

ENIGMATTERS

This enmity must go



MOHAMMAD ALI SATTAR

CONFLICT between transport workers and students in our country is nothing new. The traditional warfare between the two ends up

either with severe injuries or deaths, not to speak of colossal loss of properties. This has been going on at regular intervals and became a ritual of sorts. We are not surprised any more, but each time we are shocked to learn about loss of lives resulting from these mindless engagements. Things have come to such a pass that people are now reluctant to sympathise with any side.

The latest clash, involving bus workers and students of Dhaka University, led to death of a student, who was reportedly thrown alive in front of a speeding truck. Ghoulish!

Causes of the incidents are many, like fare hitch, repulsive gesture of the helper, offensive words of the conductor, dropping off or picking up at wrong places, but effects are same; swear, brawl and violence, mostly leading to destruction and death. The picture is only a hint of the unremitting slide of values in the society.

The need and use of road transport has risen with the growth of trade, commerce and commuters. This is a trade we can't ignore.

If anything is on the rise, it is the vehicle population of the country. Whether transport trade is always a money-spinning concern we don't know, but everyday large number of vehicles, especially trucks and buses, hit the roads all over the country. With the increase in the number of vehicles the workforce in this business has also gone up. The number of drivers, helpers, assistants makes a huge force.

While we watch with mixed feelings the astronomical growth of this sector in terms of numbers and strength of workforce, we also stare



PALASH KHAN/RIKNEWS

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with utter dismay the disappearance of good sense in them. From owners, to drivers, to helpers and the backstage parties, all members are intellectually inaccessible and prefer to reside in a domain where it is almost impossible to get through.

Imagine the setting of the big truck and bus terminals and "depots" from where they run their business. The entire area (for instance a truck depot in Tejgaon and a bus depot in Sayedabad) wears a chilling look. They are cold and damp, buried under thick black coatings of motor oil, diesel, grease and other toxics. And the workers (to me, aliens) engaged in chatting, playing cards, repairing wheels or engines, or painting or loitering. A perfect frame for a gangster film!

Most sensitive is the bus service. Buses are the only means of transport for the middle class. Students mainly prefer buses. We are more familiar

with buses than trucks. We know the routes and the fares. We learned the hard way the traits of drivers, helpers and other staff. We have also managed to learn the art of confronting these people everyday, once at least.

There are reports galore on tragic deaths of students run over or hit by a speeding bus or truck. These occur while crossing a street, and misery strikes even when he/she is standing at the wayside, or on the zebra crossings. Lynching of students by the transport goons or simply throwing them out of running vehicle is also common. Yet, the culprits go scot-free. Law enforcers prefer siding with them, letting recklessness breed.

The transport workers enjoy an outlandish freedom. They seldom show respect to the traffic rules or social commitments. Killing of people, be it students or cops, has become a regular practice for them, without least remorse. No law

appears to be strong enough for them. Years ago, a truck driver was sentenced to death for killing a young boy. He was later released under pressure from the transport workers union and other off-stage accomplices. A court's verdict proved in vain!

Dangerous driving, haughtiness of the drivers and helpers, dodging of traffic rules, offensive approaches and obscene language used by them make life impossible for us. They have set "rules" that we have to abide by!

Students' reaction engulfs an entire region like the tsunami waves or wild fire. Few kilometers of area are caught in the mess. They vent their anger by going on rampage, hitting anybody and anything that comes their way. The traditional clash between these two groups has brought about large scale misery to us time and again. It has to be stopped.

However, we cannot ignore and remain indifferent to this trend. After all, road transport happens to be the largest avenue in communication sector. These people (transport workers) needs to be brought under some kind of discipline through training, motivation and counseling to change their way of thinking. They must be brought into the mainstream population and given dignified treatment in order to raise in them the feeling of responsibility and care.

Students should also try and rediscover themselves. Their glorious history and achievements are overshadowed by the acts they indulge in now. They can't go around with rods and sticks and damaging cars and other public properties, and creating panic and mayhem! They have let themselves down by unfair exercise of their might. Still, we look up to them, for they are our power.

It's time the state administrators and law enforcers appreciate that when law does not take its own course, it is picked up by someone in the stride.

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Rural healthcare in neglect PM's reprimand was needed

PRIME Minister Sheikh Hasina has asked the government doctors who are diffident in taking up rural postings to quit their job. We hope the PM would not leave it to words but implement her warning.

The acute shortage of doctors, nurses and technicians in rural hospitals has forced many patients to resort to traditional healers or, for those able to afford it, to seek medical care in the capital, overburdening the city's already crowded hospitals. For people living in chars and other places with poor communication, the ordeal is even greater when there are no local doctors, as poor transport links prevent patients from being able to access medical care in time.

Not only are thousands of positions vacant in rural hospitals, but those which are not, in reality remain so, with only a handful of doctors attending to hundreds of patients a day. According to a World Bank report published in 2009, 40 percent of doctors at rural healthcare centres are regularly absent. Reasons for their absenteeism include the poor pay and standard of living in villages, as opposed to that earned from their private practices in the capital city. The insufficient supply of medicine, obsolete equipment and inadequate facilities in rural hospitals are also barriers to proper medical treatment within an infrastructure which was originally one of the best in the region.

The below-standard or simply unavailable healthcare in villages has forced many patients -- 80 percent of the population, according to a report by a civil society network which monitors the healthcare situation in the country -- to turn to non-state health care providers. In this context, a practical step may be the training and monitoring of village doctors. The greatest necessity, however, is that for a self-propelled, constantly supervised system of rural healthcare with a strong monitoring mechanism which will hold accountable doctors and staff for the number of patients examined and treated, cured and referred and the nature of treatment administered at these hospitals. It is unfortunate but necessary that the traditional Hippocratic Oath taken by all doctors swearing to uphold ethical standards in their medical practice, must be enforced through administrative and, if required, legal means.

Taking to bicycle

An obvious option to popularise

THE 'campus-based cycle service programme' launched at Dhaka University is a welcome, yet long overdue initiative. Now, it should not remain confined to DU campus alone. Other educational institutions in the metropolis ought to encourage bike as a favourite mode of mobility with their complements of bicycle stands and repair outfits put in place.

In fact, bicycle which is manufactured in the country, has a whole range of potential as an environment-friendly, inexpensive and healthy means of transportation to be adopted on a massive scale across the country.

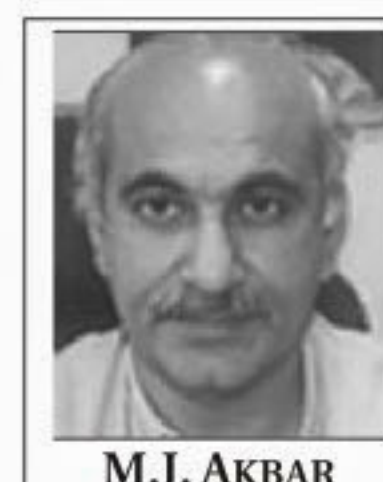
Actually, for a city like Dhaka the ideal transport should have been the two-wheeler given the income level of most inhabitants and the limited road spaces involving short-to-medium distance traveling. Instead, pedal richshaws have largely taken their places as people would neither walk nor learn to ride a bicycle. In the process, their movement has cost more and more with motorised transport guzzling petrol at a huge cost to national exchequer wreaking havoc on the environment on top of the other agents of air and surface pollution constantly at work.

There is no second opinion on the rationale for taking to bikes, especially for the young and even middle aged. But this would sound like wishful thinking as long as we have not made Dhaka city into a bicycle-friendly one. We should have lanes for special space for cycles wherever the existing road network would allow.

True, the pedestrian and cycle user have little traffic sense as the former is given to jay walking and the latter biking through the middle of the road along the road dividers, risking their lives and endangering vehicular movement. Therefore, taking to bicycle on a large scale has a whole lot to do with an instilled

BYLINE

Stars and style



M.J. AKBAR

STYLE is the yeast of leadership. The league rounds of this World Cup Cricket are not designed to offer much by way of excitement since it

would require too much stupidity on the part of the Biggies not to qualify for the knockout stage, which is when the mercury will start rising. England, possibly in honour of its long sporting tradition, is trying very hard to fail, but I suspect that it might very well fail to fail. I hope Bangladesh marches into the quarter-finals, precisely because it is the very opposite of England: its spirit is greater than its ability, unlike England, which brought along quality to the Cup but mislaid its spirit somewhere on the flight to the subcontinent.

The one fascinating aspect of this tournament so far is the difference in the management style of its captains. The test of a captain lies, obviously, in adversity, and Bangladesh's Shakib al Hasan is blessed with the courage of self-belief. He could have fallen into that worst of all traps, sulking self-pity, when angry fans broke his windowpanes after his team's pathetic loss to the West Indies. Instead, he picked himself and the team up, and led them to a famous victory against England. It does not actually matter now whether he goes into the next round. He has restored his nation's pride. Bengali fans are right. They do not expect Bangladesh to win the Cup, but they will not tolerate a team that betrays its honour.

The surprise is Shahid Afridi, who could easily join Pakistan's Foreign Service after this swansong. The man who has tweaked a ball or two in his time, has flowered into a diplomat.

He soothed ruffled feathers after defeat against New Zealand through a brilliant strategic pincer movement: he invited the huge Pakistani media contingent for dinner with the players. Mollifying the messenger is the best treatment for the ache of bad news. Afridi is clearly aware that contemporary Pakistan has only two powerful institutions, the army and the media. The army has only cursory interest in cricket during wartime, so an alliance with the media is suffi-

cient for crisis control. Pakistan remains the contrarian's favourite; and if Afridi can handle his temperamental eleven with the kind of aplomb he has shown off the field, then watch out for the Greens. Predictably Pakistan's erratic, slippery-fingers wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal has induced the best joke so far: "What is Akmal's favourite pick-up line? Can I drop you anywhere?"

In contrast, Mahendra Dhoni is so

laidback he could have been training in a sauna. Dhoni is proponent of the Yawn School of Business. When asked why India had made such heavy weather of defeating less-than-ordinary sides like Holland, he replied with a verbal shrug. India was winning, wasn't it, and that was good enough for him. Well, he might lose when there is no second chance left.

It may not be much of a problem for him personally, since the advertisement deals are done, cheques are

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SPARK STUDIO

(he disdained a helmet, trusting his eye and instinct instead). And he had a set of bowlers who could break your hand when you were looking and crack your head when you took your eye off the ball. Dhoni has fashioned half a team for this tournament, just a set of brilliant batsmen, on the assumption that opponents will get themselves out. We shall see what we shall see.

The finest gentleman ever to captain England was surely Colin Cowdrey. In his last match as captain Cowdrey walked to the pitch for the toss, dressed in immaculate whites. And waited. Richards sauntered up twenty minutes late, wearing a T shirt and bandana in more colours than a rainbow would dare to advertise. The coin was tossed. Richards won. Richards looked at the prim and proper Cowdrey and asked the Englishman what he wanted to do, rather than exercising his right of decision. Once Cowdrey had recovered, he said England would like to bat. Okay maan, said Richards, you bat.

The West Indies won that Test match by ten wickets. That is why it was Cowdrey's last match. And that is why few lovers of cricket can remember Cowdrey, and no one has forgotten Vivian Richards.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

March 15

- 1493**
Christopher Columbus returns to Spain after his first trip to the Americas.
- 1564**
Mughal Emperor Akbar abolishes jizya (per capita tax).
- 1776**
South Carolina becomes the first American colony to declare its independence from Great Britain and set up its own government.
- 1877**
The first Test cricket match begins between England and Australia.
- 1922**
After Egypt gains nominal independence from the United Kingdom, Fuad I becomes King of Egypt.
- 1943**
World War II: Third Battle of Kharkov -- the Germans retake the city of Kharkov from the Soviet armies in bitter street fighting.
- 1961**
South Africa withdraws from the Commonwealth of Nations.
- 1971**
President Yahya Khan arrives in Dhaka for talks with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He is escorted from the airport to the President's House by soldiers of Pakistan army. The whole of Dhaka displays Bangladesh flags and the only places where the Pakistan flag can be seen are the President's house and the Cantonment.
- 1990**
Iraq hangs British journalist Farzad Bazoft for spying.
- 1990**
Mikhail Gorbachev is elected as the first executive president of the Soviet Union.