

Punitive measures planned to tame the jaywalkers

Pedestrians to be fined for crossing road without using footbridge or underpass

SHAHINAZ PARVEEN

Bad news for the jaywalkers. The revised Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983 will soon have the provisions to penalise pedestrians for crossing busy thoroughfares without using footbridge or underpass.

The Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has

Built recently the much-demanded footbridges at Bangla Motor and Paribagh saw similar public apathy. Most pedestrians at Bangla Motor still tend to jaywalk, where several tragic accidents occurred.

The provisions were added with a view to increasing public safety on the streets of Dhaka.

demonstrate for footbridge or underpass. But when it is built they rarely use it.

"By taking the busy streets the pedestrians are risking their own lives. Moreover they are slowing down the traffic resulting in frequent congestions," he added.

Jashimuddin, also a member of the regulation draft commit-

tee to abide by the rules," he said.

Pedestrians are the most vulnerable section on the streets of Dhaka. According to a study conducted by the World Bank, pedestrians alone comprise almost 75 percent of the road accident fatalities. Road accident is one of the leading causes of unnatural death in Bangladesh.

Begum and dragged her for about one and a half kilometres on Tongi Diversion Road. Nahar's tragic death sparked serious protests.

With a view to improving pedestrian mobility and building friendly footbridge, the Dhaka City Corporation recently carried out a feasibility study funded by the World Bank. The study conducted by Centre for Urban Studies ended this March.

Urban planning specialist Salma A Shafi of CUS who led the study cited height, steep stairs and negative environment on the overbridge as the main reasons why pedestrians feel reluctant to use them.

The footbridges in the city are built around 20 to 22 feet high to allow the double-decker buses to

"Sidewalks are very narrow and the stairs too steep. These are physically excruciating for many. So pedestrians prefer to pick the busy thoroughfares instead of climbing up the steep stairs," said Shafi.

Widening of the footpath is urgently necessary, she said. Average width of the existing footpaths is a little more than 2.0m, the report pointed out.

The study also found insecurity, insufficient lighting and poor maintenance as the discouraging factors for pedestrians.

Unwanted elements such as muggers, pickpockets, drug peddlers, floating sex workers and vagabonds often prowl on these structures. Hawkers had taken over spaces of many footbridges leaving very little room for pedestrians.

Advertisements occupy every inch of the footbridges. The recent overhead sheds and hoardings by the side of the overbridges have virtually turned many of them into dark tunnels. After sundown they become a risky spot for people.

According to the study, most users suggested removal of all obstructions including the billboards.

When lawmen hesitate to punish the law-breakers

Pumps being used in many city areas to draw water from the supply line

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

As water supply situation is worsening, house owners in many areas of the city are violating Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) regulation that bans use of pumps to draw water from the supply pipe.

Using powerful pumps they are drawing water from the supply line but the Wasa authorities cannot take action against them fearing public outburst due to its failure to ensure smooth supply of water.

Mahmudullah Aziz, a retired government official who is the owner of a three-storey house at Rupnagar residential area in Pallabi, expressed frustrations over the irregular supply of water in the area.

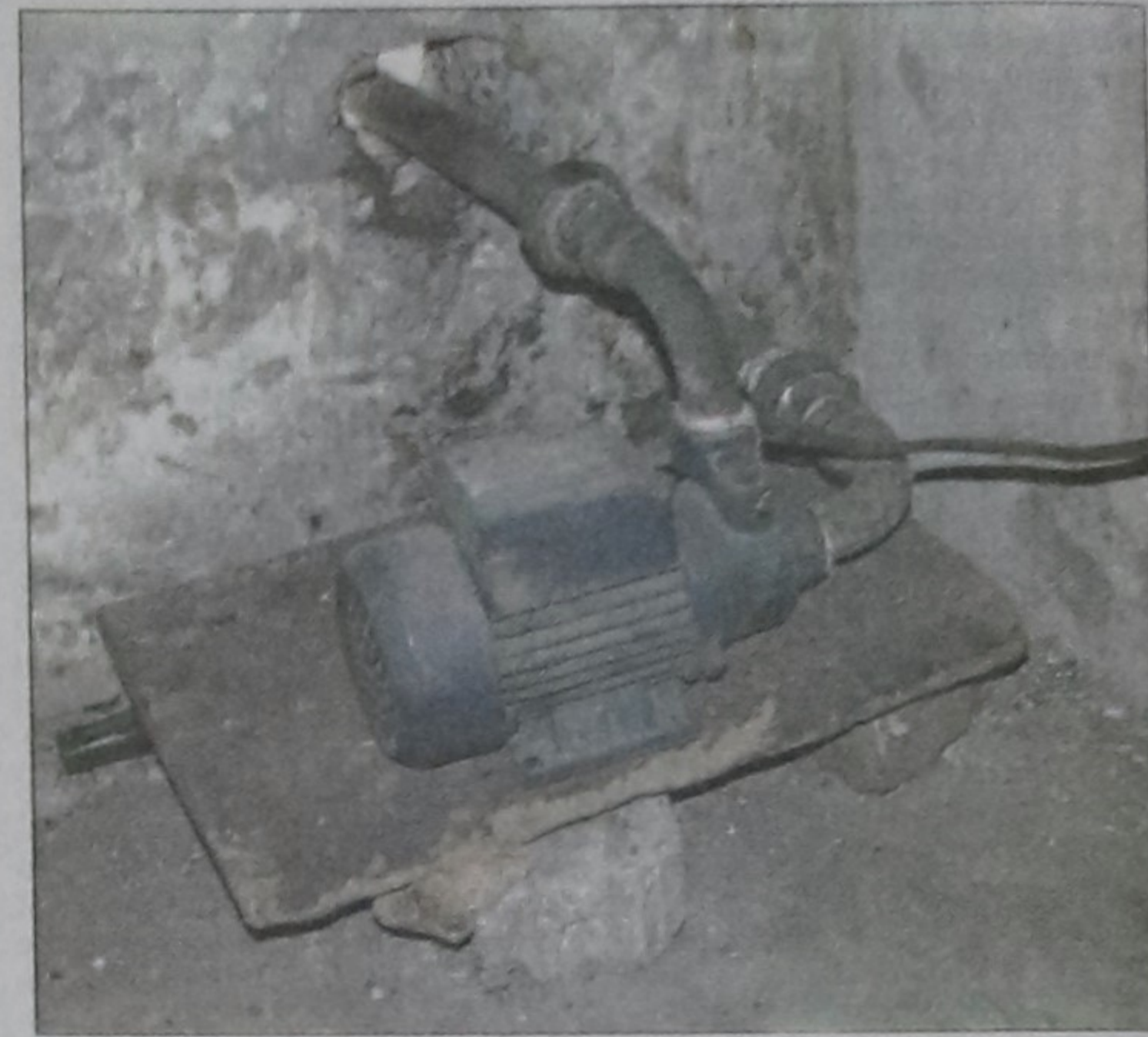
"The whole area seems to be at a war for water. The residents compete with each other to collect water from the Wasa line," he said as technicians were replacing a small water pump with a bigger one at his house.

Aziz said he has been compelled to change the less powerful pump to lift water at a faster speed from the supply pipe as duration of water supply period has become uncertain in the area.

At least 40 people reside in six flats of Aziz's house and he has to meet the water demand of all his tenants.

"In this situation we have no alternative but to do this illegally," he admitted. "We don't get water supply regularly even after connecting a pump with the supply pipe, so I don't feel guilty of doing this."

Aziz said when he built the house he did not have any pump to draw water from supply pipe. Soon he found that he was not getting water when all his neighbours were getting the same. "Once a sanitary service man



advised me to install a pump for collecting water from Wasa pipe," Aziz said.

Now Aziz has two motors installed in his house-- one for lifting water from the underground reservoir to the rooftop tank and the other for drawing water from the Wasa pipeline.

Afzal Hossain, owner of the house opposite to Aziz's, said a month ago he too installed a new powerful motor on the supply pipe changing the old one to beat others in drawing water from Wasa pipe.

House owners in many city areas operate two pumps although they know that it is illegal. They construct large underground tank to reserve water.

Arshad Ahmed, a sanitary service man, said the house owners are deliberately flouting the rules as they know the authorities are well informed of this and there is hardly any possibility of taking action against them.

A Wasa inspector said

about 98 percent house owners in his area use separate motor for drawing water from the main pipe. He said Wasa cannot take action against this as the lawbreakers are large in number.

The inspector said Wasa has nothing to say about the rules violation as it fails to supply adequate water to the consumers.

"Shortage of water supply compels the house owners to engage in a competition for lifting water from the Wasa pipeline and preserve more water for securing their daily domestic demand," he said.

The pond-size underground reservoir tanks in most of the apartment buildings contribute a lot to the worsening water crisis, said the inspector.

In Dhaka, the daily water demand is about 200 crore litres while the production capacity is around 180 crore litres. The average supply is 164 crore litres, according to Dhaka Wasa data.



Pedestrians still prefer to risk their lives at the busy intersection at Bangla Motor despite the construction of the much-demanded footbridge.

prepared the draft of the amended regulations and sent it to the Ministry of Communications for careful scrutiny.

There are 42 footbridges in Dhaka city while the number of underpass is three. Almost all of them remain devoid of pedestrians as most city dwellers seem to have a serious aversion towards using overbridge or underpass.

The draft proposed that the on-duty police officers would have the power to fine the offenders up to Tk 200 if they cross the road without using the nearby footbridge or underpass.

Md Jashimuddin, joint commissioner for traffic, Dhaka Metropolitan Police, citing the case of Bangla Motor, said, "Our common experience is that when an accident takes place people

tee, informed that more than 200 police forces have been deployed at various points recently to convince the pedestrians to use footbridge and underpass.

But the success rate is very poor, he said.

"We can try to persuade them when they do not take the safer way but we cannot force them. But if there are provisions for penalties then we can force them

Among the most tragic incidents, journalist Yusuf Pasha died when a bus hit him at Bangla Motor crossing in 2006.

In 2005, Shammee Akhter Happy, a student of Dhaka University, was crushed under the wheels of a speeding bus as she was crossing the Shahbagh intersection.

In 2003, a Pajero knocked down garment worker Nahar

NEW RULES SOON TO CURB CRIMES

Hotel guests have to reply to at least 24 questions

RIZANUZZAMAN LASKAR

The new rules for residential hotel boarders that will make it mandatory for them to provide personal information in a prescribed form may cause hassles for the boarders, say both lodgers and hoteliers in the city.

The hotel guests will have to provide the information, answering 24 questions in the form provided by the police department. The hotel management has also been asked to take photograph of every boarder and preserve it for a month for security reasons.

Law enforcement agencies said they are going to introduce the rules to curb increasing criminal incidents in the city. Many criminals specially robbers use hotel rooms as a base of their operations, police sources said.

"The recent robbery at the BRAC Bank is a good example. We have information that the robbers stayed at a hotel to make their plan, and left the hotel with looted goods after the robbery in

the locker room of the bank," said a police officer.

"We found it difficult to identify the criminals as the information they provided to the hotel turned out to be false," he said.

Once fully implemented, under the new rules the hotel guests will have to write down their name, parents' names, permanent address, mobile and land phone numbers, passport number, national identity card and voter identity card numbers (if any), driving licence and professional ID numbers (if any).

Hotel authorities have been instructed to verify whether the mobile and land phone number supplied by a boarder are genuine.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has already started to distribute these forms to the residential hotels so that police can get necessary details after an incident of crime in the hotels. The policy will soon be made mandatory for hoteliers, sources said.

Hoteliers dubbed the crime busters' new move to collect

personal information as a source of annoyance for both hotel employees and their guests.

"It is a good move for the community as a whole, but it is not without compromises," said Anup Hossain from Hotel Farmgate. "This sort of policy would be befitting for the numerous roadside and second-rate hotels. However, hotels that have a genuine appeal to a lot of people will be worse off from it," he said.

"Good hotels receive good customers -- people who are respected in society," said Shah Ali Khurram, a Pakistani businessman staying at Hotel Farmgate. "Having them to fill out forms and sit for photographs for security reasons will make them feel anything but good. It would be awkward and discomfiting, at least for me."

"It would be almost as if I am being suspected as a criminal, which is not a very good feeling," he said.

"There are a lot of people who come from different regions of

the country who do not have, or do not know most of the information required by the police. These people will have problems finding a good place to stay in the city," said Anup Hossain.

Danesh Mahmud from Hotel Green Palace International at Green Road believes that it would not be possible for a lot of hotels to comply with the new policy.

"Hotel employees have a lot of other duties like attending to the guests' needs and comforts. I do not see justification of this new policy as we already send a list of our daily guests and their information to the nearest police station," he said, adding that they have CCTV security cameras and strict rules on receiving guests.

"This policy would be appropriate for the dodgy and shady hotels. The police conduct regular raids on those hotels, so the new policy would be an exaggeration," he said.

Conversely, some hailed the policy as a good way to monitor what is happening inside the hotels, and who is going in and out of them.

"I consider it as a good move," said a spokesperson from Hotel Superstar in Dhanmondi. "Yes, it may be a source of hassle for many in the beginning but in time it will become a regular practice and a lot of people will be thankful for it," he said.

"The hotels need to be closely monitored as there are a lot of unsocial activities going on there," said Mozammel Hossain, a businessman from Feni staying at Superstar Hotel.

"Many boarders do not provide genuine contact information to the hotel authorities. Now with the police involved, they would have to provide original information and it would be easier to track them down if required," he said.



Renovation work of box culvert channel finally starts

ERSHAD KAMOL

Fifteen years after the inception of Shegunbagicha box culvert, a 2.88 km channel from Shegunbagicha to Kamalapur railway culvert, the Drainage Department of Dhaka Wasa has begun the renovation work of the channel to check water-logging in a vast area.

Using dredgers, the Wasa engineers are removing the substances that blocked over nine feet of the total 14.1 feet depth of the 16.4 feet wide channel, which is the reason behind water-logging in over 36 square kilometres areas including Shantinagar, Kakrail, Fakirapul,

Rajarbagh, Arambagh and Motijheel.

"Waterlogging is a huge problem during the rainy season. It's really difficult to move after a heavy rain, which sustains for several hours," said a resident of Arambagh.

At present the renovation is going on at three points behind Bangladesh Bank. One team will go to downstream and another will go to upstream, said the engineers.

Executive Engineer of Wasa Drainage Department AKM Shahiduddin said, "It's not possible to renovate the box culvert manually. We are cleaning the box

culvert using dredgers. This year we will be able to clean up over three feet of the blocked channel."

He further said use of dredgers would not be harmful for the surface of the culvert.

"We have to clean the channel at least three times a year to remove the garbage, domestic waste and construction materials inside it," Shahiduddin added.

However, locals complained that the garbage removed from the culvert is being dumped on the roadside, creating problem for the commuters and spreading pungent odour.

Asked, engineer Shahiduddin said, "It's a temporary problem. We are dumping the garbage beside the road as we don't have any alternative place. We remove the garbage from the road after a week when these are dried up."

Project Director of Rainwater-logging Project of Dhaka Wasa Waliullah Sikder, who is also the superintending engineer of Drainage Circle, believes that the ongoing renovation work of Shegunbagicha canal will improve the water-logging problem.

"It's really difficult to carry out regular maintenance and cleaning up of such a long box culvert," he observed.



A hotel counter: Days of hassles ahead.