

Flying Biman for a Trip to Trauma



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

FROM Dhaka to Kolkata and back -- by Biman! What's there to write home about such a short round trip of altogether 70 minutes? Actually, quite a lot when you count 24 hours being lost to make a 35 minute journey to and back from Kolkata. In those many hours you could have travelled almost round the world.

In a jet-turned supersonic age Biman's monumental nonchalance in dealing with even the briefest of flights is a shame. This blights its image and with it that of the country. After all it is our national flight carrier. Here is a blow-by-blow account of the episode: a saga, as it were, of human endurance tested under exceptionally stressful circumstances.

My spouse and I were issued tickets by our travel agent for Biman's morning flight to Kolkata on April 4 and the return flight on April 11 evening to Dhaka. Just for the heck of it I called my travel agent to bring the return journey forward by one day if possible. What I heard from him was downright arbitrary and upsetting: Our tickets were rescheduled for April 4 evening flight to Kolkata and April 12 early morning flight back to Dhaka. Neither the passengers were consulted on the change of schedules nor any prior information given to them by way of obtaining their consent. What goes on between the airlines and the travel agents seems to be passenger-unfriendly at best, and a disservice to their clients at worst.

But we were stacked up against more unpleasant surprises, even greater odds. On the evening of April 4, the plane left the tarmac on time just past seven and taxied along the runway until a storm broke out with heavy rains beating down on the earth. A member of the crew announced that the take-off would be delayed up to 50 minutes. On getting weather clearance after another two hours the plane took off, navigating a turbulent passage for nearly 25 minutes of the 35-minute journey to Netaji Subash Chandra International Airport. It was well past 11 when we got through the immigration and luggage collection. We preferred to err on the side of caution staying overnight on the airport lounge.

For our return flight at 8.15 am on the 11th we were required to report for check-in around 5am. So we had arranged a 3.30 am taxi pickup to make it to the airport on time which we did.

Hours ticked by -- even past 6, 7 and 8 am; no trace of the Biman check-in counter was to be seen anywhere on the huge concourse.

Meanwhile, passengers had gathered and having no clue of what lay ahead, some of us made frantic calls to station or traffic managers. Finally, the traffic manager with another official arrived on the scene. They made two points, each being heart-breaking and both amounted to breaching a minimum ethic binding a service industry to its customers.

Literally, the Pandora's box opened: the first surprise to spring was that the 8.15 am flight had been cancelled 3 days back and that their screen showed 'informed' against each passenger. None of the passengers reported having been informed. The second version was that 8.15 pm was mistakenly indicated for 8.15 am on the ticket.

Clearly the two versions cancelled each other and these were not any authoritative, more importantly troubleshooting, statements. It only betrayed a complete lack of coordination even in case of crisis management, patently self-created that it might have been in the first place.

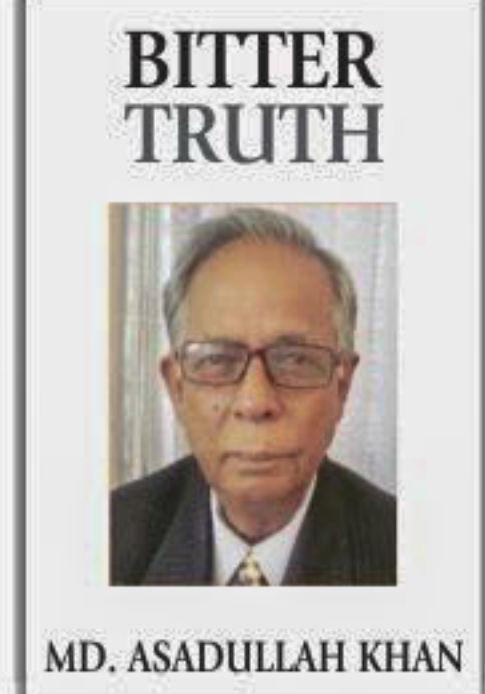
To cut it short, after 12 full hours of waiting during which breakfast and lunch were served, we would be boarding 8.30 pm flight to Dhaka. A large group of expatriate wage-earners headed for Saudi Arabia accompanied us. A Bangladeshi worker on transit was visibly concerned over expiry of visa dates should the flight be cancelled.

The point to drive home is that dissemination of information by itself cannot condone the failure of the system unless the suffering and the loss of time have been recompensed. For flights originating in Europe a 4-hour plus delay if not caused by an act of God automatically entitles a passenger to financial compensation. And on international routes flight delays up to 8 hours must entail transfer to hotels for rest.

Compatriots still fly Biman thinking that it is something of their own. But their number is dwindling, for how long can the people stand the test of patriotism when Biman disowns them, ditches them overseas, for hours? Lamented late cricketer Riche Benaud said something like this, "As in cricket so in life, it is 90 percent luck but you do need 10 percent skill to get by well enough." There is a message for Biman -- it may run out of its luck on patriotic inclinations towards it if this is strained too severely by lack of skill and coordinated management. They indeed have a captive clientele to cash in on and move forward with competent service at par with that of some competitive airlines.

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Can elected mayors save the city's water bodies?



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

BITTER TRUTH

THERE is a close link between economic growth, human development and good management of natural resources, mainly water bodies and forests. Unfortunately, socio-economic development appears threatened by environmental degradation through polluted water and extinction of forests.

Cities are measured on the basis of political and social stability, access to healthcare, natural environment, education, and the standard of infrastructure including public transport. Some mayoral aspirants in the city corporation polls race have also promised to curb corruption and bring about improvements in traffic congestion apart from taking measures to control the pollution of rivers and lakes around the city. Undeniably the river Buriganga and other water bodies as well as removing illegal encroachments of the rivers and river banks are central to planning a clean city.

In the run up to the city corporation elections, mayoral aspirants are promising everything on earth to rid the city of all the ills and restore it to its past glory. They are definitely aware that overburdened by a burgeoning population and attendant civic problems, the city of Dhaka has become unwieldy and hard to live in. Between 1980 and 2014, the population of Dhaka has swelled from 3 million to more than 14 million. From a somewhat laidback, sober city in the past, this capital turned into a thriving, bustling business centre and a crowded metropolis as well.

But despite the importance the city has received, its basic amenities have not kept pace with the changes. The citizens of Dhaka city are tired and weary. They are tired of passing through a city in which there are stinging, festering, garbage dumped on the roadside, and along the footpaths. And they are weary of travelling along the pitted roads. The city is now a hell-hole. Overpopulation, disease, litter, water shortage, and contaminated water have all played a part turning this once beautiful city into a teeming urban jungle.

The dissolved oxygen in the river Buriganga is well below 5mg per litre, the minimum requirement for the survival of aquatic life forms. The river receives an estimated 12.5 lakh cubic metres of sewage out of 13 lakh cubic metres generated by the city corporation. About 200 tanneries, most of them located at Hazaribagh pump about 21,000 cubic metres of hazardous waste. The Tejgaon industrial area offloads about 60 thousand cubic metres of polluted liquid waste into the Buriganga every day.

In most localities household drains connect to the sewer pipes, which also collect surface garbage. Consequently, the entire untreated mess drains into the river. The result: the water of Buriganga is not even fit for treatment now. Contaminated even

further by oil from barges and vessels, the river is so polluted that cleansing by surging rainwater has become almost impossible.

According to statistics of Bangladesh Water Development Board, the ground water level in Mirpur dropped by 53.75 metres, 18.59 metres in Mohammadpur and 37.4 metres in Sabujbagh between 1991 and 2008. It means that Dhaka is not only losing ground water fast but also subsiding gradually since the vacuum created by extraction does not get adequate recharge. As a result, the city might face disastrous consequences in case of a major earthquake.

Neither the past city mayors nor the BIWTA nor Dhaka WASA were concerned about the fate of the river Buriganga that once supplied piped water through treatment. The biggest onslaught has come from the river banks and the river itself. Hundreds of acres of riverbeds have fallen into the hands of encroachers. These banks have allegedly been encroached under an alliance of officials and land grabbers. If such shady deals continue to haunt the country even

discharge into the lake has to be stopped before excavation work for removing sludge from the bottom of the lake can start. Rajuk needs the permission of WASA for either stopping or reversing the discharge of waste water into the lake and approval of the DCC for cutting roads to lay a few feet of pipes and connect them to the nearest storm sewer pipes laid in Uttara.

Surprisingly, Rajuk was sitting idle over the project so long for reasons best known to them and now, because of pressure from citizens, it has asked for DCC (North) and WASA's permission after about a year of the Ecne approval of the lake project. Nobody knows when such permission will be available.

Incidentally, Rajuk is not accountable to citizens but elected mayors of the city corporations are. In such a situation, the elected mayors must sit with the prime minister to devise ways and means so that they can run their city cleaning and beautification programmes uninterrupted.

The crisis of governance is marked not only at the Rajuk or city corporation levels,



under the present government, which assumed power with firm pledges to bring about changes in the political culture, and the prevailing ill practices, then Turag, Balu and Buriganga will surely disappear.

In the present setup, the city mayors do not have any power or authority to affect or implement any development programme on their own, even when it becomes an emergent public necessity. The creation of a single authority or a supreme coordinating body comprising experts invested with authority from all such organisations has long been overdue.

Let me cite an instance of one such faltering development plan. Rajuk is invested with the authority or power for recovery or reconstruction of decrepit city water bodies because it is the owner of city land space. Rajuk received a DPP for recovery of the Uttara Lake involving Tk 38 crore approved by the Ecne in May 2014. However, in the first phase of their work they stumbled to prevent polluted water from being discharged into the lake from the drains constructed by DCC. This is because waste water

but it extends far beyond that. The constitution ensured regular mayoral elections to all urban bodies, but no election in DCC was held during the last few years. This is the main reason that performance or civic amenities and services didn't improve. Whereas urban governance demands a coherent, coordinated and vibrant setup, our cities have been saddled with fragmented authorities incapable of tackling core problems.

If under inspiring urban leadership and vision, the water of the Buriganga once again sparkled in its former glory, if the banks could be cleared of illegal encroachments, if a green vista had developed along the riverfront and if the trade and industry including the Hazaribagh tannery had been relocated, Dhaka would not have only regained its glory but also emerged as a thriving and a dynamic centre of modern civic life. It would have become a symbol of a resurgent Bangladesh. Now, in absence of a vision, Dhaka has lapsed into a beehive of filth, congestion and urban blight.

The writer is a columnist of The Daily Star.

BEETLE BAILEY

by Mort Walker



HENRY

by Don Trachte



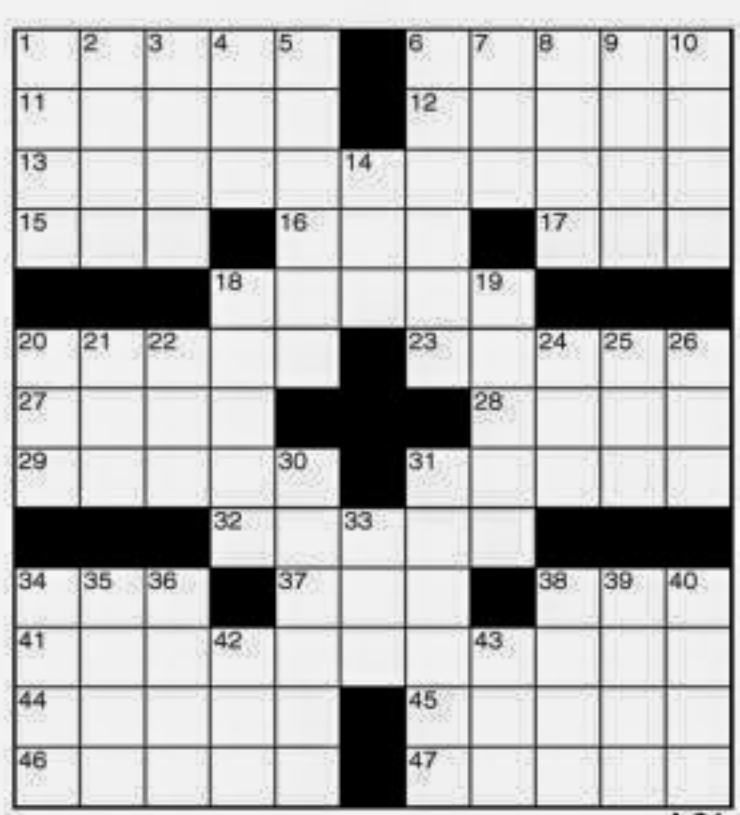
CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

ACROSS

- 1 Discover
- 6 Bridge forerunner
- 11 Find darling
- 12 Vietnam's capital
- 13 1937 West End musical
- 15 Butter square
- 16 Mafia head
- 17 Golf support
- 18 Flower
- 20 Kayak's cousin
- 23 Oklahoma city
- 27 Server system
- 28 Barking beast
- 29 Uses a keyboard
- 31 School paper
- 32 Sitting duck?
- 34 Drama division
- 37 Curtain holder
- 38 Charged particle
- 41 2008 Owen Wilson movie
- 44 Burger topper
- 45 Apartment sign
- 46 Musical transition
- 47 Perfect places

DOWN

- 1 Humid
- 2 Concept
- 3 Butter on the farm
- 4 Coffee dispenser
- 5 Sell
- 6 "Let's do it!"
- 7 Croner
- 8 "What's -- for me?"
- 9 Tender
- 10 Floor piece
- 14 Cow call
- 18 Like CD sets
- 19 Excessively emotional
- 20 Director's cry
- 21 Some amount of
- 22 Quick bite
- 24 Victor at Fredericksburg
- 25 Sleuth Spade
- 26 Tavern quaff
- 30 Peaceful
- 31 So far
- 33 Coquettish
- 34 Novelist Oz
- 35 Sugar source
- 36 Sine study, for short
- 38 Not busy
- 39 Troubling sign
- 40 Brooklyn basketball team
- 42 Singer Reed
- 43 Sign of approval



Yesterday's answer

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S T A T E R I P E N
O R I O N A L A M O
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E P E E I N T U R N
R E D K N I V E S
J E S T S
C O U P L E L A S
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