

## SUNDAY POUCH

## Biman flight suspension on five routes

*It will worsen conditions for carrier*

**B**ANGLADESH Biman has been ailing for as long as anyone can remember. It has more often than not failed to maintain its flight schedule; it has broken down on the way; and tales of corruption and malfeasance among those whose job is to keep it going have been public knowledge over the years. The fact that many people, including very large numbers of Bangladeshis, prefer foreign airlines to the national carrier when they travel abroad has been a recurrent embarrassment for Biman. Add to that the conditions of many of the aircraft in Biman's fleet. It certainly goes to the credit of Biman pilots that they have so far managed to fly these aircraft without any serious accident happening.

And just when we need Biman to reinvigorate itself, especially on international routes, the authorities have decided that flights to five international destinations will remain suspended from September 17 to November 30. Deep cuts will be made on other routes as well. The move, as we have been informed, has been necessitated by the forthcoming Hajj. During the period in question, Biman will be busy carrying Hajj passengers to Saudi Arabia and back. That our intending pilgrims to Makkah must perform Hajj in a disciplined, uninterrupted manner goes without saying. But to have so many regular Biman flights taken off the schedule, thereby affecting those who plan to use Biman on their travels is a new low touched in the airline's profile. At a time when Biman needs to gain as many passengers as it can and so turn itself into a viable carrier, the decision to suspend flights on the Hong Kong, Karachi, Delhi, Manchester and Milan routes for two and a half months is nothing short of the carrier giving itself a big wound. It is not merely that in this long period people intending to travel by Biman will suffer. There is something worse, which is that when this two-and-a-half month flight suspension ends, there is the very real possibility of Biman discovering that it has lost a good number of passengers during the period.

Such a planning disaster should be avoided in future.

## Abysmal condition of bailey bridges

*Reconstructing them should be prioritised*

**A** photograph carried in the front page of yesterday's issue of The Daily Star shows that a bailey bridge at Pekua Upazila in Cox's Bazar broke down with a stone-laden truck precariously hanging down by the side. Quite an unnerving scene indeed! It worries us to think what would have happened if there were a passenger carrier instead of a truck!

From what we could gather from our archive, hundreds of bailey bridges in the country are in dire straits, posing serious risks of fatal accidents and impediments to communication. A good many of them in different districts have become unfit for use for quite a long time. Still, only a few of them have been repaired whereas all others are left to crumble down slowly mainly due to the indifference of the concerned government bodies. In many cases, experts have said, construction of the bridges has been so faulty that some of them need to be reconstructed immediately while some others can function only for a few years.

While large-scale concrete bridges are part of an arterial communication network in a modern world, small-scale bailey bridges play a pivotal role in communication in the interiors of the country. Thanks to the very topography of our country crisscrossed with numerous rivers, canals and tributaries, bailey bridges have become indispensable for both carrying goods and passengers from one district to another. In fact, they are now a part and parcel of our communication network which in turn directly impacts the country's economy.

Therefore, the communication ministry should take the state of the bailey bridges into serious consideration and propel the roads and bridges divisions into repairing and reconstructing them immediately. If we are to avert a string of fatal accidents and bolster marketing networks and internal trade and commerce, there is no alternative

# A question of governance



ASHFAQUR RAHMAN

**W**HEN the Awami League contested the national elections, under the last caretaker government, it had pledged two

very important things. One was to change the way the country was governed. It called this Din Bodol. The other was to present a vision of a modern Bangladesh, which would be implemented in stages.

It was the fascination of Din Bodol that attracted voters on electionday. The first Din Bodol action was when the party prohibited wild electoral celebration. The next major Din Bodol was when the prime minister announced a cabinet where there were new faces, some young some old, thus submitting a happy mix of the wise and the wonderful. The third Din Bodol was when the prime minister went to Delhi to initiate a new state of relations with our powerful neighbour. Oh, those heady days!

But soon the government faced several challenges. First was the BDR revolt. This was followed by the world economic downturn. Then came sporadic violence and the deficit in supply of electricity. Awami League seemed to tackle most of the issues hands on. As India could not keep the pledges made to our prime minister, the Awami League suffered some collateral political damage.

In the meantime, the International War Crimes Tribunal started its work in Dhaka. Slowly but surely, due process was underway to reverse the impunity that the people and the nation had been subjected to since the liberation of the country. In spite of political pressures from inside the country and from interested international quarters, the trials could finally begin. An election pledge was at last being implemented.

In the last three and half years, the government had the fortune to enjoy bumper crop harvests. This was as much due to the diligence of the farmer as to the creditable policy mix of the government that provided agri-

cultural inputs where required, including electricity for irrigation, on time and at reasonable costs. The Awami League therefore could keep its large vote bank in the rural areas contended. But the government's popularity peaked when Bangladesh got a handsome maritime award, courtesy of an international arbitration that finally solved its maritime border demarcation dispute with Myanmar.

But then something suddenly snapped in political circles. In an arbitrary manner, the government pounced on Professor Yunus and the Grameen Bank, both Nobel Prize laureates for peace. The professor was accused of "malfeasance" for serving

Several big names were involved. The allegations were investigated by those who are paid by the people to do so. But nothing of substance emerged. Then came the latest scandal. This involved the state-run Sonali Bank, which gave out thousands of cores of takas as loan to a company that did not have enough credentials to ask for such a loan from the largest public bank of the country. The activities of the banks were being poorly monitored, not only by politically appointed directors but also by the Bangladesh Bank and even by the Ministry of Finance. The finance minister could only tell the press that half of the public money would be returned. What about the rest? What

The government tried to do its best about repairing the transport infrastructure with its meager resources. But the minister responsible for this sensitive task was fighting his way through a graft scandal over his alleged role in the mega Padma Bridge project. The World Bank cancelled the huge loan and other financiers went on hold with their money too because there was evidence abroad about corrupt dealings. The Awami League had promised before the election to implement this project, which will bring benefit to 30 million people in the southwest part of Bangladesh. But for the obduracy of the government the project seemed to be left in the cold storage. This is a classic case of opaque handling of international loans which the people have to repay.

Why has this government suddenly started doing all the wrong things? Is there no sensible person to help and advise our top leaders? Or are they surrounded by highly incompetent persons who have no idea about administering the day to day business of the government? To whom is the government beholden? Many say it is the quality of governance that is inhibiting the functioning of the government.

Good governance is participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, equitable, and follows the rule of law. Can we say that we can attribute any of these characteristics to our governance? Some of the events narrated explain the real state of things. When a government starts listening to political flunkies and to opportunists and not to the real politicians who have the welfare of the people at heart, then this is what happens.

People have a long memory. The next election is not far away. Time therefore is of essence. Those who govern today must be made aware that the votes of the governed do count. Let the flotsam and the jetsam of governance be sent to where they actually belong. The people have no time for tomfoolery any more.

Is anybody listening there?

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*Those who govern today must be made aware that the votes of the governed do count. Let the flotsam and the jetsam of governance be sent to where they actually belong.*

a term beyond his retirement years. Not only was he dismissed from his post, the government machinery also swung in to demonise his past. The Grameen Bank was also not spared. A fundamental change in its law was made to see that any future managing director would have to listen to the diktat of 3% shareholders (who belong to the government) instead of the 97% shareholders who happen to be women and poor but who represented more than 20 million stakeholders in the Bank. These decisions brought discredit to the government for no ostensible reason. The international community was also outraged.

Then came the financial scandals. First, the stock market crash and the loss that was taken by the small investors. The government initiated a couple of probes. But the report that listed the mischief makers was not published. The probe chairman was himself questioned. The media in the meantime reported huge flight of capital abroad. This was a case of inept handling by the government. It was pushing itself into a corner.

Next came the financial scandal connected with the Destiny group.

steps will be taken against those who gave such classified loan is now really a matter of conjecture. Gross negligence in duty as well as malafide intentions of high ups took hold of governance.

Before these scandals, there were also serious issues relating to law and order. Reputed journalists were not only hounded but were allegedly killed by unknown assailants. A well known labour leader was also assassinated. There was also alleged abduction of important public figures, some belonging to the main opposition. In spite of the law enforcers trying to piece things together to solve the mysteries, some of them were found busy enquiring into the activities of the opposition leaders. And that also in a democracy! Pictures of law enforcers going "berserk" against citizens, sometimes maiming them at other times humiliating them, was another unfortunate aspect that tainted the government. People who elected them to power were now having doubts about their own electoral wisdom.

Our poor road and rail infrastructure had always worried the people.

## | The New York Times EXCLUSIVE

# Has 'Europe' failed?

NICHOLAS SAMBANIS

**R**ECENTLY, European leaders met in Berlin amid new signs of an impending recession and an emerging consensus that Greece could leave the eurozone within a year -- a move that would have dire consequences for the currency's future. There are many reasons behind the crisis, from corruption and collective irresponsibility in Greece to European institutional rigidities and the flawed concept of a monetary union without a fiscal union.

But this is not just a story about profligate spending and rigid monetary policy. The European debt crisis is not just an economic crisis: It is an escalating identity conflict -- an ethnic conflict.

The European Union was a political concept, designed to tame a bellicose Germany. Strong economic interdependence and a common European identity, it was thought, would be cultivated by the institutions of the union, as Europeans benefited from the economic prosperity that integration would create.

Elites could sell that concept to their publics as long as Europe prospered and had high international status. But the union has lost its shine. It is slowing down and aging. Its longtime ally, the United States, is shifting attention to East Asia. Its common defense policy is shallow.

As Europe's status declines, the already shaky European identity will weaken further and the citizens of the richer European nations will be

more likely to identify nationally -- as Germans or French -- rather than as Europeans. This will increase their reluctance to use their taxes for bailouts of the ethnically different Southern Europeans, especially the culturally distant Greeks; and it will diminish any prospect of fiscal integration that could help save the euro.

The result is a vicious circle: as ethnic identities return, ethnic differences become more pronounced, and all sides fall back on stereotypes and the stigmatisation of the adversary through language or actions intended to dehumanise, thereby justifying hostile actions. This is a

Clearly something deeper is motivating the German public.

A recent study by political scientists Michael Bechtel, Jens Hainmueller and Yotam Margalit found that German voters' attitudes toward the bailouts are explained by their degree of "cosmopolitanism," or the extent to which they identify with geographically or culturally distant groups. More cosmopolitan individuals are more likely to support bailing out Germany's southern neighbours.

Unfortunately, cosmopolitanism can be the first casualty of rising ethnic tensions, as populations react negatively to escalating political

edged national identities, which the European Union hoped to banish. True, many Greeks, especially those living abroad, still toe the European line about "taking the medicine" prescribed by the European "doctors," no matter how painful.

Why? Some fear the social upheaval that a transition to the drachma would cause. Others worry that populist politicians would abandon all structural reforms without European oversight. But social psychology suggests that many Greeks might be desperately clinging to the last shreds of their European identity, because that gives them more self-esteem than the alternative -- the Near Eastern or Balkan identity they have been trying to shed for decades. Greece's wounded reputation makes some Greeks cling to their European identity. But even that may not last long.

Germans must have a frank public discussion about what it means to be European, how good European citizens should behave toward other Europeans and why a strong Europe is good for German interests in a world dominated by the United States, China and emerging powers like India and Brazil. Without such a discussion, and real concessions to Greece, a Greek exit is inevitable -- and with it the triumph of parochialism in Europe.

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## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 9

**1493** Battle of Krbava field, a decisive defeat of Croats in Croatian struggle against the invasion by the Ottoman Empire.

**1923** Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey, founds the Republican People's Party.

**1945** Second Sino-Japanese War: Japan formally surrenders to China.

**1948** Kim Il-sung declares the establishment of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

**1993** The Palestine Liberation Organization officially recognizes Israel as a legitimate state.

**2001** Ahmed Shah Massoud, leader of the Northern Alliance, is assassinated in Afghanistan by two al Qaeda assassins who claimed to be Arab journalists wanting an interview.