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Down to Earth

When Road Accidents are Made to Happen

By A S M Nurunnabi

Road accidents have increasingly become so frequent that it seems there is no point in considering them as casual or scattered events. The sad feature of these road accidents is that they kill and the rate at which they do is stunningly high. There is hardly any day when our newspapers do not carry news of road disasters and their casualties. For the observers the conclusion seems inescapable that roads and highways have turned into death traps and the engines of death include buses, trucks and more particularly the drivers.

The readily identifiable causes of road accidents have now assumed a hackneyed character through ceaseless repetition in different media, so much so that a sort of pessimistic fatalism has gripped the public mind. Yet it seems there are some glaring loopholes in road administration system which can perhaps be plugged if the authorities concerned become serious about effecting improvements in that sphere.

The basic drawback of the system appears to be the question of issue of automobile fitness certificate. At present, in the metropolis, such certificates are issued by only one particular office of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA). An applicant knows, through severely bitter experience, what a gruelling process it

is to get a fitness certificate after completing all necessary formalities. The inordinately heavy rush and the long queues of the applicants are such a fearful scene that to make a fruitful getting around, it requires the obvious strategy: The adoption of dubious practice. One may readily label it as corruption. But to many this is the only short-cut way to get anything done, according to the prevailing predominant culture of quid pro quo. But undoubtedly things can be made a lot easier if the BRTA divides the city into four to five zones and opens an equal number of small offices for issuing fitness certificates at convenient locations in each zone. Whatever be the additional cost involved in setting up such branch offices, in the opinion of observers, this may be compensated in a large measure by way of savings of time, energy and loss of working hours of vehicle owners, apart from corruption syndrome.

It is further noted by observers that the opening of a few additional offices in this purpose will hardly solve many other serious problems. Under the existing system, anybody can obtain a fitness certificate for any vehicle whatever be its condition. This is amply evident from the thousands of vintage, ram-shackle and wobbling buses, trucks, minibuses, coasters, scooters and many other

types of motorised vehicles plying on the streets of the metropolis. The black smoke emitted by the numerous defective vehicles which are most certainly not roadworthy is one of the main contributory factors for environmental pollution in the city. These defective vehicles are also responsible for road accidents.

Knowledgeable observers have suggested some effective measures to deal with the many ills prevailing under the existing system. As per practices followed in many advanced countries, fitness certificate may be issued by well-known garages nominated by authorities concerned. The authorities may issue guidelines and standard instructions to the nominated garages on the requirements of fitness certificates, and in return for a prescribed fee, and the nominated garages may issue necessary fitness certificates. Under the proposed system, there may be no scope for the adoption of corrupt practices by any quarter, since a fitness certificate held by a defective vehicle can be easily traced to the garage which issued the certificate and instant action may be taken against that garage. This may largely wipe out corrupt practices which afflict an important part of the road transport sector and ensure transparency in the matter of issuing fitness certificates for motorised vehicles.

— Star photo: Sheikh Enamul Huq.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PROTEST: Saiful Islam Khan, in his thirties tried to stay with his family. But he alleges, they did not accept him because he married against their will. In desperation he started a hunger strike in front of the flat at Ahmedabad in the city where his brothers and sisters live. After staying there for nearly the whole day he was driven out late Thursday night after this picture was taken. Saiful went on fasting leaving a hand written note addressed to the authorities, accusing his family of not allowing him to stay with them. He is the youngest among four brothers and sisters. The three are still unmarried. He also accused his brothers and sisters of taking all the money he sent from Saudi Arabia where he worked for a decade. But they deny the allegations and dismissed him as a mentally deranged person.

— Star photo: Sheikh Enamul Huq.

BB suggests steps

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that the foreign banks could be given risk coverage against currency market volatility to encourage them to bring in funds from abroad, official sources said.

On the other hand, the government is also seriously considering raising the interest rate on wage earners' bond by another two per cent and issuing dollar denominated government development bond for non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs).

These two steps, the government thinks, would encourage the NRBs to invest their money in Bangladeshi bonds instead of keeping those in foreign banks.

The prospect of more devaluation to jack up the sapping reserve is also being explored, sources said.

During 1991 to 1997, Indian and Pakistani rupees were devalued by 46.13 per cent and 44.22 per cent respectively. But during the same period, taka has been devalued by only 18.01 per cent.

Despite this gap in devaluation rate, BB now feels that a sudden adjustment of taka against dollar to keep it at par

US Open

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with the currencies of India and Pakistan would not be wise. There is, however, scope for devaluation by some percentage points. On the other hand, the IMF's Real Effective Exchange Rate (REER) that calculates the strength of taka in comparison with trade basket of currencies of 15 countries, finds that taka is now 4.5 per cent appreciated.

Identifying five reasons behind the depletion of reserve, BB said import payment in cash foreign exchange has increased significantly, causing a rapid drop in foreign reserve. This is mainly because if importers open cash Letters of Credit (LCs) and pay exporters in cash, they get concessions on price. This facility cannot be availed through deferred payment LCs.

According to figures, the total import in cash foreign currency was 2076 million dollars in 1990-91, which was 59 per cent of the total import payment. But in 1996-97 this amount had gone up to 80.76 per cent.

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Constable who killed colleague surrenders

By Staff Correspondent

The police constable who gunned down his colleague in the city's East Rampura area at about midnight Thursday surrendered at the Shabujabha thana within about an hour of the incident. He was arrested on charge of murder.

"Arif Ali confessed that he gunned down his fellow constable, Ershadullah," said an officer at Shabujabha thana.

The two constables of Rampura police outpost were on patrol duty in East Rampura.

Arif, 50, rushed to the thana with his rifle and the shot gun of his dead colleague at about 12:45 am, police said.

Ershad, 45, was fatally injured when Arif shot him in the abdomen from point blank range at about 12:05 am. Emergency patrol police immediately took Ershad to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors declared him dead.

The motive behind the killing could not be known till yesterday. However, Arif told on-duty officers in the thana that he fired on Ershad as he tried to pull his firearm from behind.

Police sources said Arif was not mentally sound. He married twice and fathered five daughters and two sons who resided in Natoyata area in the city.

Arif was produced before the court and sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday. A murder case was lodged with Shabujabha thana in this connection.

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things better.

PHILIPS

Diana's funeral today

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"We have all been trying to find different ways to cope. It is not easy to express a sense of loss, since the initial shock is often succeeded by a mixture of other feelings: Disbelief, incomprehension, anger — and concern for those who remain."

"We have all felt those emotions in these last few days," she said.

Diana was an exceptional and gifted human being ... In good times and bad, she never lost her capacity to smile and laugh, nor to inspire others with her warmth and kindness."

"I admired and respected her — for her energy and commitment to others, and especially for her devotion to her two boys," she said.

The Queen answered the criticism that she and the Royal family appeared to have been isolated from the general outpouring of mourning across the nation.

She said, "This week at Bal-moral, we have all been trying to help William and Harry come to terms with the devastating loss that they and the rest of us have suffered."

The Queen notably failed to mention by name Dodi Al-Fayed, Diana's new companion, who died with her in the crash on Sunday in Paris, or the driver Henri Paul.

"Our thoughts are also with Diana's family and the families of those who died with her. I know that they too have drawn strength from what has happened since last weekend, as they seek to heal their sorrow and then to face the future without a loved one," she said.

No-one who knew Diana will ever forget her. Millions of others who never met her, but felt they knew her, will remember her.

"I for one believe that there are lessons to be drawn from her life and from the extraordinary and moving reaction to her death."

I share in your determination to cherish her memory," she added.

Meanwhile, close to 1,900 people from all walks of life will pay their last respects to Diana at Westminster Abbey tomorrow alongside the Spencer family and the British

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