

## Endangered police chain of command

*Police reform an imperative necessity*

**T**HAT law and order has deteriorated in the country over these past many weeks and months has never been in question. And now that even senior police officers have acknowledged the situation, there are additional reasons to be worried about the state of things. What is indeed gravely disturbing is the new dimension which seems to have come into the picture. These police officials have pointed to what is clearly a break in the police chain of command owing to the close ties many of their subordinates maintain with political, usually ruling party, activists across the country. Indeed, the revelations made at a quarterly crime conference in the capital on Wednesday are but a confirmation of the politicization which has for long characterized the police service. There is not much that is new about the situation, but of late matters have clearly gone out of hand. When junior officers have the gall to defy the instructions of their superiors merely because they enjoy close ties with local political elements, it is a signal of danger for the country.

The great irony here is that the political quarters, especially those wielding power, have with regularity over the years exhorted the police force to carry out their responsibilities in a professional manner and without any fear or favour. The truth, as we have known all along and which has now been vindicated by the comments of the senior police officers, has been something else. And it is that politicians at various levels and in different regions of the country have continued to exercise their influence on police officers. If that is not politicisation, what is? And if we as citizens are worried about the declining standards of the police force, owing to such politicisation, it remains for the government to ensure that the reasons behind such worries are removed. That can happen if and when the political authorities set good examples for themselves where letting the police function in a professional manner is concerned. Citizens can certainly be persuaded to believe that the slide which has come into law order because of such factors as unbridled Chhatra League lawlessness can be arrested by the government. For that to happen, the government must take immediate and harsh measures that will leave the police to do what they are expected to do under the law of the land.

We realise, of course, that the virus of politicization which has been eating away at the vitals of the police administration was introduced through the brazen political nature of recruitment into the police service in the past. Quality and integrity were dispensed with and corruption, generally involving sinister financial dealings between the department and those eager to join the service, became the base of recruitment. Little wonder then that what begins in corruption will only expand through bigger corruption.

But the rot must be stemmed somewhere, and soon, if the police department is not to dwindle into a body which does not have respect of the public. We have heard much about the need for reforms of the police service over a long period of time. We would now like to see some real work done on these reforms. Unless reforms are undertaken, one can be sure that the police department will mutate into a moribund department existing only to pander to the whims of the ruling circles, now and in the future.

## Why this lobbying for MPO?

*Government should be insistent on fulfilment of criteria*

**A**WARE that enlisting of schools that fulfil all the criteria to receive monthly pay order (MPO) from the education ministry is nearing completion, influential ruling party people, Members of Parliament (MPs) and their cronies are still creating pressure on the ministry to have their schools of choice enlisted.

They must let the education ministry to do its job. MPO-listing being so crucial, a task that the government has restarted after six years of its suspension, the integrity of the exercise cannot be allowed to be compromised under any circumstances.

From experience we know, such lobbying for MPO-listing often leads to government recognition of such schools that hardly fulfil the necessary criteria. In such a case, fulfilment of certain criteria is pivotal as it would exclude the possibility of enlisting schools that exist only in name and have no qualified teachers and whose pass rates are deplorable.

At stake is not only the public money, the entire edifice of the nation's education is also dependent on how its schools at grass-roots level are being run. Here the issue of professional management committees assumes critical importance. So the non-government schools aspiring to get government recognition should, first and foremost, have proper physical structure in an environment congenial for learning, have a good number students and staffed with qualified teachers and supplied with other necessary facilities for education. A school that fulfils such criteria does not need any lobbying for its government recognition and enlisting.

Regrettably though, the influential people who often press the ministry for enlisting their favourite schools remain conveniently forgetful of these basic criteria.

We hope, the incumbent government will not commit the old mistake again. On the contrary, it should put its foot down in the matter, especially from its highest level so that party leaders or MPs desist from putting unnecessary pressure on the education ministry to have things their own way.



## Traffic jam

One day, if we are unlucky, we might find that the problem is no longer fixable at all. We are not yet at that point. But if we don't act soon, we will be. The clock is ticking and the hour is getting late.

ZAFAR SOBHAN

**D**HAKA is a city with no end of problems. Power. Water. Sewage. Pollution. But anyone you ask will tell you that the biggest problem we face in the capital today is traffic, and the problem is getting worse every day.

It doesn't matter whether you are a businessman or a day labourer, if your mode of transport is a chauffeur-driven car or a rusted-out bus, if you live in Gulshan or Jatrabari -- the problem is the same everywhere and for everyone.

The average man and woman has to spend hours a day in traffic, just to get to work, or to school, or the market, or even to visit friends and relatives. The soul-crushing impact of this daily frustration on the quality of life in the city cannot be over-emphasised.

And don't even get me started on the crippling economic costs that are associated with the horrendous traffic situation in terms of lost productivity and delays and our inability to navigate freely through the city.

Roughly ten per cent of the country either

lives or works in Dhaka and its environs and a huge proportion of the nation's economic activity either takes place or originates or is in some way connected to the city.

Now to fix Dhaka's traffic problems requires long-term thinking and bold action. The problem is simple enough. We do not have enough roads. The solution is simple in conception, but a monumental challenge in terms of implementation.

Ultimately, the only solution is a city-wide master-plan that must be strictly adhered to once adopted. Easy to say, rather harder to accomplish. But accomplish it we must.

Illegal buildings will need to be demolished. Hundreds of miles of new roads, ring-roads, and fly-overs will need to be built. Housing will need to be completely reimagined to accommodate us. Some kind of a mass transit system will need to be put in place.

This is obviously a long-term vision. But in the short-run there is also plenty that can be done to ease the crush. The focus needs to be on limiting the number of private cars on the roads.

First, we can pay market price for octane and petrol. There is no reason why urban car-owners such as you and I should get subsidised fuel.

The benefits would be immediate. With fuel more costly, people would be forced to take their cars out less frequently. Traffic would thin, the nation's balance of payments would improve, and the environment would be cleaner.

Next, public transport needs to be given a shot in the arm so that people will take their cars out less frequently. Whatever the cost, people won't leave their cars at home unless there is an alternative.

Finally, the most important thing would be to actually enforce traffic laws. Right now there is impunity, more or less. We need more traffic cops, and not just to direct traffic as they are doing today. They need to be empowered to write tickets and impound vehicles. In other words, we need a functional traffic court.

The simplest way to cut down on the number of vehicles plying the streets at any one time is to restrict parking and to crack down on illegal parking. If there is no place to park, and penalties for illegal parking, then people will take their cars out less.

There needs to be zero tolerance for those parking on main roads or otherwise obstructing traffic. The police need to be empowered to impound illegally parked

vehicles, with a stiff penalty for their release. That ought to do the trick.

Traffic courts would accomplish far more than people imagine. Once people start getting hit with costly tickets and having their vehicles impounded, they will shape up quickly and the entire culture of impunity for flouting traffic laws can slowly be fixed.

The government should also note that these kinds of policies would be extremely popular. The vast majority of people living in Dhaka have no cars, and so measures targeting car-owners will benefit far more people than they hurt. And to the extent that such measures will ultimately help lessen the crush of traffic, they will actually benefit car-owners as well.

The trouble with the traffic problem is that every day's inaction allows the situation to grow worse, and every day's inaction means that the problem becomes that much more difficult to fix.

Already, 15 months into its term, the government will find that it is considerably harder to fix this problem than it would have been on day one.

And one day, if we are unlucky, we might find that the problem is no longer fixable at all. We are not yet at that point. But if we don't act soon, we will be. The clock is ticking and the hour is getting late.

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## Awaiting the wait

Some flies last only a couple of days, while a termite queen can survive thirty years. Cage has bought his grave, and he is pushing forty-six. Older people know. When one is awaiting the wait, it makes the wait even more awaiting.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**N**ICOLAS Cage is a Hollywood star who has bought himself a gawky gift. Not a mansion, not a car, nor anything else of a flashy kind, neither to flaunt his money nor to flourish his fame. Nicolas Cage has bought himself a mausoleum in Louisiana, which would serve as his final resting place. Great minds think ahead of time. My man Cage has thought of his death.

In Africa, legend has it that elephants also do something like this. When the elder elephants know their death is imminent, they leave their herds and travel to a place called the Elephant Graveyard. H. Rider Haggard writes about it in *King Solomon's Mines*.

Studies also reveal that when elephants come across skulls and ivory, they get emotional. The pachyderms are capable of recognising their relatives from mortal remains. Chimpanzees, who have rituals concerning their dead, only abandon the bodies when they begin to decompose. Lions have an unappetising way of showing their appetite for dead family members. They sniff or lick the body prior to devouring it.

Nicolas Cage has done nothing of that sort. He has neither shown emotions for others, nor done it to commemorate the memories of anyone of his ancestors. He has only shown his prescience for death, and knowing that it's unavoidable, he has found himself a burial place.

One can ask questions. What if his body is destroyed after his death? What if his body is never found? What, in that case, is going to be laid to rest in that mausoleum? Will it still be his final resting place? "After me, deluge," said French monarch Louis XV. The Hollywood actor has at least bothered to figure out something.

But his choice of a mausoleum is inter-

esting. Perhaps he wants to map out something in the unknown terrains of death. Perhaps he wants to go with the knowledge of what will happen to his body once he is gone. Not an unlikely concern. Many of us have to worry about parking before driving our cars in this city. Right?

In Hinduism, the car is done away with after the passenger arrives at the destination. Dead bodies are burned on the pyre, the ashes of illustrious ones sprinkled into rivers and oceans. The final resting place is to return from ashes to ashes.

Parsis leave their dead in the Tower of Silence for vultures to eat. Many Parsis are beginning to doubt whether months of putrefaction amounts to a death with dignity. Besides, India's diminishing vulture population is posing a threat to this age-old practice. In 2008, newspapers reported how the Parsis of Kolkata had rejoiced after a few vultures were spotted on the city's skyline after a long absence. Dead bodies were decomposing and polluting the air due to the shortage of these scavenging birds.

These stories are amazing. Ensembled, they tell us something about life itself. Freud determined that we don't have a concept of death and dying until the age of eight. But it's believed that death doesn't hit us before fifty, when the chilling realisation hits us that the largesse of life is running out. And, it's running out fast.

The *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* tells us that we should die peacefully, especially if the cause of death is the exhaustion of our natural lifespan. It describes that a human being is like a lamp, and death is when it has run out of oil. Every moment lived is every moment died. Life culminates in death.

Man seeks renewal in the midst of this erasure. Mughal emperor Babur prayed to God that his son Humayun's life be spared



The wait is over!

in exchange of his own. The father died shortly after the son got well. Man makes concessions and promises, and he bargains with God, confesses his wrongdoings, and asks for forgiveness. He wants to buy more time, even begging at times for another chance to live.

The tinseltown titan has bought himself a mausoleum because he accepted the end. Most men die before they reach eighty, which is a fraction of the average lifespan of tortoises, vultures, plants and trees. A 255-year-old giant tortoise named Aditya died at the Calcutta Zoo in 2006. It had been brought to India from the Seychelles

Islands in the mid-18th century as a gift to the British colonial ruler Robert Clive.

Gabriel Garcia Marquez tells us in *One Writes to the Colonel*: "He who awaits much can expect little." The pursuit of life is pursuit of death. This is where Nicolas Cage gets creepy. Some flies last only a couple of days, while a termite queen can survive thirty years. Cage has bought his grave, and he is pushing forty-six. Older people know. When one is awaiting the wait, it makes the wait even more awaiting.

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