

The Story of the Dirty Black Road

NO STRINGS ATTACHED



AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

CONTRARY to all that can be defined as the reality around me, I do believe in miracles. Call me naive, delusional or just plain silly, but when you see a really grotesque problem actually being solved in none other than our beloved but impossible-to-live-in Dhaka city, it is akin to divine intervention.

Let me elucidate. For the last decade or so, I have often taken the unconventional route. No no, I am not being pompous; I mean it quite literally. I'm talking about a strange and convoluted journey through the back alleys of Tejgaon that lead to Karwan Bazar. It is meant to be a short cut which my ingenious driver has discovered. But sometimes this short cut has been just the opposite of that – long, ugly and perilous.

It would begin as we would turn to a road on the left instead of taking the Shat Rastar Mor, entering into the strange vortex of a back road that served more as a parking lot for trucks than a path for vehicles to go anywhere. So braving the rows of menacing trucks on both sides of the road which had now become a sliver, we would stumble on along with our fellow adventurers in rickshaws, cars, buses, pickups, cycle vans or most unwisely, on foot. The 'road' would be caked with layers and layers of thick, black slime – an odious mixture of mud and assorted garbage blended into a smelly, nauseating texture. You could see the truck wheels soaked in this stinking liquid that coated the entire road. Trying out one's journalistic curiosity in such a place would be unwise but once in a while it

would be impossible not to meet the hostile, leering eyes of a truck driver and his friends – a look of mockery for daring to cross their territory. You could imagine all kinds of horrible things that could happen, if your car broke down, if your car accidentally hit one of the thugs zigzagging their way through the traffic, or if someone just didn't like your face. If you were lucky you could cross this precarious route in twenty minutes, only to be stuck in some crazy gridlock near the Karwan

your precious life by a matter of a few seconds.

I decided a few months ago that I would not go through that unsavoury, albeit often faster, route, no matter how late I got to work. So I began taking the 'normal' VIP road that made going to the office an unpredictable escapade – it could be anywhere between half an hour to two hours, depending on whether you were going on that road before or after a VIP was due to pass through. On harta



Bazar rail gate that, if crossed, could be your gateway to freedom. You would be gripped by paralytic fright when you realise that your vehicle was right on the tracks, sandwiched by a collage of rickshaws, vans, trucks, and an indecisive three wheeled 'CNG' – while the bell to alert an incoming train rings ominously. While your heart pounded like a hunted rabbit, the gridlock would untangle somehow and you would have been spared

days or say, right after iftar, the same journey will take as little as ten minutes.

By now most of you have probably fallen asleep at this excruciating digression – but do know that it is crucial to know the antecedents of this story to comprehend the significance of its conclusion.

Moving along, about four days ago, my driver announced to me that that this unbelievably unattractive route had

been transformed beyond recognition. The roads had been cleared of all the 'kachra' (grime) and there were only one row of trucks parked, leaving most of the road completely free! This I had to see to believe, knowing his penchant for exaggeration. So the next day, instead of taking that tedious, straightforward VIP road which at least allowed me to nap peacefully without worrying about getting murdered or mugged, I took that nefarious path again.

I was openmouthed with shock. It was true. Apart from a few trucks lined on one side, the entire road was free. I could actually read the political graffiti on the wall. But most amazing was the fact that, that viscous layer of black slime was gone! I could never imagine anything being able to scrape out so many years of neglect.

My eyes were almost popping out of their sockets to see Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) workers carrying brand new fluorescent lights for the street lamps and fixing them on. In other parts they were scooping up garbage and clearing away the remains of the dried up grimy film. What a sight for sore eyes this was! A disgusting hellhole of a road actually being cleaned by the DCC. Could it be that the mayor was finally being able to do something for this city and its hapless dwellers?

People who don't know this city may accuse me of hyperbole or of going over the top for something that should be routine work for the City Corporation officials. But for a Dhaka dweller who has seen years and years of complete apathy from the DCC authorities regarding the dilapidated, dirty, degenerative state of the roads, the cleaning up of a road captured by a nexus of truck owners and made almost unusable because of piling garbage, is as good as a miracle.

The writer is Deputy Editor, Editorial & Op-ed, *The Daily Star*.

Remittance at record high commendable Manpower export potential awaits fuller realisation

IT is heartening to note that the fiscal year has closed posting \$15.31 billion worth of remittance, the highest ever in Bangladesh's history. This represents an increase of \$1.8 billion over the level of last year. This may be modest but a valuable increase in our migrant workers' contribution to the national economy.

It is a particularly significant achievement because this has been pulled off in the face of a decline in the number of people leaving the country for employment abroad. Star research informatics show that from a peak 9.8 lakh in FY 2008 through 6.9 lakh in FY 12 the number of migrants dropped to 4.1-4.2 lakh in FY 14-15. We know that in the intervening years there had been returnee workers to cope with.

All this goes to highlight much better, efficient and hassle-free handling of remittances from the source to the point of destination. The fine-tuning of the banking arrangements spurred on by the central bank served as a strong factor behind the workers' switch from the informal channel on to the formal one. Furthermore, delivery channel of inward remittances to the beneficiary has improved markedly owing to mobile banking with Bangladesh Bank laying emphasis on it. We laud the central bank and the commercial banks for their facilitation measures. Admittedly, stable US Dollar-Taka exchange rate helped the steady growth in remittance.

With Saudi Arabia and Malaysia reopening their labour markets to Bangladeshi workers things should be looking up on those fronts. Yet we should turn to potential destinations in other Continents through vigorous worker training customised to demands in possible host countries. Meanwhile, we need to solve the trafficking problem in close cooperation with the regional countries to protect our goodwill.

Admission to colleges remains an ordeal

Clear the mess

THE fate of many admission seekers to colleges is still hanging in the balance, even though classes have already commenced at colleges across the country on Wednesday. The government this year initiated online admissions for all colleges, with the boards specifying the colleges where students would be enrolled – an otherwise forward-looking move that faltered because of lack of preparation and management on the authorities' part. The government postponed publishing the results of the merit lists for class XI admission multiple times, finally issuing a faulty and incomplete list only two days before the admission deadline. Not surprisingly, it caused problem for institutions, who could not admit their students on time. Worse still, the list left out the names of 62,000 students. Although officials have said that an updated list would be published on July 6, they could not assure parents whether their children's names would be on it.

It is highly regrettable that the new admission process – which, given the reliance on technology, should have been efficient and fool-proof – has given rise to unforeseen circumstance for students, parents and administrators. Giving berths to 52 students in a private university that has not even initiated its academic activities or placement of commerce students in a science college are just two glaring examples of the anomalies in the admission process.

The educational board must speed up the completion of admission, placing those left out of the lists, and address the concerns of those placed in unsuitable institutions. The academic session appeared to have been delayed and concerted efforts are needed lest they are thrown off-gear.

COMMENTS

"Scamster got scot-free 'due to backing'"

(July 1, 2015)

Moinul Haque Moin

Thanks to our finance minister for telling the truth.

Shamim Ahsan

Just telling the truth is not enough. We want to see tough actions.

Iqbal Hosen

Only exemplary punishment can deter such crimes. So please bring the culprits to book.

Arch Bishop

Obviously this is also BNP's fault!

Kamrul Hasan

So two options; 1) take rapid action against all the culprits, the whole nation will salute you or 2) submit your resignation for failing to take any action, then also the whole nation will salute you.

"Crocodiles will indeed shed tears"

(July 1, 2015)

Rony Kabir

Even after the oil spills that have endangered many wild life species, the route is still open for cargo vessels. And now they are trying to build a power plant there. Everyone knows it will have severe consequences on the environment. Even some foreign banks pulled out of the deal.

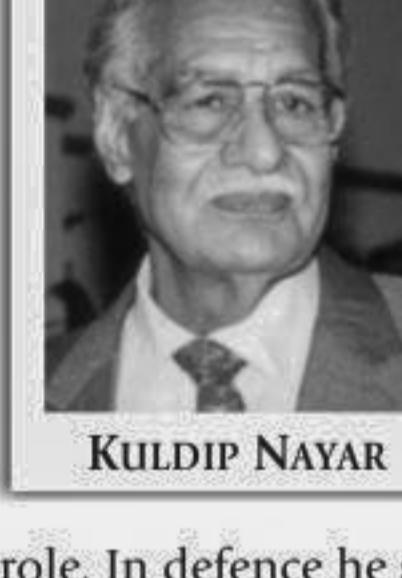
Are we living in a democracy?

Kalo Jam

It's true that Bangladesh needs electricity; but not by endangering the Sundarbans and not by giving foreign companies the contract without any bidding.

Aftermath of the 1965 War

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYAR

THE war between India and Pakistan in 1965 is 50 years old. Even today, hostilities are attributed to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then foreign minister. This is correct. General Muhammad Ayub Khan, who was heading Pakistan at that time, admitted in an interview that he did not want to disturb peace, however uneasy.

When I checked with Bhutto, he did not deny his role. In defence he said, he felt that if there was a time when Pakistan could defeat India, it was now. He argued that India had only a few ordinance factories and "we had an edge over you because of the US military assistance."

Pakistan's hand was confirmed by Lieutenant-Colonel Bernard E. Anderson of the United States Air Force who, in a letter to Time dated October 1965, said: "...In April, I returned from Pakistan. We all knew then that this fight was coming: The Pakistanis were painting their ground equipment battle grey over the original yellow, were building revetment for their aircraft..."

Pakistan's attack in 1965 began with hundreds of infiltrators – Ayub called them Bhutto's mujahids (liberators) – sneaking into Kashmir. The report of the intrusion first appeared in the Indian press on August 9, 1965, along with Ayub's assurance to Kewal Singh, while accepting his credentials as India's high commissioner in Rawalpindi, that Pakistan would reciprocate every move from India for better cooperation. He justified that infiltration into Kashmir was not the same thing as infiltration into India. The 'uprising' that Pakistan expected failed because local Kashmiris did not help the infiltrators. Bhutto called them hatos (labourers), with utmost contempt.

When I interviewed Bhutto, his explanation, as recorded, is: "There was a time when militarily, in terms of the big push, in terms of armour, we were superior to India because of the military assistance we were getting and that was the position up to 1965. Now, the Kashmir dispute was not being resolved and its resolution was also essential for the settlement of our disputes and as it was not being resolved peacefully and we had this military advantage, we were getting

blamed for it.

"So, it would, as a patriotic prudence, be better to say, all right, let us finish this problem and come to terms and come to a settlement. It has been an unfortunate thing. So, that is why up to 1965, I thought that with this edge that we had we could have morally justified it. Also, because India was committed to self-determination and it was not being resolved and we had this situation. But now this position does not exist. I know it does not exist. I know better than anyone else that it does not exist and that it will not exist in the future also."

The 1965 war is a watershed in the relations between India and Pakistan. Till then there was estrangement but no hostility. Big war gates were installed at the Attari-Wagah border. With a rigid visa system intro-

The Kashmiris have come to develop a different thinking. They do not want either India or Pakistan to be the arbiter. They themselves want to decide what is suited to their genius. The voice of fundamentalists may be loud but the Kashmiris want the pandits to be part of their culture as has been the case for centuries.

duced, even the limited informal trade on the border came to a halt.

The then popular leader Sheikh Abdullah could have aligned with Pakistan. But he preferred secular India to Islamic Pakistan when he found that it was not possible for him to stay independent. Sufism was what the Kashmiris followed and they found secularism akin. The Sheikh was able to have a special status for the state. The Indian Constitution spelled it out in Article 370. Except three subjects—Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communications—the Indian parliament had no power to legislate without the consent of the state legislature.

The undertakings given at that time are sacred and cannot be written off by the people who think differently. The state had adopted even a separate constitution to make it clear that it would not compromise on its autonomy. Watering it down now will amount to betrayal of the confidence which the people of Jammu and Kashmir had reposed in New Delhi. If any change had to be made, it has to be done by them. The Indian Union which the state had joined cannot amend its powers without the consent of the state's people.

Those who agitate for the deletion of Article 370 do not realise that they may reopen the entire question of Kashmir's accession to India. The Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir endorsed it on the basis of a special status. If any amendment is to be effected, it has to be done by the state's Constituent Assembly. Neither the state assembly nor the Centre's parliament can usurp the power vested in a Constituent Assembly. Is New Delhi willing to risk the entire status of the state by convening another Constituent Assembly, which may also be illegal?

In the meanwhile, the Kashmiris have come to develop a different thinking. They do not want either India or Pakistan to be the arbiter. They themselves want to decide what is suited to their genius. The voice of fundamentalists may be loud but the Kashmiris want the pandits to be part of their culture as has been the case for centuries.

Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed has shown a middle path by giving an equal space to the Hindu-majority Jammu in the state's affairs. But he has delineated, in the process, a line between the Muslim-majority Valley and Jammu.

This is what a tall leader like the Sheikh could have done to evoke support in the entire state, including Ladakh. The pigmy leaders of today can find a formula to placate different communities, but they cannot bring back the atmosphere of pluralism which prevailed once. Islamic fundamentalism has gained ground in the Valley and Hindutva in Jammu because the Sufi ideology has got polluted.

Before acceding to India, the Sheikh sent his confidantes to Pakistan to assess the mood. He came to the conclusion that pluralism was the best option for his people. One remark attributed to the Sheikh was that he did not like Pakistan because too many Muslims were there.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Time to end cruelty to children

It's been almost five years since the Justices Md. Imman Ali and Md. Sheikh Hasan Arif banned corporal punishment from schools and madrasas in Bangladesh. There are children in schools and madrasas today who still suffer horrific beatings from 'teachers' lacking human qualities of compassion, mercy, and common-sense. They pick-up their monthly salary with indifference to the suffering and long-term damage they have caused to the children.

When are these teachers going to learn that nothing good comes from corporal punishment; never has, never will, and there are hundreds of reports worldwide supporting this fact? Does it

have to be beaten-in to them, since they believe in the effectiveness of corporal punishment so much? The real damage of corporal punishment is not necessarily in the initial pain of the unlawful beating and inhuman cruelty involved, but in its long-term mental after-effects that over time can trigger a Dr. Jekyll into a Mr Hyde character and manifest in muggings, beatings, destruction of private and public property, wife-beatings, murders and a loveless, despising, and hateful attitude to all, including his own family.

Schools should not be horrific hell-holes of fear. Each child has a unique talent and the role of true education is to explore and promote that innate power within him or her.

Sir Frank Peters

On e-mail

Lesson from Mrs. Gandhi's misrule

Kuldip Nayar's article published in your daily on June 18 titled "Mrs Gandhi's misrule" should be a lesson for our country also. This article has cleared the role of Sanjay Gandhi during imposing the state of emergency in India by Indira Gandhi. In fact Sanjay Gandhi misguided Indira Gandhi under the pretence of her false popularity. But the people of India did not want her in power then. Even the court disqualified her for misusing government power during election.

We hope that our government will take lessons from this.

Mobarak Ali

Gopibagh, Dhaka