

**Biman to be a PLC***But will it ameliorate Biman's problems?*

THE nation's flag carrier has been floundering progressively for many years and no one will question any kind of intervention that the government can conjure up to save it from total destruction. That the caretaker government has been concerned with its fate to initiate steps for its resuscitation before it can be fully revived into a healthy organisation is to be commended. But one wonders whether making it into a public limited company (PLC) is really the right approach to making Biman a healthy and profitable commercial venture, without making it more efficient in all respects first of all.

Converting Biman into a PLC is one of the several measures suggested to make it a viable undertaking. It is to be done by June, according to the government plans. But we are not sure whether that will bring about any degree of substantive or qualitative changes in the organisation. Having it owned by seven public sector organisations may not necessarily invest the management with the required efficiency and operational competence, the lack of which has been the major cause of its current pitiable state.

This we understand is a transitional step towards a new direction, an immediate action to stop the haemorrhaging. But we are convinced that at a time when drastic measures are required to change Biman's state what we have can at best be a move towards an ill-defined direction. For example, we are not aware as to who will comprise the proposed Board or who will be its head, and insofar as transforming Biman into a PLC, one is not sure when the shares will be offered to the public. But be that as it may, if the management is given only notional autonomy with little freedom of action and hamstrung by government intervention the flag carrier will continue to incur loss in future too.

We believe that the cause of Biman's decay is not really its organisational setup per se but because of the way it was managed over the years, used as a milch cow to line the pockets of the corrupt officials, some connected to the highest seat of power. Unbridled corruption, tolerated and encouraged by the powers that be, bad financial discipline with no accountability to anyone, combined to bring the national flag carrier to this fate. And these issues will have to be addressed urgently before other changes can prove to be of any benefit. Biman should be run like a business organisation on commercial lines. There cannot be any deviation from this fundamental business principle. Otherwise all changes will turn out to be merely cosmetic.

**Death of RMG worker***Settled issues need not be reopened*

THE death of a worker in police firing at a garment unit in Gazipur on Sunday raises anew the question of the malaise the RMG sector has long been suffering from. One would have thought that with a change in conditions lately coming in, such tragedy as the one in Gazipur would become a thing of the past. Indeed, the tripartite agreement among the government, garment owners and workers made it clear that serious efforts were on to bring about security and stability for all in the industry. Only a few days ago, some of the leading figures of the BGMEA held out the warning that those units which failed to fulfill the agreement by the end of June would have no opportunity to continue in business. That statement was taken as a sign of positive developments in the industry, those that would cater to the welfare of its workers.

We do not believe that what has happened at Fortuna Apparels in Gazipur takes things back to square one. But we do think that with troubleshooting mechanisms such as the tripartite deal now in place, such a sad incident ought not to have occurred. The workers in Gazipur were demonstrating to uphold their demand for a payment of their arrears for April. Besides, it appears they had another grievance, which was the reported move by the management of Fortuna Apparels to reduce overtime hours from 80 to 30 hours. The management of course has denied taking any such step. While demanding their dues, the workers too resorted to violent action, damaging property in the process. What is of critical importance here, though, is the propensity on the part of some people, in this case the police, to resort to extreme measures of mob control. On Sunday, how much of persuasion did the police and the garment unit management go for?

Incidents such as the one in question may give people the impression that apparently settled issues are being reopened once again. It is for the management of the garment industry to convince the country that they are serious about their business. That includes providing workers with the wages and benefits they need minimally to make both ends meet.

**Dump date-expired politics**

SHAHNOOR WAHID

**SENSE & INSENSIBILITY**

Dear politicians, how come you are agreeing to all the reform suggestions being put forward in various talk shows or seminars where many of you are taking part? What had happened to your good sense when you were in power? How come many of you are venting your anger now at the way the 'illustrious' sons and their cronies ripped through your beloved party and have taken it to where it is at the moment? As the founding members of the party it was your moral obligation and solemn duty to lodge protests and compel the party chairperson to take action against the corrupt elements within the party. Your silence is tantamount to abetting in the act.



THE commodity called 'Politics' that is still being sold in Bangladesh was made in the sixties and seventies. The date of manufacturing has long expired hence it has become unfit for human use. Therefore, on an urgent basis politicians will have to dump it in the Bay of Bengal and manufacture a new version that will look smart, be futuristic, pro-poor, pro-development and powerful enough to take on the challenges of the 21st Century.

No, dear politicians, you did not get it. You did not get it because your mindset has not changed yet. By futuristic we mean looking ahead with new concept and not selling the dreams of past leaders like Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Ziaur Rahman in new packets (No more cashing in on them, for God's sake!). By pro-poor we do not mean poverty alleviation of your poor sons and poor relations. By pro-development we do not mean you buying a taka two crore car or owning two hundred flats!

Therefore, it is apparent that besides dumping the date expired politics you will have to discard many more of your old habits, which are ridiculous, to say the least. You will have to discard the century old hartal (shut down), gherao (siege), jalao porao (burning) kind of programmes to achieve your political objectives.

You have no right to destroy the

property of the state or that of the people or hold the nation as hostage. Oh, we forgot to mention another favourite programme of the political parties... "Showdown" ...whatever that may mean! That has to stop too.

Then comes the most visible part of your ludicrousness. Please refrain yourself from showing that 'wagging finger' at one another

(thank God they do not show the finger that has an universal obscene connotation!). Look around the world and you will see that no politician threatens another by pointing a finger the way you people do in Bangladesh.

People are talking about more reforms. The list is in fact getting longer. In public meetings or in parliament you must not attack

the opposition political parties with obscene words or gestures.

Parliament is not your private club. You have been sent there by the people, through a mighty expensive process called 'election,' to create laws and debate on the rising price of food items and not display your deafness in saying crude jokes concerning your opponents.

More of that refreshing wind of change is blowing across the swathe of the country. Do you feel it, dear politicians? If you do then it is good news for us. But to live up to our expectation you will have to do more. You will have to stop laying foundation stones of bridges, hospitals, community centres, schools and colleges in your name.

Remember, those are done with public money. We do not see American president or French president or British prime minister or Indian prime minister running all over the country to look at their own names on a foundation stone. This trait is called narcissism.

If something is done with your own money, or your father's money, then and only then, you can have a foundation stone etched with your name. By the way, why don't you people bring an honest old resident of the area; an old staff of the hospital; a farmer or a dedicated schoolteacher to cut the ribbon or lay the foundation?

Next, you will have to stop

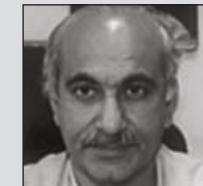
holding public meetings in the city or its outskirts. You do so only to get media coverage but in the process you totally bring the traffic to a halt for hours. Have you ever seen it done in any civilised country of the world? If not then why do you do it? Why do we have to tell you repeatedly not to do so? Don't you carry your common sense around?

Dear politicians, how come you are agreeing to all the reform suggestions being put forward in various talk shows or seminars where many of you are taking part? What had happened to your good sense when you were in power? How come many of you are venting your anger now at the way the 'illustrious' sons and their cronies ripped through your beloved party and have taken it to where it is at the moment?

As the founding members of the party it was your moral obligation and solemn duty to lodge protests and compel the party chairperson to take action against the corrupt elements within the party. Your silence is tantamount to abetting in the act.

You see, today people hardly trust the entire lot of politicians in Bangladesh. The reasons are best known to you. Therefore, now the onus is on you and you will have to come up with credible words, plans and actions. Times have changed.

Shahnoor Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star.

**Where is nowhere?**

MJ AKBAR

**BYLINE**

There are certainly forces inimical to India, based in or sponsored by elements in Pakistan. But they would achieve nothing if we in India did not have weaknesses that could be exploited. Nor is it very wise to keep suggesting that the internal security systems of India are so weak that they can be continually and easily penetrated by a foreign agency. Vigilance is the price of liberty, true. But vigilance needs three eyes, only one of which looks across the border. Two must look within.

De facto has been given the veneer of de jure. If Pakistan's Petalette-and-Moustache presidents take the Supreme Court for granted it is because the record permits them to do so. When was a coup in Pakistan ever declared illegal? When is a coup ever legal?

In practice, Pakistan's political system has found an entry route for Army chiefs to come to power. But it has not discovered an exit route. Dictators have lasted much longer than democrats because there is no system of accountability. Civilians see the mood of the people when they look ahead; they see the hunger of the armed forces when they look behind their backs.

They are hemmed in from both sides. The dictator shuffles off potential troublemakers (also known as corps commanders) behind his back, and ignores the people in front. He can concentrate on making speeches that sound good in America. Happy days are here again!

Ayub Khan and Yahya Khan had to fail in war to lose their jobs; Zia ul Haq was helped towards the Almighty by an almighty accident that still remains unsolved. Fortunately for Pervez Musharraf, he failed in a war with India before he led the coup, so he can't be punished for that.

What next? He has taken the battle to the streets, encouraging his vigilantes to inform the country that there is a King's Party in this confrontation. Will he now contest and win a dubious election by disqualifying anyone who can defeat him?

A vulnerable government is the

privilege of a democracy. Indian Opposition parties have the legal and moral right to hope that any incumbent will fall, and they can succeed in the ensuing election. But if a government is unstable, the system is stable.

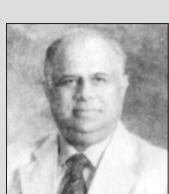
The nation is stable. There is the excitement of peaceful dramatic change, as took place at the national level three years ago, and has just occurred in Uttar Pradesh. Losers get depressed, and then gear up.

If dictatorship is the institutionalisation of ego, as today in Pakistan; then democracy is the destruction of ego. This summer's road from Lucknow to Delhi is littered with punctured egos. The punctures will heal, of course, because democracy has restorative powers as well. It is both the bane and the serum.

Alibiology is less excusable in a democracy, and therefore grates all the more when Indian officials content themselves, and hope they can fool the country, with an excuse.

There are certainly forces inimical to India, based in or sponsored by elements in Pakistan. But they would achieve nothing if we in India did not have weaknesses that could be exploited. Nor is it very wise to keep suggesting that the internal security systems of India are so weak that they can be continually and easily penetrated by a foreign agency. Vigilance is the price of liberty, true. But vigilance needs three eyes, only one of which looks across the border. Two must look within.

MJ Akbar is Chief Editor of the Asian Age.

**When tigers become man-eaters**IKRAM SEHGAL  
writes from Karachi**AS I SEE IT**

The MQM should have avoided being politically provoked, this played into the hands of the Opposition. While the anti-government political parties will shed tears, they have also raised the ethnic card, a matter of not only shame but one of national apprehension of initiating a fresh blood cycle. One must vehemently protest this. The Opposition may be aggrieved at what they took as excesses by the MQM, those shooting back were not angels.

Karachi procession despite ominous signs that it would cost innocent lives.

A prosperous future for any city is directly proportional to sustained peace. Why should the MQM, whose interest lies in maintaining peace, set free forces that would violently disturb tranquility? It is like shooting yourself!

MQM is very much the senior partner of the Coalition in Sindh, because Karachi will always remain Pakistan's economic lifeline. Its urban strength multiplies their political potential. The peaceful congregation at the Tibet Center on MA Jinnah Road, barely a mile or so from the fringes of hell, showed MQM's impressive political strength.

Regrettably its junior cohorts ran wild at many other places, some albeit on provocation and with the lack of mature

been disappointing -- a setback of sorts.

street leadership. This stained MQM's entire image in contrast to its increasingly sophisticated political performances since coming to power in 2002.

The route from the airport into the city was blocked at many places as if the CJ was leading an invading army into the city. Rommel's beach obstacles in Normandy on June 1944 would have paled in comparison. The trouble was only one violent incident away. Falak Naz Apartments is situated on the T-Junction where the road from Quaid-e-Azam International Airport joins Shahrah-e-Faisal.

From that point to the overhead bridge connecting Rashid Minhas Road is about 4 km or more. MQM activists from Shah Faisal Colony started to close

down shops from Friday afternoon. On resisting a security guard at a shop in the area was shot dead at point blank range. Just before midday on May 12, armed PPI activists, bent on revenge, came from Sohrab Goth -- one column along Rashed Minhas Road and the other through Gulistan-e-Jauhar and the ASF Camp -- and fired on the MQM activists in this area, a regular gun battle ensued.

PPI and Pakhtoon Action Committee (PAC) militants inflicted quite a few casualties before the deployed Rangers and police joined the MQM's gunmen, and the PPI militants than had to pull back.

Among the dozen or so, 4 residents of Falak Naz Apartments died in the crossfire. The firing was not one-sided; MQM's activists were on one hand and PPP, and JI and PPI militants on the other, the worst being near Guru Mandir where a major media office is located.

Some politicians were caught in the crossfire on the way to the airport; they are lucky to be alive. The most macabre part of this tragedy is that the gunfight took place between nominal allies.

Some missed their flights; most reached the airports to find flights cancelled. Sick people could not reach hospitals, urgent surgeries had to be postponed. Babies went without milk and the people without fresh food and

on sight" order recognises that man-eaters do not differentiate between friend and foe.

While this tragedy was unfolding, the CJ and accompanying lawyers stranded at a lounge at the Karachi Airport stubbornly refusing the administration's offer to heli-lift the CJ to the vicinity of the Sindh High Court.

What was more important to the lawyers? The CJ's speech at the Sindh High Court or the "triumphant" procession into town? Finally on being served orders for deportation, the lawyers left by PK 308 at 7pm for Islamabad. The CJ vacillated till the aircraft became airborne; it had to return to Karachi to pick him up.

With the city in flames in a number of places, the majority of the city's 15 or so million citizens went into a state of increasing panic. Thousands of airline passengers, many among them old men, women and children, had to walk miles with their baggage through gunfire to reach safety.

Many missed their flights; most reached the airports to find flights cancelled. Sick people could not reach hospitals, urgent surgeries had to be postponed. Babies went without milk and the people without fresh food and

some without water. A majority of day-labourers and street vendors had no daily wages for 2-3 days; their dependant families went hungry.

Karachi's plight got the attention of world media. International media showed militants roaming around brandishing and firing weapons, vehicles being torched, media offices being caught in crossfire, panic calls from abroad jam-packed communications.

Wild rumours fuelled more panic all over the city. The stance of the forces of law and order, that they were not activated to restore peace, is bankrupt. When a mob goes berserk, the officer commanding the police/para-military and/or military detachment gets a "shoot to kill" written orders from a magistrate.

When the mob has weapons and is using them, one does not wait around for legal niceties from magistrates, one takes unilateral action. Anarchy must be ruthlessly put down, without fear or favour. The hierarchy down the line must be to be taken to task for "criminal neglect."

The MQM should have avoided being politically provoked, this played into the hands of the Opposition. While the anti-government political parties

will shed tears, they have also raised the ethnic card, a matter of not only shame but one of national apprehension of initiating a fresh blood cycle.

One must vehemently protest this. The Opposition may be aggrieved at what they took as excesses by the MQM, those shooting back were not angels. There is moral bankruptcy in trying to trumpet this as ethically motivated.

For short-term advantage you cannot risk the stability of the country by raising ethnic or racial motivation. This is a deliberate escalation by our politicians bereft of other ideas. The CJ was meant to be used by the politicians and he has been.

To a "great silent majority" he has shown a callous disregard for human life, shocking for those of us who admire him and are sympathetic to his cause. While the advantage has shifted to elements opposed to Musharraf for the time being, once you sow the wind, you will reap the whirlwind!

Ikram Sehgal is an eminent Pakistani political analyst and columnist.