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"Flaws in CNG conversion"

I came across the letter from my friend Mr. Mansoor on the above subject published in your newspaper on 31st December. I feel I must reply to this as he has found a large number of reasons for the recent CNG explosions. Blaming a lot of people does not help, as the real reason for these explosions cannot be identified by wholesale blaming of everyone.

I would like to list the reasons Mr. Mansoor has identified: -- illegal conversion workshops; unskilled workers; cutting corners to cut costs; poor workmanship; faulty and unauthorised cylinders etc.

Allow me to examine each of these reasons one by one: -- an illegal workshop does not necessarily mean an unsafe workshop. And vice versa just because a workshop has been authorised does not mean it is safe. Mere permission from a government body, which is easy to get, will not solve the problem. If shoddy workmanship or poor equipment is used, an authorised workshop can also use it.

Unskilled workers may cause problems in proper operation of CNG conversion. It may not function at all, but the most unsafe aspect of it will be leakage from the large number of connections which has to be made. That may leak, they may come apart but they will not explode. I dare suggest that poor workmanship or unskilled workers cannot lead to an explosion. The worst that can happen will be gas leaking everywhere.

Mr. Mansoor then hit on the real reason, faulty and unauthorised cylinders. If we examine all the explosions that had taken place either during refuelling or in an accident, it is always the exploding cylinder which causes the greatest damage. High-pressure gas at 3,000 pounds per square inch inside the cylinders has a large amount of energy and failure of the cylinder will cause parts of the cylinder to fly in all directions. In addition the gas can catch fire. In an accident the high-pressure pipelines and equipment can also be damaged but this will cause leakage only and possibly a fire but not an explosion.

explosion.

Thus the sole cause of an explosion is the cylinder and nothing else. Poor workmanship cannot affect the cylinder, unauthorised workshops cannot affect the cylinder. The most that can happen is leakage of gas from the cylinders but not an explosion. The explosions can only take place if the cylinders are damaged by an external blow or have been manufactured incorrectly. All cylinders meant for high-pressure gas has to be manufactured and tested as per Gas Cylinder Rules. For import, the specification of the cylinders has to be approved by the Inspector of Explosives, or otherwise they cannot be cleared from Customs. If poor cylinders made by shoddy companies are being imported, it is the Inspector of Explosives who is responsible for not having enforced the gas cylinder rules. Having spent many years in the gas business, I recall that every cylinder imported or put to use had to be approved by the inspector of explosives. In addition, the cylinders have to be tested periodically as per gas cylinder rules.

The question now is how do these cylinders get inside Bangladesh. If import of defective cylinders or unsuitable cylinders is stopped, these explosions will also stop. With one proviso: if the cylinders are locally manufactured by welding pipes, or using cylinders meant for oxygen, which operates at 2,000 lbs per square inch instead of CNG which operates at 3,000 lbs a square inch, it will obviously explode. If somebody is found to have installed oxygen cylinders for CNG, legal action should be taken against those people. If there is an expulsion and the cylinder is found to be defective or for oxygen, the conversion workshop should be charged for murder or manslaughter.

This is the only way we can stop CNG cylinders exploding.
A Hasanat Khan
Former MD, BOC Bangladesh

that some of the fishing boats that were lost in the cyclone may very well have not been carrying warning devices of any kind, intentionally. Someone told me that some fishing boat owners do not want their boats to be coming back at every storm warning for fear of loss of income.

If this is indeed true then immediate legal action is required i.e. a public interest litigation before the Supreme Court on behalf of the fishermen.

Angela Robinson (Rev Mrs)
Gulshan, Dhaka

Leaders and legal process

A recent news item published in The Prothom Alo caught my attention. In a joint statement forty-one eminent citizens of Bangladesh expressed concern about the illness of the former prime minister and Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina and asked for her release from detention (The Prothom Alo, 2 January 2008). Considering her significant role in establishing democracy, rule of law and people's welfare, the eminent citizens asked the government to release Hasina and to provide proper medical treatment for her illness.

I am not sure about Sheikh Hasina's role as the former prime minister in strengthening democracy, establishing the rule of law and increasing people's welfare. Can the eminent citizens cite a single example of significant contribution to democratic governance, rule of law and people's welfare that can be attributed to Hasina?

As the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina had the opportunity to make a real difference to people's lives through creating democratic institutions and practising the rule of law in its real sense. She could have abolished the much hated black law, the Special Powers Act, 1974 or granted autonomy to Bangladesh TV and Radio as promised. This also applies to the former prime minister and the BNP leader Khaleda Zia who exercised enormous power and authority without really bothering about democracy, rule of law and sustainable public welfare.

In a modern society, it will be a fallacious reasoning to demand that Sheikh Hasina should be released from her detention because she has made an important contribution to democracy, the rule of law and people's welfare. If so, how about the industrialist and businessman Salman Rahman who established dozens of business enterprises and employed thousands of people in his businesses? Can we demand that Salman Rahman be released from prison because he has made significant contribution to the Bangladesh economy by way of building many industries and



Election on schedule ...

The present CTG deserves our salutes; they've been doing what the whole nation expects them to do. They've uprooted the multifaceted vices that had been eating up the backbone of this country; they've glued up the cracks in the democratic fabric of the republic-- the holes for the rats of the dark are severely battered. The present price hike will hopefully be resolved by this "few good men" soon.

We, the citizens, have seen much of the mal-governance by the previous democratic governments; we've well understood their unending greed for money and power-- we've lost faith in them (except the good ones) --- how long do we have to look unto the heavens for good signs? We hope against hopes, for we understand that there are good and competent

people around us ... we are a good people, sir.

At this point, however, we have noticed with some respite that AL chief Sheikh Hasina spoke for the election to be held on time even without her that is indeed a good sign for us that our leaders are, lately though, showing signs of maturity.

Finally, it is indeed nice to observe that our voice does match with that of the friendly foreign countries like the US, UK EU and others; and on top of all it matches with Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed's pledge that he made and has been making with a good and firm conviction.

Rafiqul Islam Rime
Agrabad, Chittagong

providing jobs to thousands of people? I think the answer is negative as just and proper judicial process should be followed when someone is charged for any alleged offence under the law of the land.

If anybody is criminally charged under the law, the judicial process should be allowed to operate without hindrance and undue interference from any quarters. This is what the rule of law means. In a democracy everybody should be treated equally irrespective of his or her political, social or economic status.

No doubt as a citizen and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina deserves adequate and proper medical treatment for her illness while in detention, and she should be allowed to go abroad for better treatment if she so wishes. Since she is now facing a number of criminal charges, things appear to be a bit complicated. However, Sheikh Hasina should be treated as innocent until proven guilty by the

court of law following due judicial process where the process is not influenced by those who brought charges against her. Similar should be the case with all other persons currently under detention.

The eminent citizens or any other citizens of the country should bear in mind that nobody should have any special treatment in the eye of law. If they consider that somebody is mistreated or has become victim of politically motivated actions by vested interests, they can protest against such mistreatment or actions. They can also take steps to mobilise public opinion for the right cause. However, it could be counterproductive to be obsessed with any habitual prejudices no matter what. Blind support causes harm to leaders at the end of the day. People expect sensible, logical and just behaviour, especially from those who are respected as conscience of the society and who themselves have made remarkable contributions to

their own fields of expertise and profession.

An American philosopher and psychologist William James said, "A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices." Perhaps the society as a whole needs clear thinking and shunning prejudices. Let us rethink and try different paths as convention is the enemy of progress!

Abdul Quader
Canberra, Australia

Resuscitation of Mongla Port

The recent reports appearing in different newspapers about the present condition of Mongla Port give an impression that the closing down of the port operation is a matter of time. This news hurt the countrymen, may be highly disappointing news for me, being the ex-chairman of that ill-fated port. There are many reasons for the port to malfunction but the reason most highlighted-- the silt deposit problem of river Pasur-- may not be the correct one. The years 1997 and 1998 when I was the chairman had the record earning and net profit of the port for whatever reason (this is on record). This only establishes the fact that a concerted effort by all concerned can make this port vibrant again. Needless to say, the country with roughly fifteen million people cannot depend only on one seaport i.e. Chittagong. For safety and security of the country we must put all efforts for Mongla Port's survival.

Without going into the causes of the present day condition of the port, we can still think how to make it operative again. There are a few suggestions given below and our present CTG may look into them and take the correct decision, so that, the port does not face closure.

1. The operation of the port may be vested with civil representatives of the locality having Chairman of Khulna City Corporation as the head. The earnings of the port could be utilized for improvement of Mongla, Khulna and Bagerhat area. This system of operation exists in many ports.

2. Handing it over to private port operators. They will pay certain royalty to the govt. as well as for the port's improvement.

3. Handing over the operation to foreign Firms. In this regard, I would like to recall the former Indian High Commissioner's observations on the issue.

4. Lease out the port to some foreign / national firm for some period of time.

This is suggested because all efforts by the government have apparently failed to rejuvenate Mongla Port. It is for the information of all that Mongla Port was the highest foreign exchange earner in the pre-1971 period!
Commodore AMA Alam (Retd.)
BN
New DOHS, Dhaka



Benazir Bhutto

Benazir is gone... as soon as I heard this news I felt a kind of trembling inside me, which I was not able to control. Interestingly when Benazir was in the scene years back and she was sent on self-exile, I was just a kid to understand either Benazir or her politics. Just for the last two or three years, I have started generating my own understanding regarding politics and since then I have started admiring Benazir Bhutto, Suu Kyi and Sonia Gandhi. It is true that against Benazir there was charge of corruption and more specifically perhaps her husband is responsible for her downfall. For a girl like me, Benazir was always a charismatic figure with her great look, talent, western education and personality along with media attention. Her uniquely designed coat with milk white scarf, eyes covered with fashion glasses and the fusion of being a mother and a political figure were always eye-catching.

There is a common trait in the lives of Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda Zia, Suu Kyi, Sonia and Benazir--all them started their political career after the death of their father or husband. Like Benazir, Sheikh Hasina also came to the political scene after the assassination of her father Sheikh Mujib, hence it was generally expected that Hasina would carry the legacy of her father, but she could not dominate the scene and Khaleda Zia could make her mark as a politician. I am writing not to praise Benazir but to raise the question as to why our leaders could not become so popular.

This year, for the first time, I have included my name in the voter list. So, now I am a mature citizen of Bangladesh. However, my happiness diminishes when I think of voting for someone, because I really find no party to vote. There should be at least one charismatic leader for whom I will cast my valuable vote!
Nasreen Sultana
One-mail

Transparency in government

The people of Bangladesh have yet to witness a transparent government. We expected that the current caretaker/interim government (the actual terminology remains unclear to this day) would pave the way for transparency. Before attempting to bring about positive reforms in the political parties, people expected that the present government itself would practise good governance. We are well accustomed to observing the mud slinging by the ruling and opposi-

tion parties in the past. Now we are witnessing the same trend in the present government on the issues pertaining to lifting the ban on politics, ending the emergency rule, bringing the war criminals to justice, sending archaeological artefacts abroad, and skyrocketing price of rice and commodities. Now all blame goes to the major political parties, business sectors, and some vested (yet unidentified) quarters.

The romantic idealism with which this government came to power is now facing the hard realities. It seems that the government is now attempting to maintain the status quo on these aforementioned critical issues. Although the trial of Sheikh Hasina has been carried forward fervently in the recent months, not starting the trials of Tarek Zia and Khaleda Zia could raise serious doubt in people's mind about the motive behind such moves. Recently, one of the advisers hinted that the government would consider Hasina's petition for treatment abroad. Since the law does not allow such preferential treatment, shouldn't we ask why the government is planning to entertain such a petition?
Towhid Salam
Los Angeles, California, US

Biman issue

This refers to an article on Boeing for Biman appearing in your paper. Making suggestions about aircraft purchase should be based on fleet planning study and route study. In the past, too, presidents and governments pushed through the throat of Biman certain type of aircraft that was not only unsuitable for Biman and its routes but unacceptable for the airlines of the region. One such aircraft is ATP. And that was at the behest of one of our past presidents for financial and non financial reasons; we will not go into the financial reasons... too much to count. The non-financial reason is that Margaret Thatcher called him a Statesman-- which is also incorrect information.

Everyone sings in chorus about corruption in the airline. Corruption is never acceptable and should be punished, but the major corruption of buying unsuitable planes and expensive spare parts is main reason for the debacle of the airline. Debt accumulated in purchasing the aircraft has to be paid back. Now the president who pushed the purchase has gone away... and so have the ministers and middlemen. Nothing happens then.

No corruption is acceptable but the corruption of reservation or checking counters is nothing compared to corruption of aircraft

purchases. Even the foreign airlines' reservation and airport staff are into corruption here in Dhaka.

Again, corruption is never, never acceptable but this is only petty when compared with corruption and falling into vast debt due to unsuitable aircraft purchase. The debt has to be repaid and the debt servicing has to be included as a cost component thus pushing up the cost of operation. The cost of operation is never pushed up by paying salaries to a large number of employees of Biman. Salaries and wages paid to Biman employees (not crew) is very insignificant compare to other airlines.

So, routes are not economical. And routes can never be profitable if cost of operation is increased by factors beyond the control of Biman.

The first step in the direction of aircraft purchase should be planning. A number of destinations were closed down with great speed to show efficiency without realizing the difficulty of opening destinations. Closing a destination is easy but not necessarily starting flights to a destination. Biman should plan which destinations it will resume flights and not the opposite buying plane and then deciding where to go. There is no justification in keeping white elephants. What's the hurry when the "efficient" Biman management has closed down stations like bus stops?

It is wonderful how the writer knows all the secret offers of Boeing. How does he know all this? Why only new planes and no leasing?

This is one article that does not mention about inefficiency of Biman management. How is it that the efficient management could not solve the Hajj flight problem?
Dali Uddin
One-mail

Policy guideline for NRBS

The clarion call of the Chief Adviser to the NRBS to contribute in the economy of Bangladesh was timely and thus commendable. Non-resident citizens of China, India, Philippines and Korea, in fact, made massive contributions to their countries' socio-economic development. There should be a well designed guideline indicating their areas of participation and facilities to be provided to them with banking facilities and return of profits.

In fact, in Bangladesh, NRBS should be encouraged to invest in infrastructure development like deep seaports, river ports and land ports, power generation, solar energy transmission, tourism and formation of insurance companies

and financial institutions.

Even the local entrepreneurs are afraid of investing in some critical sectors which are labour-intensive and involve indigenous technology.

Once they face debacle and fail to get the expected return, the door will be closed forever.

So we should proceed carefully with a clear guideline and policy framework to make the Chief Adviser's call meaningful and significant.

Kumar Prithwiraj Nath
Toronto, Canada

Is it true?

I wonder if any human rights organisations would be interested in checking out a story I have heard

Saga of load-shedding!

The above depressing news was published in the first page of most newspapers on the last day of 2007. A demoralising beginning of the New Year! The Adviser concerned prepared everyone for the worst in his press briefing. Despite all the plans, the proposed rationing (load-shedding) of electricity supply has condemned all of us to living in partial darkness. Hopefully, this time around it will be more democratically administered with equal misery for all and not favouring some at the expense of others, which was the prac-

tice in the past.

Unfortunately, even the CTG with a simplified decision making mechanism, and more or less free from criticism and adverse comments has failed to make any headway in solving this number one problem of the country! Meanwhile we will continue to live in a power scarcity situation more or less round the year. In summer due to the "cooling, ventilation and air conditioning" (CVAC) load, and in winter due to the "irrigation load", there seems to be no light at the end of this dark tunnel of

"no electricity" for us!

The need for irrigation is critical, and cannot be avoided in any circumstances. However, the CVAC load in summer can be mitigated with some common sense approach and regular monitoring by the power distribution staff. Unfortunately, this monitoring can lead to corrupt practices; particularly palm greasing-- in which we are second to none!

S.A. Mansoor
Retired Engineer, Dhaka

