

# On the road to road safety

SADRUL HASAN MAZUMDER

**I**NCLUSION of road safety targets in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the middle of the UN decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-20 has reinforced the urgency of initiating reforms or legislation for bringing discipline in the road and transport sector. SDG 11.2 calls to "provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons" by 2030.

Deaths and damage to properties caused by road crashes have become a daily and deadly phenomenon in Bangladesh, which has one of the worst crash rates in the world, at more than 60 per 10,000 registered motor vehicles. Research studies explored multifaceted causes of road crashes ranging from population explosion, unplanned urbanisation, and tremendous growth of motorised as well as non-motorised and para-transit vehicles.



Rescuers stand beside a smashed bus that collided head-on with another bus on Dhaka-Sirajganj highway in Kamarkhand upazila of Sirajganj. At least 14 people were killed in the accident. Bangladesh has one of the highest accident rates in the world.

PHOTO: STAR

scrapping the Motor Vehicle Ordinance 1983, which includes the proposal for Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (draft) Act 2015 framed for empowering the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) and Road Transport (draft) Act 2017. It remains unclear whether the reform proposal reflects the aspirations of the citizens and those of road safety activists and experts.

Most importantly, such slow progress of reforming road safety legislation clearly misses the ever-changing ground realities. The reform process includes all stakeholders seeking recommendations for updating the draft Act but road safety activists were ignored and are not sure whether the recommendations and views shared by them will ultimately be reflected during the passage of the Road Transport (draft) Act 2017 genuinely comprehensive, the concerns of all stakeholders must be taken into consideration. The following issues need to be considered: (i) Current reform initiatives of the road transport legislation should not only focus on road safety issues but also focus on economic potentials of the sector considering the demographic growth of the nation; (ii) Ensure effective enforcement of Road Transport (draft) Act 2017, enactment of a Good Samaritan Law and guideline for the emergency medical services agencies and institutions should be formulated at the shortest possible time; (iii) The National Road Safety Council (NRSC) should be made more functional having periodic interaction with the subnational and regional road safety committees; (iv) An independent rigorous investigation mechanism needs to be introduced; and (v) The Road Transport (draft) Act 2017 should take into consideration the needs of all road users when making policy decisions that impact road safety.

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## The weak and inefficient investigation process of road crashes is a hurdle to justice for road crash victims.

Road crash, which is caused by human or mechanical failure, negligence, or a combination of many other unknown factors, should be dealt with the principles of prevention, attention and compensation. In any human attempt to reduce fatalities of road crash, realistic legislations and their effective enforcement are a must where citizens as road users have a

vital role to play. During the pre-accident period, prevention and attention are associated with the capacity and skill of concerned stakeholders where we severely lack in terms of institutional strength. Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), which is the sole government agency responsible for looking after capacity, and providing road permits and licensing of vehicles, notably lacks skills and manpower to meet the rising demand of the road and transport sector.

The post-accident period known as the "golden hour"—the first one hour after the crash—is critical when early medical care might prevent fatalities or any dire consequences of the injury. But historically both the private and public health services-providing agencies and institutions in South Asia, including Bangladesh, are

negligent about providing emergency medical services to accident victims. In addition, good Samaritans are fearful of legal consequences, harassment, involvement in litigation and repeated visits to the police station.

Responding to a writ petition of BLAST and others, on February 10, 2016 the high court issued "Rule Nisi" asking Director General of Health Services & Secretary of Ministry of Health, Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges, and Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council to pursue directions and frame guidelines to make it mandatory for all public and private hospitals and clinics to provide emergency medical services to road crash victims.

The weak and inefficient investigation process of road crashes, however, is a hurdle to justice for

road crash victims. Under the current arrangement, the investigation process is undertaken by the police who investigate all forms of offences under the Code of Criminal Procedure but they are not provided with any special training on investigation of road crashes. Road safety experts and activists have been demanding for a specialised road crash investigation mechanism with institutional capacity which is a must for fighting for justice for road accident victims.

Furthermore, the traditional mindset of accusing the operators of the vehicles under collision has been found to be an obstacle to conducting a proper investigation and providing immediate medical care to the victims, contradicting the jurisprudential issues of the proposed Road Transport (draft) Act 2017.

Current legislation merely focuses on safety issues ignoring the economic potentials of the sector. A BRAC study shows that in low and middle income countries, the cost of road traffic injuries lies between 1-2 percent of GDP, which clearly suggests that countries like Bangladesh should adopt immediate measures to reduce losses caused by road accidents and keep pace with the nation's transition to becoming a middle-income economy by 2021. The World Bank in its latest study warned that if the transport sector is not managed lawfully, traffic congestion in Dhaka city alone will take up 3.2 million working hours per day, which will cost the economy billions of dollars every year.

The government has initiated legislative reforms since 2009

# Fifty Shades of White



NAVEED MAHUB

**HUMOROUSLY YOURS**  
**C**OMBINE the seven colours of the rainbow and you get white light. That's not to say that combine all the rainbow

flags and you get white. But that seems to be the logic of those waving swastika and Confederate flags in Charlottesville, Virginia that all that is not white is a rainbow of all that is inferior. Interestingly, the human face, which by the way always has a pair of eyes and eyebrows, a nose, a pair of lips and a pair of ears, irrespective of colour and bleeds the same red when dealt a punch, is never truly white nor truly black. What we call white is actually pink and what we call black is actually dark brown. In fact Asians, as Americans call them (and Far East Asians or Orientals as the rest of the world calls them) are truly white, though why are they called yellow, I have no idea. Perhaps when the colour tags were being assigned, the lone "Asian" (Far Eastern) sample had jaundice and I can bet my brown behind that the jaundiced eye of a pink man (not a woman) etched that

colour label into history. Perhaps the pink and the dark brown were tagged when photography came into the picture—"black" and "white" picture. And then it was "black" and "white" TV. On both these mediums the pink looked white and the dark brown looked black. On that token, the "Asian" should have been white, a much cleaner (dermatologist's dream) version and the brown people grey.

But somewhere, the colour white made it to the top, despite containing all the colours of the spectrum while black ended up at the other end of the racial spectrum. Since the superior precedes the inferior in the social strata, I would have thought it would be white and black TV, ivory and ebony, the black belt leading to the white belt in martial arts, a white tie event, white formal shoes (only Mithun Chakraborty followed that rule), white formal suit, white coffee, white at funerals, the White Sea, Whiteberry being the most secure mobile device, white Casio G-Shock watches, white bomber jackets, (at the height of the civil rights movement in America) the SR-71 Whitebird spy plane, business books striving to be in the white and not in the black, the Whitehawk helicopter, the whitejack at casinos,



A counter-protester holds up a sign before a Ku Klux Klan rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, on July 8, 2017.

PHOTO: ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP

snow being white gold and much pricier than black gold, the phrase "once you go white you never go...", the saying "X is the new white", us dying to dye our hair white to look younger, a whiteout and not a blackout as the best defence against

air raids, thousands milling about to see the white moon and not the black moon (solar eclipse), a black lie instead of a white lie, a blackwash instead of a whitewash in cricket, black trash instead of white trash, a game of chess in essence being a

racial warfare, (supposedly) Robert Mugabe saying that it is a white toilet paper that wipes his black...

Then again, in our land of Fair and Lovely, we DO say 'shada kalo' (white black). But why Charlottesville? "We

want America back"—says the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) boss. Nice words, but he should have quoted the source—the Native Americans. The KKK loves Trump, who took 48 hours to call it out for what it is, whereas he takes a fraction of 48 seconds to call out CNN "fake news".

Even ISIS distanced itself from the 20 year old hillbilly from Ohio who rammed his car into the crowd, killing one and injuring many. But history is made with the reincarnation of the redneck terrorist (the first one was seen in 1492).

Thank goodness I'm not living in the US now. I'm a brown techie and the KKK would show up in front of my house and leave a burning laptop. Also, thank goodness there are fifty shades of white with the first 48 shades labelling the 50th not as milk, but as rotten yogurt. Oh, and the 49th? There is really one person in this shade with a tinge of orange, supported by all in the 50th shade of white, who is definitely giving the "White" House a truly different meaning...

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**QUOTABLE Quote**

**NAWAL EL SAADAWI**  
Egyptian feminist, writer, and psychiatrist

*When we live in a world that is very unjust, you have to be a dissident.*

**CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH**

**ACROSS**

- 1 Like bad gravy
- 6 Commotion
- 10 Studio sign
- 11 City on the Nile
- 12 Trot and canter
- 13 Walks in the woods
- 14 Hogwarts messengers
- 15 Peaceful
- 16 Beatles descriptor
- 17 Blue hue
- 18 Blue
- 19 Less friendly
- 22 Traces show
- 23 Void
- 26 The Wild West, e.g.
- 29 Heir, often

**DOWN**

- 1 Exit a network
- 2 Oblivious
- 3 Posting place
- 4 Peach centers
- 5 Cal. spans
- 6 Uncloudy
- 7 Is fond of
- 8 Gladiator's setting
- 9 Did some modeling
- 11 Wyoming capital
- 15 Enjoy the slopes
- 17 Leave angrily
- 20 Sunscreen letters
- 21 Deep groove
- 24 Conservative's foe
- 25 Like the king of beasts
- 27 Crew tool
- 28 Comic Danger-field
- 29 Muffler's kin
- 30 Nostalgic song
- 31 Too trusting
- 35 Convene
- 36 Turner of movies
- 38 Performed

**YESTERDAY'S ANSWER**

R	I	L	E	S	S	T	A	I	R
U	N	I	T	E	H	E	N	C	E
M	A	K	E	C	H	A	N	G	E
O	W	E	R	E	F	E	L	I	
R	E	D	M	E	A	T	L	A	G
			A	C	T	B	O	N	
S	T	R	A	Y	F	E	U	D	S
C	R	A	M	F	I	R	E		
R	A	M	F	I	R	E	L	I	T
A	L	E	A	C	E	I	R	A	
T	A	K	E	C	H	A	N	C	E
C	L	I	N	T	S	E	I	N	E
H	A	N	D	S	T	O	T	E	S

**BEETLE BAILEY** by Mort Walker

**BABY BLUES** by Kirkman & Scott