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"Overloading, apathy blamed for disaster". This was the caption of the news on the capsized launch in DS. The point that caught my attention was "apathy". It is true that human disaster of such magnitude calls for a national mourning in any compassionate society. We are immune to such emotions perhaps because of the recurrence of these accidents and the victims are from the poor strata of our society.

These people make mass, overload vehicles, but does not have any say in our politics or society. Their vote counts but not their voice. Since our apathetic authority and greedy transport owners are not going to take any heed from these disasters, we have to educate our people about these disasters. At least half of the people who died on that fateful night were probably bound for a different launch. They boarded this launch, even though they saw that this launch was overloaded.

We have to create a mass awareness campaign to prevent people from boarding packed vehicles, be it a bus or a launch. Our print and electronic media should take the lead. If we want to prevent this epidemic we have to start educating people now. If people know their rights as a passenger and a customer, I am sure authority and transport owners have to bow down to take necessary steps to at least decrease the rate of these fatalities.

Ujjwal Dhar
New England Medical Center, Washington Street, Boston

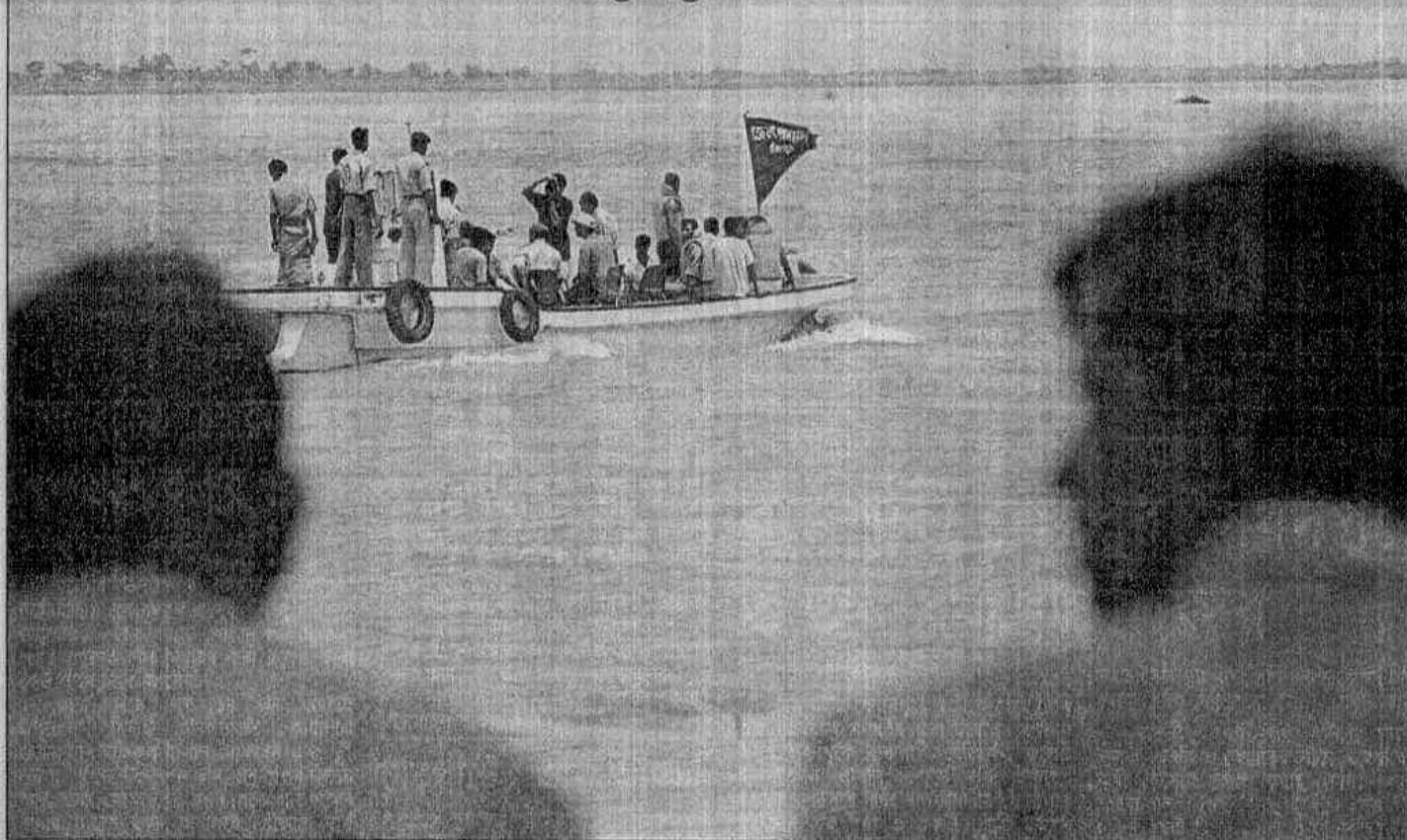
In Bangladesh we all seem to be too helpless to find a way to stop the frequent tragic recurrence of the "launch disaster" despite all apparent efforts by everyone concerned! The front pages of The Daily Star, like all other national dailies, came up with full details of the latest carnage and once again every conscious citizen of this country is shocked at the colossal loss of lives.

BBC both in its English and Bangla service has been covering the tragic event extensively including interviews of the minister concerned, high academics (associate professor /specialist on the subject) and observers.

We understand that accidents of this nature cannot be altogether eliminated and absolute safety is not achievable, but after such series of incidents we must consider the matter seriously. What is wrong with us? And how can we allow such similar disasters to continue to happen in one of our most important modes of transport system.

Inquiries and expert opinions on this subject already identified the probable causes for such disasters. They are structural failure,

Launch disasters: A recurring nightmare



human error or failure, overloading, foul weather etc.

The cause of the recent incident apparently is the vessel was sucked in to a big 'whirl-pool' due to flash-flood and nature of the river in that particular area. Allegedly that similar tragedies also occurred in the same place in past. Some of the survivors said it was overloading as well as the callousness on the part of masters/navigators.

Now, whatever the reasons are the point is we do not want such accidents anymore.

Will the ministry concerned do anything about it?

Z. Rahman
Gulshan, Dhaka

The dailies say that passenger overloading, faulty design, absence of management at Sadarghat are the main causes for continuous launch disasters. The unofficial claim is that 600 people disappeared in this recent accident. And our Shipping Minister reportedly told that matters related to launch disasters are beyond his

MPs have every right to raise their benefits (?)

It is very nice to know that our MPs have passed a bill in the Jatiya Sangsad, our national parliament, to raise their allowances. It is their magnanimity that they have enhanced the allowances only 100 to 600 per cent, and not 1000 to 2000 percent, which they could have done at their sweet will. We, the people of Bangladesh are so lucky that we have so sensible and judicious MPs.

Only I would like to draw the kind attention of our MPs to a very important fact that the British Parliament, which is known as the

Mother of all the parliaments, when passes a bill, enhancing the remuneration and/or allowances of MPs, the members of the Parliament, which has passed the bill are not allowed to enjoy the benefits. Only the members of the subsequent parliaments can enjoy those enhanced benefits.

It looks odd indeed that a person or a body enhances its benefits, which affects public exchequer. It looks extremely odd when the persons are public representatives, is not it, Sirs?

Faruque Hasan
Dhannondi, Dhaka

The government recently has introduced bills with a view to enhance

salary and other allowances of the MPs, including the prime minister and ministers. The proposed increase is substantial. But, in the last budget (2003-04) comparatively less privileged government servants has got only 10 per cent increase. It is surprising that the Finance Minister did not feel any qualms about it! Some of the proposed perks do not seem to be at all justified.

Why there should be enhancement in the allowance for MPs for attending the parliament which is their duty. Moreover, there is another proposal of allotting flats for them in the newly built NAM buildings. It seems there is no end to their perks.

Ujjahan
Once-maid

Independent anti-graft body for Bangladesh

At last Bangladesh is going to have a "self-governing" anti-corruption body, albeit brought on by the major donors and the Transparency International instead of the establishment itself.

However, the question is whether it's possible for Bangladesh to have an independent organisation, let alone independent anti-graft body. The anti-corruption commission act as approved recently by the cabinet, corroborates that apprehension beyond any reservation. If the ministers and the government-appointed high officials (no matter whether they hold constitutional posts or not) are involved in the selection process of the chairman and members of the anti-graft body, the latter would be anything but independent for the simple reason that normally political consideration is almost unavoidable in appointing the ministers or the chairmen of the constitutional entities.

Then where we might look for any semblance of independence and impartiality?

Still, it is the judiciary and judiciary alone which is recognised as unbiased and above board and there is no scope to dilute the sublime image of the judiciary with any other high office. It follows therefore that the full bench of the Supreme Court by majority decision may recommend to the President a panel of six distinguished personalities with no known political affiliation and the President may appoint any three of them as the chairman and the members of the proposed anti-graft body, with the rank and status and pay of the judges of the appellate division of the Supreme Court.

However, it is not enough just to appoint the highest echelon of the body. The chairman and the members should be given adequate legal authority to hire and fire necessary subordinates and staffs along with appropriate financial provisions to run the commission smoothly and efficiently. Last but not the least, the commission has to be powerful enough to take all necessary measures to contain corruption at any level of the government and beyond.

Hafeezul Alam
Dhaka

Bumper hamper

It is good to see that the car owners are finally getting rid of their extra bumpers. These bumpers that

people of Bangladesh fit around their cars is useless. Because if it did have a proper reason then people around the globe would be using them. This is seen exclusively in Bangladesh and I have never seen and neither heard of using such bumpers in other countries.

If a metallic bumper was used in other countries, then it surely has to be automobile company certified -- that the extra bumper will not hamper the overall aerodynamics of the car and at the same time all the passive safety features will be working properly. But in our country, all these important aspects do not seem to bother most of our citizens.

All original bumpers in cars today are made of plastic, which enables them to take small impacts (our citizens are not secured enough with them) and at the same time retract back to its original shape if hit hard from a certain speed above which cars in Dhaka do not usually go. The small impacts usually leave a black spot, which can be easily removed by polishing it.

New and re-conditioned cars that are hitting the roads today (except the Indian ones) all come equipped with 'SRS Airbags', which is considered as a breakthrough in technology. But with these extra bumpers that people fit is nothing but making a mockery of the money invested and the successful projects of the automobile companies.

Maximum car owners in the country are not well aware of automobiles. Therefore, it was really wise of the government to take the decision. It will save lives and make our citizens understand that extra bumpers are not the only solution to safe driving!

Masrur Ali
Dhaka

It refers to the front-page news about court's decision regarding iron bumpers.

I must thank Mr. Kamruzzaman Chowdhury for his action to challenge the authorities for their hasty decision for removal of metal protective bumpers from cars. I must also thank all others who have voiced their protest on this decision. I must thank the additional attorney General Mr. A.J. Mohammad Ali for his remarks and show causing the authorities.

People sitting on the helms of affairs in the government must exercise their intelligence and power of judgement before really asking the public for a major compliance. They must understand the impending problems related to the issue. There are several hundred poor families involved with this bumper making trade. The taxpayer who attaches the bumper to his car does so to protect his car from damages done by the rickshaws who knows no law.

The government should prevent accidents rather than penalise the taxpayers, car owners in particular. Government should scrutinise the activities of the law enforcing agents regarding their sincerity to duty. Government should consider enforcement of existing traffic safety rules rather than act imprudently to jeopardise the already-chaotic traffic situation. I can't imagine what will happen to the cars once the rickshawalas find out that there are no protective bumpers in cars. They will have fun while the car owner will get hypertension. This is

not justified.

Has anyone really considered finding out reasons of road accidents? Allow me to narrate some. First of all question the drivers' license issuing authority. Money will get anyone a 5-year-old driving license in Bangladesh. If this is the criterion for obtaining permission to drive, no one can stop road accidents. Most of the drivers have fake licenses issued by the cops themselves. If you talk of fitness, maximum cars are in good running conditions most of the time; it's the government and private busses, trucks, and all sundry public transport including police vans that are not for the road. They neither have qualified drivers nor are they fit enough to be on the road. Who is responsible for this mess?

So I suggest, keep the roads in good condition, issue licenses to qualified drivers, keep unfit vehicles out of the roads, ensure sincere traffic control, manage rickshaws and pedestrians properly and above all prevent cops from taking bribe -- there will be hardly any road accidents.

Shah
Dhaka

The controversy of whether to take off the bumpers from the cars or not, has now taken another turn with Mr. Asifur Rahman's suggestion (DS July 11) "to get rid of the rickshaws out of the city streets", before passing orders for reinstatement of bumpers. How irrational and unjust he is! Who knows maybe someone might suggest next time if an accident occurs, that get rid of the wheels of a car or even ban cars from the streets! These can not be a solution.

The writer ventured to give an estimated loss to owners of cars for supposed repair work at their cost but does he have an estimate about the sufferings of the poor and middle class people (who are already undergoing untold sufferings for declaring right and left 'rickshaw-free roads without minimum consideration of their plight) whose principal mode of transport is rickshaw. And what will happen to the rickshawpullers?

The poor and middle class can never dream of having a motor car but can afford a rickshaw ride -- while going to school, market or to places of work, etc. The rickshaw pullers, however, would find it too difficult to even to survive if they have to leave the present profession. Because they are illiterate and not fit for any other profession -- they are mostly rustic freshers from far flung districts. Do we consider their loss as worthy of consideration?

So, in my opinion, the pragmatic decision should be: disciplining the whole traffic system of the metropolis not by dismantling the bumpers and closing several roads and lanes to rickshaws but by renovating all the roads, inducting stiff rules and regulations and make the police, in particular traffic police, well trained, more vigilant and duty bound on the street and subjection to strict compliance of rules and to penalise both the drivers and police if found irresponsible and negligent on duty and leave the car owner at their own to decide as to how to protect their valuable transport. If needed, some out-dated British rules can be revised and improved to suit the modern day requirements.

Let me point out that I have

observed many a times a traffic police gossiping with other colleague or talking with truck drivers leaving his post and ignoring traffic flow. For such negligence and irresponsible behaviour by the traffic police drivers often cross intersections beyond instructions.

FBR
Dhaka

Double standards of USA

The US allegation against Iran's nuclear programmes is hypocritical to say the least. BBC's recent documentary on Israel's nuclear programme has revealed the US position and we are convinced that

control. If it is so then why is he there in the cabinet?

Is there any legislator who can ask the Prime minister that why her government is failing to over come such disasters? As usual the government has set up two enquiry committees to counter the immediate public outrage. And we all know that after sometime this issue will be forgotten just like in the cases of many disasters in the past. This useless exercise takes place after every launch disaster that costs hundreds of human lives. The irony is that nobody wants to do anything about it except for uttering a few words of sympathy for the grieving family.

In my opinion the Prime Minister after removing this incompetent Shipping Minister should introduce a system where cargo is shipped in separate launches/barges and where passenger will not be allowed. This used to be the practice during the British era. Cargo loaded barges were towed by tug boats to various destinations. I suggest that proper inspection team should be employed to check the vessels from over loading.

Wali
Dhaka

Yet another launch disaster takes place. This time it is more tragic in terms of the number of deaths. A far lesser death toll in the Bali bomb blast has caused a nation wide shock and grief in Australia. A loss of life of this magnitude would have called for a nation wide mourning in any developed country and the head of the concerned authority would surely have resigned. A major investigation would have been ensued. Remedial actions would be taken to avert recurrence of such incident in the future.

Unfortunately, in Bangladesh, none of these will happen because death of a few hundreds is a normal event here. After the last launch mishap few months ago, the authority promised to take stern measures to avert such incidents. Like many other promises, this one also remained unfulfilled. After any such tragic accident, the authority promises preventive measures, an investigation committee is set up, the deadline for submission of the committee report is extended a few times, and when the report is finally submitted to the authority, we hear about the assurances of implementation of committee recommendations. But it never happens. The report gathers dust and we soon forget about the incident except only those families who lost their loved ones.

How many thousands of lives must perish in launch disasters before anyone takes the necessary measures.

K M Zubair Sadeque
Dhaka

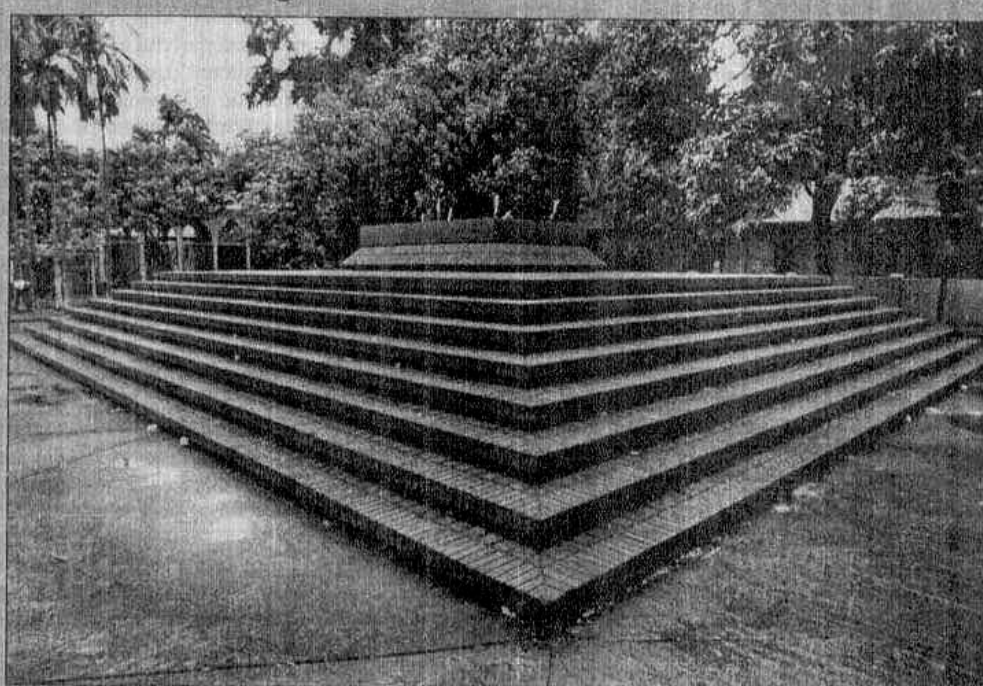
The only conclusion one can draw is that, Iran's fault (as was Iraq's under Saddam Hussein) is not pursuing the nuclear option (if it is so) but probably being an Islamic state. What distresses me even more than the double standard of the US is the position of the rich Arab states. Why can't these countries join together and ask the US to apply the same conditions on Israel that has already been applied on Iraq and 'threatened to apply' on Iran? They have the financial strength to do so.

On my part, I have no hope but to wait for some divine intervention to make the US see how wrong it is to keep a double standard. The total subservience of the US administration on Israeli interests and of US

hundreds of thousands of lives". And manufacturing drugs is not an easy task. One have to be fully alert while drug manufacturing. It is impossible for one to deal with medicines if he does not have the knowledge of the following few subjects collectively. Such as Pharmacology and Toxicology, Medicinal Chemistry, Physiology, Microbiology, Pharmaceutical Science and Technology, Pharmacognosy, Phytochemistry and some other related sciences.

So my earnest appeal to the legislative bodies to keep eye on the welfare of our common people because they take medicines keeping faith on us. Besides, this is a developing sector and it needs

In search of signboards



National poet lying unnoticed?

Please place eye-catching signboards in the arts building of Dhaka University (DU) which has witnessed many historical movements and known as the famous "Kola Bhaban". Curzon Hall of DU is also another historical and architectural site of the British era. Our national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam, the great artist Zoyunul Abedin and the Cartoonist (Patua) Kamrul Hasan are resting eternally besides the central mosque (originally named Mashjidul Jamia) of DU.

Many visitors come to DU everyday, but these architectural sights do not have signboards that can be noticed easily or mark of names either in front or atop, so it is difficult to recognise them. Specially in "Pahela Baishakh", "Ekushey February", "Shadinota Dibosh" (Independence Day), Bijoy Dibosh (Victory Day) and in other important occasions, when a large number of people come to DU, sometimes they wish to find out certain places and fail to do so because of the absence of any proper mark or signboards.

Similar situation exists in both the central libraries -- arts and science. In their first year in DU thousands of students face this kind of problems. Many unimportant buildings in DU are displaying big signboards for attention. So my humble request to the authority concerned is to place signboards that can be noticed easily or marks in front or atop of all the historical and architectural sites in DU.

Hope you will print it.

Md. Zillur Rahman
Bangabandhu Hall, University of Dhaka

the US has no moral authority to question any other country on the nuclear programme issue, not even about the North Koreans.

"The US attitude about Israel" is now a clear example of how the rest of the world views the US today; a super power shamelessly practising a policy of double standards. Here you have the Israelis who have produced all conceivable WMDs but the US exempting it from any international inspection. But Iran who is accused of producing it, threatened by the USA for inspection.

foreign policy are not democratic and it is only a matter of time that the common people of United States would see the folly of their neo-conservative leaders and will bring a change.

Shahjahan Ahmed
Dhaka

Betterment of the common people and Ordinance 13(A)

In terms of drug manufacturing "one mistake may result deaths of

national support to go further. To secure their own interest some unscrupulous bodies are trying to manipulate the positive sign of 13(A), which is being unjust and unlawful as well. I think those legislative bodies are unable to estimate what could be the impact on general people if withdrawal of 13(A) takes place. Being cognisant of the consequences I hope that the authority concerned will not take any decision that may welcome disorders for common people.

M Raseel
Jahangirnagar University
Savar, Dhaka

