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FOUNDER EDITOR
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VIP at it again!

Stop violating traffic rules

THE photo of a SUV apparently carrying a VIP holding a rank high enough to be entitled to fly the national flag on his or her vehicle driving the wrong way defies rationale. Once again, it blazons the apparent disdain of the VIPs for traffic rules, setting a bad example for the public. And the police whose job it is to uphold the law is seen escorting the VIP. This is no way of upholding the law.

The incident is not only a violation of law but the parties involved—both the VIP and the police—may be in contempt of court which has ordered the government to prevent vehicles from driving against the traffic. In this particular case, it is difficult to say who was more responsible for this act, the high ranking official or the police. Did the former instruct the police to clear the way for driving in the direction of oncoming traffic? Or did the police take it upon themselves to gratify the important person? Will we ever know?

The photo reveals more. No snarl-up is seen on the left side of the street. Why then was it necessary to drive on the wrong side? We are scratching our head to find a logical explanation. What if this irresponsible driving caused an accident?

We have written umpteen editorials on the matter. We will write ad nauseam until influential quarters stop flouting traffic regulations.

Dismal conditions on highways

Remove the causes of long tailbacks

LONG tailbacks on Dhaka-Tangail and Dhaka-Chittagong highways inflicted immeasurable sufferings on home-bound passengers ahead of Eid-ul-Azha. This, of course, is nothing new, particularly during festive periods. But letting the problem get old provides no consolation for suffering passengers, especially the women and children among them.

Two fatal accidents on the Dhaka-Chittagong four-lane highway were mainly to blame for the long traffic congestion. Additionally, a goods laden truck going out of order on the two-lane Meghna Bridge did not help the situation. But the problem could have been resolved sooner, had there been better facilities available for emergency response teams to reach the crash sites. Bad planning in the initial stages of highway construction, followed by lack of proper revision work and management, however, in most cases, provide no such breakthroughs. Lack of facilities on highways such as lavatories for passengers, on the other hand, only compounds their misery.

Meanwhile, the closure of a ferry station because of strong currents added increased pressure on highways. That no supplementary measures were taken to tackle the additional load ahead of Eid is disappointing and brings to the fore, again, the mismanagement on part of the authorities that has unacceptably become the norm now. Unless these ineptitudes are corrected, increasing the number of lanes on highways alone will clearly bear no fruit, and public funds will continue to be wasted while tailbacks persistently cause sufferings for passengers.

The authorities should formulate comprehensive plans to correct the wrongs.

If Ershad lives for another hundred years. . .



CROSS TALK

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

HUSSEIN Muhammad Ershad recently told his party men that he would live another hundred years if they were to put him back in power. One can't take his words at face value since

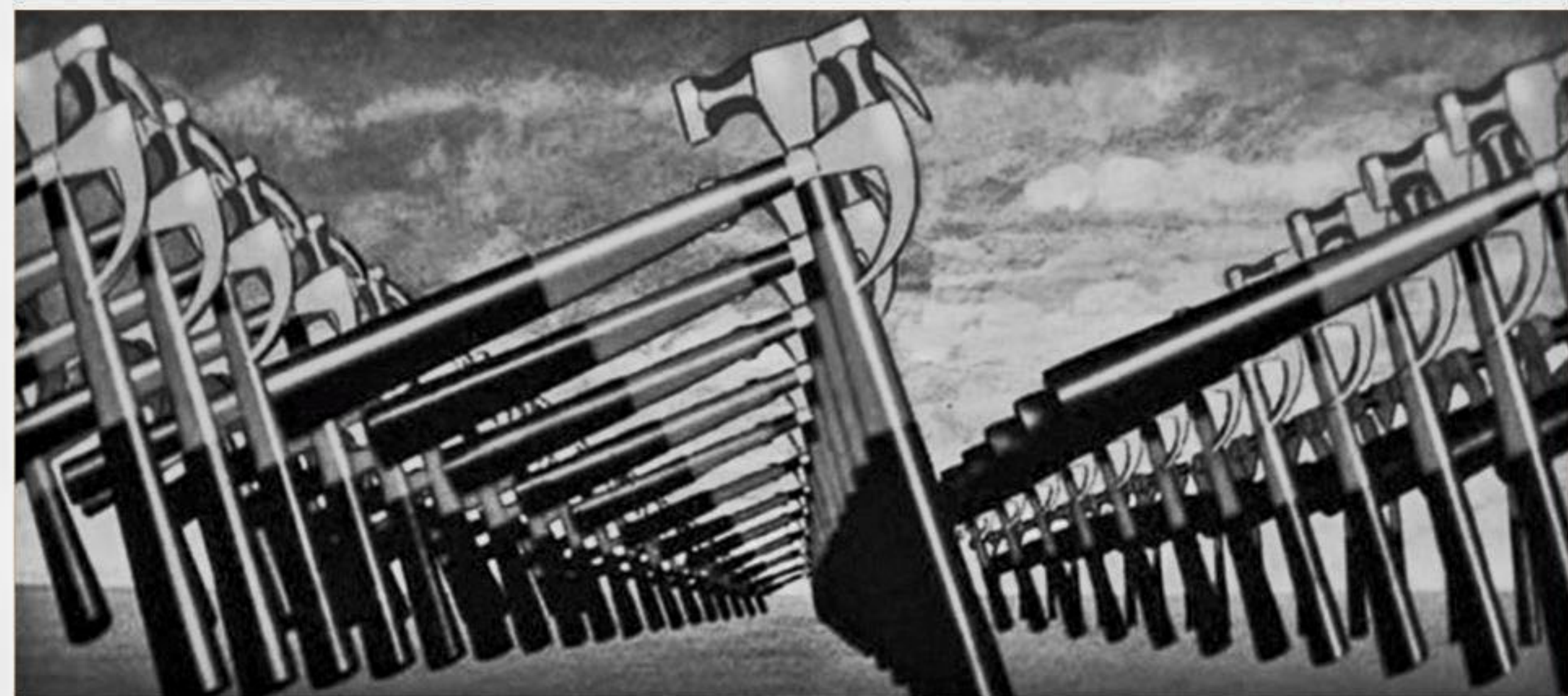
emotional exuberance has clearly overtaken ordinary common sense. It may be humanly possible to make the first century, but hitting the second at 86 is wishful thinking. If anything, his words reeked of desperate ambition. The lust for power inhabits Ershad's heart like spirits in a haunted house.

Curiously, the one-time ruler still believes that the people of this country can't wait to see him ruling again. It's perhaps not our place in life to ask what has given him that idea. Then again, nothing is impossible in the scheme of life. Anything can happen anytime, and it can happen anywhere.

The issue isn't that Ershad wants power again. But why does he want it though? It's silly that those who have tasted power feel the compulsion to regain it. The same compulsion also brings food lovers to the same restaurants and holidaymakers to the same destinations.

For Ershad, that compulsion has turned into an obsession. It has remained forever ranking in his heart and mind that some twenty-five years ago he was ousted from power by a mass uprising. Ever since then, he has been looking for some kind of a compensation for that embarrassment. Ever since then, he has been a legend in his own mind, a phenomenon waiting to happen.

Some people never give up and it works for them. Robert the Bruce, a king of Scotland, learned his tenacity from a spider. Defeated by the English, he sought refuge in a small dark cave where he watched a spider trying to make a web. The spider would fall and then climb slowly back up to try again



SOURCE: PINK FLOYD'S THE WALL

As of now, he will be remembered for his addiction to power, unless he wishes to change and concentrate on useful politics. History repeats itself if people choose not to learn from their follies.

until it managed to stick a strand of silk to the cave wall and began to weave a web. The king was inspired by this experience and went on to defeat the English at the Battle of Bannockburn.

All these years, Ershad has repeatedly disclosed his desire to grab power for one last time. But he never told us what he is going to do if it ever happens in his wildest imagination. How is he going to do things differently? How is he going to turn this country around? To this day, he hasn't done anything to convince anybody how he is going to be a better choice.

So far, we have heard nothing from him except for the occasional outbursts that accounted for no more than belching and burping after heavy meals. We know Ershad sounds uncomfortable and unhappy in his shoes. It's sad that instead of learning from the spider, he has become a spider caught in its own web. And he has aggravated his own condition, because many of his past indiscretions come back to haunt him.

While going to power is the prime motivation in politics, a good politician seeks power to change the country. A bad one does the opposite. He doesn't hesitate to change the country to seek power. Ershad has been comparable to a chameleon that changes colours to match its surroundings.

The failure of this yesteryear autocrat lies in the vicious circle he has made of himself. He craves for power because he can't have it, and he can't have power because he craves for it so much. John Keats explains this dilemma in his poem *On Fame*. He writes "Fame, like a wayward girl, will still be coy/To those who woo her with too slavish knees/But makes surrender to some thoughtless boy/And dotes the more upon a heart at ease."

It's a pity that Ershad's heart hasn't been at ease for all these years, and his mind is still hooked on power. True, politics is a means to that end but there is an end to every end. Since he was forced to abdicate in 1990, Ershad has shuffled between his many contradictions. His has been the unending saga of a wandering madman frantically seeking the touchstone.

By all means, one can live for hundreds of years if one finds one's place in history. Maybe, Ershad was allegorical when addressing his party members. Maybe, he was referring to his place in history, instead of actually breathing and kicking for hundred more years.

Politicians spend a lifetime going where Ershad started politics, and he has enjoyed power for many long years. Unfortunately, his mind still roams the blind alleys of power instead of the highways of politics. As of now, he will be remembered for his addiction to power, unless he wishes to change and concentrate on useful politics. History repeats itself if people choose not to learn from their follies.

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It's Kashmir again



BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDIP NAYYAR

A few years ago when I persuaded Yasin Malik, the first militant in the valley of Kashmir, to give up his fast unto death, his demand was that the International Amnesty should

visit the valley to verify the violation of human rights. He broke the fast when I gave an undertaking that I would myself head a team to Srinagar to prepare a report on the violations of human rights. Today that kind of confidence has gone. The Hurriyat has refused to meet the delegation because the Hurriyat is not sure whether the delegation can deliver. There is yet another reason. The Hurriyat wants to rehabilitate itself in the eyes of Kashmiris, who have gone beyond the stage of talks. They want a separate, sovereign country. And they feel that the Hurriyat failed them in the past because it sought solution within the Indian union.

Home Minister Rajnath Singh of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) headed the delegation. The Home Minister was justified in saying that the Hurriyat refusal went against the spirit of Kashmiriyat, which disseminated the message of love and harmony. The Hurriyat does not seem to recognise that. It gives little importance to the fact that the party came to power through free ballot box, the democratic way of measuring support in the country. The BJP has secured a majority of 543-members in the Lok Sabha on its own, with no alliance before or after the polls. On the other hand, the Hurriyat is only a combination of three factions. One is led by Yusuf Raza Gillani, who still wants accession to Pakistan, the other by Yasin Malik and the third by Shabir Shah.

My feeling is that at least two of them have become irrelevant in the present situation in the valley. They still prefer a settlement through a dialogue. The youth have, however, gone back to guns because they do not find either Yasin Malik or Shabir Shah delivering what they want, that is *azadi* (freedom). The gun is no solution either.

Over the years, the organisation has lost its importance in India. Even the Muslim population, some 25 million, cares little about what it says. Therefore, it was not surprising that the Indian media did not even report that the OIC had asked for referendum in Kashmir. The Muslim countries are themselves to blame for this, because

they blatantly support Pakistan, just because it is a Muslim country.

Unlike Pakistan, where the last word is with the army chief, India is ruled by Parliament. The Hurriyat has insulted it. To insult it is to insult the Indian people. It was on the suggestion by the CPI (M) that the delegation went to Kashmir. Yachuri, the party's secretary, was insistent that the talks should begin with the Gillani group. Raising anti-India slogans when the delegation reached Gillani's residence may be helpful in placating the hardcore. But it does not address the core of the problem. Rajnath Singh has made it

provide a secular and democratic rule to the state. But the party suffered defeat in the assembly polls because it was seen as being too close to New Delhi.

The People's Democratic Party (PDP) won because its founder, Mufti Mohammad Sayyid, kept a distance from New Delhi without alienating it. The Kashmiris voted for him because he gave them a feeling of defiance. Omar Farooq Abdullah had to pay the price of National Conference's image of being pro-Delhi. Kashmir's links with India are too close to challenge beyond a point. Still the opposition, however small, gives Kashmiris a vicarious

use of arms. One, they are afraid of the militants and two, there is a general feeling that the militants are only trying give them an identity. Therefore, the criticism that there is no resistance to militants from within the valley should be understandable because it is a result of alienation.

I still believe that the 1953 Agreement, which gave India the control of defence, foreign affairs and communications, can improve part of the situation in the state. The Kashmiri youth who are angry over the state's status as well as the situation can be won over by the assurance that the



A mother holds her sleeping child during a campaign rally by Kashmir's main pro-India opposition, People's Democratic Party (PDP) addressed by party patron Mufti Mohammed Syeed (unseen) amid tight security.

PHOTO: AFP

clear that Kashmir was an integral part of India and will remain so. This has put an end to the dialogue on Kashmir that Pakistan has been relentlessly demanding. Where do we go from here? There are options to hold talks. Even a limited war can become a nuclear war.

What New Delhi has to appreciate is that the Kashmiris' desire to distance themselves from India may not be considered in any meaningful transfer of power from New Delhi to Srinagar. Yet, the impression that the Kashmiris rule themselves has to be sustained. The National Conference waged a long war to get rid of Maharaja Hari Singh and had an icon like Sheikh Abdullah to

satisfaction of defying New Delhi.

Kashmir feels strongly about New Delhi's step-motherly treatment meted out to the language. And it is generally believed that it is languishing in neglect because Urdu is considered the language of Muslims. If New Delhi were to own and encourage Urdu, Kashmiris would have at least one less reason to feel aggrieved.

People in Kashmir are generally poor like the rest of India and they want jobs which they realise will come only through development in different industries, including tourism. The public themselves are not actively trying to drive militants out through

entire Indian market is available to them for business or service.

But this alone may not do. New Delhi will have to withdraw all the acts relating to the fields other than defence, foreign affairs and communications. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act which was promulgated some 25 years ago to meet the extraordinary situation in the state is still in operation. Were the government to withdraw the Act, it would placate Kashmiris on one hand, and make the security forces more responsible on the other.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Sainthood for Mother Teresa



PHOTO: REUTERS

On September 4, 2016, Pope Francis proclaimed Mother Teresa a saint, hailing her as the personification of maternal love and a powerful advocate for the poor. Mother Teresa devoted her entire life to serving the poor, sick and distressed people. We are very happy for her canonisation.

Amina Begum
On e-mail

Cleanliness must be taught at school

A few days ago, I came upon an article in a newspaper about how five school-going boys dumping their trash on the ground after eating, before boarding the bus, despite the presence of a trash can nearby. This indicates that students are not being taught not to litter either at home or their schools. Children should be made aware about cleanliness in their schools, in order to raise them as conscientious citizens of the country from a young age.

Aminur Rahim
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