

ZIA as a hub of air traffic

In all that the agencies at the airport will endeavour to achieve, Biman included -- the professed policy should be that every area of functionality will be geared towards developing Dhaka as the most attractive hub in South Asia. Pursuing a go-it-alone policy will only prove to be futile, particularly for the long run. History is rife with these examples.

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BIMAN'S growth options look to be immensely bright with the prospect of new aircraft joining its fleet. Suddenly, from a state of total despondency, there is the promise of a bright future.

However, none of that is assured. Increasing the fleet size is just one step in the right direction. While schedule adherence can actually be ensured with the new additions, there are areas of commercial interest at the macro level that are sure to impact the airline's performance.

One such area, that is always overlooked, is improvement of the hub at Dhaka. With the new capacity enhancement, there may not be the scope of sidestepping this issue anymore. Per force, attention needs to be given to the fact that there will be a sudden increase in seat and space supply at a time when the airline has had to recede from long-haul markets.

The risk of under-utilisation of aircraft will push up the production cost per unit.

Conversely, being out of touch

with market conditions, a hasty return to this service sensitive segment of the market is not advisable. The disparity between revenue earnings and expenditure looks to be real and ominous.

Aircraft shortage, continuing disruption in schedules, and the forced induction of unsuitable aircraft years back into its fleet has bedeviled the airline for decades. Debt servicing of aircraft purchases will be severely impeded without enhancing revenue earning methods and carving out a lucrative niche.

Yet, it is very much within the capacity of Biman to address this. Biman is also known to have made substantial commercial gains from pursuing pioneering initiatives at a time when other airlines were hesitant and unsure of venturing into money-spinning markets.

To cite an example, Biman launched services to the Middle Eastern destinations in the late seventies, where traffic potential looked to be uncertain and inadequate at first.

Aggressive selling methods proved to be highly successful, and the airline was able to stir up mar-

ket potential in segments that were very lucrative. Benefits gained from the pioneering efforts accrued to Biman singularly, although other airlines were hesitant to test market their products and services.

In the gestation period between now and the arrival of the aircraft, there is the arduous task of working on multiple areas simultaneously. Here's what needs to be done and why.

Work on the hub being super-efficient

We may pretend not to notice, but the reality is that there is not one top notch airline that has won appreciation of its customer base, been rated the "airline of the year" by industry analysts, or maintained profitability for years on end without the advantage of operating from a highly successful and reputable hub.

And it is not that returns from investment and spending on aviation are confined to one area -- beneficiaries of aviation spending have spilled over to a wide variety of industries. Benefits that accrue indeed trickle into other areas and are almost at par with returns on

the aviation side.

The functional expertise and the efficiency with which hubs operate inevitably carry over to the airline that uses the hub as its home base. By contrast, growth of airlines is also stymied by the inadequacy of hubs, and its inability to keep pace with the galloping pace of airlines. South Asia is replete with examples of airlines being deprived of success owing to such inadequacies.

To succeed, the hub at Dhaka must be vibrant and pulsating for the airlines using it as point of origin or termination. Worldwide, either the airlines assume the key role to keep it brimming with activity, or aeronautical authorities play the dominant role.

Biman to assume the key role

In all that the agencies at the airport will endeavour to achieve, Biman included -- the professed policy should be that every area of functionality will be geared towards developing Dhaka as the most attractive hub in South Asia.

Pursuing a go-it-alone policy will only prove to be futile, particularly for the long run. History is rife with these examples.

A mutually inclusive policy of complementing the services offered by all agencies towards a common goal will fast-track development of Dhaka to the level of an international hub.

A commonality of goals will also

encompass and reign in the otherwise disjointed efforts of a wide group of personnel in the areas of hotel accommodation, tour operators, ground transportation, catering, customs, immigration, construction companies, hotels, etc.

Why Biman?

For the present, it is difficult to think of any other agency or body that can assume the responsibility. As long as Biman is not returned to government control, the airline can actually be a trendsetter, and establish high standards for other agencies operating in the airport to follow.

In the interest of the air travel and tourist industry, Biman should be allowed to play the key role. By achieving high service standards, the benefits to the aforementioned and other industries will be profound.

In Biman's own interest, the development of a reputable and pulsating hub buzzing with activity is indispensable; let alone the fact that a reputable hub and air traffic center gives an airline the bargaining leverage to negotiate for the best traffic rights. Economic rationale also suggests that passengers will no longer hesitate to transit via Dhaka, or include it in their travel itinerary.

With an enhanced image of the hub and its own product improvement, Biman can take realistic steps in many areas that it was not able to in the past to maximise its revenue earning prospects.

Introducing additional tiers in reservation, for example, will be more practicable. The airline can seriously think of launching projects like conference tourism, incentive tourism and ecotourism in conjunction with tour operators and hoteliers.

One has to only look around to see that the successes of airlines are embedded in the presence of proper hubs -- or promise of success that never materialised was for want of efficient and reputable hubs. For example, the success of Singapore Airlines and Emirates is, to a great extent, attributable to the simultaneous success of Changi Airport and Dubai.

Emirates was not even conceived as an airline or Dubai identified by Gulf Air as its major hub at the time the rulers of Dubai were envisioning long term plans to catapult it to a major hub. The rest is history.

Ironically, neither of these high profile carriers had a strong base of indigenous traffic to take advantage of. It was either the hub that was the hallmark, or corroborated successful ventures of airlines, that attracted airlines to Dubai. Airlines, for their part, then found it easier to ensure that their own service standards were not slipping.

On the other hand, prospects of strong growth of airlines like Air India and Royal Nepal Airlines, or Air Lanka for example, were stymied by either uncontrollable factors or less than attractive hubs



Opening a new horizon.

that they operated from as their home bases, although each of them could boast of robust outgoing and incoming traffic generating market base.

In the interest of the economy

For the macro perspective, too, there is lot at stake.

Country branding experts identify food industry, readymade garments and hospitality industry to develop and nurture for image building and adding value to the country's products and services.

A reputable hub will showcase Bangladesh and its products and services, adding greater value in a way that cannot be matched by others. Readymade garments industry, for example, will no longer have to undertake the efforts on its

own, or the city of Dhaka will not have to wait for another thirty-seven years for a hotel to be built near the airport. Traffic development and phenomenal increase in economic activity generated from a buzzing hub will necessitate all of that.

Speakers at the Harvard conference -- diplomats, academics and technocrats alike -- rued woefully over lost opportunities of developing the country as a land hub and gateway to other parts of Asia. At a time when the country is aspiring to become a middle income nation, an attractive, super-efficient and vibrant air traffic hub will help recover some of the lost ground and spur economy growth through an intense multiplier effect.

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Successful test run

One thing is clear. The ordinary people no longer depend fully on the advice of political parties. However, parliamentary democracy is not possible in the absence of political parties. Due to delay in dispensation of justice, no elected representative should be barred from his legitimate right for oath taking. We should, however, allow the law to take its own course.

A.B.M.S. ZAHUR

intensity of people's interest in elections and in the development of local government.

AUGUST 4, 2008 may be recognised as a historical day in some respects for Bangladesh. The events of the day to be remembered are:

- It was an election successfully conducted within a relaxed emergency.
- It was an election not officially participated by major political parties.
- The local political leaders have been able to prove that they are fully capable of attracting voters' attention; without significant cooperation of the central leadership.
- Participation of voters was unprecedented (80 to 90%).
- No violence was committed.
- There was a prevailing friendly spirit among voters and contestants, and
- There was no vote rigging, and only an insignificant percentage of fake votes (only about 2%).

The role of local government is critical in strengthening the foundation of democracy in a country where local government was not allowed to build adequate capacity, because of the reluctance of the party/parties in government to devolve power to the local government.

The caretaker government (CTG) and the Election Commission (EC) have rightly decided to start working on strengthening local government despite strong opposition from the major political parties, who showed, so far, interest only in national election. The holding of elections of 4 cities and 9 municipalities was aimed at gauging the

The AL supported candidates have done exceptionally well, as anticipated. AL has won all the mayoral positions in 4 cities and 8 municipal corporations. The miserably performance of BNP supported candidates was mainly due to internal dissensions of the party.

At present, BNP is divided in three groups namely, Khaleda group (represented by Khandakar Delwar Hossain), Major Hafeez group and Brig. Gen. Hannan Shah group. The Delwar group, apparently, is rather hostile to the CTG.

It has totally rejected the election on August 4 and considers it as an election of conspiracy. Delwar states that the election is a part of the blueprint of CTG and EC to prevent BNP from regaining power.

The other two groups hold different views. Mr. Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan (former secretary general BNP) considers the election as free and fair.

By showing lack of interest in the local government elections, the BNP has lost some of its important strongholds, like Rajshahi, Barisal and Khulna. Not only that, this may also affect its future in those districts or concerned constituencies.

At least, the BNP could have claimed (in the election campaign) that all of their leaders were not prone to corruption, extortion or similar crimes. Instead of finding fault with the AL or EC or CTG, it would be advisable for it to participate in the future in local government elections with a



Exercising their right without fear or favour.

friendly spirit, so that national election can be held peacefully, smoothly and in time.

With regard to lifting of emergency, the CTG, it appears, is in favour of keeping it in a relaxed manner (may be a bit more relaxed) till the end of national election. There may be strong points for them. They are:

- The elections on August 4, under emergency, have been totally successful.
- Participation of voters has been exceptionally high.
- No serious irregularity (except unusual delay in counting of votes in Barisal city election) was experienced, and
- No violence was reported.

The CEC is confident about better voting in the future, because he feels that the existing flaws, defects or deficiencies can be rectified by the end of the year. He also stated that maintaining emergency may not be a serious problem for smooth election.

The local observers have described the elections as successful. The US government is happy about the elections. However, the CTG has been informed by the EU authorities that if the emergency is not lifted before national election, they will send observers to Bangladesh.

The CTG is sending a delegation to impress upon the EU members that the overriding consider-

ation of the CTG was to continue the emergency. We await the outcome of the discussions between the CTG delegation and the EU authorities.

A better assessment of the elections will be possible only after the EC receives reports from 5,000 field workers. In addition, the role of the Returning Officer of Barisal city election will also need to be investigated. Our overall impression, so far, is good about the start of the election process.

One thing is clear. The ordinary people no longer depend fully on the advice of political parties. However, parliamentary democracy is not possible in the absence of political parties. Due to delay in dispensation of justice, no elected representative should be barred from his legitimate right for oath taking. We should, however, allow the law to take its own course.

The demand for holding national election before upazila election does not appear to be based on strong rational basis. Apparently, holding of upazila election before national election will not delay national election, because the EC has gained enough of momentum in its work recently. We hope all the major political parties will ultimately participate in upazila election.

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Strongman in trouble

Leaders of the main ruling parties announced on August 7 that they would seek to impeach the embattled president, accusing him of undermining Pakistan's economy and its constitution. Musharraf dominated Pakistan for eight years and became a close ally of the US as of September 11, 2001, but ceded control of the powerful army last year and has since been largely sidelined.

MD. MASUM BILLAH

PRESIDENT Parvez Musharraf, once Pakistan's powerful general who banished two elected prime ministers, is going to be the first to face impeachment in Pakistan's sixty-one year history. The matter has ignited both attention and tension in Pakistan, in the region, and in the world. The US state department reacted cautiously to the move. Pakistan's ruling coalition stated that it was an internal matter. "We have consistently said it is the internal politics of Pakistan and an issue for the Pakistani people to decide," said State Department spokesperson Gonzalo Galegoes, pointing out that Washington and Islamabad remain close allies in the war against terrorism.

"The US government may accept the outcome of an internal Pakistani political process, but there will be concerns if the impeachment process turns out to be 'acrimonious' and an event that divides the country," said Ashley Tellis, a former UN National Security Council staff member, now an expert at the Washington based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He continues: "Then that could be a distraction from the very serious domestic and the terrorism-related challenges that Pakistan has to face."

Lisa Curtis, a former State Department advisor, felt that Musharraf's fate was largely in the hands of Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kayani who, she said, helped to ensure the success of the February elections, and appeared committed to keeping the army out of politics. Musharraf has maintained close relations and ties with the Pakistani army. He chose Kayani as army chief to ensure his security

when he shed his military uniform to occupy the presidency.

Now it seems that the US is staying away from the present political processes in Pakistan. The US, concerned with its global hegemonic policy implementation, helped the Pakistani general build a strong fort in Pakistan. But Musharraf may not be the focal point any longer -- rather, the Pakistani territory at large may be centre stage for the US. This is why it has reacted so cautiously.

"The US should stay as far removed as possible from the political machinations in Pakistan, while urging all sides to find a peaceful resolution to the political crisis that strengthens the democratic institutions of the country and prevents a return to military rule," states Curtis. But experts hold the opinion that any impeachment of Pakistani President Musharraf is unlikely to hamper US "war on terror" efforts. Washington quietly hopes the military will remain on the fringes amid political tensions in Islamabad.

US officials are reportedly con-

cerned that the government of Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gillani lacks control over the military or the powerful intelligence service, ISI, which has been linked to the July suicide bombing of the Indian embassy in Afghanistan. Gillani, of course, has agreed to investigate the allegations against ISI. Musharraf appears to take a more defiant position, viewing the allegations as a US conspiracy against Pakistan, noted Curtis.

Since September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda attacked the US, the terrorist network of haven and sanctuary in Pakistan grew enormously under General Musharraf's watch, becoming much more dangerous during the years of his military dictatorship. In recent months, a three-way struggle among the two ruling coalition parties and Musharraf has distracted the fledgling Pakistani government from dealing with rising economic and terrorism challenges.

Leaders of the main ruling parties announced on August 7 that they would seek to impeach the embattled president, accusing him of undermining Pakistan's economy and its constitution. Musharraf dominated Pakistan for eight years and became a close ally of the US as of September 11, 2001, but ceded control of the powerful army last year and has since been largely sidelined. Parliament could begin the impeachment process as early as August 11, which is also Musharraf's 65th birthday.

The coalition is currently several

seats short of the 295 votes required out of 439 in the senate and national assembly to remove Musharraf. Asif Ali Zardari of the Pakistan People's Party and Nawaz Sharif, former prime minister and president of Pakistan Muslim League, together with smaller coalition partners have 266 seats and need a further 29 MPs on their side, most probably from the troubled tribal belt bordering Afghanistan. They strongly expect that they would be successful in making Musharraf face impeachment.

Probably Nawaz still remembers the humiliation he had to suffer at the hands of Musharraf, having been exiled to Saudi Arabia. The Pakistani people hold the burning memory of the sacking of the chief justice of Pakistan by Musharraf. In order to establish the American interest against the will of the Pakistani people, Musharraf played many games in favour of Bush.

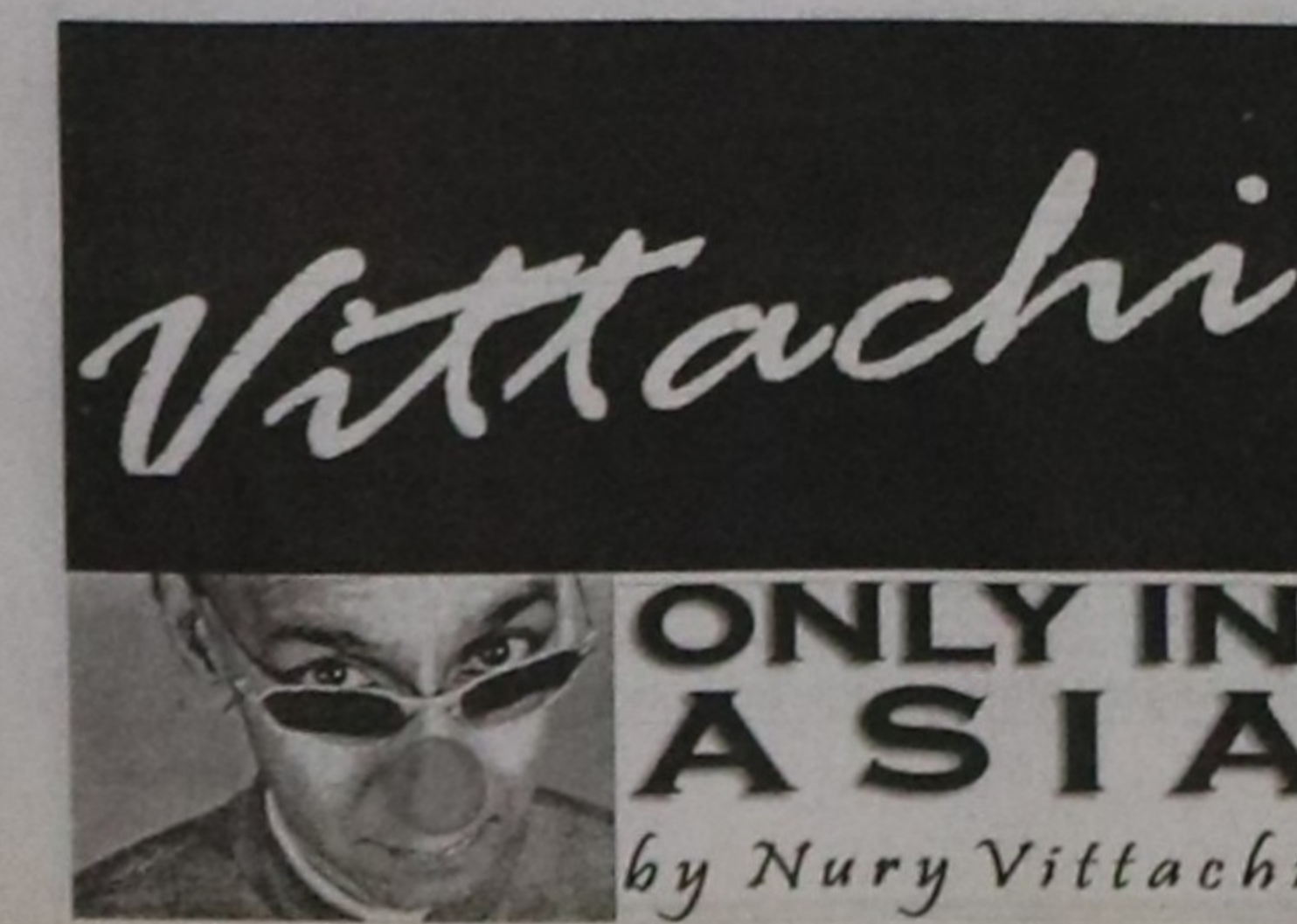
The saddest experience the Pakistani people had to witness was the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, two-time elected prime minister of Pakistan. In a sense, Pakistan witnessed many events during Musharraf's reign. They saw him with uniform even in the presidential house. Now the time has come to observe how the White House responds to the Pakistan situation, though they say it is Pakistan's internal matter. Is it only Pakistan's internal matter?

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Planning the ouster.

Draft questions for an Asian school textbook



MY neighbour's child brought home a school work-sheet. It said: "If Alfie hits a baseball at 10 miles an hour, how long will it take to cross a 176-yard diamond?"

The homework raised all sorts of questions for a child raised in Asia. What kind of name is Alfie? What's a mile? What's a yard? Even his mother had a question. Where can you buy a 176-yard diamond?

I explained that baseball was a game played on a "diamond," but that just got her more excited. "Wah! Everything so big in US," she said.

The problem was, of course, that the homework sheet had been photocopied from an ancient textbook designed for kids in the west.

My wife once volunteered to teach children at a local faith centre. The instruction sheet said: "Today's subject is the richness of diversity. Ask the children to divide themselves by hair colour and stand in various groups: one for blond hair, one for red hair, one for brown hair and so on. Then ask them to re-group according to eye colour: brown eyes, blue eyes, green eyes and so on."

In Asia, this exercise doesn't

quite go to plan.

"Anyone with brown-black hair get into a group on my left," my wife said.

Everybody moved to the left. "Okay, now anyone with brown-black eyes get into a group on my right."

Everybody moved to the right. Game over. How this taught us about the richness of diversity I don't know.

But actually, the exercise was educational: it taught us that that textbooks needed to be filed along with lunch leftovers in the free-standing, circular filing cabinet outside the back door.

Asia needs Asian textbooks. We need local homework projects. C'mon, teachers. They're not that hard to dream up. Here are some to get you started:

1. If Lee copies 1,000 CDs a day and sells them for one \$1 each, how long before he can get into Harvard?

2. If an Asian city's public transport city is built to move a million people in one day, how many people does it move in one day? (a) Three million, (b) four million, or (c) five million?

3. The dean of a high class technical college wants a new \$100,000 swimming pool for his

home, and the Daswanis want their son Ravindra to get into computer engineering. Should the dean get a Grecian infinity pool or a resort-style lagoon?

4. Ah-Li is prime minister of a small country in Asia. The constitution says that he cannot serve more than four years. How long does Ah-Li remain in power? (a) 20 years (b) 30 years (c) he's still there, despite having resigned, retired and lost his mind.

5. If Xiao Wang wants an 800 yuan overseas travel permit, and each of the six officials who need to be bribed wants 100 yuan, how reliable are the country's GDP figures?

6. In Western-style monarchies, the leader of a country retires by handing power to a member of his family. Asian republics are (a) pretty much the same, (b) pretty much the same, or (c) identical.

Best of all you can get a 10-point bonus if you answer this simple question: what is the most common hair-color on planet earth? Clue: It's not blond, red or brown. Will someone please tell the school textbook writers?

Send more questions to our columnist at www.vittachi.com.