

Chain of command in police under stress?

Police reform is the answer

Latest intelligence report on police reveals a worrying picture of indiscipline in the country's largest law enforcing agency. Based on the intelligence findings, a prominent Bangla daily reported that in the last six months more than eight hundred orders of Dhaka Metropolitan police commissioner have been violated. In most of the cases, these occurred in the form of manipulating transfer orders to stay in the same station as if growing a stake in it. It is easily understandable that this unusual long stay has very little to do with professionalism. Rather, it strengthens their hold on the area and prolongs their nexus with vested interests. As a result, the law and order situation of the area aggravates and general people have to suffer due to apathetic attitude of the police to crime control.

The investigation report reveals that a certain quarter of police forces has been allegedly continuing this malpractice by bribing and using political powers including regional loyalty. This constitutes not only insubordination but also abuse of power through political linkages. Even the seven-point directives issued by police headquarters and head-quarter of DMP failed to contain this dismal situation. This is a serious threat to the chain of command in the police force, and by implication, to the law and order situation.

Against this backdrop, the government has to look into this matter seriously. They should rise above party interest, take immediate action against corrupt elements and undertake a thorough reform of police administration which has been long overdue.

Jaywalking has to be curbed

The drive sounds impractical

THERE can't be any second opinion that the way jaywalking has proliferated in the city it requires immediate and effective remedial measures as a crucial part of traffic management. There is no alternative to enforcing discipline in the riotous form that pedestrian traffic has taken. Not only overall traffic is being obstructed but lives are put at risk, too.

That said, we now turn to the impulsive decision to impose a fine of Taka 200 or have an offender serve a jail sentence for six months to discourage people from crossing the road dangerously. The either/or penal dispensation between Taka 200 as fine or six months in jail sounds ludicrous, to say the least. It's certainly not well thought out in terms of penal provision as well as the timing of the drive which is set for tomorrow.

What we would like the authorities to prioritise at the moment is to fix the existing fledgling foot overbridges and underpasses. These need to be repaired and lighted at night. Simultaneous with this step, an awareness building campaign will have to be launched to sensitise the people against jaywalking.

They should also be made aware of the penalties they will have to endure if they break law. Finally, we are disposed

Will Obama sail or sink with his immigration policy?

ABDUL MATIN

THE result of the recent midterm election of the US Congress was a great debacle for President Barack Obama. Some analysts predicted that having lost control over the Congress, President Obama would be a lame-duck president for the remaining two years in office. One of the reasons of his unpopularity was his indecisiveness in several US policy issues.

President Obama recently issued a presidential order on the US immigration to give parents of children who are US citizens or legal permanent residents the opportunity to undergo a background check and pay a fee to stay in the country temporarily for up to three years. They aren't offered any right to citizenship and the order could be reversed by another president. About four million people will be eligible for a new legal status that would allow them to work legally. An additional one million people now living illegally will have protection from deportation.

By issuing this order, President Obama demonstrated that he is capable of taking hard decisions even without the support of the Congress, which ignored the immigration issue for decades without passing any bill. He thus refused to be a lame-duck. As a matter of fact, he intends to rebound keeping in mind the elections of 2016 even though he won't contest.

Obama's action was welcomed by not only five million illegal immigrants, but by several ethnic groups who are legal US citizens or residents. It is estimated that 10% of the voters in the 2014 midterm election were Latinos. This figure was 9% in 2008 and 8% in 2004 and is likely to increase in the future. 70% of the Latinos and Asian Americans voted for Obama in the last presidential election. The African Americans including mixed races, who normally support the Democrats, represent 13.6% of the US population though all the eligible voters among them are not registered voters and their turnout at polls is low. Nevertheless, they represent a significant number of voters. By the new US policy on immigration, Obama intends to hold the ethnic vote banks for his party.

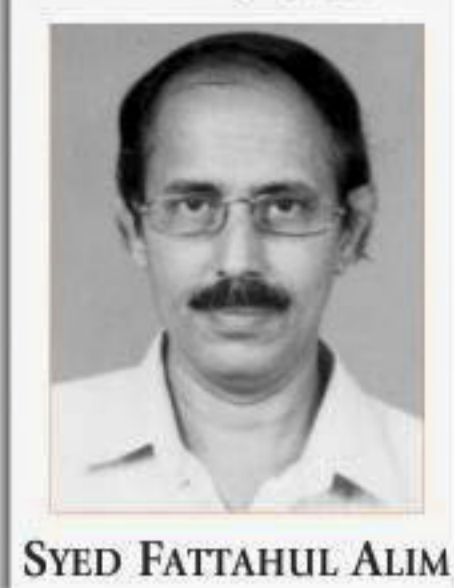
The Republicans accused Obama of violating the constitution in issuing the presidential order. Will they now pass a bill to declare the order null and void and thus lose the Latino, African American and Asian American voters? This is most unlikely. Obama has thus taken a calculated risk. No bill passed by the Congress is likely to withdraw the privileges granted by him. This will only vindicate his action. In all probability, he is, therefore, likely to sail and not sink with his immigration policy.

The writer is a former chief engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

DISCIPLINING JAYWALKERS

We have little room for experiment

KALEIDOSCOPE



SYED FATTAHUL ALAM

DHAKA Metropolitan police (DMP) has hit upon a novel idea to discourage jaywalking in the city. Part of a weeklong campaign at a pilot level, a mobile court will operate between Rupashi Bangla Hotel and Farmgate points of the city from Tuesday to control the illegal pedestrian habit to cross streets in a random manner at different road intersections or even at non-intersections by jumping over the road-dividers without regard to traffic laws. The court will penalize individuals found breaking traffic rules in this way either by imposing a fine of Tk.200 on them or by sentencing them to a six months' prison term. The DMP, however, does not say what will happen after the pilot programme is over. Will pedestrians along the section of the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in question then be left to their own devices again?

The entire idea makes little sense. It does not even look serious.

First come to the legal provisions to penalize the jaywalker. How do you match Tk.200 in fine with six months' jail? Does it not seem out of proportion to the nature of the offence? If the argument is that it aims to strike fear in the heart of the would-be jaywalker, it still does hardly stand to reason. Law is not a plaything. It has to be well-thought-of, rational and meant to be effective. But from the very beginning the whole exercise looks very tentative.

The metropolitan police chief while announcing the weeklong anti-jaywalking drive followed by a three-day awareness programme, mentioned the intolerable traffic chaos created everyday at the road island with fountain in front of Sonargaon Hotel. The stream of pedestrians gathering there throughout the day is certainly a huge obstacle to smooth movement of vehicles at that point. But what options are left to those who throng there from either side of the street than to use that intersection? Otherwise, say, those coming from the Panthapath or from Sonargaon road end will have to cross the Panthapath from its Southerner side over to its northern lane and that, too, illegally and then brace for the long walk jostling and elbowing through the crowded pavement all the way up to the Purnima cinema where the lone underpass in the entire area is situated. After going over to the other side of the street through the underpass, they will again have to use the crowded pavement and move towards the Sonargaon Hotel point to begin their eastward journey. Those who want to move westward from Sonargaon Hotel towards Patnthapath will have to take the reverse route and face a similar ordeal. Then how can one blame these people for using the Sonargaon fountain crossing illegally when there is neither a foot overbridge nor an underpass at that particular crossing?

If truth be told, the foot overbridges and underpasses spanning major city streets are rather few compared to the number of pedestrians shuttling between the two sides of different streets everyday.

Now come to the case of those who refuse to use the overbridges or underpasses. That is certainly a bad habit and deserves to be punished. But what about the old people and others who are physically handicapped or even have heart ailments? Are our footbridges or underpasses friendly towards the particular needs of those pedestrians? The steeply rising stairs of, especially, the overbridges pose a huge risk to the heart patients. Moreover, the overbridges are not only in adverse possession of hawkers and beggars, they in some cases turn into a veritable den of thugs and muggers. Shouldn't the city fathers think of increasing the number of overbridges and underpasses as well as make those more user-friendly and secure for the public?

Tokenism or adhoc-ism is no answer to the colossal problem we are talking about. While the need to train the pedestrians and other road users on the discipline and culture of a modern city cannot be overemphasized, one cannot also be oblivious of the harsh realities on the ground. Do the pedestrians of the city have any uncluttered and unoccupied walkways for them to move freely and safely? Or take the case of unruly buses. What mea-



asures have the authorities taken so far to discipline the buses that stop at undesignated spots on the streets causing passengers waiting to get on and get off such buses run in a chaotic manner in the middle of the road? And are not these undesignated bus stoppages also the points where pedestrians are in a mad rush to cross the roads, sometimes jumping over the traffic median, risking their lives?

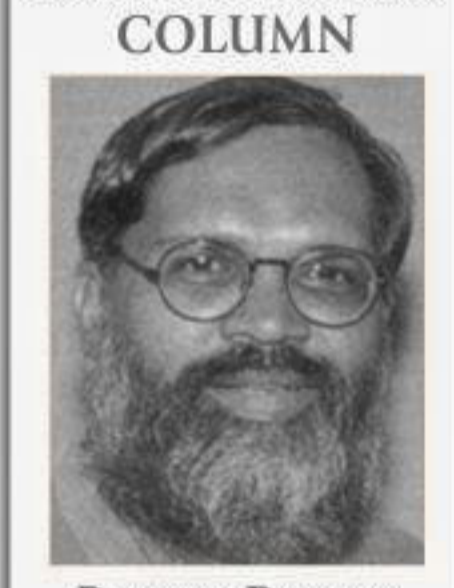
The authorities need to accept the fact that the erratic pedestrian behaviour has more to do with the lack of better alternatives than any ignorance of proper metropolitan culture on their part.

With disproportionately more vehicles than are roads and a size of population that the city can hardly accommodate, we cannot expect an ideal behaviour particularly from its less privileged citizens, let alone pedestrians. Even so, we believe, the city-dwellers are law-abiding. And for any measure meant to make them respectful of law of the road, it has to be pragmatic and sustainable. And in such a desperate situation, there is little room for experiment.

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Does socialism have a future?

PRAFUL BIDWAI COLUMN



PRAFUL BIDWAI

World Communism collapsed, and the capitalist West emerged victorious in the Cold War.

Was the collapse of "actually existing socialism" inevitable? A Stalin or Deng Xiaoping might have prevented it by using brute force, as in Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), or Tiananmen Square (1989).

But that would only have postponed the moment of reckoning. In the prevailing situation, neither force, nor half-hearted reforms -- like Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) -- could have pacified protesters.

"Actually existing socialism" was long in crisis thanks to lack of civil and political rights, severe shortages of consumer goods, and a dysfunctional, bureaucratically-planned economy.

Mis-planning often led to gluts of grain or vegetables left to rot in the fields for lack of transportation; production of unmatched pairs of socks; or rewarding managers of aircraft or lift/elevator factories in proportion to the steel consumed (when it should be minimised!)

Even in highly-industrialised East Germany, such anomalies were visible in 1976-77 when I first visited East Berlin -- dilapidated, in contrast to the shining (if subsidised) jewel that West Berlin was. The Dollar-Mark market-exchange rate was twice the official one.

A poor Third Worlder like me got countless offers for my old US-branded jeans, five times higher than the price of brand-new ones!

In reality, the social-political implosion of 1989-90 was the result of long-festered structural factors. The USSR got bureaucratized because the Revolution of 1917 remained confined to a backward country after the European working-class movement, despite its awesome strength, didn't win power.

The Bolsheviks overthrew Czarism and capitalism, and made working people arbiters of their fate by creating a new state based on Soviets (workers' and peasants' councils).

However, the Soviet system -- subjected to privations, and forced into curtailing democratic rights -- soon degenerated. Stalinism purged the once-democratic Communist party of its revolutionary leadership, subjugated the world working-class movement to "socialism in one country," subverting revolutionary possibilities, and greatly brutalised the Soviet people.

The USSR triumphed during World War-II against Nazism and fascism. As the War's part-victor, it exported its

brand of socialism to Central-Eastern Europe. These parasitic regimes remained subservient to the USSR.

Stalin's successors failed to reform the system, despite generating some growth. But the system's unpopularity hollowed out all its progressive content under Khrushchev, Brezhnev and others.

True, the USSR offered a political-military counterweight to Western domination, without which the world would have been worse-off. But this meant military over-spending, which undermined popular welfare.

Although Soviet-style socialism, based on statism and regimentation, couldn't become a model for the international working-class movement, its very existence forced post-War capitalism to create a rudimentary welfare state. The "Golden Age of Capitalism" (1945-75) spread democratisation and mass prosperity in the West, building the base for today's living standards.

Soon, alternatives towards greater freedom became visible to the Soviet public, with the lure of comparatively higher living standards. It was now willing to embrace capitalism, albeit of a degraded, criminalised variety.

South Asian Communists never had a structural explanation for the crisis going back to the 1920s. They blamed "revisionism" and Gorbachev's "errors." They refused to re-examine the ideological premises, political doctrines, and organisational principles of the Soviet model, the sole version of socialism they knew.

The Indian Left was lucky to grow for two decades despite this -- because of domestic factors. Now it's in decline, which will be accelerated by its failure to evolve an independent conception of socialism based on contemporary reality.

Capitalism's triumph didn't deliver liberal democracy and prosperity to the former socialist states. It promoted a plutocracy which looted public wealth while the majority was deprived of social security, education and housing. NATO and the European Union expanded Eastwards, fomenting "colour" revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia.

As I discovered last fortnight in Berlin, even German reunification remains incomplete. East Germany's per-capita GDP is still one-third less than the West's. A survey says four out of 10 Berliners don't feel at home; 52% would consider leaving Berlin for a good job elsewhere.

Globally, corporatist-neoliberal capitalism, unchallenged by socialism or "the emerging powers," has become super-predatory. It's dispossessing people, increasing income disparities, destroying natural resources, and dismantling the welfare state.

Capitalism has proved utterly bankrupt since the Great Recession of 2008. It cannot solve the problems of poverty, inequality within and between nations, climate change, militarism, democracy's erosion, or social discrimination.

This reinforces the case for socialism. But to be viable, socialism must be robustly democratic, internationalist, participatory, not limited to centralised planning, and amenable to popular control.

There's much to learn from Latin America's recent radical politics, including grassroots democracy. Evolving its own socialist model is a tall order for our Left. But such socialism has a bright future.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Marital laws biased against men

This refers to the report, "Redress for women divorced unjustly" (Nov.11). Even men get unjust divorces - does anyone talk of them or is bothered about them? For a husband to get maintenance, it is like reaching Mars. The wife may be working, but she gets maintenance for a certain period. There are laws which favour only women and are loaded against men. Laws have to be gender neutral.

Globally, marital laws are against men. The United Nations should work towards gender neutral marital laws. There is a plethora of organisations for women all over the world but there are very few NGOs and organisations for men. The media needs to focus on the plight of men also.

Deendayal M. Lulla
On e-mail

Joining Int'l agri-journalists' network

IFAJ, the International Federation of Agricultural Journalists, is an international forum of agricultural journalists and communicators. One can become a member of IFAJ by joining a national association or guild. As far as my knowledge goes, once in our country, a national association was formed to get affiliated with IFAJ. But I am not aware if that guild still exists.

Meanwhile, IFAJ is doing wonderful job in disseminating agricultural information and in binding together all the agricultural journalists of the world through sharing of experiences and strengthening friendship. I strongly feel that agricultural journalists working in both print and electronic media in our country should take an initiative to get connected with the IFAJ by forming a national guild for Bangladesh.

Professor M Zahidul Haque
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Capital flight to Malaysia

Nowadays, flight of money from the country has gone beyond control. For the black money holders, Malaysia is one of the favourite places where our money finally lands. To settle in Malaysia under the MM2H programme, one needs to deposit liquid assets worth at least 500,000 ringgit (about Tk 1.22 crore) and show offshore income of 10,000 ringgit (about Tk 2.45 lakh) per month. This year, 285 Bangladeshis have applied for enrollment in the programme to get five years' residence permit by making a minimum investment of US \$100,000.

These people are creating their wealth on the soil of Bangladesh and then transferring it to other countries to secure their lives and wealth. They never think of paying something back to the country. The government should control this malpractice as early as possible.

Anonymous
On e-mail

Comments on news report, "Road, rail, waterways to link entire South Asia," published on November 20, 2014

Gulshan Dhaka

The picture shows that it's India to India route; like all eggs in one basket. Why can't it be Myanmar to Bangladesh to India? We know our dependency on India because of geographical location but there must be a second way.

Sayed Rahman

It is undoubtedly a good initiative. For our greater interest, rail, road, water and air connectivity is a must. Such connectivity will boost our economic growth and development.

"NBR to check its chief's account info" (Nov. 21, 2014)

SM

This is a warning to other bureaucrats.

Nasirullah Mridha, USA

NBR chief will become a hero in people's eyes if he is proved innocent.

"Biman men in gold smuggling racket" (Nov. 20, 2014)

Sayed Rahman

Thanks to the authorities for a drive against the smugglers. One more thing, large amounts of gold and valuables are seized at the airport but we don't know what happens to those later. People should know.

PlainSpeaker

Who does not know about this high level corruption? Biman should be sold out and management of the airport leased to a foreign company. There is no way out. But who is going to do it?