

Traffic Problem in Bangkok and Dhaka

Some Stray Thoughts

by S. A. M. S. Kibria

A city begins to choke if the problem is left unattended for too long. Calcutta spent a massive sum of money for an underground trains system but its problems are still not fully solved. The experience of Bangkok, I feel, ought to be a warning to us.

ment. Thais are very tolerant of the foreigners living in their midst. High rate of literacy, nearly hundred per cent, has ensured the supply of a steady pool of literate workers for the burgeoning industrial sector. All this is very good indeed and I have great admiration for their achievements. All except their handling of the traffic problem. This question seems to defy all their ingenuity and resourcefulness. Their skyway and express ways are cluttering up the city without relieving the congestion. Even the patient Thai motorists are getting impatient.

Looking at the urban transport problems in Bangkok I was reminded of the traffic problem of my own beloved city — Dhaka. It is certainly not as bad as that of Bangkok. Except for certain parts of the city and during certain hours of the day, our traffic keeps on moving though often at a snail's pace. Of course, when a visiting foreign dignitary is in town or when the Hon'ble Prime Minister moves with her entourage from one of her many offices to the other, the traffic snarl up is something to be seen to be believed. The mix-up of cars, buses, trucks, rickshaws, baby taxis and other slow-moving vehicles trying to untangle themselves from the chaos, after the cavalcade has passed, is an experience that few people want to repeat. What about the rather normal rickshaw jam, in the Nawabpur Road or in the Motijheel area? Obviously a fate like Bangkok's clogged up streets awaits us if we either too long. What are we doing about it?

Since we are going to have a

mayoral election very soon this may be the best time to write about it. I am sure there are many laymen like me who are eager to give their advice to the city fathers. Transport engineers may get a good laugh out of my suggestions. In any case they seem to listen to nobody. So what is harm if I also join my voice to others? After all, having seen what it regarded as one of the worst traffic problems of the world, I may have a certain claim to the time and attention of those who are responsible for the solution of the problem in Dhaka.

My first question is: who indeed is responsible for the traffic problem of Dhaka? Is it the Dhaka City Corporation or the Traffic Department of the Police or is it the Roads and Highways Department or the Communications and Buildings Department of the Government? I do not know the answer and I apologize for my ignorance. But perhaps all these authorities and some others have something to do with the question and that may be one of the root causes of the problem. Any government which is genuinely interested in finding reasonable solutions to this problem will no doubt address this first question first. They will, to start with, assign clearly demarcated responsibilities to the minimum number of agencies in order to reduce the number of cooks and thus prevent them from spoiling the broth.

First, let us take up the question of rickshaws. They take up too much road space, create jams and slow down traffic. How many of them are there? I am sure no body

knows. I am also told that one rickshaw is used by two or even three persons in shifts. Thus the number of people living on the income from pulling rickshaws would be enormous. Perhaps three lakhs or even half a million. A staggering number indeed. I do not believe that we can do any thing about it by enacting some draconian law or by strong arm police action. People in the upper income bracket may be tempted by such drastic steps but it is not only inhuman to deprive so many people of their livelihood but such impractical methods, I am sure, will fail. Let us face it, the rickshaw pullers are a political force to reckon with. Any high handed attempt to throw them out of business will be vigorously resisted. The answer, in my view, must be sought in the economics of the transport system. While rickshaws will retain their utility on small and narrow lanes and by-lanes for quite sometime to come, these slow moving contraptions can be easily driven off the main thoroughfares by introducing more attractive and safe as well as faster means of transport.

I saw in Beijing, for instance, the thoughtful initiative taken by the city authorities in introducing very cheap taxis. These micro-buses are locally and, I believe, very cheaply made. Sturdy and simple, these taxis without frills can move whole families very cheaply. Perhaps more cheaply than by any other mode of transport. If I remember correctly, these are called a yuan-a-mile taxis. The existing bus fleet can be easily supplemented by a fleet of a few thousand of such inexpensive taxis.

Those who do not like the existing buses because of their shabby condition or overcrowding, will feel comfortable in a taxi of their own at affordable prices. In fact, the fare per person, if three or more persons share the cost, would not be higher than either rickshaws or the baby taxis. Greater safety would be a major gain.

Personally I am not attracted by the so-called baby taxi and even less by the so-called "tempo". I do not know why the latter vehicles are called tempo but whatever be the name, they are without doubt serving a purpose. Relatively long-distance traffic, for which rickshaws are not found suitable, is being carried by these rather flimsy vehicles. In my view, the economics of the cheap micro-buses of the Beijing variety will not be less favourable than the dangerous-looking tempo. I am also certain that those who now get into these contraptions like sardines in a tin, will prefer to ride in those micro-buses. The baby taxi, with some improvements in its design, can serve a useful purpose in replacing the rickshaws. Why could we not increase their number while freezing the number of rickshaws? I am sure this can be done if we have a plan and a policy.

Corruption is believed to be a big issue in the transport sector. It would require not only Herculean effort on the part of the agencies concerned but also firm political leadership in fighting corruption. The existing bus fleet, I was told on good authority, cannot be improved and expanded because of the vast sums that the owners have to pay not only to the traffic officials but to all kinds of people including political touts and mastans. Any plan to improve, expand and modernize the urban transport system will come up against these thugs who are skimming the entire transport industry.

What about a bit of training of the motor vehicle operators? The wise people, who happen to know the facts of life, will perhaps laugh at my suggestion. Bangladeshi drivers presume that they are so gifted that they do not need either any education or any training. Truck drivers can kill with impunity. A driving license, I am told, does not require any training or education any way. One can get a license for a fixed sum of money and more quickly than through the legal procedure. What about giving the rickshaw pullers, who come from villages without the slightest idea about traffic rules, some lessons on urban traffic rules?

Perhaps these ideas are too ambitious at this stage to talk about. So let me conclude this article by expressing the hope that some one in the helm of affairs of this nation will have the foresight to do something about this problem. A city begins to choke if the problem is left unattended for too long. Calcutta spent a massive sum of money for an underground trains system but its problems are still not fully solved. The experience of Bangkok, I feel, ought to be a warning to us.



Contraptions clog Dhaka street. Little care for traffic rules

— Star photo

Helping Children with Speech and Language Disability

by Sultana Sarwatara Zaman

At times, children with severe motor problems cannot produce intelligible speech. A common instructional strategy is called Alternative and Augmentative Communication. Augmentative or Nonvocal techniques can supplement speech in partially vocal persons and can facilitate the development of language and communication in persons who cannot yet speak but who may later develop functional oral communication.

COMMUNICATION is the exchange of thoughts, information, or ideas. Most commonly, we think of communication occurring through speech or talking. Messages can be transmitted in other ways — through writing, reading, telegraphy, or the electrical impulses of the telephone (using a computer and a modem). Communication can be non-verbal, through gestures and facial expressions.

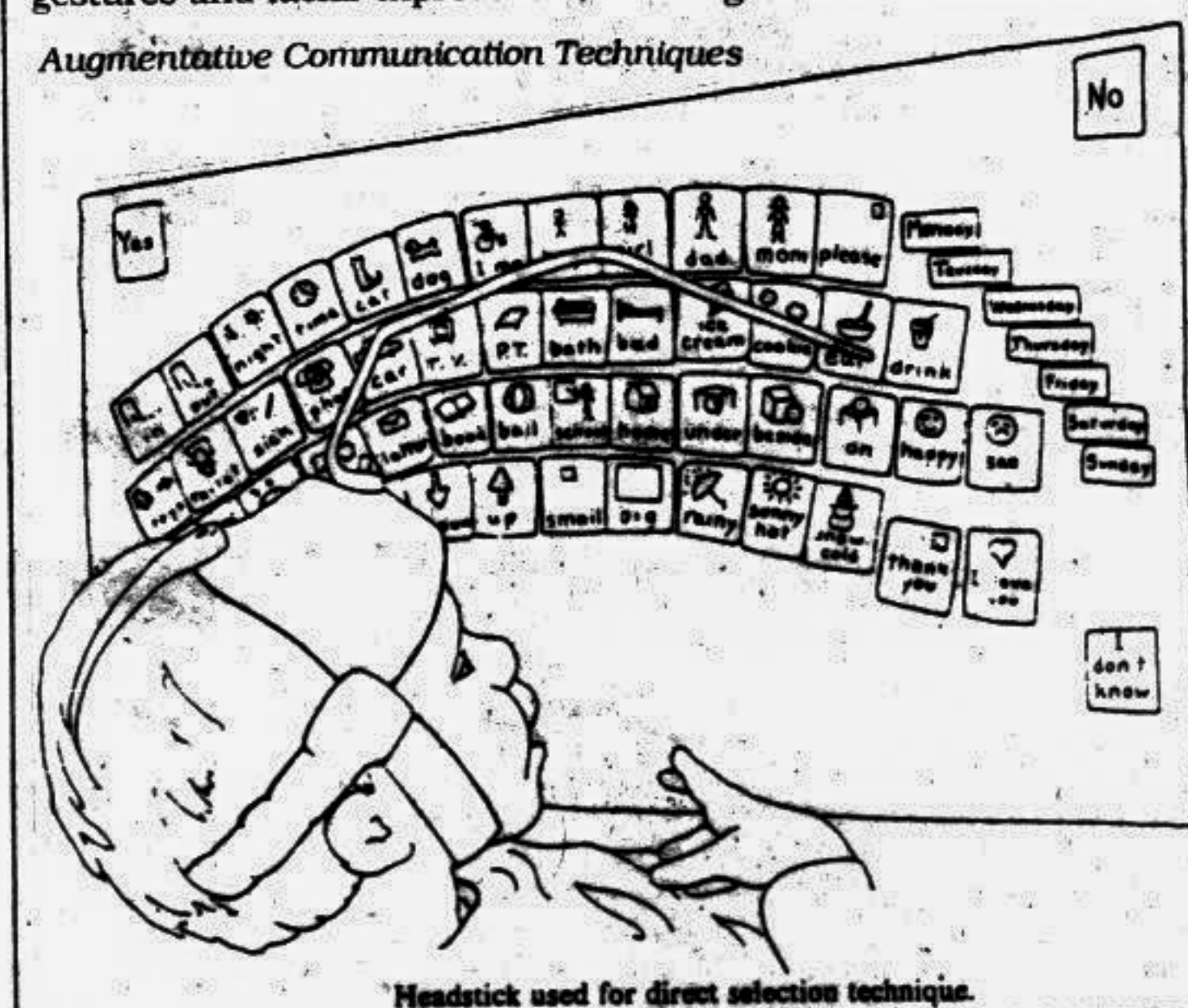
severe motor problems cannot produce intelligible speech. A common instructional strategy is called Alternative and Augmentative Communication. Augmentative or Nonvocal techniques can supplement speech in partially vocal persons and can facilitate the development of language and communication in persons who cannot yet speak but who may later develop functional oral communication. If augmentative communication

to communicate without speech in a variety of ways. Some of the systems, such as "communication boards" (also known as language or conversation boards) have been widely used with this population. These boards are often customized for the person's needs and are usually inexpensive to develop. In some cases, such as with individuals with low cognitive functioning, i.e. persons who are mentally retarded the boards adequately meet the needs of the person. But many people require more extensive vocabulary in a personal, portable system.

The answer to these problems came as a result of using computer as therapeutic tool, i.e. the microchip revolution. These tiny units of information storage provide the capability of almost limitless vocabulary compacted into systems that can be transported right along with the speech-impaired person. One of the first problems encountered in developing an effective communication system for nonvocal, severely physically handicapped (NVSPH) persons is one of establishing an effective mechanism through which the individual can interact, respond, and express himself.

NVSPH individuals who cannot use speech or sign language effectively (because of severe physical impairments) need some sort of visual graphic communication system of pictures, symbols, words, and the like. This type of system usually consists of a chart or board with pictures, drawings, symbols, or printed words. The NVSPH person indicates, in some manner, the items on the chart that he wants to use in order to convey a message.

Although fingers and hands generally come to mind as pointers, other parts of the body



Headstick used for direct selection technique.

or in sign languages, which uses an ordered form of gestures to convey meaning. The basic components of the communication process — are the sender, the message, and the receiver.

Speech is the systematic production of words of a given language. Sounds become speech only if they are used to produce words that have meaning. Speech also has a rhythmic flow with stress and intonation and words with stressed and unstressed syllables.

Language is an organized system of symbols used to express and receive meaning. Language systems evolved over time and replaced the innate communication system of emotions. Emotions expressed through gestures and facial expressions convey meanings, but the range of meaning that they can convey is limited.

An infant is innately programmed to communicate through smiles, eye contact, sounds, and gestures (the prelinguistic system). The language system uses these talents, and parents teach the child that people and objects have names and particular sounds to identify them. Children learn that things have names early in life because they are rational beings and are genetically prepared to learn a language. The language they learn is the one spoken in the home.

Nothing is more exciting to parents than their infant's amazing ability to acquire speech and language in the first year of life. On the other hand, parents are often devastated when their child fails to acquire the language of his or her home and to speak in a manner that is understood. Communication through speech and languages is a complicated but natural human process that grows out of the child's prelinguistic communications of cries, grunts, smiles, and gestures. It involves cognition (thinking) and audition (hearing). It means receiving information and sending information back. It means learning how to control air for sound production in words (speech) in a fashion that another person of the same culture can understand.

Because speech and language development occurs in most individuals who are not disabled, failure to learn to produce sounds that have meaning (words) in the way that sounds are used in a given culture (language) is indicative of almost all major disabilities. When a deficit is suspected, it must be identified and appropriate remedy initiated as early in the child's life as possible so that the child will be able to communicate with others in his or her culture and, at school going age, learn to read and write. The ability to communicate through speech is something that most of us take for granted. Yet many children and adults either fail to acquire or lose the ability to use this most precious of human communication. At times, children with



A head stick and communication board enables this young man to talk to family and friends for the first time.

STICKERS	RED	YELLOW	ORANGE	GREEN	BLUE	PURPLE	BROWN	BLACK	WHITE
BOY	GIRL	ADULT	CHILD	DRINK	EAT	SLEEP	WALK	UP	DOWN
PLEASE	SCHOOL	HOME	SPEECH	PT	LOVE	TOILET	HAPPY	SAD	THANK YOU
LOVE YOU	LETTER	TV	TELEPHONE	BALL	SUNSHINE	RAIN	NIGHT	THANK YOU	

Picture/word board.

techniques are implemented early, delayed development in motor control necessary for speech and fine motor movement need not have severe delaying effects upon the development of communication, language, social, and interaction skills.

Nonvocal communication techniques can be used with individuals who have varying degrees of physical involvement and speech abilities. They may be used:

- As an initial communication system and a means for communication. Interaction, language, and personal skill development with a child who is not yet vocal but who may later develop functional speech.

- As a supplementary mode of communication for an individual who had only limited intelligible speech comprising a small vocabulary that only a limited audience can understand.

- As a supplementary mode of communication for non-speaking persons who can use other nonvocal techniques, such as manual sign, for communication with message receivers who do not understand the system (e.g., signing).

Widespread use of sign language among deaf people is evidence of the success of augmentative (supplemental to speech) systems for individuals with speech handicaps. The severely physically handicapped, however, often find their ability to use sign language is limited by the same disabilities that prevent them from acquiring oral speech. Fortunately, modern technology has enabled these individuals

can be used. Feet, toes, and elbows can be used in manners similar to hands. Headsticks and mouthpieces are also useful for persons with good torso and head control.

The best decision, however, rests on the combined agreement of an interdisciplinary team comprised of parents, educators, speech — language pathologists, and appropriate allied health professionals such as doctors and physical and occupational therapists. Often the child can contribute ideas that determine the "best fit". No matter what the system, the desired outcome is the same: to produce an individual capable of communicating to the best of his or her potential with the greatest number of those in society willing to take time to "listen". Granted these and strange are new ways compared to the familiarity of speech.

Communicate — from me to you
Is socially the thing to do
And as the means to do it changed
Society was re-arranged!

Children with disability as such to a large extent are neglected in Bangladesh. Children with severe physical disability and mental retardation usually have an added disability of communication. Minimum health facilities and services for such children are non-existent in most of the places in this country. However, there are few non-government organisations based in the cities who are trying to develop services for these children. But the modern techniques of augmentative and alternative communication system is unknown to them.

Two Different Countries

by Harry Blasser

IT is interesting to compare Bangladesh, the nation of which I have been the Honorary Consul in Helsinki for 20 years, with Finland, as these two countries are so different. But are they so different, or does one imagine too much?

Of course they are very dissimilar, but that phenomenon is also connected to the comparative aspects of life in general. The human being is rather adaptable and he adapts his demands according to those circumstances which are available. Although the ordinary Finn and the typical Bangladeshi are in their own elements as different as night and day, their basic needs are in principle the same. That is how it is, although it would not appear to be so.

In spite of that, it is interesting to ascertain, what features are making each of these two countries clearly characteristic. It is common that the yard looks greener on the other side of the fence. Therefore it is natural that the Nordic welfare state looks in the eyes of the Bangladeshi much more green than his own paddy fields, although the shades on the colour spectrum would show that the latter are in fact more colourful than the coniferous forests of the Northern hemisphere.

Before things were perhaps felt the opposite. Rudyard

Kipling wrote at the turn of the century in his "Djungle Book" about "Golden Bengal" and about old folks' wisdom compared to the then present day occurrences, and in his book "Kim" about the Indian boy, who grew up in Lahore and who then searched for an answer in life up to the mysticism of the Himalayas. I have understood that life was perhaps easier in those days in Bengal, as there were not so many people there tilling the soil and, considering the warm climate, may be life was kinder than what it was at that time for the rather poor peasant, particularly the tenant farmer.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, we have, however, learnt that also the climate has often been a problem for the Bengalis, not only the poverty and the population explosion. There have been catastrophic cyclones and there have been floods, the strength of which have exceeded the water levels of ordinary monsoon rains, causing economic losses for the people, already hard up to make their living. It is said that deforestation on the slopes of the Himalayas are resulting in erosion and that again increases

the quantity of melting water flowing down to the delta of Bangladesh.

But it is understood that many things have improved in Bangladesh during the now 22 years of independence. The rice crops have increased considerably — from some 12 million tons to almost 20 million — thus compensating for the population increase. There are new export articles, above all garments, but also pawns, a great selection of handicrafts; even electronics are coming. It is a pity that the world market price for jute is kept low much because of artificial alternative products; but as purchasing power increases, Bangladesh can produce more and more of the necessary consumer goods locally. Also more foreign exchange will be earned the more the raw materials for the garment industry will be manufactured locally, by spinning and weaving.

The family is said to be of greater importance in Bangladesh than what it is in Northern Europe these days. As Bangladesh cannot afford all sorts of social benefits, such as

unemployment pay, old people's home etc., the people keep more together and help each other. Also in Finland it has become apparent that part of the social welfare is difficult to be maintained, as unemployment has increased drastically and revenues have accordingly diminished. It is also a fact that the comparison of living standards, based on GNP, does not tell all the truth. There may be more for a living for the peasant in a tropical country than what is being recorded, compared with the urbanized citizens in the industrialized world. A banana tree, a few chickens, a plot for vegetables, a goat, perhaps even a buffalo. They contribute to the necessities and make life more bearable. The worst are the slums of great cities, which is an ever growing problem indeed for many developing countries.

I think tourism could be improved in Bangladesh through new and modern river boats for the Journey from Dhaka to Khulna. The present ships are old and their tourist sections are too small. There should be opportunity for big groups of tourists to make the voyage a really interesting trip, and the ships should be provided with

all the comfort needed in order to make a 24-hour journey as enjoyable as possible for the most demanding travellers. It would be an attraction very typical for Bangladesh and coupled with a few days' stay in Dhaka, that would best give foreign visitors a picture of the most genuine scenery, and thus increase tourism in a way well suited for Bangladesh.

Maybe the best known Bengali also for the Finns is Rabindranath Tagore, who even remembered little Finland, then a Grand Duchy of Imperial Russia, when the Finns were in danger of being deprived of their autonomy through Russian suppression. With deep thoughtfulness of the orient he stressed the rights for all nations and for the similarities and the conformity of their cultures. I think he put it very well, when he wrote: "The civilizations evolved in India or China, Persia or Judea, Greece or Rome, are like several mountain peaks having different altitudes, temperature, flora and fauna, and yet belonging to the same chain of hills. There are no absolute barriers of communication between them, their foundation is the same and they affect the meteorology of an atmosphere which is common to us all."

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