

There has to be a legal framework through which victims can claim compensation.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

various authorities in the country are much lower. The fatality rate for Bangladesh is around 70, which is 35 times higher than that in the United States (2.0) and 50 times higher than that in the United Kingdom (1.4). The fatality index (for Bangladesh) is around 60 percent, the highest among developing countries. Unless specific measures are taken, with the number of motor vehicles growing at 8 percent per annum, there is a serious risk that road casualties will increase.

> "Under the Motor Vehicles Act (MVA) 1983, not only drivers, but also vehicle owners and insurers, are liable as responsible parties under civil law. Our case is a ground-breaking attempt to bring this long-neglected law to public notice so that in future, road accident victims and their families may have a means to be legally compensated for their losses."
>
> — Catherine Masud

"The term 'road accident' is not used in other countries anymore," says Ilias Kanchan. "They call it 'road crash.' Because when you call it an 'accident', you are under the illusion that it is sort of an 'act of God' that happened beyond our control. The word "accident" absolves the responsible parties of any responsibility. But when you call it a 'crash', you know that mistakes were committed. And if we can avoid those mistakes, we can prevent crashes from happening." Kanchan is a former film star turned road safety campaigner who lost his wife in a road crash in 1993. "The first thing the government needs to do is to disclose the real numbers. If they are hiding the real numbers from the public then how can we trust them to be sincere in its attempts to reduce the numbers?"

So the 'how many' is not known, but what about the 'why'? What are the reasons behind all these crashes?

"We have a tendency to always blame the driver for over speeding and reckless driving," says Shahnewaz Hasanat-E-Rabbi, a researcher, at the ARI (Accident Research Institute), BUET. "But according to our own research, there are other factors such as the condition of the road, carelessness of pedestrians and condition of the vehicle," he adds. Rabbi's colleague at the ARI, Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, Assistant Professor, says that there needs to be well trained, specialised teams in every zone or police station to investigate the real reasons behind the crashes. "Police personnel who fill



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Catherine Masud, film maker.