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## 14 die as truck ploughs into five vehicles

6 of a family, 4 wedding guests among the dead

### STAR REPORT

A car and three battery-run auto-rickshaws were crawling in a queue to pay the toll for the Gabkhan Bridge in Jhalakathi around 1:30pm yesterday.

A small truck carrying furniture ahead of the car paid its toll and trundled on at the northern end of the bridge.

Then the car paid the toll to the collector. The moment it was about to accelerate away, an out-of-control cement-laden truck ploughed into the vehicles in the queue crushing them and the people inside them.

Eyewitnesses were stunned as they could only watch the three-wheelers being reduced to scrap metal.

The truck shoved the car into the rear of the smaller truck. The car was crushed beyond recognition and the smaller truck flipped to its side.

Fourteen people, including six of a family and four guests of a wedding reception, were killed. Twelve others were injured, five of them critically.

Md Mohitul Islam, additional superintendent of police in Jhalakathi, told The Daily Star last night that the truck driver, who has been apprehended, claimed that his brakes had failed. He also said the driver did not have the licence to drive heavy vehicles.



An adolescent boy risks life and limb while trying to board a moving train in the capital's Tejgaon yesterday. This is not an isolated incident as people have long been getting on and off moving trains on this particular stretch of the rail line.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### ROAD SAFETY

## Maladies every step of the way

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The entire road transport sector has long been plagued by multifaceted problems, which are worsening every day amid sheer apathy from the authorities responsible for ensuring road safety.

Two major back-to-back crashes, which took away 28 lives in last two days, are yet another manifestation of these deep-rooted problems.

When it comes to the drivers of commercial vehicles, they do not just lack formal training, they are overworked.

A large number of the vehicles are unregistered and lack mandatory fitness scans, while the fitness clearances of many are questionable.

Meanwhile, safety audit is not done on most roads, while a large number of them are in poor condition and riddled with accident-prone spots. Illegal roadside structures increase the vulnerability of the roads.

The weakness of the regulatory authority and other relevant bodies tasked with enforcing laws and procedures only compounded the situation.

They not only face a shortage of capacity and manpower, but many of their officials remain involved in corrupt practices, perpetuating anarchy on the roads.

Meanwhile, some vested quarters, who have been benefiting from this situation, want to maintain the status quo for their own interests.

The Daily Star has come to this conclusion after speaking to over a dozen experts, road safety campaigners, transport leaders and officials of the government agencies concerned.

"We'll not be able to rid ourselves of this situation unless revolutionary steps involving political leaderships are initiated immediately. If we fail to do so, things will keep going downhill," Prof Moazzem Hossain, former director of the Accident Research Institute at Buet, told this correspondent yesterday.

On Tuesday, 14 people, including five of a family, were killed in a road crash in Faridpur. The bus involved had no route permit, fitness clearance or tax token, while the pickup it collided with was carrying passengers illegally.

Yesterday, 14 others were killed in a road crash in Jhalakathi when a truck ploughed through several vehicles.

The driver of the truck had no valid licence.

### ROOTS OF THE PROBLEMS

Almost all drivers of commercial vehicles do not receive any formal training and instead learn driving from their seniors.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) provides a one-day refresher training

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## Bank Asia to take over Bank Alfalah's Bangladesh unit

MD MEHEDI HASAN

Bank Asia is likely to acquire the Bangladesh operations of Karachi-based Bank Alfalah, according to information disclosed to the Pakistan Stock Exchange yesterday.

The disclosure, by Bank Alfalah itself, said its board approved in principle the non-binding offer given by Bank Asia to take over Bank Alfalah's Bangladesh operations, subject to compliance of all applicable laws and regulations as well as the necessary regulatory approvals.

"We will now seek approval from the State Bank of Pakistan for Bank Asia to commence due diligence on Bank Alfalah, Bangladesh," the bank said in the disclosure.

Bank Asia Managing Director Sohail RK Hussain said negotiations are still underway.

"But it is not linked to the ongoing discussion about the merger of some weak banks [with other banks]," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

He added that Bank Alfalah's Bangladesh unit is running smoothly.

Bank Asia's board will convene a meeting on Sunday,

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The crash on the Khulna-Barishal road happened less than 30 hours after a bus and a truck collided in Faridpur, leaving 14 people, including five of a family, dead.

Yesterday's crash killed Nahida Akhter, 27, resident of Sangor village under Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila; her husband Hasibur Rahman, 32; their four-year-old daughter Takiya, and eight-month-old son Tahmid; Nahida's sister Nipa, 22; and her husband Imran Hossain, 26; Nazrul Islam, 35, of Gabkhan village; Shafiqul Majhi, 50, of Ostakhan village; Atiqur Rahman Sadi, 11, of Shekhertek Nowapara; Tahmina, 25, of Kathalia Talgachhiya village; her daughter Nurjahan, 7; Sonia Begum, 30, of Uttar Southpur village; Ruhul Amin of Swarupkathia, and Shahidul Islam.

Seven of the deceased, including the six of a family, were in the car. Nipa and Imran were newlyweds.

They along with her sister's family were heading to Barishal from Jhalakathi's Rajapur upazila in the car to rent a home for the newlyweds, said their union parishad member.

Witnesses and sources said six of the deceased were in the auto-rickshaws. The fourteenth person to have died, Shahidul Islam, was asking for alms on the side of the road.

Of the six killed in the auto-rickshaws, four on two vehicles were going to the wedding reception.

Nazrul Islam, 35, was one of the four. Nazrul's mother Mira Begum was inconsolable after she saw her son's body.

"How will I live without my son?" she was saying.

One of her relatives said it was supposed to be a happy moment for all as they were to return home with the bride and groom. Instead, they

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## Man dies after cops 'beat him'

Police say he ran away, died of exhaustion; family says he was hit in the chest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A 53-year-old man of Sunamganj's Tahirpur upazila died on Tuesday evening allegedly after being beaten up by police during an arrest attempt.

Romij Miah of Burungachhara in the upazila was a convenience store owner.

His family claimed that police beat him up but left without detaining him as he had collapsed.

Police claimed that Romij ran away during the arrest attempt and died of exhaustion as he had been suffering from breathing and heart complications for a long time.

Romij's wife Josna Begum said, "My husband was at his shop in front of our home that evening when two people on a motorcycle went there and hit his chest first."

"They then grabbed him and beat him up while trying to get him on the motorcycle. After my husband started bleeding from the nose, they left," she said.

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Romij Miah



Cattle farmers of Bara Khalisha village in Khulna's Dacope upazila have built small canopies on their field to shelter the cows from the scorching sun. The intense heat has caused surrounding waterbodies to dry up, prompting the farmers to collect water from other places to keep the cows hydrated and healthy.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

## MYANMAR CONFLICT Fighting flares up across the Teknaf border

MOKAMMEL SHUVO

The fighting in Myanmar between the military junta and the Arakan Army across the border from Teknaf of Cox's Bazar intensified yesterday, heightening anxiety on the Bangladesh side.

The sounds of explosions heard in Teknaf municipality, and Whykong Hnila, and Shah Porir Dweep unions were louder and more frequent since yesterday morning, locals and a union parishad member said.

Nasir Uddin, a resident of the Teknaf municipal area, said, "There have been loud explosions on the other side of the border since morning and it seems like there is a war going on next door."

Mohammad Alam, UP member of Ward 8 of Whykong union, said, "Loud sounds of bombs and mortar shells have been heard on the border since morning. Compared to other days, the sounds today [yesterday] were louder and scarier."

The fighting in Myanmar's Rakhine State has triggered a fresh influx of Myanmar troops into Bangladesh.

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