

Celebrating Eid-ul-Azha

Imbibe the essence of sacrifice

AS we are about to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha, the second biggest religious festival of Muslims, we should remember the true spirit of sacrifice that this occasion stands for.

Eid-ul-Azha is profound in its symbolic manifestation and demonstrative of the ultimate sacrifice Hazrat Ibrahim (AS) was set to perform as an unparalleled example of his devotion to his Creator. Unfortunately, we seem to have become more enamoured of the ostentatious show of wealth rather than the practice of self-sacrifice and humility. The unsavoury exhibitionism of wealth during this festival, as people compete to display the most expensive sacrifice, contradicts the very essence of this pious occasion.

This Eid, let us resolve to break away from the temptation to show off our worldly riches, and focus on extending a helping hand to people less fortunate.

City Corporation authorities have taken some timely waste management measures such as designated slaughter points and distribution of biodegradable sacks which will definitely help quick removal of cattle waste. Residents of the city should extend full cooperation and abide by rules so that we don't have to compromise on the cleanliness of our cities.

Our prayers are with all Muslims who may not be able to celebrate this festival with the usual joviality because they are besieged by war, poverty or are in other difficult circumstances. We ardently hope that the essence of sacrifice, both spiritually and materially, may embrace us all.

Eid Mubarak to all our valued readers and patrons!

We demand justice for the victims

Take steps to stop police excesses

THERE is no question that the deaths of four civilians in Tangail last Friday were the result of excessive force used by the police. Investigations by this paper have found that there was no instigation to attack the police as claimed by some law enforcing agents. Locals, mostly young people, were peacefully protesting the horrific assaults on a woman and her teenaged son. They were doing what any conscientious citizen is expected to do: protest a gross violation of human rights. But their attempts to get justice for the victims were met by uncalled for violence by the law enforcers.

The dead include the driver of a three-wheeler, the sole breadwinner of the family, a 14-year-old assistant at a barber shop, an 18-year-old HSC student and a young migrant worker who was scheduled to fly to Saudi Arabia after Eid. None of them were even part of the protests but just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

It is clear that the police acted with unnecessary brutality and highhandedness. Merely closing some of them is not acceptable. As our National Human Rights Commission chairman has remarked – those responsible must be tried and punished under criminal law for killing people.

Instances of trigger-happy police shooting down civilians at the flimsiest or non-existent pretext are serious blows to the public perception of the law enforcing members. They have further damaged the already unflattering image of the police. It is imperative that the government takes serious measures against such errant policemen and impose a stricter code of conduct on all law enforcers regarding their treatment of civilians. The respect for law must not be compromised by the abuse of power.

COMMENTS

"3.8 lakh biodegradable sacks from DCCs for Eid waste disposal"
(September 22, 2015)

Md Masum Billah

They are finally doing something beneficial for the local people.

Fazlul Kader

Nice initiative!

Muhammad Hussein

Great initiative, well done!

Mollah Lotus

Much appreciated!

Abul Naser

It's a great initiative from the DCC. If people cooperate with DCC, it won't be long before Dhaka is transformed into a lovely city.

"Admission question leak: 3 doctors among 7 held in Rangpur"
(September 22, 2015)

Talat Islam

Doctors in BD are very vocal when something is said against them; are they as vocal when their peers commit crimes?

Imrul Basher

Shame on these doctors!

Saiful Alam Shelly

Well done RAB. But it took many years to arrest them. What is the reason for the delay? We demand harsher punishments for these types of offenders and an amendment of the Public Examinations Offences Act is necessary.

Not just a hashtag generation

THE SOUND & THE FURY



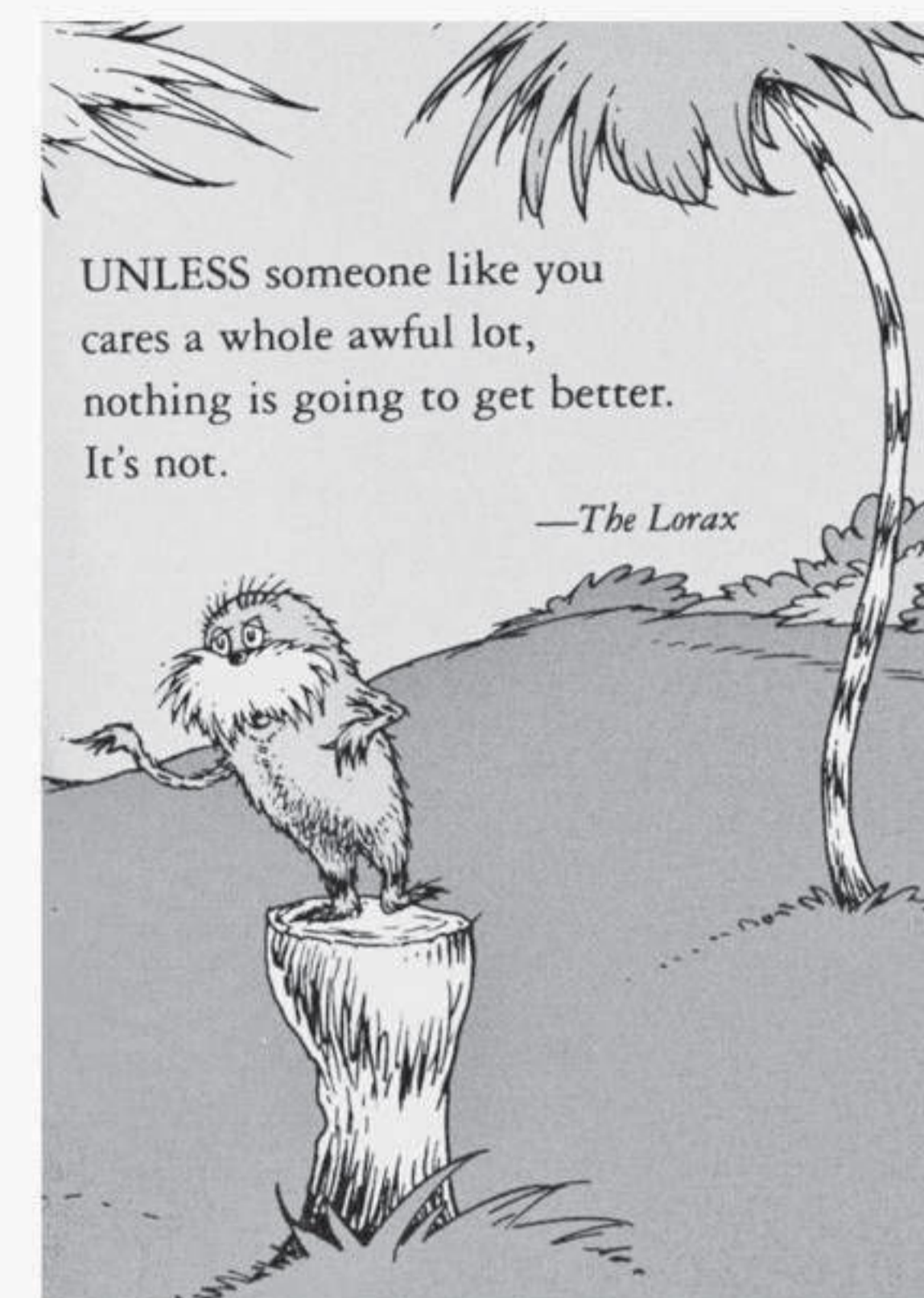
SUSHMITA S. PREETHA

KUDOS, young comrades, for making the impossible possible – for making the government rethink its position at a time when our policymakers often stubbornly stick to their guns, no matter how foolhardy their decisions. Kudos to you for making us believe, once again, in the indomitable power of mass movements, for showing us that even in these neoliberal times, where fragmentation and

individualism are the ethos of the day, collective mobilisation is not a thing of the distant past but a compulsion of the present. Kudos for showing us how an effective movement can be waged, without resorting to untoward violence, without being co-opted, without petty power struggles over representation and ownership. Kudos for proving many of us wrong – those on the left, centre and the right, who had defined, categorised and reduced you to a monolithic entity, who had dismissed your life experiences and struggles as unworthy of notice, who had deemed your hashtag generation as too apathetic to make any meaningful contributions to society.

I will admit that I, too, had written off my generation and yours as self-interested, apolitical, neoliberal citizens, whose responsibilities towards the larger society began and ended with posting a status on FB, donating a blanket for the impoverished or attending a gala dinner to fund a school for street children. This was the generation, I had thought, who would take to the streets to celebrate a Bangladesh win, but not when the plight of the Sundarbans is at stake; it would give a thousand "likes" for a post on Katrina Kaif's new item number but be bored by violation of human rights in the CHT. After all, when the youth around the globe were challenging the highly unequal structures of global capital through the Occupy movements, where were we? Certainly not anywhere close to making those uncomfortable connections that make our complicity in neoliberal capitalism visible, that make it impossible to treat issues of inequality and injustice – events like Tazreen and Rana Plaza – as too distant, too difficult, too big to concern us. When the Greek youth, frustrated with the neoliberal policies that have taken their economy further and further down in

the path of debt and destruction, voted a leftist party to power, where were we? Caught between a ruling party showing increasingly authoritarian tendencies and a communal, ideologically bankrupt opposition, we folded our hands and said, "Oh well, who cares about politics anyway?" There was Shahbagh, sure, but there, too, were we ever really able to grasp what the true "spirit of liberation" entailed or did we dilute it down to its



most shallow interpretation and let it get co-opted by those who claim to have a copyright over 1971?

The middle-class youth, when accused of being apathetic, ask in return: "Believe in what, exactly?" They have lost faith in the political process, in the power of collective mobilisation, in the possibility of radical change. And why wouldn't they? What examples have we set for them, anyway? A defective democracy (and let's admit it, our democracy has been flawed since its very inception, long before the Jan '14 elections),

ideologically and morally corrupt parties, a section of the civil society that is often more interested in pursuing their own donor-funded agendas than in bringing about structural change, a fragmented left with their outdated rhetoric, student politics that is rotten to its very core. . . Add to that disillusionment the fact that we live in a world where we are continuously taught that the power of change lies with the self-interested and enterprising rational individual, with provision of microcredit and capacity-building of the poor and with new business models and whole-scale privatisation, it can hardly be a surprise that we have a generation that no longer hold grand visions of societal transformation but rather aspire to be good consumers.

However, the successful anti-VAT movement waged by these students remind us what an incredibly powerful force the youth can be, if and when it can be moved, at the right time for the right cause(s). Rather than dismiss them as apolitical beings, we ought to harness their potential; rather than dismiss the possibility of ruptures and resistance within these 'bourgeois' institutions, we should enable students to confront their own social locations vis-à-vis the larger society and to contribute to changing the status quo.

But it's an uphill task, no doubt, when our education system itself is teaching them to be human capital, to aspire for that 9-5 job corporate job, to contribute to the "economy" but not to society, to be proud to be apolitical. So to you, dear young comrades, at the risk of sounding self-righteous, let me say this: You must begin to think critically on your own, and question the ways in which our education system itself operates, subjugates and creates hierarchies in today's world. You need to analyse education as a contested site of political and cultural struggle, determine the limitations of the current educational system, and practice alternative ways of being, learning and interpreting the world.

You have begun to ask the right questions about the commodification of education, but let the anti-VAT movement be a stepping stone for a much broader struggle to challenge the neoliberalisation of academia, to hold institutions – both private universities and their regulatory bodies – accountable, to make education accessible to all, regardless of their income. Let this movement be a reminder of the incredible power you hold to change what you deem wrong.

Let this be a beginning, not an end.

The writer is a journalist and activist.

DHAKA'S TRAFFIC GRIDLOCK

If you can't eliminate it, manage it

ABDULLAH SHIBLI

TWO recent op-ed articles on the pages of *The Daily Star* caught my attention. The first one was written by architect and planner Adnan Morshed on "Rethinking the roots of Dhaka's traffic congestion" (August 22, 2015) and the second by *The Daily Star* Assistant Editor Syed Mansur Hashim on "Rationality of fuel prices" (August 25, 2015). The issues they bring up in their respective essays are connected, since they both list some important factors that contribute to the traffic jams in Dhaka.

Morshed points out that the culture of car ownership and the mindset that leads to what economists call "conspicuous consumption" are leading to our preference for private rather than public modes of transportation. If our demand for cars, particularly gas-guzzling automobiles is partially responsible for the traffic gridlock, then one ought to sympathise with his call for initiatives to alter our behaviour pattern. Hashim, on the other hand, writes very convincingly of the paradox inherent in the current policy of pricing CNG low and keeping price of petrol high. Hashim laments that "the discrepancy in pricing between one unit of compressed natural gas (CNG) and per litre of octane is so vast that it has fuelled the massive conversion of vehicles..." With price of CNG pegged at a level lower than what is sustainable (both in terms of the impact on the environment as well as the depletion of this valuable natural resource), he argues that city roads get clogged with cars, four-wheelers and buses that take to retrofitting with CNG motors, and this perverse policy enables operators to keep the vehicles running longer than otherwise would have been possible if prices were higher. Simple economics! And, the policy of an implicit subsidy on CNG, and the price structure where the price of CNG is one-third that of gasoline, even when rational economic planning and considerations of sustainable growth would dictate otherwise, keeps us on the roads

whether we are moving fast or not!

Thus, while I agree with Hashim as well as with Morshed - where the latter argues that the solution to our traffic problem does not lie in making more roads - my take on the cause and solution to traffic jams is slightly different from that of Morshed. My point of view is that traffic congestion is not all about our values, and the issue is not 100 percent cultural, but also an economic and political one. If the government adopts some of the policies available to combat traffic problems, as adopted in major cities such as London, Mexico City and Ho Chi Minh City, then we will find that we can also solve the problem of air pollution while lessening the traffic gridlock which has landed us in the category of the second worst liveable city.

Traffic jams and all the other negatives of living in a city which supports 18 million people are inevitable. As one OECD study succinctly puts it, "Urban areas will never be free of traffic, we just have to manage it. Dynamic, affordable, liveable and attractive urban regions will never be free of congestion. Road transport policies, however, should seek to manage congestion on a cost-effective basis."

What are the tools we need to use? Economic tools have a long track record of being some of the most effective ones! That is because human beings respond very positively to economic incentives. These are known to be quite effective in changing our behaviour and to help us make our roads navigable. As Hashim argues, for example, keeping the price of CNG low led to many behavioural changes including owning and retrofitting our cars and other four-wheelers.

Economic tools work better than command and control mechanism to manage traffic gridlock. The cost of the traffic jams, however we measure it (cost of time, business loss, air pollution, or damage to our infrastructure, among others), is enormous. The total annual cost due to traffic congestion in Dhaka is found to be USD 3.9 billion. That will eventually sink in if we just

start paying attention to per capita cost and keep that as a benchmark as we debate various policy options. Is the fetishism we note in our culture for driving a nice car one that can be addressed by admonitions or appeals to our conscience? I doubt it!

Let me offer a daring idea. We could, as a first-step measure, try to take some of the cars off the road. As Morshed writes, "The share of private cars in Dhaka's daily commutes is a negligible 5-10 percent, but private cars occupy a staggeringly asymmetrical 70-80 percent of the road space" and we keep on adding 200 cars a day in Dhaka. Or to quote Hashim, "Can we afford the luxury of pumping cheap fuel into carriers for the more affluent in society while industry starves?" How can we then provide incentives to our private car owners to cut down on "road time" or increase the cost of parking illegally on the roadside? The toughest decision is to pick a few from about twenty practical measures (for example, raising the cost of auto registration, vehicular restrictions on Mohakhali Road, etc.) which are feasible to implement, but can pass political muster. Then the question is, can we implement any of these?

Last but not least, I was reminded of an interesting quip to characterise the inertia we suffer from when we discuss Dhaka's traffic woes. More than a century ago, Charles Dudley Warner (although it is often misattributed to Mark Twain) said about another problem, the weather, "Everybody complains about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." So, let me summarise the key takeaways from this polemic.

Traffic jams cannot be eliminated but only better managed. Economic incentives ("carrots and sticks") are often more effective to change human behaviour. We need a moratorium on policies that address traffic problems but don't weigh the cost-effectiveness of all alternatives.

The writer is an economist and professor who writes on public policy issues.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Eid-ul-Azha and cattle markets

Dhaka is known as one of the dirtiest and most polluted cities in the world. A few days ago, a group of foreigners cleaned a portion of the streets. As a Bangladeshi citizen, I am truly ashamed and I wonder how the mayors feel about it.

In the end, the City Corporation realised that the cattle market issue was serious and recently declared that they will take action with regard to the location of cattle markets. I believe that this is a good sign showing that the authorities are beginning to make amends. Although they are facing a lot of criticism, I think that this is a good start. Our country has many other problems and I hope that the mayors are as sincere about resolving these longstanding issues.

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New provision by IBA breaks hearts

The recent circular advertised on IBA's website has shattered the hopes of many who have been preparing themselves to be admitted in this institution for a long time. The new directive states, "Foreign nationals with a score of 1900 or more in SAT Reasoning Test (with at least 600 in Critical Reading and Math and at least 550 in Writing) may be exempted from the Written Assessment, but must appear in the Communication Test." While foreign students can get admission through SAT irrespective of age limit, why can't Bangladeshi students do the same? Even world famous universities like MIT and Harvard allow students to attend examination more than once; then why can't IBA? The authority concerned said, "No Candidate

is eligible to sit for this year's admission test, if he/she had appeared in any admission test of Dhaka University, including IBA in 2014 or before." The authorities should have announced this one year ago so that the candidates who had been preparing since last year could search for other options in lieu of wasting one whole year.

One thing to be noted is that a three-month period right after HSC is not sufficient to study for IBA Admission Test as there is hardly any resemblance between the HSC syllabus and the subjects which applicants are tested on. The older directive allowing admission test to be taken more than once was much more realistic. So here's a request to the authorities of IBA: Please reconsider your new rule and do hopeful students a favour.

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