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## MADARIPUR ROAD CRASH Guardrail could've saved many lives

Finds Buet's Accident Research Institute, suggests audit on Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga expressway to identify safety lapses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

While tyre burst could be the most plausible cause for the March 19 road crash in Madaripur's Shibchar upazila, it was the absence of guardrails that led to many fatalities and severe injuries, said Buet's Accident Research Institute (ARI).

Nineteen people were killed and 26 were injured in the crash, which occurred on the Dhaka-Mawa-Bhanga expressway – the first in the country and open to traffic since March 2020.

There was no continuous guardrail – a major inconsistency and lacking for such an expensive and high-standard expressway.

The ARI revealed the information while disseminating the investigation findings at Buet's Council Bhaban.

It recommended conducting urgent Road Safety Audits on that corridor of the expressway to identify safety lapses and install a continuous safety barrier.

The institute also said 264 people were killed in 222 road accidents in nine months since June last year (almost one death every day) on this very expressway.

"This essentially suggests that only construction of high standard capital-intensive infrastructure is not enough to ensure safe mobility.



**Mainly, infrastructural deficiencies led to so many fatalities and severe injuries. Even though crashes can't be prevented, fatalities can be averted with very low-cost but highly effective countermeasures.**

PROF SHAMSUL HOQUE  
Director of Buet's Accident Research Institute

There is a need for vehicles that are fit and expressway-worthy; competent drivers, standard road safety devices and, most importantly, well-enforced safe and disciplined traffic operating conditions," said Prof Shamsul Hoque, director of ARI.

"It would be highly regrettable if this 'proven-to-be safe' expressway gradually becomes hazardous and fails to improve the [road] safety situation in Bangladesh."

After the Madaripur crash, a government probe committee said the registration of the Enad Paribahan bus had been suspended for involvement in accidents before and thus, was not eligible for plying highways, especially with its overspeeding being another plausible reason behind the accident.

The driver did not have the licence for operating heavy vehicles and might have lost control over the wheel as the road was slippery after rain. The ARI probe, however, nullified many of these findings.

It prepared a speed profile of the bus with the speed data available on the Akash TrackMe server as the bus had an Event Data Recorder.

From the data, the ARI found the bus was operating at a speed of 79kmph when the accident occurred, Prof Shamsul said.

"The driver was not speeding and had enough scope to take rest. So, speeding or tiredness are not likely to be the reasons behind the accident," he said, adding that the weather too was unlikely to be a factor.

The bus was registered with Bangladesh Road Transport Authority in 2018 but was later modified to increase the number of seats.

Meanwhile, the tyres were relatively new but of poor quality, and one was found punctured.

Shamsul said that in this given situation, a tyre burst could be the most plausible cause for the crash.

He said there was no protection on the road for derailed vehicles, adding that many fatalities could have been avoided if there were guardrails.

"Mainly, infrastructure deficiencies led to so many fatalities and severe injuries. Even though crashes can't be prevented, fatalities can be averted with very low-cost but highly effective countermeasures."

Prof Shamsul further said drivers are always targeted after an accident. "People at the top level should be held accountable instead."

He said pre-safety audits should be made mandatory before opening a highway or expressway and imported tyres should be examined.

He also emphasised maintaining lane discipline to ensure road safety on the expressway.

## Former Indian MP, brother shot dead live on TV

AFP, Prayagraj

Gunmen seemingly posing as journalists shot dead a former Indian member of parliament and his brother live on TV as they were being taken in handcuffs to hospital by police, authorities said.

Atiq Ahmed, 61, who had been jailed since 2019 and was convicted of kidnapping, was answering reporters' questions late Saturday when he and his brother Ashraf were shot at close range, the television images showed.

"According to preliminary information, three persons posing as journalists approached them and opened fire... The attackers have been held and are being questioned," police official Prashant Kumar said.

The TV clip in the northern city of Prayagraj shows the assailants shouting Hindu slogans after the brazen attack.

Following the shooting, gatherings of more than four people were banned yesterday across the crime-rife Uttar Pradesh state of 200 million people that is ruled by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

The two victims were from India's Muslim minority but police did not say whether they were investigating a possible sectarian motive in the killings.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



Makeshift shops and illegally parked people carriers, popularly known as Leguna, hamper the construction work of Dhaka-Padma Bridge rail link in Gandaria Rail Station area. It seems that the authorities concerned have not taken any steps to evict them. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## Both US, AL want free polls

Says Momen

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday said both the United States and the AL want free and fair elections in Bangladesh and there is no difference of opinion between the two sides on this.

Since holding free and fair elections is a government's commitment, the repeated calls from the US helped them make the commitment afresh, Momen said.

"No pressure. We want free and fair elections. It's our own commitment," the minister replied when asked whether the government feels any pressure amid such calls from the US.

"We are very happy," he told reporters at the foreign ministry.

He, however, said the government and the Election Commission alone cannot ensure free polls but it requires sincerity and commitment from all political parties.

Regarding his recent meeting with US Secretary of State Antony

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1

## Public audit law in the offing

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and REJAUl KARIM BYRON

The government is set to enact the first-ever public audit law that will usher in more transparency and accountability in public expenditure and expand the scope of the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh.

The draft of the Public Audit Bill 2023 was uploaded to the website of the finance division soliciting opinions from concerned government offices and the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry by May 7.

At present, the CAG is performing its duties with the constitutional mandate and with the Comptroller and Auditor-General (Additional Functions) Act, 1974. The new law would supplant it.

After the law is enacted, CAG will be able to audit public-private partnership arrangements that were initiated under the Bangladesh Public-Private Partnership Act, 2015 or PPP Agreement, Public-Private Partnership System and others.

The CAG will get to audit the government funds provided to private institutions or organisations like NGOs, foundations, trusts, charities and civil society organisations or any other private institution or organisation.

It will be able to verify whether the conditions on which the grant or loan was extended were being fulfilled satisfactorily.

The new law will make the audit process specific. Following the best international practices, the CAG can communicate, coordinate or sign cooperation deals with similar national and international institutions and agencies, as per the draft.

Itekharruzaman, executive director of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB), the local chapter of the global anti-corruption watchdog, welcomed the move.

"There are a few areas that need to be more closely considered. For instance, terms like frugality, efficiency and effectiveness should be clearly defined to ensure robustness in the performance audit."



**In principle, the new law has created the scope for increasing accountability and transparency. But there are risks of abuses.**

ZAHID HUSSAIN  
Former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

## Historic Mujibnagar Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The historic Mujibnagar Day will be observed across the country today, marking the oath-taking ceremony of Bangladesh's first government at Baidyanathola mango grove in Meherpur.

Baidyanathola, mainly a mango orchard, was later renamed Mujibnagar in honour of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was declared president of the government-in-exile, and supreme commander of the armed forces.

Following the Pakistan army's genocide on March 25, 1971, senior leaders of the Awami League assembled at Baidyanathola in Meherpur on April 17 to form the provisional government of independent Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu was arrested and flown to Pakistan after the Pakistan army swooped on the Bangalees on March 25. Bangabandhu was declared the first

## 500-yr-old Inca ceremonial bath found in Peru

REUTERS, Lima

Archaeologists in the Peruvian Andes have discovered an Inca bathing complex built half a millennium ago, which they believe may have served the elite of the sprawling empire that once dominated large swathes of South America.

Found near the "House of the Inca" in the Huanuco Pampa archaeological zone in central Peru, local archaeologists believe that the bath may have served a religious purpose for high-ranking members of the Inca empire, which 500 years ago extended from southern Ecuador to the centre of Chile.

Luis Paredes Sanchez, project manager at Huanuco Pampa, said the structure was similar to "more hierarchical, restricted and sacred spaces within the Inca administrative centres, because rather than having a utilitarian or hygienic function, they also served for religious functions and worshipping ancestors."

The "finely carved" bath averages some two-metres in depth, with independent pools and spillways and a central passage taking water into a drainage duct that divides the room into two small platforms, or "benches" for the Inca, Peru's culture ministry said in a statement.

The Huanuco Pampa archaeological site is part of the Qhapaq Nan project, a complex 25,000-km-long road network that linked Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia and Argentina. The road system was declared a World Heritage Site in 2014.

Peru is home to hundreds of archaeological sites across the country, including the Machu Picchu citadel in the Inca capital of Cusco, and the Nasca lines, massive designs drawn in Ica's coastal desert region over 1,500 years ago.



At least 18 of 81 flats of this 10-storey building have been demolished by the Dhaka South City Corporation as a portion of it was built over the Kalinagar canal next to Road-1 of Mahadi Nagar residential area in the capital's Kamrangirchar. Despite the risks involved, at least 22 families of the building are still living there. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## BNP team meets US envoy, talks election

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-member delegation of the BNP held a meeting with the US ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas yesterday.

The delegation, led by BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, went to US ambassador's residence at 12:00 noon and held the meeting for around an hour, said sources.

During the meeting, they discussed the importance of free and fair elections and a nonviolent political process, according to the US embassy.

The BNP's standing committee member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury and Organising Secretary Shama Obayed were the other members of the delegation.

Contacted, Fakhrul said it was a normal discussion and refused to make further comments.