

"I was shocked by the number of people dying on the nation's roads."

Jon Moussally MD, MPH, President and co-founder of TraumaLink talks to Amitava Kar about the importance of emergency medical services for victims of car crashes.

What was the background under which you established TraumaLink in Bangladesh?

My father was killed in a car crash about five years ago, and I care for many people who have suffered road traffic injuries through my work as an emergency room doctor. When I first came to Bangladesh in 2013, I was shocked by the number of people dying on the country's roads and all the more distressed to find out that there were no emergency medical services available for these victims at the crash scene. However, we also found that when a crash occurs in Bangladesh there are almost always people at the scene trying to help. Unfortunately, without proper training or equipment these efforts may not always improve patient outcomes and can sometimes cause harm. We felt that if we could harness this goodwill by providing guidance, education, and first aid supplies through TraumaLink, then we could really start making a difference in the lives of these injured patients.

I was fortunate to be travelling with two students who were also interested in road safety and we began a conversation about addressing this problem in Bangladesh with Mridul Chowdhury, CEO of mPower Social Enterprises. As we began investigating, the best way to do this, we brought other organisations into these conversations as well. Early on these included the South Asian Youth Society, Independent University of Bangladesh, Jagoree, and the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed. Based on these discussions we created the TraumaLink.

Please tell us how TraumaLink works.

We have created an emergency hotline number and a call centre that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. When a victim or bystander calls from the crash scene, the operator first collects information on where the crash occurred and how many people have been injured. As soon as this information is entered into our call centre software, the computer automatically generates SMS messages to volunteers prioritised by how close they are to the crash scene.

We recently completed our six-month pilot study in Daudkandi, on a 15 km stretch of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway where we responded to 88 crashes and treated 109 injured patients. Comparing our records to

police records, we found that we have been called for every incident that would require a volunteer response. In the vast majority of cases, our volunteers arrived at the crash scene in five minutes or less.

What are the challenges you are facing?

We are facing a growing number of people dying on the roads as the country becomes more affluent and the number of road users and need for transportation increases. We are therefore working hard to balance our desire to provide high quality patient care against the need to expand these desperately needed services as quickly as possible.

us enough to call our hotline number and use our services. We have been honoured and humbled by the outpouring of support we have received thus far, and continuing to earn that trust is something we take very seriously. In order to continue providing free high quality services to our patients, we will also need ongoing financial support for our activities. We plan to expand first along the highways and then on a national scale, so that the country finally has a robust and self-sustaining pre-hospital emergency medical system. We have also formed a broad network of partners working in road safety and hope to use this as a strong and unified front for education, advocacy, and creating positive policy changes.



Jon Moussally, MD, MPH

Because our volunteers are working on the major highways where more injuries are occurring, we also worry considerably about transportation blockades and violence on the roads. Thankfully, none of our volunteers have been harmed in the course of their duties. I believe that having the community so strongly behind us has helped to provide them with protection, and we are extremely grateful for that.

What kind of support do you need?

Because this is a problem that affects all Bangladeshis, we need broad support from the government, private sector, and most importantly the communities we serve. We need people to trust

Although we started our service with a regular phone number, we have been advocating strongly for a short code hotline number from the BTRC. We feel like this is crucial, especially as we move up to a national scale, because people need a number that is easy to remember in a time of crisis.

[An attending emergency physician at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, USA, Dr. Moussally received his Master of Public Health degree from the Harvard School of Public Health. He has over a decade of experience teaching acute emergency medical care in the US and abroad.]

Although we started our service with a regular phone number, we have been advocating strongly for a short code hotline number from the BTRC. We feel like this is crucial, especially as we move up to a national scale, because people need a number that is easy to remember in a time of crisis.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

In remembrance of a brother I have lost

BRIG GEN SHAMSUDDIN AHMED (RETD)

His memory is too fresh and too endearing to forget for a long time to come. Major General Syed Badruzzaman, a very dear friend and a close relative of mine, died suddenly of a massive cardiac arrest at the Dhaka Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the evening on May 5 this year.

How could it happen and so soon, I began wondering. Earlier on the day, as we brought him to the hospital with complaint of severe pain in the region of his chest and shoulders, the doctor on duty in the emergency ward had his angiogram done and told us what none of us were prepared to hear. He said that Gen Badr, as he was popularly known, had a massive heart attack and that he had a similar heart attack about a year back. But strangely enough, none of the family members knew of the earlier heart attack. It is difficult to believe that Gen Badr did not know of the heart attack he had suffered earlier. Here was a man so healthy and so full of life. He said that he wanted to study MBBS and pursue a medical profession but somehow opted for the army career rather fortuitously. He never complained of any serious disease or illness in the last many years after we got to know each other closely following matrimonial relations forged between our two families; my younger son married his only daughter.

Gen Badr was more than a relative to me. We were like two brothers. I was senior to him both in age and service in the army. He was



Major General Syed Badruzzaman

never found wanting in giving me the respect of an elder brother. Whenever we met and spoke to each other, he would address me as *bhai* with such warmth and spontaneity as if I was his real brother. Whenever I visited his house, he would be there, invariably standing near the elevator to receive me and come downstairs to see me off. Of course we differed with each other on many issues and on many an occasion but he was always respectful towards me. This probably had something to do with his upbringing and the values he grew up with in the family.

Gen Badr was a brilliant officer of the Bangladesh Army. Even as a Captain, he served as an instructor in the Anti-Aircraft Artillery School in Pakistan Army. In the Bangladesh Army, he would be remembered most for the magnificent role he played in shaping and moulding Gentleman Cadets at the Bangladesh Military Academy (BMA) into officers during his tenure as an instructor and the Commandant of BMA. His cadets are now senior officers in command and staff in different echelons of the Bangladesh Army. What could be a more befitting reward and achievement for a senior officer than this?

In his own right he should have climbed up further in his career in the army. But that was not to be in a country like ours. He was retired when he had more years to serve in the army and the country. He would often lament about the way his career was cut short. But his eyes would light up as I consulted him and asked him to look at the gentleman cadets he had turned into officers and commanders in the army.

As he was my junior, it would have been fitting had he been living today to survive me and write an obituary on me someday. But instead, I am now writing about him which pains me the most. After all, who can defy destiny?

The writer is former Military Secretary to the President.

Is our Parliament functioning THE WAY IT SHOULD?

GHULAM MUHAMMED QUADER

A few days ago, during a discussion with a foreign delegation inside the Parliament building, an important personality stated that the Parliament is the symbol of our democracy. Similar views are frequently being propagated by the present party in power and its alliance.

In a democracy, responsibilities and authorities are distributed through different institutions. In a parliamentary system, it is the Parliament on which effective coordination between different functionaries rests. A culture of overall accountability is thus ensured by establishing a balance of power and authority amongst individual institutions. If any person/institution has control over other organs then it becomes a dictatorial rule and undermines accountability, resulting in a loss of public interest.

The Parliament is the pivot that makes sure that the balance of power is maintained, that it is not tipped in favour of any particular person/institution. The Parliament, if necessary through discussion, may amend the constitution, enact new laws, and use any other means to achieve that.

In the one house parliamentary form of government in Bangladesh, the leader of the ruling party is appointed as head of the government or the Prime Minister (PM) who chooses the members of the cabinet. It is a normal practice that the

chief of the winning party (is elected and) becomes the Prime Minister as well as the head of ruling party parliament members. As per the Constitution (Article 70), MPs elected from a party cannot disobey the decision of the party in Parliament. The PM, being head of the party and parliamentary party is in a position to impose his/her decisions on the party MPs. Any decision taken by the head of the government is sure to get the nod of the



Parliament, irrespective of merit. Bangladesh's Parliament, for this reason, is considered by many as a rubber stamp parliament to give the seal of legitimacy to every work of the government.

There are, thus, shortcomings in the functioning of our Parliament. But instead of making the appropriate amendments, the situation has been made worse after the election of January 5, 2014.

The election was boycotted by most political parties. The majority number of candidates were declared elected unopposed. Elections in the rest of the seats were alleged to have a minimal turnout amidst allegations of rigging and violence. The public now probably feels that with the right to vote, they have also lost the power to make the government accountable to them.

The main opposition party has been

made a partner of the government as cabinet positions have been allocated to its members. The opposition is thus discouraged from taking any stand against government proposals in the Parliament. If they vote in the negative on any proposal brought forth by the ruling party, ministers and MPs from the opposition can lose their membership of the Parliament as per provisions of Articles 70 & 55(3) of the

Constitution. Moreover, the chief of the opposition party has been made an adviser to the PM. How can the functioning of such a party, whose leader is under the administrative control of the ruling party, be acceptable as the opposition to the public?

The president is elected by majority votes (no provision of secret balloting) in the Parliament and his removal needs a two-third majority. The ruling party has more than that and this provides absolute authority to the PM. Appointment of high court judges and all other constitutional bodies like the Election Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission, and Public Service Commission etc. are under the jurisdiction or influence of the PM. Removal of officials from these positions are made possible now by the PM due to an amendment of the Constitution.

Thus we have one person as the head of the ruling party, who is also the chief of the executive office and has effective influence over other institutions responsible for additional state functions. The balance of power is totally skewed, creating a setback for accountability which is the essence for the proper functioning of democracy.

The parliament is expected to create a barrier against dictatorial rule and facilitate democratisation. The present parliament has been doing the opposite. As such, it fails to symbolise democracy.

The writer is the Presidium Member of the Jatiya Party and a former minister.

QUOTABLE Quote

Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth.



SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR THE SECOND SEX

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Ship pole
 - 5 Unescorted
 - 9 Nairobi's nation
 - 11 Role for Arnold
 - 13 Appended
 - 14 Confuse
 - 15 Sea dog
 - 16 Tribute VIP
 - 18 Tin or Tungsten
 - 20 Purpose
 - 21 Used four-letter words
 - 22 Influence
 - 23 One of the Hardy boys
 - 24 Rap's - Kim
 - 25 Ocelot feature
 - 27 Some MOMA paintings
 - 29 Contented sound
 - 30 Board
 - 32 Business gamble
 - 34 Truck part
 - 35 Cow of ads
 - 36 Struck down, in the Bible
 - 38 Tart fruits
 - 39 Floorsquares
- DOWN**
- 40 'No its, --, or but's'
 - 41 Writer Rice
 - 1 Flat fish
 - 2 Bike pair
 - 3 Seventeenth President
 - 4 Reuben bread
 - 5 Meager
 - 6 Fuss
 - 7 "The Walking Dead" star
 - 8 Lead ore
 - 10 Stick
 - 12 Destitute
 - 17 Small bill
 - 19 Irrelevant
 - 22 Farm sight
 - 24 New news
 - 25 Goalie's stat
 - 26 Saffron-flavored dish
 - 27 German article
 - 28 New York's - Island
 - 30 Shot in the dark
 - 31 Corpulent
 - 33 Even
 - 37 Hamm of soccer



Yesterday's answer



BABY BLUES by Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott



BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

