

Foreign airlines pulling out of HSIA

Review current policies and formulate comprehensive plan

THE Singapore-based budget airline Scoot is the latest foreign operator that has just announced its decision to pull out of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport (HSIA). The reason given to stop its Bangladesh operations is that it is apparently not cost-effective to operate a route here.

Indeed, Scoot joins a host of other airlines, including better-known airlines like British Airways, Korean Air, Dutch KLM, Etihad Airways—a total of 10 airlines—which have wrapped up their business here. So many airlines pulling out of business in the capital is going to have a dampening effect on our efforts to turn HSIA into a regional hub for aviation and impede efforts to upgrade our international rating.

The complaints against ground handling at HSIA aren't new. Foreign operators have been pointing out that the costs of operating in Bangladesh are higher than those at other airports in the region. We are informed that airlines are not charged anything in countries like Malaysia and Singapore. On top of it all, when it comes to handling baggage and cargo, HSIA's efficiency is lacking leading to the process being time-consuming. In an industry where time literally means money, inefficiency has no place in an international airport. The price of fuel is also apparently higher in our airport than elsewhere and the cumulative effect of all the extra charges has landed us in a situation where HSIA is losing business.

While there will always be those who will find excuses to not initiate meaningful change, the time is ripe for a comprehensive assessment to be conducted on HSIA to find out the problems in terms of infrastructure, manpower and how ground handling operations can be streamlined. It is obvious that the current scenario bodes ill for HSIA's future unless we are willing to face up to the fact that things need to change to boost operational efficiency and cut costs.

Their homes burnt, where will they go?

Bring the perpetrators to justice

A report published in this daily on March 27 has once again brought to the fore how the vulnerability of indigenous communities is often used as an instrument of exploitation against them. The report described an incident in which shacks of at least 37 landless families, mostly from the indigenous Pahan community, were burnt down in Naogaon's Dhamurhat Upazila in the early hours of Monday. The arsonists, armed with sharp weapons, sticks and several gallons of flammable liquid, targeted their shacks while they were asleep, and the latter barely came out alive. The manner in which the attack was carried out—not too far from a BGB camp and led by a member of the ruling party—speaks volumes about the risks in which many indigenous communities live, with virtually no protection and hardly any help from the government. It was a heinous crime committed in full knowledge of the inherent vulnerability of the victims.

In the past, we've come across similar news of arson attacks orchestrated to drive out indigenous communities from their land/homes. What makes it worse is that often the attacks are carried out by people either affiliated with the ruling party or assisted by the local administration. The memory of the horror unleashed in three villages in Rangamati's Langadu Upazila is still fresh in our mind. The Langadu attackers haven't yet been brought to justice. This is the kind of situation that enhances the indigenous communities' sense of insecurity, and emboldens the perpetrators. The government must not allow this to continue. It should make every effort to ensure that no one can take advantage of this situation and that the indigenous communities are given proper security—and the victims are properly rehabilitated.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Women's safety in public transport

Although women are regularly harassed in public transport in Dhaka city, they are often unable to protest for fear of further harassment. Researchers have found that lack of proper enforcement of the law, excessive passengers on buses, lack of adequate lighting in the vehicles, lack of supervision, etc., are some of the main reasons for sexual harassment in public transport.

The existing education system, under which there exist schools segregated by sex (all boys' and girls' schools), limits the scope for these children to learn about gender equality as well as building a respectful attitude towards women. Both male and female children should be taught from an early age to respect each other. To do that, adequate training and counselling of teachers are essential. Also, the government should take proper steps to stop harassment of women in public transport. Proper monitoring, formulating laws and enforcing them can help improve the situation. The number of special buses for women should also be increased. If corrective actions are not taken, the situation will only get worse in future.

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Ethics rather than policing of the internet



LARRY STILLMAN

FOR many people in Australia and New Zealand, the horrific attack on mosques in Christchurch by an Australian national was not totally unexpected.

Australia has had a long history of intolerance towards minority groups, ranging back to the genocidal killings conducted against Aboriginal people.

During the past few years, a variety of neo-fascist, anti-Muslim groups have been growing and engaged in noisy protest, often against the building of mosques in the suburbs of major cities, as well as in confrontations with left-wing groups. They are also homophobic and misogynist. In this regard, their intolerance and rejection of a liberal society in favour of authoritarianism have much in common with Muslim extremist views.

But this phenomenon, while restricted to a tiny minority, in an otherwise peaceful environment, is part of a disturbing trend which both stigmatises Muslims and plays into the hands of nationalistic politics. For example, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison has now rejected as untrue reports that he urged the then shadow cabinet in 2010 to capitalise on the electorate's growing concerns about Muslim immigration. The Minister for Border Security, Peter Dutton, has constantly raised the spectre of refugees as terrorists. Former prime minister of Australia, Tony Abbott, has now backed down from his controversial 2017 claim that "Islamophobia hasn't killed anyone." And there are more vile politicians who get plenty of media exposure.

They are easily able to raise the spectre of terrorism. The terrorist attack in Bali in 2002 by Indonesian members of Jemaah Islamiyah, which killed 202 people including 88 Australians and maimed many more, left an indelible mark on Australians, and there have been other local acts of Islamist-inspired terror in Melbourne and Sydney, including a stabbing by a Bangladesh student inspired by ISIS online propaganda. Members of local terrorist cells have been arrested.

Concerns over the growth of cities, crime, the cost of living or problems in employment are inevitably connected to Muslims and terrorism. Virtually no distinction is made between the huge diversity of cultures and practices in the Muslim community. Yet, for all the exaggerations made for electoral purposes, the chance of a terrorist attack is less than that of being killed in a car accident.

In addition, populist print media, including the one national daily, owned by Rupert Murdoch's New Limited, publishes articles about the problem of Islam. Negative headlines and photos are featured on front pages. The same attitude is found on commercial TV programmes and popular radio programmes with

dependent on their support. Third, there is the "dark web"—networks, applications and platforms which are hidden to the vast majority of us but known to criminals of all sorts (Islamist terrorists and extremists on the right).

We all know, as is the experience in Bangladesh, a government can turn off the internet or mobile phone networks in response to what a government says is an emergency. People have also been charged with unlawful behaviour when, in many other countries, their activity is regarded as legitimate free speech in the interests of a better society. The problem with a heavy-handed approach is that it can interfere in the conduct of everyday life and progressive business and social, cultural or economic development. As

occur because the companies and numbers involved will still be massive.

In contrast, it is remarkable that Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand, a woman in her 30s, a digital native, appears to have a new political language of inclusion, and the capacity to shame commercial social media giants.

Perhaps, just perhaps, she will inspire, even lead, younger leaders in other nations to take on the seemingly impossible challenge of challenging the social media giants and their wicked association with intolerance and simplistic commercial imperatives. Higher education and civil society also have a critical role to play here in making this happen.

The study of ethics is neglected in IT education: the technical and commercial outcome is what is regarded as legitimate, rather than the goal of attaining the good and preventing evil. Students (and their teachers) need to be aware of what they are involved with when it comes to the development of social media products or any product that deals with personal data. As an example of this kind of work, at Monash University, we have a cohort of Bangladeshi women doing their PhD with a great concern for the ethical development of the IT for social progress in Bangladesh.

Thus, in Bangladesh or elsewhere, young people who take on jobs working for local technological industries or global social media platforms should be actively conscious of the moral and ethical issues and values that should be designed into social media platforms. They should have values that promote a good society to prevent its hijacking by extremism and unethical commercial imperatives. I also know that NGOs around the world, including those in Bangladesh, feel that they have a role to play in developing more effective public policies rather than a policing environment.

This change is not a dream. The time is ripe for a fundamental change to occur in what social media is, and therein lies an opportunity for this to happen with "digital natives", inspired by politicians like PM Jacinda Ardern, progressive academicians, and civil society organisations.

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The solution to online extremism is, in the end, political and ethical. A good example to follow would be PM Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand who has brought forth a new political language of inclusion.

PHOTO: AFP

huge audiences which exploit community fears and worries.

So, what do we do about the dreadful multiplier effect of social media? First, we need to recognise that there are essentially three forms of social media. The first is represented by the global commercial systems such as Facebook and its subsidiaries which are increasingly demonstrating that they are unable to govern themselves in a way that accords with democratic sentiments. They are driven by commercial greed. Second, there are also profitable online services associated with commercial print media and TV that have large audiences. All are unwilling to accept external governance or supervision, and the government is

another solution, we hear of the use of advanced forms of surveillance to provide better alerts to extremism online, but we all know that systems have a habit of failing or being abused by intelligence agencies. While acceptable in some countries, reports indicate that these products are abused in their application as they are used for purposes other than crime and terrorism prevention.

In my opinion, the solution to online extremism is, in the end, political and ethical. We cannot and should not control the internet as if it was a village water pump, nor is it simply a matter of breaking up the giant companies into smaller parts—the same problems can still

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Towards a new global charter



CARL BILD

IN August 1941, even before the United States had entered World War II, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and US President Franklin D Roosevelt met secretly off the coast of Newfoundland to discuss how the world could be organised after the war. A similar feat had been attempted at Versailles just over two decades earlier, but it had clearly failed.

Churchill and FDR's assignment resulted in the Atlantic Charter, which established a set of shared principles and institutions that still define the international order eight decades later. In 1944, the Bretton Woods conference laid the groundwork for the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and other global financial institutions; the establishment of the United Nations soon followed. The defeated Axis powers were transformed into dynamic democracies with market economies, and were integrated into the new global system, while stability was maintained through cooperative security structures spanning the transatlantic and Pacific theatres.

Then came China's economic reforms, starting in the late 1970s, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, whereupon the dream of truly global multilateral governance as envisioned in the Atlantic Charter could start to be realised. In 1995, the Bretton Woods-era General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was replaced with the World Trade Organization, and, in under two decades, trade as a share of global GDP has grown from around 40 percent to over 70 percent (owing in no small part to China's accession to the WTO in December 2001).

During this golden age of multilateralism, globalisation, and social and economic development, more than one billion people were lifted out of extreme poverty, and democracy became the global norm. But it is clear that the second decade of the twenty-first century has marked the advent of a different era. Memories of the international order's formative years, and of the tragedies that made it necessary, have faded with the passing of generations. New powers have emerged to challenge Western dominance

within an increasingly multipolar context. And the recent proliferation of authoritarian regimes has raised questions about the future of democracy.

Though the basic structures of the post-war order remain in place, they are being hollowed out in the face of Russian revisionism, Chinese assertiveness, US disruption, and European uncertainty. With the goal of revising the principles of the Atlantic Charter for this dangerous new world, two prominent think tanks, the Atlantic Council in the US and the Center for Global Governance Innovation in Canada, recently convened policymakers and thinkers, including me,

Declaration of Principles that we issued at the Munich Security Conference last month. "Inspired by the inalienable rights derived from our ethics, traditions, and faiths," the declaration reads, "we commit ourselves to seek a better future for our citizens and our nations. We will defend our values, overcome past failures with new ideas, answer lies with truth, confront aggression with strength, and go forward with the confidence that our principles will prevail."

The full declaration comprises seven statements under the headings of "freedom and justice," "democracy and self-determination," "peace and security,"

gained significant currency.

But basic values such as respect for individual rights remain fundamentally important, as does the belief that "governments that answer to their citizens and respect the rule of law can best address inequity, correct injustice, and serve the good of all." Indeed, governments ignore this proviso at their peril.

As the fruit of a year's worth of discussions and revisions, the declaration has received broad support from different corners of the world. But our goal is to start a larger debate, not to have the final word. We are under no illusions that it



President Franklin D Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill after Divine Service on board HMS Prince of Wales. This photograph was taken during the Atlantic Conference between the two leaders off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada, August 9-12, 1941.

PHOTO: LT LC PRIEST/ZWM VIA GETTY IMAGES

from 19 different countries.

When attempting to draft a new set of shared principles, the biggest challenge is in deciding whether to make them applicable just to the world's democracies, or also to the likes of Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia. Obviously, democracy is by far the best way to ensure that individual rights are respected; but the debate should also be open to those advocating different values and interests. In our case, we wanted to produce a document that would resonate both in the "classical West" as well as in Brazil, Algeria, Iran, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Our deliberations resulted in a

"free markets and equal opportunity," "an open and healthy planet," "the right of assistance," and "collective action." In each area, our goal was to set down principles that might serve as the tenets of a new consensus after an inclusive global debate.

The declaration is not merely a restatement of previously held beliefs. Environmental issues clearly have become more prominent than they were before, and questions of sovereignty must be reframed for an increasingly interconnected and interdependent world. Concerns about how prosperity is shared both within and between countries have

will rival the Atlantic Charter in terms of its historical impact. But nor do we have any doubts as to the urgency and necessity of a new discussion about the basic principles of global governance. Without such a debate, the old order will continue to decay, to be replaced by a Hobbesian jungle ruled by sheer power and narrow self-interest. We all know how that turned out last time.

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(Exclusively to The Daily Star)