Nano or Mega Tyranny!

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I know of one classic case of a 'blessing in disguise' sending an ill-fated fugitive to a better life in USA, all because he had fisticuffed a traffic policeman. This is how it happened with a youngster, and happens to every car owner these days with disturbing frequency.

Three decades ago, a youngster driving a car had been halted at a traffic signal for an excruciatingly long time as the red blinked into green and green into red many times over and yet he could not move an inch out of the space he was holed in. Fuming with rage, he got down from his car at the first opportunity, ran into an altercation with the on-duty cop and landed a boxer's jab on his face.

Although he apparently got away with it, soon a case would be made out of his 'obstructing a policeman on-duty', the usual immunity clause law enforcers can invoke without compunction for any unsuspecting victim. He turned a fugitive from law overnight, took out a visa for the USA and settled down to a star-studded career overseas.

I was tempted to relive his experience the other day at Sonargaon intersection, one of the many notorious traffic circles the citizens have come to dread with no relief in sight. Held up on one side of the intersection when you have barely touched the cross bar after a longish snail's pace you would expect a passage shortly. Well, your mendicant's patience will run out as you see transports on all other three sides making beelines and exiting away as you gnash your teeth in impotent rage. You hoot, you blare, but all this falls on deaf ears. It feels like a *man-little-man-dressed-in-brief-little-authority* displaying his small little power to the utter disgust of the commuting public. For the love of God, citizens expect an explanation as to why certain sides to traffic intersections are inordinately blocked while others are freed up in inexplicable frequency. What is the thumb rule followed in traffic management at the busy intersections, a citizen would very much like to know and he has a right to know that. Isn't there an equal, or at least tolerable, apportionment of time for each side of traffic circles, or is this altogether left to the whims of traffic policemen and officials on duty? One senses a certain deliberate arbitrariness based on perceived, scheduled, rescheduled or canceled VIP movements (!) at the expense of ordinary citizens' easement rights.

We must take a leaf out of traffic management manual followed in other metropolises, where VIP movement is channeled through bypass roads or is timed at lean hours of traffic.

The other day, I got a taste of the capricious manner in which a petty incident was handled by cops on the road. My car had come to a halt as its battery had gone kaput and I was not on it to handle the situation. My driver mumbled over his mobile phone to inform me that a wrecker would tow my car into my office building at a charge of Tk 1200. I thought with that bit of police efficiency and my payment of fees the problem would have been solved. But no, there was more unpleasantness to it. A printed official proforma has certain columns one of which is labeled 'obstruction to traffic'. And the police had to go by rules, and so against the space inscribed with 'obstruction to traffic' my car which had gone out of order mechanically earned an entry. The poor driver was in breach of a rule that was bent in a clear case of misapplication.

It reminds one of Oscar Wilde's words: "Duty is what one expects from others, it is not what one does oneself."

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