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Traffic sergeants



We live in a corrupt country. If we keep our eyes open we find that everywhere corrupt people are roaming around us. How can we expect a healthy nation when our traffic sergeants take bribe even from a local bus driver? I witnessed this incident several times while I was travelling in local bus from Mohammadpur to Motijheel. When a local bus comes near Farmgate and stops to collect passengers, a traffic sergeant comes and wants to see the

driver's licence. Each time the driver tries to manage him with giving money than surrendering the licence, as he knows that the sergeant's ultimate target is to take money. Only to show off he seizes the licence. The driver uses very bad language about the sergeant behind him and asks his helper to give him money and take back his licence. This is a regular scene. Sometimes I feel ashamed to see the hatred in the driver's eyes and words, which he delivers to the

sergeants. I saw these sergeants' expressionless faces-- with no dignity, no morality, and no shame! They forget that they also represent a group of government employees having the important duty of controlling traffic. It is also reported that these sergeants even take Tk 2 from the rickshaw pullers to allow them to cross road!

Shegufa Yasmin
Lalmatia, Dhaka

Attack on Islam

Terrorism shouldn't be confused with religious teachings. Attack on Islam is not a new phenomenon. It is a long-term plan of the enemies of Islam. If we observe the recent incidents we find that the US economic sanctions on Iraq annihilated thousands of infants. In the name of eliminating weapons of mass destruction they have killed thousands of civilians in Iraq. Torture on Muslims in Abu Garib and Guantanamo Bay is continuing in the name of nabbing the terrorists. Bombings in Afghanistan and killings of innocent civilians in the name of searching for Osama bin Laden are a day to day affair. The US army killed at least 18 innocent people in Pakistan recently.

They want to erase the belief from the Muslim mind.

Sabu & Mamun
University of Dhaka

The anti-Islamic forces are constantly and regularly attacking Muslim sentiments, distorting Islamic principles, jeopardising religious preaching & practices etc.

Khalid Ibne Ali
One e-mail

China, Russia and Iran

Why China and Russia are reluctant to impose sanctions on Iran?

People may think they are the allies of Iran. But we should realise the overall situation. Russia wants IREA meeting to be guided by the agency's own assessment on Iran's behaviour and China reiterated its preference for diplomacy. As China and Russia are not talking directly against Iran like the US which demands quick UN action, the observers

might think that they are the friends of Iran. But it cannot be true. They have trade interest in Iran and are wary of any full-scale embargo. During Iraq war France and Germany talked against the US invasion on Iraq as they also had trade interest in Iraq but they are not opposing US occupation of the country now and not playing any role to withdraw the US army from the country. In case of any aggression against Iran, though they are talking positively now, ultimately they will be silent.

Kofi Annan said, "They should not escalate, they should not press ahead with their nuclear fuel research." "If all else fail the Security Council should take up the issue."

The US is taking action against Iran's nuclear fuel research while it is supporting technical assistance to such a country which did not sign NPT and to legalise

this they are even amending the law. This is double standard at its worst.

Taslim Hasan Sabu
University of Dhaka

Motherland and mother

The love for our mother cannot be defined by words. The words of praise and love can be written, but respect cannot be judged by any jury-- the respect that we all have inside us for our mothers. Our great mothers cared for our protection and growth and taught us the equations of life. The language that we speak was learned from our mothers. She taught us to be nice to others.

Our motherland is also like our mother.

Tahsin Hyder
Maple Leaf International School, Dhaka

For fair elections

"Suppose elections are free and fair and those elected are racists, fascists and separatists,.....that is the dilemma", these haunting words are from the American diplomat Richard Hallbrooke about former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. But I feel those words are equally true about Bangladesh in 2006. Bangladesh is not former Yugoslavia but when it comes to hype about free and fair elections, it is not unlike most places experimenting with democracy.

Bangladesh has been holding relatively free and fair elections (by comparison of earlier elections) from early 1990s till date. And at present we are all concerned that changes in the functioning of the Election Commission might affect the outcome of the next parliamentary elections. The political parties in power are contending that the changes in Election Commission (EC) are not unprecedented against the allegations of the Opposition that this is an orchestrated move to rig the next elections with partisan collaborators at the EC. Whatever may be the truth behind these allegations and rebuttals, the point which had been suppressed is: the quality of candidates from political parties who will contest and some of them will be elected to the parliament to "represent" us.

After return to democracy in Bangladesh in the 90s, we have watched the take-over of the parliament, by people with money and some with long lists of criminal and bank default cases. Fortunately for these elements, our courts are rather slow and convictions are rare, mostly in cases involving "political leaders" and the principle of criminal law does not preclude someone from participating in elections, merely because they were charged with criminal offences. And this would also be highly unfair too, with so many false prosecutions out of vendetta, political and otherwise, being lodged in this country with an unusually low rate of convictions.

Whatever, may be the merits and demerits of the candidates, I would like to urge our great leaders heading the political parties to look at the candidates and not nominate someone who might bring embarrassment to the parties themselves and weaken processes of governance in Bangladesh in the future. Doing this takes courage and merely doing the convenient thing will not be able to prevent repetition of what has happened with party nominations in the era of democracy. This is also a test of political leadership in Bangladesh, which resulted in failure in the past.

It takes a great leader to deliver what myself and many others are hoping for. I trust, our political leadership to be much better, than those who present themselves as the "alternative", but are full of contradictions. But am I being mindlessly optimistic when I beg for doing one right thing on which

will hinge the future of Bangladesh in the years to come?

Abu Mohammad
One e-mail

Only way left for us?

I was wondering about the best way to make our politicians pro-people. Newspaper, TV and other media tried their best, but failed in a massive way. After the regime of the autocratic government, we had a hope that our country would be set for massive economic growth along with parliament-based politics. Unfortunately, we could not get rid of street-based politics. Parliament has remained as a symbol in the last 15 years. Whatever economic growth we see today has resulted from the initiative of our private sectors. The government has remained as a barrier rather than a facilitator. Power sector is a glowing example of that. Projects, which need government's support, are for table talk only. We don't have sewerage treatment plant for Dhaka city (I think 'Pagla plant is not functioning'). Also we don't have treatment plants for industrial waste. Underground water and surface water are being contaminated in a massive scale, which will increase chronic diseases and cancer in a big way soon. Who cares for that?

It is really exciting to see the entrepreneurship in our people. I would say that private sector in our country is really vibrant. They just need pro-people policies from the government. It is amazing to see the news that our private sector is capable of building 450 megawatt power plant, sky train for Dhaka city and 8 km long flyover. Who knows, they will go for building subway for Dhaka city, deep-sea port and expressways in different parts of the country. We need only government support for this. However, government and opposition are busy with their power game. They don't heed any good advice from our people or civil society. I was thinking how can we compel our politicians to sit together and resolve all the political matters on the table. Do we have any role as expatriates to press both the parties (BNP and AL)? After all, we are sending 4 billion US\$ per year which is keeping the economy alive. But there is no platform for the expatriates to talk with the political parties. We are also divided into many factions for no reason. Thus, I found that there is one way to hope for everything, that is, pray to the Almighty. I found the following points reasonable.

1. Almighty God, please force our politicians to sit together and resolve their differences in matters of caretaker government and Election Commission reform.
2. Please make our parliament effective and the centre of our politics.
3. Please force our lawmakers so that they make good laws for our land.

Mahbubur Rahman
Marshfield, USA

CEC's role

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice M A Aziz has been 'found' sick for quite a long time. He could not talk to his long time colleagues in the EC even staying at home. He was found well only once in about two months during his meeting with all the Election Commissioners, including the two newly appointed ones.

Just on the day scheduled for a meeting with the respected guests from the European Union the CEC again fell ill. Now the illness seemed grave since he was admitted to the PG Hospital for treatment. However, his going home at night incited the public to cast doubt on his physical condition.

Under the prevailing condition, the government should ask the CEC if he is really able to deliver the goods.

MAS Molla, BAAS, Dhaka

The activities of the CEC have badly tarnished the image of the judiciary. If this is the way of managing an election; let's forget it. Either sort it out on a free for all basis or let the incumbents in power carry on from here to eternity; or at least till sanity returns to EC.

A voter, On e-mail

The way our chief election commissioner is behaving is unacceptable. He had purposefully avoided meeting the press on the pretext of low back pain. He also put a pillow under his back to substantiate the fact of LBP during the meeting.

One needs to live and die with dignity and honour.

SN Mamoon, Dhaka

Election in our country is not a matter of joke. In a country where one candidate is more influential than the other and there is a relentless competition for capturing votes by 'any means', the role of the Election Commission gets more and more challenging. The chief election commissioner has to work under tremendous pressure. He/she has to oblige the order and threat from the government, and on the other hand, he/she has to take the blame for partisanship from opposition for the slightest unfair actions. Sometimes they are surrounded by thousands of people (recent Chittagong mayoral election) who demand transparency. Above all, he/she has to face the media. A CEC thus should be very strong both mentally and physically.

Now, let's look at our current CEC Justice M.A. Aziz. I do not want to criticise anyone's health condition. But does our CEC have the health condition necessary to run such an office? I raise this question for the following reasons.

1. After a recent verdict from the High Court which went against the CEC's decision, he (CEC) became ill and spent more than a week at home. He became so ill that he even refused any meeting at his home which was requested by other two commissioners.
 2. Finally, he got well and came to office after the government appointed two more commissioners to support him. Dr. Kamal referred to that as an antibiotic for the CEC to recover. So, it seems normal allopathic medicine cannot cure him and it is a matter of great concern. On Monday (Jan 24), he attended office till 11:00am. Next, he had a scheduled meeting with the visiting European Union (EU) team. But he again became ill (to avoid the meeting).
 4. Doctors in his (CEC's) medical history sheet mentioned of nine diseases that our CEC is suffering from. Some of those are: Cataract, Kidney Stone, Thyroid problem, Lumbago, and Rheumatoid Arthritis.
 5. Now, how can such a sick person who is suffering from nine diseases run a tense national election in our country?
- Good news is that our ill CEC with 9 diseases suddenly felt better after the EU team left the country and went back home.
- My question is, should we take the risk of a national election under him? His health condition is very unstable and making him sick in unpredictable ways. Our government should think about his health condition seriously and replace him by a healthier CEC. This way, Justice Aziz will get some rest and get a chance to take care of his diseases.
- Dr. Reaz Rahman, USA**

Prevention of accident deaths



Visits to our village home for Eid should be a time of great joy, but unfortunately, year after year, that joy is marred by needless deaths. Recently over the Eid holidays, twenty people died in a road crash in Savar, and road accidents occurred in thirteen districts of the country, causing unlimited sufferings to homecoming people for celebrating Eid and revealing the extremely poor condition of our communication system. Year after year, even day after day, there is a repetition of the same events, news headlines on the tragic deaths of children and adults, causing deep concern and anxiety for all. Those dying on the roads are our brothers, sisters, children, parents, neighbours and friends. Following those deaths, Eid will come not as an overwhelming joy, but as a painful memory of the death of loved ones. This is the tragic truth of our everyday life. Anyone may be victimised at any time. This fear is not groundless.

According to government figures, every year in Bangladesh four thousand people die and five thousand are injured in road accidents. But many suspect the actual figures are more than ten thousand deaths and twelve thousand injured. Of patients being admitted to the emergency ward in orthopaedics hospital, 56 percent are due to road crashes. In 2005, 3,437 people died and 15,742 were injured due to road crashes. The social and psychological cost of families losing an income earner or beloved child, or of people losing their legs, never to walk again, cannot be measured with statistics.

The government and concerned authorities try to hunt up solutions, from the problem of traffic management, blaming the drivers in the name of reckless driving, removing poorly maintained

vehicles from the roads, and suggesting a magnetic train. But we must question how practical and realistic such solutions are, given pressure on bus and truck drivers to speed, difficulty in banning aging vehicles, and the great expense of a magnetic train. Rather than trying to solve our urgent problem with dreams, we must look for a proper solution in our everyday reality, from within our existing communication infrastructure. In this context, we suggest greatly expanding the use of railway. Think of the numbers of holiday travellers who used rail: did a single person die in an accident? If we ensure effective management and logistic support to the railway system, we will get more advantageous and economically viable output than from roads and highways. If we compare the two modes, we can easily realise how important rail is!

The most effective and practical way of greatly decreasing road deaths is to shift much of the transport of people and goods from roads to rail. During 2002-2003, 524 trains were derailed, resulting in the deaths of 28 people and injuring 144. In contrast, there were 8,000 road crashes, which killed about 10,000 people and injured 25,000. That is, 174 times more injured and 357 times more deaths from road than rail.

In addition to advantages in terms of safety, rail also has other significant benefits. Consider use of fuel: to travel by rail from Chittagong to Dhaka requires 0.95 to 1.06 liter of fuel per person, while travelling the same distance by road requires 6.22 liter, or five times more. For an individual, rail travel is 32% cheaper than road transportation.

Railway used to carry more passengers and larger quantities of heavy goods than bus and other modes of road-based transportation. Trains are far less expensive than bus, truck, or car travel, and far superior in terms of safety, the environment, and amount of space needed to move people. So it is high time to think deliberately for initiating, expanding and promoting rail. In this regard, a major obstacle is planning. If we have strong political commitment, and can ensure smooth coordination of the total system, we will be able to ensure great improvements in our rail network. If we wish to reduce the ongoing slaughter on our roads and ensure transportation facilities for the masses, the one and only alternative is through promoting rail. Imagine a future in which people travel home for Eid and any other occasions conveniently, cheaply, and perhaps most importantly of all, without fear of loss of life or limb.

Jafar Iqbal
On e-mail

Students and politics

Our country has a rich history when it comes to the revolutionary steps taken by people, especially the students to liberate ourselves. Currently, our country is suffering from the malaise of political instability and rampant corruption. However, one of the greatest problems right now is student politics. We have students who are wasting government resources and their lives by ignoring their academic responsibilities and their future by involving themselves in political activities that are harmful for the country. Riots, rallies, violence and other forms of activities will not rid our country of political instability or corruption.

Unlike years before when we were fighting against the rule of another country that had nothing in common with us, right now our fight is against the system. The only way to fight the existing system is through

education, academic excellence and the ability to understand the system to fix it.

Mr. Ahmed Riasat Hasan of Notre Dame College wrote in his letter to the editor, "Students should choose the right path to achieve their ultimate political objective. The political objective should be liberation from all corrupt ideas and forces."

Students should achieve academic success and then get involved in politics to make changes if their goal is change. Lining with political groups and becoming hired goons will result in the country losing a precious resource -- future leaders. After all, a leader should be educated and learned and anything else will continue to push our country further down the current path.

Zeenat Z. Syed
UPS eDeployment

