

Unskilled drivers

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roads during rush hour every day, he observed. In Dhaka, 60 percent road users are pedestrians whose needs are ignored in urban planning and designing of streets.

Engineering flaws in designing the roads, however, are to blame for most mishaps.

Referring to the recent deaths of two top government officials -- secretary Razia Begum and BSCIC chairman Md Siddiqur Rahman, he said, "Clearly, this accident was the result of faulty design of the road."

The accident spot at Utholi on Dhaka-Paturia highway appears to be a straight road from a distance although it is an intersection, he explained. The cautionary sign installed at the crossing says nothing about intersection; it only says 'curve'.

In addition, the sign is invisible to drivers due to billboards and trees along the road.

"This type of engineering blunder can be found all across the country. More investment on road safety is required to overcome these slip-ups," continued Prof Hoque who investigated the Utholi road crash.

He also identifies integration of fast and slow traffic on highways and urban roads without proper lane system as a major cause of accidents.

"Aggressive business method" practised by private bus owners heightens the risk further, he opined.

The root cause behind this "unhealthy" competition is that many private bus owners are dependent on bank loans. They manage their business with minimum number of vehicles as well as drivers. In order to pay back the loan while trying to maximise their profit, they always compete with each other.

According to him, this covetous business policy disregarding traffic rules is

liable for many accidents.

Citing findings of a study conducted by ARI on 500 drivers, the professor said almost cent percent drivers are compelled to take the wheel at least three days in a row without proper rest.

"Then there is desperate effort to recover time lost in unwanted incidents, and let's face it there's always something, for instance traffic jam, political programmes [blocking the road], clashes etc," he says as for the reasons of human errors on the part of overstressed drivers.

BRTA Chairman Ayubur Rahman Khan agrees with him: "Imagine what happens when drivers without proper knowledge of driving and traffic rules, often underaged or overworked, are randomly speeding and overtaking with overloaded vehicles on highways that have many engineering flaws"

He terms it a perfect condition for disaster, which turns deadlier with lack of policing.

Md Shafiqur Rahman, joint commissioner (traffic), says total disregard for traffic laws and norms by both drivers and pedestrians results in a lot of accidents.

"May be it's the result of lack of awareness and illiteracy, but it's really difficult when everyone disobeys every single rule," he said.

He also observes that the current law is too weak to punish the offenders.

"Under the current law, punishment of road accidents or fine for violating traffic rules is too little.... There's no provision to punish bus owners who employ drivers with fake driving licences or operate unfit vehicles," he noted.

158 officials

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Of the 43 reinstated officials, 8 were deputy commissioners, 4 were divisional commissioners and 31 other officials.

8 stalkers jailed

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family members, sources said. According to the complaint, Rafeyul used to stalk the girl at different occasions. Around 12:30pm yesterday, the mobile court arrested Rafeyul from Charmathamore and took him to UNO office, sources added.

On another incident in Dinajpur, at least four family members of an alleged stalker were sued yesterday after stalking victim Shabnur Begum committed suicide following the assault of her family members by the stalker's on Friday.

The accused were identified as Md Wazed Ali, 55, his wife Rahima Begum, 45, his son Md Rabiul Islam Bulu, 22, and his daughter Mst Parvin, 25, all of Uttarpara village in the district's Biral upazila.

Shabnur's mother Meherjan Begum yesterday filed the case with Biral Upazila Police Station accusing four members of the alleged stalker's family, said police.

Our Noakhali correspondent reports, a mobile court led by Sadar UNO Mostafa Zaman yesterday sentenced three brothers to different terms of imprisonment for stalking a woman.

Of the accused brothers, Sharafat-ullah was given one-year imprisonment and fined Tk500, while Enran-ullah and Rahmat-ullah Manik were awarded one month's imprisonment each.

OC Mosharrif Hosen of Shudharam Police Station said the brothers used to stalk Kamrunnahar Tehery, 21, wife of Saudi expatriate Nur Islam Babu, of Binodpur village under sadar upazila.

In another incident at Khatapara village of Aditmari upazila in Lalmonirhat, a village arbitration committee had decided to isolate the families of two alleged stalkers yesterday, reports our Lalmonirhat correspondent.

The alleged stalkers were Ekramul Haque alias Khabo, 25, son of Mozibar Rahman, and Joleya Islam, 24, son of Abdul Mannan, of the village.

Khatapara mosque Imam Maulana Abdul Gony, also chief of the committee, said the families of the alleged stalkers would not be allowed to talk to other villagers until they hand over the accused to police.

Our Pabna correspondent reports, a mobile court led by Ishwardi UNO Md Jakir Hossain sentenced three stalkers for stalking schoolgirl Halima of Muladuli Girls School in Ishwardi upazila yesterday.

Of the accused stalkers, Saddam Hossain, 19, was given a 6-month imprisonment, while Saddam Pramanik and Sohel Rana got two months imprisonment.

The stalkers followed Halima and her friends on the way to their (girl's) private tutors place, said police and UNO sources.

their teachers and locals chased the stalkers and caught them in Muladuli market area around 1:30pm and handed them over to the police, they added.

Police and locals said the accused often teased Halima and disturbed other girls of herschool.

Our Kurigram correspondent reports, a mobile court led by Rajarhat UNO Rahenul Islam sentenced a stalker to two months imprisonment for harassing a female student in Rajarhat upazila yesterday.

The accused was identified as Aminul Islam, 21, son of Saber Ali of the upazila's Natua village.

Police said locals caught Aminul when he was stalking Sweetie Tara, 15, daughter of Shafiqul Islam of the village, while she was on her way to Shingherdabri Hat Girls' High School around 9:00am yesterday.

Aminul also used to stalk Sweetie over the phone, said police.

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Two kids

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spread shortly to the adjacent rooms.

The SI quoting the family members said that the children were sleeping when their rooms caught fire.

40 trees

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Condemning the tree-felling, Anu Muhammad, economics professor at JU, said it was not only against the environment and the government's stance but also unaesthetic.

"They [university authorities] do not have a sense of beauty. Since the government is working to amend the forest law, it should take note of such activities," he observed.

"We were stunned to see this mindless act. If the government does not take exemplary actions, it will encourage others to fell trees at will," Anu added.

The JU VC, however, claims they have done it to give the campus a facelift.

"Most of the trees cut down neither bear fruits nor are they used for wood. They are mostly tamarisk trees (jhu). They were invading the road island," he said.

Calling himself pro-environment, VC Shariff Enamul Kabir said he has planted over 3,000 trees on the campus since taking office.

Anu Muhammad dismisses the logic cited by the VC as an excuse.

"It was a very irresponsible thing to do. We don't understand why they have to fell trees to make the Shaheed Minar more visible from the main gate," he said.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1
from attending the reception.

Former army chief Lt Gen (ret'd) Harun-Ar-Rashid said, "It's a tradition that the two leaders [Khaleda and Hasina] attend the reception party. In the recent past I haven't seen Khaleda Zia's absents herself except for 2007 when she was in jail."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was in too jail that year. Both Khaleda and Hasina attended the programme in 2008 during the army-backed caretaker government rule.

Talking to The Daily Star, the chairperson's adviser and BNP's defence and security affairs coordinator Maj Gen (ret'd) Ruhul Alam Chowdhury said, "I heard madam [Khaleda] and a few of her personal aides were invited but may be the overall environment could have led her to make such a decision."

Ruhul Alam said he and a few other BNP colleagues who served in the army were not invited to the reception.

BNP standing committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, however, said he was invited to the programme but could not attend due to personal engagements.

"Armed Forces Day should be honoured by all as it happened in the past. I could not attend but I express my solidarity with them," the former army chief said when asked about the absence of the leader of the opposition there. He termed it an unfortunate exception.

On November 13, the Inter Services Public Relations Directorate (ISPR) alleged that Khaleda called army personnel, who were present at the cantonment house before she left, 'ungrateful dogs'.

At a press briefing later on, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain categorically denied the allegation, saying Khaleda did not make such comment.

Cop, mugger

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Pangu Hospital with bullet injury to his leg.

SI Mosharrif Hossain of Dhanmondi police station said a police patrol team led by Officer-in-Charge Shah Alam and SI Sohel chased down a private car carrying the muggers near the police check post in the area at around 12:45am.

They found one bullet and Yaba tablets while searching the car.

"All of a sudden Milon, who was driving the car, shot in the back of SI Imtiaz standing near the car", he added.

In retaliation police opened fire, leaving Milon injured.

Police then arrested the three and seized the firearm with two bullets and the Yaba tablets, he said.

Police said they had information that a gang of armed muggers using a private car was committing snatchings over a month in Dhanmondi and adjacent areas.

Yesterday six police teams led by six police officers were out to capture the muggers' gang. SI Mosharrif said adding, they in plain clothes used private cars to nab the muggers.

Police said during primary interrogation the arrestees admitted that they used to commit snatchings in the area using rented cars from Car Choice at Paltan.

They sent the car's registration number to BRTA to detect its owner.

Four separate cases were filed with Dhanmondi police station against the arrestees on charge of carrying arms, drugs, assaulting police and mugging.



Illegal loggers of Rema-Kalinga forest in Moulvibazar now prefer saplings to large trees since the former are easier to smuggle out. PHOTO: STAR

Wiping out future

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found out that it takes little time, effort, and a far smaller party to chop down small plants.

But the effect is devastating. The forest is losing its regeneration capacity. As young plants are mowed down, so is the future of the forest. This is a frightening prospect for a natural forest so huge and valuable for biodiversity.

ATOUGH TASK
The firewood collectors march in from all directions, from villages around the forest.

Kalinga village, just beside the forest, is inhabited by settlers coming mainly from Noakhali, and a number of them are naturally attracted to the vast wealth that just lies in the forest. It is alleged that relatives of some of the headmen of this village are also involved in the illegal logging.

Other villages are inhabited mainly by Sylhetis who are also staking their claim on the trees. It is thought that these villagers are responsible for 80 percent of the illegal logging in Kalinga.

Stopping them is difficult but not impossible. For them, working as labourers may fetch about Tk 150 a day. But if they can slip into the forest and come out safely, a bicycle load of firewood brings them Tk 400 to Tk 500, which is two to three days' income as a labourer, without the hassle.

And they have strong backing from local politicians. Only last month, the forest department decided that enough is enough. With the help of locals, the department captured about 30 bicycles and their owners while they were smuggling firewood from the forest.

But then pressure from the local politicians started mounting, and finally the forest department had to let the thieves go with the bicycles. Now they are back in old business.

Kalinga is a remote place and the access road is really intractable. Even a four-wheeler would bog down in places during monsoon. There is not much to do in this place other than growing crops on land given by the forest department. Not much job opportunities either. But the population is growing at least at the national rate. A few shops -- two restaurants, a few pharmacies, and general stores -- line the village square. If there is no crop in the fields, jobs just fizzle out. And then the eyes turn to the forest -- the easiest way to eke out an earning.

No matter how much the forest department fends them off, they enter the forest any way and do their job. Filing cases against the thieves proved counterproductive. As cases are filed, the thieves have to appoint lawyers, and appear at hearings. That requires money, and once again trees are the only source of free money. More trees are chopped down to foot the legal bills. And the vicious circle goes on.

LOCAL INITIATIVE
Nishorgo, an USAID project, had initiated a forest management programme involving the locals. It had formed patrol teams involving 100 villagers. It had offered some of the team members training and funds to start small businesses.

For example, Abdul Haque got training to become a nurseryman, and started his own business. He sells saplings to the forest department, and also to other villagers.

Abdus Sahid got Tk 5,000 from Nishorgo, and bought a cow. Now he has three cows. Nishorgo had also held sessions with villagers to raise their awareness about the importance of the forest. After the Nishorgo project was over, another project IPAC (Integrated Protected Area Co-management) started.

Under IPAC the forest department and a group of locals patrol through the forest regularly at different times, and keep a check on illegal logging. Sometimes, when presence of illegal loggers is reported, they rush immediately no matter what hour of the day or night.

Face-offs with the thieves also occur often. Only last month, a few members of the patrol team came face to face with a gang of thieves who had cut up a huge tree into three pieces, and were trying to smuggle those out through a stream.

The patrol team challenged the thieves who first abandoned a piece of log and ran inside the forest. A few minutes later, they regrouped and came back with machetes and sticks. They attacked the patrol team, seriously injuring at least two of the members.

This incident, just one of many, shows how weak these patrol teams are against the thugs. They were promised some sort of uniforms, to give them an official air. They have not got those yet. They were supposed to get identity cards, which also did not come. The team members now feel they could exert a lot more power on the thieves, only if they had those two promises fulfilled.

Such patrol teams are essential, and the only way to save this magnificent forest is through people's participation, foresters say. The forest department is stretched thin to guard this huge swath of wilderness. The department has only 32 staff to look after more than 12,000 acres of forest, an impossible task by any count. It has 200 village volunteers who guard the forest in return for forest land on which they grow crops.

But using volunteers in exchange for land is proving costly, as the villagers are pushing for more and more land, squeezing the forest coverage. Once they get a piece of land, they keep on expanding it illegally, encroaching on more forest land.

GIVING JOBS WHAT MATTERS
It is now apparent that the only way to save the forest is to provide employment to the local people. IPAC has its impact, limited though it may be. But that model of providing employment to the local people in exchange for guarding the forest, needs to be duplicated many times over.

"If you cannot ensure jobs for the people, you will not be able to save this forest even by engaging the army," a forester said. "The population pressure must be taken off the forest. At the same time guarding must be stricter."

But until that is done, the men with cycles will keep entering the forest. Every day!

Saudi king to be treated in US

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

Saudi Arabia's ruler will fly to the United States for medical tests over a blood clot, according to a Saudi official, in a development that renews questions about succession in the kingdom.

King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, 86, is set to leave on Monday, three days after he was admitted to the hospital suffering from back pain due to a blood clot, the official said on Saturday.

The palace said on Friday that the king had a blood clot, which had created pressure on the nerves surrounding a ruptured disc.

Sultan bin Abdulaziz, the crown prince, will arrive in Riyadh on Sunday to oversee the kingdom, the official added.

CID seeks

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petition on November 25, said a source in the court.

The IO moved the petition yesterday--three days before the expiry of previously extended time.

Earlier on September 26, a Chittagong court for the tenth time granted CID two more months and extended the time till November 24 for further investigation into the case.

Regarding the 11th time petition, PP Kamal Uddin said the IO sought time extension since some important matters and enquiries regarding the case are yet to be resolved.

The statements given by the then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar during a five-day remand in the early week of this month are needed to be verified, said the PP quoting the time petition made by the IO.

IO Moniruzzaman told The Daily Star that they moved the petition since the investigation could not be completed in due time.

He said they needed more time to verify the confessional statements given by some witnesses including several former police officials. Besides, several other important witnesses are yet to be quizzed, he added.

They also needed to verify the information given by the then state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar, the IO said.

Police seized 10 trucks loaded with weapons and ammunition from the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) jetty on April 1, 2004.

Police and coastguards found submachine-guns, AK-47 rifles, submachine carbines, Chinese pistols, rocket shells and launchers, hand grenades and bullets stuffed in around 1,500 wooden boxes during unloading those from two vessels at the CUFL jetty.

On April 3 2004, two cases were filed with Karnaphuli police under section-25/B of the Special Powers Act for arms smuggling and section-19 (ka) of the Arms Act.

The investigation made a significant headway when prime accused Hafizur Rahman made his confessional statement on March 2 last year indicating involvement of NSI and DGFI officials in the incident.

Nine killed

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The identities of other deceased and injured persons could not be known immediately. The death toll might rise, police and witnesses said.

All the deceased and injured were passengers of both buses, police said.

Traffic movement on the highway remained suspended for around two hours after the accident.

Locals and police said vehicular movement on the highway became normal at about 9:30pm after the buses were removed.

Talking to The Daily Star, Officer-in-Charge Ashulia Police Station Sirajul Islam confirmed the death of nine passengers till filing of this report last night.

PM off to Russia

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Hasina will join the "Tiger Natural Habitat" conference in Russia and hold bilateral meetings with Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao.

In Japan, Hasina will also hold talks with Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan.

In Brussels, Hasina will have separate talks with President of European Union Council Van Rompuy, President of European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso and Prime Minister of Belgium Yves Letempe focusing on various bilateral and international issues.

Primary final exams

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another seven in Riyadh, Jeddah, Abu Dhabi, Qatar, Tripoli, Singapore and Berlin.

Class V students of ebtadai madrasa will take the exam for the first time. Earlier, only students of primary schools participated in the terminal examination introduced last year.

A change has been brought to the exam schedule this year with six exams to be held in six days whereas last year the exams were held in three days with two exams a day. The examinations will conclude on November 29.

Some 24,88,148 students--21,57,015 from schools and 3,31,133 from madrasas-- have registered for the examination this year. Like the previous year, girls outnumbered boys in both categories.

As many as 4,049 students from English version and 1,878 physically disabled students will also take the exam while the number of overseas students is 366.

At a pre-examination briefing at the secretariat yesterday, Primary and Mass Education Minister Asrafur Ameen said the government has completed its preparation for holding the exam in a flawless and peaceful manner.

He urged the opposition political parties not to enforce any hartal during the examination period.

The students of class V must pass the terminal examination and collect their certificates before they enrol in class VI, he mentioned.

The minister also said the government will increase the number of scholarships in general category by 5,000 this year. Last year, total 50,000 students were awarded scholarships on the basis of their results in two categories, talent-pool and general. Of them, half were boys and half girls.

"We are trying to increase the scholarship by 20,000," he said.

Delwar

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take the judgment in favour of it and to harass the opposition leaders," Delwar said at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan office.

Party leaders including Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Abdullah Al Noman and Fakhrul Islam Alamgir were present at the briefing.

The SC is due to hear on November 29 BNP chief Khaleda Zia's leave to appeal petition against the High Court verdict concerning the house.

Delwar said, "Timing of the incident, presence of the home minister, Rab and police chiefs at the site and filing of the general diary (on the incident) proved that it was nothing but a stage-managed drama."

He claimed that the home minister along with the officials reached the spot within half an hour of the blasts.

The BNP secretary general alleged that the government has failed to ensure security of the judges including Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque.

Earlier on Thursday, unidentified persons threw cocktails which exploded on the premises of the CJ's residence around 8:30pm.

World Tiger Summit

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outright extinction by the next Year of the Tiger under the Chinese calendar.

The tiger rescue effort's success "depends on the political will of the countries that support it," WWF Director General James Leape told the conference.

The World Bank estimates that it will take at least 350 million dollars to support nation's joint efforts to fight poachers and introduce incentives for nature preservation over the next five years.

But the summit's Russian hosts voiced optimism that the four-day conference would be crowned with success and provide a lesson for other joint environmental pursuits.

The tiger summit will be an example "for global warming", Russian Natural Resources Minister Yuri Trutnev told the gathering.

The high-profile meeting is due to be attended by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and delegations from India and Bangladesh -- the three nations with the largest volume of tiger skin and other organ trafficking.

But consensus on the need to save the tiger has been hampered by a lack of coordination on the ground to stop the trafficking of tiger parts such as paws and bones -- all prized in traditional Asian medicine.

"Countries cannot fight the

However, the Madrasa Education Board will separately arrange for scholarships for madrasa students as per their regular system.

The results will be published between December 22 and December 27.

Asraful said no money would be required to get the certificates and punitive actions will be taken if any institutions receive money.

The Ministry and Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) identified 168 examination centres as remote and the question papers, which will be distributed to those centres, have been kept at secured nearby places.

Replying to a question, DPE Director General Shyamol Kanti Ghosh said the ministry has taken necessary steps to ensure that question papers are not leaked out in the remote areas.

Official sources said the answer papers would be evaluated at the upazila headquarters only.

Primary and Mass Education Secretary AKM Awal Majumder and other high officials were present at the briefing.

BNP expels

FROM PAGE 1
The party also issued a news release around 9:15pm announcing Huda's expulsion, while the meeting was still going on.

Meanwhile, Huda termed the decision of his expulsion from the party "illegal" and "undemocratic."