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Biman



It's in the news that the govt has approved a proposal to buy a few aircraft for Biman Bangladesh Airlines. I am shocked to hear the news. Will new aircraft solve Biman's performance and management problems? Of course not. We all, including the Honourable Finance Minister, know it. We need to define our Objectives and Goals before pumping in Tax Payers' money in a big hole. We need to plug all other holes to stop draining of our hard-earned money. Here are a few points for the State Minister for Civil Aviation to ponder.

Do we need a national airline? Many countries including the US, UK do not have state owned airlines. They are all privatised to improve efficiency and profitability. So, why do we have to have a state owned airline? What purpose it's actually serving? We have deregulated Telecom and Electrical Power Generation, why not international routes for airlines? Biman is operating in a very complex international commercial market. If we want to operate Biman with profits in mind it has to be run with compatible policies and infrastructure. And it's not easy. If our objectives are something else we don't know about, please spell them out.

Why so many types of aircraft? If the government goes ahead with plans to buy B777-200 and A330-200s, Biman will end up with having Five different types of aircraft. Will Biman be able to build up capability to maintain them? The simple answer is no. Maintenance is one of the major heads of expenditure of an airline.

Who is managing Biman? A very tricky question. Do we have a Business Plan to manage it? Of course not. Biman does have a Management, but that is run by everybody else including Unions. It is apparent that policy decisions are never taken by Biman Management. It's taken by others.

Biman has been historically used as a vehicle for corruption. Buying new aircraft to try to make it profitable is just another scam may be. Biman is not going to make any profit if they do not reassess their route structure. They must trim down their workforce. At almost 500 employees per aircraft, it's almost 300 % over the industry average for Biman's kind of set-up. It's sad to see draining of hard earned national resources so openly and brazenly.

Rahim Ahmad Munshi, Kingsford, Sydney, Australia



Save children from drowning!

Injuries are one of the leading causes of death and disability to children (under the age of 11 years) in Bangladesh, and drowning is one of the largest killers of children once they start crawling and walking. Traditional approaches to public health have attempted improving child survival by focusing largely on infectious diseases such as diarrhoea and pneumonia; however as these are controlled deaths from drowning occur each day and take precious young lives. Drowning is both predictable and preventable - and there are interventions that can be used to stop this menace from occurring. It is time for the health and research communities in Bangladesh to give appropriate attention and effort to explore why drowning occurs, what can be done, and how quickly can specific interventions be implemented to save children.

Individuals and institutions from the US are joining hands with local institutions in Bangladesh to research this issue - we need to understand this health problem. Ignoring this cause of death in children is no longer an option.

Adnan A. Hyder, Maryland, USA

Dollar crisis and exchange rate

The banks are reporting a shortage of dollars, which is making it difficult for them to make payments for imports. It has been obvious for years that Bangladesh would suffer a foreign exchange crisis in 2005. We all knew that the Multi-Fibre Arrangement (MFA) would expire this year, making it difficult for Bangladeshi garments manufacturers to compete with Chinese manufacturers. We knew that this would reduce our garments exports and hence our inflows of foreign exchange. What we did not know is that petroleum prices would be so high for so long in 2005. In addition to fall in garments exports we are faced with bigger bills for petroleum imports.

There is only one way for the banks to deal with this. They must continue to raise the value of the dollar in relation to the taka. This will discourage imports of non-essential goods (goods other than petroleum and industrial raw materials). It will also help the garment exporters to compete with Chinese manufacturers. The taka will have to continue depreciating until the supply of dollars (from exports) is equal to the demand for dollars (to pay for imports).

We hope that the Bangladesh Bank and the finance ministry will not hinder the banks as they carry out the necessary depreciation of the taka.

Kazi Zahid Hasan Dhanmondi

Why gas cylinders?

Our government is thinking of supplying gas in homes through gas cylinders. How wise this decision is? One thinks of going a step ahead in

progress and not stepping backwards! It was quoted by the finance minister that nowhere in the world gas is supplied through pipelines. Not only in the US but in our neighbouring country India gas is supplied through pipelines in a few areas. I was living in Lodi Road Complex in New Delhi and their gas was supplied through pipelines with meters to read its usage.

Withdrawing the present system of gas supply will lead to accidents, as cylinders are very risky. Instead, our government should fix meter in every home to stop wastage of gas.

Anjana Gulshan-1, Dhaka

Indian visa

Everyday I pass through the Gulshan Avenue in the morning on my way to the workplace. We see hundreds of people queuing up along the avenue for Indian visa. They tolerate and brave the long line, heat, rain, hassle, brawls, etc. for the visa which they require for various purposes namely visit, business, medical treatment, tourism, to see an ailing relative or to attend a marriage ceremony etc.

Well, why do we need a visa? The answer is the High Commission would like to screen out undesirable elements from entering the country and to keep a tab on the persons visiting India. Honestly speaking, are all the hassles necessary? Indian border is so much porous that anybody with ill motives can sneak through the borders at ease. That leaves us with the vast majority of good, innocent, honest and business people.

The procedure can be simplified by giving a visa on arrival at the port of entry. Only special cases may be dealt with at the High Commission. Such practice will have the following

positive effects. People will be relieved from hassle and hardship of obtaining a visa in Dhaka. Time can be saved. The travellers will have more peace of mind. There will be more travels to India resulting in more sale of bus, train, airline tickets, which will generate more revenue and profit for the relevant sectors.

Lastly, when the whole Europe has opened up why should the sub-continent lag behind in easing sufferings of the people?

We would request the Indian High Commission to forward the suggestions to the authorities concerned with positive recommendations.

SN Mamoon Dhaka

When teachers are a problem

This has reference to Mr. Ashabuzzaman's letter 'A Sad Experience' in The Daily Star on 12 July.

If Mr. Ashabuzzaman's account of the behaviour of his Dhaka University teacher is true, should not the university that keeps such a person and calls him a teacher do some soul searching? I myself have been a university teacher for almost forty years and would sadly admit that such despicable behaviour by a university teacher in our country does not seem incredible to me.

I have known many who are capable of even worse. I have long felt that our teachers are a much bigger problem than our students. In fact, we have so many problem students mainly because we have an abundance of problem teachers.

AKM Mohiuddin

Dhanmondi, Dhaka

Finance minister and gas

Our outspoken finance minister has blasted his fellow countrymen for wasting precious gas to save a mere match stick, and also the practice that some people use it to dry cloths. He is certainly a wise man and he knows it is totally unwise to cast pearl before the swine. Now he has come up with a plan to stop the supply of gas through pipeline to houses and instead supplying it in cylinder, which will naturally be more expensive. What a way to teach the "swine".

It is okay for him if Niko burns up a total gas field and causes irreparable loss to ecology and environment of the area, if his fellow minister forces Bapex to pay more to Niko.

Our honourable finance minister has a habit of saving the big guys and picking the common people. He has imposed new tax on mobile Sim card. He could easily charge the mobile companies. If he had the intention of slashing call rate, he could take steps to make the call charge of the state owned mobile TeleTalk some 0.30 or 0.50 taka per minute so that others are forced to follow suit.

But no! He will find graft in everything and anything. He will call government employees thieves to get cheap limelight and has no prescription to remedy any of it. All he knows is to take money from common people's pockets.

A.K.M. Saifuddin On e-mail

Economic diplomacy

A news report "Dhaka energising economic diplomacy" published in The Daily Star of July 6 has drawn

my attention. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan has made known his intention to rejuvenate the diplomatic machine. He underlined economic diplomacy to boost diplomatic outputs. He set six priority fields to handle with utmost care and urgency. In this age of globalisation economic diplomacy is very much essential and lucrative. Without sound economic relation diplomatic relation is really unproductive. If Bangladesh wants to energise its economic diplomacy it will have to penetrate new markets, enhance export volume, manpower export and focus on development assistance, infrastructure and information and communication technology. It will have to attract more FDIs.

The foreign ministry seems to be listless and smug. Our diplomats lack professionalism. They are not being groomed perfectly for diplomatic assignments. In many cases political lackeys get ambassadorial appointments.

Molla Mohammad Shaheen Dept of English, DU

Debt relief

This year G8 Summit is aimed to address poverty especially in African countries. The G8 nations have pledged to provide debt relief to poverty-stricken countries and celebrities have used their support to raise consciousness among citizens of various countries. There is no denying that we are a poverty-stricken country. That fact is made clear by the number of beggars we see all around us, by the condition of living in the slums. It becomes even clearer when we see under aged children bearing the burden of earning an income for their families when they should be enjoying their youth and gaining education.

For all intents and purposes, Bangladesh deserves debt relief. The need for debt relief may seem like an insult and embarrassment to the educated that are capable of living a comfortable life. But it will go a long way to send a child from a large family to school or to actually provide agricultural subsidies etc, instead of having to pay the IMF back.

But the question that probably comes to mind is that if Bangladesh does get debt relief who will benefit? Will the government officials end up filling their pockets with the money or will it actually be put into use for subsidies, programmes etc. that really help the poor and the needy?

We need to make sure that the proper individuals or groups are benefited from this. If we are not able to guarantee this we do not deserve debt relief to already line the pockets of individuals who are comfortably placed.

Zeenat Z. Syed UPS eDeployment

Love

It is known to all that of all human emotions, love is the most fundamental, which is missing in many respects in the life of majority today. The situation is such that we are achieving everything in life but failing to gain and offer love. We see many spending their whole life in search of true love but are not able to get it.

The number of divorces is increasing in society.

We can call it love only when one is willing to sacrifice his own interest for the sake of his or her beloved. In reality, the greed for earning an income for their families when they should be enjoying their youth and gaining education

lessening the precious emotion called love for others.

Rubab Abdullah Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Preventing launch disaster

I have read with interest the letter written by Mr. S.A. Mansoor on the captioned subject and published in your July 10 issue. It is with regret that I have to say that it is not possible to prevent a launch from sinking while it encounters moderately rough weather or meets a collision. It is because the launches are not built to withstand rough weather or collision. In support of my foregoing statement I would like to draw the attention of the readers to the fact that it is only launches that are involved in the disasters that took place in our waterways since liberation. Passenger ships operated by BIWTC have never been involved in any such incident. Not even the two 40 years old passenger ships operating regularly between Chittagong and Barisal. These two ships regularly cross the turbulent Bay and for the past forty years these ships have done so without any major incident.

This is because of the simple reason that the contraption we call launch do not have to comply with "International Conversion on load line" whereas load line convention has to be followed in vessels and ships. During load line survey the watertight integrity of the vessel is ensured and certified. You may have seen in movies that ships encountering rough weather gets completely submerged under huge waves and again resurfaces because the vessel is watertight and no water can enter the vessel cargo

hold compartments, accommodation and engine room. The intact watertight integrity allows sufficient buoyancy to keep the ship afloat.

In conclusion, I would like to mention here that we have to live with launch disasters as long as these dangerous contraptions are allowed to ply in our rivers.

Salahuddin Ahmad On e-mail

Anti-smoking law

The other day, some of my students and I took our lunch at the BRAC restaurant, situated on the 4th floor of the BRAC-building in Mohakhali, Dhaka. Although the restaurant is mostly visited by educated people and business people, we had to shift from one table to another before we could find a healthy place far enough from the nearest cigarette smokers. When I asked the waiter of the restaurant for the non-smokers zone, to my total surprise, the man gave us a negative answer: smokers and non-smokers are forced to sit side by side in the BRAC-restaurant!

What is appalling is the fact that meanwhile there is an anti-tobacco law in Bangladesh and most of the countries in the world have banned smoking from all public places, including restaurants.

Is it so difficult for a big NGO like BRAC to give the correct example by asking their clientele and visitors to leave their cigarettes outdoors? This has all to do with common sense, nothing else. Just to give BRAC an example: the UNICEF building in Dhaka is declared 100% non-smokers.

Willy Legendre Baharchara, Cox's Bazar

London bombing: few thoughts

I woke up to an e-mail from a newspaper asking for my reaction to the London blasts. I wrote back at 5:20am, Pacific Standard Time, "What blast in London? Just got up and haven't checked the BBC". As I turned to the TV, the gravity of the tragic situation in my former hometown began to unfold. Pictures showed Russell Square, where I had made some of my fondest memories as an undergraduate and then a postgraduate at the University of London. King's Cross,

Euston and Tavistock Square all my former stomping grounds in a state of shock, deserted like a ghost town at 2:30pm on a working day. These were upsetting.

This will be an interesting day. Not quite like the morning of September 11, 2001, but similar. My thoughts are with all my friends in London and the city dwellers in general.

I condemn these dastardly attacks in no uncertain terms. The government of the UK, especially

Tony Blair, is to a large extent responsible for the war on Iraq based on lies and the atrocities and the chaos in the aftermath.

Shabbir A Bashar, PhD California, USA

I wish to express my deepest sympathies to Mr Cheesman and to all my friends and relatives living in England. I also wish to advise Ms. Asfia not to mix up things. One injustice to revenge another injustice doesn't make it even. A crime is a crime and that must be condemned to the fullest. Life is a precious gift of Allah and no one has any right to blow himself up or other innocent people. We all know that there are reasons of anger, desperation in the Muslim world but that cannot justify killing ordinary people.

I thank Dr Cheesman for raising money for the people of Bangladesh during the severe floods last year. Thank you. And let me tell you on behalf of most if not all Bangladeshi people that we share your pain, we do.

Shahid H Khandker Canada

The four bombings in London have brought back the fear of lack of safety and instability that everyone felt during the 9/11 incident. This

was an inhuman act which proved nothing but one thing: that these individuals are wrong and deprived of any semblance of feeling or intellectuality. A few individuals are responsible for this deed and I hope the world blames the individuals involved and not a nation, or a people or even a religion. This is the work of mad men. Unfortunately, in this case the reason was religion.

Nowhere in Islam is suicide or murder condoned and one can only hope that societies understand this and the innocent, peaceful Muslim populations do not suffer the repercussions of this barbaric act. To be honest one should not care about what could cause a person to commit suicide and at the same time end the lives of others. People will always be unhappy, there will always be conflict, argument, political issues, social issues, poverty and unrest.

The only reality is that world peace is at stake because of some mad men and their beliefs and it is up to people like us to take away that power from them.

Zeenat, UPS eDeployment

In response to Ashifa's letter dated July the 12 in The Daily Star, I would like point out that London bombing is somewhat different from other

incidents of such kind.

The crucial question is why some British born young men did something like that to their own country? What drove them to do something so barbaric? Some came up with generalisation that those young men were not well integrated into the mainstream British society and they were somewhat marginalised. But, generalisation of such kind is hard to establish, since, there are other marginalisation of different nature within the Great Britain. However, had some non-British people carried out the attack, the "point to ponder" could have been different from what it is now.

I think it is the ideology that provided with reason, confidence and provoked those young men to carry out such an attack on innocent members of the public.

AA Faruk, On e-mail

This is for attention of Dr. David Cheesman of Luton, UK (DS July 10), it goes without much saying that all peace loving people of Bangladesh solidly stand united with you against any terror or inhuman acts and we never support any dreadful event or action, be it against our own people or people at

large wherever it may be.

But as a normal human being, having a little bit of common sense, I want to convey my humble feeling that I also agree with Dr. Cheesman, as many will, nothing much will be achieved by terrorism --whoever is behind it. But we can perhaps eradicate terrorism if we all sincerely and honestly think and work to achieve the goal. What will come out of G8 or G80, for that matter, if we do not work to wipe it out from the roots.

I humbly say to the great people of Great Britain that you will perhaps not see terrorism again if you can get rid of a leader like Tony Blair and accept that 'Muslims are also Humans'.

AF Rahman, On e-mail

It is a matter of great concern that after the London bomb attack, Muslims are being targeted deliberately. More than half a million Bangladeshi expatriates living in London are passing every moment amid fear and scare of racial and communal tension. Already a British born Pakistani has been attacked. Mosques are being burnt down. Men and women are remaining at home, and children are abstaining

from going to school.

It is up to the British people and the government to tackle all kinds of racial tension and make their multicultural society unified, rather than divided in the name of colour and religion.

Md. Harisur Rahman JU

I have never been to England, let alone, London. My Father however fought in WWII and was stationed there. I remember him sharing his two years that he spent there, loading bombers. He talked well of the People and had some good memories even though war was raging. The folks at home he said teased him because when he came home from England, he had picked up an accent or so he said.

I am writing to you because London's great loss has gripped our hearts here at home. Some of us feel a need to come and be with you but not really knowing what we could do, or should do or say. We are praying for all of you especially those who have suffered personal loss and tragedy, that Allah send his mighty compassion and wrap his loving arms around you and you

must know He is with you through this time of trouble.

A reader, Missouri USA

The barbaric attacks on tubes and a bus in London are a sheer reminder of fact that global terrorism is not waning, rather augmenting day by day. Nobody and no place are safe from the heinous act of terrorism and mass killing. The terrorists are everywhere in one garb or the other. While we express our deepest condolences to the victims' families and show solidarity with the Londoners, we must also do every bit in our individual capacity to socially defeat the forces of terror. We can never let them play with the overwhelming Muslim sentiments against western policies in Iraq or elsewhere.

We must make sure that they have no voice at all in mainstream Muslim belief. The time has been very crucial for Muslims since 9/11 attacks. Since then, the criticisms, condemnations against terrorism and a war on terror could not, unfortunately, deflect or even slightly weaken the forces of terror.

AFM Mohiuddin Lalmatia, Dhaka

