik Mia Avenue, speed limit signs in most of the city are either missing or not posted properly.

Better and safer traffic engineering is important, experts say.

Traffic management measures such as median dividers, speed bumps, rumble stripes, road markings, traffic signals and roundabouts are very important tools that can prevent fatalities. Although many of these features were made available for Dhaka, pedestrian and road safety have not improved much.

"Awareness among the drivers is needed. They break the rules too often. A few reasons that pose danger to pedestrians are speeding, overtaking and violating traffic signals", said Abu Bakar M Shahjahan, chairman of BRTA.

BRTA is conducting motivational counselling regularly for driving licence applicants. "Tests for driving license are more strict these days. We are also taking strict measures against drivers with fake licences so that incompetent drivers cannot cause accidents in the city streets," he added.

Unfit vehicles are also a threat to pedestrians and passengers. Reckless driving by the public transport drivers is also to be blamed.

Another study conducted by National Institute of Traumatology and Orthopaedic Rehabilitation (NITOR) revealed that vehicles that lose control most often are three-wheelers -- such as tempos or auto rickshaws.

BRTA chairman said with the help of magistrates and the police, two mobile courts are working on Thursdays and Mondays on the streets of Dhaka. He however admitted that this is insufficient for the city.

BRTA conducts an awareness programme that includes counselling for school children. "It is also important to explain our children about the road safety. Children often are not careful on the streets because they were not made aware of the danger," said Shahjahan.

Road traffic injuries are the second leading cause of death of people aged between 5 and 25.



While many city pavements and street crossings remain unusable, pedestrians are constantly exposed to dangers.

## Thieves on the prowl for rickshaws

RAIHAN SABUXTAGIN

Although incidents of rickshaw theft have gone down significantly during the present interim government, rickshaw pullers are still being killed or poisoned by organised rickshaw thieves.

The organised gang of criminals keep coming up with shocking techniques for stealing rickshaws and then extort money out of the rickshaw owners in return for the stolen rickshaws.

After talking with rickshaw owners, pullers and law enforcement officials in Mohammadpur, Pallabi, Bashabo and Dhamondi areas, Star City found out that rickshaw theft has been on the decline since the present government busted a few hideouts of rickshaw thieves.

Babul, a rickshaw puller from Rupnagar area, is incapable of any physical work now after the thieves poisoned him for the rickshaw he was pulling.

On the day of the incident, two impressively attired men hired him to haul furniture for them. Somewhere on the way, they offered him a glass of drink that appeared to be juice.

"The day was hot and the two gentlemen was also drinking the juice. I didn't suspect anything and I thought it would be alright," said Babul.

Babul could not remember anything after having the drink.

He later discovered himself lying in the bed of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. He was told that he had been rescued unconscious from the roadside and brought to the hospital.

Miraz, a rickshaw garage owner, said usually well-dressed criminals posing to be passengers hire a rickshaw and knock the rickshaw puller unconscious from behind when they reach a convenient spot and make off with the vehicle. In another technique, the thieves request the puller to buy something for them from a roadside store. The thieves then flee the scene with the unattended rickshaw.

When asked what the owners do to retrieve their stolen rickshaws, Miraz said, "The owners contact local brokers who have connections with the thieves. The owners provide them with necessary description about the rickshaw while paying Tk 300 to Tk 500 for information about each stolen rickshaw."

"Description of how the rickshaw was stolen is also very important to track down the stolen vehicle as different thieves follow different methods for stealing a rickshaw. There are many nicknames for the stealing methods. 'Shahebana', 'Official' or 'Rich Lady' techniques are to name a few," he said.

Locman, a seller of new rickshaws, said, "Rickshaw theft flourished during the past governments since the law enforcers at that time also got a piece of the pie. Back then, a law enforcement personnel could make Tk 1 lakh by 'handling' 10

cases of rickshaw theft each month."

Large rickshaw garage owners are also harbouring the thieves by buying stolen rickshaws from them. These crooks often refurbish the stolen vehicles and resell those as new

When a puller loses his rickshaw, he undergoes a prolonged suffering, painstakingly paying back half price of the vehicle, which could range from Tk 3000 to Tk 6000.

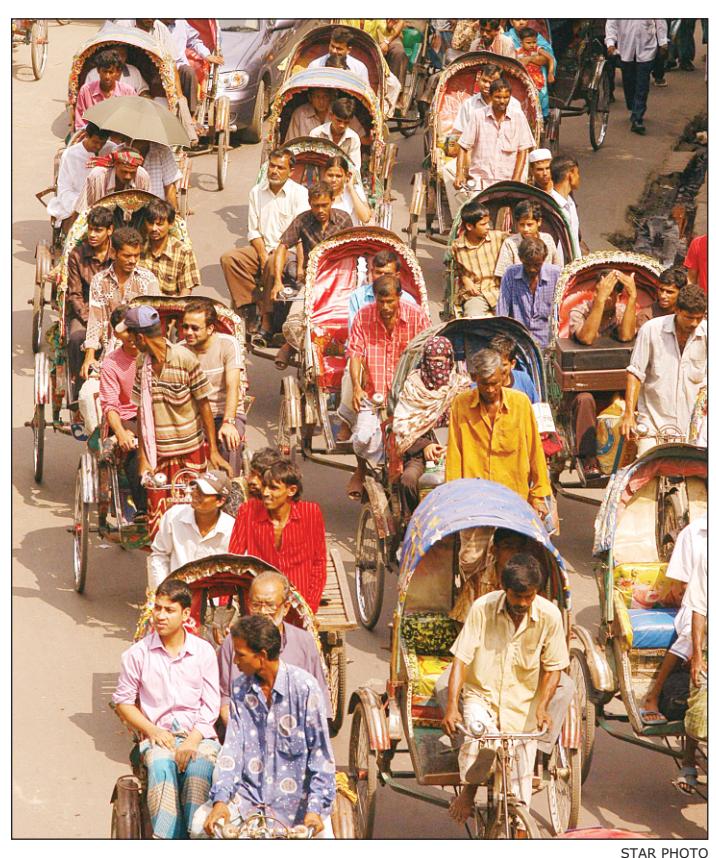
Owners of the stolen rickshaws usually do not take the matter to the law enforcers because the thieves have a network of informers all over the city. If they find out that a rickshaw owner has reported the theft, the thieves would ruin the owner's rickshaw rental business by stealing the same owner's vehicles over and over again, explained Ebad.

Besides, thanks to the mismanagement in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), out of a staggering 4 lakh rickshaws plying in Dhaka, only 89,000 are registered with the DCC. Owner of an unregistered rickshaw will never report its theft to the law enforcers, he said.

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ones for as much as Tk 10,000, he added.

"If you dig deep inside the unauthorised rickshaw business, you will learn a lot about the rickshaw thieves," said Nolini, a rickshaw trader.



Rickshaw pullers are drugged or even killed by gangs of rickshaw thieves in the city.

STAR PHOTO

Weekly weather forecast for the city		hellodhaka			
Today	Low: 28 °C High: 35 °C Sunny and	Monday	Low: 27 °C High: 33 °C Humid with clouds and	sun	Humid with partial sunshine
WEEK AHEAD	Tuesday	Low: 27 °C High: 33 °C Humid with clouds and	Wednesday	Low: 25 °C High: 33 °C Humid with partial sunshine	Thursday
				High: 33 °C Low: 26 °C High: 31 °C Partly sunny and humid	High: 33 °C Low: 26 °C High: 31 °C Partly sunny and humid
					Friday

source: accuweather.com

e-mail: starcity@thecitystar.net



A uni-pole advertisement hoarding dangerously tilts towards a building at the Bangla Motor intersection after being lashed by a nor'wester on Thursday. Dhaka City Corporation has rented out hundreds of similar poles around the city exposing public to danger.

## Rajuk to publicise approved housing projects

Publication of the list would help stop fraudulent practices in the private housing sector

TAWFIQUE ALI

Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) is going to make public a list of approved private housing projects to make people aware of illegal projects and stop fraudulence by a section of developers who are advertising their unauthorised projects.

Rajuk Chairman KAM Haroon said they will soon publicise detailed and specific information on the approved private housing projects.

"We will display the designs of approved projects specifying the exact area and blocks so that people do not fall prey to flashy advertisements of unauthorised projects," he said.

Rajuk Board dealt with a large number of private housing projects and approved them before enactment of laws and rules like Wetland Conservation Act of 2000, Environment Conservation Act of 1995, Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan (DMD) of 1995 and Private Housing Project Land Development Rules of 2004.

Most of these projects are now completed and unknown to the public.

Once the list of approved projects is displayed at Rajuk, real estate buyers will have an opportunity to check authenticity of a project before buying a plot or flat. They will be able to identify the unauthorised projects.

Rajuk's town planning section has already been asked to take measures for publicity and lamination of designs and layout of the approved projects to put them on display.

"We will hang laminated designs at Rajuk specifying exact area and status of approval so that developer cannot alter it anyway or resort to deception in any manner," Haroon said.

Deputy Town Planner of Rajuk Abu Hasan Mortuza said at a seminar on February 17 that 35 housing projects got approval long before the rules of 2004 were framed.

In case developers initiate extension or alteration of the layout plans of any these projects, they have to obtain approval under the private housing land development rules.

According to Rajuk, it has received only 21 applications from ongoing private housing project developers for approval under the rules of 2004. Now, approval depends on compliance with the said laws and related rules.

Rajuk has filed cases against eight project developers under Wetland Conservation Act of 2000, Land Development Rules of 2004 and for running advertisements illegally. Six projects could not yet obtain final approval, as the developers could not meet preconditions set by government, while seven projects are under consideration.

The rules of 2004 provide that any extension or continuation of a completed project, let alone the new ones, has to obtain approval.

According to records at Rajuk, Pallabi Abashik (30.44 acres) and Arambagh Cooperative Housing (7.59 acres) projects of Eastern Housing Ltd got approval in 1984. Kalyanpur Land Project (4.79 acres) of the same developer got approval in 1986. Cap Hasan (Niketan) Housing Project (68.53 acres) of Eastern Housing got approval in 1987.

Adarsha Chhayanir Greeha Nirman Samab

Samity project (4.5 acres) got approval in 1986. Baitul Aman Cooperative Housing Project (12 acres) got approval in 1986. Mohammadpur Pisciculture Housing Project (38.01 acres) in 1987. Firoza Properties and Development residential project (9.10 acres in Mohammadpur) in 1987 and Metropolitan Christian Co-operative Housing Project in Tejgaon got approval in 1987.

Janata Housing Project (4.40 acres in Kafirul and Mirpur) got approval 1987. Postogola (2.22 acres), Rayerbazar (10.03 acres), KM Das Lane (4.02 acres), Bashabo (3.03 acres) and Shishmahal (11.31 acres) projects of Eastern Housing got approval in 1987. Cap Hasan Housing Project in Pailkpara (6.13 acres) got approval in the same year.

Postogola Riverview Land Project (29 bighas) of Eastern Housing got approval in 1989. Mallika residential project (4.53 acres in Mirpur) of Sheltch Private Limited in 1990, Blue Star Estate (0.33 decimals in Kakrai) of Blue Star Real Estate Limited got permission in 1990, Probal Housing (8.49 acres in Mohammadpur) in 1990 and Janata Co-operative Housing (14 acres in Mohammadpur) in 1990.

Mukti Real Estate in Mirpur got approval in 1990, Sukhni residential project (3.99 acres) in 1992, Susomoy Bahumukhi project in Uttarkhan and Gobindapur in 1994 and Jahangirnagar University Cooperatives' Arunapalli project (82.34 acres in Savar) got approval in 1998.

Basundhara (Baridhara extension) housing project of East West Property Development Limited got approval for 305 acres. But the developer later placed a proposal of 1247.30-acre extended project, which has not yet got approval.

Dhaka Real Estate project in Katasur, Shyamoli project (18.25 bighas) in Uttara and a number of other projects got approval but were implemented deviating approved layout plans. There are several other projects that got approval but later the government filed cases against the developers for rules violations and the projects were stalled.

A number of powerful developers that have no government approval, have recently embarked on massive advertisement of their projects on television, newspapers and in public places alluring people into investing huge amount of money in illegal housing.

Commercial advertisement of such unauthorised housing projects in any manner is a punishable offence, as per the Building Construction Act of 1952 and rules of 2004.

A housing developer, among other preconditions, has to obtain plan approval for any construction complying with wetland and environment conservation acts, Building Construction Act of 1952, Bangladesh National Building Code (BNBC) and Building Construction Rules of 2006.

A crucial precondition for implementing a housing project is that the layout plan of a proposed project must have a GPS-based (Global Positioning System) topographical survey map clearly marking cultivable and non-cultivable lands, wetlands, flood retention ponds and basins, canal, river, creek and forestation.