

Campus violence spells disaster for the country

Nobody would question the need for having student organizations on ideological bias. Undeniably true, a student's philosophy of life and idealism are moulded and shaped by his exposure to world literature and history during his studies in colleges and universities. But to drag them into the quagmire of politics on the pretexts that national identity and sovereignty face a crisis amounts to inviting gloom for the country.

MD ASADULLAH KHAN

WITH the tragic death of Abubakar Siddique, a fifth semester meritorious student of Islamic History and Culture Department of Dhaka University on February 3 last after sustaining a serious head injury by some solid object thrown in his room at A. F. Rahman Hall, the ominous signal of the slide to disorder and violence in the campuses of the universities in consequence of intra or inter party clashes has surfaced again. Abubakar was killed as a sequel to clashes between rival groups of Chhatra League in the AF Rahman Hall of Dhaka University and two days after this killing, Faruk Hossain, an activist of the Chhatra League in Rajshahi University fell victim to Islamic Chhatra Shibir barbarity. With the grisly killing of

Abubakar and Faruk Hossain the good days their poor parents were looking forward to, have been dashed to ground.

Sensible citizenry has issued a clarion call to the political leaders of the country for a consensus in declaring a moratorium on religion-based student politics in colleges and universities. Sadly true, student politics in recent times has taken away hundreds of promising lives from among our midst, leaving the unfortunate families in a pall of gloom and shock. The glorifying age of our patriotic political leaders and statesmen who kept politics for themselves is a fading memory for many now. Before it is too late, every conscientious citizens of the country must come out in public and express their outrage and revulsion to such vile nature of politics. Many people in the country whose voices seem to

have been silenced by the upsurge of violent politics are still waging a battle to preserve those pristine values that kept the nation to peace and prosperity, leaving the students absorbed in their vocation of studies.

People recall the days when students in the country had to abandon their studies and respond to the call of the time in throwing out the British Raj from this sub-continent. That was a time when the colonial British army officers very often tossed the 'natives' out of the first class railway compartments, in a fit of racial superiority. The heroic role of the students in the Language Movement of 52, anti-Ayub movement in the '60s, anti-Education Commission movement in 1962, mass upsurge in 1969 and Liberation War in 1971 when the valiant students of the country played the most crucial role against

the oppressive regimes of the Pakistani rulers can hardly be forgotten. Without any contradiction, people stood in revolt against the high-handedness and brutal torture and genocide unleashed by the Pakistani rulers but unfortunately that spirit of idealism, that once burned bright in many gave way to negative impulses during the successive rules of partisan politics in the last 38 years.

The killing of 7 student activists belonging to a student party in 1974 in Mohsin Hall of Dhaka University and the arrest of the rival leaders, followed by jail sentence of the leader of the gang and subsequent reprieve by the then President spawned the disastrous effect on student politics. The country, believably, is reeling under the strain of such student-dominated politics often leading to conflicts, clashes and killings.

Terrifying violence has enveloped the country. The victims, mostly students in the universities, numbering about 74 during these long 38 years, have been the promising sons of the country. Most of the offenders indicted in these killings have come out through the loopholes of investigation and that has made Dhaka, Rajshahi and

Chittagong university campuses safe havens for gun-toting criminals masquerading as students. Most shockingly, about 80 per cent of the population in the country including the families of these victims have always been disenchanting waiting to get an equitable share of the country's wealth and resources.

Political leaders seem to have a narrow cause, often in disregard to national interest. Ill served by corrupt politicians and fed with extremist and religion-based agendas, and narrow vision, many student activists in the country have become adept crying with their rights and dogmas often shirking their prime responsibilities. The warning bells have been sounded and their grim message reverberates. Unhappily, the violence and killing spree have spilled over to Rajshahi and Chittagong university campuses and as reports go, the Shibir student activists inspired by their mentors has unleashed a planned and organized attack on February 8 last in some residential halls of the Rajshahi University killing one Chhatra League activist Faruk Hossain and cutting off tendons of four Chhatra League activists. In Chittagong, one AAM

Mohiuddin of MA final year class was stabbed to death on February 11 evening while he was waiting to board a train at Sholashahar rail station.

Student politics that has bred terrorism, extortion, admission trade in colleges and schools and even murder was never conceived for this country by any sensible citizenry. Students have been used as tools in achieving the interest of the politicians and in climbing the ladder of power with all its concomitant privileges. People can well remember that in these days student politics could not make any dent in the academic issues of the students such as non-availability of textbooks, escalating price of paper and reading materials, rising expenses for food, non-availability of seats in the halls of residence, concession tickets for students in the city transport services, session jam and last of all shrinking job opportunities after completion of academic programmes.

People only recall with anguish how a former president of the country polluted the politics of the country through distribution of favours to a handful of meritorious students and inducting them into the quagmire of

dirty politics. These innocent boys at the prime of their life were lured to a life of darkness from light by the temptation of fast money made available to them through different unethical means.

The campuses, these days, as reports go, have turned out to be arsenals of weapons that are being used freely by these young goons. But this was never the objective that drove the parents in the remotest rural surroundings to send their wards to join colleges and universities in the cities. What could be more shocking for the parents when their sons vibrating with life and enthusiasm were sent back home in a coffin as a sequel to campus violence? Year in and year out, the whole country has been witnessing the shocking episodes of campus violence that proliferate overtly at the indulgence of self-centred politicians, often propagating and injecting radical thoughts suffused with an overtone of fanatic sermons in young minds.

Nobody would question the need for having student organizations on ideological bias. Undeniably true, a student's philosophy of life and idealism are moulded and shaped by his exposure

to world literature and history during his studies in colleges and universities. But to drag them into the quagmire of politics on the pretexts that national identity and sovereignty face a crisis amounts to inviting gloom for the country. The perils that the country face today, to be blunt, have also been inflicted by our so-called religious leaders masquerading as patriotic politicians.

The ultimate analysis is that most of these killings, mayhem and violence in the campuses of the universities are pathetic reminders of the proliferation of religion-based politics in the country, especially in the educational institutions. People have expressed their revulsion and outrage at those acts of grisly killing and barbarity of cutting tendons of fellow students that no religion can support. Sensible citizenry have issued a clarion call for a total ban on religion-based politics. If people's revulsion and outrage drive home the grim reality, then the nation as a whole may steer clear of the rocky path ahead.

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Enforcement dimension of traffic management

We have for too long given a disproportionate emphasis on enforcement of laws, being nearly oblivious to the urgency of cultivating a habit of observance of such laws. While enforcement remains a prime imperative, cultural internalization of orderly conduct is expected to ease the hardships on the road in some measure.

MUHAMMAD NURUL HUDA

THE almost unbearable traffic situation in Dhaka metropolitan area has engaged the attention of people of all classes and vocations. This has been natural as the socio-economic costs of traffic disorder have been too high to be ignored. While the statistics that graphically depict the harm caused to the economy and the tragedy in terms of loss of human lives serve useful purpose, the important considerations at this time are the remedial measures.

Experts have already delineated on the short, medium and long-term remedial actions that need to be taken to tide over the stagnation. While deliberating on the measures, it is relevant to remind ourselves that modern

traffic management is a matter of three 'e's, that of enforcement, education and engineering and that concerted actions on all three fronts are essential to achieve the desired result.

This writer is of the considered view that while the long-term stable and durable solutions of traffic management would require, amongst others substantial engineering skills, entailing time and resources to be devoted, it may now be pragmatic to lay greater emphasis on the enforcement and education aspects. Such a proposition might prove to be incongruous in addition to being very difficult to implement. However, our socio-political reality may demand a different approach.

The reality on ground is that unauthorized occupation

or encroachments on public space have not seriously engaged the attention of concerned authorities though the same has a disabling impact on traffic management. The irony is that while those who would not allow any trespass on their private estate are willing to contemplate, with total equanimity, encroachments on public property and destruction of public amenities.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that our urban centers are in a state of accelerated decay partly resulting from public property being encroached upon with impunity, with the misguided sympathy of prominent citizens and leaders. Humanitarianism, unfortunately, in our parlance could not be distinguished from miscarriage of mercy.

The above observations have been made to highlight our scant concern for public good and the disinterest of many in public welfare. In such a scenario, it becomes very difficult to do the needful in a venture of public good like orderly traffic management.

Our lack of concern for public good manifests itself in many ways -- in the way we walk or drive on the road and in more significant things like our attitude to encroachments on public property. In fact, we have no sense of pride in our city and as such there are very few that would speak in support of upright functionaries and activists dedicated to the espousal of public causes.

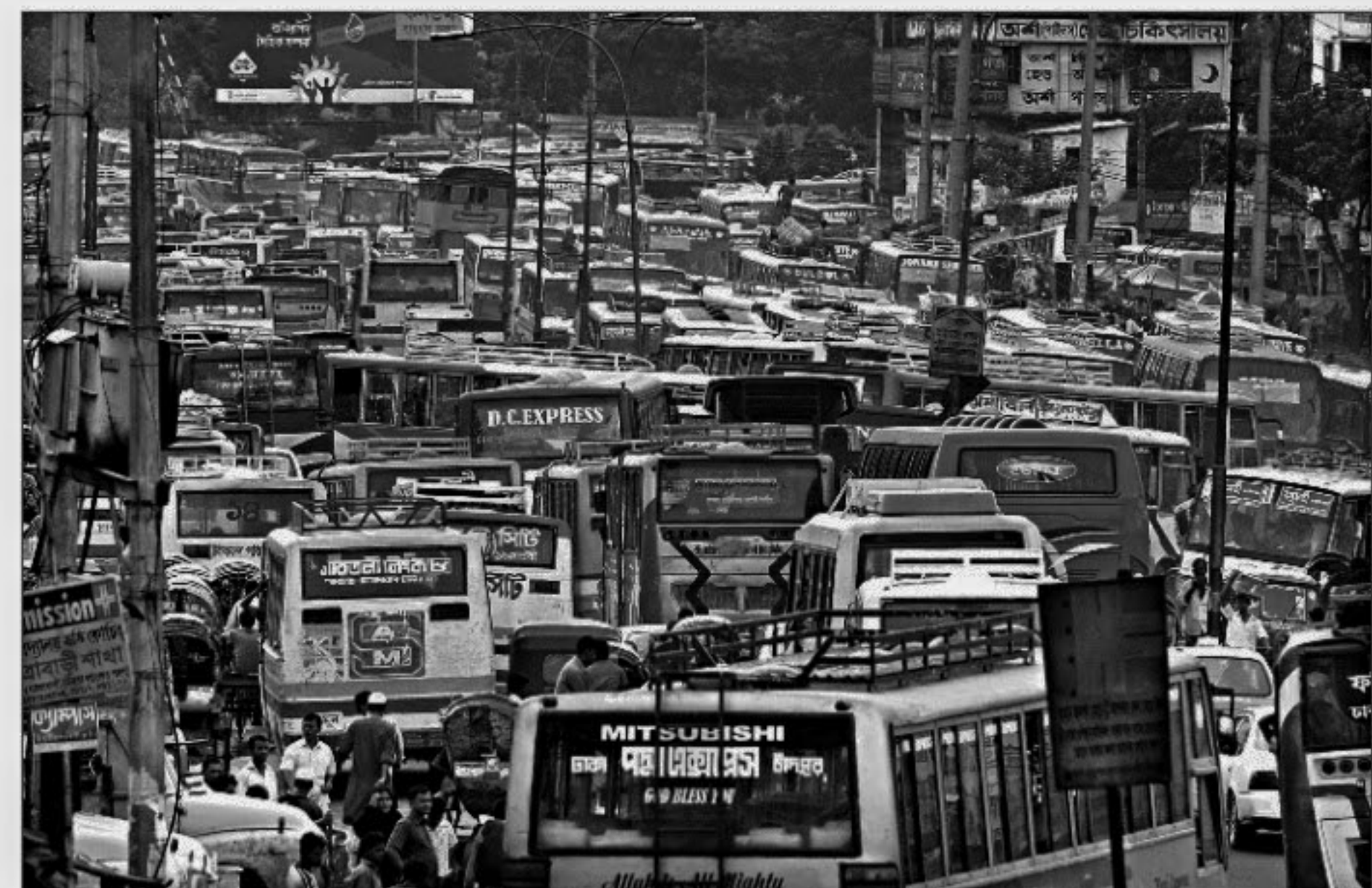
Part of the above irregularities and illegalities can be corrected by means of a serious official campaign to remove unauthorized structures on public roads and the make shift businesses on public footpaths. It would only be practical to remind ourselves that for such programmes to be sustainable and making an impact would require strong political will and an agreement across the

political spectrum. Past experience shows that electoral compulsions have stood in the way of corrective measures.

To come to specifics, can we stop regular trading on the footpaths and pavements and on the road itself at places for facilitating orderly vehicular movement and human traffic? One needs to know that avowedly residential areas in Dhaka city have been allowed to engage in commercial activities. Partial exemptions given by statutory body have been badly abused, and there are reports of even foreign missions in Dhaka indulging in encroachments on public space.

There is no doubt about the regrettable laxity in the enforcement functions of the traffic managers on the road but equally doubtless is the extremely inadequate incentives provided to such managers that are inhaling poison daily on the streets of Dhaka city.

Culturally speaking, we have for too long given a disproportionate emphasis on enforcement of laws, being nearly oblivious to the urgency of cultivating a habit of observance of such laws.



This extreme chaos mustn't be allowed to continue.

Even within our existing constraints of inadequate roads, greater than bearable number of transports and other known shortfalls and inconveniences, we can effect some improvements in the traffic chaos by means of orderly conduct, both voluntary and enforced. Add to that the prime requirement of removing encroachments of

all kinds on the public space that will undoubtedly bring some immediate relief.

The behaviour of our folks, both high and low, on the road has been less than responsible. Some say that in traffic law violations, higher the position, greater is the indifference and irresponsibility. This observation, if true, should not be surprising in our place

where disobedience of law has not attracted adverse legal attention and social condemnation. Thus while enforcement remains a prime imperative, cultural internalization of orderly conduct is expected to ease the hardships on the road in some measure.

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Easing traffic jam, ushering in livability

There is need to modernise the existing surface railways with trains which will run in rapid intervals at higher speeds from nearby townships in the morning and evening rush hours. Gazipur, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Tangail and Comilla (via Daudkandi) perhaps Mymensingh may have fast running railway connections.

PROF. MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN TARAFDAR

THE traffic jam recently in Dhaka painfully surpasses all that obtains in other mega cities, with too many vehicles, many with inadequate road networks, some with narrow roads except the major roads, particularly Manila and Bangkok. All the major European and American cities and Tokyo in Asia have efficient underground metro which has made their traffic situation easier than in other cities. The traffic madness in Manila and Bangkok was worse during the pre-underground metro up to eighties.

Our government's proposed plan as announced by the Prime Minister for elevated-rails, and underground metro, elevated roads, ring road and waterway around the city is highly commendable and timely. Implementation is, however, costly and will

take time for feasibility studies, pre-construction preliminaries and construction.

Recently traffic jam is intensifying with each passing day. We need to do something in order to provide some immediate succour and ease with method of amelioration proven elsewhere. For the last 30 years (for ten years the writer witnessed as a resident of) the Lagos City Corporation has been trying to tackle the traffic jam by staggering the car number plates; today only even number cars ply on the roads from 7.00am to 7.00pm, next day it is the turn of the odd number plate holders. Both even and odd number plate cars travel on weekly and public holidays. Essential services and emergency vehicles are exempted from this rule. Public transports also ply all days.

The population of Lagos megacity is the same as that of Dhaka city (12 million). In the oil rich Nigeria with crude export reaching 2.5 million

barrels a day many people can afford to buy two or even more cars. Despite elevated expressways and flyovers, jams occur during busy rush hours of morning and evening. The proposal to build underground metro is yet to be implemented. Lagos has too many cars which the existing roads could hardly accommodate. Without this odd/even traffic, Lagos with lacs of cars on roads would have been turning into a veritable unlivable abyss perhaps into which Dhaka today is fast entering.

In London in the densely crowded commercial areas like Piccadilly Circus, Regent Street, Oxford Street and Marble Arch no parking is allowed on the roads, no basement parking below shops, hardly any private cars, ops on the road except buses. People use underground stations, Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Circus, Marble Arch bus stops and do shopping by



Delhi metro: Can't it be replicated in Dhaka?

walking miles in the world's biggest shopping areas. Oxford street is regarded as the world's largest shopping mall arcade.

During rush hours traffic in Manila and Bangkok is almost a nightmare so also in NY and Los Angeles, despite super highways, underground metro trains, surface railways. Except major roads in Manila and Bangkok streets are narrow and haphazard like in Dhaka. Traffic jams are a regular feature of the cities.

Dhaka City planners/managers may seriously consider to borrow a leaf from the above options, particularly, those in Lagos staggering of number plates, even/odd and turning some streets one way during rush hours. Establishment of underground metro, discouraging entry of private cars in crowded busy areas of the city can usher in some ease.

For Dhaka city the proposed elevated road will run

from Uttara (may be extended to Gazipur) to Sydebad (may be extended to Narayanganj). Two more major N-S roads and half a dozen E-W link roads, and ring road, western flood embankment with road and the proposed eastern boundary embankment (by-pass) with road on it and elevated railway and underground metro may be built in due course. Circular waterways around the city will definitely help in decongestion and

easing of the traffic.

There is need to modernise the existing surface railways with trains which will run in rapid intervals at higher speeds from nearby townships in the morning and evening rush hours. Gazipur, Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Tangail and Comilla (via Daudkandi) perhaps Mymensingh may have fast running railway connections.

Bangladesh can boast of experienced and qualified engineers, planners, developers, contractors, managers for planning, design and supervision of construction. Experienced technicians, skilled and unskilled manpower shall be available for the constructions.

Government's bold programme of capital dredging of rivers will improve nation's waterways affording snag-free navigation, also improving trade and commerce. Waterways are cheapest means for transporting men and materials. Waterways are environment-friendly and will create job opportunities.

Connecting neighbouring townships around Dhaka will help relocation of people away from Dhaka. With improved communication, trade and commerce will prosper in satellite towns which will

create jobs and may tend to encourage migration of people from Dhaka city to the semi-urban towns. It will likewise slow down migration from small towns and rural areas to the capital Dhaka.

One more suggestion is for relocation of harmful waste producing industries like tanneries, garments, chemicals and pharmaceuticals as well as paper, leather, cement, rubber, plastic industries away from Dhaka to Savar, Munshiganj, Narayanganj, Manikganj, Narsingdi, Mymensingh, Tangail and Comilla. This will save rivers Bariganga, Turag, Balu, Siatalakha and Tongikhal, from pollution and environmental degradation and will decongest Dhaka city with concomitant relocation of some millions of workers who run these industries.

Larger the population, bigger is the problem of housing and traffic management as well as waste disposal and environmental pollution. With decentralisation of some population and implementation of the traffic management proposals, the city dwellers may find a healthy environment to live in.

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