



Advocacy Coalition Framework in Fixing Road Transport Act 2018 of Bangladesh

Md. Jahid Hashan

Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Dhaka International University, Bangladesh.

Email: jahiddusm@gmail.com

Received: 12th January 2025

Accepted: 05th March 2025

Published: 5th April 2025

ABSTRACT

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith, provides a powerful analytical lens for understanding public policy. This paper applies the ACF to examine the enactment of Bangladesh's Road Transport Act 2018, a landmark policy reform that replaced the Motor Vehicle Ordinance of 1983 in response to the country's escalating road safety crisis. The Act was catalyzed by nationwide student-led protests following the tragic deaths of two students in a road accident, revealing deep-rooted governance failures, public discontent, and entrenched opposition from transport sector stakeholders. This research identifies two dominant advocacy coalitions: the "We Want Safe Roads" coalition, comprising students, civil society, and the media, advocating for stricter traffic laws and greater accountability; and the Road Transport Workers' Federation coalition, resisting regulatory changes to protect industry interests. The study examines the interplay between coalition strategies, policy brokers, and external system events, demonstrating how public mobilization and media influence reshaped policy discourse and compelled legislative action. Findings underscore the incremental and conflict-driven nature of policy reform, revealing the complexity of institutional resistance, stakeholder negotiations, and enforcement challenges in the policymaking process. This case reinforces the relevance of the ACF in analyzing policy shifts in highly politicized environments and offers broader insights into the dynamics of advocacy coalitions in developing governance contexts.

Keywords: Advocacy Coalition Framework, Road Transport Act 2018, Policy Change, Road Safety, Public Mobilization, Bangladesh, Governance

INTRODUCTION

The Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was first developed by Paul Sabatier and Hank Jenkins-Smith in the early 1980s. It stands as one of the most widely utilized theories in the study of the policy process. This framework helps to understand policy change and multiple actors from several level of government, media etc. as well as conflicting beliefs, technical disputes among diverse stakeholders Sabatier and Smith suggests that people engage in politics to influence policy outcome. This study aims to apply the ACF to Road Transport Act 2018 of Bangladesh. It sought to provide an overview to the understanding of the Road Transport Act 2018 policy process as a policy cycle. The bottom line of this framework is that individuals engage in political activities to translate their beliefs into actionable policies. Thus, forming advocacy coalitions is based on shared common goals and values. The ACF is particularly relevant in analyzing policy changes that arise from complex interactions among various actors, including government officials, civil society organizations, and interest groups.

Theoretical Framework

Summary

The existing literature on political engagement explores the various mechanisms through which individuals and groups participate in the policymaking process and influence governance. While individuals contribute to the policymaking process through these, they lack direct influence over policymakers. Moreover, traditional academic literature has encountered challenges in systematically tracking and analyzing policy changes, which are regarded as fundamental to the study of policy sciences (Stewart 2006).

To address the inherent complexity and uncertainty within environmental policy subsystems in the United States, Sabatier (1988, 1994, 2007) developed the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) as a means of analyzing policy change. This analytical approach evaluates the roles and influence of different actors within the policymaking arena (Figure 1). Thomas A. Birkland formally defines the Advocacy Coalition Framework in his seminal work '*An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*' (2011, p. 298). According to Birkland, "the ACF constitutes a theoretical model designed to explain the interactions among groups and coalitions in the policy process." In this framework, two to four coalitions typically emerge, each characterized by shared policy

beliefs.

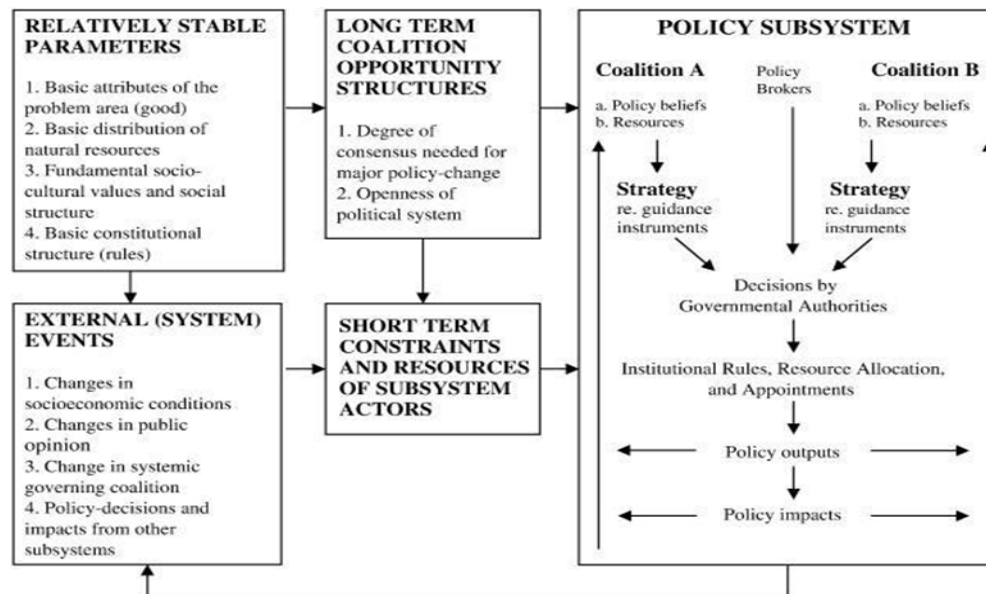


Figure 1: Advocacy Coalition Framework (Sabatier & Weidle, 2007)

Application of ACF

Sabatier and Weible (2007) documented more than one hundred scholarly works on the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), authored by researchers from diverse global contexts. These studies examined a diverse range of policy domains such as nuclear policy, drug policy and others. Their findings indicated that the ACF has proven valuable to scholars employing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This section aims to present a selection of studies published by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1999) (Table 1).

Applications by ACF Authors, 1998–2006

Table 1: Applications by ACF Authors

Author(s)	Author's Affiliation	Year	Geographic Scope	Geographic Topic
Zafonte & Sabatier	UC, Davis	1999, 2004	U.S.	Air pollution
Weible, Sabatier, & Ludbell	UC, Davis	2004, 2005	California, U.S.	Marine protected areas
Leach & Sabatier	UC, Davis & Center for Collaborative Policy	2005	California & Washington, U.S.	Watershed partnerships

Weible & Sabatier	UC, Davis & Georgia Institute of Technology	2006	California & Nevada, U.S.	Lake Tahoe water policy
Herron, Jenkins-Smith, & Silva	U of New Mexico & Texas A&M U	2002, 2005	U.S.	Nuclear security

Source: Sabatier, 2007; p. 217

Road Transport Act 2018 of Bangladesh: Policy Background

Bangladesh has long struggled with road safety issues and management of traffic. It is due to rapid urbanization, growing vehicle numbers, and limited infrastructural developments. The previous legal framework, the *Motor Vehicles Ordinance 1983*, was considered outdated and ineffective to address modern transport challenges. *The Road Transport Act 2018* of Bangladesh was introduced to modernize and strengthen the legal framework governing road safety, vehicle operations, and traffic regulations. This act replaced the earlier Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983. It aims to reduce road accidents, enhance accountability, and improve overall transport management (Dhaka Tribune, November 1st, 2019) It went into effect on November 1, 2019. The call for legal reforms became more urgent following a series of road accidents such as the tragic deaths of students in Dhaka in 2018. On July 29, 2018, a road accident claimed the lives of two students from Shaheed Romijuddin Cantonment College. This incident sparked nationwide protests, demanding stricter road laws and better enforcement. The government responded by enacting the Road Transport Act 2018. Despite its enactment, the RTA 2018 faced delays in implementation due to resistance from transport workers and associations. Strikes and protests were organized, demanding changes to the law, particularly concerning the severity of penalties. In response, the government formed a committee to review the Act and consider amendments to address these concerns.

Key Provisions of the RTA 2018:

- **Enhanced Penalties:** The Act introduced more severe punishments for various traffic offenses, including driving without a license, operating unregistered or unfit vehicles, overloading, and environmental pollution caused by vehicles.
- **Operator and Designer Accountability:** The legislation places increased responsibility on vehicle operators and designers to ensure safety standards are met, aiming to reduce accidents caused by mechanical failures or design flaws.

- Insurance Requirements:** Initially, the Act made it optional for vehicle owners to insure the lives and assets of passengers. However, proposed amendments seek to make passenger insurance mandatory, with fines imposed on owners who fail to comply.

In summary, the Road Transport Act 2018 was a legislative response to the pressing need for improved road safety in Bangladesh, aiming to modernize transportation laws and enhance accountability among all stakeholders in the transport sector.

Applying Advocacy Framework in fixing the Road Transport Act 2018

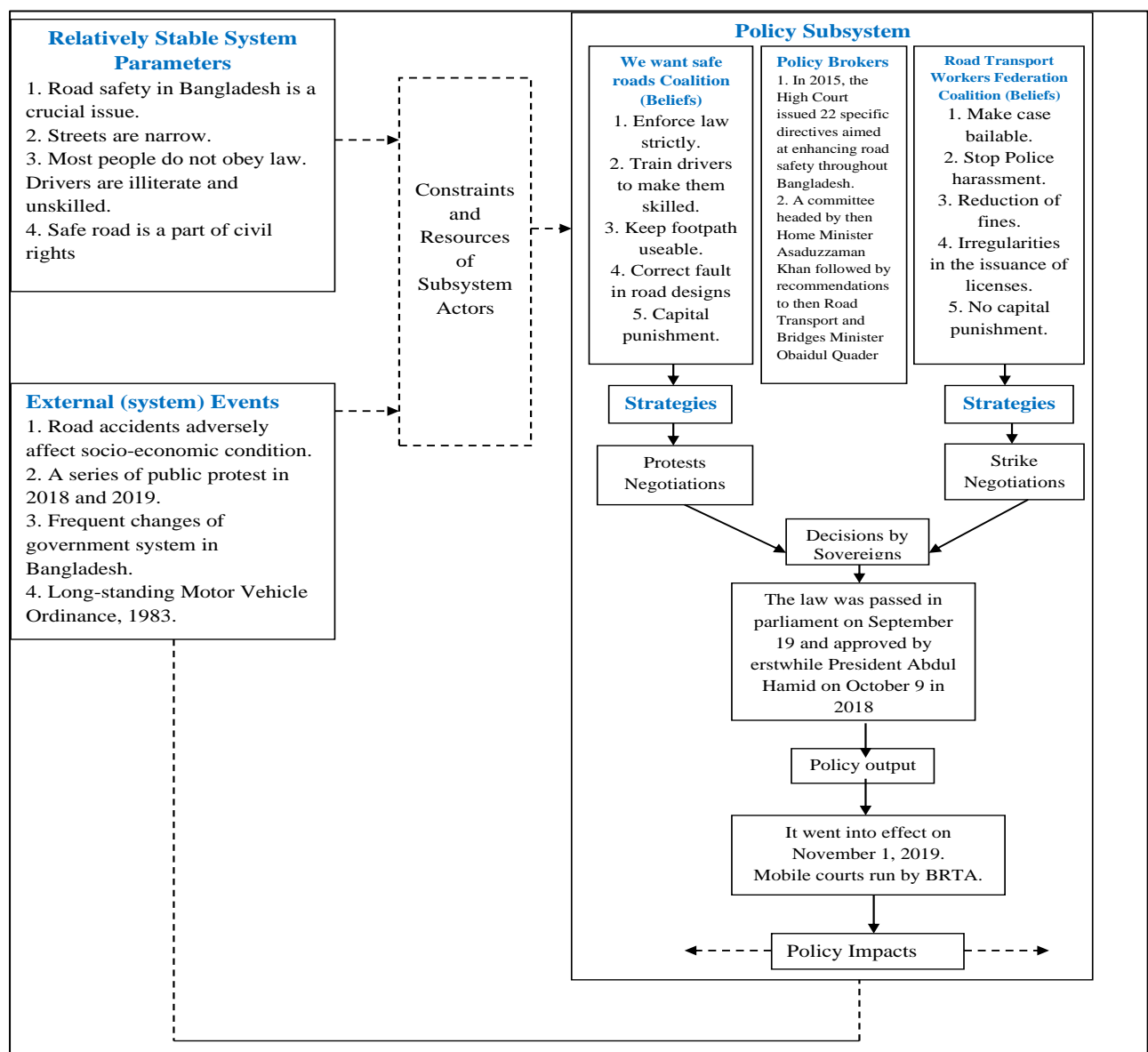


Figure 1: It demonstrates ACF in accordance with Bangladesh's Road Transport Act 2018.

Relatively Stable System Parameters

Relatively stable parameters remain consistent over time. For instance:

Basic attributes of the problem area

Road safety in Bangladesh is a crucial issue. It is a long-standing problem in Bangladesh. Road accidents in Bangladesh have reached epidemic levels. These are usually quite stable over time. The number of road crashes and deaths rose alarmingly. According to Nirapad Sarak Chai, the crashes and deaths increased last year by 51.53 percent and 17.75 percent over 2018 (The Daily Star, February 23, 2020). So the problem area can be identified as: How could we ensure safe roads? How to reduce deaths on roads?

Year	Total Accidents	Total Fatalities	Total Injuries	Major Causes
2018	3381	2500	4821	Reckless driving, poor road conditions
2019	4147	3220	5732	Speeding, lack of enforcement
2020	3297	2765	4987	COVID-19 restrictions, poor maintenance
2021	5229	4128	6894	Increased traffic, driver negligence
2022	5643	4502	7235	Vehicle overloading, infrastructure issues
2023	5901	4789	7541	Road congestion, unregulated public transport
2024	6359	8543	12608	Speeding, reckless driving, poor enforcement

Source: Author-compiled based on existing reports from national dailies

Basic distribution of natural resources

Streets of Bangladesh are not that wide spread. It is due to illegal possession on the road. As a result, roads are getting narrow and becoming a reason behind unsafe roads. A survey conducted by the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) in 2019 revealed that approximately 25 percent of roads nationwide were in extremely poor condition, with an estimated repair cost of Tk 10,679 crore. (The Daily Star, July 11, 2019) Moreover, rapid urbanization in Bangladesh has resulted in extreme levels of traffic congestion. Dhaka is not a pedestrian-friendly city. Every day, many people face accidents due to heavy traffic and poor management of resources.

Fundamental socio-cultural values and social structure

Most people do not know the law. Those who know law, they do not obey. Many people cross the road without crossing the over bridge or crossing the zebra crossing. That's why

they break the law and get into an accident. People in general cross the road at the risk of their lives. The main reason for this is ignorance about traffic laws. On top of that, there are even unskilled drivers who get valid licenses. The educational qualifications of the drivers and supervisors are questioned.

Basic constitutional structure

Safe road is indeed a part of civil rights. But in the Bangladesh Constitution, there is no clause regarding safe roads. There was only one ordinance.

Policy Subsystem

This is the core of the framework. For example:

a. Advocacy coalition

Table 2: *Coalitions reflect their values and beliefs.*

Coalition A	Coalition B
We want safe roads Coalition	Road Transport Workers Federation Coalition
Nirapad Sarak Chai organization	Transport leaders
Civil society	Truck-bus-covered van owners' federation
Students	Truck-bus-covered van workers' federation
Journalists	Inter district truck drivers' union
Mass people	Truck owners union
Researchers	Bus workers federation
	Mass media

b. Policy beliefs

Policy beliefs are of 3 types. These are applied below

Table 3: *It presents the beliefs system of 'Coalition A- We Want Safe Roads Coalition'*

Coalition A: We Want Safe Roads Coalition		
Deep core beliefs	Policy core beliefs	Secondary aspects of beliefs
Enact new law	Continuous media campaign to increase public awareness.	Demanding capital punishment.
Enforce law strictly	Special tribunal in case of road accident.	Life time imprisonment of the driver for killing anyone in an accident.
Train drivers to make them skilled	Positive changes in the establishment of discipline in road transport.	Non bailable punishment.
Keep footpath useable	Ensure the rule of law.	Educational qualifications for

		the drivers.
Continuous media campaign to increase public awareness.	Positive changes in the establishment of discipline in road transport.	Impose huge fines.
Special tribunal in case of road accident.	Ensure the rule of law.	Demanding capital punishment.
Educational qualifications for the drivers.	Continuous media campaign to increase public awareness.	Life time imprisonment of the driver for killing anyone in an accident.
	Impose huge fines.	Non bailable punishment.

Table 4: It presents the beliefs system of ‘Coalition B: Road Transport Workers Federation Coalition’

Coalition B: Road Transport Workers Federation Coalition		
Deep core beliefs	Policy core beliefs	Secondary aspects of beliefs
Enact new law.	Workers should be represented on the road accident investigation committee.	No capital punishment.
Demand safe roads.	Educational qualification in driving license must be fifth grade.	Bail able punishment.
It will take time to adjust according to the law.	Punishment should be abolished.	Fix the fine in proportion to the current amount as per the previous law.
Keep footpath useable	Police harassment on the road must stop.	All districts need to issue driving licenses with extensive training of workers and stop corruption and irregularities in the issuance of licenses.
	Proper license process	

Policy brokers

- The High Court ordered the government to immediately remove all unauthorized structures within 10 meters of highways, restore visibility of motorists at blind curves, and install speed-limit signs to prevent road accidents (The Daily Star, December 8, 2015).
- The government formed a committee headed by Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan (erstwhile) to comment on the law’s implementation. Law Minister Anisul Haque (erstwhile) and Railway Minister Mujibul Haque (erstwhile) are members of the committee. According to sources in the Ministry of Roads and the committee of three ministers and the owner-worker organization, the committee of three ministers has held several meetings with the concerned including the owner-worker organization (The Daily Star, November 25, 2019).
- Besides, the government has already formed a committee to reduce accidents by restoring order in roads and public transport. The 15-member committee is headed by Shahjahan Khan, acting president of the Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation and former shipping minister. The committee was formed at the 28th meeting of the National Road Safety Council. (The Daily Star, February 18, 2019)

External (System) Events

External events are not static rather, it is dynamic.

Changes in socio-economic condition

The effects of a road accident in Bangladesh are most deeply felt within households. It often has a dangerous impact on household activity. The loss of the primary earner, medical expenses, and job or income loss can lead to serious economic and social hardships for families. Road crashes often push poor households into poverty. It creates economic burden to the society due to loss of productivity.

Changes in public opinion

From July 29 to August 8, 2018, a wave of public protests took place across Bangladesh, demanding better road safety measures. (The Daily Star, August 14, 2020) It was sparked by the deaths of two high-school students in Dhaka. It was a strong catalyst which was required to reform law.

Changes in the systematic governing coalition

Military dictator in 1983 issues an ordinance namely Motor Vehicle Ordinance. Since the Constitution (Fifteenth Amendment) Act, 2011 (Act No. 14 of 2011) repealed Article 19 of the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh relating to the approval and support of ordinances issued by military decrees between March 24, 1972 and November 11, 1986. In a judgment of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court No. 48/2011, the Constitution (Seventh Amendment) Act, 197 (Act No. 1 of 1986) declaring martial law unconstitutional was declared null and void; And Since some of the said ordinances are kept in force by Act No. 7 of 2013. Motor Vehicle Ordinance, 1983 is one of these. Bangladesh witnessed presidential form of government, military rule, caretaker government and parliamentary form of government since the birth of Bangladesh.

Policy decisions and impacts from other subsystem

In Bangladesh, there was long-standing Motor Vehicle Ordinance of 1983. This ordinance lacked updated law and definitions of offense. Moreover, corruption in the process of making a license is an open secret in Bangladesh. So, previous policy decisions significantly impact

external system.

Decisions by Sovereign

On August 2, 2018 Sheikh Hasina (Erstwhile Prime Minister) has called upon the agitating students to return to their respective educational institutions shunning the path of movement on the streets (Dhaka Tribune, October 23, 2019). The law was passed in parliament on September 19 and approved by President Abdul Hamid on October 9 in 2018. The act would replace the existing Motor Vehicles Ordinance, 1983.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The case on Road Transport Act 2018 of Bangladesh suggests that there was interplay between transport sectors and mass people, students. The demand for a new road safety law had been growing, yet it faced persistent delays due to strong resistance from transport workers. From this perspective, it is evident that policymaking is a complex process and influenced by various factors. Policy changes typically unfold over an extended period, often spanning a decade or more, rather than occurring rapidly. It is crucial to recognize that the Advocacy Coalition Framework operates as a continuous and evolving process.

References

- Birkland, T. (2011). *An Introduction to the Policy Process: Theories, Concepts, and Models of Public Policy Making*. London: Routledge.
- Dhaka Tribune.** (2019, November 1). *Road Transport Act, 2018 goes into effect on Friday*. Retrieved from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2019/11/01/road-transport-act-2018-goes-into-effect-on-friday-brta-not-yet-prepared-to-implement-new-traffic-law>
- Dhaka Tribune.** (2019, October 23). *Road Safety Act goes into action from Nov 1*. Retrieved from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/government-affairs/2019/10/23/govt-to-enforce-road-transport-act-2018-from-nov-1>
- Howlett, M., & Ramesh, M. (2003). *Studying Public Policy: Policy Cycles and Policy Subsystems*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins-Smith, H. C., & Sabatier, P. A. (1994). Evaluating the Advocacy Coalition Framework. *Journal of Public Policy*, 14(2), 175-203. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X00007431>
- Sabatier, P. (1988). An Advocacy Coalition Model of Policy Change and the Role of Policy-Oriented Learning Therein. *Policy Sciences*, 21, 175-203. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00136406>
- Sabatier, P., & Weible, M. (2007). *The Advocacy Coalition Framework: Innovations and Clarifications*. Westview Press.
- Sotirov, M., & Memmler, M. (2012). The Advocacy Coalition Framework in natural resource policy studies - Recent experiences and further prospects. *Forest Policy and Economics*, 16, 51-64. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2011.06.007>
- Stewart, J. (2006). Value Conflict and Policy Change. *RPR Review of Policy Research*, 23(1), 183-195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.2006.00192.x>
- The Daily Star.** (2015, December 8). *Bangladesh top court pulls for road safety*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/hc-pulls-road-safety-184111>
- The Daily Star.** (2019, February 18). *Controversial leaders given road safety job*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/country/shajahan-khan-lead-committee-formed-prevent-road-accident-in-bangladesh-1703365>
- The Daily Star.** (2019, July 11). *4,200 km of roads in bad condition*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/news/4200km-roads-bad-or-very-bad-1764895>
- The Daily Star.** (2019, November 25). *Checking Road Accidents: Long wait for effective steps*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/checking-bangladesh-road-accidents-committee-formed-for-action-plan-1831594>

- The Daily Star.** (2019, November 6). *Road Transport Act 2018 – details, repercussions, reactions*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/shift/news/road-transport-act-2018-details-repercussions-reactions-1823818>
- The Daily Star.** (2020, August 14). *Road Safety Movement 2018: Was it worthwhile?*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/star-youth/news/road-safety-movement-2018-was-it-worthwhile-1944557>
- The Daily Star.** (2020, February 23). *Accident fatalities in Bangladesh: Good trends ‘undermined’*. Retrieved from <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/crash-fatalities-bangladesh-good-trends-undermined-1871680>