

Women's public transport nightmare

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

It is daily suffering for working women or female students who have to travel by bus across the city. It is a horrific cycle: waiting for it, getting on it, hobbling inside it or alighting from it. After a long queue, she may be lucky to be taken onboard a transport

stopping for seconds! But her struggle has just begun; she would have to squeeze through the flailing human bodies, park her feet on the tiniest of space and avoid having to brush against a stranger.

Then when the time for exiting the bus comes, she would be ejected before it slowed down, risking her life and limbs in the dangerous follow through. Only the other day, I was told that a middle aged woman at the point of alighting from a bus with her child, ran to the motion of the vehicle, thankfully coming out more or less unscratched. But her child took a nasty tumble.

The Los Angeles Times in a report said that there are far fewer public transports than the number of working women in Dhaka. Result: They are subjected to humiliation and harassment, and that travelling after dusk is riskier. So it has drawn the attention of a newspaper from a faraway city where the fantasy world of Hollywood is tucked away. It is being cognizant of a mundane matter on the other side of the globe with a humanist touch.



PHOTO: KAZI TAHSEEN AGAZ APURBO

meeting the high profile MDGs and SDGs. A 'nothing doing' approach is taken under heaps of excuses that try as they did, they couldn't make a dent on it. Inaction cannot be an option. If the people in charge persist in this, then the conclusion would be that since they don't have to

endure it, it's not their problem. It is a no brainer when you think of a basic civic infrastructural issue to be unresolvable. Take stock of the public transports you have of mixed buses and women-only buses and the active demands for such vehicles in both

categories. Work out the rate of deficit and meet it on a flexible basis. It is not rocket science to find out if re-routing a certain number of transports would ease the situation.

Statistics show that out of 450 BRTC buses, 17 are earmarked for women. The BRTC chairman points out that most of the vehicles for women run empty most of the time. In view of this, the BRTC has now decided to ply the buses only in the morning and evening hours. Even then, they don't run to full capacity probably because working women with relatives do not ride such exclusive buses. It is understandable that he cannot run at a loss. Presently, the routes that are not covered by BRTC buses may be tried out for catering for newer or potential women's demands.

What is the number of transports in the private sector? There appears to be a severe deficit in this sector. This is borne out by the fact that the reserve seats for women are routinely occupied by male passengers. The bus operators too advance a commercial argument that they cannot hold women's seats indefinitely, and thus it is expedient for them to apply first-come-first-serve basis of occupancy.

Let me offer two concrete suggestions for an improved and verifiable management of transportation service to women. In the first place, all the buses should have CCTV cameras installed in them with a button panel placed in front of the driver's seat. If he sees anything wrong, he will push the button to close the doors, engaging the trouble-maker under intimidation to the nearest police posse. The attempted or real offence would be recorded and the very presence of a CCTV camera itself is sure to be a deterrent.

Secondly, we might try providing a woman martial to the vehicles who will be connected to the ground police to combat harassment and assault on travelling women.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

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A divided nation

BETWEEN THE LINES



KULDIP NAYYAR

WHEN I was in college before partition, politics was not on communal lines as it is today. Then the enemy was the British and all were

joined in a struggle to oust them. It was the 70s when Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah came to Law College at Lahore and exhorted all of us to make a joint effort to drive out the British.

Subsequently, things came to such a pass that even water was divided into Hindu pitchers and Muslim pitchers. We, the students, were not contaminated at that time. We would eat together at the same table, ordering food from the Hindu kitchen as well as from the Muslim kitchen.

Today, the polarisation has contaminated the Hindu community, dividing it into castes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not recognise this and recently talked about *kabaristan* [graveyard for Muslims] and *samshan bhoomi* [pyre grounds for Hindus]. He unnecessarily brought in religion, asking why there is no electricity at the *samshan bhoomi* while it was available at *kabaristan*.

State chief minister Akhilesh Yadav corrected the Prime Minister and stated that Uttar Pradesh had electricity for 24 hours and both *kabaristan* and *samshan bhoomi* get constant power supply despite the fact that the state had been facing severe power cuts. The complaints the Muslims make is that there are fewer ATMs in their localities and they feel handicapped in withdrawing money.

This may be true. But Muslims do not point out the real reason. They lost their importance after the creation of Pakistan, which was

founded on the basis of religion. Congress leader Maulana Abul Kalam Azad fought a lonely battle against this thinking during the British period itself. He would say that if the Muslims felt unsafe or insecure in a large country like India, they would feel more unsafe in partitioned India because the Hindus would tell the Muslims to go

to Pakistan after having taken their share.

This is precisely what happened. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who was able to stop the exodus. Along with Sardar Patel, who was not enthusiastic about Muslims staying back in India, he appealed to the Hindus that Mahatma Gandhi, who freed India from bondage, would say that India will continue to be a country where there

will be no distinction between Hindus and Muslims. The Muslim community has lost its importance in government affairs after partition. They number about 17 crore in India but have no important portfolio in the Narendra Modi cabinet. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi was the lone Muslim face until M.J. Akbar was inducted as the second minister of

Sardar Patel was willing to give reservations to Muslims. But the community refused it on the ground that such thinking would again result in another division. Nonetheless, the appeal to voters is still on the basis of caste and creed. Although the Election Commission has banned invoking the name of religion or community, political leaders

offer of freebies, including electricity and writing off loans to farmers, is the routine trait adopted by all political parties. This once again goes on to prove how the Muslims are used as a vote bank.

Unfortunately, all these last until the polling dates. Soon after, different parties go their own way and the elected government once again turns a blind eye towards the betterment of Muslims. The wishes and aspirations spelled out in the Constitution become a mirage. Muslims are pushed into the background to be brought back to the forefront before another set of elections.

I witnessed a similar scenario when I left my hometown, Sialkot. There was no difference during those days and we lived as citizens, not as Hindus and Muslims. I had even got the Crescent tattooed at the bidding of my Muslim friends. However, none of them agreed to my plea to get a tattoo of Om. They said that they would be beaten up at their home if they did.

We have come a long way since those times. Today, the society is so polarised that the question of tattooing another religion's symbol does not arise. He who dares the community by violating its code would be a brave man. Muslims prefer to live in a locality where their community's people are concentrated. They do not feel safe in a mixed or secular habitation.

A Muslim would not think of buying property in a decent locality. They do not even agitate for it lest they should be misunderstood. But there are instances of Muslims having bought properties in a Hindu locality after the court's intervention. Of course, there are some misguided elements among Muslims throwing their weight about.

However, despite the Hindutva factor, people in India are realising that they have to live together as they have done centuries before. That is the idea of India and most people are clutching onto it.

The writer is an eminent Indian columnist.



ILLUSTRATION: NEEZABH TOONS

The appeal to voters is still on the basis of caste and creed. Although the Election Commission has banned invoking the name of religion or community, political leaders continue to use them so blatantly because they know that Muslims [in India] do have a say when it comes to elections.

A WORD A DAY



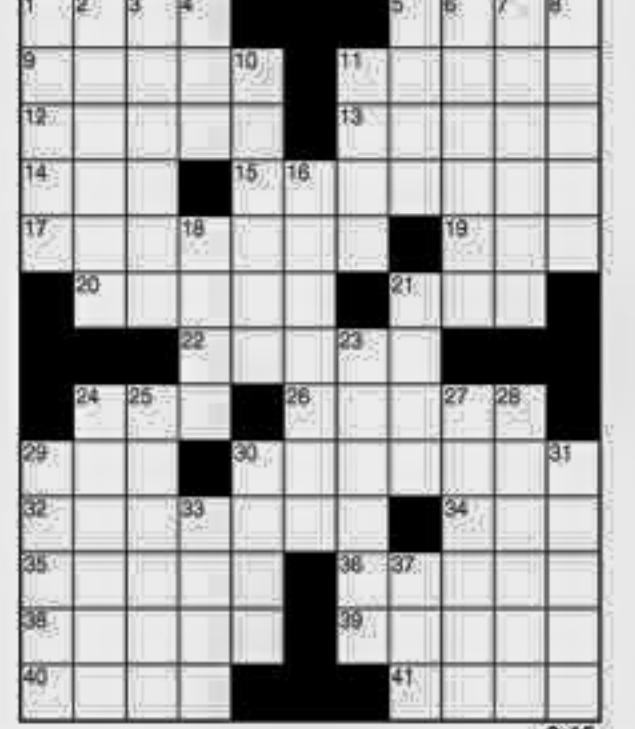
MELLIFLUOUS

(noun)

Adjective (of a voice or words) sweet or musical; pleasant to hear.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
- 1 River of Russia
- 5 Launder
- 9 Ear parts
- 11 Gymnast Rigby
- 12 Insertion mark
- 13 Like draft beer
- 14 Memorable period
- 15 Dangerous algal bloom
- 17 Merlot, for one
- 19 Scepter
- 20 Title documents
- 21 Lawn coating
- 22 Low card
- 24 Argon or xenon
- 26 Flat floaters
- 29 Okra unit
- 30 Bureaucratic hassle
- 32 Token of love
- 34 Brick carrier
- 35 Key
- 36 Hackneyed
- 38 Colander's kin
- 39 Squelched
- 40 Finishes
- 41 Metal boxes
- DOWN
- 1 Stomach woe
- 2 Laughed loudly
- 3 Rub the wrong way
- 4 Rebel general
- 5 Long for
- 6 Duds
- 7 Sundial reading
- 8 Promoted
- 10 Long step
- 11 Program lines
- 16 Guarantees
- 18 Ties the knot
- 21 Skilled
- 23 Academy attendees
- 24 Enters
- 25 Confused
- 27 Where Gauguin painted
- 28 Exact, to Brits
- 29 Use a crowbar
- 30 Learning method
- 31 Perfect places
- 33 Guns
- 37 Informer



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

ITALIC BAJA
NAGANO OPAL
SNOWFLOWERS
MEDAL
SPARSETS
OMENSIRIUS
KID DOSBRA
STRAWS TILT
HONEY GRAY
YESNO
SNOWBLOWERS
IOWA AMELIA
PREY YELLOW

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES

by Kirkman & Scott

