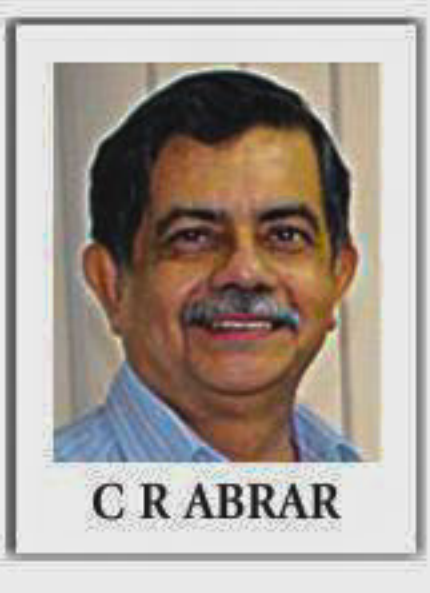


STATE RESPONSES TO DEMANDS FOR SAFE ROADS

Could these all been avoided?



C R ABRAR

SOMETHING is rotten in the state of Denmark", lamented Hamlet. Though the context is different that's the pervasive thought of conscientious Bangladeshis irrespective of their economic status and social standing at the moment. They are at a loss as the situation in the country saw instances of violence. They ponder why the peaceful demonstrations of the youngsters to exert pressure on the authorities to realise their legitimate demand for safe roads triggered such harsh response from the state and their cohorts. Why on earth have the children been subjected to harm at such a scale? Why did the law enforcement authorities look the other way when in government's parlance "miscreants" swooped on the teenagers? Why are the authorities keener to take action against the victims and their supporters and not the perpetrators?

The students' 9-point charter of demands secured broad endorsement from many quarters. Their peers, parents, admirers and even those in the highest echelons of power of the state unreservedly expressed that every single of those demands was justified. What then did go wrong that triggered the subsequent impasse and violence?

A dispassionate introspection leads to issue of incredulity. Presumably the government felt its formal acceptance of the demands should have been enough for the protesters to return to classes. For the protesting youth however, the endorsement of the demands by the authorities was the primary condition but not the only one. They remained apprehensive if the approval was indeed sincere and not just another ploy "for the crisis to pass". They

further felt that even if it was genuine, what they needed was concrete evidence for their speedy enforcement. Unfortunately, it is in this regard the state faltered leading to precipitation of the crisis.

Can the students be really held responsible for being uneasy about the government motive? Didn't they have reason to believe that the authorities might renege on their promise? Does not the latter's dragging of feet on the quota reforms remain fresh in their mind?

The lack of concrete action to immediately follow up on their demands and allay their nervousness led the protesters to continue with their agitation programme and stay back on the streets until what they claimed "all demands were met". Instead of assuaging them with a clear timeline and at least a few tangible steps, the government moved forward only by arresting the driver and helper, and rushing through the transport law; the latter not being a priority for the protesters.

In a situation of such volatility would it have been too tough a decision to ask the principal protagonist to step down from the presidency of the Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation, something that is untenable under the law of the land? Readers may recall that one of his colleagues resigned as editor before joining the Cabinet. Why then should his case be different from the other? Observers have noted not a single measure has been implemented even though six weeks have elapsed since the prime ministerial instruction on road safety in June. Are publicly visible measures such as impounding un-roadworthy and unregistered vehicles that much of a time-consuming and difficult task? Or does implementation of such apparently simple decisions entail ruffling of strong interests that the authorities are yet to work out?

Almost from the beginning there have



Equipped with sticks, activists opposing the movement for safe roads launch attack on protesting students in Science Lab area. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

been attempts to dismiss the teenagers' movement as BNP-Jamaat inspired. How can one blame the young protesters in doubting the administration's intent when they are branded wrongfully and stigmatised instead of being acknowledged as independent assiduous agents of change?

The events in Jigatola, Mirpur and Science Laboratory on August 7 and that of Bashundhara on August 8 as reported by the print, social and electronic media leave little doubt that law enforcement agencies not only looked the other way as criminal acts by the opponents of the movement, youth and labour wings of the ruling party, but also used disproportionate force on grounds of dispersing agitating students by resorting to batons, rubber bullets and water cannons and allegedly broke into shops and

apartments in pursuit of fleeing protesters. It is time for the law enforcement agencies to distance themselves from the actions of the perpetrators and be seen as neutral enforcers of the law. Meaningful actions against the wrongdoers and errant police functionaries (who can be identified from the print and video footages) will surely boost public confidence on the forces. Are the agencies prepared to take this legally mandated task?

The new mantra of the authorities is "vested quarters have infiltrated through the ranks of the protesters". Such perception at least to an extent may have provided the rationale for the use of force. The infiltration theory has been propounded without much of evidence. Even if the contention is valid should the rank and file protesters be held responsible for such "infiltration" and thus being

subjected to reckless violence?

A little juggling of our collective memory would remind us the astute moves made by the Awami League, then in opposition, in exploiting the civic movements against Yasmeen's rape and murder by the police and police excesses committed at the time of the raid of Shamsunnahar Hall of Dhaka University when Khaleda Zia was in power. Have those smart political initiatives in anyway undermined the rationale and efficacy of the civic groups that launched the protests and movements? If not, why should it be different this time?

The government has expressed concern about the spread of unfounded news and warned the media houses and others to remain vigilant so that "fake news with ulterior motives" does not circulate. The much-maligned ICT Act has come in handy for the administration and was put into use including against renowned photographer and blogger Shahidul Alam. Experiences have taught that efforts to suppress facts become the breeding ground for rumours and fake news. Should not those in command of the information and mass communication in the administration acknowledge the fact that the best antidote of rumour is the free flow of information?

Bangladesh is passing through a testing time. Lack of empathy and understanding of the teenage protesters' psyche and overt reliance on coercion have transformed an innocuous civic protest into a bigger challenge than it was meant to be. One hopes that through sincere adherence to the public pledge by the political leadership and obedience to rule of law and professionalism by the law enforcement agencies this challenge will be met.

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Cities are changing faster than you think

FARHAT AFZAL

WHEN infrastructure for cities are built, they are built with the aim that they will sustain for at least three to four decades down the road. In the meantime, cities change in terms of technologies or service systems. So it is essential that city planners think ahead, use that as a basis for planning rather than thinking of what the best practice would be today.

Cities evolve due to a variety of factors. Urban designer and former dean of the School of Design at University of Pennsylvania, Gary Hack believes four things cause spaces to change: economic shifts, technologies, social organisation and public policies.

Barcelona is a prime example of how such changes affected the city planning. In the year 1850, Barcelona experienced a new economy, thanks to the railroads that ran across the city and connected with the rest of Europe. Nine years later, Ildefons Cerdà drew up a plan of the city that reflected the changes the city will be going through thanks to new technology, railroads and economics of the place. Cerdà realised that in order to be recognised as a big city, it was important that the city infrastructure was built before the city itself. In the last fifty years, Barcelona has gone through a lot of changes. The city has built mass transit systems connected within the city and outside, built a new set of high-speed trains connecting the city with the rest of Europe, and reconstituted the city around these transportation nodes that were created. Hence an entirely new kind of city was built centred around the new kind of transportation system.

several rulers from different cultures with varied perspectives regarding city development. The city continues to become unliveable due to continuous negligence in planning initiatives and weak urban governance. Although it dates back to 17th Century CE, the masterplan for Dhaka was not drawn up until 1959, with the aid of the British firm Minoprio, Spencely and Macfarlane. However, in 1971, the masterplan became useless when Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation. The next planning initiative was taken in 1995, by Mott MacDonald Ltd and Culpin Planning Ltd together with local consulting agencies, and was called Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan. Unfortunately, the planning proved to be unsuccessful as well in transforming the city into a liveable one.

It is evident from the history of Barcelona and Beijing's city planning how and why cities change, and how they reconstitute themselves around factors of change. To understand that,

areas need a more secure system where parcels are kept safe until it is picked up by its receiver. As a result, the whole system has to be reconsidered.

Additionally, there has also been a shift in the way we work today. At present, places like North End Coffee Roasters in Gulshan or Coffee World in Dhanmondi are preferred as working environments as they offer WiFi Internet services as well as refreshments. This shift in preference to work at a public environment has given rise to a number of shared workplaces. Coworking spaces in Dhaka like Moar, HubDhaka and The Wave are thus quickly gaining popularity. This can be considered as new infrastructure which is changing the nature of cities.

Secondly, a big factor of change is mobility. Parking spaces can be decreased through autonomous cars, autonomous parking systems and driverless taxis and buses. BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) proposed a driverless city

Similarly, in order to improve the environment of the plaza at the Boston City Hall, a crowdsourcing of ideas was

If our cities are not evolving to catch up with the ongoing changes, we will be missing out on all the technological advancements that are happening. It is not the work of any one particular group of professionals to be responsible for such evolution to happen.



Coworking space at Moar. SOURCE: COWORKER.COM

one needs to delve deeper into the drivers of change that are applicable for Dhaka and other cities today as well as in the foreseeable future.

First of those drivers of change is networked work and living. Today people are living connected lives, thanks to technology of apps in handheld devices. All of this connectivity affects the city, and changes how the city functions. Today, because of platforms like Chaldal, HungryNaki and Pickaboo, products are available for purchase online, hence delivery vehicles pack the streets. This also means that residential

plan that estimated it will liberate 14 percent of road area from cars. The proposal included roads and pavements connected to form a fluid circulation space by the year 2030 through which driverless vehicles will move, replacing rigid spaces such as driveways or sidewalks. Use of public spaces can be revolutionised this way.

The third big change for cities is crowdsourcing, where small amounts of money can be invested for construction or planning purposes. One such example is BD Bacata in Bogota where 3,800 investors raised USD 200 million.

carried out through Twitter. These kinds of initiatives were effective in reaching out to the general public and getting their voices heard in terms of what they wanted for their cities.

Finally, the fourth factor of change is eco-sustainability. In *Designing Dhaka: A Manifesto For A Better City*, urbanist and architect Kazi Ashraf recommends the following for a sustainable urbanism in Dhaka: increase in vegetation, producing renewable energy through solar farms, rainwater harvesting and waste recycling.

Over the past two decades, technology and connectivity has brought us closer than our ancestors could even begin to imagine. Human lives are connected and intertwined in ways that affect how we think, live and plan for the future. In such a scenario, if our cities are not evolving to catch up with the ongoing changes, we will be missing out on all the technological advancements that are happening. It is not the work of any one particular group of professionals to be responsible for such evolution to happen. For collective change that will drive cities to progress further, a collaborative effort is required from policymakers, planners, government officials and citizens. Otherwise, cities will start to regress instead of moving forward.

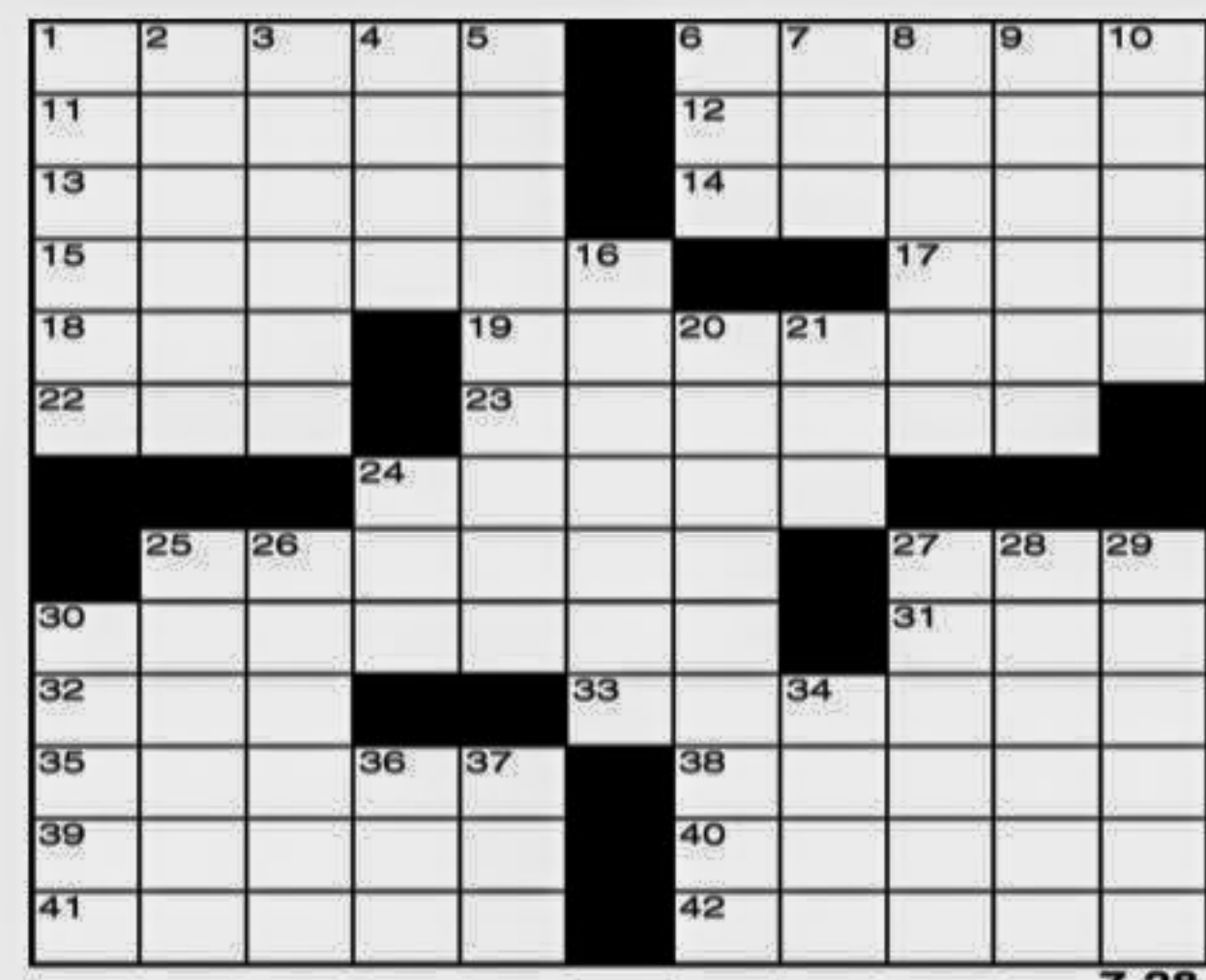
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This article is based on the Academic Program events with Gary Hack conducted by Bengal Institute in the Academic Session "Complexity & Landscape Operations" in April 2017.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS
 - 1 Like some jackets
 - 6 Model adornment
 - 11 Tolerate
 - 12 Clearly stunned
 - 13 Baffled
 - 14 Book after Ezekiel
 - 15 Sly, in a way
 - 17 Busy agcy. in April
 - 18 Confession item
 - 19 Beat
 - 22 Holds
 - 23 "Who-- kidding?"
 - 24 Hackneyed
 - 25 Moolah
 - 27 Mountain pass
 - 30 "You busy?"
 - 31 Refinery supply
 - 32 World of denial
- DOWN
 - 33 Many a computer
 - 35 Not napping
 - 38 Prepare to drive
 - 39 Bath need
 - 40 Make blank
 - 41 Hit bottom?
 - 42 Ancient Mesopotamian region
 - 16 Flat form
 - 10 Sunday topping
 - 20 Washables requiring special care
 - 21 Pupil's place
 - 24 Mrs., in Madrid
 - 25 1950s singing style
 - 26 Parliament city
 - 27 Cheering call
 - 28 Kindle
 - 29 Mill contents
 - 30 Pesky swarm
 - 34 Llama's land
 - 36 Filmmaker Burns
 - 37 Antlered animal
 - 7 Freud topic
 - 8 Gaming spot

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

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ON THIS DAY IN HISTORY



AUGUST 9, 1974
 NIXON RESIGNED AS US PRESIDENT

Richard Nixon resigned as US President and Vice President Gerald Ford takes oath of office to take his place as the 38th President.