

Anarchy in transport sector

Not more laws but implementation of current ones is the cure

IT has become a predictable reaction of the government to initiate curative actions after a matter precipitates to a point such as we have witnessed in the present situation stemming in the wake of the killing of the two school students. We are glad to note that the government deems all the nine points of the students valid and have issued instructions to implement them. And this is what begs the question, as does the statement of the home minister a couple of days ago while addressing the students through the media that discipline would be restored in the transport sector once the road transport bill is passed in the next parliament.

The home minister's assurance, we are constrained to suggest, does not wash. We believe that equally important as the laws is the system that control the road transport sector, which has been made dysfunctional by the unholy nexus of a cabal with political backing. Regrettably, various agencies that control the system and implement the laws have become complicit too in creating the chaos.

New laws are not a natural remedy for any disorder. There is no dearth of laws in the country governing the road transport sector. What is missing is the failure or reluctance to implement the laws. What is also absent is the lack of political will to do anything about it. And lack of political will is clearly evident in the fact that the so-called road transport bill has been hanging since 2016. And it is only after the students took to the streets was it deemed fit to be vetted by the committee who had been sitting on it since November of last year.

The authorities should implement the existing laws forcefully. Waiting for a proposed law will be seen as an excuse for inaction.

Crack down on the syndicate

Ensure fair bidding process for cattle markets

AS this daily has reported last Wednesday, six cattle markets out of 13, for cattle sales before Eid-ul-Azha, in Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) have failed to get a single offer in the last three biddings as a syndicate is forcing general bidders to keep out from bidding. The syndicate, led by ruling party leaders and activists, has been controlling the tender process of all the makeshift cattle markets of both the city corporations. Also, nearly all of the highest bidders for the other seven cattle markets are ruling party men. The situation is worrying because if the syndicate is allowed to continue such illegal activity, the city corporations will be deprived of a fixed yearly income.

Although there is a provision of "khas collection" under which the city corporations can operate the markets for which they do not get any offer, it seems this process is also not in their control. According to the DSCC sources, last year some ruling party men had controlled the markets that didn't get any bids. So it is clear that the city corporations have, in fact, no control over the cattle markets which are a major source of their yearly income.

We urge the government to crack down on the syndicate and do what is needed to ensure a fair bidding process. Only through a fair and competitive bidding process, can the city corporations have a fair earning. The home minister has informed us recently of the many steps the government is going to take to reduce the sufferings of the buyers and ensure the security of the cattle markets. We hope that he would also put all-out efforts to break this unscrupulous syndicate.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Time to end reckless driving!

The premature death of two students of Shaheed Ramiz Uddin Cantonment College at the hands of a reckless driver shows us the horrible condition of our country's transportation system. The loss of two young lives in this way is totally unacceptable. So was the irresponsible response by a minister.

We always expect immediate and constructive actions from our ministers. The kind of response we have seen from the shipping minister was deplorable.

The incident triggered a city-wide student protest that has crippled the capital for days now. As per the demands raised by the students, the government should take strict actions against those who flout traffic rules. To make our streets safe, it is high time the government took actions to contain reckless driving by hardening and enforcing the existing laws.

Sajedul Islam, Jahangirnagar University



When we falter they rise

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

AASHA MEHREEN AMIN

THE damning indictment had been announced a long time before we were ready to hear it. Now, we can no longer look away from that awful, cringe-worthy truth. We, the grownups, the apparent decision makers of their fate, have failed our children. Failed to protect them from sexual predators. Failed to shield them from sadistic bus/truck drivers and nonchalant politicians who could have saved their precious lives if they wanted to.

And now that we have successfully failed—to ensure, for example, that reckless, unqualified bus and truck drivers will not plough into school/college children while they wait at the bus stop, our children have been forced to take to the streets to protest. That indeed speaks volumes of their bravery and our collective failure; for to take to the streets these days is no mean feat. It means risking getting bludgeoned by hardened law enforcers or brutally hammered by the “big brothers” of ruling parties. It may mean incarceration, remand, even death in custody. For that is the price of protesting the grossest of injustices these days, you protest, you pay.

But today (Thursday) as I am stopped by a lanky young schoolgirl, soaked to the skin by the rain, to ask the driver to show his licence, I cannot help but feel

In all the despair we are mired in, our children are rising against the injustice. They will rise and they will fight.

exhilarated with hope. She instructs the driver confidently, her face resolute: “keep the licence near the windshield so it is visible.” I am moved to tears to see the determination in her face and in the faces of her young co-activists who have cordoned off a part of the streets to allow ambulances through. As we sit, in chastened silence, more children come to check whether drivers of various vehicles have licences. Some instruct the CNGs to keep within the lane and not try to

under the noses of law enforcers. Sometimes the news of yet another bright young life being crushed by the recklessness of drivers leaves us shocked, saddened and feeling helpless. We, the ordinary adults, who do not hold the positions of power that govern the system, feel disempowered and debilitated. We know that these drivers are underaged, under the influence, unqualified, undocumented and completely unsympathetic of their fellow

arrogant driver to go on the wrong side of the road, adding to the congestion. Are they not blind too, to the sufferings of the people as they wait for agonising hours in rain or scorching sun, just to get to their destination?

In this blindness that has stripped grownups of their conscience or their will to fight injustice, these kids, these bright-eyed, beautiful children, have suddenly grown up well before their time, to wake us up to the ugliness we



Holding placards, students demonstrate in the capital's Farmgate area for safer roads.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

squeeze into spaces. They even redirect cars of MPs, a Secretary so they don't go on the wrong side or to check whether the driver has a licence. They are not rude or rowdy. They do not carry sticks or weapons—all they have are their uniforms, the school logos on their shirts, the tell-tale rucksacks on their backs. The only weapon they have is their incredible courage—to make a point regarding something as basic as safe, killer free roads.

Every day we watch helplessly as dilapidated buses and other vehicles make a mockery of traffic rules right

citizens. Yet we feel we can do nothing. Because those who can—the ministry of road transport and bridges, the traffic police, the police on the streets, the owners of the vehicles who demand more trips than the safe limit, the drivers who make their young, uninitiated helpers to drive—all these people who have the power to do something about these unacceptable deaths, have chosen to do nothing. It is a whole system and its governance that has gone awry, mad with greed, blinded by power. And to top it all come the big, monstrous cars with a VIP sitting cosily inside, allowing his/her

have created. They do this out of anger and anguish. Because the grownups are not doing their job.

Yes we are guilty as charged and most of us are ashamed and humbled. We have failed dear children, to take care of you as we should have. But in all the despair we are mired in, our children are rising against the injustice. They will rise and they will fight, not with hammers and machetes but with their brave, pure, fearless young hearts.

Aasha Mehreen Amin is Deputy Editor, Editorial and Opinion, The Daily Star.

Lynching to nowhere

BETWEEN THE LINES

KULDIP NAYAR

MORE gruesome details about the Alwar lynching have come to light. Rakbar Khan, the victim, could have been saved if the police had acted in time. In fact, the force stopped for tea and wasted three and a half hours in reaching the victim to the hospital. He bled to death. If one were to put all the pieces together, one would come to the conclusion that the police delay was deliberate.

The religion of the victim—he was a Muslim—has been his undoing. Inquiry would give details but there is no doubt that the police were keener on recovering

his prayers. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, too stressed on the same point and strengthened the argument for unity through steps, including abolishing the column of religion from application forms for admission to institutions and employment.

The line drawn on the basis of religion is haunting us all the time. Muslims in India, although 17 crore, do not matter in the affairs of government administration. In fact, their habitation is separate and even though they have become slums they feel safe in living together.

Not long ago, there was a riot in Delhi. I was helping the community as an activist. One sitting judge preferred to stay in the slums and told me that he felt safe there. He found the police

directed at the Congress which had ruled the country since independence. Instead of giving reply to what I had mentioned, Pranab Mukherjee, then a top Congress leader, went out of the house to register his lack of interest on the issue. Probably, this was his reply to my pointed criticism of the Congress for having failed to galvanise the nation.

Secularism is the ideology which we have chosen in contrast to Pakistan's Islamic order. Unfortunately, the Muslim community in India stays distant. It feels as if it is somewhat responsible for the partition. This is not entirely true. The Hindus failed to instil confidence among the Muslims. Some fundamentalists were openly propagating for the beliefs they espoused.

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has no connection with the

Vajpayee emerged as the leader because he was acceptable to all. He kept their confidence intact because the bus he took to Lahore had members of all political parties. The speech he made at the civic reception was so appealing to the Pakistanis that some of them came to me to seek my services to request Nawaz Sharif not to speak because the mood was pro-Vajpayee. Nawaz Sharif said he was not a fool to speak after Vajpayee. Instead, he said that if Vajpayee were to contest elections today in Pakistan, he would sweep the polls.

The BJP has come a long way since then. Prime Minister Narendra Modi looks trying to be another Vajpayee but not succeeding in his efforts. Vajpayee remains the idol because he was able to influence even the Congress followers. I recall Vajpayee visiting London when I



Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS chief, with Narendra Modi, the Indian Prime Minister.

the two cows from him than saving his life. The cows were taken to a gaushala (cow shed) 10 kilometres away, a good one hour before Khan was brought to the community health centre, a six-kilometre drive from the attack site.

According to data available on blood-thirsty mobs striking fear in the hearts of minorities for some time now, 86 percent of those dead in cow-related violence since 2010 are Muslims and 97 percent of the attacks took place after 2014. Whenever such happenings took place, including lynching or attacking people, invariably the Muslims and dalits had borne the brunt in the name of so-called cow protection.

This is a sad commentary on our efforts to have the society pluralistic. Mahatma Gandhi would emphasise on Hindu-Muslim unity all the time during

contaminated. Obviously, there is a lacuna in the training of policemen. For a long time, the government kept out mosque, temple or gurudwara from the police line. But leaders from different political parties saw people only in terms of religion and catered their parochial tendencies.

The question we should ask ourselves is why the protectors of law are becoming violators themselves. Now the temple, mosque and gurudwara are allowed in the places where they live and they blare their propaganda all the time. There are separate schools for each community. The madrasa cult has got deepened in the community because the Muslims want to save their identity.

I raised all these points in the Rajya Sabha when I was nominated to the house in the 90s. My criticism was

national struggle and therefore its ideology remains what Shyama Prasad Mookerji, a tall leader at that time, propagated. The philosophy was to establish a Hindu rashtra. Jayaprakash Narain was able to bring even the fanatic Hindus into the Janata Party and act at his bidding. They gave up their caps which was typical.

The sticking point, however, was the relationship with the RSS. When JP asked the then Jan Sangh leaders to sever their ties with the RSS, they preferred to constitute their own party. LK Advani founded the BJP. Some committed members stayed with the RSS but most of them remained with JP. The matter ultimately came before the central leadership. The Jana Sangh lost there.

That is the time when Atal Behari

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was the High Commissioner. Those were the days when Babri masjid dominated the discussion. Vajpayee said: “Those who are Ram bhagat, they have gone to Ayodhya and those who love the country have come here.”

Though Modi is emphasising on *sabka saath, sabka vikas*, but RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat seems to have initiated a parallel campaign to have as many candidates in the Lok Sabha as possible so that when the time comes to choose the prime minister, the RSS would have its own stamp. Instances like Alwar lynching is going to pull down both the RSS and the BJP because the country's mood does not tally with the intentions of RSS. The nation wants to stay pluralistic.

Kuldip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.