

Taskforce to meet Sunday amid rise in road crashes

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

After two-and-a-half months of inception, the special taskforce, formed to restrain accidents and bring discipline on the roads, is expected to hold its first meeting tomorrow.

The meeting will be held amid a steep rise of over 15 percent in the numbers of both accidents and casualties on roads in 2019 than 2018.

At least 3,060 people were killed and 3,292 more injured in a total of 3,009 road accidents between January and September this year, according to a police report.

Police records also mentioned that 2,035 people were killed and 1,920 others injured in 2,609 road accidents in 2018. The numbers mentioned in the police reports, however, are significantly lower than other reports published by different road-safety organisations.

To achieve the Target 3.6 of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the government would have to curb then numbers of crashes and casualties on roads to halves of the statistics mentioned in the police report by 2020.

Talking to The Daily Star, a member

to play a significant role in bringing discipline on roads.

Besides, experts and road-safety campaigners said the numbers of accidents and casualties on roads were on the rise as a comprehensive plan of action to address the serious problem was absent.

They said most of the steps taken by the authorities were related to enforcement of law without developing necessary infrastructure and manpower.

However, road safety cannot be ensured only by enforcing law, they added.

According to Accident Research Institute (ARI) of Buet at least 3,488 people were killed and 5,863 others injured in 3,131 road crashes until October 18 this year.

Some 4,076 people were killed in 3,513 road crashes last year, said an ARI report which was prepared based on different media reports.

According to Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a passengers' welfare organisation, the numbers were much higher in real.

Prof Shamsul Haque, former director of Buet's ARI, said institutions involved



Sohel Bepari, middle, wails in front of his house in Munshiganj's Louhajang upazila yesterday after losing his wife and a son in a road crash in Sreenagar upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

ROAD ACCIDENTS AND CASUALTIES			
YEAR	NUMBER OF ACCIDENTS	DEATHS	INJURED
2019 (Sept)	3,009	3,060	3,292
2018	2,609	2,635	1,920
2017	2,562	2,513	1,898
2016	2,566	2,463	2,134

SOURCE: BANGLADESH POLICE

of the taskforce said the maiden meeting would not have any specific agenda but there was a high chance that the stakeholders of the taskforce would discuss their plan of action.

The taskforce, headed by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, was formed at the 27th meeting of National Road Safety Council (NRSC) on September 5 this year. The government issued gazette of the 33-member taskforce on October 15.

The taskforce was primarily assigned to work on a 111-point recommendation, placed by former shipping minister Shahjahan Khan-led committee, to curb the number of accidents and bring discipline on the roads.

Among others, 11 secretaries of different ministries and division, inspector general of police, commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police and five transport leaders were made members of the taskforce.

The list of the taskforce members also include transport expert Prof Shamsul Haque, noted columnist Syed Abul Maksud and Nirapad Sarak Chai Chairman Ilias Kanchan.

CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR THE AUTHORITIES

The government, along with its subordinate authorities, is facing a huge protest while implementing the Road Transport Act-2018 which is expected

in controlling the transport sector lack infrastructural capacity and manpower which is a major obstacle to achieving SDG.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) does not have sufficient manpower and infrastructure to check fitness of the huge number of vehicles plying on roads and provide licences to drivers.

In the capital, no terminal for intra-city buses exists. Besides, adequate number of truck terminals is also missing. All these are elements for sustainable development for the transport sector, he said.

"With the given situation, I do not think it would be possible to achieve SDG's target," Prof Shamsul said.

Maruf Hossain, programme manager of Work for a Better Bangladesh Trust, an organisation working in road transport sector, also echoed Prof Shamsul's statement.

Maruf, who also worked with the government's policy makers for preparing a plan of action for "Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020" in 2013-2014, suggested that the authorities should focus on pedestrians equally.

More than half of the road accident victims are pedestrians. By curbing the number of pedestrians' death authorities could achieve the SDG's target.

Kansar village, Rubel and his relatives were overcome with grief.

Nothing could console Sohel Bepari who lost his wife Runa and three-year-old son Tahsin.

"Everything ended in moments," he wailed in front of his home.

The district administration gave the families of the dead Tk 20,000 each in compensation.

Mohammad Zayedul Alam, superintendent of police in Munshiganj, said the process of filing a case was underway.

A five-member team, headed by Additional Deputy Magistrate Asma Shahin, was formed to find out the cause of the accident, he added.

Workers stick to demand

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programme within a day or two after observing how he [home minister] solves our problems," he told reporters after the meeting at the federation's Segunbagicha office.

He also said transport workers, who had been refraining from work in several districts for the last few days, resumed work yesterday following requests from the federation.

Our district correspondents also reported that bus services resumed in nine districts yesterday, ending people's sufferings.

The authorities started enforcing the Road Transport Act on Sunday, two weeks after the law came into force.

Transport workers called a wildcat strike in different districts from Monday, while truck workers and owners called an indefinite strike on Tuesday, demanding amendments to the law.

However, the strike of truck workers and owners was called off early on Thursday after the home minister had assured them of meeting their several demands.

In an apparent attempt to appease the agitating transport workers, the government assured them of relaxed and gradual implementation of the law.

DECISIONS OF FEDERATION

A top leader of the federation last night said most of their local leaders in the meeting demanded amendment to the act and urged the central leaders to announce tougher agitation programmes to force the government to meet their demands.

Accordingly, the federation decided to call a countrywide 72-hour strike in the last week of January if the law was not amended by then, he told this correspondent.

The federation picked January for enforcing the strike as it was unwilling to do so in December, the month of victory, he said.

The workers' leader said their demands include making all offences under the act bailable, scrapping of the provision for fining a worker Tk 5 lakh for involvement in a road accident, reducing the minimum educational qualification requirement for obtaining a driving licence from class-VIII to class-V, and ending harassment by police on roads.

Amid a widespread student agitation for safe road, parliament passed the act in September last year to bring discipline on roads. But its implementation remained halted for more than a year as transport leaders allegedly lobbied against it.

Dull Tigers dampen Eden spectacle

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the 12th such instance in cricket since the first day-night Test between Australia and New Zealand in Adelaide in 2015, unfolded over the next seven hours, the only dull aspect being Bangladesh's play. In an utterly one-sided day of cricket, India ended a historic first day on 174 for three, 68 runs ahead of Bangladesh, who the hosts bowled out for 106 in just 30.3 overs. India skipper Virat Kohli was batting on 59 and Ajinkya Rahane on 23. Bangladesh pacer Ebadot Hossain had taken the wickets of Rohit Sharma and Cheteshwar Pujara.

Apart from the meek surrender of Bangladesh's top order against India's pace attack, it was a day to cherish for over 50,000 fans -- itself a triumph in modern Test cricket in the subcontinent -- who thronged the Eden Gardens for a special occasion.

The day that started with players of both sides being introduced to Hasina and West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and saw Indian legends like Sachin Tendulkar, Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev, Ganguly, Rahul Dravid and VVS Laxman being paraded around the ground during

the supper and tea intervals, ended with a concert featuring popular Bangladeshi singer Runa Laila. Along with many former Indian legends, all members of the Bangladesh team that played the country's first Test against India in November 2000 were also invited.

There was much to celebrate for locals on the field too, but for those who made the trek from Bangladesh to support their team on a historic occasion, it was an abject affair.

Both teams were playing their first match with the pink ball, which is used for day-night Tests. Bangladesh skipper Mominul Haque chose to bat first upon winning the toss, and the wisdom of that choice came under question as the lack of preparation with the ball had become a theme leading up to the Test.

However, the exaggerated movement that the pink ball is said to offer came into play only after Bangladesh had been bowled out, when India were batting under lights. Following the 1:00pm start, Bangladesh had the best of the conditions as the ball did not swing much, but the likes of skipper

Mominul Haque, Mohammad Mithun and Mushfiqur Rahim departed for ducks against a primed Indian pace attack comprising Ishant Sharma, Mohammad Sami and Umesh Yadav. Mithun and Mushfiqur were bowled by Yadav and Shami respectively, each being too late on the ball and unable to adjust to the slight inward movement. Ishant ended up with the bulk of the wickets, taking five for 22 as he ran through the lower order.

Shami was also responsible for knocking out two Bangladesh players from the match as the Tigers employed concussion substitutes for the first time. Liton Das, the best Bangladesh batsman on view with a fluent 24, was struck on the helmet by Shami before the supper break and retired hurt after an over. Over the break the team management decided to field Mehedi Hasan Miraz as concussion substitute. Mehedi will only be able to bat, however, as that was the role Liton was supposed to play. After supper Shami repeated the treatment to off-spinner Nayeem Hasan, who was later replaced by left-arm spinner Taijul Islam.

How liquid waste causes health risk

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of waste that may have a harmful impact on the environment. Under this law, the DoE issues clearance to hospitals only after they install an effluent treatment plant (ETP).

The DoE served a letter to Labaid Cardiac Hospitals and Labaid Specialised Hospital three years ago. And that was when the Labaid authorities began thinking about how to ensure safe disposal of liquid waste, said Farid Hossain who oversees the operations of ETP at the facilities.

It took almost a year to draw up lines to carry liquid waste from different units to the ETP, he said.

Like Labaid, some other upscale healthcare facilities, including Apollo Hospitals Dhaka, Square Hospitals Ltd, Ibn Sina Hospital have set up ETP to treat liquid waste and the total number is not even close to 50 of more than 1,000 healthcare facilities in Dhaka, said Sohrab Ali, of Dhaka metropolitan office of the DoE.

While the DoE is trying to compel private entities to address the concern over liquid waste management, the scenario at public hospitals is bleak and there is no sign of getting things right in the near or distant future.

Last year, the DoE issued a letter

for the second time to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, which treats nearly 3,500 in-patients on a daily basis, bringing its attention to the matter of liquid waste disposal. The letter went unheeded, Sohrab said.

The previous letter was served three years earlier. The hospital followed it up by communicating the matter to the health ministry, but met a dead end there.

While recent developments regarding discharge of liquid waste from hospitals fail to evoke any sense of optimism, findings of a 2017 research present a horrifying picture of how it can become a source of public health hazard.

Scientists from Iccddr, Erasmus University Medical Center of the Netherlands and Stanford University of the USA had tested about a hundred wastewater samples from areas adjacent to hospitals and communities and found that 96 percent of those contained bacteria resistant to the most powerful class of antibiotics.

"In view of existing practice of discharging untreated liquid wastes into the environment," the study report says, hospitals in Dhaka city contribute to the spread of such bacteria.

The Medical Waste Rules 2008 require diluting liquid waste with

water and then releasing it into the sewer system. Liquid waste can also be treated with 1 percent sodium hypochlorite before it is discharged into the sewer, according to the rules.

Administration of many public and private hospitals seem to lack awareness about the issue or are downright negligent.

When asked where the liquid waste goes, Sazzad Hossain, ward master of Sir Salimullah Medical College Mitford Hospital, located on the bank of the Buriganga river, on October 16, said it was dumped along with the infectious waste that PRISM Bangladesh Foundation carries every day to its Matuail treatment plant.

Prism is an NGO tasked with collecting and disposing of medical waste.

But Prism says it collects only solid waste from hospitals across the capital for safe disposal in Matuail.

About the necessity of an ETP, Mazibur Rahman, superintendent at Ibrahim Cardiac Hospital and Research Institute, said, "The hospital doesn't have one since it doesn't need one. Liquid waste is harmless.... Besides the amount of such waste [generated in that hospital] is negligible."

No fanfare this time

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Also, the AL front wanted to organise a doa mehfil to mark her birthday on September 28. After she was informed about it, Hasina angrily said she was very much aware of incidents of "extortion" by some Jubo League leaders and the celebration of her birthday would be nothing but a veiled attempt to legalise extortion money, said AL sources.

THE MISDEEDS

Jubo League was founded in 1972 with an aim to alleviate poverty and establish the rights of the youths. But a group of its leaders deviated from the objectives and got busy making their own fortune, said sources in the organisation.

Instead of working to protect the rights of the youths, the Jubo League leaders got engaged in numerous misdeeds and criminal activities -- from grabbing tenders to running illegal casino business in sporting clubs, the sources said.

Some of the misdeeds came to light after law enforcement agencies began a drive against illegal gambling and casinos, with a raid on Fakirpool Sporting Club in the capital on September 18.

Amid the crackdown, a section of Jubo League leaders brought several allegations against their chairman Omar Faruk Chowdhury.

The allegations included running Jubo League at whim, patronising the corrupt, and awarding key posts of the organisation in exchange for money.

On October 20, Omar Faruk was relieved of his duties. The decision was

made at a meeting between Hasina, the president of the AL, and some top Jubo League leaders.

Law enforcers arrested Dhaka City Jubo League (south unit) President Ismail Hossain Chowdhury Samrat, Organising Secretary Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan, Vice-president Enamul Haque Arman and Dhaka City North unit Joint General Secretary Tarequzzaman Rajib in connection with running illegal casino business.

The name of Office Secretary Kazi Anisur Rahman also surfaced during the drive.

Jubo League have expelled all these leaders.

Besides, there are allegations that Jubo League presidium member Nurunnabi Chowdhury Shawon, Science and Technology Secretary Shafiqul Islam, Liberation War Affairs Secretary Kaiser Ahmed and Labour Affairs Secretary Taslim Uddin, Deputy Publicity Secretary Farid Uddin are involved in tender manipulation, said insiders.

The Daily Star could not verify this claim.

AGE ISSUE

Jubo League also faces criticism over the age of its leaders and activists.

The National Youth Policy, formulated by the AL government, defines any citizen between 18 and 35 as a youth.

But this definition does not seem applicable to most of the leaders of the AL front. None of its 351-member central committee falls under this age group.

The youngest person in the

committee is 44, and the oldest is none other than the organisation's immediate past chief Omar Faruk Chowdhury, who turned 71 this year. The existing general secretary, Harun-Or-Rashid, is 68.

In Omar Faruk's absence, the AL made the organisation's presidium member Chayan Islam, also a former MP from Sirajganj, the convener of its congress preparatory committee.

Chayan is 57.

The Jubo League charter does not mention any age limit for its leaders and other members, but says any employable youth is eligible to join it.

THE CONGRESS

Jubo League leaders hope that the new leadership to be picked today will be able to rebuild the organisation's image that has been damaged in recent months.

They said they wanted to see dedicated leaders with clean image in top posts of the organisation.

Around 3,000 councillors from across the country would elect their new leaders today at the triennial congress.

Talking to The Daily Star, Jubo League Organising Secretary Fazlul Haque Atique said his organisation had recently been facing an image crisis and their main responsibility would be to rebuild the image.

Jubo League presidium member Shaheed Serniabat blamed some corrupt leaders for the image crisis.

He, however, hoped that fresh blood would be injected in the organisation and they would be able to take it to new heights.

UN adopts resolution on natural fibres

It'll pave way for effective 'global value chain' for jute

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's resolution entitled "Natural Plant Fibres and Sustainable Development" has been adopted by consensus in the plenary of the second committee of the 74th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA).

In September, the resolution was tabled before this committee and adopted on Thursday, said the Bangladesh Mission at the UN.

This is the first resolution in the UNGA that features the challenges as well as the potential of jute and other natural plant fibres as economically viable, socially beneficial and environmentally sustainable agricultural products.

The resolution primarily focuses on jute and other natural fibers such as Abaca, Coir, Kenaf, Sisal, Hemp and Ramie which are lesser known to the international community and reiterates that the promotion of these fibres would contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

During the resolution adoption, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN Ambassador Masud Bin Momen said Bangladesh took the lead in highlighting the potential economic, social and environmental benefits of the natural plant fibres such as jute, which is fondly called the "Golden Fibre" in Bangladesh.

After the resolution adoption, in front of the UNHQs Building Ambassador Masud briefed journalists about how this resolution would help Bangladesh.

He said this resolution would pave the way for a stronger, effective and efficient "global value chain" for jute and other natural fibre products.

"If the demand for jute and jute products increases in the global market, Bangladesh's jute growers and traders will get competitive prices."

He added, "Our primary objective is to promote jute. To bring all the countries on board, we have broadened the scope of the resolution which includes other natural plant fibres such as Abaca, Coir, Kenaf, Sisal, Hemp and Ramie. We need the support of the international community in our first ever attempt to promote jute."

Man killed by daughter's stalker

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Benapole

A 42-old-man died allegedly after his daughter's stalker kicked him in the chest in Sharothi Mills area of Jashore yesterday.

Abdur Razzak was attacked when he went to the suspect's house to tell him to stop harassing his daughter around 11:30am, police said.

The two neighbours got into an argument soon and the suspect, Hossain Ali, 34, allegedly kicked him in the chest, leaving Razzak unconscious.

Police arrested Hossain at his house later in the day.

Moniruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said Razzak's 20-year-old daughter had informed her parents that their next-door neighbour Hossain had been stalking her.

Razzak then went to Hossain's house and got attacked.

His family members took him to Jashore General Hospital where doctors pronounced him dead, the OC said.

The body was sent to the morgue for an autopsy, he added.

Tk 3.5cr gold bars

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The bars weighing 8.2 kg were found in a black bag in a toilet around 1:45pm, said officials.

Riadul Islam, deputy commissioner of Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate, said the officers had information about gold bars being smuggled through the airport and they had been searching the vicinity since morning.

The bag was wrapped in sticky tape, he added.

"We are not sure who brought the gold, and from which country... The smugglers might have sensed the authorities' alertness."

The bars were found about an hour after a plane arrived from Mascot, said Assistant Director Nurun Nahar Lily.

Officers are investigating whether any passenger of the flight was involved, she added.

UK begins to repatriate British orphans in Syria

AFP, London

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said on Thursday that the UK had "facilitated" the return of British orphans whose parents had died in Syria "because it was the right thing to do".

"These innocent, orphaned, children should never have been subjected to the horrors of war," Raab said in a statement confirming the first children had begun to arrive back in Britain.