



APURBA SAHA
MANAGER TECHNICAL
ROAD SAFETY PROGRAMME, BRAC

I have talked to many government officials about road safety issues. Unfortunately, most of them are not adequately aware about it. It does not get priority in their daily responsibilities. That's why most of the district and upazila road safety committees are inactive. We can significantly reduce road crash casualties by following the ToR of these local committees.

Last year, BRAC did a research on road safety. Technical development of roads and highways and training of drivers were two important recommendations of the research. BRAC has a driver training course named Surokkha. It is on defensive driving. We see our drivers are skilled enough in driving but they lack social responsibility. They are not sensitised about safe driving. Under this project we have so far trained

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only 600-700 drivers. We cannot train the huge number of drivers alone. We need support from the government and different owners' associations. A research data in India shows that this two days training can save 30 percent of the maintenance cost. So it is good news for the owners also.



SARA HOSSAIN
ADVOCATE
SUPREME COURT OF BANGLADESH

Our existing law on road safety is over 30 years old, and needs an urgent overhaul. The new Road Traffic and Transport Act has been in draft for years, and still hasn't been enacted. Urgent measures are needed for wider public consultation and then adoption of the law, and for it to be backed up by training of officials, and resources for the investigation and prosecution of cases, and for fast-tracking of courts.

Of course the law itself cannot solve all the problems, but it can prescribe measures for prevention and punishment. The existing legal procedures for monitoring and evaluation of fitness certificates and driving licenses are not followed. The Road Safety Council and the various grassroots level committees are barely functional.

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After the death of Tareque Masud and Mishuk Munier, four years ago, and responding to the outpouring of national grief on that occasion, the High Court gave important orders in a public interest litigation requiring responses from the state on these issues, and on investigation, trial, punishment and compensation. The case remains pending for hearing.

District level session courts have powers to hear civil suits for compensation in road injury and road crash cases. But we get reports that in most districts, neither judges nor lawyers are aware of this. Few cases are filed. In Tareque and Mishuk's cases, their families filed civil suits for compensation in an effort to try to establish accountability. This was an exception. Too often, after road crashes, a 'settlement' is often reached

on the spot, and no action against perpetrators. This is almost always the case for those who are powerful, politically connected and moneyed. We are told that for poor victims money is more important than accountability or punishment of the offender. But every victim is entitled to justice and accountability to demand adequate compensation and not just a handout.

We have to focus on accountability and enforcement of the law. We have to guarantee that the poor and powerless can get justice in this country, and ask the hard questions about why they don't.



AHNAF CHOUDHURY
BAR-AT-LAW
DR. KAMAL HOSSAIN & ASSOCIATES

There is a proposed "Transport and Traffic Act" that includes a provision of compensating the victims of road crash. This proposed act is intended to cover all the road users, i.e. motorised as well as non-motorised vehicles and pedestrians. In terms of compensating the victims, 'accident' has been given a broad definition, same as the case with the definition of victims. It covers the family members or representatives of the person deceased or injured as a result of road crash.

To implement and make this Act functional, new rules will have to be promulgated under that Act. There is also a provision inserted "Hit and Run Motor

2020 as the decade of action on road safety. They have stipulated five pillars, one of which is the management of road safety. We have a road safety council, but ad hoc bodies for road safety, armed with a specific budget, could be designated to each locality. Two to five percent of the budget for road construction is supposed to be invested into road safety measures but I am not sure whether it's being implemented. We need to look into these things. We must also take precautionary measures, especially after injuries and deaths on the roads, so they can be avoided in the future.



SAIFUDDIN AHMED
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
WORK FOR A BETTER BANGLADESH TRUST (WBB)

We are planning to make room for three and a half crore people in Dhaka by 2035. That would put tremendous pressure on our roads. Only expanding roads or improving the quality of vehicles will not help. If we can develop the divisional towns and properly decentralise power, I think we will be able to address many of the persisting problems. We just need strong political will. At present a school teacher has to come to Dhaka if he wants to get transferred to another school, whereas he should be able to do that in his own divisional town. We need to limit unnecessary road travel.

drivers and increase their pay scale and job status to encourage them. Strict enforcement of laws is the most important thing to make roads safer.

It is urgent to develop alternative ways of travel such as railways and waterways to reduce the pressure on roads. Since independence, no government has addressed this issue. Moreover, our cities are not well-planned. Unplanned urbanisation forces us to make unnecessary travels.

Children should be taught to read road signs and cross the roads carefully from a very early age.



MD. SHOWKAT ALI
SECRETARY, BANGLADESH ROAD TRANSPORT AUTHORITY (BRTA)

BRTA acts as a regulatory body in road management and road safety. The government has been implementing National Road Safety Strategic Action Plan 2014-2016 to ensure road safety. There are nine sectors in the plan: Planning management and coordination of road safety; road safety education and publicity; road accident data system, road safety engineering, medical service for road accident victims; vehicle safety; traffic legislation; traffic enforcement; and driver training and testing. The government has distributed the responsibilities among all the stakeholders: The Road Transport and Bridges Ministry, BRTA, DMP, DTCA, Roads and Highways, BRIC, owners' and workers' association. The

media. It's only when the civil society and the people created uproar (after Mishuk Munier and Tarek Masud's death), that the government actually took notice of the issue over the last few years.

The fact is, all of us – drivers, pedestrians and the concerned authorities – are responsible for these accidents. But we are yet to come up with a solution. Why is that? The first reason would be corruption. Political influence and our social mindset are other reasons. The recent case of a young boy who was responsible for a car crash further establishes this. What if the case was the

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reverse? What if those who were wounded in this incident were responsible for injuring this boy, who belongs to a rich, influential family? The police seemed so sympathetic that no case has been filed!

Instead of engaging in blame games, we need to work together to ensure safety on our roads and raise awareness in this regard. Strict enforcement of law is also a must.



PHOTOS: SK ENAMUL HAQ

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Accident." What it intends to do is, if the culprit responsible for a crash cannot be identified after an accident, the victims would be compensated by a fund which is supposed to be set up and maintained by the government. The question is, how should that fund be maintained and administered? Would the benefits of that fund reach the victims? If the new Act is implemented, everyone (lawyers, judges, prosecutors) should be aware of the timeframe within which an accident case is disposed as there is always a huge backlog in the courts.



AKM FAZLUR RAHMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CENTRE FOR INJURY PREVENTION AND RESEARCH, BANGLADESH (CIPRB)

There is definitely a correlation between economic development of a country and road safety. As research has shown, there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between the two. In the beginning stages of the development of a country road crashes tend to increase because population, vehicles and roads are all on the rise. Later, road crashes tend to fall when per capita income of a country reaches \$5000. But we cannot sit around waiting for our per capita income to get to \$5000. The UN and WHO have declared 2011-

We need to know the exact number of vehicles that are plying the roads at present and also the number of drivers. Where have all the taxi cabs and the BRTC buses gone? Does BRTA have a database?

We need more driving schools. BRTA should work within a framework and encourage the private initiatives to establish driving schools. Lastly, we need to consider the possibilities of rail travel.



DR. M MOSTAFA ZAMAN
NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL OFFICER, WHO

The actual figure of road crash casualties is not available as all crashes are not recorded by police. So the real figure of the casualties is more than the reported figure. There should be no compromise in case of providing driving licenses. The minimum educational qualification of a driver should be SSC. The government should arrange a rigorous driving training programme for the

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civil society has also been involved in this. I don't think we need a separate body to deal with road safety issues. We just need to strengthen the existing bodies.

Vehicle registration, giving fitness certificates, issuing and renewing driving licenses,

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etc., are some of our services. Some of our services are online; the rest will be online soon. With the assistance of KOIKA, we will soon introduce Vehicle Inspection Centres (VIC). We are planning to have a data centre soon which will make the system of getting driving license easier. Our Honourable Minister has declared that within December 31, 2015 the BRTA will provide digitalised number plates for all vehicles, which will reduce vehicle theft. We are also considering introducing GPS system. At present BRTA is working under the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983. We have drafted a new law namely, Bangladesh Road Transport Act 2015, which is on our website. We would request you to give your valued comment on the act.



SYED ABUL MAKSUD
ACTIVIST AND COLUMNIST

We can't look at road accidents on an individual level but rather take them as a whole. If we consider a conservative estimate, at least 3 lakh people have died in accidents since our independence, and seven lakh people have been wounded.

If these people had died due to cholera or bird flu, then it would result in a hue and cry within the government and the



MAHFUZ ANAM
EDITOR, THE DAILY STAR

We do not want to go into the politics of blame game. We only seek solutions. We want to focus on how all the stakeholders, including the media, can work together to make roads safe. To comprehend the complexity of the issue of road safety we first need some basic statistics. If the statistics are lacking, let's work on collecting useful data so we can understand the gravity of the problem and initiate appropriate measures.

Not only should we enact road safety related laws but we must also ensure that the current situation does not exacerbate. We regularly see practices that are completely contradictory to universal norms, for example, cars going in the opposite direction. Some of the most fundamental laws of road safety are being broken and people are losing lives due to road crashes on a daily basis.

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