

City Traffic Flaws

The road traffic of Dhaka city has been described as intractably messy. This is not for nothing. The fault most of the time has been attributed to the road users. No doubt they are to some extent to blame. But the accusing fingers have rarely been pointed to the system or those responsible for enforcement of traffic rules and laws.

It is indeed inexcusable to erect speed-breakers on streets without road markings. But the authorities are oblivious of this essential indication. The fact that vehicles of varying speed limits use the same space of the road is a major cause of accidents and traffic jam.

The report has drawn attention to the unspecified rules the road users are subjected to comply apparently with no valid reasons. It has also shown how the authorities themselves fall short of doing their part of the job. However, there are a few more dangerous provisions the authorities might have created rather unwittingly that deserve mention. Like speed-breakers, the roads are also replete with humpback manhole covers right in the middle.

Unlikely Arms Haul

It is difficult to define a madrasa. It should have been just a school, no different from the others. Only the name is in Arabic rather than in English. But it is in fact not so what makes it different. This is a religious school, some may say so. But the ordinary schools also offer courses in religion.

The sense of deference with which the madrasas and their students are revered has for some time been eroded by the armed Islamic jingoism of the Jamaat-Shibir camp. And every so often the madrasa students do start fighting amongst themselves. That isn't either ideally suited to imbuing spirituality.

The first guess that the arms-and-the-men-of-religion haul tends to prompt is, this is a sampler of what is going on — on whatever scale — in the madrasas rather than an isolated stray thing. Militancy is spreading in every sphere of our social, educational and professional life — the chain-reaction originating in the political arena. It is sad that it is infecting the madrasas too.

The Ugly Duckling

Unending are the ways in which God has provided us with security against death and disease. As man advances on the path of knowledge, chiefly organised scientific knowledge, these mysterious ways are unraveled — very unyieldingly — one by one.

In the average Bengali man's or woman's childhood, he or she was taught to spit into the oozing bruise or cut parts of the body. Experience sustained the wisdom of the practice. With the development of the discipline of immunology one easily understood that through one's own saliva it was immunology in action.

Now there is news that saliva is also helpful in containing the spread of AIDS. Rarely is there a greater and happier tidings that was published in Wednesday's Daily Star. But the happy news is a long step further than ever could be expected. Saliva has proven specially effective against one's own AIDS viruses for which reason AIDS does not propagate through kissing and other body contacts through salivation.

What empowers saliva to do this wonderful job is the little protein cell called secretory leukocyte protease inhibitor or SLPI. There couldn't be a meaner thing in all civilisation than spitting — specially when done on another person or in response to anything. Now what a wonderful thing it is turning. The ugly duckling turning into a heavenly swan.

WHENEVER we talk of police reforms, it is the macro level problems like structure, training, accountability mechanisms, changes in laws etc which dominate the scene. These are no doubt very important aspects and perhaps the process of reform would not be complete unless these are given due attention.

There are other equally important reasons why reforms at the PS level have become important. The basic functions of the police are prevention and detection of crime and maintenance of order. Both these important responsibilities are required to be discharged by the PS but in a fast changing environment crime itself has assumed new dimensions.

In the fair of tiger economies that is East Asia, even the cubs are certain to sprint to boom years in 1995 and beyond.

But analysts are starting to look beyond growth graphs and see how the economic records set by the region can stand in the longer term. At the same time, attention is shifting to the price of growth, quality of life and technological abilities that will ensure economic health.

East Asia owes its current economic strength to a mix of diligence, savings rates of up to 48.8 per cent of GDP as in Singapore's case, and minimal government. Private sectors are at work in Vietnam, billed as a future tiger, and the economic behemoth that is China.

But experts at Manila-based Asian Development Bank (AsDB) say South-east Asia will lead Asia's economic pack in the years to come. Already, the subregion is expected to have an average GDP growth of 7.7 per cent this year, boosted by economic recovery in the Philippines, the region's biggest turnaround.

Indeed, GDP growth could reach six per cent in 1995 in what is now considered the newest cub in East Asia. The tigers themselves — Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan — are to grow by 6.9 per cent in 1995, slowing at bit from 7.1 per cent in the year just ended.

"Asia's growth isn't too good to be true because it's been true for many years in the past already," says J. Malcolm Dowling, AsDB assistant chief economist. The only surprise at least in terms of history is the Philippines.

Most of South-east Asia's

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.

'Calcutta and the Ganges Water'

Sir, I extend my hearty thanks and profound felicitations to O H Kabir for his excellent letter captioned 'Calcutta and the Ganges Water' in your esteemed daily of 31st January.

Mr Kabir's correct exposition of the history of the birth of fabulous Calcutta, once the seat of administration and the envious capital of the undivided Bengal, shows the depth of his historical knowledge. His deep insight and thought-provoking study and observation of the flow of the mighty Ganges for a quick solution of the long-standing knotty Farakka problem, which has been the cause of desertification of the northern part of Bangladesh and salinity and siltation of our major rivers deserves attention by both Bangladeshi and Indian negotiators experts.

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Reform the Police Station

T Ananthachari writes from New Delhi

The basic functions of the police are prevention and detection of crime and maintenance of order. Both these important responsibilities are required to be discharged by the PS but in a fast changing environment crime itself has assumed new dimensions, what with organised crime, involvement of mercenaries, use of technological gadgets, violence becoming more and more common.

newer challenges which call for new skills — and innovative methods to be in the armoury of the police. Communal problems and problems arising out of caste divisions are emerging in a big way and often have the tendency to have widespread repercussions, if not handled firmly, in time and with a fine sense of commitment.

Wide ranging social legislations have been introduced in the country and in their enforcement the police has been given a key role to play. This role of the police demands of their qualities which are very different from those required in handling ordinary IPC crimes. A deep sense of commitment, a remarkable strategy for enforcement (under very complex and sensitive conditions) and complete adherence to truth and fair play are among the qualities required in the SHO of a PS to cope up with such onerous tasks.

The emerging scene due to globalisation is bound to bring new problems for the police in its wake. The police have to recognise the change-over inherent in this development. Police will have to play an effective and decisive role to ensure that the new phase of economic liberalisation leads to economic prosperity and social harmony resulting in

more democracy, more freedom, more opportunity and greater prosperity. It goes without saying that unless the most desirable, stable and peaceful atmosphere prevails, it would be difficult to achieve the above goal.

Developments the world over have led to the prediction that "the most exciting breakthrough of the 21st century will occur not because of technology but because of an expanding concept of what it means to be human". This will call for the human and humanitarian face of the police to be a lot more visible and felt than ever before. How will this be so unless the police station gears up itself for such development?

The process of decentralisation heralded by the Panchayati Raj Act (April '93) would necessitate a fresh look at the relationship of the police with the decentralised political institutions. This will also influence the pattern of command and control prevalent in the police today. The Police Station will have to figure prominently in any such review. The problems of rural policing are bound to demand a lot more attention there. The National Police Commission in its Third Report pointed out that "the spread of the police

in rural areas is very thin. In fact it may be said that, it is disproportionately thin in the context of the progressively increasing attention the rural areas are being given in the scheme of overall development of the country.

In the context of the current social and economic changes, the controlling and coercive influence of the family and the community to contain the deviant behaviour of their constituent members is now weak and will get further eroded. In fact the new economic changes which are taking place, the new social scene that is emerging, the numerous problems which would arise on account of the current importance attached to environmental aspects — all these have tended to prove the above projection right. The NPC rightly concluded that "the tasks of policing the rural areas will have to be given much more attention than now and the police system will have to prepare itself to meet the requirements of the fast changing rural situation". The first essential of police reform on the rural side will be to increase the spread of the regular police in the rural areas and reduce the gap in the density of police presence between the urban area and

the rural area as compared to each other. Can we do all this, if we do not have an indepth look at the needs at the PS level itself?

It is clear that the police has to recognise itself as an instrument of "change" and therefore, it has to know how to "manage change". The actual operational responsibility in this regard will devolve on police stations, even though the overall responsibility will lie with the District and State level police administration. The rural masses have traditionally continued to depend upon the government machinery for looking after interests and police being one of the few agencies of government spread out into the interiors, will have to play the role of a friend, philosopher and guide and also render ready justice. The PS in their present shape and structure are hardly in a position to shoulder such responsibilities, particularly in rural areas. Existence of rural mafia groups which are often channelised to sub serve partisan political ends has often tended to aggravate the challenges at the PS level. The use of NGOs and human rights groups, welcome as they are, will call for greater accountability of the police.

The combined effect of all

East Asia: A Troublesome Tiger Trek

high performers are already within growing distance of the Asian tigers. Growth may be tapering off.

In the last two decades, East Asia has seen a phenomenal fall in poverty rates — in Indonesia's case from nearly 60 per cent to under 20 per cent in a decade — in a region that decades ago had been dismissed as a hopeless case.

But the newly affluent South-east Asian countries are also experiencing for the first time such problems as serious lack of labour to cope with an avalanche of foreign investments pouring into them.

Experts say the shortages may affect the cubs' ability to build backbone capabilities in industry, though the scrappy nations are no less eager to reach tigerhood and harbour ambitions of breaking the high-tech frontier in areas like the space and aircraft industries.

Economists are asking if countries like Malaysia are developing the industrial base needed to propel them into full tigerhood, the way South Korea and Taiwan developed theirs. The cubs are so flush with foreign investments that they have come to rely — some say too much — on foreign technology.

"There's concern that at some point it can't buy everything, there won't be enough foreign direct investment (that brings in technology) and so it will stumble in the sense that it won't make it to the last stage," Dowling says.

Even the tigers or newly-industrialised countries (NICs), seen as models by much of Asia, have problems with their technological dependence on Japan, says economist Walden Bello, co-di-

East Asia's aspiring tiger economies are eager to be shoulder to shoulder with their models, but some analysts caution of traps ahead. Johanna Son of Inter Press Service reports from Manila



Inter Press Service

rector of the Centre for the South.

He points out: "They're now more technologically depen-

dent on Japan than when they began their industrialisation process."

The NICs' problems may well offer a glimpse into the future for today's emerging tigers, says Bello, who in 1990 co-wrote a book warning that NICs would run into problems in the mid-1990s.

"In many areas they look very successful, but in the medium term their growth is going to be unsustainable," he adds.

The NIC model's viability is also being questioned as protectionism in the West hurts exports that powered much of its economic boom. The NICs' old advantage, cheap labour, has also disappeared as workers become unionised, a situation that is increasingly evident as well in emerging tigers.

Asian cities are richer today, but they are also congested, polluted and suffer from infrastructure bottlenecks that may one day make them unliveable. Governments may not be enforcing environmental laws for fear of turning away investors.

Bello says the NIC model should be reviewed, because it is not the sole way to economic success.

He suggests that Asia's smaller economies learn from the NICs' experience and form a "techno-economic bloc" to avoid overdependence on both Japan and the United States. Nations, he says, could in addition to freeing up trade, band together to coordinate policies in technology, agriculture and environment.

But today's cubs may be charting their own way to success by deviating from the exact path trekked by the tigers. Unlike the situation decades

ago, foreign direct investment today gives countries much easier access to foreign capital and technology. "Malaysia doesn't need necessarily to build a huge, high capital intensive base to be successful," says Dowling. "You can reach a reasonable standard of living and reasonable state of physical comfort without producing washing machines, cars and 45-inch wide TV screens. You don't have to produce everything."

Unlike Bello, Dowling says the tigers' growth slowdown is a natural stage in a cycle where growth rates decline after countries' industrial sectors make their biggest expansion. He expects NICs' growth rates to fall to four to five percent, though Asia's high savings could keep the rate at a higher level. Still, Bello only allows that there will be high performers when asked if there will be more tigers ahead. He says tiger economies may one day become extinct.

Unlike their predecessors, the aspiring tigers will have no leeway to set their pace of liberalisation because of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). NICs got their tiger stripes by nurturing local industries during industrialisation, "so we might have seen the last of the NICs," says Bello.

Chan Heng Chee, head of the Singapore-based Institute of South-east Asian Studies, is more optimistic. "There is today no ringing model anywhere in the world that has worked completely well," she said in a recent lecture in Australia.

Despite Asia's growth problems, she said this much is clear: "It is fair to say that East Asia's model, at least its economic model, holds out the greatest inspiration for countries still seeking to break the vicious cycle of poverty."

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Mr Kabir's correct exposition of the history of the birth of fabulous Calcutta, once the seat of administration and the envious capital of the undivided Bengal, shows the depth of his historical knowledge. His deep insight and thought-provoking study and observation of the flow of the mighty Ganges for a quick solution of the long-standing knotty Farakka problem, which has been the cause of desertification of the northern part of Bangladesh and salinity and siltation of our major rivers deserves attention by both Bangladeshi and Indian negotiators experts.

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We express our heartfelt sympathies for the distressed peoples. We must help them in this hour of their need. We urge our government to airlift a plane load of jute bags to EEC Brussels so that the marooned peoples can at least protect their endangered embankments with gunny bags of sand.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203.

DRA and offices

Sir, Dhanmandi Residential Area (DRA) was planned and developed as a residential area. There was a time when it used to be a really residential area. But gone are those days, the days when rules were honoured and regulations followed. As the rule of law has become a matter of the past days, so has people's general attitude towards established norms, values, and mutual respect.

Unfortunately this is not only the attitude of our Bangladeshi brethren, the expatriate nationals, international and foreign organisations seem to be affected as well. In Dhanmandi (Residential Area) there are a number of foreign and international organisations having their offices located in rented houses. These offices park their automobiles on road sides, thus often hindering smooth movement of vehicular traffic. On Road No 21, there's such an office. Cars and staff buses of this office are parked on both sides of the narrow road. This not only creates difficulty for the residents of the area in particular. It is also an

eye sore. Though the office has adequate parking and garage facilities, the vehicles are parked on either side of the road. The drivers also make avoidable noise by blaring horns almost unnecessarily. May I request the concerned organisations to kindly look into this and demonstrate a little care for the neighbourhood residents.

Mujazzal Hossain Rd. 21, DRA, Dhaka

VAT on telephone bill

Sir, The T&T Board charges VAT on the entire amount of telephone bill including line rent. This is wrong. VAT should not be charged on line rent which is a fixed amount charged every month as rent for maintenance of telephone lines. VAT, according to its concept, should be charged on the amount of calls only.

T&T Board may consider this issue and discontinue charging VAT on line rent. MH Choudhury Lalmita, Dhaka

The Economist and Bangladesh

Sir, 'The Economist' of London in a full column page (Jan 14-20th, '95, page 30, column 3) has expressed its concern, that the present unrest and political instability in Bangladesh, this can only lead the country to ruin.

Douglas Hurd. Fed up after ten months of political agitation, they (the businessmen) met in Dhaka ... and told the politicians that, unless the political confusion were settled, the economy would come to a standstill. If that happened, said Salman Rahman the president of the FBCCI, which organised the conference, recovery would be very difficult.

"Foreign investors have been put off by civil disorder, such as general strikes and mass demonstrations. A visit to Bangladesh... by Douglas Hurd, the British Foreign Secretary, coincided with a general strike called by the opposition, as did that of a British trade delegation in November. Mr Hurd made it clear that investors were bound to be deterred if such disruptions to the economy continued."

"Bangladesh's businessmen fear that the country may now face a long battle between the two sides. In the absence of a settlement, more strikes and protests are likely. The businessmen now intend to organise an even bigger get-together in Dhaka, as a show of strength. It is unclear whether the politicians will be impressed."

The Economist is read all over the world by the businessmen and the investors, and also in the highest circles. This kind of coverage goes against the interest and well being of Bangladesh. But for this we alone are responsible, and nobody else.

Mr Salman Rahman and the FBCCI has done a patriotic duty

to raise their voice against the present impasse. It is the duty of each one of us to raise our voice loud and clear, and say that given the goodwill and statesmanship, our present problem can be overcome. While other countries, are determined to improve their economy and ensure well being, we are unable to solve our political problem which seen in the right perspective, is not a stupendous one.

Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswari Road, Dhaka

Hail Hartal!

Sir, Why worry about the state, its economic decline, its slow destruction, its damnation. There is nothing to worry about. Look on the bright side of hartal, and contemplate on the wonders they do to you.

The advantages of a 12-hour hartal, for example, are: — get up from sleep at 12 noon, extra rest; good for the body.

— schools closed; no rickshaw fare or tiffin money for the kids; Good for papa's pocket.

— no transport on the road; less pollution; Good for the lungs.

— no vehicular traffic on the road; no noise; Good for the nervous system.

— no rickshaws on the road; go to market on foot. Good for the legs.

— no traffic; no noise; I can peacefully hear the birds sing. So don't worry be happy! Zolitan New Eskaton, Dhaka