

Where vehicles turn

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mangled remains a wheel is sticking out.

Shah Ali police said it was a yellow taxi that met an accident in May 2009, leaving one person dead. A case was filed against the driver over death due to negligence and a charge sheet was submitted in August that year. Since then none ever came to take it back.

During a recent visit, these correspondents found most of the 10 cars lying aground in the station in dilapidated conditions. Police could not give any details immediately about most of those.

"How long can these vehicles be kept guarded? When it is dark, people take off parts of the vehicles," said a constable of the police station.

Not only in Shah Ali Police Station, hundreds of vehicles, seized as evidence and worth crores of taka, have been left to gather dust and rust on the road in front of police stations or on their premises or surrounding areas in Dhaka and elsewhere for years.

Come hail or storm, rain or sun shine, none is there to take care of these until the cases are settled. Eventually, plants start growing and the vehicles become breeding grounds for mosquitos.

The Daily Star correspondents recently visited at least 12 police stations in Dhaka, three in Chattogram, two in Khulna metropolitan cities and 16 other police stations in Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur, Bogura, Kushia, Jhenidah, Dinaipur, Faridpur and Bagerhat and found the similar pictures.

An officer of Tejgaon Industrial Area Police Station recently said there are more than 150 vehicles, including motorcycles, seized as evidence in his police stations. They have kept the vehicles on the compound of the station and some on nearby places due to lack of space.

"We have to deploy extra manpower to guard these," he told The Daily Star. During a recent visit to Banani

Police Station, it was seen that the seized vehicles covered with dust and dirt were lined up on a narrow street in front of the police station. Parts of many vehicles are missing.

Movements of other vehicles on the streets are being disrupted because of these cars, locals said.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of police officers said most of these vehicles were damaged in road accidents, some were used in crime while some were recovered from miscreants.

Md Walid Hossain, immediate past deputy commissioner (Media and Public Relations) of DMP, recently said bigger items, which are pieces of evidence, like motor vehicles and other things, are kept on the roads and nearby areas outside some police stations due to lack of space.

So, the evidence gets damaged and causes obstructions to movement of people and vehicles, he added.

Metropolitan Public Prosecutor Abdullah Abu said the courts have no impound for the cars. "After completion of trial of the cases, police can remove those with court orders," he added.

Abu Rayhan Muhammad Saleh, joint commissioner traffic (north) of DMP, said, "The vehicles we seize are dumped at certain dumping ground where usually from where owners take away their vehicles."

Things are done differently in developed countries.

In many countries, including the US, a car is impounded by agents employed by the law enforcement agencies. They are authorised to pick up and impound a vehicle and the owner is charged towing fees and a daily rent for the spot it occupies.

This ensures an owner a process to get the vehicle back in more or less the condition it was picked up as the impound lots are usually well-guarded multi-story car parks or at least a shed protecting the vehicles from the elements.



A security personnel is seen near a damaged vehicle after a blast in Kabul, Afghanistan yesterday. Four people were killed and nine wounded when the roadside bomb hit the bus carrying Afghan government employees.

PHOTO: AFP

Ctg to have one station at Pahartoli

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shows.

The feasibility study of the first high-speed rail, commissioned by Bangladesh Railway, has already been completed. The route has also been selected and a draft report on the detailed design of the "passenger-dedicated" railway project has already been submitted.

Meanwhile, two Chinese companies have expressed interest in forming a joint venture to construct, operate, and manage funds for the line.

Once finished, the journey from the capital to the commercial capital will be slashed to just 73 minutes.

An uninterrupted journey between Dhaka and Chattogram will take only 55 minutes.

The trains, which will run at a top speed of 300km/hr, will have the capacity to carry approximately 50,000 passengers each way daily.

It will, however, not be cheap. With fares expected to be around the Tk 2,000 mark, more than three times the fare of an AC seat on existing Bangladeshi inter-city trains.

However, some transport experts termed the project "highly ambitious"

and questioned the capacity of BR to operate the high-speed train, when it has not yet introduced electric trains.

NEW OPTIONS

The consultants, appointed for the feasibility study and detail design of the project, gave two options -- setting up one station or two stations as traffic hub for high-speed rail in Chattogram.

In their power-point presentation, they mentioned different aspects of setting up one station for high speed near the existing station or Pahartoli.

They said if the station for high-speed rail was built near the existing rail station, it would be more convenient for passengers.

But passenger distribution would be centralised, causing pressure on the urban transport, they said.

Besides, there is a high-density of residential buildings around the existing station and the proposed Cox's Bazar high-speed line would have to go through the urban areas, which would require large degree of demolitions and project implementation would be difficult, they said.

On the other hand, if the station is built on the right side of the existing Pahartoli station, the extension of

high-speed rail to Cox's Bazar would start from Pahartoli.

In that case, construction work would be easier and the main line would be shorter, they said.

But, the new station would be little far away from the city and the existing urban road connection would not be able to meet passenger demand, they said.

The existing 4.3km trunk road will need to be widened to six lanes, they said.

The total cost of the project with the station near existing station would be \$11.063 billion while the Pahartoli's option would require \$11.114 billion. The project cost with two stations in Chattogram would be \$11.113 billion.

The another option, the consultant recommended for, is to build two stations in Chattogram—first one near the existing station in Chattogram for now and keep option at Pahartoli station for building another transport hub when the speed train line would be extended up to Cox's Bazar.

The total cost of the project with this option would be \$11.093 billion.

The meeting decided to build one station at Pahartoli, sources said.

Pollutants 10 times

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According to a global report published on Wednesday, air quality of Bangladesh was the worst in the world, while its capital Dhaka was the second worst air polluted city last year.

The study on the three health care institutions was conducted by health care professionals and academicians in two periods -- pre-monsoon and winter. It found that air quality remains worse during both the periods.

For example, the average concentration of PM 2.5 at the three healthcare institutions was 52.28 µg/m³ during pre-monsoon which is double than the NAAQS permissible limit.

In winter, the average concentration of PM 2.5 was 222.53 µg/m³ which is around eight times higher than the NAAQS permissible limit, the report said.

The WHO's ambient air quality permissible standard is 25 µg/m³ while it is 55 µg/m³ for NAAQS.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Prof Abdus Salam, key author of the study and also a chemistry teacher at Dhaka University, said indoor air quality worsens due to various activities of the people and it indicates the unhygienic condition at hospitals.

To improve the indoor air quality at government hospitals, the authorities concerned should focus on the overall hygiene situation and reduce crowding by patient's attendants at hospitals, he added.

The first-of-its-kind study on indoor air quality of hospitals in the country also said toxicity potential (TP) values at the three installations were 10 times higher than normal, which means the environment there could aggravate patients' health.

The TP indicates the overall environment of a place.

"Extremely high TP values indicated potential severe health consequences of the healthcare professionals

and patients in indoor hospitals environment," the report said.

The children's surgery ward site showed higher particulate matter (PM) concentrations than other indoor sampling locations at the DMCH. The ward was most crowded and filthy among all the sites in the hospital, the study found.

It also said unhygienic environment and movement of people increased outdoor particulate concentrations inside the hospitals.

Prof Salam said proper ventilation can improve the air quality inside the hospitals, adding that cooking inside the wards should be stopped.

Contacted, DMCH Director Brig Gen Nazmul Haque said they were working on improving the environment inside the hospital.

"The hospital is overcrowded and people's movement is big inside the hospital. We try to keep our hospital clean but it is not possible to keep it clean all the time especially when the hospital is overcrowded," he told The Daily Star.

Be-Nazir Ahmed, former director (disease control) at the Directorate General of Health Services, said poor air quality inside a hospital indicates that there is high possibility of infection which is dangerous.

"The hospital authorities must identify the sources of dust. There is no alternative to cleanliness. There is a serious lack of cleaners at hospitals. We have to engage more cleaners in keeping the hospitals clean."

Modern equipment should be used to make the indoor environment clean, he added.

Indoor and outdoor air pollution led to 1.23 lakh deaths in Bangladesh in 2017, according to a study titled The State of Global Air 2019.

Long-term exposure to outdoor and indoor air pollution contributed to nearly five million deaths from stroke, diabetes, heart attack, lung cancer and chronic lung disease in 2017.

India, Pak suffer new Covid

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In Pakistan, 3,495 people tested positive in the past 24 hours, the most daily infections since early December. Total cases rose past 615,000. Deaths rose by 61 to 13,717.

Most of the new cases came from Pakistan's largest and richest province, Punjab.

Pakistani minister Asad Umar said on Twitter that hospital beds were filling fast, warning of stricter curbs if rules were not followed.

"The new strain spreads faster and is more deadly," he said on Twitter, referring to the UK variant.

India's first wave peaked in September at nearly 100,000 cases a day, with daily infections hitting a low of just over 9,000 early last month.

India and Pakistan have a combined population of 1.57 billion, a fifth of humanity.

CURBS RETURN
Cases have been rising in Maharashtra since the reopening of most economic activity in February. Mumbai's suburban trains, which carry millions daily, also resumed.

The state of 112 million people ordered a fresh lockdown in some districts and put curbs on cinemas,

hotels and restaurants until the end of the month after infections rose to a multi-month high earlier this week.

New cases have more than doubled in the past two weeks in Maharashtra's industrial towns such as Pune, Aurangabad, Nashik and Nagpur, home to car, pharmaceutical and textile factories.

"We have asked industries there to operate with minimum manpower as much possible," said a senior Maharashtra government official, declining to be named as he was not authorised to talk to the media. "Most of the IT companies have allowed their employees to work from home."

Hospital beds and special Covid-19 facilities were filling up fast, especially in Mumbai, Nagpur and Pune, said another state official.

THIRD WAVE
Large parts of Europe are at the start of a third coronavirus wave, experts have said, with warnings that the decision to pause the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine over health concerns is likely lead to a rise in cases and a high number of deaths as more contagious new variants account for the majority of cases.

Why silent on Sunamganj mayhem?

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campus yesterday afternoon to protest the attack on minorities.

"Minority people of Shalla could earlier sense that the attack might be launched on them. Why did the administration not take any effective measures to resist the attack despite knowing it? Should we assume that communal people have entered the administration?" the BCL leaders questioned.

Earlier on Wednesday morning, several hundred supporters of Hefajat-e Islam attacked, vandalised, and looted at least 75 Hindu houses in Sunamganj's Noagaon village over a Facebook post criticising a Hefajat leader's statement.

Meanwhile, a case was filed in connection with the violence around 4:30pm yesterday, close to 30 hours after the incident.

But none was arrested as of 8:30pm last night when this report was filed, said police.

Contacted, Shalla Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Nazmul Haque said some 70 named and 630 unnamed persons have been made accused in the case.

Without disclosing the identity of the plaintiff, the OC said, one of the victims has filed the case.

Although additional law enforcers have been deployed in the area to avoid any further untoward incident, people of the minority communities are still in a panic.

"We are afraid as no attackers have so far been arrested. We want justice," said Anil Chandra Das, a freedom fighter and resident of the village.

"The role of administration and law enforcement agencies is suspicious to us as none has been arrested till now," said advocate Bishwajit Chakraborty,

general secretary of the district unit Bangladesh Hindu-Buddhist-Christian Unity Council.

Rab Director General Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun visited the spot and assured victims to take legal actions against the attackers.

Contacted, Deputy Commissioner Zahangir Hossain said, "We have taken all necessary measures to ensure security to the villagers, who have already returned home."

"Besides, we will also provide financial assistance to the victims to repair their houses."

Meanwhile, different organisations and people from different walks of life across the country protested the incident and demanded trial of the attackers.

ATTACK WAS PREDICTED
On Monday, Hefajat unit of nearby Derai upazila, organised a rally where the organisation's Ameer Junayed Babunagari and Joint Secretary General Mamunul Haque spoke.

At the rally, Mamunul criticised the celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit marking the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence, according to local media reports.

The following day, Jhumon Das Apon, a youth from Noagaon village, made posts on his Facebook wall, slamming Mamunul for trying to create a religious division, police said.

At this, Hefajat supporters became agitated.

Locals of Noagaon village caught Jhumon at a bazar on Tuesday night and handed him over to police. But the tension was prevailing in the area.

Officials of the law enforcement agencies and local administration

tried to pacify tension through discussion with local peoples' representatives, influential persons, and Hefajat men that night, said Bibekanda Majumdar, chairman of Habibpur village, whose house was also vandalised.

But on Wednesday morning, around a thousand people gathered on the bank of the Darain river, which is just opposite Noagaon village.

On information, law enforcers and local administration officials rushed to the spot and tried to resist people from crossing the river.

But a large portion of the crowd, with locally made weapons in their hands, crossed the river and started mayhem.

Contacted, Shalla Upazila Nirbahi Officer Al-Muktadir Hossain, Upazila Chairman Chowdhury Abdulla Al Mahmud, and Shalla Police Station's Officer-in-Charge Nazmul Haque gave an almost similar description of the incident.

Contacted, DC Zahangir Hossain said, "We have not found any negligence in duties of any officials of local administration in this incident."

"Nevertheless, legal action will be taken, if the negligence of any of our officers is found."

On Wednesday, Jhumon Das was produced before a court that sent him to jail.

However, no case has so far been filed against Jhumon till filing the report around 8:30pm last night.

Meanwhile, police filed another case with the same police station in this regard, Mizanur Rahman, superintendent of police in Sunamganj, told The Daily Star.

No further details were disclosed about the case.

Dhaka talks

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president and his advisers.

He further said Awami League's stand (vis-a-vis constitution-making) was clear and the whole world knew why the people of Bengal had made sacrifices. He, however, pointed out that it was not an easy problem and sufficient time was needed to solve it.

Later in the evening three advisers of the Awami League chief had a meeting with the advisers of the president.

On the 18th day of the non-cooperation movement, most of the schools, private offices and institutions remained closed in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. Black flags were hoisted atop houses and offices.

FIRING AT JOYDEBPUR

Curfew was imposed this evening in Joydebpur town following a clash between the local people and the army personnel, which resulted in the deaths of at least three persons.

The problem was triggered when locals of East Pakistan put up a barricade on the road to prevent a military commander from returning to Dhaka, who had earlier travelled to Joydebpur. The news of the attack angered the people of Dhaka. They immediately brought out spontaneous processions in the city.

Bangabandhu strongly condemned tonight the firing on the unarmed people at Joydebpur. Talking to newsmen, he said, "If they think they can suppress people's struggle by bullet and force, they simply live in a fool's paradise."

The Awami League chief said he wondered how the army could go to the Joydebpur Bazar when martial law authorities had stated that troops had already been withdrawn to the barracks.

'HANDOVER POWER TO BANGABANDHU'

NAP (Bhashani) Chief Maulana Bhashani today urged Yahya to immediately hand over power to the leader of the majority party, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. This is the only solution left to keep the two wings united, he added. Speaking at a meeting with journalists in Chittagong the Maulana said if Yahya didn't accept this proposal Bangabandhu should immediately declare independence.

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Cops recover

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added.

According to the police official, Sandeep went to Sunamganj for business a day before. Returning home, he found the main door of the house open around 6:00am yesterday.

As he entered the house, he found the bodies of his wife and daughter under the bed, the SI said, quoting Sandeep.

Parvej Alam Chowdhury, assistant superintendent of police in Habiganj, said a police team, including him, visited the spot on information.

"The incident must have happened between 4:00am and 6:00am as Anjali talked to her husband around 4:00am over the phone for the last time," he said.

Meanwhile, a neighbour of the family named Amir Ali, who lived on the second floor of the same building, was being questioned in police custody, he added.

Amir was found injured and had been taken to a hospital. He alleged that a thief injured him while stealing a sewing machine around 3:00am the same night.

A case will be filed in this regard, ASP Parvej said.

Suspect dies

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local chairman and Jewel's family members and tried to convince him to surrender.

At one point, Jewel poured petrol on him and set himself on fire, the OC said, adding that the petrol was collected from a motorcycle stolen allegedly by Jewel, said the OC.

Jewel died on the spot. Later, police recovered the body and sent it to the morgue of Sirajganj General Hospital.

The law enforcers also claimed to have recovered charred remains of three stolen motorcycles from the spot.

Contacted, Abdul Mazid, chairman of Mesra union, confirmed the incident.

The Daily Star tried to contact Jewel's family members for comments, but could not reach them over phone.

Australia rumbles

'nest of spies'

targeting

defence tech

AFP, Sydney

Australia's top spymaster has revealed that his agency disrupted a "nest of spies" sent by an unnamed foreign intelligence service to steal sensitive trade and defence secrets.

Mike Burgess, the head of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, said the group was disrupted last year, but not before recruiting an Australian official with "access to sensitive details of defence technology".

Myanmar faces growing

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others. Asian neighbours have offered to help find a solution, but the military has a long record of shunning outside pressure.

Large parts of an economy already reeling from the novel coronavirus have been paralysed by the protests and a parallel civil disobedience campaign of strikes against military rule, while many foreign investors are

reassessing plans.

The UN food agency warned this week that rising prices of food and fuel could undermine the ability of poor families to feed themselves.

"Whatever happens in Myanmar over coming months, the economy will collapse, leaving tens of millions in dire straits and needing urgent protection," historian and author Thant Myint-U said on Twitter.

'Cosmic web' reveals maze of dwarf galaxies

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billions of previously invisible -- and unsuspected -- dwarf galaxies spawning trillions of stars.

The findings were reported in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

"After an initial period of darkness, the Universe erupted with light and produced a huge number of stars," senior author Roland Bacon, a scientist

at the Centre for Astrophysics Research in Lyon, told AFP.

"One of the big questions is what ended that period of darkness," leading to a phase in the early Universe known as re-ionisation, he said.

Until now, astronomers had only caught partial and indirect glimpses of the cosmic web via quasars, whose powerful radiation, like car headlights,

reveals gas clouds along the line of sight.

But these regions do not represent the whole network of filaments where most galaxies -- including our own -- were born.

"These findings are fundamental," commented Emanuele Daddi, a researcher at Atomic Energy Commission who did not take part in the study.