



## Old, unfit vehicles running amok

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The bus involved in yesterday's accident that left 14 dead in Faridpur would not have been on the road had the government not caved in to transport associations' demand for allowing over 20 years old buses on roads.

The Uttara Unique Paribahan bus was registered in November 2002 and would have been retired if the government last year could stick to its guns on limiting the economic life of buses to 20 years and trucks and lorries to 25 years.

According to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), there are 35,782 registered buses older than 20 years and 37,275 trucks and lorries over 25 years.

Over 6 lakh registered vehicles, including the Uttara Unique Paribahan bus, did not go through the mandatory annual fitness test.

According to BRTA data, the number of crashes sharply rose this year. At least 1,477 people were killed, and 1,920 were injured in 1,630 crashes between January and March this year.

In the first three months of 2023, at least 1,051 people were killed and 1,440 were injured in 1,017 crashes.

### WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Prof Hadiuzzaman, former director of the Accident Research Institute at Buet, said the maintenance costs of old vehicles increase with time.

Owners often skip maintenance as it cuts into their profits. But they keep the vehicles on the roads jeopardising safety, he told The Daily Star last night.

"The government's backtracking from setting the economic life was a suicidal move. It will make the road more unsafe," he said.

He said pressure from transport associations and a lack of proper planning were to blame for the reversal of the government decision.

The government does not have a proper plan to replace the large number of old vehicles with new ones or any strategy to scrap the decades-old vehicles, he added.

Transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque, however, said a commercial vehicle does not necessarily become unsafe instantly after it exceeds its economic life.

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## 73,057 RUNDOWN commercial vehicles

|            |                            |
|------------|----------------------------|
|            | <b>BUS, MINIBUS 35,782</b> |
| DHAKA CITY | OUTSIDE DHAKA              |
| 14,610     | 21,172                     |

|            |                     |
|------------|---------------------|
|            | <b>TRUCK 34,979</b> |
| DHAKA CITY | OUTSIDE DHAKA       |
| 5,958      | 29,021              |

|            |                     |
|------------|---------------------|
|            | <b>TANKER 1,792</b> |
| DHAKA CITY | OUTSIDE DHAKA       |
| 282        | 1,510               |

|            |                        |
|------------|------------------------|
|            | <b>COVERED VAN 504</b> |
| DHAKA CITY | OUTSIDE DHAKA          |
| 149        | 355                    |

SOURCE: BRTA

Total registered vehicles till March, 2024 **60,17,438**

Vehicles that did not go through mandatory fitness test till April 15, 2024 **6,17,588**

Registered bus, minibuses, trucks and covered vans **2,89,612**



The mangled remains of a pickup being removed from Faridpur-Magura highway after it collided head-on with a bus in Faridpur's Kanaipur area yesterday. PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Another day, another crash, 14 more killed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

|              | JAN-MAR '23 | JAN-MAR '24 | RISE   |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------|
| Road crashes | 1,017       | 1,630       | 60.28% |
| Deaths       | 1,051       | 1,477       | 40.33% |
| Injured      | 1,440       | 1,920       | 33.33% |

SOURCE: BRTA

Fourteen people, including five of a family, were killed in a road crash in Faridpur yesterday, exposing a serious lack of monitoring and enforcement of road safety laws.

The accident took place in Faridpur Sadar's Kanaipur area on Dhaka-Magura route around 7:45am when a Magura-bound bus of Uttara

Unique Paribahan collided with a Faridpur-bound pickup. The bus had been operating without a fitness clearance and tax token for over three years. According to sources at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, that bus was not even supposed to be on that particular route.

STORM DESTROYS THEIR HOMES, BUS TAKES THEIR LIVES — PAGE 5

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## Historic Mujibnagar Day today

UNB, Dhaka

Today is the historic Mujibnagar Day.

This year, the Meherpur district administration and the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs have made preparations to observe the occasion in a grand manner.

On this day in 1971, the first government of Bangladesh was sworn in at Amrakanon in Baidyanath Tala, Mujibnagar upazila, Meherpur.

Mujibnagar Upazila Nirbahi Officer Md Khairul Islam said, "We have made elaborate preparations to welcome war heroes, ministers, and visitors from all over the country. Cleaning, painting various murals and installations, and all other preparations have been completed. Uninterrupted electricity, safe drinking water, and adequate temporary toilets have been arranged."

Meherpur Superintendent of Police SM Nazmul Haq said, "The district

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## Stay off upazila polls or face the music

BNP warns party leaders, activists

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

BNP will take tough organisational actions against those party men who would contest in the upcoming upazila polls ignoring its decision of boycotting the elections.

The party wants to show the world that the upazila polls are one-sided elections without voters like the last national election, party insiders said. BNP has already conveyed a message to the party's grassroots that those who have already filed nomination papers as independents must withdraw.

"If anyone violates the party's instruction, tough organisational actions will be taken against them," Syed Emran Saleh Prince, an organising secretary of the BNP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, BNP in a press statement yesterday said it will not take part in the upazila polls as it does not want to be a part of the "farical elections". The decision was taken at a BNP standing committee meeting, the highest policymaking body of the party, on Monday night.

Earlier, the BNP high-ups were in two minds about joining the upazila polls following the announcement of the election schedule by the Election Commission.

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman had several virtual meetings with the party vice chairmen, joint secretary generals and organising secretaries, and former upazila chairmen to know their opinions on joining the upazila polls, to be held in four phases from May 8.

BNP standing committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy yesterday said the party is sticking to its stance on boycotting polls under the Awami League government.

"Tens of thousands of BNP leaders and activists are facing cases and more than 27,000 party men were sent to jail over the January 7 parliamentary polls. Amid such a situation, we don't want to run into further troubles by joining the polls," he told The Daily Star.

Some 45 BNP leaders have reportedly filed nomination papers to run for upazila chairman in the May 8 polls. The last date for withdrawing nominations is April 22.

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## BHASHANTEK HOUSE FIRE 'Why haven't my parents come to see me yet?'

9-yr-old keeps asking from hospital bed

RAFIUL ISLAM

Lying on a hospital bed, nine-year-old Sujun kept asking for his parents and two sisters whenever relatives visited him in the High Dependency Unit (HDU) of the Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

"Where are my parents? Why haven't they come to see me? Take me to them." He was given the same response every time: "They're doing well and will come once they have fully recovered."

Speaking to The Daily Star, Sujun's cousin Saiful Islam said, "We can't dare to tell him that his parents have passed away... His condition is already critical and hearing this news might make it worse."

Sujun, his parents, two sisters and grandmother suffered critical burn injuries after a fire engulfed their house on the ground floor of a two-storey building in the capital's Bhashantek area on Friday.

Relatives of the family suspected that gas from a leak in the cooking cylinder accumulated and caused the fire after Sujun's father Liton Mia, 48, lit a mosquito coil.

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## IRAN'S ATTACK ON ISRAEL Archenemies trade war of words

Netanyahu summons war cabinet for 3rd day in a row; US to impose sanctions on Iran, its proxies

AGENCIES

Israel and Iran traded threats yesterday after Tehran's first-ever direct attack on its arch-foe sharply heightened regional tensions.

Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Israel would not get off "scot-free" after Iran and its allies launched a barrage of over 300 missiles, drones and rockets at Israel at the weekend.

"We cannot stand still from this kind of aggression," Hagari said, a day after Israel's military chief vowed there would be "a response" to Iran's offensive.

Meanwhile, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu yesterday convened Israel's war cabinet for the third time in three days, an official said, to decide on a response to Iran's first-ever direct attack on the Jewish state.

Iran said its attack was an act of self-defence following a deadly Israeli air strike on its consulate in Syria, and that it would consider the matter "concluded" unless Israel retaliated.

Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi

warned that "the slightest action against Iran's interests will definitely be met with a severe, extensive and painful response".

US President Joe Biden stressed on Monday that "the United States is committed to Israel's security" and

**Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi warned that "the slightest action against Iran's interests will definitely be met with a severe, extensive and painful response".**

wants to prevent the conflict from spreading.

Washington, Israel's top ally and arms supplier, has made clear it will not join Israel in any attack on their common adversary Iran, a senior US official said.

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## BUSINESS

### IMF cuts GDP growth forecast for Bangladesh

The International Monetary Fund has further revised down the growth forecast for Bangladesh's economy for the ongoing fiscal year owing to persisting global and local challenges, including higher inflation.

The Washington-based lender said the economy would grow by 5.7 percent in 2023-24, lower than the 6 percent forecast in October. The gross domestic product (GDP) projection was 6.5 percent initially.

The GDP growth will rebound to 6.6 percent in 2024-25, said the IMF in its World Economic Outlook yesterday.

STORY ON B1



The DSCC continued the dismantling of the makeshift shops at the Bangabazar Shopping Complex for the second consecutive day yesterday. The shops were set up after a fire razed the market in April last year. Dhaka South Mayor Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh had earlier announced that the construction work of Bangabazar market would start after Eid. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Mystery shrouds death of a sand trader in Sylhet

Local cops initially said he was killed in bike crash; family says it was a murder

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

The death of Babul Islam, a stone and sand trader of Sylhet's Companiganj, is still shrouded in mystery.

After his body was found by the side of a road on April 12, police said the 48-year-old might have died in a motorcycle accident.

But his widow Asma Khatun and other family members insist that Babul was killed, and she filed a murder case yesterday.

Asma and her son Sazzadul Islam allege that police earlier refused to record the case.

The case was filed as hundreds of locals held a rally in Islampur area where Babul lived, demanding a proper investigation into the death. Residents also demonstrated on April 13.

Golam Dastagir Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Companiganj Police Station, refuted Asma's allegation.

According to the complaint, after receiving a phone call from his business partner Akkas Ali near midnight on Thursday, Babul left home with his motorcycle.

Before leaving, he told his wife that there was a problem at the sand extraction site. His phone was found unreachable afterwards, it adds.

After daybreak, locals found his body and the motorcycle in a roadside ditch, says the complaint, adding

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