

Seven more die of dengue, 1,373 get hospitalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven more people died of dengue and 1,373 were hospitalised across the country in the 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

All seven deaths were reported in Dhaka South City Corporation.

With the latest fatalities, this year's death toll has risen to 364, while the total number of cases has reached 1,16,990. Currently, 5,970 dengue patients are receiving treatment at hospitals nationwide.



Plastic, polythene and other non-biodegradable waste discarded by market traders pile up along the Bhairab river, threatening aquatic life and biodiversity. Once a vital waterway, the river remains important to Khulna's trade, transport and local livelihoods. The photo was taken at Daulatpur Launch Ghat in Khulna yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Sajek road blockade resumes today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rangamati*

Sajek Gano Odhikar Rokkha Committee and Sajek Karbari Association will resume their indefinite blockade of the Sajek tourist road today, following a temporary suspension for Durga Puja, as their three-point demand, including the withdrawal of armed JSS members allegedly stationed in different parts of Machalong, remains unmet.

The decision was announced in a joint statement issued yesterday afternoon by Natun Joy Chakma, president of Sajek Karbari Association, and Babudhan Chakma, convener of Sajek Gano Odhikar Rakkha Committee.

The blockade will continue until further notice, said the statement. It requested tourists currently visiting Sajek to leave by yesterday.

Bijoy Kanti Chakma, member secretary of Sajek Gano Odhikar Rakkha Committee, told The Daily Star, "We had suspended our blockade from October 16 to 21 on the occasion of Durga Puja. As the puja ends today [yesterday], our previously announced blockade programme will be enforced from 6:00am tomorrow [today]. Our blockade programme will continue until our three-point demand is implemented."

Earlier, the two organisations began an indefinite blockade on the Sajek tourist road from October 11. They later placed three demands before the administration and suspended the blockade for two days following assurances.

However, as the administration failed to meet their demands within two days, they enforced the blockade again on October 15.

Malaysia bans civil servants from using Waze over Israel links

AFP, *Kuala Lumpur*

Malaysia banned civil servants from using the navigation app Waze, Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim's office said yesterday, citing data security concerns over its links to Israel.

Kuala Lumpur is a longstanding and vocal critic of Israel and maintains no diplomatic relations with it.

Waze, which is owned by Google LLC, was founded in Israel and remains incorporated there.

Anwar "has decided to prohibit the use of the navigation application Waze among all civil servants," his office said.

"This measure is intended to safeguard government information and users' personal data against the threat of misuse by the Israeli regime," it added in a statement posted on Facebook.

The decision was made at a National Cyber Security Committee meeting chaired by Anwar on Tuesday, local media reports said.

The Malaysian government did not give further details on why civil servants were prohibited from using Waze, which uses data from drivers to provide real-time traffic information.

Nearly 8,000 children killed

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died while crossing or walking along roads.

As Bangladesh observes Road Safety Day today, the figures underscore the dangers that persist nearly eight years after the student-led road safety movement of 2018 prompted promises of sweeping reforms.

RSF compiled the report from nine national dailies, 17 national and regional online news portals, electronic media reports and its own sources.

Its Executive Director Saidur Rahman said few schools have dedicated buses, forcing students to walk along busy roads or use unsafe public transport.

"Many educational institutions are located beside highways and major roads without pedestrian crossings, speed-calming measures, traffic signals or adequate footpaths," he said.

Parents and campaigners said zebra crossings are often absent or ignored, while speeding vehicles endanger children in school zones, particularly where designated walkways and traffic police are lacking.

Motorcycle riders and passengers accounted for the largest share of child fatalities, at 2,958 (37.14 percent), while another 2,193 (27.53 percent) died as passengers in other vehicles.

Among pedestrian deaths, three-wheelers, including CNG-run auto-rickshaws, auto-tempos, Nasimons and other locally made vehicles, killed 1,271 children. Heavy vehicles, including buses, trucks, covered vans and pickup trucks, killed 1,126, while private cars, microbuses, ambulances and jeeps were involved in 317 deaths. Motorcycles killed another 98.

Rural roads were the deadliest, claiming 2,713 children's lives, followed by regional roads (2,082), highways (1,974) and urban roads (1,194).

Afternoons recorded the most fatalities (2,634), followed by mornings (2,168), midday (1,813), night (598), evening (546) and dawn (204).

RSF blamed speeding, reckless driving, weak traffic law enforcement, poor road safety awareness among drivers, parents and children, and unsafe road design, particularly in rural areas. It said the transport system fails to protect children, leaving them disproportionately vulnerable.

The government is preparing a comprehensive road safety law, targeting enactment in 2027. The draft proposes banning children under six from motorcycles and those under 14 or shorter than 135 centimetres from front car seats, while requiring appropriate safety restraints.

Road Transport and Highways Division Additional Secretary Anisur Rahman said the proposed law would address gaps in the Road Transport Act, 2018. Separate guidelines on standard helmet use and pedestrian safety are also being developed.

Saidur said schools lack adequate safety education, while drivers often fail to exercise caution near educational institutions. He called for technology-based speed monitoring, better driver training and regulatory reforms.

Kazi Md Shifun Newaz, assistant professor at Buet's Accident Research Institute, said schools should be built away from roads and highways.

"Road safety education is not a structured part of our school curriculum. In many countries, children learn from an early age how to cross roads safely, use footpaths and follow traffic rules. Such initiatives are largely absent in Bangladesh," he said.

He said clear, organised school surroundings and footpaths would help drivers spot children and children see approaching vehicles. "Under the current conditions, children often emerge suddenly onto roads, leading to accidents. Parents also place too little emphasis on teaching safe road behaviour."

Motorcycle riders and passengers accounted for the largest share of child fatalities, at 2,958 (37.14 percent), while another 2,193 (27.53 percent) died as passengers in other vehicles.

Children often ride motorcycles without helmets, while parents cross roads indiscriminately, violating traffic rules, he added. "Children tend to imitate these behaviours, making it difficult for them to understand road risks and normalising unsafe practices. These problems are particularly acute around schools."

Meanwhile, Anisur said, the BRTA was conducting awareness programmes and training in schools and colleges.

"Efforts are underway to incorporate road-use rules and safety issues more comprehensively into textbooks so that students can learn about safe road use from an early age. We also want to engage young people more actively in road safety initiatives."

In February, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education proposed introducing traffic and road safety education in primary schools, including safe road-crossing practices.

Star journo Sohrab Hossain laid to rest

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Sohrab died at Patuakhali Medical College Hospital on Tuesday at the age of 55. He breathed his last around 7:10pm, with the hospital's death certificate listing cardiac arrest as the cause of death.

According to family members, Sohrab was riding a motorbike from his village home in Auliapur to his residence at Banani Mor yesterday morning. Around 8:30am, he felt pain and stopped near Molla bus stand before collapsing on the road. Local residents and family members rushed him to the hospital, where he later died.

Sohrab joined The Daily Star on January 1, 2004. He leaves behind his wife, two sons, a daughter, and many relatives and well-wishers.

Under police's nose, for nearly a year

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Cars frequently lined the road outside the walled property, while loud music continued late into the night, within earshot of the nearby police outpost, according to residents.

Around 2:00am that night, a team from the Detective Branch (DB), acting on instructions from the police top boss, raided the property belonging to Abdullah Al Jahir, an additional deputy inspector general (DIG) of police headquarters, uncovering alleged drug use and illegal DJ parties.

The raid has raised questions about how such gatherings could continue for so long in a police personnel's residential area without attracting police intervention.

Shorab Al Hossain, the officer-in-charge of Khelkhet Police Station, said they knew the house belonged to a senior police official and that social gatherings were held there regularly. However, they were unaware of DJ parties, drug consumption or other antisocial activities. "When we came to know about it, the DB conducted a drive," he added.

Between 20 and 22 parties were being organised at the property every month since 2025, with participants joining through online registration, according to the DB.

During a visit to Police Housing-1 in Purbachal yesterday, residents, caretakers and security personnel described frequent music, dancing and gatherings at the house. Such gatherings have been going on for around a year, said Abdul Jahir, who lives with his family in a small house about 100 yards from the property for five years now.

He said that six to seven cars would sometimes be parked outside the property, while music played from large sound systems. People of different ages could be seen dancing in the open space in front of the house.

The gatherings initially took place three to four times a month but had become more frequent recently, particularly on Thursdays and Fridays.

Some parties began in the morning, while others took place in the afternoon or evening, sometimes continuing after Esha prayers.

The music would pause during the call to prayer. A nearby mosque's imam described a similar experience.

He said he occasionally walked along the road after Fajr prayers and had noticed men and women dancing outside the house early in the morning.

The house was known locally as a venue rented out for private functions, said a security guard at the entrance to Police Housing. The Daily Star approached personnel at the nearby police outpost; none agreed to speak.

The raid has raised questions about how such gatherings could continue for so long in a police personnel's residential area without attracting police intervention.

"We have come to know that 20 to 22 DJ parties were organised there every month," Elias Kabir, deputy commissioner of DB's Uttara division, told The Daily Star.

The property had been used for such gatherings since 2025, with Mahbub Alam acting as the co-host and managing the arrangements of the DJ parties. Mahbub used to charge 30 percent of the profit generated from the parties, and additional DIG Jahir used to get 70 percent, he said.

The house has six rooms, five of which were rented. The caretaker occupied the remaining room. Bookings were accepted through online platforms Airbnb and Travela. The entire property, including the five guest rooms, was rented out for Tk 18,500 a day for 10 people, while participants paid Tk 600 each as registration fees, according to Elias.

Two youths -- Sadman Rifat and Param Guha Niyogi -- coordinated with Mahbub to organise the parties.

Most participants were from affluent families, including university students and bankers.

Describing the raid, Elias said detectives found around 22 vehicles at the property. Music was playing at high volume, while smoke from shisha filled the premises.

SEIZURE LIST RAISES QUESTIONS

Despite allegations of widespread drug consumption and regular DJ parties, the DB's seizure list from the nearly three-hour raid paints a different picture.

According to the list, detectives recovered a bottle of Indian Iconic White whisky, 500ml of Royal Stag whisky from a one-litre bottle, 200ml of Russian Smirnoff vodka from a one-litre bottle, and an empty 750ml bottle of locally produced Carew's Imperial whisky. They also seized just one yaba tablet, equipment used for consuming yaba, and a small quantity of a substance identified as "kush".

The relatively small quantity of drugs recovered during an operation that led to the detention of 85 people has raised questions even among some senior police officials. Asked about the limited seizures, Elias Kabir, deputy commissioner of the DB's Uttara division, told The Daily Star that participants had consumed alcohol and yaba before detectives arrived. As a result, investigators could recover only what remained, he said.

Additional DIG Jahir repeatedly contacted investigators after the raid began, seeking to prevent Mahbub's arrest, said a high official of DB police asking not to be named.

"He called Elias Kabir three times during the operation," the official said.

Contacted, Additional DIG Jahir admitted he spoke to investigators on Mahbub's behalf, saying he initially believed the caretaker had properly discharged his responsibilities.

"I believed he had informed the guests about the house rules, including the prohibition on drug use. I did not want a poor man to face unnecessary trouble if he had performed his duties properly," he said, adding that he did not repeat the request after learning what had happened.

Mahbub told him only 35 to 40 people would attend the gathering, whereas he later learnt from DB's briefing that 84 people had been found at the property.

"That made me realise he had misrepresented the facts. Now I need to find out whether he misled me about other matters as well," he said, adding that he would examine Mahbub's role in managing the property and consider legal action if negligence or wrongdoing was established.

Meanwhile, the 85 people -- 26 women and 59 men -- detained from the residence were sentenced through summary proceedings.

The men were sentenced to one month in jail and fined Tk 1,000 each, with an additional 15 days in jail for failure to pay the fine. The women received 15 days' imprisonment and a Tk 500 fine each, with another three days in jail for non-payment.

Elias said they are now trying to get details on the organised operation involving regular bookings, paid registrations and repeated parties.

Fatalities jump 26% since 2018

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After the movement in 2018, the then government enacted new laws and policies to improve road safety. However, there was little impact of the efforts.

According to the data of the passengers' welfare platform, 68,285 people were killed in 50,936 road crashes between January 2018 and June 2026, an average of 22 deaths and 16.4 crashes a day.

With the grim data in the backdrop, Bangladesh observes National Road Safety Day today under the slogan "Safe Roads, Prosperous Country, Bangladesh First".

To strengthen road safety measures, the government is preparing to enact a comprehensive road safety law by 2027.

Following the 2018 student-led movement demanding road safety, the government passed the Road Transport Act and issued 17 directives through the Prime Minister's Office.

A government-appointed committee made 111 recommendations in 2019 to reduce crashes and restore discipline in the transport sector. A high-level task force was subsequently formed to oversee their implementation.

However, while the law came into effect in November 2019, the accompanying Road Transport Rules were approved in December 2022.

Key provisions, including mandatory appointment letters for public transport drivers, regulated working hours, adequate rest periods and accountability of vehicle owners, remain inadequately enforced.

The National Road Safety Council, the government's highest policymaking body on road safety, has not met since November 15, 2022, although it is supposed to convene at least once every six months or as required.

Meanwhile, the National Road Safety Strategic Action Plan for 2021-2024 has expired, with no new plan approved and no comprehensive assessment of its implementation made public.

Insufficient personnel and logistical support remain major obstacles to enforcing traffic laws.

According to a highway police report published in May this year, the force had around 3,030 personnel and 99 patrol vehicles, seven of which were out of service.

Police officials estimate that at least 6,000 more personnel and 250 patrol vehicles are needed for effective highway policing.

"Our law enforcement and manpower capacities are inadequate. As a result, traffic violators often escape punishment," Anisur Rahman, an additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police's traffic division, told The Daily Star.

The continued operation of unauthorised three-wheelers, including Nasimons and Karimons, on highways also highlights gaps in enforcement.

Over 6.26 lakh registered vehicles lacked updated fitness certificates as of July 2025, while another 80,309 commercial vehicles had exceeded their prescribed economic life.

According to the data of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), over 6.26 lakh registered vehicles lacked updated fitness certificates as of July 2025, while another 80,309 commercial vehicles had exceeded their prescribed economic life.

The government has introduced the Motor Vehicle Scrapping and Recycling Guideline, 2026, to facilitate the removal of such vehicles.

The increase in the number of motorcycles on the roads has heightened road safety concerns.

According to BRTA, the number of registered motorcycles more than doubled from 24.13 lakh in 2018 to 50.80 lakh in August 2026.

Talking to this newspaper, Kazi Shifun Newaz, assistant professor at Buet's Accident Research Institute, said the technical measures to enhance road safety already exist but are not being implemented effectively. He stressed the importance of enforcing speed limits, controlling light vehicles, and conducting mandatory road safety inspections.

PROPOSED LAW

The Road Transport and Highways Division has prepared a draft Road Safety Act, 2026, containing 15 chapters, 111 sections, and two schedules.

The proposed law seeks to strengthen institutional accountability, improve road infrastructure, regulate driver behaviour and vehicle standards, and ensure emergency medical care for crash victims.

Government and private hospitals and clinics would be required to provide immediate treatment without demanding registration, tickets or advance payments.

Mandatory safety audits for road construction and renovation, identification of crash-prone locations and accountability for defects in road design, construction and maintenance have been proposed.

The draft also includes provisions for footpaths, safe crossings, ramps, and facilities for people with disabilities.

The maximum prescribed punishment for repeat traffic offences would be doubled, alongside driving licence demerit points. Penalties are also proposed for using mobile phones, smoking, or engaging in other distracting activities while driving.

Speaking to this correspondent, Anisur Rahman, additional secretary of the Road Transport and Highways Division, said his division, BRTA, police, and relevant health sector agencies are working together to improve road safety through better management and improved post-crash care.

Regarding fatalities from motorcycle crashes, he said, "A large number of working-age people are losing their lives. Guidelines on helmet standards are being developed to reduce such crashes and fatalities. The use of helmets has been made mandatory for motorcyclists and pillion riders. Some additional rules have also been introduced for motorcycle movement on highways."

The uneven road to controlling hypertension

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studies use overlapping samples from the 2022 BDHS, while the WHO report relies on older STEPS data.

Organised hypertension treatment programmes in Bangladesh have reported higher control rates among enrolled patients.

At a seminar in May, Dr Syed Zakir Hossain, former line director of the Non-Communicable Disease Control programme under DGHS, said 446 NCD corners had been established, and over 9,18,000 patients with hypertension had been registered digitally.

"Through our digital system, blood pressure is now being successfully controlled among 58 percent of patients under treatment," he said.

The figure applies to patients enrolled in the programme, not everyone with hypertension. Population-level estimates also include people who have never been diagnosed or started treatment.

The October study's authors called for community screening, continuous access to affordable medicines, and the integration of patient education and follow-up into primary care, particularly for people with limited education.

Biman sets Riyadh flight, resumes Dammam services

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despite its reopening on October 18.

Under a Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) effective from October 17, airlines must obtain prior permission from Saudi Arabia's General Authority of Civil Aviation before operating flights to or from the airport.

The Saudi-led coalition said it intercepted drones over the Madina region and the kingdom's Eastern Province, Reuters reported yesterday.

Yemen's Houthi movement denied launching the drones or carrying out military operations against Saudi Arabia.