

Whither professionalism



CHINTITO SINCE 1995
NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

IT happens occasionally, during busy hours particularly, that even before you can get off the rickshaw, *mama* has begun negotiating with his next customer, about which you cannot complain much because you have already completed your journey as per contract and the rickshaw-puller has the right to earn his bread. As the payment exchanges hands, a subtle tension develops and the feeling on both sides, three actually, is that you should get off because the more important customer is now in waiting. The outgoing passenger (you) and the incoming commuter often get to brush certain parts of their bodies, depending on the busy traffic that has occupied the other possible side of alighting, perhaps not realising that never the twain shall meet again.

At a *deshi* restaurant, curiously called 'hotel', not the imported sushi or grill, *balti* or hot plate genre, the waiter definitely has more than four hands. He hands you the gravity-stained menu card while holding three filled glasses on his left, on the way wiping the remnants of the previous customer's satisfactory meal and casually slipping a bill to the patron seated down the slippery aisle.

The shop counter that tops up or refills phone cards was empty when you requested the clerk to transfer your cash to another mobile number. While he is doing what you think is

an important task because you do not want your money to land up in an undesired destination, another person butts in, asking if the gentleman could add Tk. 50 to his phone account. In the next 20 seconds, two more customers approach my money-transfer man with a similar request but of different denominations. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a lady asks at the top of her voice if the shop has a push shower. For the first time I looked up to see that actually it does, in addition to electric kettles, table fans, wiring of various dimensions, sockets and plugs... I am now surrounded by five people and, would you believe it, all of us are in a state of comfort because we have been made to believe that all of us are being served.

The MRI room of a reputed diagnostic lab is filled with patients and their attendants, online technicians and service personnel. The door of the CR scan room opens to reveal a large bed at the head of a large spherical machine. A patient lies down in full view of others, not concerned. The online technician in the meantime gets a call on his mobile. During much of the ten to fifteen minutes, the man inside is undergoing the scan, the technician is talking full throat regarding some house rental issue, his right hand on a mouse to move the cursor over what is on the screen, and his other eye hopefully on the patient. Continuing the phone call, the technician concludes the scan and announces loudly, 'the patient will now get down'. To no one's amazement, a service person indeed leaves some other pursuit at another



part of the room, and moves in to help the patient off the flatbed.

Once, while travelling in an air-conditioned bus from Chittagong to Dhaka, I found the driver of the top-of-the-line *paribahan* talking throughout the journey on his phone. Thank God, he had two hands, because while one held the cell phone, the other was on the steering wheel. Another time, I saw the driver of a bus adeptly open the

cap of a sealed mineral water bottle with his left hand while his right hand was on the wheel. Phew! Long-haul drivers of AC passenger buses are, according to my information, rather well paid. They work with an air of disdain, for the job at hand is routine (it has become boring) and they have not met with an accident, yet. Realise they not, lessons of the past they do not take: not all live to tell the tale.

Multitasking is common in this country. In most cases, the dealing of several people at the same time is not life threatening; at worst, it is impolite, perhaps considered an inherent attribute of our social custom. Yes, yes! We have many rich traditions, but simultaneously encountering as many people as the number of our body parts cannot be accepted in all situations, because there are serious risks involved.

Stretching the same demeanour to tasks where human life is involved can lead to catastrophes. A medical treatment could go wrong, a vehicle could end up in a ditch off a highway, a critical part of a building could be inadequately constructed, a lot of money could be hacked... Either we are extremely talented, despite our qualifications, unmatched by any other species in the world, or we are insensitive to the job we are undertaking, unaware of the risks involved, aided by our general indifference. The problem in developed countries is that they cannot find reasons to be positive and have to undergo stress sessions, pep talks, etc. Our problem is we are always 'damn-caringly' positive. Nothing can go wrong, because "I" am doing it, and, please, "I" know what "I" am doing. That is our attitude whether we are selling sugarcane juice off the roadside drain or piloting a trainload of passengers across the Bangabandhu Bridge over the Jamuna.

Professionalism is essential in all walks of life. Any one task should be completed before taking up another; that adds to efficiency. Let us learn to deliver what is expected of us competently, without allowing our F&Fs or any other interference to be a cause of distraction. After all, we are paid for the job that we are supposed to perform. Low pay? That's another agenda, and cannot be the justification of your under-performance.

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COPENHAGEN CONSENSUS

The smartest ways to deal with traffic congestion in Dhaka

BJORN LOMBERG

DHAKA is one of the fastest-growing megacities in the world. A population of just 3 million in 1971 has ballooned to 18 million today. This unprecedented urban growth has resulted in a city more densely inhabited than Tokyo, Shanghai, Mumbai, or any other major city (Robert Gallagher).

The capital's growth partially represents the progress of the Bangladesh economy, which has grown at over 6 percent annually (7th Five Year Plan). The city's transport system, however, hasn't kept up, and Dhaka now has some of the worst traffic congestions in the world.

What are the best ways to deal with traffic in Dhaka?

Research by Robert Gallagher, a transport planner and South Asia specialist, explores alternative options for Dhaka's future urban transport.

Two major factors contribute to Dhaka's current traffic congestion: lack of planning and preparation over previous decades, and an over-reliance on cars due to a deficient public bus system. Even though there are 33 times more cars than buses in the city, cars account for just 13 percent of passenger transport, while buses are responsible for 49 percent.

Today, the average traffic speed in Dhaka is 6.4 kph. But if vehicle growth continues at its current pace, without substantial public transport investment the average speed may fall to 4.7 kph by 2035—about as slow as walking.

In 2014-15, the government commissioned a Revised Strategic Transport Plan (RSTP), which proposed building five metro rail lines, two rapid bus routes, and 1,200 kilometres of new roadways—double the existing major road network—including six elevated



expressways and three ring roads. The total public outlay proposed in the plan would be about Tk. 3.5 trillion over 20 years.

The Bangladesh Priorities research found that private investment in Dhaka's transport over the next two decades would be much greater than the proposed public outlay. Including all the private operating costs such as fuel, drivers' wages, garaging, plus the actual purchase cost of new cars, motorcycles,

rickshaws, the private spend could be about Tk. 6.1 trillion, or twice the public spend.

The public spending proposed in the Revised Strategic Transport Plan will help make Dhaka traffic flow better, both with more street capacity and more metro rail. Modeling shows that it could speed up Dhaka traffic to about 13.7 kph—the speed seen last around 2010. The biggest part of the benefits would come from travel time saved. Overall,

the analysis shows that compared with a "do nothing" scenario, each taka spent under the RSTP scenario would do about 3 takas of good.

Transportation outcomes, however, largely depend on the mix of vehicles that occupy the new roads. The 360,000 extra cars expected in the draft transport plan will take up a very large amount of space—the area needed just to park them would take up 3.6

km², about the size of the Gulshan and Banani residential areas combined. It is no surprise that Dhaka's roads have become overloaded.

Gallagher examines an alternative scenario that focuses on greater investment in bus systems and infrastructure, which would mitigate the need for so many space-intensive private automobiles, motorcycles, auto-rickshaws and cycle-rickshaws. The scenario assumes the same amount of public spending as under the draft transport plan, but with 9,000 more buses. This would result in just 100,000 additional cars by 2035, less than a third of the number expected under the RSTP strategy. The alternative option would occupy considerably less road space, reduce traffic congestion, and lead to an average traffic speed of 14.4 kph, saving commuters even more time.

The alternative scenario would also save substantial private investment on vehicles, drivers, spare parts, and fuel. Over 20 years, the more space-efficient buses could provide greater transport capacity while saving total private transport investment of about Tk. 1.3 trillion compared with the RSTP scenario - a 15 percent cost reduction, equivalent to the cost of four and a half Padma bridges.

The combined benefits from reduced traffic congestion and reduced transport system costs would mean that each taka spent would do about 6 takas of good.

Would increased investment in public transport infrastructure for the capital be your priority for Bangladesh's development needs? We want to hear from you at <https://copenhagen.fbapp.io/dhakatransportpriorities>. Let's continue the conversation about the smartest ways to do the most good for Bangladesh with each taka spent.

The writer is president of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, ranking the smartest solutions to the world's biggest problems by cost-benefit. He was named one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time* magazine.

QUOTABLE Quote

JOHN STEINBECK

One can find so many pains when the rain is falling.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- Made a choice
- Apparition
- "Deathtrap" co-star
- Ham's need
- Farm machine
- Abrasive powder
- Feels jealous of
- Newsstand buy, for short
- Pen fill
- Card spot
- Once more
- Primer character
- Creative field
- Janitors' tools
- "Key Largo" star
- Cigar bit
- Humor
- Sticky stuff
- Stick in the fridge
- Vacillate
- "--of Two Cities"
- Out doors
- Shows surprise
- Critter
- Cultural character

DOWN

- Sphere
- Soup sphere
- Wire sender
- Tied up
- Muslim ascetic
- Like Zeus and Hera
- Corny performers
- Exalted poem
- Knight's title
- Gift from Santa
- Restrain
- Molten rock
- Hairdos
- Prose unit
- Prologue
- Basil-based sauce
- Short records, for short
- Drinking spree
- Summer house
- Sausage
- Plays the ponies
- Coup d'--
- Fly catcher
- Cut dramatically
- Through
- Zodiac cat
- Scrollwork shape

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

S	P	E	A	R	P	O	O	R
H	I	N	G	E	B	A	T	H
I	N	D	E	X	E	T	H	A
N	A	G	S	A	D	H	E	R
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R	A	M	B	L	I	N	G	
S	E	A	L	O	A	H		
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T	A	B	S	O	S	R	I	O
I	N	A	R	O	W	D	E	C
M	I	L	E	R	P	E	S	O
E	S	S	A	Y	A	M	O	R
D	E	A	L		D	O	N	N

Mort Walker's beetle bailey