

DU Body Count Continues

The responsibility for the untimely death of the Dhaka University MA student, Qamrul Islam Bulbul, squarely lies on the shoulders of the law enforcement agencies, and the two political parties whose student wings are responsible for the campus gun battles of the last few days. We have written numerous editorials on the need to curb terrorism in the campuses throughout the country. Obviously, all of them fell on deaf ears, and very little real progress was made. Only a few days back we witnessed the peace procession by the DU students, which came about at the initiative of the Vice Chancellor Prof. Emajuddin. We welcomed it, and rejoiced at the prospect that finally our students would be able to study in peace. The death of Qamrul shows us how naive we were.

Qumrul died from the injuries received from a misdirected tear gas shell that struck his neck and blew open his windpipe, causing his near instantaneous death. Tear gas shells are usually lobbed into the air, which follows an oval trajectory and lands inside the crowd that needs to be dispersed. But in the case of Qumrul, the tear gas shell followed a trajectory which was almost parallel to the ground indicating that it was neither fired into the air nor on the ground, which is the usual practice. So the first question is that why should the police fire in such a trajectory? Once we understand the question of trajectory, then we realise that accidental shooting of an innocent passerby was only a matter of time. Is our police force properly trained to handle these weapons of crowd control? We hope that the five-member inquiry committee set up by the DU syndicate will probe these questions and come up with some satisfactory answers.

These are, however, the technical aspects of the incident. The real killer of Qumrul is the environment of political violence that has existed in the DU campus for several years now. Every major political party has a student wing. And each of these so-called student parties have armed wings. While condemning terror and violence in the campus, and while professing to be concerned about the welfare of the students, all the political parties continued to maintain, and in cases of some, expand, their armed cadres to be used for occasional show of strength against the opponent, and to intimidate neutral students into joining ranks with them.

What is particularly depressing about the latest incident is the casualness with which each contending side brought out its arsenal and used it in broad daylight. It is one thing to see the outburst of armed violence on rare occasions of extreme political importance to a party. It is quite another, and disturbingly so, to see the guns being toted in every incident of rivalry and conflict, many of them being inconsequential and personal in nature. It is as if these people are above the law. This means that the so-called armed wings of these student parties consider themselves to be a power unto themselves, engaging in gun battles whenever they feel like, killing or maiming innocent people at will.

At the risk of becoming boringly repetitive, we restate our view, with all the emphasis at our command, that the responsibility of maintaining law and order in the campus, as in rest of the country, lies with the government. We refuse to accept anymore excuses. We want action. We want our university campuses to be a places of education, free from the activities and influence of criminals and 'mastans.' Second to that of the government, the responsibility for bringing peace in the campuses lies with the political parties. Each time their student wings fire a bullet, the parent parties lose public goodwill and moral right to lead the people. If the process remains unabated, then public will reject these parties completely. We, the public, must give this message to the political parties in the most unambiguous of terms. Only then may some sense prevail on them.

Rediscovering Ustad Ayet Ali's Music

Ustad Ayet Ali Khan was a very retiring and reclusive type something so very rare among the top ones in the performing arts. This is not to say that he had inclinations to the occult or mystic predilections like Kale Khan or, in our life time, Mastan Gama who spent his last days in Dhaka. He was quite the domestic genre and yet not really much caring for worldly success both of which contributed to his comparative anonymity in the subcontinental musical scene. That he was not half as famous or influential like his super achieving brother Ustad Alauddin Khan owes much to his ingrained modesty. But the quality of his music spoke eloquently of the fact that he was at once the younger brother of Sadhu Aftabuddin, and no mean bearer of the glorious Senya tradition received through Wazir Khan, perhaps the greatest of teachers tracing their musical origins to Mian Tansen.

Although much younger in years, Ayet Ali met a kind of a musical peer in Rabindranath who engaged the former as a teacher of classical-instrumental in his Visva-Bharati University. Contrary to brother Alauddin's mastery of a multitude of instruments — exactly 100 when he went to Maihar for a position in that princely court — as well as over the vocal form, Ayet Ali perfected his music on the *surbahar*, the bass plucked string that was capably suited to give most of what a *Saraswati veena* would in the golden olden days of raga music. The *surbahar's* forte is in the *alaap* ang of the *dhruwad* tradition ending up in a rhythmic *taarparan* and Ayet Ali was steeped in this music. As Rabindranath draw all his musical inspirations from the same musical vintage, the two made up a fine duo.

It is a measure of decline of our overall musical arts that not many has followed in the footsteps of Ayet Ali. Not one in this land of 120 million people plays the *surbahar* and not one either sings the *dhruwad*. The compliments we pay on the occasion of his death anniversary, such as were paid yesterday at the Shilpakala Academy, are largely unmeaning as no one outside of a very small group of professional musicians, that too directly from within the clan, is in truth interested in pure music, not to say anything of the high music of Ayet Ali.

The Ustad found in his son the late Bahadur Khan a worthy scion of the house while his eldest son Abid grew into a noted teacher grooming Ayet Ali's grandson Shahadat into a *sorodiya* of the best subcontinental standards. We hope, with the days changing for better, our society will soon rediscover *dhruwad* and the *surbahar* and as such, Ustad Ayet Ali Khan and his music.

WHILE the intense demand for university education (higher education in general) continues to grow in a country like Bangladesh, the supply of such services are yet to grow in tune with the total demand. Every year, thousands of students run after university admission but a very few of them can go back home with a smile. If you are a teacher, say, a university, you might have experienced a lot of phone calls and knocks at the door by your relatives who expect their sons or daughters to be admitted to your university. If not your department. The problem is still more pervasive and perplexing in a residential university like Jahangirnagar that operates with a fixed or vertical supply curve of university services. It may be mentioned here that the problems of universities in terms of demand and supply are not, probably, as grave in other countries as it is in Bangladesh at the moment. Two of the most important reasons attributable to this could possibly be cited in this context. First, the motions of the law of demand and supply generally preclude the emergence of the non-equilibrating forces. Second, the opportunity cost of university education is clearly visible by the movements of the socio-economic variables of the society to allow a part of the admission seekers to go for jobs and, thus, reduce the rush to universities.

There was a time, perhaps until the 1960s, when the economics of higher education throughout the world was largely ignored by academics and policy makers. It was not because the "economics" of higher education was unknown to them but, probably, because the supply of services at the time outstripped the demand for such services. It constituted a very small part of the then GNP and as such a small part of the headache, too. But the burgeoning enrollments since World War II called for a revisit to the decision making

The Economics of University Education

by Abdul Bayes

process on higher education and the "mundane" things like costs and benefits began to occupy the floor. In Bangladesh also, we are becoming more concerned about the issue.

Basic Logic

Economists appear to argue that the production of university graduates is almost similar to the production of any other commodity for the market, at least in terms of resource allocation. If we go for more of university graduates, in a resource constraint situation, we have to sacrifice the production of other goods and services (may be even the production of life saving medicine or rice and milk). A student of first year economics should be able to place higher education (Tk. worth) on the horizontal axis and other goods and services (Tk. worth) on the vertical axis to draw a production possibility frontier and, thus, see how the increment of one commodity tends to reduce the availability of the other commodity. The "trade-off" or the "opportunity cost" should be the major determinant of resource allocation in this situation. The alternative cost principle tends to show that the cost of increase in university graduates is the value of goods and services forgone as a result of resources being drawn to university education. The application of the concept of opportunity cost pervades in our other decisions also. For example, the cost of a soldier in the society's army is the value of what one could have produced as a civilian or the cost of a maund of paddy is the value of jute forgone in a plot suitable for the production of both paddy and jute. However, in terms of spill-over effects on the society, investment on human capital (and hence on universities) is more productive and far reaching than, perhaps, investing on the production of other goods. Human

capital formation is the most important goal of the world societies at the moment, IPSO FACTO.

Nature of Costs

The explicit costs of grooming university graduates are the costs of resources that the university buys or hires to provide those services to the students. These are, for example, land, buildings, equipment and supplies. Also included in the bracket are professors, maintenance personnel, administrators, clerks, peons and gardeners etc. What is the explicit cost, say, of the administrative building of JU? One might say that it is what the value of the building would be if the university was closed down. The correct answer would be the value of goods and services that were forgone to build and maintain the house. Our accounting procedure hardly takes this true explicit costs into account.

But more importantly, we often tend to forget that there are certain implicit costs borne by the society for the university graduates which, sometimes, might tend to outweigh the explicit costs. When a student gets admission into the university to obtain educational services, obviously he/she withdraws his/her labour wholly or partly from the labour force and thus reducing the availability of other goods and services that his/her labour could produce. Suppose he/she could be a worker in a factory but sacrificed that due to the admission. The forgone earning in this case is the equivalent of forgone GNP. This is the implicit cost to the society (and to the student also) of the educational services thus provided and which are not at all shown in the book of accounts. Also considered as implicit costs are those relating to

books, pens, entertainment etc.

Who Bears the Costs?

Where do the costs finally rest? Before answering this question, we should assume that the kinds and qualities of services provided are same and of same efficiency level in Government, quasi-government and private universities. According to economists, three attributes of the incidence of costs can be observed: First, implicit costs appear to account for a larger slice of the total cost than the explicit costs therein. Exact estimate is difficult to arrive at but some studies tend to show that implicit costs could vary between 65-70% of the total cost. And as said earlier, the whole implicit cost is borne by the students and their families. Second, the lion's share of the explicit costs are borne by the government and a little amount is shared by the students and university's other sources of income. Since the government draws heavily from its budget to finance about two-thirds of the explicit costs, ultimately the burden is shared by the tax-payers of the country rather than by the students and their families. Thus, public institutions bring about a shift in the incidence of some two-thirds of the explicit costs of higher educational services from students and families to tax-payers. Third, if private institutions bank on donors for meeting explicit costs, the incidence is shifted from students and their families to the donors.

Pay as per Demand

We know that, in the economic system, consumers register their demand for goods and services by the ways in which they dispose of or spend their purchasing power and suppliers tend to react accord-

ingly. Theoretically, those demanding face a downward sloping demand curve and the suppliers, an upward sloping curve for the reasons quite well known to the students of economics. However, the universities and colleges in our country (or in many of the countries in the world) hardly rely on the pricing system in determining the types of programmes they would like to offer. One wonders why the price system is ignored or snubbed in determining the offer. Universities appear to use the "same cost" principle in admitting students and hence apply the same price (tuition fees) across the board. The application of differential pricing system (depending on demand and supply), as many would like to argue, could redirect the supply and demand schedule and thus possibly could assure a better allocation of resources.

The Missing Economics

Similar reasonings are also being aired in the case of fixing salaries and wages of teachers and employees of universities. For example, many people would like to argue: why should a professor, who spends the whole day in class rooms or laboratories and attempts to publish his works/findings be paid the same amount as one who is always found running after the "economics of university politics"? Or why should a teacher be punctual in attending classes when his colleague, who does not do it for years, is given the incentive via, say, provostship or other positions? Why should an officer of merit be given the same salary as some one who took 10 years and means of persuasion to be in his position? In all of the cases, there is a lack of incentive schemes that would upgrade the academic thirst of the teachers and efficiency of officers. More often than not,

it is alleged that the "leaders" appear as "ladders" to move up the hill and if that is so, there is every chance that the standard of university education would remain much below expectation. In other words, the products of the industry-like university are likely to fetch a lower price in the market, the nation is bound to loose by putting resource there.

Uniform pricing principle so pursued, so runs the argument, may ensure social equity for the moment but ultimately would adversely affect the efficiency parameter. It is like killing the goose for the golden eggs! The critics of the differential pricing mechanism, however, would like to cite the example of public services where it is difficult to incorporate a differential structure.

The last, but not the least, neglected economics is the distribution of the money as per revenue and developmental purposes. It is being alleged that more than two-thirds of the total allocation goes to the payment of salaries, wages, transport etc and one-third seems to go to the logistics and constructions that are really in consort with the physical and research growth of universities. Thus while the laboratories starve of the latest equipments and machineries (that tend to deter discoveries), the class rooms replete with "white" black boards and broken chairs, teachers are provided with broken tables and chairs, the universities are alleged to spoil a fair amount of money in unproductive channels. A march towards efficiency and productivity could perhaps reinstate the missing economics of university education. University education needs to be subsidised. But it needs to be seen as to who is getting the subsidy and for what purpose. It is high time that universities place the economic principles in its true perspective.

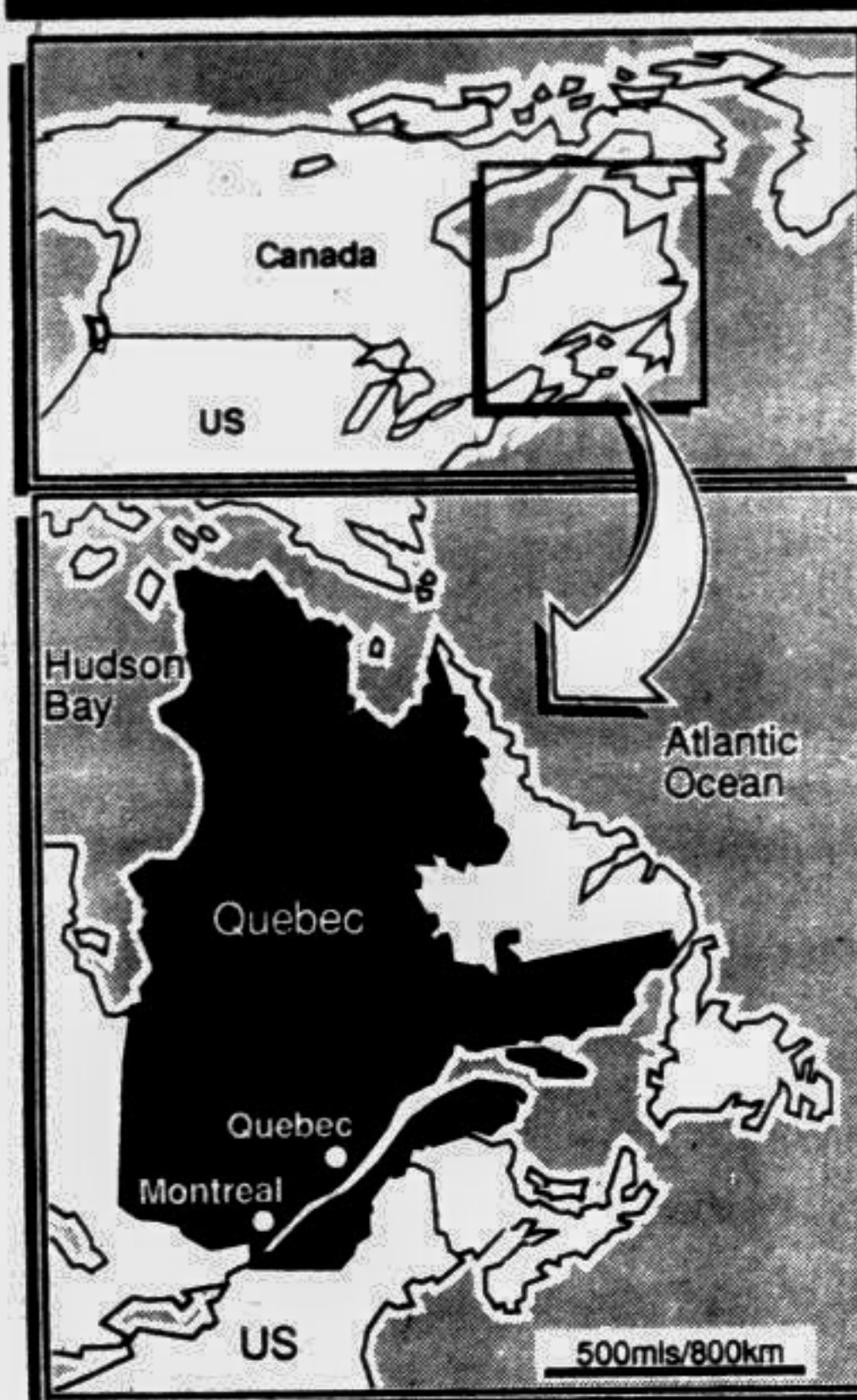
But who will bell the cat?

False Alarm — or is the Wolf Really at the Door?

Clyde Sanger writes from Ottawa

An opinion poll for the Quebec election shows the governing Liberals have closed the gap on the separatist-minded Parti Quebecois. Gemini News Service reports on the latest campaign to decide the province's future place in — or out of — Canada.

Battle for Quebec



- 1968: Parti Quebecois (PQ) founded
- 1976: PQ wins power in Quebec
- 1980: PQ loses provincial referendum on independence
- 1985: Provincial Liberals win election over PQ
- 1992: Quebec as 'distinct society' within Canada rejected in national referendum
- 1993: Bloc Quebecois becomes official opposition in federal parliament

reasons.

After each of these alarms, most of Canada's 27 million people, and most of the seven million Quebecers — returned to the ordinary routine of life. They did not hear any wolves howling.

But the sounds today are

different. PQ is now led by a tough and confident Jacques Parizeau whose undeviating aim has been to gain sovereignty for Quebec with all speed. He is in sharp contrast to his old leader, Rene Levesque, a chain-smoking former journalist in rumpled

clothes, whose views about sovereignty were never quite clear.

Parizeau, a former bureaucrat who won respects as finance minister under Levesque, left the party for a time when it did not give priority to separation from Canada. Since

he took over its leadership, he has attracted to its ranks some leading businessmen who share his belief that an independent Quebec will do better on its own, outside constraints of a federation.

He has told voters that separation will not be disruptive to the economy. An independent Quebec will keep the Canadian dollar, he has said, and will not have problems in negotiating separate membership in the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Mexico.

He will interpret an election victory in September as a mandate to start talks immediately on breaking up with Canada, and will hold a referendum on the issue in mid-1995. In his view, the matter is cut-and-dried.

Others, including some of his leading supporters, challenge these assertions. Richard Le Hir, former president of the Quebec Manufacturers Association and a PQ candidate, has suggested Quebec will have to adopt the American dollar.

Lucien Bouchard, leader of the Bloc Quebecois, which holds 54 seats in the federal Parliament, has said negotiations over sovereignty should not begin until after a referendum on this single issue. Bouchard, a lawyer and former Canadian ambassador to France, has argued for a slower pace.

Halfway through the 50-day election campaign, the Liberals

had reduced the PQ's initially large lead. Johnson achieved this by saying his party was making job creation its top priority and that a PQ government would waste all energies in arguments with the federal government in Ottawa.

Opinion polls also showed that he was a more popular leader than Parizeau. The PQ leader, who has a string of degrees and dresses in an old-fashioned style, is seen as stuffy and somewhat pompous.

Johnson came in as a new broom in January after long-time premier Robert Bourassa retired because of sickness, and he has offered the people straight talk about their future.

He has an uphill task, however. His Liberals have been in power for nine years, and voters want a change. In addition, Liberal votes are heavily bunched in English-speaking districts of Montreal, and he needs to be about five per cent ahead in the opinion polls to have a chance of winning.

So it seems most likely that Quebecers will head for a referendum on sovereignty in June 1995 or soon afterwards.

Most commentators say Parizeau will win the election and lose the referendum, so that Quebec will remain part of Canada after all. But maybe they are ignoring the cry of "Wolf!" once too often.

— GEMINI NEWS

Clyde Sanger is director of communications at the North-South Institute, an independent economic research group in Ottawa. He has worked as a journalist in Europe, Africa and at the United Nations, and has lived in Canada since 1967.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Intrinsic qualities

Sir, Dhaka, the metropolitan city of Bangladesh, with its origin and originality has its beauties hidden in Nature, in glory and bliss!

I, residing in my neighbouring country, feel the comfort, the traditions that relate as I think of a pathway very slowly down the Ganges and feel the vibrant glow each day.

The Daily Star is my morning paper and amidst all commotions and religious strifes, I free my mind in a monotony of work atmosphere and do enjoy the many life-styles striving utmost to remain in vogue.

In point, fashion and style and the uniqueness of each, I do follow, and a recent fashion house have grasped my attention to the extent that I tend to write on it.

Firstly, as an Indian the name 'Naja Naja', deriving from Nag Rag appears to me fashion-

ionable and at a recently held show in Sonargaon Hotel, organised by the WVA, I could not hold my temptation as the work of Naja is striking, different and is a change with relief from a buyer's perception. The items are simply beautiful showing the intrinsic qualities of Bangladesh.

Mrs G S Ghugant, Country Managing Director Karm (Int'l) Textiles Ltd, Mirpur, Dhaka

"Political Stock Exchange"

Sir, I wrote 'awami politicians' meaning masses (Opinion/Political Stock Exchange/DS 26-8-94); ordinary 'awami' was printed 'Awami...' completely changing the meaning.

A Husnain, The inadvertence is regretted. — Editr.

Disappearance act!

Sir, How is it that the Navy cannot locate a big sunken launch (the gigantic Chandpur tragedy involving about 300 passengers), when a spy satellite can read the number plate of a car from 26,000 miles above? Even a shoal of fish can be detected by a fishing boat's electronic sonar set. Today's electronic wizards can spot a pin in a tanker.

Attention is therefore diverted to the Opposition's suspicion that some information might be suppressed from the public or the salvage of the vessel is not being handled with the seriousness the national tragedy deserves. The nation expected daily press briefing by the emergency control room set up for the purpose.

It appears that we need a Watergate/Anderson type of investigative reporting to unearth the masterly inactivity of the authority when it decides to keep mum. The government must prove its credibility at times of emergency. The Navy may be allowed to explain to the media how and why the launch cannot be traced with sophisticated electronic gear, when a satellite can do it from thousands of miles away.

The dead cannot be brought back to life, but we all sincerely wish that in such type of accidents the loss of life is minimal. The Coast Guard Service is still working on paper! Can we appeal the government to seek UN assistance with an immediate emergency set-up, to be expanded in a modular manner during the next five years?

We continue to be lazy, whether the service is for the living or the dead.

A Husnain, Dhaka.

"A Promising Start"

Sir, Your editorial titled 'A Promising Start' on August 13, 1994 is undoubtedly unforgettable and as such it deserves private and personal scrutiny on the question of consensus relating to peaceful coexistence vis-a-vis student politics at the university level. I also like to congratulate you on your discreet version of student-politics for generating peace process at the sacred precinct of the universities.

After all, students are the architects of the nation's future. It is imperative to trace on the relationship between

the teacher and the taught as well as between the students and their guardians at the grassroots of academic and social environments. Mere belief of oneness can never ensure a durable academic atmosphere unless we all and, in particular, the politicians sincerely aim at creating a better future for the posterity. Violence and destructive animus in the educational institutions can never ensure positive thoughts on national unity. So we eagerly look forward to seeing the dream of healthy student community come true on the soil of Bangladesh without the intervention and provocation of the interested parties to use our student community in politics. Let us pray for the fulfilment of "a promising start" initiated by the Vice Chancellor of the Dhaka University. May Allah bless all of us.

Prof Abul Ashraf Noor, Pabna

Am I a fool?

Sir, Every day while I drive down to my office, I suffer the indignity of having the vehicle behind me honking fanatically at every traffic signal — because I'm foolish enough to wait till the light changes to

green (by which time the faces of the drivers behind me change to blue). But to be accosted by a traffic policeman for the same, is a bit too much to swallow without a squeal.

At the meeting point of Road 27, Dhanmondi and Mirpur Road, there are the usual traffic signals, and as one approaches from the north of Mirpur Road, an arrow pointing right towards Road 27, Road 27 while the light is still red (once I noticed a police jeep doing the same), blocking traffic from that road. It is only when oncoming traffic from Road 27 face red that the arrow turns green signalling right turn into Road 27. The other day a very dutiful traffic policeman standing on Road 27, stopped my car as I turned into that road — because he was seeing red! His knowledge of traffic signals being limited perhaps to cross-roads only. If this is any reflection of the traffic policemen in general — what can be expected of the poor drivers, rickshawpullers, or even law-abiding fools like myself?

M Haque, DOHS, Dhaka