

Well done, Sir!

THERE are iconic pictures that sometimes capture an age, define a moment in history, exemplify beauty, tragedy, or joy, in ways otherwise impossible to evoke. Who can forget the naked, screaming Vietnamese girl fleeing the napalm attack on her village in 1972; the Chinese man standing in lonely defiance in front of a column of tanks at the Tiananmen Square in 1989; the Times Square kiss; or the raising of the US flag at Iwo Jima, heralding the end of WWII?

The picture published in *The Daily Star* on June 7 on Page 3 of a police officer pleading with a flag-bearing car to not go the wrong side of the road certainly does not have the same drama or historical resonance. But it is remarkable nonetheless for it not only portrays the exemplary integrity of the officer but also reveals a subtle but stark truth about our political realities. The first gives us hope, the second makes us cringe.



The on-duty police officer pleads with a flag-carrying car on Hare Road on June 6. The photo was shared on the 'Traffic Alert' Facebook Group.

COURTESY: SHAMOL JAHANGIR HUSSAIN

The officer serves to reaffirm our faith in the system, and reminds us once again that there are honourable people in law enforcement willing, and daring, to do the right thing.

We can be justifiably proud of the fact that an officer could, on his own cognisance and authority, exert the supremacy of law and insist that even the privileged classes follow the standard procedures established for everyone else. This is most reassuring. Moreover this took place in a posh area. The people who live or visit here are the ministers and secretaries, power brokers and high rollers, the insiders and deciders. This is where wealth and power seduce each other, and remain locked in intimate, if illicit, embrace.

These are not people used to hearing the

word "no", or being stopped, or being told that they are engaging in an illegal act, or being made to feel accountable for their actions, or (heaven forbid) being asked to correct their behaviour or reverse their decisions. Power in Bangladesh is usually defined, and often expressed, as the ability to flout the law and face no consequences, or as Erich Segal had put it in *Love Story* in a slightly different context, "never having to say you are sorry."

Thus, driving on the wrong side of the road becomes a metaphor of our political times. It is an "in your face" raised middle finger which indicates both an entitlement that is casually assumed, and an attitude that is sneeringly demonstrated.

The reason the picture acquires such enormous significance is because it contradicts our typical experiences and expectations. We are not generally used to the rule of law being duly respected and publicly enforced. In these matters we are more likely to be disappointed and, sometimes, outraged. We read of the increasing numbers of extrajudicial killings in the country where those entrusted with enforcing the law take upon themselves the roles of prosecutor, judge and executioner all rolled into one. We also see pictures of stricken family members holding up

photographs of people who have "disappeared".

Some of these supposed "victims" in both groups are/were presumably horrible individuals who deserve to be removed from our midst. But, no amount of public anger and frustration about supposedly "bad people" can, ever, justify the suspension of the human rights and liberties guaranteed in the constitution. We must never forget that the concept of democracy entails a nation governed by law, not a nation governed by "men" (however well-intentioned the latter may be).

The public's confidence in the rule of law is also a bit shaken by the lack of enthusiasm in bringing the full force of the law against the high and mighty. There are the bank-swindlers, the land-grabbers, forest-cutters and water-polluters, the money launderers, the drug kingpins, the local "investors" who park their money in dodgy deals and shady holdings abroad, the real estate scammers, the tax evaders, the corrupt contractors offering shoddy work at inflated prices, and the ubiquitous "gatekeepers" of the rentier state who command its resources and extract payment for services to which citizens have a right. These people are not particularly concerned about being "caught" and, in fact, flaunt their (mostly ill-gotten) wealth in rude

and taunting swagger.

Moreover, the citizens see inordinate delays in the investigation of crimes and bringing perpetrators to justice. In the last several years alone the murders of young Taqi in Narayanganj, college student Tonu in Comilla, journalists Sagar and Runi in Dhaka, and many progressive bloggers and social media activists, remain shrouded in ambiguity and confusion.

Crimes against women and minorities are particularly vulnerable to foot-dragging and seeming indifference. The attacks on temples and ashrams, or communal violence in Ramu in Cox's Bazar, Shantia in Pabna, Nasiragar in Brahmanbaria, Thakurpara in Rangpur, or Longadu in Rangamati, have not seen much prosecutorial headway. Similarly, of the 4,541 allegations of rape brought to the much-vaunted one-stop crisis centres over the last 16 years, only 60 have been found guilty. And when one is both a woman and "indigenous" (e.g., Kalpana Chakma who was abducted in 1996), the wait for answers can be long and cruel.

The clogged and sluggish nature of the legal system was revealed in the law minister's own statement in Parliament in January 2018, when he indicated that there were more than 3.3 million cases pending in courts, with more than 476,000 in the High Court Division and 16,565 in the Appellate

Division of the Supreme Court. More importantly, almost a million cases have been languishing for more than five years. Not only does this provoke the old dictum of "justice delayed is justice denied" but it also indicates a court system almost overwhelmed by the pressures put on it.

There are also some public concerns about the use of law enforcement agencies as partisan instruments serving the agendas of particular governments, rather than as autonomous institutions serving the interests of the State. Cases may be initiated or withdrawn because of political considerations (even indemnifying entire classes of crimes committed at certain times), and judicial orders may, at times, be held in abeyance. In an unprecedented affront to the Courts, it is even possible for an individual, who had been duly charged, convicted and sentenced for a capital crime by the legal system, to receive a political pardon and then be spirited out of the country in the cover of darkness.

But this litany of criticisms and complaints should not blind us to the fact that most law enforcement personnel are generally honest, dedicated and competent. They toil in thankless, often dangerous tasks, are usually overworked and underpaid, and receive little appreciation even when they take huge risks and make personal sacrifices to uphold the principles of law and justice. Moreover, the system has to contend with a colonial legacy which had defined its structures and priorities; struggle with inadequate resources, training and incentives offered to it; and function within a larger moral environment which neither rewards nor encourages integrity and talent. To expect these people to be saints, when most others around them are not, is both unrealistic and unfair.

However, it is undeniable that there are some widespread anxieties and skepticism about the rule of law in the country. It is in this particular context that this picture is so memorable and the officer so heroic. He serves to reaffirm our faith in the system, and reminds us once again that there are honourable people in law enforcement willing, and daring, to do the right thing.

The only aspect of the photograph that is a bit awkward, and which also speaks volumes, is the fact that the officer has his hands folded in front of him in a traditional gesture of submission and forgiveness-seeking. Sir, it is the occupant of the vehicle who should be assuming that posture, not you. The law is on your side. So are we. Stand tall.

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Why humans and robots together can make roads safer

ROAD accidents are a major threat to human capital and economic development in Bangladesh. The economic cost of road accidents is estimated to be two to three percent of GDP in developing countries according to WHO; but the loss of human lives, and mental and physical effects on the people involved in accidents and their families are irreparable.

According to compiled data from Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), Bangladesh Passengers Welfare Association (BPWA) and Dhaka Transport Coordination Authority (DTCA), around 1,500 people died in the first three months of 2018 and many more were injured in nearly a thousand accidents. It should be noted that many accidents in rural areas are not reported. Ninety

percent of accidents occur due to drivers' errors and the natural slowness of human capability to take action in a dangerous driving situation while other causes are poor eyesight/vision, physical tiredness and distraction of drivers, and poor infrastructure.

Technological advancement has benefitted our lives in many spheres of life—from agriculture to healthcare, telecom to manufacturing, finance to aviation, etc. Think of the simple satellite navigation (satnav) device and how it has made our lives so much easier. We don't need to memorise complex maps or hold a map while driving to get to one place from another. The satnav system helps us plan ahead, alerts us when we exceed speed limit, reroutes if we wrongly exit a roundabout or motorway, notifies us of the traffic ahead and the locations of fuel stations, etc, that ultimately make us feel more in control while driving.

Similarly, advancement in research can help us create a nearly collision-

A combination of driving between human drivers and robots is the most ideal pathway to prevent accidents from happening in the future.

free driving experience. We have Mobileye, a subsidiary of Intel, already deployed in over 15 million vehicles that have advanced driver-assistance system (ADAS) which can alert the driver of a potentially dangerous situation so that corrective measures can be taken by the driver. For example, its forward collision

warning (FCW) and pedestrian and cyclist collision warning to alert the driver if a collision is imminent, lane departure warning (LDW) to alert the driver if s/he is drifting from one lane to another, and headway monitoring warning (HMW) to alert the driver to maintain a safe distance between the driver and the vehicle ahead are some of the features. Not only that, its active safety systems like automatic emergency braking (AEB), lane keeping assist (LKA) and adaptive cruise control (ACC) intervene in a situation where a collision is imminent and if no human action is taken.

Here, we see the wide-range use of a semi-autonomous or parallel autonomy system, a kind of shared control set up between humans and robots to create collision-proof vehicles where robotics aids the driver as a guardian angel. An example of the parallel autonomy system would be the driver attempting to go too fast, turning the steering wheel more than necessary or about to run over a pedestrian in

which case the robot will take control to prevent this from happening.

There are a number of cars already with the semi-autonomous system, e.g. 2017 Mercedes-Benz E-Class, 2018 BMW 5 series, 2018 Volvo X Class, 2017 Tesla Model S and X, 2018 Cadillac CT6, Nissan ProPILOT, etc. By now one might be thinking that s/he needs to spend loads of money to acquire a vehicle of such safety technology but the good news is that this safety package will soon be available to fit in vehicles of any make, model or age. Currently, such safety-featured assistance can be outfitted within the budget of Tk 1,50,000 on most of the Honda Models and Toyota's Corolla Sedan and RAV4.

Planes around the world make more than 100,000 trips daily but the rate of plane crash is rare. This is due to modern equipment and use of strong sensors and IoT in the aviation industry that are designed to diagnose problems faster; this has paved the way for safer, smoother flights and acts as the last line of

defence in order to assist or fully recover through automation from an imminent loss of control. Similarly, a combination of driving between human drivers and robots is the most ideal pathway to prevent accidents from happening in the future.

Considering the rate of accidents and fatalities on the roads, governments can incorporate various rules in order to ensure that imported vehicles are fitted with the aforementioned safety systems and gradually it can be made a mandatory requirement for all vehicles in the country once the system is widely available. While technological advancement and automakers can greatly contribute to creating a world where injuries and fatalities resulting from road accidents can be reduced, it is of paramount importance for everyone to stay alert while on the road and governments should ensure that reckless driving is duly punished.

ABM Kamrul Huda Azad is the CEO of B A Exchange UK Ltd, a subsidiary of Bank Asia Ltd.

ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY

JULY 2, 1990

MECCA TUNNEL TRAGEDY

During the Hajj in 1990, 1,426 people suffocated and were trampled to death in a tunnel near Mecca. After the 2015 Mina stampede, this was the highest death toll of any Hajj tragedy in modern times.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Syrup source
- 6 College group
- 10 Kitchen wear
- 11 Sordid
- 12 Be unthrifty
- 13 Peony part
- 14 Umpire's call
- 15 Guatemala neighbor
- 16 Geologic period
- 17 Suffer
- 18 " -- the ramparts ..."
- 19 Dresses up
- 22 Floral garlands
- 23 Shaving mishap
- 26 Leaves quickly
- 29 Young man
- 32 Yr. parts

DOWN

- 1 Accumulated
- 2 Duds
- 3 Book lead-in
- 4 Single
- 5 Complete
- 6 Sense
- 7 Math comparison
- 8 Wow
- 9 Tenth president
- 11 Explores caves
- 15 Life story, for short
- 17 Taking for granted
- 20 Youngster
- 21 "My country -- of thee"
- 24 Engine fluid
- 25 Iraq's neighbor
- 27 Debate side
- 28 Muscle connector
- 29 Union chapter
- 30 Bakery output
- 31 Fairway chunk
- 35 Wilder on film
- 36 Thunder sound
- 38 Debate side

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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

BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER

WELL, WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOURSELF, BEETLE? SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN. IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE. IT WORKS FOR ME. CHECK IT OUT. IT'S A NO-BRAINER. IN YOUR DREAMS. BEETLE! WILL YOU SHUT UP?!! BEEN THERE, DONE THAT.

GREG + MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES

BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

WELL, ANOTHER GREAT CHECKUP, WREN? MAINTENANCE TO LOBBY THREE. KID IN THE FISH TANK. SO YOU BROUGHT HAMMIE ALONG TODAY? IT COULD BE SOME OTHER KID!