

2021 saw spike in road deaths Says Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Another road safety organisation said the number of road crashes and resultant deaths saw a sharp rise last year, reinforcing the impression that road safety has deteriorated further in the country.

Road crashes and deaths were higher by 16.8 percent and 15.35 percent respectively last year, compared to 2020, said Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity yesterday.

At least 7,809 people were killed and 9,039 injured in 5,629 road accidents last year while in 2020, at least 6,686 people were killed in 4,891 crashes, the organisation said.

Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of the organisation, shared the information at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters' Unity, where it also placed recommendations. The organisation prepared the report based on media reports.

Road safety organisations Road Safety Foundation and Nirapad Sarak Chai had earlier said the number of road crashes increased last year.

Although more people are getting killed in road accidents than dying due to Covid, the government's steps for ensuring road safety are not as visible as those taken to curb militancy or Covid, Mozammel said.

Anarchy in the road transport sector is tarnishing the government's achievements, he added. "The government's reluctance about ensuring road safety matches its enthusiasm for road development."

Reckless driving, dangerous overtaking, unfit vehicles, lack of awareness among pedestrians, unskilled drivers, poor enforcement of law and dependency on bikes and three-wheelers in absence of public transport are major reasons behind the rise of accidents, he said.



Some of the fasting students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology get intravenous rehydration yesterday, the fifth day of their hunger strike demanding resignation of their vice-chancellor. Demonstrations at the university gained momentum after a clash between police and the students left 30 injured on January 16.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Take measures for VC's removal

Sust Teachers' Association urges govt; two MPs echo the demand; 4 more students join hunger strike

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, *Sylhet*

Sust Teachers' Association yesterday urged the government to take steps for the resignation of Vice-Chancellor Farid Uddin Ahmed and to meet all demands of the students, so that their hunger strike stops.

The association also called for the formation of a neutral probe body to investigate the police action of January 16, Dr Tulshi Kumar Das, president of the teachers body, told media after a meeting of the association.

On Saturday night, four Sust students joined their fellows in a hunger strike demanding the VC's resignation.

This takes the number of fasting students to 27.

Of the 23 students who have been fasting since Wednesday afternoon, 16 were taken to different hospitals. They are yet to break their fast.

At Jalalabad Ragib-Rabeya Medical College Hospital and Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, doctors told this correspondent that the students were refusing to eat or take oral medication and their health was failing.

A spokesperson for the demonstrators said two of the hospitalised students were asthmatic and one was diabetic.

The protesters blocked the entry to VC's residence yesterday afternoon and disconnected the water and electricity supplies to the residence around 7:00pm, the spokesperson added.

On January 13, a group of resident students began demonstrating, alleging that their provost, Zafrin Ahmed Liza, misbehaved with a student who called her to report bad food and other issues.

On January 16, police fired rubber bullets and threw sound grenades in a clash that left over 30 students injured.

Meanwhile, Education Minister Dipu Moni spoke with a delegation of the protestors in a video call early yesterday for almost an hour. The students said they would not break their fast until the VC resigned.

"The VC continues meeting with people as if nothing is happening. We are blocking the gate. No one, except police and reporters, will be allowed to enter or exit the residence," a spokesperson told reporters.

TWO MPS DEMAND SUST VC'S RESIGNATION

Jatiya Party lawmakers Kazi Feroz Rashid and Pir Fazlur Rahman, speaking on a point of order in parliament yesterday, said the VC should resign and criticised the education minister for urging the students to travel to Dhaka.

"We have all been involved in student movements. We know that no student will ever leave the field and come to Dhaka. The minister should wear two masks and go there," Feroz said.

He added that VCs' positions are not permanent and that the university would not be closed if the VC left.

"There is nothing more tragic than students on a hunger strike for the removal of a vice-chancellor."

"I think there is no need to form an enquiry committee, nor is there a need to discuss with anyone. I will urge the education minister and the prime minister to remove the vice-chancellor by today [yesterday]."

Pir Fazlur said, "If he does not want to resign voluntarily, the government should remove him by today [yesterday]."

Omicron raging at community

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spread as Delta, which explains the surge in new cases over the past few weeks.

In Bangladesh, which experienced months of low deaths and cases, cases started picking up again around the same time that Omicron was identified on December 9 last year.

In the 24 hours to 8 am yesterday, the DGHS reported 10,906 new cases, up from 9,614 in the preceding day.

The deadly Delta variant is still dominant, according to Islam.

"Omicron is gradually taking the place of Delta," he said, while presenting a statistic on the sign and symptoms of the Omicron infection in the bulletin.

The runny nose appears to be giveaways of infection

with the Omicron variant: 73 percent experienced it.

It was followed by headache (68 percent), fatigue (64 percent), sneezing (60 percent), sore throat (60 percent) and cough (44 percent).

The DGHS compiled the data from different sources at home and abroad for mass awareness, Islam told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We have to keep these symptoms [of Omicron infection] in mind. They are, however, similar to those of seasonal flu and influenza," he said, adding that one should seek medical advice if one experiences any of the symptoms.

Asked when to get to the hospital, he said: "When any Covid-19 positive patient experiences unpleasant physical conditions like lower oxygen saturation

[breathing difficulties], abnormal increase in sugar level or hypertension or any, they should go to the hospital."

At the bulletin, Islam said the upward trend of Covid-19 cases will not stop if people continue to break the hygiene rules.

"The number of patients at hospitals has increased significantly, and this trend is continuing," he said.

He also put caution over the upcoming book fair.

"We would like to request that those who are associated with the book fair complete their vaccination before the start of the fair."

Anyone who attends the book fair, especially those over the age of 60 or who work on the frontlines, should get their booster dose of the Covid-19 vaccine.

Legal cover for past ECs is the mainstay

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Khan Menon said the law should be enacted in a better manner after analysing its different aspects.

JP Chairman GM Quader said the law should be formulated in a way that is acceptable to all.

Both of them said they would submit proposals to amend the law.

The president held the dialogue with 25 registered political parties from December 20 to January 17 on formation of an EC ahead of the 12th general election slated to be held at the end of 2023 or in early 2024.

THE BILL
The bill says the previous

search committees, their functions and the appointments of the CECs and other commissioners made following their recommendations will be deemed valid, and no question can be raised in any court over the matter.

It will be considered that the incumbent and previous ECs were constituted as per the law.

As per the proposed law, a search committee will be formed following the president's approval for forming the EC.

"The search committee will recommend names of candidates for the chief election commissioner and other commissioners to the president..." it said.

The committee will be headed by a judge of the Supreme Court's Appellate Division, to be nominated by the chief justice.

The five other members will be a justice of the High Court Division nominated by the chief justice, the Comptroller and Auditor General, the chairman of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission, and two other personalities nominated by the president.

HARUN'S OPPOSITION, ANISUL'S REPLY
BNP's Harun told parliament the proposed law did not fulfil expectations of the people, political parties and civil society platforms.

"We have long been calling for enacting a law to strengthen the Election Commission. Various political parties and civil society platforms have already given their reaction on the issue. The BNP has termed the bill a mockery with people," he said.

He also said there was nothing new in the proposed law.

Backed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Law Minister Anisul rejected the allegation and claimed that no other country has a law for forming EC in such a transparent manner.

"If this bill is passed and the Election Commission

is formed through it, the BNP will not be able to engage in vote rigging. This is why the party is so angry," he said.

He scrapped Harun's allegation that the proposed law aims to legalise all misdeeds of the Election commissions.

"They want to create a political issue. They want to wage movement over the matter," he said, adding, "The constitution says that a law should be made for the formation of the Election Commission. That is why we are formulating this law. Without even understanding, they are calling it a law for the search committee."

Uphold democracy

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Fifteen of them will receive the BPM gallantry and 25 the PPM gallantry awards for their courageous and heroic activities for 2020.

Besides, 25 personnel will get the BPM-Service and 50 the PPM-Service awards for their outstanding performances in unearthing the mystery

of important cases and controlling crimes and for commendable contributions with skills, piety, integrity and disciplinary behaviour.

In 2021, another 115 members of the police and Rab received awards for the prestigious BPMs and PPMs for their outstanding performances.

Of the awardees, 15 will receive the BPM-gallantry, 25 the PPM-gallantry, 25 the BPM-Service and 50 the PPM-Service awards.

The last police week was held in 2019. The Police Week did not take place in the past two years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. So, medals for both years were given together.

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out victorious.

Neither will the parliament bring the changes necessary to the bill to make it democratic, opined the jurist. "A comparative analysis of the bills placed at the parliament and the laws that get passed show that the members of the parliament do not even change the punctuation," said Shahdeen.

The government has long been at loggerheads with multiple political parties regarding whether the next Election Commission will be formed by a law, or through a search committee.

Civil society members have been demanding a

law, saying that a search committee will curry favour to partisanism.

The draft law for the EC formation bears no difference with the president's gazette circulated in 2017, announcing the formation of a search committee, said Dilip Kumar Sarkar, the central coordinator of Shujan, a civil society platform working for good governance.

"Upon analysing the gazette and the draft bill, it is clear that this is not a law for forming an Election Commission, but rather a law for forming a search committee," he said.

"The general people did not have a pleasant experience with the past

two election commissions formed by search committees," Dilip added.

The draft law is no different from the gazette regarding the job responsibilities of the search committee, how many candidates each committee member can recommend and many other areas.

There is no scope in the law to truly scrutinise whether the candidates being proposed for the EC are fair and impartial, said Dilip. "Their eligibility will only be judged based on certain documentary evidence. But this needs the involvement of civic and political voices."

But because there is no provision to make public

names of the candidates being proposed by the search committee, there is no way to know who is being selected and why.

"They are not being transparent," said Dilip added.

Shujan Executive Member Justice Abdul Matin said, "The search process must be public. The candidates must be interviewed by the public in a public hearing."

The law was not done with good motives, he opined.

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (retired) Sakhawat Hussain questioned, whether the law has a conflict with article 48(3) of the constitution, which states that the

president must take the prime minister's advice when making decisions.

Dilip said there is a chance that the commission will be formed as per the PM's choice because the search committee might not make names of the candidates public while the president must abide by the PM's advice.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association, said, "If the government does not have the intention of giving the people a fair election, then the Election Commission will never be fair."

Shujan Secretary Badiul Alam Majumder moderated the event.

Secretariat puts ban on visitors

BSS, Dhaka

The Secretariat has imposed a ban on visitors' entry for an indefinite period on account of the Covid-19 surge.

"The Cabinet Division has ordered the restriction to be enforced from January 24," Md Shahinoor Miah, principal information officer, said yesterday.

Khaleda exempted from court hearing

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday exempted BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia from personal appearance for the hearing on the Gatco graft case.

Judge Muhammad Ali Hussain of Dhaka's Special Judge's Court-3 issued the order in response to a petition filed by Tasvir-UL Islam, now out of jail following an executive order from the government, is unwell and cannot commute.

The next hearing is on March 13.

FR TOWER FORGERY CASE Lower court given go-ahead for trial

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday cleared the way for a lower court to run the trial proceedings of a case filed over forging the design of FR Tower.

The HC bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman also rejected a petition filed by Tasvir-UL Islam, an owner of the building, for quashing trial proceedings, Deputy Attorney General AKM Amin Uddin Manik told The Daily Star.

After a fire ravaged the FR Tower in the city in March 2019, a case was filed against 16 over violation of building code. The tower was raised to 23 floors from 19 through fake clearance, and upper floors were illegally mortgaged and sold.

Arrest warrant issued against SI for rape

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

A Panchagarh court has issued an arrest warrant against a sub-inspector on charges of raping a widow.

Md Mehedi Hasan, judge of Panchagarh Women and Children Repressions Prevention Tribunal, yesterday issued the order to arrest SI Abdul Jalil of Kurigram Police Station in a case filed by the victim.

According to the case, Jalil was investigating a land dispute case filed by the woman earlier. During the probe, he raped her for months by faking a marriage registry document.

Run with half staff till Feb 6

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such that the third wave of the coronavirus can be contained efficiently.

Banks have also been asked to ensure that their

employees and clients wear facemask regularly, according to a central bank notice issued yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Public Service Commission

(BPSC) in a circular has asked the examinees to carry Covid-19 vaccine certificates at the time of exams including written and oral tests.