



Pedestrians cross road at Paribagh intersection risking their lives while the work on building a footbridge goes at a slow pace.

WORK ON FOOTBRIDGE AT PARIBAGH BEGINS BUT Cry for urgent steps to build two underpasses goes unheeded

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

While work has started on building a new footbridge at Paribagh, the Dhaka City Corporation's (DCC) promise for two underpasses at two nearby busy spots remains far from reality.

A number of fatal accidents on the street stretching from Shahbagh to the Shahid Jahangir Gate of Dhaka Cantonment have finally jolted the DCC into taking measures to construct a foot-over bridge at the Paribagh intersection. But there is no concrete move yet for two underpasses at Bangla Motor and Shahbagh.

Construction of two underpasses along with the new Paribagh foot-over bridge were promised by the DCC mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka in the wake of public demands following the deaths on this street.

Due to the absence of any underpass or foot-over bridge, thousands of pedestrians are compelled to cross the two of the busiest intersections in the city risking their lives round the clock amid heavy traffic flow. They have no alternative means of crossing the streets as rickshaws are prohibited from both the intersections.

Several accidents took place in the Bangla Motor intersection because of which the pedestri-

ans worry a lot about this spot.

"This (Bangla Motor intersection) is a very busy spot with heavy traffic operating on it round the clock every day. Crossing the intersection is not only risky but also quite irritating as you have to wait for several minutes before you can cross the street," said Rehana Sultana, a housewife from Maghbazar who routinely visits the Hatirpota kitchen market every day.

Just like Rehana Sultana, this is a common phenomenon for thousands of pedestrians who have to pass through the Bangla Motor intersection every day.

"On my way to drop my daughter at her school and on the way back home, I have to cross the 'troublesome' Bangla Motor every day during rush hour," said Israt Jahan, from Pallabi.

Similar notions and complaints regarding the issue are frequently raised by city dwellers.

"Watching those cars and bulky buses racing with each other always gives me fright. In quite a few occasions I even narrowly escaped being hit by vehicles," said Mahabub Hossain from Moghbazar.

Yusuf Pasha, assistant editor of the Daily Janakantha, died in a road accident in the

Bangla Motor intersection earlier last year. He was hit by a passenger bus while crossing the road in the evening that day.

About three years ago a young graduate engineer died at the same spot knocked down by a bus.

Besides fatal accidents, a good deal of minor accidents also took place at this very intersection that go unnoticed and ignored.

Mahmud Karim, a service provider, was speeding across the Bangla Motor thoroughfare in his two-wheeler earlier last week. It was early morning and the street was relatively free from the rush-hour traffic as Karim sped across the street.

Just then, two pedestrians, one of whom is an aged woman tried to cross the street unaware that a speeding two-wheeler may hit them in a matter of a few seconds. Having seen the two pedestrians, Karim slammed the breaks, and as he did so, his tires hit a crack in the street and his two-wheeler went down in the street with a loud thump.

"It was a sunny morning so I could not see them crossing the street at the beginning and when I hit the brakes I didn't see the crack in the street ahead. In the end I managed to avoid major injuries," said Karim.

"They should definitely build

a foot-over bridge or underpass in the Bangla Motor intersection as accidents can easily happen with people haphazardly crossing the streets," he added.

According to on-duty traffic official from the Shahbagh intersection, there must be a foot over-bridge at the Shahbagh and Bangla Motor intersection sometime along the future as managing the pedestrians is not always possible by the traffic officials.

"Sometimes managing the pedestrians becomes just as difficult as managing the street traffic. Often the pedestrians lose patience and attempt to cross amid heavy traffic risking their lives," said the on-duty traffic sergeant requesting anonymity.

"The proposals for the underpasses are under the examination of the planning commission and awaiting final approval. The project requires thorough examination as it involves enormous funding," said Syed Qudrat Ullah, superintendent engineer of Traffic Engineering Department of DCC.

"DCC will start the construction work of the underpasses as soon as the proposals receive final approval," he said.

Cable TV operators defy govt order, overcharge subscribers

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Cable TV operators are still overcharging their viewers—blatantly defying the government-set maximum fee for the service.

On July 11, information ministry had declared that for a cable service with 60 channels and at least 30 pay channels, cable TV operators cannot charge a subscriber more than Tk 300. Violators of the instruction would end up losing their licences, the ministry warned.

The subscribers welcomed the government move and hoped to see the much-needed constancy and accountability in cable television industry soon. But, to their disbelief and frustration, many operators are still charging their subscribers well over Tk 300 and getting away without any punishment.

A Green Road resident, SM Atique, said cable operator in his neighbourhood demanded Tk 400 service fee for August. As Atique raised objections and pointed out the government-fixed ceiling of Tk 300, the bill collector simply told him that the fee would not be reduced.

"He told me to either pay Tk 400 or cancel my subscription as they would not reduce their monthly charges," said Atique.

"I had read in newspapers that the government would cancel licences of cable operators who are found to be charging higher fees. I wonder if that was just an empty threat to create panic amongst the cable operators," added a frustrated Atique.

Similar allegations are being surfaced throughout the city where a good number of subscri-

ers are saying that their cable operators are collecting higher fees from them.

Ataur Rahman, a resident of Mirpur, used to pay Tk 300 a month to local cable television operator. However, the operator raised the fee to Tk 350 from July.

"They [cable operator] told us that the government increased the monthly cable fees. Consequently, we have to pay more for the subscription," Ataur added.

A number of cable TV operators, especially at Malibagh, Bashabo, Dhanmondi, Rampura, Tilapara and adjacent areas, are also alleged to be demanding higher monthly fees in the name of collecting VAT (value added tax). They are making their subscribers pay an additional Tk 40 to

Tk 50 in VAT on top of their monthly fees.

In proposed budget of fiscal year 2003-2004, the government imposed a 15% VAT on cable TV operators. Apparently, the operators are now collecting that VAT from subscribers.

Mainul Hossain, representative of Cable Vision at Kalabagan, told this correspondent that Cable Vision is collecting VAT from subscribers during collection of monthly cable fees because it is the end users who are supposed to pay the VAT.

"VAT stands for value added tax. By its very definition, it is a charge supposed to be paid by the end user. That is why we are collecting VAT from our customers," said Mainul.

However, information ministry

officials could not confirm officially if the cable TV subscribers are supposed to pay VAT.

"Since our official policy does not indicate that VAT is to be paid by subscribers [of cable TV services], it is obviously a deceitful act for them [cable TV operators] to force their subscribers pay VAT," said an information ministry official requesting anonymity.

According to sources in the ministry, Controller of Licence of BTV is authorised to monitor cable TV operations and take action against operators who violate government policies.

"If any viewer is forced to pay higher cable fees, complaints should be filed with BTV Controller of Licence for actions," added the official.



Cops undergo reform

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criminal. But police allegedly take all the suspects to the custody where they beat up many of them during interrogation, which is a violation of human rights.

"My son along with some other young boys were arrested as a suspect when a murder took place in our neighbourhood. He was beaten up in the custody but was later proved innocent," said a mother of a victim, seeking anonymity.

The officials hope that introduction of DNA test will eliminate the aforesaid practice during interrogation. "We are hoping that the attitude of beating up will be eliminated, as there will be no need to do that. That should end this age-old habit among the police force," said Ahmed.

CSI kits will be provided to 17 police stations across the country, including two in Dhaka. The training on CSI will start after all 17 kits are available. An initial training on CSI has been given to 98 police personnel of two model police stations.

Some 200 constables and sub-inspectors were trained on law enforcement and implementation, human rights and investigations so far.

In 2003, the government of Bangladesh thought of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the police force by addressing areas like crime prevention, investigation, prosecution, strategic planning and IT. At the same time UNDP approached the government with PRP.

UNDP did a basic analysis on what are needed to improve the image of police

among cross-section of people and then started working on PRP.

Officials will be sent to Australian Institute of Police Management, Canadian Police College, Police Staff College, Bramshill, UK and Cambridge, UK for training.

Three model police stations are at work now and three more will be inaugurated by August 2007. A total of 66 police officials of the stations were trained in IT related jobs.

Problems that was addressed during the training programme were lack of managerial competence, training and resources, low motivation due to low pay scale, poor working condition, limited promotion prospects, less participation of women, more focus on protocol, inadequate strategy planning, people's lack of trust on police and police personnel's lack of sensitivity on the plight of victims.

The officials are expecting that if PRP can be implemented properly it would make police independent from political influence, enhance crime prevention through community awareness.

PRP can build a good public image of police, train them in victim support, and make them more responsive to women, children and vulnerable people. Transparency and merit were given importance in PRP in police recruitment and promotion process.

Polythene menace

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The only exception was made for the packaging of 14 items, which include biscuit, chanachoor, bread, salt, shemai, medicine, flour, naphthalene, fertilizer, chocolate, milk powder etc. However, polybag produced for these items must be above 100 micron. The law is also lax for export oriented polythene production.

Manufactures are cashing in on weak law enforcement. Magistrate Rokon-Ud-Doula told Star City that the magistrates in charge of the mobile courts do not have enough legal powers to stop the illegal manufacturers. "Under the existing law we can only punish the sellers. It is important to stop the production. We don't have enough powers to seal factories," he said.

Bangladesh Environment Protection Act 1995 had given power only to the Environment Court (Paribesh Adalat), which can take decisive action against the manufactures. There are environment courts only in the divisional districts, which is not enough to punish all environment offenders around the country.

Doula mentioned that maximum penalty under the Environment Conservation Act 1995 for manufacturing and marketing polythene shopping bag is 10-year rigorous imprisonment, or a maximum fine of Tk 10 lakh, or both. Paribesh Adalat is the only one who can sentence this punishment.

Whereas, mobile court magistrates can only fine Tk 10,000 and award 6 months' imprisonment to the seller, he said.

The fine for using polythene shopping bags for purposes other than export trade is Tk.500.

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