

# Reckless driving takes another life

Nothing will change if we cannot bring the guilty drivers to justice

NOT even a week has passed since Nayeem Hasan—a second-year student of Notre Dame College—was killed in a road accident in the city, that we came to know about another student’s death in a road crash in the capital’s Rampura area. Mainuddin Islam Durjoy, a student of Rampura Ekramunnessa High School, was run over by a bus of Anabil Paribahan in Rampura on November 29. The 19-year-old just finished his SSC exams and was hoping to get enrolled in a good college when reckless driving took away his life. The accident happened at a time when students have been demonstrating for safer roads in the city, demanding the enforcement of the Road Transport Act, 2018, as well as justice and compensation for Nayeem and other road crash victims.

Besides these two accidents that got people’s attention, several other accidents also took place in the last one week. Among them, the killing of Ahasan Kabir Khan, an employee of the Daily Sangbad, by a garbage compactor vehicle of the Dhaka North City Corporation, and the death of three students in Chandpur as a BRITC bus hit their CNG-run auto-rickshaw, were reported in *The Daily Star*. What we have seen in Nayeem, Mainuddin and Ahasan’s cases is that the drivers first hit them, and as they fell on the street, they ran over them. The lives of all three victims could have been saved if the drivers had stopped their vehicles on time instead of running them over. The sheer indifference shown by the drivers towards human lives is truly abhorrent.

As the number of road accidents rises in the country, we want to ask the authorities: What is the point of formulating a law if it remains largely unenforced? Do the authorities really care about people’s lives or are they just trying to serve the interests of the transport owners and workers? Why did the government make amendments—which is in the draft form—to the Act even before enforcing it?

It is unfortunate that the transport owners and workers protested against some very important sections of the Act and the government actually bowed down to those demands. According to the Road Transport Act, 2018, there was a provision of maximum punishment of five years’ imprisonment for causing death and serious injuries to a person through reckless driving. However, in the amended Act, the punishment of maximum five years’ imprisonment for serious injuries has been excluded. According to transport experts, the changes were brought to the Act without holding discussions with the concerned stakeholders, which is shocking.

The increasing number of deaths on our roads and the growing anarchy in our public transport sector need to be addressed at all costs and for that, there is no alternative to enforcing the transport act. If the guilty drivers in the above-mentioned—and other—cases can be made to face justice, we may hope to see some changes on our roads.

Savar tanneries’ shutdown comes too late in the day

Authorities must urgently protect the Dhaleshwari River from further pollution

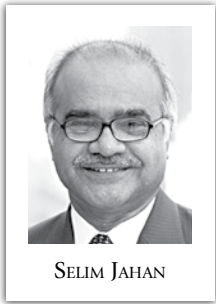
WE are delighted to hear that the environment ministry has agreed to its watchdog’s recommendation to shut down the Savar Tannery Industrial Estate immediately, which has been causing irreparable damage to the Dhaleshwari River for the last 10 years. The unchecked dumping of toxic waste generated at the tanneries has not only choked the river, but has had severe repercussions on the lives and livelihoods of the people living around it as well.

While we applaud this step in the right direction, we feel compelled to point out that this decision has already come too late in the day. According to a 2019 report by *The Daily Star*, ever since the Savar Tannery Industrial Estate started dumping effluents into the river in mid-2016, this relentless pollution has all but killed the Dhaleshwari. Around 1,500 fishermen who used to earn a livelihood from the river have had to move on to other professions, there is a constant stench emanating from its waters—which has become unusable even for farming, let alone bathing—and children living near it have been put at risk of water-borne diseases. The excuse given for this sorry state of affairs is that the estate simply does not have the capacity to treat all the waste that it generates. But why has this capacity not been built up in all these years?

What truly beggars belief is that this wanton destruction of the river and its surrounding environment, exposing local populations to a myriad of health hazards, has been going on despite the fact that the estate has no environmental clearance from the relevant authorities. The Department of Environment’s own statistics show that, in the last three years, the estate has dumped around 1.60 lakh cubic metres of waste into the river—yet, it has been allowed to continue operating.

According to a report in this daily, the process of shutting down the Savar tannery estate will now be initiated only after the industries ministry receives a letter from the environment ministry. We urge the authorities to not drag their feet in going through these different layers of administration, especially since it has already taken more than three months from the initial recommendation to shut down the estate to actually coming to the decision to follow it. We are also concerned to find that the Savar tannery estate will be given the opportunity to apply for fresh environmental clearance and re-start operations after meeting all necessary requirements. Can a tannery estate built on the banks of a dying river ever meet these requirements? In 2003, the government took the initiative to move all tanneries from the capital’s Hazaribagh area to protect the Buriganga. We strongly urge the authorities to take a similar initiative in the case of the Savar estate in order to protect the Dhaleshwari and restore the local environment.

# Bijoyphool: A symbol of our struggle and victory



pay him a visit, I was proudly wearing a *Bijoyphool* (victory flower) as one of its Global Ambassadors. The flower beamed on the left lapel of my jacket. In fact, I was also carrying a *Bijoyphool* in my pocket to give it to the vice premier as a present. Soon I was received by the vice premier himself, a person of medium height, but with a pair of inquisitive eyes. After we exchanged pleasantries, the first thing he asked as he pointed to the flower on my

time, I became emotional remembering the sacrifices made by millions of people of my country.

In my role as a *Bijoyphool* Ambassador, I have been spreading the message of this symbolic flower to groups of people in different countries; following the instructions on its website (<http://www.bijoyphool.co.uk>). I myself made *Bijoyphools* and pinned them on friends, colleagues and peers. In Vientiane, I did the same to the members of the High-Level Consultative Panel on the 2018 Human Development Report. The panel included, among others, the former finance and planning minister of Pakistan, the former governor of the Central Bank Nepal (now minister of finance) and the advisor on Science and Technology in Malaysia. Every year, from the first day of every December till the 16th—Victory Day—people wear it on their dress over their heart.

The notion of the *Bijoyphool* was

(freedom fighters)is a *Bijoyphool* too. Third, it is not only a symbol, but also an instrument. Using this flower, we can talk about our country, its history, our culture and heritage. Through it, we can take our future generations to their roots.

Today, it may serve another purpose. Bangladesh was established on the basis of four fundamental principles—nationalism, democracy, socialism in the sense of social justice, and secularism. Over the years, for various reasons, the country has moved away from its four founding principles. We have also forgotten that people’s emancipation is larger than political independence. That is why Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nation, finished his historic March 7 speech by saying: “This struggle is a struggle for our emancipation, this struggle is a struggle for independence.” Political independence is a necessary condition for people’s emancipation, but on its own, it

*It symbolises the Liberation War of Bangladesh, its ultimate victory and independence. The Bijoyphool also represents remembrance—through this symbolic flower, we remember our heroic freedom fighters, their contributions and supreme sacrifices.*



We want the spirit and the history of our Liberation War to remain intact from generation to generation. PHOTO: ARCHIVES

jacket lapel was, “What is that?”

His question gave me the opportunity to explain to him the significance of the *Bijoyphool*. When I finished, I politely asked him whether I could pin a flower on him. His warm response was, “It would be an honour”. As I was pinning it on the left side of his jacket, I was overcome with mixed feelings. I was very humbled but felt proud that I had this unique opportunity to present to a leader of a country something which is reflective of Bangladesh, its Liberation War and our ultimate and glorious victory. At the same

originally conceived in London, following the idea of the poppy flower in Britain. Thus, the conceptual framework of the *Bijoyphool*—not a real, but an abstract flower—is broader and deeper. Three things are crucial with regard to the *Bijoyphool*. First, it symbolises the Liberation War of Bangladesh, its ultimate victory and independence. Second, the *Bijoyphool* also represents remembrance—through this symbolic flower, we remember our heroic freedom fighters, their contributions and supreme sacrifices. In a way, each one of our *Muktijoddhas*

is not sufficient.

Using the *Bijoyphool*, we may say that out of the five petals of it, four may represent the four forgotten fundamental founding principles of Bangladesh, and the fifth petal may represent our political independence. And the red sun in the middle may reflect our yet to be achieved emancipation for our people. Such interpretation of the *Bijoyphool* may remind us of the path that Bangladesh set for itself in 1971.

One wonders as to why a group of people living abroad became so excited

# What did COP26 do to deal with loss and damage?



human-induced climate change to get significant attention in the COP process, as well as outside the COP process. Now, after COP26 is over, we can discuss what was achieved, as well as what was not achieved, and where we will go from here as we head towards COP27 in Egypt in November 2022.

The first item to discuss would be the follow-up of the decision from the 2019 COP25 in Madrid to set up the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage (SNLD) to provide research and technical assistance on the issue of loss and damage from human-induced climate change. However, the COP25 decision did not work out the details of how the SNLD would be set up and what exactly it would do. These issues were discussed in the first week of COP26 in Glasgow and a way forward was agreed upon, including the decision to hold further workshops and finalise the setup in COP27 next year.

While this was indeed a positive outcome, it only touched on the technical

assistance required for loss and damage and did not address any realistic aspects of it, such as finance.

So, in the second week of COP26, all the developing countries under the Group of 77—which represents over 136 developing countries with a total population of five billion people—and China, put forward language for the creation of the Glasgow Facility to finance the solutions to loss and damage as part of the overall Glasgow Climate Pact that was the final outcome of COP26.

However, this proposal from the entire developing countries group was watered down at the insistence of the US and some other rich nations, which agreed to only hold a dialogue on finance for loss and damage, and the COP26 Presidency pushed developing countries to accept this outcome as part of the Glasgow Climate Pact.

This extremely disappointing outcome had to therefore be accepted, heavy-heartedly, by the most vulnerable developing countries and the most vulnerable communities in all countries.

But the story did not end there, given a very significant development that took place in Glasgow, outside the COP venue. This was the creation of a new Loss and Damage Fund set up with GBP 1 million from the Government of Scotland and offered by Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, which she challenged the other leaders to match. Over the course of the two weeks of

COP26, this fund was increased by a number of philanthropic foundations, including one million Euros from the Province of Wallonia in Belgium. Sturgeon also doubled the contribution of Scotland itself by the end of COP26.

I had the good fortune of being invited to meet First Minister Nicola Sturgeon at her residence in Edinburgh after COP26 ended, and she reiterated her commitment to supporting both

damage in all countries, and which will have to be dealt with regardless of any COP decisions.

Thus, every country, including Bangladesh, has to work out the possibility of loss and damage from human-induced climate change occurring at national and local levels, and develop national strategies to deal with those impacts, regardless of any global action



An advertising board is seen during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland on November 7, 2021. PHOTO: REUTERS/YVES HERMAN

funding and actions to address loss and damage going forward.

So while the outcome of COP26 itself was disappointing, it nevertheless has paved the way for discussion of loss and damage to continue till COP27 next year. Under the Presidency of Egypt, we can also expect this issue to be treated much more seriously than it was in Glasgow.

A final and extremely important aspect of the COP26 journey, which is bound to persist, is the reality of the adverse impacts of human-induced climate change which are causing real loss and

or inaction.

Bangladesh has an opportunity to be a leader in tackling loss and damage, as it has been on adaptation, going forward. This will require another all-of-society approach by government, parliament, NGOs, academics, media and youth working together at the local and national levels and also linking with other countries through South-South as well as South-North collaboration.

Dr Saleemul Huq is Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh.