

## A very public spat centring Biman affairs

*It undermines the government's image*

**T**HE very public bickering between Minister of Civil Aviation GM Quader, the parliamentary standing committee and the authorities of Bangladesh Biman is predictably raising a good number of questions in the public mind about the national flag carrier. That Biman has always been in a poor state of health has never been in any doubt over the last many years. It has had falling revenues owing to a reluctance on the part of people to fly it. Such reluctance again has had to do with the regular propensity on the part of the airline to delay flights or for its aircraft to develop technical faults that have consistently left passengers stranded for days. On top of everything, Biman has for years been seen as a victim of corruption indulged in by large sections of its officers and employees.

These are truths no one can deny. The very fact that Bangladesh Biman was transformed into a public limited company by the last caretaker government was a clear recognition of what needed to be done to retrieve the airline from the morass it was trapped in. It should have been on the rail from there on. But now that the minister, the head of the parliamentary standing committee and chairman of the Biman board of directors have brought their squabbling out in the public domain, it is natural that questions will arise over the propriety of such an act. We believe the minister certainly meant well when he questioned what he thought was a lack of transparency about the way Biman has been working. He was clearly exasperated about Biman's unwillingness to accept his ministry's authority, especially where financial decisions were the issue. More importantly, the minister has pointed to the presence of a vested interest in Biman which is busy scuttling any plans toward ensuring efficiency and good service by the airline. There is a hint of allegations against the minister. The minister's discomfiture is palpable, so much so that at one point hints were given out that he was about to quit the cabinet.

Perhaps an argument can be made that Quader ought to have raised all these issues before the cabinet or even in Parliament. But what clearly is a matter of disappointment in the manner in which the chairman of Biman's board of directors and its managing director-cum-CEO reacted by pointing to differences between the secretary and the minister of civil aviation. There are certain rules and norms that government employees as well as those engaged in public limited companies must follow. However, the minister and the secretary have made it clear that there is no discord between them. If in future ministers and employees of the republic engage in similar public quarrels, what will that do to the image of the Biman and that of the government itself?

It is time for the cabinet to study the Biman situation in its entirety. The prime minister and her cabinet colleagues must also reflect on how best the minister, the parliamentary standing committee and Biman authorities can work together. But what has arisen out of the bickering must be probed. A system which is riddled with feuding and internal squabbles with no delineation of jurisdictions is certainly in need of reform.

## Bus drivers on a killing spree

*Stricter measures necessary to rein them in*

**W**ITH the traffic congestion aggravating during the month of Ramadan and in spite of the government's addiction to ad hoc-ism as a way out, the city is witnessing a spate in the frequency of road mishaps.

Rash driving of buses and minibuses has claimed as many as three lives on two days in a row -- Tuesday and Wednesday -- in the capital. In the first incident, a four years old girl was crushed under the wheels of a bus, while another bus rammed into a rickshaw killing a 35-year old man and injuring his friend. On Wednesday, a mini bus hit a motorcycle killing a woman riding it and injuring the driver, her son.

With Ramadan mobility peaking, vehicles have to wait at the road intersections and the traffic signals in a logjam for a longer time than usual. It tells upon the patience of the bus drivers leading to the mad race to overtake one another. It has been observed that most of these accidents take place around the traffic signals and other intersections. And of all other mass transports, it has been further observed that the minibuses are highly prone to such speeding rush, as their drivers in most cases are untrained.

Impatient, nervy and sometimes amateurish drivers in control of buses that lack fitness are mostly to blame for the frequent deaths on the road.

The issue has been brought to the notice of the authorities again and again through the media. How often we have seen the police swinging into action after the resulting public furore over the deaths in the road mishaps! There may be a comparative lull for some days. And then the buses are again on a killing spree as before. This has become the normal pattern on the city roads as elsewhere in the country.

To add to the woes of the road users, one can also see haphazardly parked cars, rickshaws and buses hogging a big swathe of the space on a busy road. So, the motorised vehicles jostle with one another for space leading often to deadly mishaps.

Clearly, it is this off again and on again approach of the government in dealing with rash driving on the roads that has further emboldened the proclivity to impulsive driving further. To rein them in, it has become necessary for the authorities to arrange stricter punishment and quick delivery of justice against the wrongdoers. Particularly in the present Ramadan context, urgency needs to be felt to address the issue followed by appropriate action.

## United we stand, divided we fall

We have created a society that is worse than a jungle. Wolves don't hunt prey unless they are hungry. Snakes don't bite unless they are threatened. Bears don't attack a victim if he is perceived as dead. But we spare nothing. We dare everything. There is no protocol of our greed. There is no limit to our need.

MOHAMMAD BADRUL AHSAN

**I**N *The Jungle Book* Rudyard Kipling lays out the fundamental of the law of the jungle: "For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack." Extrapolated for human society, it more or less means the same thing for a nation and its people. The strength of the nation is the people, and the strength of the people is the nation.

It should remind us of this Aesop's fable. A dying father gathers his quarrelling sons around his deathbed. He hands them a bundle of sticks and asks each of them to break it. When they failed, he unbundled the sticks and handed one stick to each son. This time each of them could break his stick.

It tells us something that is perennial common sense -- united we stand, divided we fall. Turned on the head, it leads us to this logical conclusion. If people aren't united, a nation is without strength.

Because, when people are shaky, they might be able to do everything. They might make syndicates. They might form cartels. They might also make political parties, social clubs or professional associations. But, mind my words, they can never make a powerful nation.

Besides, when the people are divided, it comes as a manifestation of many more things that have gone wrong. The politicians are disenchanted. The professionals are disoriented. The intellectuals are disillusioned. The businessmen are depraved. The common people are distressed. Then what kind of a nation do we expect?

The answer is the kind of a nation we can get. And the nation we can get will be like a table with wobbly legs. Every section of people is unstable, maybe it would be more appropriate to say they are unreliable. Corruption is rampant. Greed is dominant. Conflict is pervasive. Conscience is evasive. People do not trust people. What kind of a nation have we got?

Nations are made in the images of their



people. The Chinese are hardworking, the Thai are hospitable, and the Indians are mystical people. The British wear tweed suits and flat caps. The French are world's worst tourists, bad at foreign languages, arrogant and tight-fisted. The Spaniards are noisy and messy. The Americans wear loud shirts and they have got loud voices.

What kind of people are we? Conspiring, contentious, complicated, hardworking and contending? Are we cunning or opportunistic? Are we creative or destructive? Are we rational or erratic? Are we idealistic or romantic?

If anything stands out, it's our divisiveness. We are pitted against each other, views against views, beliefs against beliefs, interests against interests, and vengeance against

vengeance. Lord Thomas Babbington Macaulay said that a Bengali has his "mind bear a singular analogy to his body." Trampled by "men of bolder and more hardy breeds" for ages, the Bengali mind is as feeble as his body. "Courage, independence, veracity are qualities to which his constitution and his situation are equally unfavourable," Macaulay concludes.

Thus, we look for our strength by making others weak, and I say it twice because in this country the wolf is busy draining the pack. We are regularly destroying the institutions by destroying their sanctity. We are regularly destroying individuals by destroying their integrity.

We have created a society that is worse than a jungle. Wolves don't hunt prey unless they are hungry. Snakes don't bite unless they

The division amongst us, therefore, comes from the strength of our weakness. "Large promises, smooth excuses, elaborate tissues of circumstantial falsehood, chicanery, perjury, forgery, and the weapons, offensive and defensive, of the people of the Lower Ganges," Macaulay enumerates the fallouts of that contradictory strain in the Bengali psyche.

Each of us believes he is strong because his opponent is weak. And until that equilibrium is achieved, he will leave no stone unturned to seek it. He will use his influence to transfer the judge if he has to win the verdict. He will use his influence to remove an official from his job so that the next man grants him his wish. He will bribe the police to look the other way so that he can break the law.

are threatened. Bears don't attack a victim if he is perceived as dead. But we spare nothing. We dare everything. There is no protocol of our greed. There is no limit to our need.

The powerful man uses the government, and the weak uses his guile. But every wolf in this country likes to be strong at the cost of his pack. Bribery, nepotism, transfer, and termination have weakened this nation, because those who can afford have no consideration for right and wrong.

An honest man was transferred last week because he refused to do what he was told. Nobody bothers that another man diminished has diminished us all.

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## Power game in Asia



Nuclear cooperation between China and Pakistan will only intensify as China becomes more assertive in pursuing its interests. China is concerned about deepening Indo-US relations and India's attempts to cultivate ties with states in China's periphery. The resulting priority of the Sino-Pakistani relationship is evident in Chinese policies toward South Asia.

HARSH V. PANT

**T**WO years ago when former US President George W. Bush helped end India's status as a nuclear pariah, opening the country for civilian nuclear technology sale, the long-term implications were obscure.

With Japan, a long-time critic of India's weapon bid, lining up for deals with India, and China proposing to offer similar technology to Pakistan, the geopolitical import of the 2008 Indo-US agreement is becoming clear: Japan, concerned by China's rise, wants to strengthen India while China counters the US-India partnership by helping India's nemesis Pakistan. In the process, protecting the nuclear non-proliferation regime has become more complex.

Since the signing of the Indo-US agreement and special dispensation granted to India by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), India has signed civilian nuclear energy pacts with states as diverse as Britain, France, Russia and Canada on the one hand, Argentina, Kazakhstan, Namibia and Mongolia on the other.

The start of negotiations with Japan is the latest in a long line of such agreements. China announced its own civil nuclear pact with Pakistan earlier this year though it has yet to receive a waiver from the NSG for selling technology to a country not a member of the non-proliferation treaty.

Behind seemingly innocuous agreements of civilian nuclear cooperation, India, Japan, China and Pakistan engage in a strategic balancing game that could draw in other countries, complicate the global non-proliferation agenda and raise serious security concerns about Pakistan as a Wal-Mart of illicit nuclear technology.

The US-India nuclear pact virtually rewrote the rules of the global nuclear regime by underlining India's credentials as a responsible nuclear state that should be integrated into the global nuclear order with the Bush Administration deciding to "dehypenate" US relations with India and Pakistan.

The pact creates a major exception to the US prohibition of nuclear assistance to any country that does not accept international monitoring of all its nuclear facilities. The unspoken context of the deal was US concern

about China's rapid ascendance in the Asia-Pacific.

Both India and US realised that, to prevent China from dominating the Asia-Pacific, a close partnership between the world's two largest democracies was essential.

The nuclear deal became the most potent symbol of US-India rapprochement.

But the deal was not merely between India and US. Successful approval by the NSG allowed India to engage other nuclear powers in civilian nuclear trade and provided new market opportunities to major nuclear powers.

Even Japan decided to fast-track negotiations for a civilian nuclear deal, planning to sign the accord during the Indian prime minister's visit to Tokyo by year-end -- the first such agreement between Japan and a country that isn't a signatory to the NPT.

Though Indian-Japanese ties have blossomed in recent years on a range of issues, the nuclear issue has been a major irritant in the relationship. The new understanding between the two nations underscores Tokyo's attempts to come to terms with India's new nuclear status.

Japanese nuclear companies are eager for a share of the Indian market. Given involvement of Japanese firms such as Toshiba Corp, Hitachi Ltd and Mitsubishi in US and French nuclear industries, an Indo-Japanese pact is essential for US and French civilian nuclear cooperation with India.

Beyond the commercial dimensions of the deal, political symbolism is even more critical. Such a deal would underline Japan's determination to put Indo-Japanese ties in high gear.

The rise of China is a major factor in the evolution of Indo-Japanese ties as is US's attempt to build India into a major balancer in the region. Both India and Japan chafe at China's not-so-subtle attempts at preventing their rise. An Indo-Japanese civil nuclear pact would signal an Asian partnership to bring stability to the region at a time when China goes all out to dispense civilian nuclear reactors to Pakistan, putting the entire non-proliferation regime in jeopardy.

The Sino-Pakistan nuclear relationship has been the major factor wrecking the foundations of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. China's nuclear test in 1964 propelled India's nuclear weaponisation culminating in India's 'peaceful nuclear explosion' in 1974. Sino-Pakistan nuclear cooperation -- involving the sharing of weapon design and missile technology in the 1990s -- forced India to go overtly nuclear in 1998.

When US announced its civilian nuclear energy cooperation pact with India in 2005, China indicated displeasure by asking India to sign the NPT and dismantle its nuclear weapons. Beijing promptly moved to make that concern pointless by declaring its own intention to sell nuclear reactors to Pakistan.

The not-so-subtle message was if Washington decided to play favourites, China would do the same, confirming that China continues to view Pakistan as an asset in countering India.

Chinese authorities confirmed earlier this year that the China National Nuclear Cooperation signed an agreement with Pakistan for two new nuclear reactors at the Chashma site -- Chashma III and Chashma IV -- in addition to the two already under development in Pakistan. This action of China is in clear violation of the NSG guidelines that forbid nuclear transfers to countries not signatories to the NPT or not adhering to comprehensive international safeguards on their nuclear program.

With or without the NSG approval, nuclear cooperation between China and Pakistan will only intensify in the coming years as China becomes more assertive in pursuing its interests. China is concerned about deepening Indo-US relations and India's attempts to cultivate ties with states in China's periphery. The resulting priority of the Sino-Pakistani relationship is evident in Chinese policies toward South Asia.

Moreover, there's a sense in Beijing that the Obama administration would be reluctant to challenge the deal as it needs China's help on issues ranging from Iran and North Korea to the global economy. US no longer seems to have the willingness and clout to enforce the rules requiring credible safeguards before civilian nuclear technology can be exported.

China is not only active in Pakistan. Iran has emerged as the second largest customer of China's defence industry after Pakistan, receiving critical defence technology from China, including some that violate the stated Chinese policy of adhering to the norms of the non-proliferation regime.

As China becomes more assured of its rising global profile, it challenges US foreign-policy priorities, and the non-proliferation regime fast becomes the first casualty of the emerging great power politics.

It's safe to conclude that notwithstanding the hype surrounding the NPT Review Conference held in May, the nuclear non-proliferation regime as we have known it is on its last legs. And the reason is simple: the changing balance of power. The most dramatic changes in the global balance of power are taking place in Asia, and it's there that the epitaph of the non-proliferation regime is being written.

International regimes merely reflect the extant distribution of power, and the non-proliferation regime is out of sync with the distribution of global power at the moment. Is it any surprise then that its credibility is rapidly eroding?

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