

Learning to value people, not cars

The spirit of World Car-Free Day should not be limited to just a day; it should be put into practice every day



DEBRA EFRGYMSON

IMAGINE if aliens came to Earth. If they landed in just about any major city, they would be forgiven for believing that people are simply batteries for automobiles, and that automobiles are the true life form, with everything designed around their needs for housing, fuel, and socialising with other automobiles on congested streets.

If the aliens were to land in Dhaka, they would undoubtedly conclude that whatever the dominant life form is, it is extremely fond of pollution, congestion, noise, and danger. Why else would someone design a city in a way to maximise them all?

If, however, the aliens had the good fortune to drop in during a World Car-Free Day celebration, they might get a vastly different impression. Ah! People, not cars, are the major life form. People are joyous, sociable creatures who enjoy interactions outdoors in a convivial and safe environment. They respect the rights of people on foot and on bicycles to move about safely. Rather than forcing people to the margins, they assign automobiles to that unenviable spot.

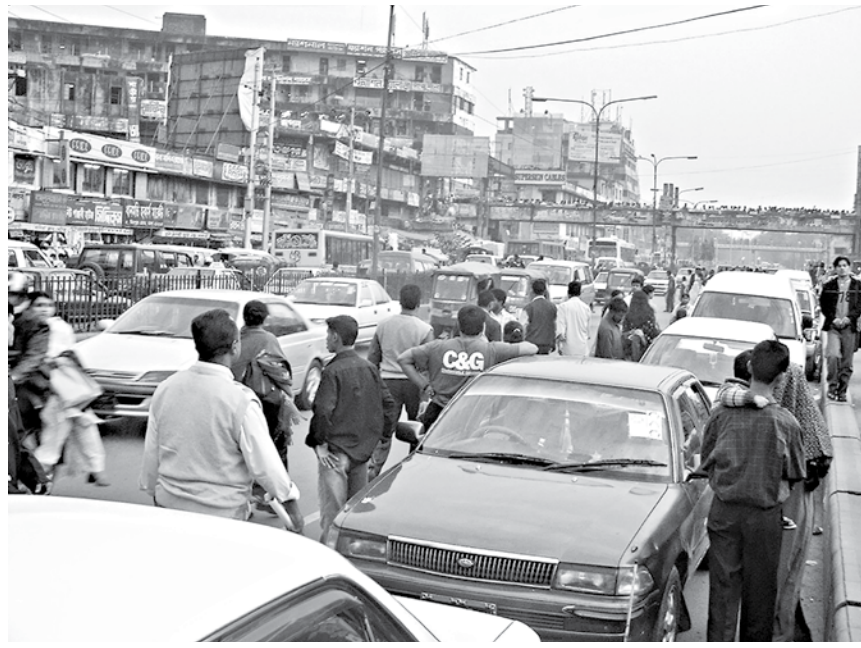
Around the world, countless cities—

including Dhaka—celebrate World Car-Free Day on September 22 every year. This day serves as a useful reminder that the automobile was meant to serve us, not vice versa.

We pour our money into vehicles and the infrastructure to serve them. We lose blood and limbs in the inevitable crashes that occur when people operate heavy vehicles at a speed more than 30km/hour. We accept that we will breathe filthy air, and that millions of people worldwide will die prematurely each year from air pollution. We prioritise the rights of cars over the rights of people. And what do we get in return? Endless congestion and ugly, unliveable cities.

None of that is inevitable. People have lived in cities for thousands of years; automobiles are a recent entrant. Given all the disasters they have wreaked, it is well past the time to consider whether allowing, nay, inviting them into our cities was a wise choice.

There is a saying that if we aspired to make our cities polluted, dangerous, and congested, we could hardly have chosen a better way than to make them auto-centric. If, on the other hand, we wish to have cleaner air, safer streets, easier travel, and more active, happy residents, then we should make major changes. Those changes involve both a carrot and a stick. The carrot is in making better transport options—walking, cycling, rickshaws, and public



Remember how Dhaka streets looked during the lockdowns? It could become a reality, instead of what this photo shows, if we start devaluing the use of cars.

PHOTO: COURTESY

transit—attractive, convenient, and affordable. The stick involves making trips by cars (and motorbikes) more cumbersome and expensive, by not allowing them everywhere and by charging both for the time and space occupied when they are parked.

In our globalised world, it is easy to see the results of different approaches.

Car-centric cities around the world are congested, polluted, and dangerous. Cities that reward people for moving about without a car are vastly more pleasant.

It will not be easy to break the stronghold that the three-headed monster—car, fuel, and road construction companies—has over our

governments. All of us are, to some degree, susceptible to the propaganda they put out, genuinely believing that modernity means cars, and that pollution, congestion, and crashes are inevitable. But we can work to liberate ourselves and our governments from the monster's malevolent influence. We can demand that the rights of children to walk and cycle safely to school, and for adults to commute safely and conveniently without a car, should take precedence over the "right" of people to drive and park.

We can make our demands clear through our actions and words. We can learn more about urban planning and transport, and how they play out in different cities. How some cities are striving to become "15-minute cities" where everything important is within a 15-minute walk or bicycle ride of residences. How some cities have started to convert roads for cars into bicycle avenues, or to convert road space on weekends temporarily into a space for lively, fun social gatherings, during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

Most important of all, we can dare to believe in, dream of, and work for something infinitely better than the polluted, car-centric cities that our alien visitors will otherwise discover.

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The vaccine apartheid must end

ANIS CHOWDHURY and JOMO KWAME SUNDARAM

VACCINE costs have pushed many developing countries to the end of the Covid-19 inoculation queue, with most low-income nations not even lining up. What's worse, less vaccinated poor nations cannot afford fiscal efforts to provide relief or stimulate recovery—let alone achieve Agenda 2030.

Excluding by appropriating

Developing countries now account for more than 85 percent of global pandemic deaths. By early September, *The Economist* estimated actual Covid-19 deaths worldwide at 15.2 million, rather than the official 4.6 million.

In six of the 10 countries with the highest fatality rates, less than a 10th of their populations were fully vaccinated as of August 10. In the other four, no more than a third were fully vaccinated.

Now, as rich nations buy up more vaccines for third shots, vaccination inequities are becoming starker. Buying up hundreds of millions of doses, they penalise poorer countries who are already doubly deprived. Rich countries will likely have about 1.2 billion extra doses by the end of 2021!

More than 5.41 billion vaccine shots have been administered worldwide, with 81 percent in only 10 high and upper middle-income

12, despite earlier official hesitation. US President Joe Biden expects to launch a campaign for a further 100 million booster shots this month.

France began administering boosters to people over 65 years old from September. The UK has announced offering a third dose from late September. Germany, Belgium and other European countries followed suit.

Now, the vaccine supply will decline further as Pfizer and Moderna sell booster doses. Two new Pfizer-BioNTech facilities have been approved to manufacture boosters in France and Germany. Meanwhile, Moderna is scaling up booster production in Massachusetts and New Hampshire in the US. Almost all the 3.2 billion Pfizer and Moderna doses to be produced this year have already been purchased by the US and Europe.

The WHO DG lambasted this "scandalous inequity" at the World Health Assembly in May. The UN health agency has repeatedly called for delaying booster provision, arguing that the most vulnerable people worldwide should be vaccinated first.

Pfizer and Moderna have not provided details on their booster prices. An economist has estimated that, sold at present prices, the booster shot sale would represent roughly a 50 percent increase in revenue over the longer run.

to recommend Covid-19 vaccine boosters. A European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control report this month affirmed that "there is no urgent need" for booster shots, except for those in frail health.

The WHO noted on August 18 that the current data did not support the case for booster shots. Scientists described official decisions approving third booster shots as "shocking" and "criminal." When US authorities approved boosters, two top vaccine officials quit in protest.

Independent research on Pfizer's two-dose vaccine suggests that it provides long-term immunity for years, contrary to the company's

to such technologies—terming the initiative "nonsense."

Vaccine equity necessary

There is also a practical reason behind seeking vaccine equity. We are all safer when everyone is vaccinated. New, more vaccine-resistant variants are emerging, endangering everyone. Rich countries protecting their own citizens will not prevent new mutants from emerging. New infections risk triggering a resurgence with new, more dangerous mutations.

The Delta variant, first reported in India in late 2020, surged in March as few there had been vaccinated.

Ironically, the Serum Institute of India has the world's largest vaccine production capacity by far, but it has been largely underutilised for Covid-19 vaccines.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warns that highly infectious variants could derail economic recovery, cutting global output by USD 4.5 trillion by 2025. But the Economist Intelligence Unit estimated the world economy could lose USD 2.3 trillion in 2021 alone, due to delayed vaccinations, with developing nations losing most.

As the WHO DG said: "Vaccine

inequity is the world's biggest obstacle to ending this pandemic and recovering from Covid-19... Economically, epidemiologically and morally, it is in all countries' best interest to use the latest available data to make life-saving vaccines available to all."

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As rich nations buy up more vaccines for third shots, vaccination inequities are becoming starker. Buying up hundreds of millions of doses, they penalise poorer countries who are already doubly deprived.

latest claims. Also using mRNA technology, Moderna's vaccine should have similar longer-term efficacy.

As Covid-19 vaccines are still new, such expectations remain subject to confirmation. As with most vaccines, "memory response" triggers antibody protection when someone vaccinated is infected, even after natural response levels have waned.

Perhaps most worryingly, as big pharmaceutical companies transform their business strategies to generate more profits from boosters, their incentives change. They have less reason to develop vaccines fully immunising against the Covid-19 virus, or even to ensure that everyone is vaccinated.

Apartheid booster

Supplying boosters reduces vaccines available to others. Supplies to poorer countries have already been greatly reduced by rich countries securing many times more than what their populations need.

Some have even abused the COVAX scheme, which is purportedly designed for equitable distribution of vaccine doses to poorer countries. COVAX aimed to deliver a billion vaccine doses in 2021, but had only delivered 217 million by August, according to Unicef.

Meanwhile, many rich countries continue to block the request to the World Trade Organization to temporarily suspend Covid-related intellectual property rights. This waiver would enable developing countries to affordably produce tests, vaccines, treatments, equipment, and other such needs.

Earlier, Big Pharma leaders rejected WHO's Covid-19 Technology Access Tool (C-TAP) initiative to share technologies and research knowledge in order to accelerate affordable production of and access



It's an outrage that some countries are stocking up on Covid-19 jabs to administer third shots as boosters, when a large segment of the world population is still waiting to get their first shots.

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

countries. Meanwhile, the poorest countries have only received 0.4 percent.

In January, the World Health Organization (WHO) director-general voiced caution: "I need to be blunt: the world is on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure—and the price of this failure will be paid with lives and livelihoods in the world's poorest countries."

Profits booster

In early July, Pfizer and BioNTech announced plans to get emergency authorisation for booster vaccine doses. Pfizer then met with US officials to press their case, while Moderna applied for approval this month.

Following the Israeli president's third shot on July 30, nearly a million boosters have been administered in the US since August

Moderna raised its 2021 vaccine sales forecast for its first two doses to USD 19.2 billion in May. So, booster sales should add about USD 10 billion. Meanwhile, Pfizer raised its own forecast by more than 70 percent to USD 26 billion, with booster sales bringing USD 13 billion more.

Profits over science

Rich countries' practices actually go against most of the scientific advice. The case for boosters is not scientifically established. The majority of scientists do not agree that boosters are the best way to deal with new threats. Citing lack of credible data, scientists have opposed boosters in reputable journals, including *Nature*.

On August 6, the European Union's drugs regulator noted that there was not enough evidence

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১.	প্রতিষ্ঠানের নাম	: বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সংসদ সচিবালয়।
২.	অর্থের উৎস	: জিওবি।
৩.	দরপত্র আহ্বানের বিজ্ঞপ্তি নম্বর ও তারিখ	: ১১.০০.০০০০.৬০৯.০৬৯.০৬৭.২০২১.২৯৬ তারিখ: ২০-০৯-২০২১।
৪.	দরপত্রের ধরণ	: ওপেন টেন্ডার।
৫.	প্যাকেজ নম্বর	: প্যাকেজ-৪৮
৬.	কাজের সংক্ষিপ্ত বিবরণ	: মানিক মিয়া অ্যাভিনিউস্থ ৩ নং সংসদ-সদস্য ভবনের ৩৬টি ফ্ল্যাট এবং শেরেবাংলা নগর সদস্য ভবনের ২০টি অফিস কক্ষের জন্য আসবাবপত্র ক্রয়।
৭.	দরপত্রের সংখ্যা	: ০১টি।
৮.	সরবরাহের সময়	: চুক্তি অনুযায়ী।
৯.	দরপত্র দাখিলের শর্তাবলী	: (১) দরপত্র তফসিলের সাথে ২০২১-২০২২ অর্থ বছরের ট্রেড লাইসেন্স, (২) ২০২১-২০২২ কর বর্ষের আয়কর পরিশোধের সনদপত্র (কোম্পানীর ক্ষেত্রে তার সর্বশেষ আর্থিক বছরের পরিশোধিত আয়কর সনদ), (৩) বিন সাটিফিকেট (১৩ ডিজিট), (৪) আইএসও সাটিফিকেট (৯০০১ : ২০১৫), (৫) হালনাগাদ ব্যাংক সলভেন্সি সাটিফিকেট, (৬) ব্যাংকে এক কোটি টাকা থাকার প্রমাণক অর্জিনাল স্টেটমেন্ট (২৮ সেপ্টেম্বর ২০২১ হতে ১৮ অক্টোবর ২০২১ তারিখের মধ্যে), (৭) সরকারি সহায়/প্রতিষ্ঠানে আসবাবপত্র সরবরাহে পাঁচ বছরের অভিজ্ঞতা সনদ, (৮) এক কোটি টাকার আসবাবপত্র সরবরাহে কাজের কার্যাদেশ, (৯) দরপত্র ক্রয়ের মূল রশিদ, (১০) ম্যানুফ্যাকচার প্রান সাটিফিকেট, (১১) উড সিজনিং অ্যান্ড ট্রিটমেন্ট সাটিফিকেট, (১২) লেকার সাটিফিকেট, (১৩) Forest Stewardship Council Certificate (FSC), (১৪) Import Registration Certificate (IRC) ও (১৫) এনআইডি-র কপি। বর্ণিত শর্তাবলী ছাড়াও দরপত্রে উল্লিখিত অন্যান্য শর্তাবলী এক্ষেত্রে প্রযোজ্য হবে এবং সকল কাগজপত্র সত্যায়িত হতে হবে।
১০.	দরপত্র তফসিলের মূল্য	: ২০০০/- (দুই হাজার) টাকা (অক্ষরতযোগ্য)।
১১.	দরপত্র জামানত	: দরপত্রের সাথে সিনিয়র সহকারী সচিব, সদস্য ভবন শাখা, বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সংসদ সচিবালয় এর অনুকূলে ১,৪৫,০০০/- (এক লক্ষ পয়তাল্লিশ হাজার) টাকার পে-অর্ডার (ফেরত যোগ্য) দাখিল করতে হবে।
১২.	টেন্ডার ডাখিলের তারিখ	: দরপত্র দাখিলের দিন থেকে ১২০ (একশত বিশ) দিন।
১৩.	প্রি টেন্ডার মিটিং	: ১২ অক্টোবর ২০২১ তারিখ, রোজ মল্লবার, সকাল ১১.০০ ঘটিকায় যুগ্ম-সচিব (প্রশাসন-২), বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সংসদ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা এর অফিস কক্ষ।
১৪.	দরপত্র তফসিল বিক্রয়ের স্থান ও ঠিকানা	: সহকারী সচিব (অর্থ-১), (দক্ষিণ পশ্চিম ব্লক, লেভেল-৫, কক্ষ নম্বর-৫২৩) বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সংসদ সচিবালয়, ঢাকা।
১৫.	দরপত্র তফসিল বিক্রয়ের তারিখ ও সময়	: ২৮ সেপ্টেম্বর ২০২১ তারিখ সকাল ০৯-০০ ঘটিকা হতে ১৮ অক্টোবর ২০২১ তারিখ অপরাহ্ন ৫-০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত (অফিস চলাকালীন)।
১৬.	দরপত্র দাখিল এবং খোলার তারিখ, সময় ও স্থান	: দাখিল : ২০ অক্টোবর ২০২১ তারিখ, রোজ বুধবার, সকাল ০৯-০০ ঘটিকা হতে ১২-০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত। খোলা : ২০ অক্টোবর ২০২১ তারিখ, রোজ বুধবার, দুপুর ১২-১৫ ঘটিকা। স্থান : উপসচিব(প্রশাসন-১) এর কার্যালয়, কক্ষ নম্বর-৭৪১, ব্লক-পূর্ব, লেভেল-৭।
১৭.	বিশেষ নির্দেশনা	: কর্তৃপক্ষ কোন কারণ দর্শানো ব্যতিরেকে যে কোন দরপত্র বা সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ কিংবা বাতিলের ক্ষমতা সংরক্ষণ করেন।
১৮.	টেন্ডার আহ্বানকারী কর্মকর্তার নাম, পদবী, ঠিকানা ও ফোন নম্বর	: আবদুর রহমান, সিনিয়র সহকারী সচিব (সদস্য ভবন শাখা), বাংলাদেশ জাতীয় সংসদ সচিবালয়, শেরেবাংলা নগর, ঢাকা-১২০৭, ফোন নম্বর-৫৫০২৮৯৮৯।

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