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EXPRESSWAY TRAGEDY

Everything was wrong with the bus

19 lives lost as the vehicle veers off Dhaka-Bhanga road; its registration, route permit suspended last November

STAR REPORT

The bus that went off the Dhaka-Bhanga expressway and crashed killing 19 people yesterday should have been taken off the roads four months ago when the authorities suspended its permits following a fatal crash.

The fitness certificate of the Emad Paribahan bus also expired on January 18. Yet, the owner of the transport kept it on the road.

"All kinds of approval -- registration and route permit -- of the bus was suspended in November last year as a punishment following a crash involving the bus," said Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) Chairman Nur Mohammad Mazumder yesterday.

"But they kept the bus in service violating the suspension. We are now going to revoke the registration and a case will be filed against its owner," he told The Daily Star.

Yesterday's crash again exposed the serious lack of enforcement of rules by government agencies, including the BRTA and the Highway Police.

The bus began its journey from Phultala Bus Terminal in Khulna around 4:00am yesterday and crashed in Kutubpur area of Madaripur's Shibchar upazila around 7:30am.

The driver and the bus conductor were among the dead. At least 25 passengers were wounded.

This is the deadliest crash since the expressway was inaugurated three years ago.

The bus was either speeding, or its front tyre burst at speed, or the driver dozed off, Madaripur Superintendent of Police Md Masud Alam told The Daily Star yesterday.

Taimur Islam, officer-in-charge of Bhanga Highway Police Station, who rushed to the spot after the crash, said, "We suspect the bus was speeding and the driver could not control the bus after one of its tyres burst."

"The exact cause would be revealed after investigation," he told The Daily Star, adding that speeding is rampant on the expressway, particularly in the area where the bus crashed.

The highway police know it well that early mornings are risky hours and they should strengthen law enforcement at that time, said transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque, adding, "As drivers get away with speeding, they keep doing it."

Abdullahel Baki, sub-inspector of Shibchar Highway Police, said, "At least 14 died on the spot. Two died while being taken to Life Care Hospital

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The mangled bus beside the Dhaka-Bhanga expressway in Shibchar of Madaripur yesterday after it went off the highway at speed, broke the guardrails, and crashed into the wall of an underpass.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

Of dresses and dolls, and a scar for life

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and JAHID HASAN RONI

The night before he left for Dhaka from Khulna, Rashed Sardar's daughters -- nine-year-old Safa and five-year-old Sara -- had asked him to bring back Eid outfits for them.

The little girls' wish, however, is never to come true as the Emad Paribahan bus that Rashed was traveling on fell into a ditch next to the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga Expressway yesterday morning, leaving their father and 18 others dead so far.

Rashed, a Dutch-Bangla Bank official working at Dhaka head office, boarded the

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NIKO GRAFT CASE

Charges framed against Khaleda

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and seven others in the Niko graft case.

Khaleda, now on bail, pleaded not guilty through her lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder and demanded justice after Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman of the Special Judge's Court-9 of Dhaka read out the charges.

Earlier, Khaleda's petition, seeking



a time extension for the hearing on the charge framing against her, was rejected.

Four others -- former acting secretary for energy ministry Khondaker Shahidul Islam, its former senior assistant secretary

CM Yusuf Hussain, and BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman's close friend Glausuddin Al Mamun -- also pleaded not guilty after the same judge read out the charges.

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They must be identified

Says PM on those tainting image of Bangladeshi institutions

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said those who are tarnishing the image of the country's institutions by spreading propaganda must be identified.

While addressing the 19th founding anniversary of the Rab at the force's headquarters in the capital's Kurmitola, the PM said Bangladesh can judge who has done good or bad. "If anyone commits an offense, we must speak about it. Don't be upset hearing words from others. You'll have to move with a sense of self-esteem and self-confidence..."

She asked law enforcement agencies to take proper action against cybercrimes.

"We'll have to be careful against cybercrimes and take action accordingly. I would like to tell all, including Rab and every intelligence agency that they will have to play a proper role in this regard."

Noting that her

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Diya, Hakim promise further glory

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Diya Siddique and Hakim Ahmed Rubel promised to improve their performance in international events after winning a gold medal at the Asia Cup World Ranking Archery event in Chinese Taipei on Sunday.

The Bangladeshi pair beat their Kazakh opponents -- Ilfat Abdullin and Alina Ilyassova -- by 5-3 sets in the final of recurve mixed team event.

"Alhamdulillah. It was nice the way we bounced back. We will do better in future, insha'Allah," said Diya in her instant reaction.

Having lost the first set by 38-36 points, Diya and Hakim bounced back to take the next two sets by 36-35 and 37-33 before drawing the final set 39-39.

"We are satisfied as we could execute our plans. We will perform better in future," added Hakim, who occupies the 34th spot in world rankings.

Hakim later won his individual bronze medal match against Ilfat Abdullin of Kazakhstan by 6-4 sets but Diya, ranked 39th, lost the bronze-medal match of individual recurve event against Mashaiykh Syaqiera of Malaysia by 6-4 set points.

The duo had previously paired up to achieve major success when they bagged a silver medal in recurve mixed event at the 2021 Asian Archery Championship in Dhaka.

FY24 BUDGET

Focus on inflation, macro stability

Economists tell Kamal in pre-budget session

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Economists yesterday stressed on addressing the persistently high inflation, macroeconomic stability and low revenue base in the pre-budget session for the upcoming fiscal year with the finance minister.

The virtual session was the first in the series for Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal before he sits down to finalise the budget for fiscal 2023-24, the last budget for the current Awami League government's five-year term.

At the session, finance ministry officials did a presentation on which recommendations of the economists did they accommodate in this year's budget and their impact.

The International Monetary Fund's timebound conditions for the \$4.7 billion loan, the persistently elevated inflation and the upcoming polls are weighing heavy on the finance ministry's mind as it does its computations for the forthcoming budget.

The next fiscal year's budget is likely to be Tk 750,165 crore, about 10.6 percent higher than this year's.

But economists said the budget falls short of the requirement, The Daily Star has learnt from officials informed with the contents

TAKEAWAYS FROM PRE-BUDGET SESSION WITH ECONOMISTS

- ✓ Elevated inflation must be addressed
- ✓ Impact on the ordinary people must be addressed
- ✓ Budget size not up to requirements
- ✓ Questions hang over the funding of the modest budget

of the meeting.

The issue of budget implementation was also discussed. Due to weak capacity, budgets invariably get revised down every year.

The issue of funding the budget was discussed given the low revenue base.

"The budget will be extremely challenging to fund, realistically," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

For funding, the government has become central bank-dependent, which is not right as it is inflationary.

The government has to come out of this practice as inflation will get worse otherwise.

In the first eight months of the fiscal year, inflation averaged 8.74 percent, way above the budgetary target of 5.6 percent, according to data from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

"Besides, the Bangladesh Bank is printing money through the refinancing packages -- which a parallel budget. How you are going to control this budget of BB?"

Chief among the conditions agreed with the IMF is raising the tax-GDP ratio to 11 percent from about 8 percent at present, which Mansur, a former economist of the Washington-based multilateral lender, said would be difficult for the government to implement in

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