

Crisis at Biman

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IMRAN ASIF

Strat-e-gy [strat-e-jee] (plural strat-e-gies) *noun*. A carefully devised plan of action to achieve a goal, or the art of developing or carrying out such a plan.

HERE you have it. If you would care to look into any of the world's dictionaries, this is just about how the word "strategy" is defined. As I write this article, a series of events are taking place surrounding Biman. The combined body of Biman's trade unions, Biman Sammito Sangram Parishad (BSSP), have just suspended the indefinite strike they had called to force the rather "unmotherly" government to take a look at the state-owned airline.

It was important that the unions called the strike off, because if it did not, all foreign airlines operating into Bangladesh would have been faced with an inevitable suspension of flights due to non-availability of ground services.

That would have been scandalous, and more than anything else, the country's image internationally would have been diminished. But the actual problems for which the unions had decided to go on strike are far from being over.

The unions demanded immediate injection of capital into Biman, in order for it to survive and sustain. But this critical situation at Biman has been deliberately brought upon by the management of the airline over at least the last four years. Surprised? Read on.

Biman's current fleet includes five DC-10-30 aircraft, providing 1,373 seats in total, and equalling to 53% of Biman's total seat availability from its entire fleet of aircraft. On August 17, 2001, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) had issued an Airworthiness Directive which included two Service Bulletins (SB DC10-78-061/062) to modify the thrust reversers of all DC-10 aircraft operating in the world, including that of Biman. The modification was mandatory for all airlines to

complete by September 30, 2006 for the DC-10s they wish to operate beyond that date.

Biman's board of executive directors, headed by the erstwhile managing director, held as many as nine meetings between July 22, 2003 and November 20, 2005, in all of which the issue of this mandatory modification was raised for discussion and approval. The management could afford to be naive enough not to have made a decision until the meeting of the board of directors held on January 5, 2006 when the modification was finally approved, way too late to get the modification complete before the September 30, 2006 deadline, which in effect will result in grounding all five of Biman's DC-10s.

Throughout this period of over two years, invaluable time was wasted in the name of seeking unnecessary clarification from the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), manufacturer Boeing, and service provider MRA Systems, all of whom had rejected Biman's plea for a waiver from the

modification, which from the moment of its issuance was meant to be mandatory. These deliberate actions to force the grounding of Biman's workhorse aircraft seems to be nothing but a scandalous sabotage, with the intent of justifying outrageously expensive lease of aircraft, as was the case in Biman's leasing of two B737-300s in 2005. These people who are sabotaging Biman from inside the organization, essentially close to the aces of the government, deserve to be brought to swift justice.

Recently, the Ministry of Civil Aviation & Tourism has issued an official invitation for Expression of Interest from airlines interested in becoming a "Strategic Partner" of Biman. It is a wise move that may help Biman to get its acts together and be more competitive in the global airline industry defying the "sinking" it has been experiencing through decades. A prime example is Sri Lankan Airlines who have benefited largely from associating itself with Emirates. But local newspaper reports have alleged that the case of Biman is again aimed at favouring a quarter close to the government. That would be unfortunate, because you cannot pull a bullock-cart with a bunch of donkeys.

Biman urgently needs money, a lot of that actually. It needs to pay \$7.5 million for the engines lying with KLM and MTU so two

grounded DC-10s can take to the skies again, \$2.8 million to carry out the modification on the four DC-10s, out-station fuel bills amounting to approximately Tk 20 crore, and last but not least, for the people who keeps Biman flying.

Most importantly, Biman should not only prepare a survival plan, but also a sustainability plan. It should lose much of its manpower weight by means of mutual agreement with the employees. It should also find a way to pay off, over a period of time, the outstanding fuel bills with Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) amounting to approximately Tk 1,000 crore.

On August 4, the day before the unions were supposed to go on strike, the state minister of civil aviation & tourism had a meeting with the finance minister regarding the cash requirement for Biman to handle the crisis. The finance minister was seen on television channels criticizing Biman for being utterly inefficient and unprofessional by minimal business standards as it is a commercial organization, albeit owned by the state. This gentleman endlessly impresses me with such abstract statements from time to time. Which other airline in the world can he name, which is bound to follow rules anywhere similar to what is described in Public Procurement Regulation (PPR) 2003 and is still efficiently operational?

I am told that Biman's Authorized Capital is Tk 750 crore,



is a nightmare for any commercial airline, and more than anyone else, the finance minister should know better. To stay competitive in the global airline industry, Biman should be exempted from having to follow that. And before that is done, the board of directors of Biman should be saved from unnecessary bureaucrats and the executive management comprising of the airline's professionals should be given thorough and independent decision-making authority.

The PPR-2003 in simple words

of which so far approximately Tk 382 crore has been paid up by the government. I am also told that the government owes Biman an amount to the tune of Tk 600 crore as subsidies for the operation of VVIP flights over the years. Still, our beloved finance minister, while speaking to reporters, said he does not have an allocation for Biman in his budget, and will see if he can get Biman a loan from the banks. Bizarre!

The "Things To Do" list to get Biman on track would be a tediously long one, but right at the

top should be to get the government to start behaving. Ill strategies to choke the airline to death should be fought out. We, as a nation, have a history of fighting out the ills and the evils.

The author, currently an aviation industry consultant, has previously worked on projects with The Boeing Company, Honeywell Aerospace, and FAA's Operational Evolution Plan (OEP) in 2004-2005.

Invasion of the managers

The wide-scale Indian invasion of Bangladeshi industrial and commercial management is unhealthy and detrimental to the growth of management skill of the younger generation of the educated youth of Bangladesh. Even some of the trading houses are hiring low calibre Indian managers at salaries and benefits 8 to 10 times higher than those normally offered to a Bangladeshi with similar talent.

MUNIM CHOWDHURY

INDIA has achieved global respect for its managerial talents and many Indians are enjoying top positions in the American corporate world. At least half a dozen Indians are CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, including Pepsi Co. Even conservative British companies are filling up top posts with Indian talent. A few years ago, one of the best known marketing schools in the world, the Kellogg School of Business of Northwestern University, after a global search for many months found a dean for the business school, an Indian from Gauhati. No one can deny the fact that India is a major producer of highly talented management and technical personnel today.

India produced Hinduism for domestic consumption and non-violent Buddhism for export. Today India is exporting bifurcated talent to the two worlds. A grade, highly talented people are exported to the western world, B and C grade to the developing countries, and the least talented D grade find their way to Bangladesh. The Bangladeshi entrepreneurs appear to be impressed by the English speaking abilities of the Indian managers.

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some of the trading houses are hiring low calibre Indian managers at salaries and benefits 8 to 10 times higher than those normally offered to a Bangladeshi with similar talent. They live in Gulshan and Baridhara's posh apartments, enjoy chauffeur-driven cars, and employ armies of domestic help. This is certainly unfair and unjust.

The majority of these managers come to Bangladesh without work permits. They remit home their earnings through unofficial channels. A Bangladeshi owner of a distribution house (distributor of imported products) boastfully told me: "I have 30 expatriate managers." Further enquiry revealed that all thirty are Indians, mostly without work permits. Many of those managers do not appear to have the type of skills unavailable in Bangladesh, which would have made them deserving of the kind of compensation they are being paid.

A result of hiring Indian managers in this manner, when we have some educated Bangladeshi youth with comparable talent whose skills can be easily developed, is that we are destroying the hopes and aspiration of our own talented younger generation.

The multi-national company, British American Tobacco, managed its business most professionally in Bangladesh over the last 36 years without having to import Indian managers. Rather, BAT exported dozens of talented Bangladeshi managers to associated companies overseas, includ-

ing to the position of director and managing director. By training and allowing Bangladeshi managers to develop and exercise their skills, they have also contributed to filling many top positions in other multinational companies here in Bangladesh and overseas. Four of its managers served as ministers to the government of Bangladesh and Pakistan (prior to 1971). If the opportunity is provided to educated Bangladeshi with talent and aptitude, their managerial skills can be developed at a much faster rate.

In not just the developed countries of Western Europe and North America, but in many African nations also there is legitimate need for expatriate talents where the rules of engagement of foreign workers are strictly enforced; justification for employment is scrutinized, and work permits issued only when legitimate need, lack of local talent, and the professional capabilities of the foreign worker in question are demonstrated.

If the developing countries of Africa can apply legal rules in employing foreign workers, then what prevents Bangladesh, also a developing country, from enforcing its own rules? Can any Bangladeshi work in a professional job in India without a work permit (other than domestic help and as the sex workers in Bombay and Delhi)?

It will only be fair and just for the government to look seriously into the matter and prevent illegal

engagement of foreign nationals for non-essential jobs in Bangladesh. It will require a little patience and sympathetic attention from our business community, too.

Immediately after the creation of Bangladesh in December 1971, some Indians in professional fields in New York expressed their opinion that "this is the right time for Indians to move into Bangladesh and help run business and industry." Maybe they thought it was the right time to replace our Pakistani masters. However, it took another 25 years and the process started slowly about 10 years ago. It will take its toll on the new generation of Bangladeshi boys and girls, maybe in the same way as it did prior to 1971, unless we wake up to the reality and guard the interests of our younger generation.

The Bangladesh government should not allow needless engagement of Indian managers or for that matter any other foreign nationals in Bangladeshi industrial and commercial houses. If these Indians were top-rated talents, they would not come to Bangladesh, at the very least they would find their way to Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and Dubai, if not North America and Europe.

A little research and discussion with Indian managers will confirm that they certainly do not enjoy life in Dhaka but they are here for the money and its associated comforts. Why not give our own youth with similar education and aptitude the same opportunity and dignity that are being provided to Indians, to develop their management skills? Our industries, business houses and country would benefit more in the long run as a result.

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Lost in translation?

The most common form of translating films made in Bangladesh is through subtitles. Unfortunately, except for a handful of the movies produced and directed by new age and alternative filmmakers, Bangladeshi productions do not have high-quality subtitles. I am really surprised by it because so many Bangladeshis are either bi-lingual or multi-lingual.

BINA D'COSTA

ONE of the subtweets of Sofia Coppola's 2003 film *Lost in Translation* is to remind us in a very witty but subtle manner of the accuracy or truth being lost in the complex processes of crossing beyond one language to the other. And this is the context of my discussion today. I love to watch movies and documentaries from all parts of the world. And it is always a delight to watch Bangladeshi productions. Just to mention a few, Abdul Jabbar Khan's *Mukh o Mukhosh* as the first film from Bangladesh, Shubash Dutta's *Dumurer Phool*, *Boshudhara*, *Arunodoyer Agnishakhyi*, Alamgir Kabir's *Shurjokonyona*, *Shimana Perieye*, Zahir Raihan's *Jibon Theke Neya*, Rajen Taralder's *Palnoko*, Shaik Niamat Ali and Mashiuddin Shaker's *Shurjyo Dighol Bari* had tremendous values across genres and made lasting impressions on Bengali culture.

Nonetheless, in my young and wild days, just like my friends, I ignored mainstream Bengali movies and would laugh at the romanticism, sudden eruption of music and highly melodramatic performances in them. It was just not "cool" to watch Bangladeshi films. While at the University, I detested the Bangladeshi films which borrowed heavily from Bollywood and were full of superfluous violence, deep-rooted gender biases, chauvinistic pat-

terns of interaction and banal plots.

Alternative filmmakers brought a breath of fresh air to Bangladeshi films. Partly due to the fact, that as an expatriate Bangladeshi, I just crave even minuscule drops of "Bangaliana" and largely due to these original and innovative film-makers, I have become quite fond of Bengali films in recent years. To name a few, Tareque and Catherine Masud's *Matir Moina*, 2002, *Muktir Kotha*, 1999, *Muktir Gaan*, 1995; Shameem Akhter's *Itihash Konnya*, 2002; Yasmin Kabir's *My Migrant Soul*, 2001; Tanvir Mokammel's *Achin Pakhi*, 1996 *Morshedul Islam's Chaka*, 1993; Nasiruddin Yusuf's *Ekatturer Jishu*, 1993 gradually made me interested in alternative Bangladeshi films and documentaries. I even started watching some popular Bengali films to remind myself of home; to make myself nostalgic about those amusing moments, making fun of the performers while watching these with friends. However, it seems to me, we are still far behind when it comes to creating international audience.

According to Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia, subtitles are textual versions of the dialogue in films and television programmes, usually displayed at the bottom of the screen. They can either be a form of written translation of a dialogue in a foreign language, or a

written rendering of the dialogue in the same language -- with or without added information intended to help viewers with hearing disabilities to follow the dialogues. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subtitle>)

There are also other methods of translating films produced into a foreign language. These are dubbing and lecturing. In dubbing, voices are recorded over the original voices of the performers in a different language. It is the method in which "the foreign dialogue is adjusted to the mouth and movements of the actor in the film," (Dries 1995: 9 quoted in Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997: 45) and "its aim is seen as making the audience feel as if they were listening to actors actually speaking the target language" (Agnieszka Szarkowska, *Translation Journal*, Volume 9, No 2, April 2005). In lecturing, a narrator translates the dialogues while the original voices could be heard in the background. Often in the former Soviet Union states this method was used to show movies.

The most common form of translating films made in Bangladesh is through subtitles. Unfortunately, except for a handful of the movies produced and directed by new age and alternative filmmakers, Bangladeshi productions do not have high-quality subtitles. I am really surprised by it because so many Bangladeshis are either bi-lingual

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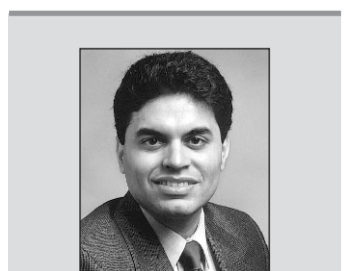
Bangladesh is the homeland of a people who are unique in this world because they fought for their right to speak a language in 1952. The rich history, the beauty and evocative nature of the Bengali culture are a source of pride for the people who speak it, who think in it and who write in it. It is indeed distressing that not enough attention is paid to the translation of dialogues in the movies.

The lack of sensitivity and attention to details, when it comes to translating, are frustrating. Some of the translations are totally wrong or simply do not make any sense. Sometimes, these subtitles show no understanding of cultural contexts. It is not politically correct to say "negro" or "native" anymore unless it refers to specific historic moments. In *Londoni Koyinna*, locals in the rural areas (*gramer manushera*) were repeatedly called "these natives." While we can mention native Chittagonians or native New Yorkers, the word has specific historic and political meaning in the colonial context and therefore if used without due regard for the politics of language, it may totally mean something else.

Our indifference may also be a sad reminder of our inability to embrace multi-culturalism and think outside our homogeneous boxes and recognize that others who cannot understand the language may well and truly be interested to know more about Bangladesh and our culture. What better way than films and documentaries?

Bina D'Costa writes from Australian National University.

Mao & Stalin, Osama & Saddam



FAREED ZAKARIA
writes from Washington

I'M glad George W Bush is using the bully pulpit to clarify the war on terror. Many of Bush's basic ideas -- such as the need for reform in the Arab world -- are sensible; it's their simplistic and botched execution, coupled with a mindless unilateralism, that have derailed his foreign policy. But recently the president, seeking to shore up domestic support for his policies, has been redefining the nature of the enemy. In doing so he

To speak, for example, of Sunni and Shiite fundamentalists as part of the same movement is simply absurd. They have hated each other for almost 14 centuries. Right now in Iraq, most of the violence is the work of Shiite militias, which are murdering people they claim are Sunni extremists. How can these two adversaries be part of a unified network?

is making a huge conceptual mistake, one that could haunt American foreign policy for decades.

Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have compared the current conflict to the Cold War, a decades-long struggle that was ideological and political in nature, though always with a military aspect. But if we're going to use history and learn from it, it is worrying that America is beginning to repeat one of the central strategic errors of the Cold War: treating a fractious group of adversaries as a unified monolith.

At the outset of the Cold War in 1949, a senior State Department official, Ware Adams, prepared a critique of America's evolving policy of containment. While accepting that international communism was a monolith and that diverse communist parties around the world shared aims and goals, Adams argued that Washington was playing into the Kremlin's hands by speaking of communism as a unified entity: "(Our policy) has endorsed Stalin's own thesis that all communists everywhere should be part of his monolith. By placing the United States against all com-

munist everywhere it has tended to force them to become or remain part of the monolith." For example, the memo explained, "in China, the communists are somewhat pressed toward being friends of the Kremlin by the fact that they can never be friends of ours." (The memo, previously unpublished, will appear in a forthcoming book by Marc Selverstone of the University of Virginia.)

Four decades later, the Soviet Union collapsed, undermined in good measure by the diversity within the communist world -- a diversity that the United States

should have done more to encourage. Had Washington been more attentive to the differences within international communism, the Sino-Soviet split might have taken place earlier, Egypt might have defected from the Soviet camp earlier and, perhaps most important, the rift between Beijing and Hanoi might have developed earlier, changing completely the character of the Vietnam War.

In a careful recent essay, former US intelligence official Harold P Ford documents that by the mid-to late 1950s the CIA was arguing that such splits were developing and should be exploited. Nevertheless, Ford writes, the agency's arguments met stiff "external resistance" from politicians and bureaucrats who were wedded to the idea -- no doubt once true -- of a unified communist monolith. Even sophisticated policymakers who saw the fracture lines couldn't see how to

sell the new approach to Americans who had been brought up to view all communists as evil. Words matter.

In the past few weeks President Bush has, for the first time, started describing America's adversaries as part of "a single movement," "a worldwide network," with a common ideology. He notes that these groups come from different traditions but concludes that what unites them -- their hatred of free societies -- is more important. This kind of rhetoric does have the benefit of making the adversary seem larger and more sinister, thereby drumming up domestic support for the administration's policies, but it comes at great cost.

To speak, for example, of Sunni and Shiite fundamentalists as part of the same movement is simply absurd. They have hated each other for almost 14 centuries. Right now in Iraq, most of the violence is the work of Shiite militias, which are

murdering people they claim are Sunni extremists. How can these two adversaries be part of a unified network?

A look at Bush's remarks on Iran will show how such a monochromatic view distorts America's strategic thinking. Recently he spoke of Iran in the context of a worldwide movement of Shiite extremists. This movement, Bush argued, has managed to take control of a major power, Iran, and use it as a launching pad to spread its terrorist agenda.

I'm not sure the president actually believes in the transnational threat of a "Shiite crescent." If he does, why would he have invaded Iraq and handed it over to another group of Shiite extremists? (The parties that rule Iraq -- and whose militias are killing people -- are conservative, religious Shiites, often with ties to Iran.) In fact, Iraqi Shiites are different from Iranian

Shiites. They have separate national agendas and interests. To conflate them into one group, and then to toss in Sunni Arab extremists as comrades in arms, is bad policy.

The world of Islam is extremely diverse. We should recognize and act on this diversity -- between Shiites and Sunnis, Persians and Arabs, Asians and Middle Easterners -- and most especially between moderates and radicals. But instead the White House is lumping Chechen separatists in Russia, Pakistani-backed militants in India, Shiite politicians in Iraq and Sunni jihadists in Egypt all together as one worldwide movement. This is, of course, exactly what Osama bin Laden has argued all along. But why is Bush making bin Laden's case?

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