

12 killed in road accidents in 5 dists

STAR REPORT

Twelve people, including six in Gazipur, were killed and several others injured in separate road accidents in five districts across the country yesterday.

In Gazipur, six people died and six others were injured in a head-on collision between a human haulier en route to Chandna intersection and a passenger bus in the morning in front of Bhawal Badre Alam Government College on Dhaka-Tangail highway.

All the deceased were passengers of the human haulier. They were identified as Sujon, 20, from Gopalganj and driver of the vehicle; Abul Hossain, 50, from Netrakona; Ukil Miah, 45, from Sherpur; Pran Nath Das, 38, from Sunamganj; his cousin Bakul Chandra Das, 35; and Amena Begum, 45, from Jamalpur.

The collision took place as the smaller vehicle rammed into the bus while passing a slow-moving bus that was loading and unloading passengers on the highway, said roadside vendor

Mazom Ali.

The injured, mostly factory workers, were admitted to Gazipur Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Medical College Hospital, reports our Gazipur Correspondent.

All sorts of unfit as well as banned vehicles such as human hauliers and three-wheelers operate on the highway unhindered, ignoring public safety, complained Tareq Rahman Bhuiyan and Ashraful Islam, both fourth-year students of political science department at Bhawal Badre Alam College.

Emran Hossain, sub-inspector of Highway Police at Naojore camp said, a ban against illegal and unfit vehicles was in force and they regularly take action against violators of traffic rules.

However, he said a new lot of human hauliers financed by commercial banks have been operating on the highway with legal route permit.

Our correspondent from Natore reports, a BRTC bus ran over a rickshaw van at noon at Jolarbata area of Singra upazila, leaving the van puller, Abul

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



The mangled remains of a human haulier after it had a head-on collision with a bus on Dhaka-Tangail highway near Badre Alam Govt College in Gazipur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Textbooks not up to the mark

FROM PAGE 1

Talking to more than a dozen students, parents and teachers, The Daily Star found that students follow guidebooks more than they follow textbooks given for free up to the secondary level on the first day of every academic year.

One of the major reasons behind this is that textbooks are so abridged that learners fail to get the essence of the topics.

For example, the chapters on the Liberation War for class-V include lists of 11 sectors, in which the then East Pakistan was divided to organise the fight against the Pakistan army; significant movements prior to the Liberation War; and names of a few martyrs known for their sacrifices.

But they fail to provide the context that pushed the Bangladeshis into the war and how one socio-political event led to another. Those are left for students to discuss with teachers.

The National Education Policy 2010 recommends interactive teaching method to encourage students to do exercises through individual or group work.

Since schools have limited time and resources, and teachers limited knowledge, it is difficult and not always possible to engage students in discussions and acquire more information to understand the subjects better, said teachers at both primary and secondary levels.

So, they choose guidebooks as a shortcut to good results.

Teachers also complain that coherence is absent between contents and exercises, and between textbooks for one academic level and those for the next.

The aim of introducing creative method to education was to give children enough knowledge in sync with their level of maturity on a topic so they can answer questions based on their understanding.

However, contents in textbooks have been reduced drastically to keep the academic pressure on children low. That in reality leads them to take help of guidebooks to pass exams.

Besides, textbooks have been so condensed that teachers find it difficult to set questions in the four segments -- knowledge, understanding, application and higher ability -- introduced in the new system.

When children get scanty and disjointed information, they fail to build their own perception of what they read about. This makes harder for teachers

"The textbooks have become such that students don't have much to read and learn from them. So, guardians of even primary-level students tend to rely on private tutors at home or coaching centres."

JAHURA BEGUM
A TEACHER AT UDAYAN
HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL

as well to test children's understanding and higher ability.

Explaining the situation, Jahura Begum, a senior teacher at Udayan Higher Secondary School in the capital, said students have less to read and learn from textbooks and more to discuss with teachers. Thus children's education has become more dependent on how much teachers can deliver.

But teachers across the board are not equally capable. So, for good results in exams, students and guardians seek ready materials from guidebooks or coaching centres, according to the science teacher.

Also, several teachers who received training more than once said they were not suggested any reference books they could use to teach in detail the topics written in brief in textbooks.

The problems facing students in remote areas are of different dimensions.

Shamim Hossain, a teacher at Jagusha Government Primary School in Jhenidah's Maheshpur, said almost all 156 students of the school, nationalised in 1973, were born to parents with little or no education. Apart from school teachers and textbooks, they have no access to other sources of learning.

Over the time, he has observed that children find it hard to get the message of textbooks as they tend to forget much of class lectures. They then become reluctant to study.

Three other teachers in city schools echoed his view. Besides, they pointed out mistakes in the books. Like, the world's most populous continent Asia has 27 countries according to the textbook for class-VII while the number is put at 51 in the textbook for class-VI.

"Textbooks have become more like pamphlets," said Jahura Begum, adding that those were not written with much sincerity either.

Flipping through the science textbook of class-VI, she pointed out that

pollution is discussed in several chapters -- one on environmental pollution and others specifically on water and air. However, those chapters could have been put together for the students' better understanding.

Fida Hossain, a senior mathematics teacher at Motijheel Ideal School and College, has another point to make.

Some textbook chapters have exercises without similar examples explaining how to solve them. Though teachers at classes of 70-80 students demonstrate how to do those exercises, except for a handful of brilliant or more mature students, the majority need further guidance back home.

A teacher of the primary level, Mousumy Shill, said if academic pressure on students is all that the authority is concerned about, then why subjects in class-VI total 13, more than double the number of those for just one class down.

While studying too many subjects, children can hardly manage time to gain in-depth knowledge of the basic subjects, Fida Hossain said.

It is reflected in a government survey on children of class-VI and class-VIII.

According to the Learning Assessment of Secondary Education, 2015, 51 percent eighth graders didn't have expected level of competency in English while 46 percent in mathematics and 45 percent in Bangla. The condition of sixth graders was somewhat better, as 71 percent were found competent in English, 70 percent in Bangla and 77 percent in mathematics.

Sankar Debnath, a teacher at Blue Bird Kindergarten in Comilla's Kurbanpur village, said the public examinations start as early as class-V, and this is one of the main reasons why guardians and teachers put emphasis on results rather than quality education.

Teachers of Bangladesh International School and College in the capital, where 11-year-old Rheed studies in English version, don't follow guidebooks. Instead, they prepare question-answer sheets and give those to students.

Rheed memorised and revised again and again the answers in the sheets he received from class teachers to prepare for Primary School Certificate exams that ended on November 27.

This rote learning is exactly what the education ministry wanted to discourage when it adopted the creative method in 2008.

Under the new system, which aims

to help students develop their creativity and thinking ability, students first took public exams -- Secondary School Certificate exams -- in 2010.

Six years have gone by, but except for a handful of institutions, most schools have remained confined to the old method tucked under the mask of the new one.

"All schools in this area follow guidebooks," said Sankar, who founded Blue Bird Kindergarten in Comilla 18 years back. And he claims success in running the school as most of its students have been passing public exams with flying colours.

Looking for ways to learn how to answer creative questions, Fardin, a student of class-VII at Motijheel Ideal, has started attending a coaching centre but there, he says, he gets sheets of study materials for all subjects except mathematics.

"The coaching helps us prepare for exams, and shows us how to score high marks," Fardin says.

As to how the new system in place can ensure better education, Asadul Alam, assistant professor of chemistry at Udayan that has around 3,500 students, said textbooks should be valuable sources of information, since leaving everything to teachers would be like depriving students who don't have access to resources of knowledge.

Questions can be set in a creative way to test the clarity of students' concepts of the subjects, he added.

Theoretically, experts are supposed to take into account opinions and observations of teachers while bringing out textbooks. But that rarely happens, said science teacher Jahura.

Acknowledging that, Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of the Campaign for Popular Education, said experts wrote textbooks without keeping child psychology in mind. To make things interesting, they should go down to the level of children and write in their language.

The primary education has been improved to a great extent, said Rasheda, adding that secondary-level education has, however, many hurdles to overcome.

Talking to The Daily Star, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said the government has been trying relentlessly to reform the education system. In that endeavour, quality teachers and textbooks remain the main challenges.

[The Daily Star didn't mention the full names of the students at the request of their guardians]

More than farming

FROM PAGE 1

afford the ongoing therapy he needs.

Mamun suffers from myelomalacia, a disorder involving a softening of the spinal cord. It usually arises from a spinal injury though what caused it in his case is uncertain.

"When I was in class seven," he recalls, "I felt acute pain, like an electric shock, mainly in my neck, and during the bouts of pain I could not speak. Later my muscles grew weak."

Weakened muscles, along with loss of motor function in the extremities, sudden jerking of limbs, depression, some paralysis and even death are symptoms of myelomalacia. As the nerve damage behind the disorder cannot be reversed there is no cure, but surgery and therapy can help.

Mamun managed to pass his Secondary School Certificate examinations in 1986 but was unable to study further. In 1992, he sought treatment in Malaysia where he stayed for eight years. While receiving treatment he worked for a company that sold mushroom products, the first time he saw them.

"My Malaysian doctor, Dr Azmi said I may have been injured while still inside my mother's womb or perhaps while playing during childhood," Mamun explains.

Thankfully, the treatment that cost him about Tk 60 lakh brought some relief to his neck pain and weakened muscles.

Returning home, Mamun has been receiving physiotherapy at the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralysed in Savar. Each admission costs him Tk 10,000.

But it wasn't medical bills that led him to consider mushroom farming. Dr Azmi had advised him to include mushrooms in his diet, Mamun says.

"I sought health from mushrooms; and then I wanted to save others from disease by making mushrooms available. The benefits of mushrooms to human health are enormous. They are good for treatment and prevention."

Mushrooms are like a medicine for all diseases, says Jhenidah's Deputy Director of the agriculture extension department Shah Md Akramul Haque. Farming mushrooms is a profitable venture too.

Thus in 2002, Mamun began cultivating mushrooms, starting his own

farm with financial support two years later.

"My family members always discouraged me. They never helped," Mamun regrets.

Yet he was able to complete initial training in mushroom farming at a youth development centre in Jhenidah. He received laboratory, industrial and post-harvest training later in Savar.

Mamun's farm produces East Asian lingzhi and Japanese shiitake mushrooms, as well as common mushrooms, which are native to the grasslands of Europe and North America. Each mushroom passes through tissue, mother and spawn culture stages in order to be ready to sprout.

"When I work hard I sweat a lot," says Mamun. "My left side is more paralysed than my right side, but still I manage."

These days Mamun sells around 300 kilograms of mushrooms per month, for up to Tk 70,000, leaving him a profit of around Tk 30,000.

"I am so grateful for our solvency," says Mamun's wife Rozina Khatun. She helps her husband by taking responsibility for the laboratory work. With two sons studying in class-II and class-VIII, she says the family is a happy one.

In the district Mamun is a shining example of a successful mushroom grower, says Bilal Hossain, Harinakundo upazila's youth development officer.

"He is the pride of our upazila. We can learn from his self-confidence."

"Mamun has contributed a lot to mushroom cultivation in Bangladesh," says the local upazila nirbahi officer, Monira Parvin.

"Right across the country people should be proud of his success. We should help him in any way we can."

In recognition of his achievements, Mamun received a national award from Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last month. But he is not yet satisfied; he wants to do more.

"I'd like to produce mushrooms for export," he says.

"A mushroom industry could help alleviate unemployment in this area. A good number of people could have jobs in mushroom processing."

Mamun is held back only by a lack of capital. He hopes for favourable loan facilities or perhaps government assistance to make his vision a reality.

BNP to talk also on polls-time govt

FROM PAGE 1

forward her proposal for the formation of the new EC and would also talk about election-time government. The party was likely to suggest names for the members of a search committee for the EC formation.

It wants a five member search committee.

BNP sources said the party might propose 10 names for the committee and three of them would be for the chief of the search committee post. The party would suggest an appellate division judge, a former bureaucrat, a woman, and a former vice-chancellor of a public university to be made members of the committee.

A senior BNP leader seeking anonymity said, "If talks move sincerely and the president asked names for the CEC [chief election commissioner] and others [commissioners], the party will propose the names. Otherwise we will propose only the names for the search committee."

The strategy and the names were finalised during a late night meeting of the party high ups at the Gulshan office of Khaleda.

Khaleda might place a written statement before the president urging him to

take initiatives so that a political consensus could be reached on the EC formation and election-time government issues.

Political parties have been laying emphasis on the formation of a competent new EC which would conduct the next general election scheduled to be held in 2019. Members of the civil society and political analysts stressed the need for forming a neutral EC which could help avoid a possible political crisis in future.

Political analysts said the formation of the new EC would, to some extent, show the sign whether the next general election would be free, fair, impartial and all inclusive.

"It's a good initiative that the president has taken to hold talks with different political parties. Only a good outcome can make the initiative successful," former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Shakhawat Hossain told The Daily Star.

The BNP and other political parties have already welcomed the president's initiative and expressed hope that he would be able to play his due role in forming a stronger EC.

The BNP yesterday called for an independent EC to be formed with the consent of all political parties.

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan office said, "People hope that the EC will be impartial and independent which will work ignoring the evil intentions of the government...."

"We will ask the president to form an Election Commission on which all political parties can rely."

The BNP, which has been demanding the holding of general election under a non-party administration since 2011, has taken the issue very seriously, said party insiders.

The BNP-led alliance and most other political parties had boycotted the January 5, 2014, national election as their demand was not met. The alliance is still demanding the same, but the ruling Awami League and its allies refused to entertain such demands citing constitution obligation.

On the talks, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said their dialogue would be based on Khaleda's recent proposal for the EC formation.

On November 18, Khaleda rolled out a 13-point proposal for the EC's formation which included forming a search committee on the basis of consensus

among all registered political parties or the ones that had representation in parliament at different times since the country's independence.

The committee would pick the chief election commissioner and four commissioners, Khaleda had said.

The four-year tenure of Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad-led EC, which earned widespread criticism for its alleged failure to hold free, fair and peaceful elections, would expire in February.

It held a general election in 2014 which the BNP-led alliance boycotted. It held city corporation, municipality, and upazila parishad elections that were marred by violence and irregularities.

While forming the Kazi Rakib-led EC, then president Zillur Rahman consulted 23 political parties. Five parties had proposed forming a search committee, while four suggested enacting a law that could be followed for such appointments.

Zillur finally appointed an Appellate Division judge as the head of a four-member search committee to recommend names for the EC in 2012.

That committee, after screening, short-listed 10 people. Later, Zillur picked five and formed the EC on February 9, 2012.

Self-reliant no longer

FROM PAGE 16

the indigenous people from the disputed land of Rangpur Sugar Mills in Gaibandha's Gobindaganj upazila.

Three Santals were killed and several others were injured.

"I can't work with such an injury. Besides, I have already spent all my savings [around Tk 4,000] for my treatment," she said, adding that she lost her home as well.

Monglu now has to seek food from others.

The woman alleged that police along with some mill staff and their hired goons set Santal shanties, including hers, on fire on November 6. The Santals have to spend most of their time in the open.

Police denied any role in setting any home on fire.

Hopna Murmu, 58, a Santal farmer, said he was lucky to have survived.

He was hit by rubber bullets on his chest while he was fleeing a "joint attack of police and sugar mills workers", he said.

"After I was hit by rubber bullets, my relatives took me to a private clinic in Dinajpur. I don't know how they managed the money for my treatment."

Hopna Murmu came back to Madarpur in Gobindaganj some 15 days ago. Now he

is staying in a tent beside a village church.

Talking to The Daily Star in front of the tent in the chilling weather on Thursday, Hopna removed his shirt to show the reporters his wound yet to properly heal.

He said he stopped taking medicines a few days ago as he was able to walk again. Budoni Hasda, 61, was also hit by pellets in the head that day.

"Most of these elderly people were injured in the attack as they could not run fast enough, said local Santals.

Another Santal woman, Minara Begum, 50, who was shot that day, took shelter in a tent there.

"I can't walk properly as I did not go outside for treatment fearing arrest," said the woman whose son Miraj was arrested by police on charges of setting Santal homes on fire.

"My son is innocent. I want his release as soon as possible," she said.

Rafayel Hasda, a leader of the evicted Santals, said the injuries of Choron Soren, Bimal Kisku and Dijen Tudu, among other Santals, were the most severe.

Choron and Bimal are being treated at Rangpur Medical College Hospital while Dijen is at a Dhaka hospital, said their family members.