

Train services remain poor

Justify the fare hike

ALTHOUGH nearly three and half months have elapsed since the government increased the train fares, the railway services remain horribly poor as were in the past. There is not adequate number of trains, and commuters suffer from frequent disruption of train schedule. On top of all this, existing train compartments are not fit for use as the seats are torn and toilets filthy and bug infected.

Despite being one of the cheapest, safest and sustainable public transport systems the railway sector has never received the due attention from the authorities. Due to lack of investment, improvement plan and corruption it is struggling to survive in the face of competition from other transport systems. There is also vested interest of transport businesses behind this sheer disregard.

Though the general people are interested to use this mode of travel, the poor condition of railway services hardly encourages people to opt for train rides over bus rides on long-distance routes. In the present case, commuters are not getting promised improved services despite bearing increased train fares. Moreover, now the government has a plan to readjust the train fares every year. Earlier, train fares used to increase after 10-15 years. If the services remain poor then there is little justification for putting extra burden on general public. We believe that there is no reason why Bangladesh railway cannot be turned into a profitable entity if proper modernisation initiatives are undertaken to improve the performance of a system that the vast majority of the middle income group would chose over other modes to commute long distance.

Relaxing traffic laws unhelpful

Remove unfit vehicles from roads

WE are taken aback when the minister for Road Transport and Bridges goes on record to state that unfit buses are kept on the roads to ease public suffering. It is common knowledge that many bus operators keep their vehicles off the roads when authorities declare, beforehand, a drive to catch these vehicles. In fact we fail to understand precisely how the public in general are benefitted when they have to ride around in dilapidated public transports that are operated by drivers, the bulk of whom do not have valid driving licenses.

We are informed that 600 new buses will be inducted into service by March next year. What we do not know whether this will pave the way for the decommissioning of 600 old buses. That authorities are now open to relaxing the rules of business to allow for these dilapidated public carriers to ferry the thousands of people who travel each year during the Eid holidays to be with their loved ones in their respective home districts, is hardly joyous news.

What about the safety of passengers? Or does that not count anymore. What of the tattered limbs and lost lives we witness during this peak holiday season because authorities continue to allow unfit vehicles to operate with impunity on our highways? Are bus operators so powerful that they can bend the law to their benefit and to the detriment of citizens? This sort of attitude towards enforcing the law merely creates more hardship than public benefit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Tonu's cause of death still unknown?!

According to a report published in The Daily Star on June 13, 2016, the cause of Tonu's death is still unknown and the second autopsy does not suggest rape; it only found evidence of "sexual intercourse" before her murder!

We are speechless. It has been almost three months since Tonu was raped and murdered. Her father found her body beside a bush inside Comilla cantonment area; her head was smashed and there were injury marks in her nose.

We did not believe the first autopsy which stated that there was no injury mark on her body and no sign of rape was found. According to a report published on May 18, 2016, the CID revealed that the girl was indeed raped before being murdered. Kamoda Prasad Saha, head of the three member board that conducted the second autopsy at Comilla Medical College used the word "rape" then, but now he is declining to use that term. Is he under pressure to do so?

We deeply sympathise with Tonu's family and condemn in the strongest terms the way the case is proceeding. Will the murderers of their daughter ever be traced and punished?

Nur Jahan
Chittagong

The Orlando massacre and the "Muslim factor"

HIGH NOTES LOW NOTES



HASAN FERDOUS

WHEN I first saw the news flash scrolling at the bottom of my TV screen, my first thought was, please God, not another Muslim! With Donald Trump waging his own "jihad" against Muslims – all Muslims, including those who are American – I was hoping that the shooter was from another religion, any religion but Islam. My hope turned into a nightmare when the shooter was confirmed not only to be a Muslim, but someone who was born in New York and had gone to US schools. Omar Mateen was just a regular guy, it seems, who wore a bandana, loved taking selfies, dated a Pakistani woman, and even occasionally visited the same gay night club where he unleashed his vengeance. He may have been a closeted gay.

Omar was also someone living amidst other Muslims. Some people might have known his darker side and could have stepped in to intervene. Nobody did, and now all Muslims living in the US are guilty by association. We are giving the Donald Trumps of the world a reason to gloat.

There could be a thousand theories to explain what motivated this "homegrown" terrorist to decide one night to gather all his guns and embark on a personal vendetta against a group of people he thought was different and deserved punishment. At the end of the night, his decision to play God left nearly 50 people dead and another 50 or so gravely wounded, and turned every Muslim in the US a marked person. Dana Milbank at the Washington Post has publicly wondered, how long would it be before American Muslims are forced to wear yellow badges featuring the star and crescent?

Donald Trump had already used his "Muslim card" to romp through the Republican primaries and to snatch the party nomination for president. Be fearful of Muslims, he had warned, while demanding a total ban on Muslims entering the US. Now, after Orlando, he is self-congratulating saying, "I told you so".

Like it or not, this "Muslim card" is winning, as Trump's words are echoing with many Americans. Six months ago, after the San Bernardino shooting carried out by another "homegrown terrorist" and his Pakistani wife, Trump cheerfully explained why he loved these mass shootings. "Whenever there's a tragedy,

my numbers go way up," Mr. Trump gloated.

This time, he has amped up his attacks on Muslims, and even implicated President Obama, another "Muslim" in his estimation, for enabling such a massacre by refusing to condemn "radical Islam" as the real culprit behind all terror attacks. To many Trump supporters, Obama's argument that terrorists use a perverted version of Islam to advance their political cause sounds hollow. "Look, he was a Muslim," they now say, pointing to Mateen's last minute declaration of allegiance to the so-called Islamic State.

"I told you so," Trump smiles and gloats.

The wounds are still fresh and many

stricter gun control, making sure that guns don't fall into the hands of any deranged person, such as Mateen.

Although there is strong support within the country for "common sense gun control", the gun lobby is too strong and the politicians in Washington, in the view of The New York Times, "too cowardly." So nothing happens, except for an occasional call for vigilance and prayer.

President Obama and some of his Democratic allies have tried for some common sense gun control measures. He tried again three days ago, after the Orlando shooting. "The shooter was apparently armed with a handgun and a powerful assault rifle. This massacre is therefore a further reminder of how easy it is for someone to get their hands on a

of solidarity all across America, beyond all social and cultural boundaries.

While there is no reason for any Muslim to own this dastardly act, it is important that they publicly condemn Mateen and others like him. After all, these attacks are carried out by people who claim to be Muslims and do so in the name of Islam. The Islamic State, for example, quickly claimed responsibility for the Orlando massacre. No sensible and self-respecting Muslim should allow a group of perverts to hijack their religion. Now more than ever before, they must – with every fibre of their being – condemn such mindless killings.

Unfortunately, no leaders of the Muslim world have risen. Not in one Muslim country has there been a public



PHOTO: AFP

of the dead have not yet been laid to rest, but he is already out there to collect a few extra votes.

Some opinion leaders have tried to redirect the conversation, focusing instead on the need for gun control. In the US, mass shootings – in which at least four people are killed or wounded – take place almost on a daily basis. In 2015, according to a Shooting Tracker Data, there were as many as 372 mass shootings in the US, killing 475 and wounding 1,870. That makes it more than one mass shooting per day throughout the year.

Mateen – who was known to FBI for his radical views – acquired his cache of guns legally. In any other country, in the aftermath of such a mass murder, the obvious action would be to impose

weapon that lets them shoot people in a school, or in a house of worship, or a movie theater, or in a nightclub," he told a stunned nation.

Appearing exhausted and even resigned, he somberly said, "We have to decide if that's the kind of country we want to be. And to actively do nothing is a decision as well."

Clearly, Americans have already chosen the kind of country they want for themselves. They want to remain armed to the teeth. Bearing arms is a sacred right and an expression of their free will, guaranteed by an amendment to the Constitution.

"My numbers go up, way up," winks Trump and many people clap.

Meanwhile, there has been an outpouring of emotions and expressions

demonstration of protest or solidarity. Yet, the massacre was committed in the name of their religion.

We may now deny but Omar Mateen was our son, growing up in a Muslim family that sympathised with the Taliban. It is also entirely possible that Omar was bipolar and needed help. Shouldn't the family and members of his own community have been the first to notice this and come together to aid him?

Clearly, they did not do their part. The time to act is now. We must not allow the self-proclaimed Islamic State and its ideology to enter stealthily into our homes and turn our children into monsters. We cannot and we must not.

The writer is an author and journalist based in New York.

Bangladesh will not run out of gas any time soon

BADRUL IMAM

THE possibility of natural gas being exhausted within a decade or a decade and half worries us all. It is easily understandable how the industries, power plants and many others could be affected if gas is depleted in near future. In spite of the fact that the government is serious and sincere about finding alternative energy sources, there is not much progress visible in this respect yet.

According to Petrobangla, the remaining reserve of gas in the country at present is about 13 Tcf. In the face of increasing gas demand in the country, this reserve would run for about 10 to 12 years. Or should the gas production be regulated downwards, this would run for some more years. But what will happen after that? Many believe that this will result in the country being devoid of gas.

The idea that reserves can grow and new reserves could be added is not given enough room in the minds of the energy players. This is due to a lack of foresight that a strong and long term exploration campaign could change the way we take for granted the scenario of depleting gas sources. In the practical front, we see a very weak exploration programme, whereby drillings are only few and far between.

However, reserve growth and new reserve addition have been noticed in Bangladesh in the previous decades and it would by all likelihood happen further if a strong exploration campaign is launched. The Bangladesh delta, being the largest in the world, is least likely to be devoid of gas so early in its exploration history, because deltas, throughout the world, tend to be very rich in gas or oil. The exploration in Bangladesh remains at an immature stage and it is too early to contemplate a depleted gas scenario.

The reserve growths: In 1993, the remaining reserve of gas in the country was estimated at about 10 Tcf which would run, as it was suggested at that time, for about 10 to 12 years. But in 2001, the remaining reserve of gas was recorded at about 15 Tcf (Petrobangla 2001). It was again thought that this would be exhausted in around 10 to 15 years. Yet in 2011, the remaining reserve was found to be 15 Tcf (Petrobangla 2011). It means that instead of depleting, the reserve actually grew.

Would this trend of reserve growth continue? Certainly not. Reserve growth will stop at a time in the future depending on the maturity stage of exploration in the area. For an area where exploration reaches a mature stage, depletion of gas may appear to be more realistic. But for an area like Bangladesh, where exploration is far from reaching a mature stage, it is naive to

suggest that gas would be exhausted after the consumption of the presently known reserve.

Bangladesh is unlikely to find very large new onshore gas fields, but there are certainly many small sized gas fields waiting to be discovered. The offshore is even less explored, yet it holds great possibilities. For the general readers, a geological review of the above may be put forward in "soft technical" terms.

The onshore prospects: Exploration carried out till date in the onshore has been restricted to simple and 'easy to find' anticlinal fold structures. These are identified by simple geological mapping in hilly terrains or by seismic surveys in plain lands. Almost all the gas fields discovered in the country are found in such anticlinal (arch-like fold that has its oldest beds at its core) structures in the eastern part of the country. There are many smaller to very small fold structures which may still be identified by further seismic surveys for drillings. This will find individual small gas reserves

In reality, the expected gas richness has not been visible because of the lack of exploration. Far more exploration needs to be carried out in order to unravel its true gas potential.

but a large number of such small discoveries would add to a notable reserve.

A second stage of the exploration programme could target more 'difficult to find' and subtle gas pools (traps). These are formed not by any fold structure, but by the inherent lithological changes (called facies changes) within the subsurface rock layers, and hence comes the difficulty in their identification. These are called 'stratigraphic traps'. Geologists argue that these types of gas pools should be abundant beneath the delta plain of Bangladesh, considering the experiences of other deltas around the world like the Niger Delta, the US Gulf Coast, etc.

A third stage of exploration lies beyond the conventional targets; such unconventional targets include synclinal (sloping downward to form a trough) plays, high pressure plays, thin bedded plays and so on, none of which has been targeted seriously in Bangladesh.

With modern technologies taking up their share in explorations, unconventional plays have started showing their worth. Attaining a mature stage of exploration implies that Bangladesh has to take all these into active consideration.

The offshore prospects: If Bangladesh hasn't been able to reach a mature stage of exploration in its onshore fields, it remains truly immature in its exploration ventures. Activities in the offshore today runs in very low profile, with only three exploration blocks out of 26 being active by IOCs under production sharing contracts (PSC). There has been no exploration drilling in the offshore in the last seven years, and success in negotiations with IOCs is not visible enough. Yet, just on the other side of the maritime boundary with Myanmar, the offshore Arakan basin has the speed of exploration matching the success of discoveries. The most recent gas discovery, the Thanin gasfield as it is named, took place in January 2016 and is located in the Myanmar offshore block AD-7, adjacent to one of the offshore blocks of Bangladesh. Peter Coleman, Chief Executive of the Australian-based Woodside Oil Company - which has discovered this and another gasfield - has said that these discoveries testify the high gas potential of the surrounding blocks.

The offshore Arakan basin is a natural continuation of the offshore Cox's Bazar-Teknaf coastal basin (part of the offshore Bengal basin) and hence, both have similar geologic structures and frameworks. There is no reason why the fast track exploration and success in Myanmar's offshore basins should not be replicated in Bangladesh's side of the Bay of Bengal. Some large discoveries (Shew, Phu and Mia gas fields) earlier in the Arakan offshore attracted the major IOCs, and this area has now been proven to be one of the best places to look for gas.

Based on the available data, geologists are almost convinced that the Bangladesh offshore adjacent to the Myanmar maritime boundary is sitting on major gas reserves. It is believed that the number of gas fields would surely be discovered here if a serious exploration drive is launched.

To conclude, we may agree with the geoscientists' belief that a large delta area like Bangladesh should form a very rich gas province. In reality, the expected gas richness has not been visible because of the lack of exploration. Far more exploration needs to be carried out in order to unravel its true gas potential. With all the geological parameters in place for a gas rich habitat, Bangladesh should take this into consideration when forming its future gas exploration strategies.

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