

Open, troubled skies!

NAJMUN NOOR

As a new CEO just assumed office in Biman, it's *deja vu* all over again at a time when the airline industry is still suffering from an acute lack of direction. Quite like his predecessor, his fate may also be reduced, if not doomed to responsibility without authority. But there are other concerns, too.

Concerns surrounding the business reasons are far more compelling than regulatory agencies will have us believe. The litmus test of strategies is reflected in the outcome of adopted policies and revisiting to tailor those to dramatically changing needs. Domestic airlines, too, are oblivious of what continues to bedevil the very feasibility of their operations.

A double edged sword
The tell-tale signs of misdirected policies are all too obvious. A proper air traffic hub, for instance, has failed to develop. The business potential of airlines of Bangladeshi origin either remains stymied or their very existence is at stake. And one only has to look around to conclude that without a proper air traffic hub, it is impractical to expect an airline to succeed. The rationale applies in reverse as well. A hub also cannot succeed without a vibrant domestic airline. The success of any international airline is predicated on the success of the hub that it is housed in or operates from. But conditions are nothing short of an oxymoron for Bangladeshi airlines on their home turf.

Open-ended operation
A laissez faire policy in the way that airlines of other countries are allowed to operate in Bangladesh does not allow a level playing field. Carriers of Middle Eastern or Western Asian origin seem to enjoy frequency of flights that totally misrepresent or are far in excess of what the demand of the market would suggest.



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Glut of seats have a profound effect

When airlines are allowed to operate a number of flights on a route that is totally disproportionate to market demand it inevitably has a telling and severe effect on the viability of the airlines' operation. It triggers a glut of seats, as does fare wars, dilution of revenues and eventual discontinuation of services. It is not only that the economic viability of airline operation is in jeopardy. The very existence of these domestic airlines is also at stake.

The latitude or flexibility allowed to Middle Eastern / Western Asian airlines encourages them to target long haul traffic to and from Europe and USA which is rightfully the mainstay of the business of direct bilateral operators operating on those long haul routes. The imbalance created throws the market into disarray.

Tragic effects

The effects are tragic in that bilateral 'direct' carriers are forced to discontinue operations against the backdrop of highly aggressive methods employed by the 'intermediate' carriers as a result of the inordinately high number of flights allowed them in the first place. Indirect carriers also resort to their abundance of resources and incur marketing costs at will and with scant regard to operating costs like jet fuel that play havoc on the fate of direct bilateral operators.

Equitable distribution of flights

Equitable distribution of flight frequencies based on market demand is a time honoured universal practice for assessing seat requirement and to avoid market anomalies. It is also a safeguard against arm twisting techniques that Big

League carriers are known to employ on smaller airlines to weed out competition or even result in their extinction. Some of big league carriers have now assumed behemoth proportions capable of shooing in elements of oligopoly and unfair competition.

But how does it affect Bangladesh?

It is more than just a red line that defines the difference between competition in the Open Skies and the opportunity of Fair competition. Open Skies policy is a myth or fallacy at best. Anomalous practices allowed to others place airlines of Bangladesh origin into hazardous position that is hastened by under-utilization of newly acquired aircraft. The leeway allowed to operators to fly in with frequencies disproportionate to market demand force direct operators like Biman or other

airlines of Bangladesh origin to withdraw operation of flights.

It was easy to discontinue flights with (written off) DC10 aircraft as a quick fix. In the present day context, however, operation of flights with newly acquired or leased aircraft must be kept buoyant and ongoing --- for the principal reason of debt servicing, if not anything else. Carriers like Biman are forced to consider borrowing from banks to pay wages and salaries while also debt servicing the loans. Origins of this anomaly lie in the open-ended and lopsided benefits enjoyed by the intermediate or foreign carriers than what the interplay of market forces would normally suggest.

Glaring legitimisation

Bangladeshi carriers lose out on potential revenues that are legitimately theirs but made to be conveniently legitimate for others. The national carrier of Bangladesh, for example, was forced to pay royalties to Big League carriers in the past whereas lop sided effects favouring certain carriers are now affecting them in their home market.

Other effects

Going out of the way to allow opportunities to other carriers at the expense of Bangladeshi airlines also compromises with the aim of developing a vibrant hub at Dhaka. Any chance of correction becomes remote with others gaining from the plight of domestic carriers. Circumstances are far from being a level playing field for the carriers of Bangladeshi origin. Conditions must be set right for the national carrier as well to showcase Bangladesh's economic growth in the economy. It behooves common sense why a suitably crafted aviation policy cannot be introduced. Both the aviation industry and the national economy can benefit from it.

It is of crucial strategic interest.

The writer is an airline marketing executive.

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Corruption, controversial elections and violent extremism

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDAR

CORRUPTION – the use of public office for private gains – benefits a powerful few while imposing serious costs on large swathes of society. It is believed to impede economic development. More importantly, it seriously hampers poverty eradication efforts of least developed countries. In a recent best-selling book, *Thieves of States: Why Corruption Threatens Global Security* (W.W. Norton, 2015) Sara Chayes explains how this oldest problem of governments can also be their greatest destabilising force and the biggest threat to their national security.

Sara Chayes, currently a senior associate at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, was a journalist and later became an adviser on corruption to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Her book is primarily on Afghanistan's governance failures and their effects on the Talibanization of the country. It also has chapters on Egypt, Tunisia, Uzbekistan and Nigeria, among others. The book is enriched with its reference to medieval and Renaissance works of advice for rulers, known 'as mirrors,' to contextualise current abuses of governments. She even quotes the 11th-century Persian Administrator, Nizam-al Mulk, who cautioned that a government's ability to administer justice and hold officials accountable was key to its very survival.

In her anecdotal, but compelling story, Chayes makes the strong case that acute cor-

ruption causes not only social breakdowns but also violent religious extremism. She shows that where there is poor governance – specifically, no rule of law and no protected right of property – people begin a search for spiritual purity that puts them on a path to radicalization. Mired in graft, many countries of Africa, Asia and former Soviet Union, are caught in a Mafia-like system in which money flows upward. In many of those countries, according to Chayes, "Development resources passed through a corrupt system not only reinforce that system by helping to fund it but also inflamed the feelings of injustice that were driving people toward the insurgency."

Some of the other countries Chayes covers in her book show similar patterns of stealing money, although with some variations. The variations range from military-kleptocratic complex in Egypt to bureaucratic kleptocracy in Tunisia, the post-Soviet kleptocratic autocracy in Uzbekistan and the resource kleptocracy in Nigeria. The Arab Spring, Chayes contends, "amounted to mass uprising against kleptocratic practices." The book singles out a few characters like Hosni Mubarak's son Gamal, who crystallised popular revulsion, because he and his cronies 'hijacked' the Egyptian state, "rewriting the laws, awarding themselves privileged access to land and other public resources."

The effect of such kleptomania is religious extremism. For example, according to Chayes, among the Nigerian Christians and Muslims, the "puritanical focus on personal behaviour has increased in recent decades, as corruption metastasized beyond the confines of official-

dom to infect nearly all Nigerian behaviour." In Uzbekistan, where Chayes says the aging dictator's eldest daughter is involved in faux charities, telecom sector bribery and possibly even sex trafficking, many people are disenchanted and turning to religion.

According to Chayes, the government of Afghanistan "could best be understood not as a government at all but as a vertically integrated criminal organisation whose core activity was not in fact exercising the functions of a state but rather extracting resources for personal gain." As a result, Chayes quoted a local human rights activist as saying: "People are becoming more devoted because they are more and more frustrated with the government. They are turning to God for recourse."

Faced with such a kleptocratic, criminal empire in Afghanistan, Chayes tried to convince the senior officials at ISAF and the U.S. Joint Chiefs to do something about the danger it poses. Their response was, "First let's establish security, then we can worry about governance." But, according to Chayes, in Afghanistan, corruption and social injustice are the main causes of insecurity. In a recent interview with Reuters, she claimed to have told her bosses: "If we don't address the underlying drivers of the Taliban resurgence, you can kill all the Taliban you want and you won't get anywhere. But I didn't (she admitted) make the case sufficiently enough for people to change the policy."

In the same interview, Chayes described her experience of giving a talk in Germany in 2010, where she characterised the Afghan

government as a vertically integrated criminal organisation: "I thought that was a wonky throw-away line, and I got a standing ovation! There were people from 45 different countries there and several came up to me and said 'you just described my country.' And every person who said that had a violent religious extremist movement in their country."

Chayes also argues in her book that rigged elections can anger people and make them

the common people, with their limited income and no 'patron' in positions of power to help out, are the hardest and directly hit, especially by all pervasive petty corruption. Our January 5, 2014 parliament elections were one-sided and largely voter-less. We also have a growing problem of religious extremism. We are afraid that the continued looting and plundering of our corrupt politicians-bureaucrats-businessmen nexus and the

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violent. She points to the fraudulent 2009 Afghan elections, which so frustrated citizens that the vote may have boosted support for the insurgency. The book thus identifies new stimulants to and provides new understanding of the problem of violent religious extremism.

We too have serious graft and corruption problems in Bangladesh. The problem is widespread and affects everyone. However,

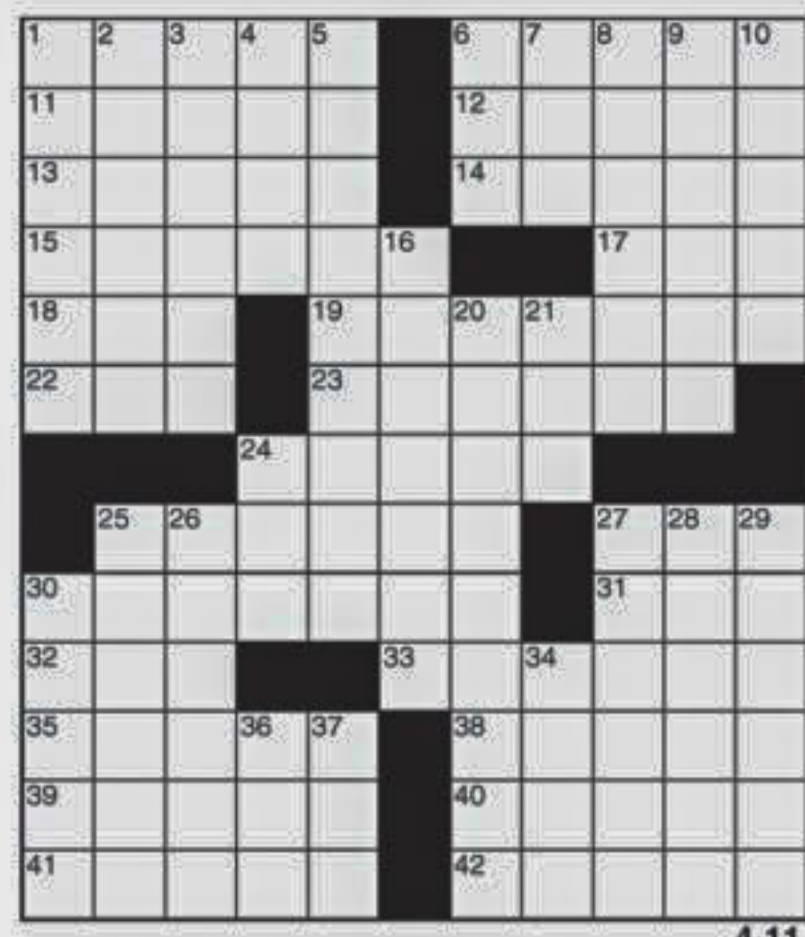
recent controversial elections have been fanning serious grassroots anger, boosting support for growing violent extremism in our country. We are concerned that unless we begin to recognise this link and start taking the necessary remedial measures, our future may be doomed.

The writer is Secretary of SHUJAN: Citizens for Good Governance.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- Treated roughly
 - Caravan creature
 - Nimble
 - Texas landmark
 - Red Square name
 - Arrested
 - Effortless
 - Computer unit
 - Deep voice
 - Genesis name
 - Decline
 - Headgear with eyesholes
 - Mistreat
 - Low-grade peer
 - Weasels' cousins
 - Eurasian deer
 - Wise teacher
 - Eat in style
 - General feeling
 - Movie plantation
 - Phoenix birth-place
 - Forum garb
 - Moving sinuously
 - Conspicuous
 - Like Santa's duds
 - Full of flavour

- DOWN**
- Chum
 - Application entry
 - Sherwood Anderson book
 - Inventor Howe
 - Lairs
 - Highway sight
 - Mobile home?
 - Sherwood Anderson book
 - Put out
 - Single
 - Hairy ox
 - Roof support
 - "Fernando" group
 - Claiming cry
 - Visionary
 - Shortly
 - Leg bend
 - School attendee
 - Bonbon center
 - Took the wheels
 - Physics amount
 - Capital on a fjord
 - Full range
 - Blue shade
 - Skill
 - Messy digs



YESTERDAY'S ANSWER

P	A	W	E	D	C	A	M	E	L
A	G	I	L	E	A	L	A	M	O
L	E	N	I	N	R	A	N	I	N
E	A	S	Y	B	Y	T	E		
B	A	S	S	A	D	A	M		
E	B	B	S	K	I	M	A	S	K
A	B	U	S	E	B	A	R	O	N
M	A	R	T	E	N	S	R	O	E
G	U	R	U	D	I	N	E		
M	O	O	D	T	A	R	A		
A	S	H	E	S	T	O	G	A	S
S	L	I	N	K	O	V	E	R	T
S	O	O	T	Y	Z	E	S	T	Y

CRYPTOQUOTE 3-4
QOK FAAL JMPK MZ Y CGADKZZ, UAQ Y ZQYQK AP WKMUE. MQ MZ Y LMGKDQMAU, UAQ Y LKZQMUYQMAU.
-- DYGI GAFKZ

YESTERDAY'S CRYPTOQUOTE:
EFFORTS AND COURAGE ARE NOT ENOUGH WITHOUT PURPOSE AND DIRECTION.
-- JOHN. F. KENNEDY

A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW
One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three Ls, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

QUOTABLE Quote

It's no use of talking unless people understand what you say.

Zora Neale Hurston

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