

Risk of accidents

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However, about 20,000 unfit buses, minibuses and microbuses take the inter-district roads to make quick bucks during the Eid rush, transport operators claim.

"These unfit and unregistered vehicles do not enter the capital. They pick up passengers from the city exit-points or its outskirts," said Osman Ali, general secretary of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation.

Plying of the ramshackle vehicles that cause accidents, break down on roads creating tailbacks was discussed with importance at an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by Communications Minister Obaidul Quader last week.

At the meeting, both police high-ups and road transport owners blamed the unfit and unregistered vehicles for interrupting smooth vehicular movement last year.

When a vehicle breaks down on a road, it takes time to remove the vehicle and long tailbacks develop in the meantime. Worse still, some desperate drivers then take the wrong way, blocking the other lane of the road as well, making it a bigger challenge to clear the road.

The meeting decided not to allow unfit and unregistered vehicles to ply this time. Interestingly, similar decisions were made in last few years as well but neither the police nor the communications ministry could implement these.

"It is very tough to prevent plying of such vehicles when hundreds of passengers rush for a single transport. They even get on whatever they find ahead of the Eid," said a police officer, wishing anonymity.

He suggested the government assess the demand of transport ahead of the Eid and take steps to introduce more passenger buses.

These unfit vehicles have caused concern to the transport operators already worried over the dilapidated condition of roads and highways across the country.

"As the home rush begins, some unscrupulous owners of unfit vehicles cash on it. They start operating their vehicles, causing congestion and accidents," said Romesh Chandra Ghosh, managing director of Shyamoli Paribahan.

"The government must make the highways fit for traffic movement. Otherwise, it will be a terrible situation during the Eid rush," feared Khandaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Sarak Paribahan Samity.

Meanwhile, the state-run Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) will start selling advance bus tickets from July 20 and start special bus service from July 24. A total of 450 BRTC buses will be operated daily from Dhaka to different destinations across the country, said Enayet Ullah.

Quader vows

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active after criticisms. But those running propaganda [against us] will be disappointed," he added.

There would be no traffic congestion in the entry points to the capital during the Eid, the minister said, adding that the streets of those entry points had already been expanded.

Quader also said that a tender would be floated next month for the construction of a flyover in Bhulta to ease traffic congestion on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway. The construction work would end in 2015, he added.

Several top officials of the Roads and Highways Department accompanied the minister during the visit.

3 to die

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Sources said Salam had good relations with Mabiya Akhter, 46, wife of a Saudi expatriate. On the night of August 13, 2012, Salam along with Malek and Faruk came to Mabiya's house. They wanted to spend the night at her house, saying that a businessman was with them.

Mabiya agreed with their request. On the night, the three killed Mabiya and her daughter Sadiya Akhter, 12, by slitting their throats.

Two days later police recovered the bodies from their flat.

A case was filed with Narayanganj Sadar Model Police Station.

Police arrested Salam, Malek and Faruk in connection with the double murder.

Later, the trio gave confessional statements to the court.

Man set Chinese bus on fire over gambling losses

AFP, Beijing

A Chinese man infuriated by his gambling losses set fire to a bus, leaving two people dead and injuring 32, police said yesterday.

The blaze, which started with an explosion, engulfed the vehicle in Guangzhou, capital of the southern province of Guangdong, late Tuesday, police said on a verified account on Sina Weibo, a Chinese Twitter equivalent.

BASIC Bank

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The board, then led by Abdul Hye Bacchu, approved another loan of Tk 7.9 crore three months later. The branch, however, did not find the borrower's residence, office and factory.

Against all these loans, the central bank's special inspection found no business transactions, as the money was withdrawn by individuals from the credit accounts in cash.

Sahara Import Ltd withdrew Tk 12 crore, without any business purpose, within 12 days of the sanction of the loan.

RK Food Ltd was given a loan of Tk 69.85 crore without assessing its business transaction and capacity of the firm. It withdrew Tk 40 crore within four months from Gulshan and Shantinagar branches of the bank.

"The then branch manager helped embezzle the money. It was clear that the money was embezzled in connivance with the client and the authorities of the bank," said the central bank report.

The 47-page report, which includes a list of borrowers, gives a detailed picture of how the loans were approved and withdrawn in clear violations of rules.

In Gulshan branch, 12 clients took out Tk 297 crore through pay orders or in cash.

One client, SFG Shipping Line, was given a loan of Tk 37.54 crore. He

transferred the money to five companies, with accounts with other banks, through pay orders. All these companies are fake.

The report also contains a list of 40 pay orders that were transferred from a number of loan accounts at Shantinagar branch to suspected accounts in the same branch in 2012. Each pay order transferred funds between Tk 50 lakh and Tk 1 crore.

The central bank suspects a chunk of Tk 4,500 crore embezzled from BASIC Bank has gone out of the country, officials said.

The report was also sent to the anti-money laundering unit of Bangladesh Bank to see whether the money was laundered.

The latest inspection was aimed at identifying the actual beneficiaries of the scam by digging deep into specific accounts.

The report said the BASIC Bank's board and its credit committee at the headquarters ignored the negative observation from branches on a number of loan proposals and approved them without following due diligence.

At least on one occasion, BASIC Bank flouted instructions from the central bank.

The central bank had ordered the state bank to submit a report containing details of loans beyond Tk 1 crore, but the report never reached the BB, according to the report.

TIB findings

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said each sitting of the first session of current parliament witnessed a 28-minute quorum crisis on average, causing a loss of around Tk 8 crore in public funds.

Feroz, however, did not reject outright the total study, saying that there were some good recommendations in it for the lawmakers.

In its study "Parliament Watch", TIB said ruling party legislators who were ministers in Sheikh Hasina's previous government (2009-13) should not be appointed as chiefs of parliamentary standing committees on their respective ministries to avoid any conflict of interest.

But the chief whip defended the government's decision in this regard. "They [former ministers] are fully aware of the problems and weaknesses of the ministries. It will enable them to ensure accountability and transparency in different ministries."

Asked about conflict of interest of the former ministers in discharging their duties as heads of parliamentary bodies, Feroz said truth could not be concealed forever as it would eventually come to light someday.

"Besides, all suppressed issues must be unearthed through the writings of journalists," added the Awami League lawmaker.

The maiden session of the 10th parliament had 36 sittings, where 191 MPs did not participate in any of the House proceedings, according to the study.

On the TIB's observation that lawmakers spent just 1.8 percent of the total number of 114 hours for lawmaking in the first session, Feroz said MPs enact laws in parliament on what they think necessary for people.

"But if you [journalists] and civil society members feel that we should enact a particular law, make sugges-

tions to this end we would do accordingly," he mentioned.

About TIB's criticism of the Jatiya Party's role as the main opposition, Feroz said it was totally unfounded as the JP participated in all parliamentary activities spontaneously and made the House effective.

"The opposition played an effective role by raising questions on the activities of different ministries, putting enquiries before the prime minister during her question-answer sessions in parliament and thus ensured parliamentary accountability," he noted.

On the waste of public money due to the quorum crisis, the chief whip said he did not understand on what basis the TIB had calculated the loss from the quorum crisis.

"Activities of the parliament secretariats go on all the year round, no matter if the House was in session or not," said Feroz, adding that parliament has a specific amount of money to run its activities. "Therefore, TIB's claim of wasting money due to quorum crisis is motivated," he claimed.

Three whips were present at the press conference.

Contacted, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said their only aim behind the study was to strengthen the country's parliamentary democracy.

About the method of calculating the loss from the quorum crisis, he said TIB summed up the amount from the total budget of parliament for a certain year.

The study estimated that when the House is in session, it costs about Tk 78,000 per minute.

"The cost includes the salaries and benefits of parliament officials and maintenance charges of the parliament building and utility services," he told The Daily Star.

Israel steps up Gaza

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The punishing air campaign aimed at halting cross-border rocket fire by Hamas militants resumed after Egyptian-brokered truce efforts collapsed on Tuesday.

So far, Israel's campaign, now in its ninth day, has killed 220 Palestinians, with a Gaza-based human rights group saying over 80 percent of them were civilians.

In the same period, militants have fired more than 1,200 rockets at Israel, which on Tuesday claimed their first Israeli life.

Hamas said it had rejected the Egyptian truce efforts because it had not been included in the discussions.

The peace initiative continued yesterday, however, with a Hamas official meeting Egyptian leaders as Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas arrived in Cairo to join the diplomatic efforts.

In the latest violence, four children died and several were wounded in an apparent Israeli naval bombardment of a beach in Gaza City yesterday afternoon, medics said.

The first strike hit at around 1300 GMT, prompting terrified children and adults on the beach to scatter. A second and third struck as they ran, setting fire to huts on the beach.

The strikes appeared to be the result of shelling by the Israeli navy against an area with small shacks used by fishermen.

Several hours later an army spokeswoman said that the military

was still checking into the reports. Several children ran inside a hotel where AFP journalists saw at least three with shrapnel injuries.

The dead boys, all from a family, were laid out, wrapped in the yellow flags of the Fatah party, in front of mourners.

Earlier, the Israeli military dropped flyers and sent text messages warning 100,000 people in northeastern Gaza to evacuate their homes ahead of an air campaign targeting "terror sites and operatives" in Zeitun and Shejaiya, two flashpoint districts east of Gaza City.

An identical message was sent to Beit Lahiya in the north, echoing a similar army warning on Sunday, when more than 17,000 residents of the north fled for their lives, most seeking refuge in UN-run schools.

The Israeli warnings appeared to have had no immediate effect, with only limited numbers seen leaving. Children picked up many of the flyers and played with them, an AFP correspondent said.

But for patients at Al-Wafa hospital in Shejaiya, many of whom are paralysed or in a coma, the warning simply provoked even more fear.

"We cannot leave our patients, they are helpless," director Basman Alashi told AFP, saying most of them were completely incapacitated and in no position to be moved.

"There is no place safe in Gaza. If a hospital is not safe, where is?" he said as the sound of nearby shelling rattled the windows.

Suchitra's home

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"Knowing of the Supreme Court verdict, we asked Imam Gazzali Institute to free the place and it has moved from there today [yesterday]," said Azmal Hossain, additional deputy commissioner (revenue).

The district administration sealed off the house. The government high-ups of the district will visit the house today, Azmal told The Daily Star.

Born on April 6 1931, Suchitra, whose original name was Roma Dasgupta, left Pabna along with her family a few months before the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and settled in India.

The 0.21-acre house located on Gopalpur Hem Sagor Lane then went into government custody as vested property.

In 1987, the district administration leased out the ancestral home of Suchitra Sen to the trust for a year but the organisation continued occupying the place by renewing the lease every year.

A cross section of people of the district demonstrated for years, demanding that the house be freed and finally, in 2009, the district administration refused to renew the lease further.

Imam Gazzali Trust, established by Jamaat naye-e-ameer Moulana Abdus Subhan in 1983, then moved the High Court, seeking to continue with the lease.

Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh in July 2011 filed another writ petition seeking protection and maintenance of the house.

Responding to the petitions, the HC in August of the year directed Imam Gazzali Trust to forgo possession of the house in two months. It also directed the government to take over the house and protect the memory of the silver screen legend, who died on January 17 this year in Calcutta, India.

The Jamaat-backed organisation filed an appeal with the SC, challenging the HC verdict.

On May 4, the Appellate Division upheld the HC verdict. The full judgement was released on July 10.

Since the government does not want the trust to continue running the institute there anymore, it has freed the place though it has scope for further appeal, said Abid Hassan Dulal, secretary of the trust.

Ram Dulal Bhoumik, secretary of Suchitra Sen Smriti Shangrakhhan Parishad, said the move would help fulfil the longstanding demand for the museum.

Cop 'detained'

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lamented Shahida Begum, Sujan's mother.

"I want justice and all the policemen involved in the killing tried and punished," she said.

Shahida said Sujan's five-year-old son Rabbi was staying with his maternal aunt. Whenever someone visits him he tells them about how police tortured his father, she said.

Rabbi, who was taken to the police station along with his parents on Sunday, said he had seen how police had raided their house and the brutally with which they tortured his parents.

Rabbi had gone down to his knees and pleaded with SI Jahid to let his father go.

OC Salahuddin said the CCTV footage showed SI Jahid and a team of police brought Sujan to the police station at 1:48am Sunday. Nasim was with them.

The team led by Jahid left the police station with Sujan at 3:43am, the footage showed.

The OC claimed that the police team left the station for an operation and that Jahid told him about Sujan's death at 5:27am over the telephone.

Sujan's wife Lucy was notified of his death around Sunday noon.

SI Jahid had picked up Sujan, his wife Lucy and their five-year-old son Rabbi from their Shankar home in the wee hours of Sunday. Jahid, who went to Sujan's house to extort money, tortured Sujan at his house, in the police van and at Mirpur Police Station, according to Sujan's family members. Rabbi and Lucy were allowed to leave in the morning.

Police sources said the autopsy report, which they received yesterday, mentioned that Sujan had been subjected to severe torture that led to his death.

They said they had "closed" Jahid late Sunday. A closure of a police official means he or she had been temporarily withdrawn from the police station concerned.

Jahid had been "closed" on similar grounds earlier this year. On February 10, when he was working at Pallabi Police Station, he was "closed" for his alleged involvement in the custodial death of Istiaq Ahmed Johnny, 28, a resident of Talab camp in Mirpur-11.

Sujan's widow Lucy had claimed that the Mirpur Police Station officer-in-charge had forced her to sign on a blank piece of paper Sunday morning.

OC Salahuddin, however, refuted the allegation and said he had taken Lucy's signature on a bond, as per standard procedure.

Sujan's family was planning to file three cases today. One of the cases would be for murder.

They said they would file the cases with court rather than with Mirpur Police Station as they don't trust the policemen there.

Subhan led killings

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had joined the Liberation War ... I want justice," pleaded emotion-choked Shahid before the International Crimes Tribunal-2.

On June 22, Momtaz Uddin Montu, a fellow fighter of Shahid, gave almost a similar testimony about the mass killing committed in Kolunia and Dogachi villages on May 11, 1971 and linked Subhan to the crimes.

Subhan, naye-e-ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami, faces nine charges, including genocide, committed in Pabna during the nine-month-long war. He had pleaded not guilty before the tribunal.

Shahid in his around two-hour testimony said he was involved in Chhatra League in 1971 and had heard that Peace Committee, an anti-liberation platform, was formed in Pabna in the first week of May with Subhan as its secretary.

Shahid, who also organised youths to join the war, was holding a meeting at a primary school at Kolunia in the morning of May 11 to discuss war preparations, the 64-year-old said.

The witness added that they had seen a white car, which was usually used by Subhan, going towards Dogachi from Pabna town around 10:00am and within 20 to 25 minutes, they had seen the car return. Within half an hour they, hiding inside a bamboo orchard, had seen several vehicles of the Pakistan army and the white car approaching the primary school, added Shahid.

"I saw the army led by Moulana Subhan going to the house of Samajuddin after they had got down from the vehicles. As they opened fire, Samajuddin was running towards a bush," said Shahid.

"I saw Moulana Subhan giving a signal with his hand pointing at Samajuddin. As the army shot him, Samajuddin collapsed," said Shahid. The army had destroyed eight to 10 houses including that of Samajuddin and continued shooting for around half an hour before leaving the area for neighbouring Dogachi village.

When they had come out from hiding, they found three more bodies there, he said.

The witness added that he along with others had gone to Dogachi after the army and the white car of Subhan had left the area around 2:30pm. They had found two bodies beside a burned temple in the village and two more bodies inside Dogachi Bazar. When they had visited the western part of the village,

they found six to seven bodies inside a mosque, he added.

"Probably panicked people took shelter inside the mosque, but the Pakistan army gunned them down there," said Shahid.

In the first week of September, the white car and an army pickup had stopped in front of their house, picked up his father and took him to Nurpur army camp, he said.

"My father endured severe torture there. In presence of Subhan Saheb, the Pakistan army told my father: 'we will release you once you bring back your sons, who are freedom fighters. We will recruit them in Razakar force,'" said Shahid.

"My mother had met Subhan Saheb at his house and requested him to release my father. He told my mother: 'bring back your sons ... your husband will be released'," he said.

His father was later handed over to the police and received bail when the police produced him before a court, said Shahid.

The Pakistan army had once again picked up his father and taken him to Nurpur camp eight to 10 days later and tortured him before handing him over to the police. He once again obtained bail due to poor health, said Shahid.

On October 13, members of Razakar and Al-Badr, auxiliary forces of the Pakistan army, killed his father when he was returning home after offering prayers at a nearby mosque, he said.

Shahid said he and his brother returned home after Pabna was liberated on December 19 and learned about the brutal incidents from his mother and relatives.

"Although Subhan Saheb was not in the area [after the Liberation War] his family members were in Pabna. We could have avenged my father's killing. But our conscience restrained us," said Shahid.

"Whenever we see the red circle in our national flag we think it contains blood of my father," said emotion-choked Shahid, who identified Subhan in the dock.

Subhan's counsel Mizanul Islam had asked the witness three questions before the three-member tribunal, led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam, adjourned the proceedings until today.

Shahid is set to face further cross-examination today.

Rotting in a traffic hell

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Moreover, illegal parking on both sides of the road adds to the intensity of the already unbearable traffic congestion.

The chaotic traffic at Tantibazar intersection leading to English Road on the east and Gulistan on the north creates tailbacks up to the middle of the Buriganga bridge which connects to the vital ferry terminal of Mawa.

Md Shahin, driver of Gangchil bus service, said that he has to wait for around 15 minutes at this intersection during the day.

"However, after 9:00pm when trucks too start running on the road, the congestion intensifies and it takes even an hour to cross this intersection sometimes," said Shahin.

Sergeant Abdullah Al Shakil of Kotwali traffic police zone said rickshaw and non-motorised vehicles like push carts make up 70 percent of the vehicles that use the intersection.

"It is not possible to control them. They keep violating traffic rules all the time," he said.

In fact, when this correspondent visited the area around 11:20am on Tuesday, he did not see any traffic policing at the junction for about half an hour.

Three traffic constables were found standing nonchalantly nearby as the vehicles, mainly rickshaws, were crossing the roads from all sides freely.

The constables stepped in only when the gridlock became too chaotic for them with vehicles honking and people shouting and swearing at each other. However, their interference hardly worked.

DMP now to take

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supply and marketing, the law enforcers are only going to detect it at the markets in the capital, experts added.

"The setting up of the booths will begin in 7 to 10 days and will extend to 236 markets in phases in the capital so that customers and retailers can test their food items at nominal costs," said DMP Commissioner Benazir Ahmed at a discussion at Jatiya Press Club in the capital yesterday.

The Saarc Cultural Society organised the discussion on food safety with its president Syed Abu Hossain Babla in the chair.

Terminating the recent drive a success, the DMP commissioner said some of the major media houses stood against it but the people did not accept their stand.

"Yes, they (media houses) do social and other good works. They think that they will only do the good jobs and criticize the government. The government also does good jobs, but they cannot accept it," he said.

Apart from law enforcers, university-level students will also be engaged in this work, so that they can earn alongside their studies, the commissioner added.

Another police official said four students of private and public universities will be engaged in each booth for the tests and a portion of the earnings

from the tests will be distributed among them.

They will carry out solution tests as they are low cost and will not use Formaldehyde Meter Z-300 since tests using these kits will cost more, said the official seeking anonymity.

Benazir insisted the government form a unified single authority to make the anti-adulteration drive a success.

Around 600 tones of formalin are being imported against the demand of only 50 tones for industrial and medical purposes. People are taking in the additional amount of formalin by consuming food laced with formalin by some unscrupulous businessmen, the DMP chief said.

"We have already identified at least 38 organisations who import formalin. We are keeping vigil on the use of these imported formalin," he said.

Earlier, with the move of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), traders of the city's 11 kitchen markets declared them formalin-free at different times since September 2012.

But the move basically went in vain as the traders were selling adulterated food due to lax monitoring by the market committee and other authorities concerned, sources said.