

A cosmetic exercise at the cost of road victims

Board formed to settle compensation claims cannot function without the RTA rules

THE government has finally formed a trustee board to settle compensation claims over road accidents. While this is good news, one must wonder why it took so much time to form this board—three long years after the enactment of the Road Transport Act, 2018 (RTA), and around a year after the board's chairman and member secretary were appointed. Even worse, the formation of the board is now appearing to be a case of putting the horse before the cart: while the process of seeking compensation can now be started, the applications will not be processed until the RTA rules (which are yet to be formulated) determine the amounts and procedures to collect contributions for a government fund to pay for the compensation.

In this sense, the newly-formed board is purely cosmetic. Since the passing of the RTA, the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) has missed four submission deadlines for a draft of the rules, submitted an incomplete draft in 2019, and is now in the process of going back and forth with the law ministry with the "completed" rules. The latest update is that they are still working on the queries that have been sent to them, and it will take "some more time." We must ask: How much more time can be afforded to road accident victims who have been disabled for life, or have become insolvent while trying to pay for their hospital bills?

It is also frustrating to find that the board that has been formed does not include a single representative from organisations campaigning for road safety and victims' compensation, even though it includes representatives of transport owners and workers. Given that the delays in making the RTA functional have been a result of pressure from transport associations—and that the rules will determine how much these associations will contribute to the compensation fund—it was imperative to include board members who can keep such vested interests in check.

According to a police report in September, a total of 3,095 people were killed in 3,259 road crashes in the first seven months of this year alone. While deaths and injuries from road accidents continue to soar, justice for road accident victims faces one obstacle after another. This sluggish progress in providing compensation is an affront to their sufferings. The government must do everything in its power to ensure that there are no more delays in fully implementing the Road Transport Act as soon as possible.

Another burglary in the garb of e-commerce

The menace must be stopped

THE Bengali mind is known for its innovativeness. The Dholai Khal initiative is well-known nearly all over the world. While Dholai Khal brought relief to many and had a positive impact on the economy, innovativeness in other sectors of business has had the most damaging consequences. The business that is hogging the news currently is e-commerce—not for its positive contribution to society and the economy, but for the manner in which a perfectly novel way of trading has been corrupted to exploit people through fraud and deceit.

Another name has been added to the long list of fraudster companies that have cheated unsuspecting customers out of thousands of crores of taka: 24tk.com, an e-ticketing agency. Reportedly, this particular company has swindled Tk 50 crore out of smaller agencies and customers. What surprises us is that it is not one or two or even a dozen people that 24tk.com have managed to swindle, but 2,000—yes, 2,000 people. And they have been at it since 2019. The question is: how come? How has it been possible if the custodians have, as they claim, been keeping their antennae honed and their eyes open?

24tk.com made the best of both worlds. They bought thousands of tickets from larger agencies on credit and sold them to smaller agencies and individuals on cash. And it never paid their creditors. Thus, the ticket was not confirmed—something that the unwary travellers found to their chagrin once they went to check in. We would like to point out that while the amount is comparatively smaller than what the other e-commerce companies like Evaly have swindled out of people, here the sufferers are the expatriates; many of them are workers whose jobs are on the line if they don't report to their workplace in time.

We are happy to know that two of the owners of the company have been arrested. Interestingly, nearly 30 e-commerce agencies are currently under surveillance, according to the CID. Unfortunately, there must be loopholes in the system, since so many of them have escaped the net. Our opinion is that the fraudulent ones must be identified and caught before they can do more damage to people. What is the point of arresting a few operatives when the masterminds manage to flee the country? Nipping them *ab initio* is essential, since the long-drawn legal process allows very little of the swindled money to be returned to the rightful owners.

The deadly urban heat that can cripple our city



NAZNIN TITHI

IN yet another sign of rapid deterioration in the quality of life in Dhaka, a recent study, published by the US-based scientific journal PNAS, has found the city to be the worst-affected around the world due to extreme urban heat. According to the study, the dramatic rise of population in Dhaka between 1983 and 2016 is one of the key reasons behind the increasing heat the city has been experiencing. It's not just Dhaka; exposure to deadly urban heat now affects around a quarter of the world's population. Some other affected

million people in Dhaka have lost their productivity, the study has revealed. Apart from Dhaka, cities like Cumilla and Chattogram are also affected by severe urban heat.

Around the same time, a report by the World Bank, titled "Climate Afflictions Report," has revealed yet another worrying fact. It has found that infectious diseases are increasing in Bangladesh due to hotter and longer summers, warmer winters, and extended monsoons. The report found erratic weather conditions to be the main factor behind the 2019 dengue outbreak in Dhaka.

It's mid-October now. During this time of the year, we usually expect the temperature to drop a little in the city areas. But there is hardly any sign in nature that the weather will cool down anytime soon. Rather, the city dwellers

depression, and anxiety disorders, which will become more common in the future.

The PNAS study has pointed out that global warming due to climate change has played only a 20 percent role in the temperature rise in Dhaka between 1983 and 2016, while rapid population growth and unplanned urbanisation has had an 80 percent role behind it.

Currently, the population growth rate is 2.7 percent in Dhaka, which is the highest in the world. The city's population was four million in 1983, which increased to 20 million by 2016. In addition, people are continuously coming to the capital for different purposes, so on any given day, around 60 million people live in the city, the study has revealed.

Moreover, with rapid and unplanned urbanisation, the greenery of the city has

According to the lead researcher of the study, in addition to increasing morbidity and mortality, extreme heat reduces people's productivity or their ability to work, resulting in lower economic output.



Unplanned urbanisation and development have made Dhaka a concrete jungle that traps heat.

FILE PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

cities are Shanghai and Guangzhou in China, Yangon in Myanmar, Bangkok in Thailand, and Dubai in the United Arab Emirates—which also experienced rapid population growth.

Scientists have found that rising temperatures and growing numbers of people living in urban areas combined have led to this situation, and warned that extreme heat would have devastating consequences for the urban population.

What happens when urban areas face increasing heat? According to the lead researcher of the study, in addition to increasing morbidity and mortality, extreme heat reduces people's productivity or their ability to work, resulting in lower economic output. Due to extreme heat, a total of 57.5

are now experiencing sweltering heat, which is affecting their ability to function properly. The World Bank report has found that not only are the summers getting hotter and the winters warmer, the monsoon is getting longer too—it now spans from February to October.

Bangladesh's temperature has increased by 0.5 degrees Celsius over the last 44 years, and is predicted to rise by another 1.4 degrees by 2050. With a one-degree rise in temperature, 9.3 percent more people are likely to suffer from respiratory diseases, while for one percent increase in humidity, there may be a 12.5 percent increase in the number of such patients, as the report has found. Extreme weather conditions can also cause mental illnesses, such as mood swings,

decreased to a minimum level, while the rivers and wetlands surrounding it have been filled up for illegal purposes as well as to make room for the growing population. The result of that is: Dhaka has literally become a concrete jungle. According to the Bangladesh Institute of Planners (BIP), 75 percent of the city area is now covered with concrete structures. With its greenery gone and concrete structures and asphalt surfaces trapping and concentrating heat, the temperature of the city has increased significantly.

Research has found that many areas in Dhaka, Chattogram, and Khulna are turning into "urban heat islands" due to unplanned urbanisation and development. It is feared that more of such heat islands will be created in the

future if the issue is not addressed by the city authorities urgently. By now, 70 percent areas of the capital city and 60 percent areas of the port city have turned into heat islands. If the trend continues, Dhaka and Chattogram will soon become extremely climate vulnerable (Prothom Alo, April 22, 2021).

With Dhaka being severely affected by extreme heat and adverse weather patterns, and its population being exposed to infectious diseases, the residents' ability to work will decrease inevitably. The exposure to extreme heat will particularly affect the urban poor who live in slums in cramped conditions, without basic healthcare and other facilities.

If people are not able to work and function properly, if their productivity decreases from being exposed to extreme heat, what purpose will our big infrastructure development projects serve? If all our wetlands are filled up and rivers are grabbed, and all the greenery in the city is stolen, will the metro rail, the giant concrete structures mushrooming everywhere in the city, the big shopping malls and housing projects erected illegally on filled-up land let this city breathe?

To stop this worrying trend of temperature rise in Dhaka and other major cities, urgent action needs to be taken. Enough damage has already been done to our cities due to our ignorance and inaction. We have no time to waste. While we must have a national plan to fight against the impacts of climate change—which is one of the reasons behind the rise in Dhaka's temperature—reducing the population growth, focusing on planned urbanisation, increasing the greenery and reclaiming the wetlands in the city must also be given due importance if we want to save Dhaka from becoming a crippled city.

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The third era of climate change is upon us



SALEEMUL HUQ

THE issue of climate change was first identified by the scientific community three decades ago, through the first assessment report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),

and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was agreed upon back in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since then, the issue has grown in importance, and the way that it is understood by different groups of people around the world has changed several times. Here, I will describe my take on the evolution of the understanding and perception of climate change, which has now become a global emergency.

The first era of climate change viewed the problem through the first assessment report of the IPCC, and led to the environmental perspective where the problem was defined as a result of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and, therefore, the solution was to reduce those emissions. The process of doing so was termed "mitigation" and denoted the first era of perceptions and pledges of action. It led to all countries agreeing to take actions to reduce emissions under the UNFCCC. However, despite that promise, the GHG emissions continued to rise, and are still doing so today.

This, then, was followed by the second era of climate change, through the third assessment report of the IPCC, which was published in 2001 and highlighted the failure of mitigation actions. The report cautioned about the failure leading to the adverse impacts of climate change, which would be unavoidable in the near future. Hence, there was a need to prepare for those adverse impacts by adaptation to climate change. I had the privilege of being a lead author of that report, which

highlighted the importance of adaptation for the first time.

An important corollary of this message was that not every community in every country would be adversely affected immediately—the poorest communities in the poorest countries would be the first to experience the impact; hence, tackling climate change was no longer just an environmental issue, but a development issue as well. This era of climate change drew in development actors both globally

and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was agreed upon for mitigation, and a global goal on adaptation was accepted to be developed. The latter goal will be a major subject of discussion in the upcoming COP26, hosted by the United Kingdom in November this year, in Glasgow, Scotland.

After the publication of the sixth assessment report of the IPCC in August this year, we have now entered the third era of climate change, which is about the

which is completely unjust and indeed immoral.

We still need to continue—and do much more of—mitigation and adaptation, but we also have to address the inevitable loss and damage from human-induced climate change going forward. Thus, COP26 will be the first climate summit of this new era, and all countries will need to rise to this new challenge.

I will conclude by making a few suggestions on how to do so.

Firstly, the objective of the UNFCCC, the actions to reduce emissions, and adapting to climate change is no longer about the future, but about the present as we are already seeing the costs of loss and damage occurring in almost every country. These costs will rise exponentially, at least in the near term, so the new metric for measuring success is how much the loss and damage of climate change is minimised, as it can no longer be avoided or prevented. This will be a major paradigm shift, for which COP26 will have to lay the foundations to deal with it in every COP onwards.

The second point to recognise is that, as of 2021, the loss and damage of climate change is no longer a developing-country-centric issue, but a global issue as rich countries are beginning to feel the hurt as well.

The third and final point is that a significant paradigm shift is necessary to treat the climate change emergency as an issue of injustice where poor people are suffering due to the pollution caused by rich people—this is immoral and unacceptable. It is, therefore, time for every conscious citizen on Planet Earth to think in terms of solidarity for all the victims of loss and damage, and extend a helping hand towards their fellow human beings. Hence, in this new era, everyone, everywhere, needs to take actions to reach that goal every day; we cannot wait for the leaders alone to act.

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A climate activist calls for immediate action during the Global March for Climate Justice in Milan, Italy, on October 2, 2021.

PHOTO: REUTERS

through the United Nations agencies and multilateral development banks, and nationally with the government authorities of planning and development.

The era of adaptation has been pursued since then, in parallel with the era of mitigation, which still continues.

Both mitigation and adaptation were enshrined in the Paris Agreement on climate change at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) in 2015, where the goal of keeping the global temperature

loss and damage attributable to GHG emissions since the Industrial Revolution, which has already raised global mean temperature over one degree Celsius, which is already causing severe adverse impacts around the world.

While the first era was under an environmental paradigm and the second era under a development paradigm, the third era is under a climate justice paradigm as the problems are caused by the rich and the victims are the poor—