

The roads of death

Road crashes have become the norm in Bangladesh, claiming lives on a regular basis



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DREAMS meet devastating ends on the roads and highways of Bangladesh almost every day. Puja Sarkar's death is one of the latest examples. The young scientist was on track to fulfil her dreams, despite all the challenges she had faced in life. With unflinching determination and hard work, she went on to finish her graduation with distinction, and joined Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC). On the personal front, her life seemed to be as close to perfect as she could ever hope for. She had married the love of her life, Tanmoy Majumder, a doctor, and she had been expecting a baby. Three months ago, Puja was reunited with Tanmoy, who had recently been transferred to a Manikganj hospital after being posted in Patuakhali for two years. The couple were finally together and were eagerly awaiting the arrival of their bundle of joy. Her Canadian expatriate uncle, Subrata Nandy, in a heart-wrenching Facebook post, said Puja, expressing her gratitude for facilitating Tanmoy's transfer, told him, "I don't want anything else. I am

per day in May 2022, while this number was 18 in April. Last month, 528 road crashes took place, where at least 641 people were killed and 1,364 were injured. Of the dead, 97 were children and 84 were women, shows the organisation's monthly data compiled on the basis of media reports. The figure, however, could be even higher as many accidents in remote areas do not make their way to newspaper headlines. The World Bank estimates the costs related to road crashes could be as high as 5.1 percent of the GDP.

And every time a fatal accident or a death of a prominent person happens, it stirs commotion among the general masses, prompting the government to take measures. In a knee-jerk reaction, the government takes no time in forming probe committees who make recommendations. Some piecemeal measures are also seen from the authorities concerned in conducting mobile courts. But after a few days, the heat dies down and the issue is forgotten until the next major crash. In the meantime, precious lives are lost. Beyond those who get killed, the stories of road crash survivors are even grimmer as their families reel under acute economic shocks.

But how long will we have to bear with the procession of the dead? Are the authorities concerned giving due importance to road safety issues? A few instances could give an indication

Such road tragedies have become commonplace in Bangladesh, with hundreds dying and countless becoming disabled, destroying the dreams of many families and often leaving them destitute. Of late, there seems to be a frightening spike in these road crashes. Things have turned so terrifying now that many feel that they must go out on the road with a death threat constantly hanging over their heads. Day in and day out, newspapers and TV channels report road crashes and deaths, along with the horrible pictures of the crashes in various parts of Bangladesh.

now the happiest person in the world, the first step in fulfilling my dream. Tanmoy will have his FCPS completed, he will be a good doctor. Life is really beautiful, uncle."

But everything was shattered in the blink of an eye on June 5, when a speeding long-haul bus rammed into the BAEC staff bus carrying Puja, viciously cutting this bright young woman's life short. Two of her colleagues were also killed in the accident on the Dhaka-Aricha highway. And obviously, Puja's accident exposed the gaping anomalies in our public transport system. According to media reports, the killer bus's fitness certificate and tax token had expired in 2014 and 2015, respectively. The harrowing picture of the crash shows the recklessness of the bus driver. The driver lost control over the steering and first hit a bus parked by the road before swerving into a cattle-laden truck. The bus then ploughed through the road divider and hit the BAEC bus on the other side of the road.

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of just how serious they are about this. Following an unprecedented student movement for road safety in the wake of the deaths of two students in 2018, the government was forced to enact the Road Transport Act (RTA). Many considered the new law a silver lining in the darkest cloud of relentless road accidents. But soon it appeared to be an attempt to quell the heat generated by the protest. Within months, the government's slow-go approach to implement the law became evident as it tried to balance the interests of passengers and that of vehicle owners and their workers. Road safety campaigners alleged that several key sections of the act remain "ineffective" following "negotiations" between transport associations and the government since November 2019. Regrettably, four years after enacting the law, the government has failed to formulate rules required to make it effective, preventing the authorities from executing some of its vital sections. Sadly, there is no indication from the relevant government agencies about the progress of framing the rules that have been caught in red tape.

Here's another example of state apathy to the public's concern about road safety. The government has a National Road Safety Council (NRSC), the apex body to take policy decisions over road safety issues, which approves strategic action plans for improving road safety. Formed in 1995, the NRSC has so far approved eight action plans, the last one getting the nod in November 2017, with a deadline of December 2020. The tenure of the existing plan has expired, but no new action plan has been approved as of now. A draft for the National Road

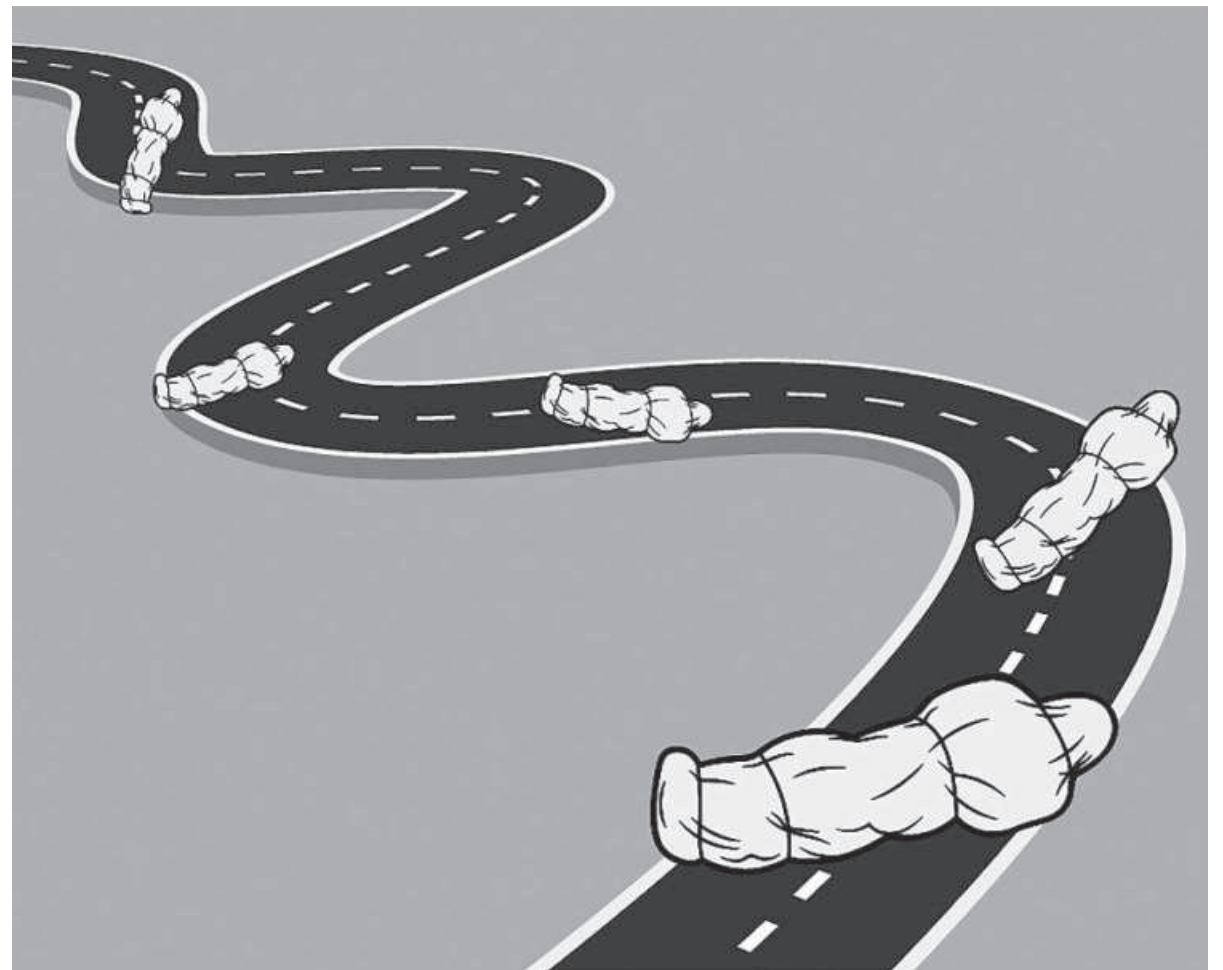


ILLUSTRATION: TEENI AND TUNI

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Safety Strategic Action Plan 2021-2024 was prepared over a year ago, but it apparently could not be sanctioned, as no NRSC meeting was held over the last one year. In fact, there is a clear lack of accountability everywhere in this sector. We have different bodies to ensure road safety, but apparently, they are not empowered and lack effective coordination to get expected outcomes. These organisations are also not held accountable.

As a result, the roads remain as hazardous as ever. Reckless driving, movement of unfit vehicles, gross violation and poor enforcement of traffic rules, and a lack of awareness among road users are all too common. The bus drivers are least bothered about safety, despite all the horrific accidents. In fact, they enjoy an unbridled freedom to flout basic road safety rules, such as speed limits and overtaking, and picking up and dropping off passengers from anywhere they please, because they want to meet the commercial needs of the owners. Passengers' safety is not a concern. They believe they can get away with killing people, as instances of drivers who are at fault getting punished by law are hardly seen. On the other hand, the law enforcers don't always show the desired urgency to enforce the rules and regulations to penalise

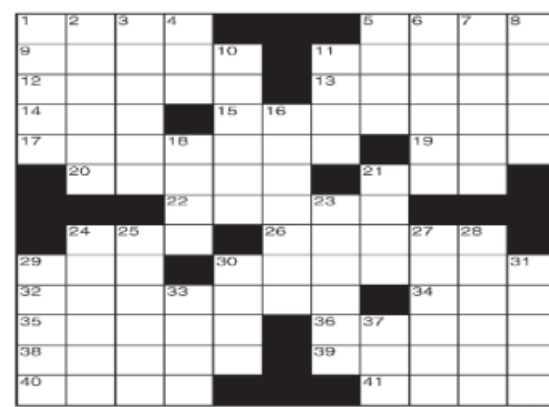
the violators. As citizens, we also don't play the role as desired since we tend to flout the laws, putting our own lives at jeopardy.

The problems beset with our transport sector are all known and well discussed: Reckless and rash driving, dilapidated road conditions, countless unfit and unregistered vehicles, unlicensed and unqualified drivers and so on. Experts have time and again talked about the problems along with solutions; meetings and seminars are often held; and road safety campaigners continue their campaigns round the year to try to make the roads safe. But without effective measures to ensure discipline and compliance with traffic rules, road accidents continue unabated.

So, how many people would have to die before the authorities concerned will wake up and take the right steps to fix the disorderly, unsafe public transport system? When will our policymakers truly realise that road crashes have become a national problem? Unless the government ensures strict enforcement of the law, metes out stringent punishment to offenders and violators, and creates mass awareness, death will continue to stalk us on the roads and shatter the dreams of many more Puja Sarkars. We cannot afford to be so callous.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Some adops
- 5 Snaps
- 9 Enjoyed avidly
- 11 Discover
- 12 Ignominy
- 13 Busy
- 14 "My country — of thee"
- 15 Give orders
- 17 Artist's overlay
- 19 Approval
- 20 Takes aback
- 21 River blocker
- 22 Hackneyed
- 24 Chiding
- 29 Singer Rawls
- 30 Having a will
- 32 Copy
- 34 Painter
- 35 Classical
- 36 Fuming
- 38 Physics bits
- 39 Bengal beast
- 40 Heart
- 41 Nuisance
- DOWN**
- 1 Elbows on the table
- 2 Morality topic
- 3 China buy
- 4 Bottomline
- 5 Milk buy
- 6 Scaly pet
- 7 Usual practice
- 8 Haste
- 10 Bookish sort
- 11 Backgammon need
- 16 "You're on!"
- 18 Walrus feature
- 21 Car scar
- 23 Blow one's top
- 24 Popular soup
- 25 Beau
- 27 Impair
- 28 Declares
- 29 Fragrant
- 30 Works
- 31 Bring to bear
- 33 Watch reading
- 37 Tear



YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS



গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার
বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ
অধিনায়কের কার্যালয়
র‍্যাপিড অ্যাকশন ব্যাটালিয়ন-৯
বরায়, উত্তরভাগ, হেতিমগঞ্জ, (শাহপরাণ সেতু টোল প্লাজা সংলগ্ন বাইপাস সড়ক), গোলাপগঞ্জ, সিলেট
স্মারক নং-৮৬৩৪/মেরামত/এমটি
তারিখঃ ০৯ জুন ২০২২ইং

উন্মুক্ত দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি

এতদ্বারা ২০২২-২০২৩ অর্থ বছরে র‍্যাব-৯, সিলেট এর যানবাহনের বিভিন্ন প্রকার স্পেয়ার্স পার্টস সরবরাহের নিমিত্তে প্রকৃত প্রস্তুতকারী/সরবরাহকারী ও ডিলারদের নিকট হতে সিলমোহরকৃত খামে দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাচ্ছে। দরপত্রদাতাদের পরিচালক, র‍্যাব-৯, সিলেট এর অনুকূলে ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার এর মাধ্যমে দরপত্র জামানত জমা দিতে হবে। অকৃতকার্য দরপত্রদাতাদের নিরাপত্তা জামানত দরপত্র গ্রহণের পর ফেরত প্রদান করা হবে। র‍্যাব-৯, সিলেট এর কার্যালয় এমটি শাখা হতে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে বিজ্ঞপ্তি প্রকাশের তারিখ হতে সিডিউল (সকাল ১০.০০ ঘটিকা হতে ১৭.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত (সরকারি ছুটির দিন ব্যতিত) ক্রয় করা যাবে। দরপত্রদাতাগণ দরপত্র জামানতসহ সিলমোহরকৃত খামে প্রত্যেক লটারে জন্য পৃথক পৃথকভাবে দর প্রদান করবেন। সিডিউলের বিবরণ এবং মূল্য নিম্নে দেওয়া হলোঃ

ক্রমিক	লট নম্বর	স্পেয়ার্স পার্টস/দ্রব্যাদির বিবরণ	সিডিউলের মূল্য (অফেরতযোগ্য)	দরপত্র নিরাপত্তা জামানত (ফেরতযোগ্য)
১।	লট নম্বর-০১ হতে লট নম্বর-২১ পর্যন্ত	যানবাহনের বিভিন্ন প্রকার স্পেয়ার্স পার্টস ক্রয়	প্রতি লট ৩০০/-	প্রতি লটারে জন্য =২,০০০/-
২।	লট নম্বর-২২	বিভিন্ন প্রকার যানবাহনের টায়ার-টিউব ক্রয়	৭৫০/-	৫০,০০০/-
৩।	লট নম্বর-২৩	বিভিন্ন প্রকার যানবাহনের ব্যাটারী ক্রয়	৫০০/-	৫০,০০০/-
৪।	লট নম্বর-২৪	ইঞ্জিন ওভারহোলিং এবং লেদ মেশিনের কাজ	৫০০/-	১০,০০০/-

আত্রাহী দরপত্রদাতাদের ব্যাংক ড্রাফট/পে-অর্ডার সহকারে দরপত্র র‍্যাব-৯, সিলেট এর কর্তব্যরত কর্মকর্তার অফিসে রক্ষিত দরপত্র বক্সে আগামী ০৬ জুলাই ২০২২ইং তারিখ রোজ বুধবার বেলা ১১.০০ ঘটিকার মধ্যে ফেলতে হবে এবং ঐদিন বেলা ১২.০০ ঘটিকায় উপস্থিত দরপত্রদাতাদের সম্মুখে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) দরপত্র বক্স খোলা হবে। জামানত ব্যতিত দরপত্র বাতিল বলে গণ্য করা হবে।
সংরক্ষিত শর্ত মোতাবেক আগামী ০৫ জুলাই ২০২২ইং তারিখ ১৬.০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত সিডিউল বিক্রয় করা হবে। দরপত্র কর্তৃপক্ষ যে কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে দরপত্র গ্রহণ অথবা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।

মোঃ মোমিনুল হক
উইং কমান্ডার
পরিচালক
টেলিফোনঃ ০২-৯৯৬৬৪১৭৯১

জিডি-১১৮৯