

Which way is Biman flying?



Caught in severe turbulence.

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S. M. HELAL

I have been waiting for Bangladesh Airlines Pilots' Association (BAPA) to react to the proceedings thus far, but in absence of any such reaction I take this opportunity to redress my tormented conscience. I think remaining a silent bystander in this situation is an offence for a person who is in some way related to Biman.

I am a stakeholder in Biman's affairs as an employee and as a citizen, because Biman belongs to the people, and everyone of the country has right to all information related to the performance of the airline.

Biman is plagued with too many issues which need desperate and immediate action. It is inconceivable why there is so much controversy about one aircraft, which has not been contributing positively either towards revenue earnings or the image of the airline.

It can be said safely that CAAB regulations do not allow this aircraft to be flown. Whether the aircraft is making money for the airline does not matter in any way. There is a cost associated with regulatory compliance and any company doing business should be ready and willing to incur that cost.

There is one argument being voiced today; if Biman can operate aircraft that are more than 30 years old, why can't Kabo 747 be operated? Regulatory requirement prescribes compliance for further acquisitions, and not

for aircraft already owned by concerns. It is like the BRTA restriction on import of vehicles older than five years, whereas older vehicles can run up to 20 years from the date of manufacture.

Biman should not be flying the DC-10s or the F-28s. We should have replaced them at least a decade back. Unfortunately, we did not have the visionaries who would make things happen, or even if we had, they were unable to realise their dreams because of pressure from influential people.

No flight should have been operated with the Kabo 747 aircraft during and after the last Hajj. Its story up to the pre-Hajj operations is that of deceit and blackmail. Kabo's bid for Hajj operations was \$8,900/hr and the lowest bid by Orient Thai was \$7,800/hr. Kabo was asked to match the Orient Thai cost per seat, which would make their hourly rate \$8,090 because of the additional capacity of 24 seats.

Kabo initially agreed to this proposal, but they replaced their offer just a few days before Hajj operations with an alternative offer. Kabo would operate for one year instead of only the Hajj operations at a rate of \$5,300. This aircraft was parked at Dhaka airport following the 2008 hajj operations. It is obvious that the attempt to secure its long-term wet lease with Biman was preplanned.

There was an emergency meeting at Balaka, Biman head office, to solve the crisis arising from Kabo's withdrawal. It was decided that

Thai Orient would be asked to provide a second aircraft. Thai Orient obliged and the second aircraft was contracted. When Kabo's local agent found that their plan did not work, they offered to operate the aircraft for a period of eight months instead of one year.

Having contracted both Thai Orient aircraft, Biman decided not to entertain the Kabo offer. Instead it was recommended that Kabo be blacklisted for deliberately putting Biman under pressure. But amazingly, Kabo's offer was accepted on the pretext that it would provide additional support during Hajj operations.

Obviously, there was strong lobby behind Kabo, strong enough to plan and execute an extra-ordinary and unethical ploy. It is needless to say that Biman had to swallow one additional aircraft without any real requirement.

Why is it so important to have aircraft on wet lease? Because wet lease payment is on hourly basis, and dry lease is on monthly basis. There is a published dry lease rate for different type of aircraft depending on date of manufacture and configuration, but there is no such reliable information on wet lease.

A wet lease aircraft has to be operated for a minimum guaranteed hours, whereas the use of the dry leased aircraft is at the operator's discretion. Just think about it, in case of dry lease, an aircraft can be contracted at a rate of \$10-15,000 over the actual market rate, but in the absence of any such published rate, the hourly rate can be a few hundred to a thousand dollars more than the actual "per hour" rate for wet lease.

With guaranteed use for 350 hrs, \$1,000 over the actual rate would translate into \$350,000. The dry lease contract of the 777-200ER with Biman is for \$600,000. We have no idea whether the dry lease part of the contract will actually come into effect, because there is no visible effort in that direction. Of course,

we have crew, maintenance capability and ancillary support, all of which are highly under-utilised now.

Surprisingly, while there is strong lobby for allowing Kabo 747 to operate, there is no debate for changing the CAAB regulatory requirement which bars the aircraft from being flown. If it is imperative to fly old aircraft, the rules should be amended to suit that instead of granting waivers to suit particular groups.

It is my assumption that all the private airlines are waiting to see the outcome of this battle, which will ascertain whether the Kabo 747 gets to fly or not. Waiver to let Kabo operate will allow others to bring in old aircraft.

CAAB is presently listed Category Two by FAA and "Significant Safety Concern" by ICAO. Another deviation definitely will not help its efforts to improve credibility in the eyes of those organisations. CAAB is an oversight body and must promulgate appropriate rules/regulations and strictly enforce them.

Aircraft leasing is a fairly common strategy practiced by most airlines. It reduces investment significantly. Nearly 40% of all aircraft with the airlines have been acquired on lease. Airlines purchase aircraft to build equity as they expand. But hardly any airline acquires aircraft on wet lease, simply because they have the capability to provide all the components required for operation, like crew, maintenance, network and many other associated services developed through years.

Acquisition of aircraft on wet lease is done only to address short-term capacity crisis. But in our airline wet lease aircraft acquisition has become a regular practice. Regular leasing companies do not let out aircraft on wet lease, otherwise they would attain the characteristics of a charter company. Obviously, all-round support package always comes at a much higher price.

I have no intention of getting into the financial details, but one thing I can tell with certainty, the airline is bleeding because of the wet leased aircraft. They are becoming increasingly more expensive to operate and less appealing to the passengers. This is an appeal aimed to catch the attention of the Honorable prime minister, who went out of her way to extend sovereign guarantee for the purchase of the new aircraft. We are aware of her feelings for the airline, and I am confident that with the right picture about the airline, we will receive appropriate support to make this airline an asset.

There is no point in hiding corporate dirt under the corporate rug. I request all concerned to open up and make a change. The brand equity of the airline is presently dwelling in negative territory; let us not allow it to slip any further.

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China warns US-friendly neighbours

While the Chinese strategy of threats and intimidation may have some effect, it would be much wiser for China to return to its old policy of emphasising goodwill and joint development.

FRANK CHING

CHINA is warning Asian countries that holding military exercises with the United States is bad for their health. South Korea and Vietnam, both of which have recently conducted naval activities with their American counterparts, have been warned that the United States is far away, suffering from financial difficulties and is not a reliable partner, while China is right next door.

"Military drills leave South Korea insecure," blared a headline Friday in the *Global Times*, sister paper of the *People's Daily*.

South Korea and the United States are holding a series of military exercises aimed at warning North Korea not to take any more bellicose actions against the South. The manoeuvres follow the sinking in March of a South Korean naval vessel, allegedly by a North Korean torpedo, with the loss of 46 lives.

Will such exercises, and a stronger military alliance with the United States, provide Seoul with the security it is looking for, the *Global Times* asked.

"New military drills will only send more hostile signals to the North," the commentary said. "It is this hostility that has been the source of insecurity and has forced North Korea to take more risky actions."

Moreover, the commentary made clear, South Korea was not only antagonising North Korea -- it was also provoking China.

"Whatever the explanations the U.S. and South Korea offered, the military drills surrounding China's offshore sea obviously have the intention of targeting China," it said.

The Pentagon has announced that the aircraft carrier USS George Washington will not take part in planned exercises next month in the Yellow Sea near China. This is the second time the George Washington has not taken part in exercises in the Yellow Sea after the Chinese protested that its presence would jeopardise their national security.

The American decision to once again accommodate Beijing will no doubt be noted in Seoul.

The *Global Times* commentary, without naming names, added: "South Korea needs to keep clear-minded that its security has to be built on goodwill with its neighbours. A stronger South Korea-United States alliance might jeopardise the trust of Seoul with its neighbours, and lead to more insecurity."

That is to say, it would be a mistake for South Korea to think that it could rely on the United States to deal with its mighty neighbour -- China.

A similar warning was delivered to Vietnam, which recently conducted its first joint naval engagement activities with the United States.

The aircraft carrier George Washington also sailed to Vietnam after exercises east of the Korean peninsula. Perhaps even more significantly, Vietnam and the United States held their first defence dialogue last week at a time when Washington's military-to-military dialogue with Beijing remains suspended.

The Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Jiang Yu, warned that Vietnam's situation was "as precarious as a pile of eggs" with potential hazards lurking on every side.

Vietnam, she warned, is incurring Chinese displeasure. Hanoi "might well overestimate the capacity of Uncle Sam's protective umbrella," she declared bluntly. "Should China and Vietnam truly come into military clashes, no aircraft carrier of any country can ensure it to remain secure."

She advised Vietnam to "give up the illusion that it can do what it likes in the South China Sea under the protection of the American navy."

China is also pointing out to one and all that the United States is bogged down in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and facing a difficult economic and fiscal situation, is taking steps to reduce its military expenditures.

Thus, the *People's Daily* online reported the dismantling of the Joint Forces Command, established less than a year ago in Norfolk, Virginia to focus on the transformation of U.S. military capabilities.

Defence Secretary Robert Gates has said that though the defence budget is growing by one or two percentage points a year, this is not enough to maintain today's fighting capabilities, which requires growth of 2% to 3%.

China, on the other hand, is in much better financial shape and can afford to have its defence budget grow by close to double digits every year. While the Chinese strategy of threats and intimidation may have some effect, it would be much wiser for China to return to its old policy of emphasising goodwill and joint development.

China's charm offensive since the 1980s was hugely effective. Resorting to threats and blackmail may cow some of the smaller countries in Asia but will not create reliable friends and allies, which is what China needs.

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World without words!



ken one. Just as cultures develop spoken, verbal languages, they also develop unspoken nonverbal languages.

Nonverbal communication takes place through behaviour, signal or sign projected by a person. For example, if you smile and your friend smiles back, communication is occurred. The correct information need not always be delivered.

Can we produce or interpret nonverbal messages correctly when communicating with people from cultures other than our own? The answer is yes and no, and sometimes a combination of both -- even for signals rooted in our evolutionary history.

We have found that some nonverbal behaviour is universal, eg., the meaning behind a look, keeping interpersonal distance, smiling etc. However, local cultures reveal varied tolerances and expectations for their display. Facial expressions of emotions are interpretable cross-culturally but, depending on where you travel, it may be more appropriate to portray an emotion you do not feel than to reveal one that you do. Culture even regulates the messages that parts of our anatomy convey.

It is important to understand that not all cultures view or perceive nonverbal communication in the same manner. Gestures, a kind of nonverbal behaviour, are movements of the body, usually the hands, that are generally reflective of thought or feeling. Many cultures exhibit differences in the use of gestures as illustrators, and the possibility of unnecessary intercultural conflict is all too real.

The "V" for victory sign with index and middle fingers is an example of cultural differences in gestures. This gesture is commonly used in the United States to mean victory, and it has been widely used in other countries as well.

It is said that some members of the Greek and American military may have insulted former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and then they gave that sign with the palm facing backward instead of forward. Facing backward, it is a common English insult equivalent to an American saying "up yours."

The original "V" for victory sign is given with the palm facing outward. But you would not want to do that in Greece because it is an abbreviated form of an insult there. The gesture evolved in Greece from the practice of throwing garbage and dirt from the streets

toward criminals as they were paraded through the streets.

A "thumbs up" sign, which has become an almost universal sign for "okay," may have a very derogatory meaning in Australia and some parts of Eastern Europe. In South East Asia "thumbs up" is considered to be very offensive behaviour -- indicating that you are ignoring and humiliating the person. However, in Malaysia and Indonesia it is perceived as a kind of greeting. In Arab countries this gesture does not exist at all.

A "finger circle," formed with thumb and forefinger, in America means "okay," but it is considered a vulgar or obscene gesture in Germany and Brazil. In Russia and Greece it is considered impolite. In Japan it signifies "money" and in France it symbolises "zero."

Another important aspect is the outcome of competition between individuals' ranks in the social hierarchy. In some cultures a gaze fosters less intimacy between individuals from different social classes. Reports on nonverbal behaviour suggest that members of dominant social groups often perceive this act as showing disrespect.

Thus, we see the distinctive touches each culture or social class imprints on its method of nonverbal communication. As we encounter those of other cultures or social classes, it is important to remember that each of us has the desire to communicate as fully as possible with others. Nonverbal behaviour in many forms is often the most revealing and striking means by which we allow others to understand our thoughts and feelings.

In the changing world, people need to move for employment, immigration and other reasons. It may so happen that we need to spend four seasons of a year in four countries, and have to adapt to the local culture where we often use language without words -- facial expression and body language.

The study of nonverbal behaviour should advance rapidly but carefully to give us better understanding among ourselves and of others in different cultures. As we talk about globalisation we need to widen our cultural filter so that greetings of one culture should not lead to misunderstanding with a person or group in another culture.

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S.H. MAHMUD

HUMAN communication skill is very powerful. However, it does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs in a specific context. The power of communications to draw others near or to drive them away derives as much from how we appear as from the language we use.

When people think about communication, they generally think about language. But language is just one form of communication -- and perhaps not the most important one.

In fact, we use many other vehicles of expression to communicate our thoughts, feelings, desires, and wishes to others. These other means of communication are not verbal -- they do not use words -- but nonverbal.

Applied either naively or artfully, nonverbal expressions, gestures and signs can comple-

ment language. These silent messages, expressed through face and body, can communicate motives and thoughts, or they can embellish, minimise, or disguise them.

Nonverbal behaviour can highlight or accentuate our emotional states. They convey how excited we are or whether we are angry, upset, or happy. We can also get conflicting messages from nonverbal behaviour. The words coming out of someone's mouth may tell you one thing, but the person's nonverbal behaviour (tone of voice, gaze) may tell you something else.

The nonverbal dimension is spontaneous and automatic. No one ever taught us how to do this; we do not attend classes in nonverbal behaviour. All of our education about nonverbal behaviour is informal, learnt in our homes and on the streets. Nonverbal behaviour is just like a second language, albeit a silent, unspo-