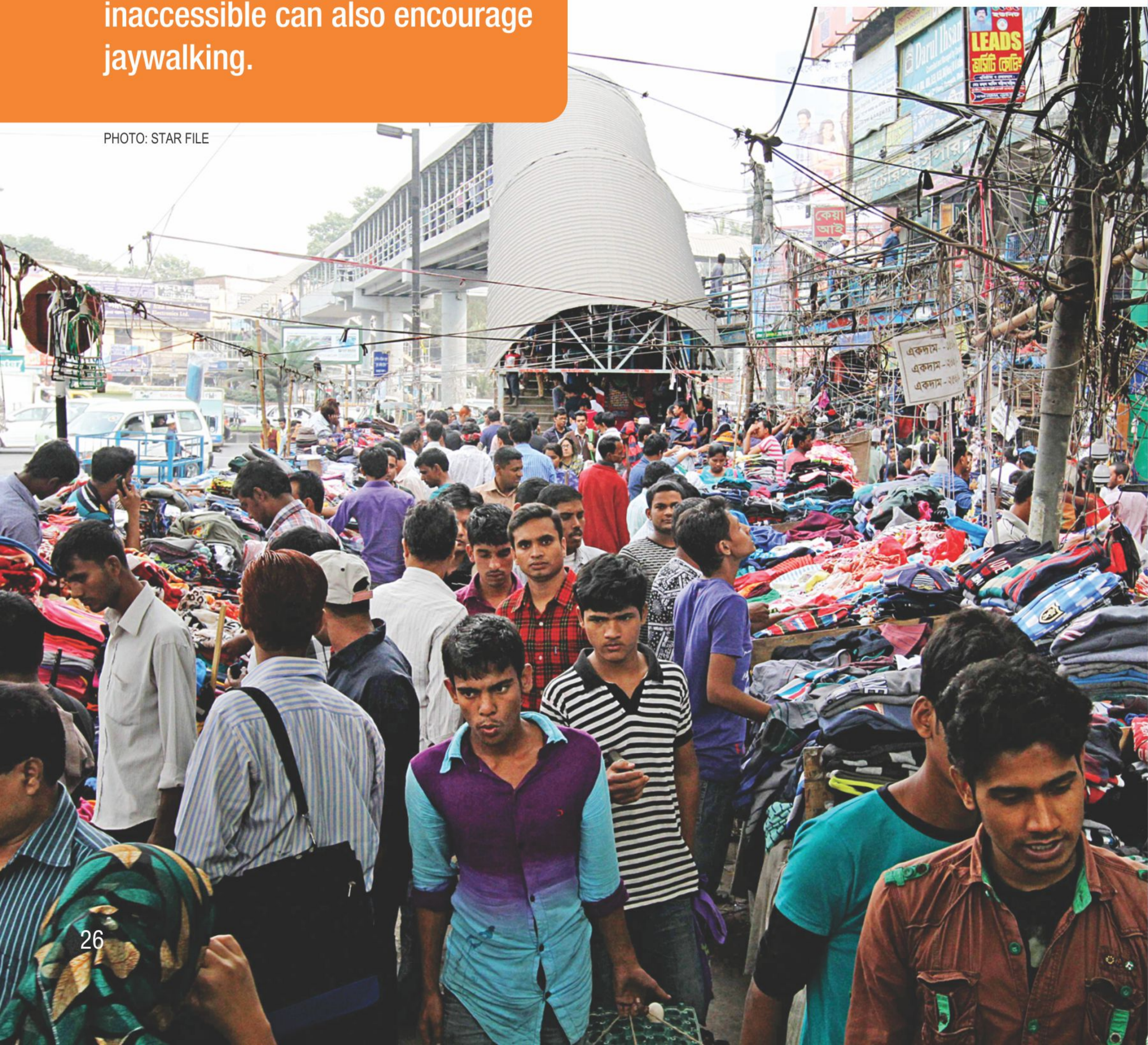


(DMP) began an anti-jaywalking drive with a couple of mobile courts between the Farmgate Police Box and the Hotel Ruposhi Bangla intersection. Apart from trying to motivate pedestrians to use the foot-over bridges instead of running to the other end of the road in the midst of heavy traffic, the court also conducted drives against illegal makeshift shops and vendors occupying the footpaths meant for the pedestrians.

While the drive is a welcome gesture from a law enforcement agency that is often accused of doing next to nothing to curb road accidents, critics point out that this will prove to be an ineffective measure

Apart from illegal establishments, the fact that the crosswalks and footbridges are poorly located or simply inaccessible can also encourage jaywalking.

PHOTO: STAR FILE



in the long run. Pedestrians will continue to cross a busy, traffic filled road instead of using the foot-over bridges and footpaths until strict measures are taken to improve the state of these facilities.

"This initiative to prevent jaywalking on the road is truly praiseworthy. However, we cannot just end here," says noted actor and chairman of Nirapad Sarak Chai, Ilias Kanchan. "The authorities concerned need to ensure that illegal establishments that hinder pedestrian movements be removed from the footpaths of the city."

Deputy Commissioner of DMP, Khan M Rezwani, argues that the situation cannot improve even after increased monitoring by the police and traffic department unless everyone involved is more aware and cautious. "We cannot curb road accidents on our own. Drivers, transport owners, passengers and pedestrians need to cooperate if we are to deal with this situation effectively," he says.

Apart from illegal establishments, the fact that the crosswalks and footbridges are poorly located or



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

simply inaccessible can also encourage jaywalking. Pedestrians obviously look for the most direct route between the origin and destination. If we can ensure that the crosswalks and footbridges can be accessed easily, are designed keeping the convenience of the pedestrians in mind and don't require pedestrians to travel too far out of their desired path, they will use them.

"Public awareness is as important as government and NGO initiatives. If the public can be ensured that the footbridges and underpasses are actually better and safer alternatives for them, why shouldn't they follow the rules?" asks Kanchan.

Noted architect and urban planning expert Mobasher Hossain has said that while flyovers have certainly eased traffic congestion, it was done at the cost of walking space for pedestrians. "Several foot-over bridges, such as the one at the Jatrabari intersection, have been demolished to make space for these huge flyovers. However, alternative arrangements are yet to be made for the easy access of pedestrians, he says. This "squeezing of space", he adds, is often responsible for jaywalking and tragic road accidents.

While the recently concluded anti-jaywalking drive might seem like a short term solution, it does seem to affect a number of people.

"I was caught trying to cross the road at the Sonargaon intersection. Paying a fine of Tk 200 was not a big deal, to be honest, but having to sit in a police van, waiting for my turn to pay the fine was very embarrassing," says Sakib Ali, a university student, who added that he'll think twice before



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

crossing the roads illegally, following this incident.

In our country where everyone is always in a hurry, road accidents have actually become a very commonplace affair. In most cases, car drivers, who lack the proper training and sensitivity, are at fault. But sometimes it's the pedestrians conscience who put their lives on the line for the sake of a misguided notion of comfort and convenience. If you are one of those people, reconsider the risk. Yes, our footpaths are not in the best condition, our foot-over bridges lack proper maintenance and space. But for now, that's our best option. Just remember, no matter how powerful you are or how fast you run, you will always