



CITY

SMALL BRIBE, GREAT FAULT

SHAMSAD MORTUZA

PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

I call them kingfishers for a reason. The way they perched on their bikes wearing their turquoise and blue attires waiting for their catch in the middle of the streets can only be compared to the majestic birds waiting on small fries. One such kingfisher swooped on my car and taken away my car papers. My driver immediately called me to inform that a traffic sergeant had got hold of the documents for parking in a side road adjacent to my daughter's university campus in Dhanmondi. I told my driver to ask the traffic sergeant to issue a case. I started for the spot to spare my daughter from further hassles, and found that the traffic sergeant was still dealing with a bunch of papers collected from at least five to six private cars parked in the vicinity.

By that time my daughter had come out of her class, and it was getting late. So I decided to approach the uniformed man. "Officer may I know why you are holding onto my papers?" "Sir you cannot park here!" I realized that the Dhaka University sticker on the window shield had earned me the salutation. "But there is no 'no parking' sign; no double line or

anything—how am I supposed to know that cars cannot be parked in an alley?" I protested.

"Sir you are honorable man. I wish I could honor you. But my hands are tied. The other day my colleague and I were punished for not being able to clear off this road. The last house in the corner houses two Honorable judges, and one of them made us stand for half an hour in front of KFC."

"Is there any law about not parking car in a public road?"

"Sir, I don't know."
"Do you lodge cases when the flag bearing cars use the wrong sides of the road? Use hydraulic horns?"

"Sir you are an honorable man. I shall return your paper if you can pay the fine for 'blocking the road' in a U-cash outlet inside the mall here. This is a special favor as it will save you the time of not waiting for your blue book to arrive in the mail."

While he was getting my driver's details, a Judge's car drove by. The driver exchanged greetings with the sergeant. "See he needed to see that we were taking action against those who parked in front of his house!" He handed me the case slip.

I went to the mall and tried paying the fine at three mobile banking points. The vendors however kept showing me the same returned text message: "no such case number exists." Frustrated, I came back to the one who issued the slip.



"Okay I am going to do an exception for you. The other four cars here will have to go through the usual process. I will pay your fine myself after returning to office. I know that will require some paper work on my part. Still this is the best I can do." So he took the fined amount in cash and returned my car documents.

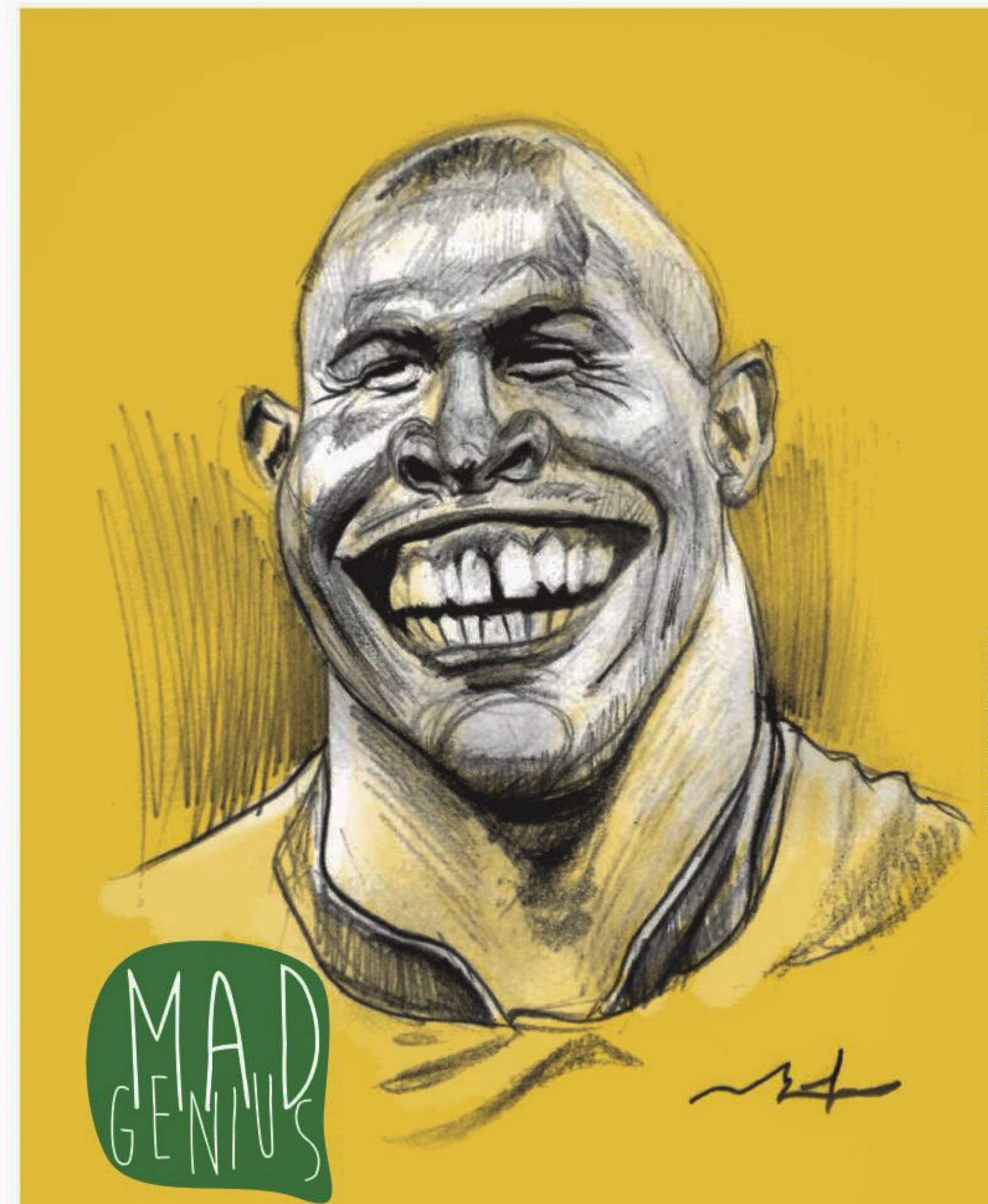
Instantly, I knew that the sergeant would tear off the case slip, and the fine would never reach the exchequer. I posted my experience on Facebook. One of the other cars belonged to a student of mine. She too got her paper back after paying the same amount that I had paid. At least she did not have to go through the drama of trying to pay the fine legally through the prescribed channels. That's the price of being duped honorably.

You must be laughing at my naiveté and banality of this 500-taka experience. You see my academic profession does not require me to come in contact with

people who need speed money. So paying Tk.20000 to a city council clerk for initiating a holding tax file or Tk.5000 to a BRTA official to get my car papers or Tk.500 to a traffic sergeant is the height of my misgivings. Those of you who deal in millions must have worthier stories to tell.

What makes my experience special is that it is not special. It is so ordinary that it does not affect our blunt senses anymore. We simply assume that people who are in power will relegate us to a position of a lowering herd, and their cowboys will lasso us in the fold and milk us at their own convenience. Just remember even for a day the cow becomes holy; even God has designed a day for the cow to assume holiness. You may feast on us. But we (at the expense of greater sacrifice) can also make you say: Holy Cow!

The writer is Professor of English, University of Dhaka (on leave). He is the Head of the English Department, ULAB.



SKETCH: YARIZ SIDDIQUI

RONALDO LUÍS NAZÁRIO DE LIMA

Born 18 September 1976

Ronaldo Luís Nazário de Lima, commonly known as Ronaldo, is a retired Brazilian professional footballer who cemented the reputation as one of the greatest football players of all time. Played as a striker, Ronaldo was a three-time FIFA World Player of the Year, two-time Ballon d'Or recipient and was named in the FIFA 100, a list of the greatest living players compiled in 2004. He was also inducted into the Brazilian Football Museum Hall of Fame and the Italian Football Hall of Fame. Ronaldo played for Brazil in 98 matches, scoring 62 goals, and is the second-highest goal scorer for his national team.

"I don't want fans to have the same disappointment as me when I was refused by some players to sign my notebook when I was young."

I have been poor and money does not make any importance to me. I won't let all the money and glory go to my head.

There is always the dream. It is that you will conquer your fears and when it matters most you will find power you never had before.

I don't consider myself the best player in the world. I am not obsessed with individual titles. I am much more interested in being part of a team which wins trophies."

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA AND BRAINY QUOTES

STARWARY
thestarmagazine@gmail.com

BAFFLING WORDS

Last week as I went to the hospital to collect data on the rate of infant mortality, I was a little shocked to hear the yelling of women in the maternity ward. I was terrified by the words she uttered as I went there. What I saw was a woman of around fifty years shouting "the mother's womb is cursed and hence, her second born is a girl. Take her to some astrologer during her third birth." Another proud grandmother was boasting that her daughter's womb would never carry a girl foetus, because she hates girls. The ward became noisier because of the incessant crying of mothers who gave birth to daughters. Some of their in-laws did not even come to see the baby because it is not a boy. We make a lot of big-talk, that in the twenty-first century there is no gender discrimination and yet we are tormenting the mothers who give birth to girls. Why do they fail to see without a woman a baby cannot see the light of world? That without a strong woman a man is incomplete? All these conversations disgusted me. I'm just hoping for future generations to have better sense.

Esaba Ahnaf
Maple Leaf International School, Dhaka



THE TRAGIC DEATH OF ANOTHER TEENAGER

After Tanu, another girl meets a tragic death. Risha, a teenage schoolgirl recently became another victim of violence against women. The safety of women is a big question lurking the streets now. Who knows what will happen tomorrow? Girls are always a victim of sexual harassment on the streets, and now, it has become a reason for their deaths. Risha's killer is now in jail. But Tanu's family is still waiting for justice. Tanu's killer is yet to be arrested. Why is the government failing to stop this nonsense? Only a few of these cases are out in the media. Many other cases of cruelty against women are not even disclosed. Women even have to face harassment when they want to get justice. Therefore, criminals are encouraged to commit these crimes again and again. We are very sorry to say that women are unsafe in the country, be it at home or outside of the home. I just hope that we continue to our protest to bring a stop to violence against women. We don't want to see such cruelties of life again.

Marshia Afrin
Mirpur, Dhaka