

Good initiative falls short

Vehicles, pedestrians ignore push button signal for lack of law implementation, awareness



RED MEANS STOP! A DNCC guard tries his best to stop vehicles so that students can cross this road in Mohammadpur. Impatient drivers continue to jump red light ignoring the time countdown signal, below. The photos were taken recently in town hall market area. PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

MATHEWS CHIRAN

With an aim to help pedestrians cross an intersection safely and reduce risks of accidents, Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) in October installed “push button time countdown” signal systems on a pilot basis in two of its areas.

One of the signals were installed in front of SFX Greenherald International School in Mohammadpur on October 24.

A similar signal was set up in front of Brac University in Mohakhali, which is yet to be fully functional.

To make people use the signals, the city corporation and Dhaka Metropolitan Police designated three guards and two traffic officials at the Mohammadpur spot. Besides, there are also two guards from Greenherald who help students cross the road.

Even with all that manpower and digitalisation, the initiative has failed to achieve desired results as not only are vehicles ignoring the signal, but pedestrians are also showing reluctance to avail the service.

Visiting the spot this week, this correspondent saw police, guards and school volunteers stopping vehicles of all sizes and kinds manually, that too after much efforts. Many pedestrians were crossing the road when the red light was on.

This newspaper had also visited the spot around three weeks back and saw similar chaos.

“Often, drivers do not follow the signal. We need to whistle and stop vehicles for students to cross the road,” said Saiful Islam, shift



in-charge of DNCC guards.

Constable Bashir added, “Drivers behave in such a way as if they own the road and are above the law. Some of them even ignore red light intentionally.”

Teachers of Greenherald hoped the situation would improve.

“It’s a good initiative, but it has to be implemented properly to be more effective,” said senior teacher Malcolm Mendez, adding, “A month back, the situation was even worse but it’s improving now.”

Auto-rickshaw driver Noor Alam, however, had a different response. After skipping the stop signal, he stopped to pick up a passenger nearby. When asked, he said, “Have you seen any vehicle stopping at the signal?”

He also blamed pedestrians for crossing the road haphazardly.

Caught in the act, Mohammad Jalal, a private jobholder said, “I

pushed the button three times and waited. But no one stopped. So I just looked around and crossed the road.”

Activists, however, blame lack of awareness and enforcement of laws in this regard.

Maruf Hossain, programme manager of Work for Better Bangladesh Trust, said, “Law enforcers should strictly maintain and implement the law to make sure vehicles and people follow it. Also, the city corporation authorities should raise awareness among residents.”

Contacted, KM Shahidul Islam Sohag, assistant commissioner of DMP traffic (west/Mohammadpur), said “The new road transport act just came into effect. We’ll soon fine vehicles for not abiding by law. Now, we are focusing on raising awareness.”

Meanwhile, the signal has

been made automated. It allows pedestrians 26 seconds to cross the road. During the countdown, the light turns green. Afterwards, the red light turns on and another countdown starts for 70 seconds, prohibiting pedestrians from crossing the road and allowing vehicles to pass.

A week after its launch the system had faced difficulties, including problems with the countdown and power failure.

Architect Shareq Rauf Chowdhury and Nur-E-Dipha Muttaqi Ananya designed the system. Based on their design, DNCC implemented the system via a contractor.

Asked, Shareq said at first, the countdown after pressing the button worked properly. Afterwards it was having some issues as the circuit system was not updated. “Considering all that, we’ve made it automated,” he added.

There was also no backup power system installed for the signals in case of power outage, he said, adding that they will set up IPS (instant power supply) units soon.

Contacted over phone, DNCC Superintendent Engineer Arifur Rahman said, “It’s a new concept... we need some time to make people get used to it.”

He said taking experience from the system at Mohammadpur, they will improve the Mohakhali signal, where guards from Brac University are helping students and pedestrians cross the road.

The project cost around Tk 9.2 lakh. DNCC plans to install the system in at least 20 points -- mainly in front of educational institutions.

‘Don’t give in to evil forces’

Ilias Kanchan urges govt to implement new road safety act properly

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should not bow down to any “evil force”, which is obstructing the implementation of road transport act, said road safety crusader Ilias Kanchan yesterday.

“If the government relaxes the law under pressure from any such group, the country and its people will lose. That’s why legal actions have to be taken against those who are creating disorder to prevent the law,” he said.

Ilias, founder of Nirapad Sarak Chai (We Demand Safe Roads), was speaking at a press conference at Jatiya Press Club. The platform organised the event, marking its 26th founding anniversary.

Citing the recent lack of order in transport sector, the actor-turned-road safety campaigner alleged that an evil force is misguiding transport workers and creating the unrest. They do not even know about the law properly, he added.

Ilias said the government introduced this law after consulting with different stakeholders. It also kept the drivers in mind and made sure to preserve their rights, but a section of them are now holding the country’s people hostage in the name of strike, he added.

Terming himself just a campaigner for road safety, he alleged that transport workers had burnt his effigy intentionally.

“I am not one to introduce a law and my intention is not to hurt any group but to aware and save people from road accidents,” said Ilias, who has been carrying the rigorous campaign for road safety since the tragic demise of his wife, Jahanara Kanchan, in a road crash in 1993.

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DRU elects new leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rafiqul Islam Azad of English daily The Independent and Riaz Chowdhury of online news portal asianmail24.com were elected president and general secretary of Dhaka Reporters’ Unity respectively for next one year.

At yesterday’s election, The Daily Star’s Helemul Alam in an overwhelming victory bagged the highest number of votes -- 851 -- to win the joint general secretary position. His rival Mehedi Azad Masum of Dainik Jagaran got 430 votes.

Azad bagged 550 votes to take the position of the union’s top leader, with his nearest rival Shahnewaz Dulal of bbarta24.net getting 489 votes.

There were five contestants for the top position of DRU.

Riaz Chowdhury got 567 votes to win over Nurul Islam Hasib by only two votes.

Nazrul Kabir was elected SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Prof Anisuzzaman awarded Ahsanullah Gold Medal



National Professor Anisuzzaman receives a crest from Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology yesterday.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

National Professor Anisuzzaman was accorded the “Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah Gold Medal 2018” yesterday, for his outstanding contributions to the country’s education sector.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain handed over the award at a ceremony held at Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology auditorium in the capital’s Tejgaon.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a non-government organisation, has been giving the award since 1986 on the name of its founder Khan Bahadur Ahsanullah, a legendary scholar, to recognise contributions of distinguished personalities.

Prof Anisuzzaman is the 27th recipient of the prestigious award, that includes a gold medal, crest, certificate, books and a cheque of Tk 2,00,000.

Speaking at the ceremony, the chief justice said Prof Anisuzzaman is not only a famous academician, he is also a reputed writer and researcher. Many of his write-ups have been highly appreciated by the readers.

“His familiarity and acceptance are well-established at home and abroad. I express my wholehearted congratulations to this living legend,” said Syed Mahmud.

Prof Anisuzzaman himself is an institution, he added.

The chief justice also urged the solvent people in the society to contribute for social well-being of others.

Expressing gratitude to Ahsania Mission authorities, Prof Anisuzzaman said he feels proud that most of his work has been well-received by people.

He also said the student-teacher relationship has become “very mechanical” in the modern era.

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‘Displaced by development’

People living in coal-based power plant project areas share ordeals at public hearing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Locals from two coal-based power plant project areas in south and southeastern part of the country yesterday said their everyday life has been hampered severely due to the government’s ongoing development activities.

Meanwhile, Santals of Gaibandha’s Gabindaganj said they were forcibly displaced from their ancestral land by the authorities in the name of development about three years back, and are yet to get back their land.

They raised the allegations at a public hearing on “Development, Eviction, Human Rights and Environmental Degradation” organised by Life and Nature Safeguard Platform at Liberation War Museum auditorium in the capital.

Attending the programme, green activists and civil society members called upon the government to shun the path of development that brings sufferings to people and poses threat to environment.

Among several others, the government is implementing two coal-based projects -- a 1,200-megawatt power plant in Matarbari at Maheshkhali upazila of Cox’s Bazar and the controversial 1,320-megawatt power plant in Rampal of Bagerhat near the Sundarbans.

Beside the government, some foreign countries are financing the projects, said organisers.

Hamed Hossain (45), a union parishad member from Matarbari, said due to land acquisition, many locals -- involved in traditional salt cultivation and shrimp farming -- lost their occupations.

Some 20,000 labourers involved in salt

supply chain through cargo-vessels also became jobless, he added.

Land acquisition caused displacement of some 45 families at Matarbari but houses have been built for only 10 families so far, he alleged.

Homaira Begum (26), member of a displaced family, said they were served with a notice and given only seven days in 2014 to evacuate their home. “We were assured that we will get a new house under the project within six months. We are still living in a rented house,” she said.

Rent has increased significantly over the years there because of high demand as many outsiders involved in the project now live in the area, she added.

Mohammad Mohsin of the same area said they face severe waterlogging round the year as the mouth of Rangakhal, a local canal, had been filled with earth for the project. “Now, children have to travel on small boats for at least 0.5km to reach school,” he said.

Fisherman Abdur Rashid of Mongla said his catch from the Pashur river, which is used as a route for carrying goods for Rampal plant, has reduced significantly.

Coals and burnt furnace oil are now dumped in the river more frequently, he alleged, adding that some 8,000 fishermen from Mongla depend on the river.

Manindranath Roy (53), a resident of Rajnagar near the project area, said although the project authorities promised to create jobs for locals, only a handful of them were hired as cooks, sweepers and gardeners.

On the other hand, Olivia Hembrom,

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PHOTO OF THE DAY

PRABIR DAS



Hunched over a phone, four street children watch cartoons at Sadarghat Launch Terminal. Their days are usually spent selling water at the terminal, but the area was devoid of crowds due to the daylong transport workers’ strike yesterday.