



Garbage is being dumped on the bank of the Buriganga River at Shyampur Bazar in the city despite a higher court directive to protect the river from pollution and keep it free from encroachers. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Road crashes kill 12

METRO DESK

At least 12 people were killed and 22 others injured in separate road accidents in Comilla, Barisal, Jhenidah, Magura, Lalmonirhat and Narayanganj on Sunday night and yesterday.

UNB from Comilla reports: At least four people were killed and 16 others injured in a head-on collision between a bus and a truck on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Chouddagram upazila yesterday.

The identities of the deceased could not be known immediately.

Police said the accident occurred around 5:00am when the Chittagong-bound bus from Dhaka collided with the truck coming from opposite direction and fell into a roadside ditch at Padua of the upazila, leaving the bus driver, helper and a passenger dead on the spot.

Of the injured, one succumbed to his injuries at Chouddagram Upazila Health Complex. Ten of the wounded were admitted to Comilla Medical College Hospital while the remaining is receiving treatment at the health complex.

Our correspondent from Barisal reports: Three of a family including mother, one son and one daughter, were killed and four others remained missing after a tempo turned upside down on Bakerganj-Moheshpur road and fell into the Araibeki canal of Padrishpur union under Bakerganj upazila of Barisal at about 6:45 pm yesterday.

The dead were identified as Nupur Begum, 35, wife of Nasiruddin Mridha of Kestanagor village and her son Shimul, 9, and daughter Rita, 8.

The missing people are Sagor, 11, another son of Nupur, tempo driver and two unidentified passengers, said Rashida Begum, one of the five injured.

The injured passengers said the accident occurred when the driver of the tempo lost his control over steering and fell into the roadside canal.

Our correspondent from Jhenidah: A student of Magura Government College was killed and two others including a kid and his mother injured in a road crash on Jhenidah-Magura highway at Madhupur intersection under Sadar upazila in the district yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Piter Biswas, 20, son of Tokon Biswas of Hazipur village of Magura Sadar upazila.

Sagir Mia, officer-in-charge of Jhenidah Sadar Police Station, said Piter along with his aunt Rawshanara, 35, and her son Mahmudul Hasan, 4, was going to Kaliganj in Jhenidah riding on a motorbike. When they reached at Madhupur a speedy passenger bus hit them from behind, leaving Piter dead on the spot. Injured Rawshanara and her son were admitted to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

Our correspondent from Magura adds: A youth was killed in an accident in Magura Sadar upazila yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Ikram, 20, son of Insan Molla of Atharokhada.

Police quoting eyewitnesses said the accident occurred at Atharokhada area on Magura-Sreepur road as a shallow engine-driven human hauler hit an easy-bike killing its passenger Ikram on the spot.

Agitating people barricaded the road for about an hour from 10:00am after the accident.

Our correspondent from Lalmonirhat says: Two people including a driver were killed and four others injured critically in a truck-tempo collision at Sarkarerhat of Patgram bypass road under Patgram upazila in Lalmonirhat around 11:00pm on Sunday night.

The victim was identified as Zahurul Islam, 28, a tempo driver, of Jongra village and passenger Hosne Ara Begum, 35, of Sarkarerhat village of Patgram upazila. The injured four passengers are Yasmin Begum, 40, Halima Bewa, 65, Nur Jahan, 10, and Taherul Islam, 44, of same village of Sarkarerhat of the upazila.

Police said a Bogra-bound stone laden truck collided with the tempo at Sarkarerhat leaving the tempo driver dead on the spot.

Locals seized the truck and handed it over to Patgram Police Station, but its driver fled away, police said.

A correspondent from Narayanganj adds: A housewife was killed when an oil tanker hit a rickshaw at Fatulla bazar area under Sadar upazila of the district yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified as Roma Akter, 28, wife of Sumon Sinha of Lalpur area and also an American expatriate.

Police and local sources said the accident occurred around 3:00pm when an oil tanker hit the rickshaw carrying Roma at Fatulla Bazar while she was going to Chashara, leaving her dead on the spot.

However, the oil tanker managed to flee the spot soon after the accident.

Jibon Kanti Sarker, officer-in-charge of Fatulla Model Police Station, said the body was handed over to the deceased's family.

Roma was supposed to leave the country for America next week. She left behind a three-year-old daughter.

In Loving Memory



Today 23rd November, 2010 is the 1st death anniversary of Mr. Razaul Karim, an eminent insurance executive, founder member of Shishu Hospital & Palli Shishu Foundation. Former General Manager of Shadharan Bima Corporation, Managing Director of Janata Insurance Company Ltd., Pioneer Insurance Company Ltd., Agrani Insurance Company Ltd., Member Secretary of Central Rating Committee, notable philanthropist and freedom fighter. We request all his relatives, friends, associates and admirers to pray for the eternal peace of the departed soul.

Mala Rubina Karim and family members.

Untrained drivers rule routes

PORIMOL PALMA

Most drivers including those of heavy vehicles on busy highways lack institutional training and knowledge of traffic rules contributing to the increasing number of road accidents.

They enter the profession as transport helpers or conductors at an early age and become drivers in a few years. A large number of them obtain fake driving licences while many get it without following due process, transport workers said.

As many as 13.5 lakh vehicles -- bus, truck, private car, microbus, motor cycle and other motor cars -- are registered with the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) as of 2009 while the number of drivers obtaining licence from it is 9.5 lakh, said Ayubur Rahman, chairman of BRTA.

Of the six drivers The Daily Star has recently interviewed, none took the test, which is mandatory as per law, before securing their licence. Three of them had fake licence for several years.

BRTA's former chairman Sunil Kanti Bose at a meeting at the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2008 said 50 percent of the licences obtained by the drivers were not issued by BRTA.

Sanwar Rahman, 46, who now drives a passenger bus on Dhaka-Chittagong route, came to Dhaka from Kushtia only at 12. He started working as a tea boy at a transport labour union office at Fulbaria in the capital's Gulistan.

A few months later, he got a job of a bus helper on Dhaka-Mymensingh route. In five years, he became a conductor and soon learned driving from the driver of the bus.

"In 1983, I collected a fake driving licence through a broker. My ostad (trainer) then arranged me a job of a driver," said Sanwar, who studied up to class IV.

After seven years of driving using the fake licence, he obtained a "genuine" one for Tk 2,000 without taking a test.

Like Sanwar, 97 percent drivers come to the profession having no institutional training, says a survey of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) released last year. The sur-

vey found that 61 percent drivers get licences without taking any test.

"This is where lies the main reasons behind road accidents. First of all, most drivers have education up to class V or have no education, and then they don't have institutional training," said TIB researcher Rezaul Karim.

BRTA Chairman Ayubur Rahman says the drivers having no institutional training are not that bad. According to him, the bad thing is many of them have little or no knowledge of traffic laws.

"They drive well on the roads but they don't follow traffic signals," he said. They frequently drive beyond speed limit, and do not check fitness of their vehicles before plying the street, Rahman observed.

Against these backdrops, the government

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initiated setting up of training institutes for drivers in all the divisional districts, he said. Besides, BRTA will arrange motivational programmes for them.

Presently, Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) has 17 training institutes across the country. In its Gazipur centre, mostly government officials are trained. The institute, however, has capacity to train 80 more people every month.

On an average, 60 people can get training from each of the 17 institutes per month, said Fatima Begum, instructor of BRTC institute in Gazipur.

However, to enroll there, one must have education up to class VIII, a reason why many uneducated drivers cannot take the training. BRTC provides a one-month training for

medium and light vehicles and two months' training for heavy vehicles.

Driving under pressure

Many drivers operate under tremendous stress in the poorly managed traffic system that provokes them to drive recklessly often leading to fatal consequences. Many of them drive for 12 to 16 hours at a stretch, and the duration is even higher for many others.

"Driving is very tough now. In recent years, the Dhaka-Chittagong trip takes 12 hours at times."

"A few years ago, it used to take six to seven hours. A round trip now takes around 26 hours, and a driver can rest only two hours or less in between," said Sanwar Rahman.

A tired driver may naturally feel sleepy

while driving, he observed, adding, he has driven for 24 hours without any sleep on several occasions.

"Vehicle owners treat the drivers like plastic that has no feelings."

Financial stresses

Salam Mia drives a passenger bus on Gabtali-Chittagong Road. He hires the bus for Tk 3,000 a day. Salam starts his day early in the morning and never closes before midnight.

"I feel serious pressure because I've to make profit after paying the owner, buying fuel and paying extortion to "different groups" on the roads. We drive speedily when there is a chance, as traffic jam eats up a lot of time," he said.

According to a survey of Accident Research

Centre (ARC) of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET), overtaking performance of 61 percent of the drivers is bad.

The survey found that most drivers do not get a break in between their trips.

In addition, majority of them have no written job contracts. "They are in constant fear of losing their job, and this lack of self-confidence affects them unconsciously while driving," it observed.

Ali Reza, a leader of transport workers' association, says transport workers come from the poor section of the society and get bad treatment from owners and passengers.

They live in the buses, terminals and slums and lead a life of the nomads, he said, adding, "A mentality may have grown in them that if they don't live well, why would others!"

"Drivers lack awareness, live uncontrolled life."

Shyamoli Paribahan is one of the few reputable transport services. Its managing director Ramesh Chandra Ghosh said they check driving licence and experience of drivers while recruiting.

Asked if they give appointment letters to the drivers, he said most drivers prefer payments on the basis of trips, as they can earn more -- Tk 12,000-15,000 per month -- while the regular monthly pay is Tk 8,000-10,000.

According to him, uses of mobile phones by the drivers while driving, their lack of awareness and "uncontrolled" lifestyle are the key reasons behind the rising number of road accidents.

BRTA Chairman Ayubur Rahman said mobile phone use by drivers is common while many of them take drugs, which is one of the main reasons behind reckless driving.

Hashis and phensidyl are the two most common drugs taken by drivers, a microbus driver, who works for an NGO, said.

Truck driver Rafiqul Islam who takes hashish said taking drugs does not affect his driving.

Asked what happens if someone takes excessive doses, he smiled and said, "Excess of everything is bad."



Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia speaks at the party's national standing committee meeting at her Gulshan office in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 1)

PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA NEWS

RMG worker killed as train hits him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A garment worker was killed as a train hit him while he was crossing rail track in front of the Sainik Club in the city's Banani area.

The deceased Mosharraf Hossain aged about 20 of Sherpur district was a machine operator of Madona Fashion of Banani.

A witness, also production manger of the factory, Mohammad Shahjan said a Tongi-bound train from Kamalapur Railway Station hit him when he was smoking and absent minded crossing the rail track around 1:00pm.

Government Railway Police Sub-Inspector Amir Hossain said locals rushed Mosharraf to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) where duty doctors declared him dead at about 1:40pm.

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