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Dhaka has launched an artificial intelligence-powered traffic enforcement system to bring order to one of the world's most congested cities. AFP PIC

AI putting Dhaka drivers on alert

BANGLADESH'S densely populated capital, infamous for its crippling gridlock, has launched its first artificial intelligence (AI)-powered traffic enforcement system to bring order to one of the world's most congested cities.

Across Dhaka, buses, cars, motorcycles and pedal rickshaws compete for space, often treating traffic signals, pedestrian crossings and even traffic police as obstacles to overcome.

On-the-spot police fines frequently spark arguments, confrontations are common and officers are sometimes struck by motorists refusing to obey instructions.

"Those who violate the rules turn against us," said traffic sergeant SM Nazim Uddin.

"But since AI was introduced, people behind the wheel have started obeying the law — and we have been spared the everyday quarrels."

A.I. TRAFFIC MONITORING

Despite repeated attempts to modernise traffic management, the city of more than 22 million people remained heavily reliant on manual traffic control, with officers stretching ropes across roads before traffic lights turned green.

However, in April, Dhaka police linked traffic cameras to AI software designed to automatically detect traffic violations.

Motorist Hannan Rahman Jibon,

28, was among the first drivers caught by the new system.

"I ran a red light and the owner of my car, who was sitting at home, received a text message saying the vehicle had violated traffic rules," said Jibon, who received an automatic 2,000 taka fine.

"I am more careful now, with cameras installed in many different places."

WORLD'S 'SLOWEST CITY'

One study by the United States National Bureau of Economic Research ranked Dhaka as the "slowest city" in the world.

According to a study by the World Bank and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, the city records an average traffic speed of just 4.8kph — making walking faster in some areas.

Dhaka police spokesman N.M. Nasiruddin said the AI system used existing traffic-monitoring camera feeds, with the software identifying offences ranging from traffic signal and lane violations to illegal parking.

Coverage has yet to extend across the entire city and manual enforcement will gradually be phased out. However, police said the technology was already changing driver behaviour.

"We have started getting results," Nasiruddin said. "We have prosecuted at least 300 vehicles."

Inside a control room at the police headquarters, analyst Sharmin Afroze, 52, monitored live traffic feeds connected to the AI system, where flagged violations were verified by human operators.

"Before, police used to stop vehicles, check documents and determine fines," he said, noting that the system had recorded nearly 800 traffic violations in a single day.

For now, police are only fining serious offenders, while others receive warnings.

CHALLENGES REMAIN

Still, officials admit the technology faces several challenges.

"We are facing some issues, too," Afroze said. "For example, some number plates are blurred or too small to identify."

Police are working with the road transport authority to address the problem, while additional monitoring features, such as detecting vehicles driving on footpaths, are expected to be introduced soon.

The system currently focuses only on motor vehicles, while authorities are still considering how to regulate Dhaka's vast fleet of pedal rickshaws, a defining feature of the city's traffic.

Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology professor Hasib Mohammed Ahsan said the long-term success of the system would depend less on technology and more on consistent enforcement.

"We have spent huge amounts of money on traffic signals and their upgrades, but those efforts were never sustained," Ahsan said.

"We do not follow rules, there is no consistency in our planning and there is no accountability for failure."

