

Road Safety: A Shared Responsibility

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Preventing road accidents and ensuring safe roads remain top priorities for governments worldwide. While road accidents are a global issue, efforts are consistently being made to minimize them. Alongside legal and institutional measures, Bangladesh's current government is actively promoting awareness among road users. This combined approach, involving multiple stakeholders and initiatives, has shown progress in reducing accidents. However, there is no room for complacency—continued efforts are essential to achieving long-term success.

Every road accident brings immense pain and suffering. The families of those who lose their lives endure lasting grief, while survivors with severe injuries often face lifelong struggles. Many lose their ability to work, becoming burdens on their families and society. This underscores the urgent need for safer roads—a demand that grows stronger each day. The government and private organizations are intensifying their efforts to address this critical issue.

Road accidents are a major social, economic, and public health challenge worldwide. Statistics reveal that approximately 14 million people are injured, and over 1.1 million lose their lives in road accidents annually. In Bangladesh, a report from the Accident Research Institute (ARI) at BUET shows that 56% of orthopedic emergency patients are victims of road accidents. Alarmingly, 60% of road accident fatalities are among people aged 16–45, a demographic crucial to economic productivity. These accidents not only devastate individuals and families but also deprive society and the state of valuable contributions.

Building a safe and efficient road network is a key government priority. To meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UN's Decade of Action for Road Safety, Bangladesh has implemented the Road Transport Act 2018. The Road Transport and Highways Department is executing the National Road Safety Strategic Action Plan, aligning with both international and domestic legal frameworks. Various short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives have been launched, guided by recommendations from expert committees. A National Monitoring Committee, which includes civil society representatives, oversees the implementation of these programs. This committee also addresses issues like the harassment of women and children on public transport, in addition to improving road safety.

Poor road and highway construction is often blamed for accidents. To address this, 144 accident-prone spots have been identified nationwide, with risks reduced in approximately 200 locations through targeted projects. For instance, the Dhaka-Aricha highway, once infamous as a "death trap," is now significantly safer. Special projects are underway to improve high-risk areas by installing signs, signals, and road markings and constructing bus bays. Additionally, the government is enhancing road sustainability by installing weighing scales to control vehicle overloading and removing unplanned speed bumps 550 of which have been eliminated so far.

Road safety audits, a hallmark of modern road management, have been introduced in Bangladesh. Audits have been conducted on over 500 kilometers of highways, with ongoing evaluations covering an additional 300 kilometers. Research highlights that installing dividers on highways has significantly reduced head-on collisions. To manage increased traffic from economic growth, the government is upgrading highways to four or more lanes. Over the past decade, approximately 450 kilometers of highways have been expanded, with similar upgrades underway for another 450 kilometers. Separate lanes for slow-moving vehicles are also being constructed.

To improve connectivity and safety, the government has built over 1,200 bridges, 18 flyovers, and 27 underpasses in the past 11 years. These infrastructures have played a vital role in reducing accidents and ensuring smoother travel.

The government has intensified road safety measures by increasing the manpower of the Highway Police and establishing highway police stations. Legal actions are being taken against vehicles exceeding speed limits, while training programs for professional drivers have been expanded to district and upazila levels. Over the last two fiscal years, about 1 lakh75 thousand professional drivers have received training on road safety. Programs to train women drivers have also been introduced, reflecting the government's inclusive approach.

New facilities, such as a driver training center and a competency test center in Keraniganj, are under construction. Additionally, a Vehicle Inspection Center in Mirpur ensures digital fitness certification for vehicles, with plans to expand this service nationwide. To prevent fraud, biometric-enhanced smart cards are being used for driver's licenses and vehicle registration.

Public awareness is crucial for road safety. The government has introduced various measures to educate pedestrians and drivers about traffic laws. Initiatives include mandating seat belts, prohibiting mobile phone use while driving, and promoting the use of footbridges. Wearing helmets has been made mandatory for motorcyclists and their passengers. Mobile courts have been strengthened to penalize unfit vehicles and unlicensed drivers. To instill road safety values early, the topic has been integrated into school curriculums from pre-primary to higher secondary levels.

Ensuring safe roads requires addressing three critical factors: eliminating engineering defects, enforcing laws, and raising public awareness. This calls for effective coordination among government agencies, private organizations, and civil society. Various private and voluntary organizations are working alongside the government to create public awareness campaigns.

As road users, we all have a role to play. By adhering to traffic laws, promoting awareness, and encouraging others to do the same, we can collectively achieve the goal of safer roads. Let us commit to this cause and turn the vision of accident-free roads into reality.

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