

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DAY

Protesters stop another minister's car

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agitating students yesterday stopped the motorcade of Water Resources Minister Anwar Hossain Manju in Dhanmondi to check the papers of the vehicle.

The driver of the SUV didn't have a licence, witnesses said.

A video clip of the minister coming out of the vehicle in rain and getting in another one to leave the place went viral on social media.

The protesters were chanting "we want justice" as they surrounded the minister, the video showed.

The incident took place a day after Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed's car driving on the wrong side of the road was stopped and turned around by protesters.

Police SUV runs without proper documents!

The black SUV of a high ranking police officer was stopped near Karwan Bazar by the students.

One of the students present at the scene said the car had been running without papers for the last three years. The driver also didn't have licence.

Asked about the matter, he simply told The Daily Star, "Action will be taken against the driver."

Students allowed the vehicle to leave after a while.

In similar incidents, students stopped vans of Jatrabari police in the capital and Shonargaon police in Narayanganj for not having papers. They also stopped a car of Ramganj Municipality Mayor Abul Khair Patwary in Shantinagar as the driver didn't have licence.

Mother offers snacks to students on streets

In a video that went viral on Facebook yesterday a middle-aged woman is seen walking with two sacks of snacks and offering those to the students.

"[You] will not be able to continue the movement if [you] do not have strength. Take, take food from the mother," the woman says.

Some youths distributed snacks and juice bottles among students near Manik Mia Avenue intersection on Mirpur Road while others were cleaning the road.



Radwan Mujib on rickshaw

In yet another viral video, Bangabandhu's grandson Radwan Mujib Siddiqi is seen riding a rickshaw along with a companion. As the rickshaw reaches a group of students, he gets down and crosses the road on foot.

2 students hurt as a police vehicle hits them

Two school students were injured after being hit by a police vehicle in front of a gate of Rajarbagh Police Lines yesterday afternoon, reports UNB.

Witnesses said a police car hit them when they tried to stop the vehicle to see the driver's licence.

The injured were then taken to a city hospital.



PM Sheikh Hasina hands over savings certificate of Tk 20 lakh to Jahangir Fakir, father of Dia Khanam Mim who was killed in a road crash on Airport Road on Sunday, at her office yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Dia's father urges students to go home

Families of road crash victims meet PM; receive financial assistance

UNB, Dhaka

Jahangir Fakir, father of road accident victim Dia Khanam Mim, yesterday urged the students to go back home as he expressed optimism that the prime minister would take effective measures to check road accidents.

He made the call during a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office.

"We want students to go back home as measures will be taken to prevent such accidents in future," Prime Minister's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim quoted Jahangir as saying.

College students Dia and Abdul Karim Rajib were killed in a road crash in the capital on July 29.

Dia and Rajib's family members and the principal of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College were also

present at the meeting.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Ihsanul said the premier consoled the bereaved family members and donated a savings certificate of Tk 20 lakh to each of the families.

On Sunday, Dia and Rajib of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College were killed as a bus of Jabal-e-Noor Paribahan ploughed into some students in front of Kurmitola General Hospital on Airport Road.

The tragic accident sparked massive student protests across the country which continued for the fifth consecutive day yesterday.

Dia's father Jahangir became emotional while talking to the PM, said Ihsanul.

Expressing sympathy to the bereaved family members, Hasina said

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Protesters resolute

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decades-long anarchy on the roads and highways in phases. They also asked them to return to their classes.

The students stoutly rejected their assurances, issuing instead a clarion call to meet their demands for a safe and orderly road and justice for their two fellows killed in Sunday's road crash near the airport.

"Assurances for how long more? You have destroyed our trust."

This slogan, written on a city road, summed up why they refuse to leave the streets and why they continue to block the key streets in Dhaka and elsewhere, halting traffic causing public suffering.

"Whenever students take to the streets with any demand, the government accepts the demand but does nothing in reality. So we will continue our protest until our nine demands are met," said Zawad Munshi, a second-year student of Dhaka College.

Like in the past few days, the demonstrators yesterday assumed the role of traffic police, checking driving licences and fitness certificates, and seizing the keys of the vehicles that had no valid papers.

In the process, they found several police vehicles, including one belonging

to a deputy inspector general of police, do not have any valid papers. They also intercepted the vehicle of Water Resources Minister Anwar Hossain Manju in Dhanmondi, and found his driver does not have driving licence. The minister was seen leaving his white Pajero at the spot.

Throughout the day, the students were seen controlling the traffic, forcing vehicles to drive in files across the city. In some areas, including in Malibagh and Mohammadpur, they were seen controlling traffic well into the night.

In some places, they resorted to violence, smashing over a dozen vehicles at Science Laboratory intersection and in Mirpur. A number of them engaged in heated arguments with journalists and broke a video camera of a private television channel.

Meanwhile, police and alleged ruling Awami League men attacked some students in Mirpur yesterday evening, injuring several protesters.

Students also came under attack by alleged Chhatra League and Jubo League men at Jahangirnagar University and in Chittagong.

Outside Dhaka, they staged protests in Savar, Narayanganj, Tangail, Natore, Bogra and Rajshahi, among other

districts.

The protest began on Sunday after two college students -- Khanam Mim and Abdul Karim Rajib -- were killed in a road crash. The accident happened when a Jabal-e-Noor bus ploughed through a crowd while competing with another bus of the same company. It was later revealed that a third bus was also involved in the race.

All the three drivers and the owner of Jabal-e-Noor bus have been arrested.

Deaths on roads are common in the country. According to police record, some 3,000 people die every year in road crash. But the actual number of casualties is much higher as many accidents remain unreported.

Reckless driving, over-speeding, operating unfit vehicles and dangerous overtaking are some of the key reasons behind the crashes. Little has changed over the years, causing anger and frustration among the public.

So the student protest is nothing but the outburst of the pent-up grievances, experts and campaigners have told this newspaper.

STUDENTS RULE THE STREETS

Science Lab intersection saw its largest gathering yesterday with the participation of college and private university students. Soaked in rain, around 5,000

students ruled the street since 10:30am.

The protesters vandalised five buses as the drivers failed to show any documents. They also wrote slogans on the damaged buses.

They said they would not leave the street until their demands are met.

"We have no faith in empty assurances. We want our demands met," said one of the protesters from Dhaka City College.

Coming down hard on the shipping minister, they made cartoons on placards. Some wrote fiery slogans on the streets.

Some guardians and volunteers were seen delivering food, drinking water and juice for the young protesters.

A traffic sergeant was beaten up by a group of students, after he allegedly shoved a protester for demanding his driving licence. He was taken to a hospital with severe injuries, witnesses said.

Later, all police officials left the area. Around 4:00pm, some Chhatra League men from Dhaka University went to talk to the protesters, but they were sent off.

At Shahbagh, the students gathered around 11:00am and continued their demo for about five hours.

More than a thousand students formed a large circle in the middle of

the intersection, put up barricades on all the roads leading to Shahbagh, and chanted slogans in support of their nine-point demand, including resignation of Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan for his insensitive comments about road crash victims.

"We have no political affiliation and we are not protesting for any political purpose. We just want justice," said Hashib Hasan, a second-year student of Bir Shrestho Munshi Abdur Rouf Public College.

The protesters will gather at Shahbagh at 11:00am today.

Protests were staged also by students of Willes Little Flower School and College, Vigarunnisa Noon School and College, Notre Dame College, Siddheswari Girls' College, Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, Daffodil International University, Mohammadpur Preparatory School and College, and Mohammadpur Residential Model School and College.

"I could be one of the two victims, but luckily I'm not. But if such reckless driving continues, sooner or later we will be victims of such reckless driving," said Marjan Mahbub, who came with her mother to join the protest.

Students chased, beaten up

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The students then gathered in Mirpur-14 area around 4:00pm and continued their demonstration. Law enforcers with batons charged the crowd to disperse them later. The streets in Mirpur 13 and 14 were cleared around 6:45pm.

"When we gathered in Mirpur-14 around 4:00pm, some policemen and unidentified men attacked and chased us," said a student of Shaheed Police Smriti College.

Some Facebook live posts that went viral during the attack, showed police officials beating up students trapped on the staircase of a footbridge.

A video posted on Facebook around 6:30pm taken near SOS Hermann Gmeiner College shows police and men in plainclothes jointly encircling a few students and forcing them to leave the place.

They also snatched a camera from a girl and threw it on the road.

The students allegedly vandalised several vehicles while leaving the area, said some hawkers who were present during the incident.

Locals said some students and at least one attacker were injured as they were hurling brickbats at each other. Police officials also claimed one of their officers was injured during the incident.

However, officials from Kafrel Police Station denied that any such attack on the students took place.

During a briefing at his Dhanmondi residence last night, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said, "From what I



Armed with sticks, some unidentified men along with police chase away protesting students in Mirpur-13 area of the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

heard, some youths loyal to the BNP gathered in the area to instigate the students. The locals then chased them away."

In Chittagong, a group of Bangladesh Chhatra League men

allegedly beat up two demonstrators at the city's GEC intersection and snatched away two cameras from them.

Witnesses said the BCL men reached the intersection around 4:00pm.

As they were checking the drivers' licences, some JU BCL activists told them to leave and a scuffle ensued.

However, the university unit BCL President Jewel Rana refuted the allegation and said the men were not BCL activists.

In Comilla, ruling party activists occupied key intersections on Dhaka-Chittagong highway and resisted protesters at several points.

A new law is not the answer

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transport sector but also brings to the fore the questions of whether the existing laws are inadequate to tackle the road anarchy and whether passing of a mere law will change the situation.

Our answer is an emphatic NO and this is why we think so.

In the first place, the provisions in our existing Motor VehicleS Ordinance 1983 is stringent enough to ensure a safe transport sector.

It has outlined in clear terms how registration, fitness certificates of vehicles will be issued, who will get driving licence and who will be authorized to be conductors of public transports.

To get a driving licence, a person has to be of a minimum age of 18 and has to provide medical certificates in support of mental and physical soundness. Rules have been laid down about what kind of driving tests one has to pass to get a licence.

A conductor has to obtain a licence too through a clearly termed process and each transport worker has to have

appointment letters.

In reality, none of these are followed. Most public transport drivers, a significant portion of whom are below the age of 18, now sit in the driving seats and police turn a blind eye to the flagrant violation as part of a systematic corruption.

Of the 50 lakh vehicles running in the country about 20 lakhs have no fitness certificates and a similar number of drivers have no licences. The police know it very well and let the system continue because any illegal act means illegal earning for them. Here public safety does not count and the law does not mean anything.

Although fitness assurance is a vital part of road safety, the matter has largely been ignored by the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA). There are only three digital inspection centres for Dhaka city where 11 lakh vehicles ply. So one can imagine how the fitness scanning is being done and how the certificates are obtained in exchange for money.

Causing deaths in road accidents can count as culpable homicide punishable by life term.

Again, the law here is again meaningless for lack of enforcement and corruption.

Now let's look at the sweeping authority that the existing law gives to the law enforcement agency.

A policeman can arrest anyone on the spot without warrant if their vehicles do not have registration, road permit or fitness certificate. Similarly, a policeman can arrest anyone for reckless driving, driving under influence, speed racing or carrying weight in excess of permissible limits.

For such crimes the drivers can be punished for up to six months in prison and fines of different amounts up to Tk 25,000.

And in case of an accident causing death by rash driving or by negligence, the driver can face between three and five years of prison term and fines under the penal code.

Causing deaths in road accidents can count as culpable homicide punishable by life term.

And again all these laws could not bring any order on the road and each year over 7,000 people die in accidents mostly for reckless driving, unfit vehicles and unauthorized driving. Here the presence of a mere harsher law could make no difference because of the lack of enforcement bred by rotten governance. And harsher law will only breed more corruption.

There are plethora of examples that enactment of mere laws cannot change the situation if the system is corrupt. We have not been able to ensure safe food despite having stringent laws that threatens even death to food adulterers under the Special Powers Act. Drugs like yaba have infiltrated into the society the tentacles of the octopus although we have a good narcotics control act.

In the last ten years, 371 laws, rules and policies have been made on various issues ranging from dealing with corruption to road safety to food to environment to city improvement. We have developed a certain degree of penchant for making new laws but not for enforcement.

It is embedded in the constitution that the parliament will examine the enforcement of the laws but that has never been done.

So may we ask what difference the minister's announcement for a new law providing for harsher punishment will make when the situation calls for fixing the whole system? How can the minister ensure that the new law, however unnecessary it is, will be enforced with earnestness? Will this corrupt system change just for a new law?

Our answer is again a NO. The road anarchy is an outcome of misgovernance