Dhaka, Friday, August 27, 1993

A Plan for the Girl Child

Government formally launched on Tuesday a decade action plan for the girl child. Considering the thin coverage of social security network in the country, the initiative merits consideration as a commendable move. However, launched well into the third year of the decade, the plan's activities may have to be speeded up a bit if it is to see completion by the end of the century.

The action plan's components of basic education, health and nutrition, sanitation as well as legal and social support, would make up a nearly total package of measures available to the beneficiary. This should help the girl child attain a better quality of life in the days ahead.

The plan's special emphasis on education is well placed. It gets the basic right. A recent World Bank study of the success story of some of the East Asian economies identified investment in education as one of the key elements in promoting higher growth. However, education also creates aspirations. The beneficiaries of the programme would expect new avenues to open up before them by way of job opportunities and self employment. The action plan should, therefore, incorporate functional education also and dovetail the programme with arrangements for placement in jobs and creation of self employment opportunities. Frustration could be the end-product otherwise. In any case, the plan's objective of ensuring integration of the girl child with development activities in the country, demands that the beneficiary should be adequately equipped to participate in the process.

The problem of child labour is an area which the programme should specifically address. In truth, this issue should well appear as a special component of the action plan. This problem is already posing a serious threat to the future of the export oriented readymade garment industry. It cannot be gainsaid that some day child labour issue will not engulf other export sectors. Carpets made in India, Pakistan and Iran, face entry restrictions in the European and American markets for reason of use of child labour in the manufacturing process. Activists such as the South Asian Coalition on Child Servitude, have carried their campaign into Europe and the USA. The problem is thus assuming new dimensions. It is high time that instead of leaving the issue to be tackled largely by the concerned industry itself, the government also takes it up directly. The social support platform of the new action plan provides just the right forum for addressing this issue. Besides, the government would be in a better position to secure financial and other forms of support from agencies such as the International Labour Organisation, for finding a long-term solution to the child labour problem.

However, the aptness of the proposal to introduce a food for education programme in the rural areas is open to doubt. As it is, criticisms are often heard that similar programmes for the adults had been making beggars out of the people. Children should take lessons on human dignity, develop a healthy attitude towards work and learn to face the future with confidence. They should value education for what it is - not as a preoccupation which is rewarded with crumbs of bread. This part of the programme needs urgent rethinking.

Government has sought the participation of NGOs and voluntary organisations in the implementation of the new action plan. This is as it should be. These bodies enjoy wide exposure to social work at field level. They also have established fairly extensive network of their own in the countryside. NGOs and voluntary organisations must respond positively to the call of the government and participate actively in carrying the programme forward.

Tribute to Nazrul

There are so many reasons why we observe national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam's seventeenth death anniversary with such love and adulation. Nazrul, as a poet, left us perhaps the most powerful and eloquent writings against social injustice and exploitation. His feelings for the poor and the socially disadvantaged produced some of his most powerful works. Today when we are fighting against widespread poverty and backwardness, Nazrul's writings are a great source of inspiration for us.

Political oppression was another phenomenon against which he produced some of his best works. His writings formed a major source of inspiration for our anti-colonial struggle against the British. Much later, Nazrul's writings gave us courage to struggle against the Pakistani colonial rule. His revolutionary songs were a constant source of strength and encouragement for us during our Liberation War.

It was the passion with which Nazrul wrote that makes such a live presence of him in our daily life. Whatever he wrote, it was characterized by the full force of his feelings.

He hated oppression, exploitation and domination with an intensity that has rarely been matched in anybody else's writing. His love was also of an unbounded nature. He loved life and every thing in it. His songs and poems depict the full range of nature's beauty and that of our people. He wrote for us all - Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and any other community that lived here. His writings encompassed the totality of the Bengali people, leaving behind a most magnificent variety of literature and music for us.

Today as we pay tribute to Nazrul, we must remember the dream that he left behind for us. As long as we remain mired in poverty and ignorance. as long as the majority of our people are illiterate and exploited, and till we can give the basic necessities of life to our masses, Nazrul's dream will remain unfulfilled

The sincerest tribute we can pay to our beloved Nazrul, is to devote ourselves to ensuring a minimum of dignity and sense of well-being for the people he loved so much, and wrote so passionately about.

Opening Our Skies to Private Sector Reflects Failure of Biman, Offers New Potential to Economy HE authorities have possibly looked back to the

origin of our national carrier and recalled its past by allowing the launching of private sector airlines in the country. It was the Orient airways established by the Isphanis on which the roots of Pakistan International Airl-ines (PIA) and Biman Bangla-desh Airlines were implanted. Orient airways had operated regular flights to the then East Pakistan, now Bangladesh in early

In fact, the success stories of privately-owned airlines, the growing passenger traffic in the region, entrepreneurs' interests in the aviation sector and the fatlure of Biman to make its position in the competitive market compelled the authorities to open domestic skies on a limited scale.

Although the government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia approved STOL (short takeoff and landing) service operation on different domestic routes where Biman is not operating, aviation sources hinted that all the domestic routes along with a number of regional and international routes are to be opened to the country's private airlines in future. Four firms have already ap-

plied to the Ministry of Civil Aviation seeking licences for STOL operation and a number of others including the Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) are contemplating to enter the business.

Currently, Shamsernagar of Sylhet, Lalmonirhat, Ishwardi. Barisal, Patuakhali, Mongla,

NDIA is inexorably mo-

ving towards political

uncertainty. The wafer-

thin majority of Narasimha

Rao's government on a no-

confidence motion was, say

opposition leaders, a "political

former foreign minister Atal

Behari Vajpayee said: "A cor-

rupt government had resorted

to corrupt practices to defeat

the motion." Roa's defenders,

talking realpolitik, say all is fair

in political war. They contend

that those seeking moral values

in the present-day Indian poli-

tics are searching for a needle

splitting their own creation, the

break-away of the centrist

Janata Dal (A) led by Ajit Singh

on the eve of voting, and win-

ning the support of smaller

parties by means considered

members are increasingly real-

ising Rao is not the leader who

can take the party past the

winning post at the next elec-

tion. Rao supporters ask who

ernment from the beginning. It

has survived because of the re-

luctance of opposition parties to

overthrow it because it was

pursuing a policy of "con-

sensus" and they were un-

mosque in Ayodhya from demo-

lition by Hindu fanatics last

December was a blow to Rao's

secular credibility. It alienated

the Muslims, tore the govern-

ment's pretensions of consen-

sus politics to pieces and ex-

posed its administrative inepti-

The riots across India that

followed the demolition further

eroded Rao's authority. The

bomb blasts in Bombay which

killed more than 300 people ex-

posed the weakness of the gov-

The failure to protect Babri

prepared for a snap poll.

Rao's was a minority gov-

The ruling Congress party

unfair by the opposition.

else in Congress can.

They find nothing wrong in

Leader of the opposition and

moral defeat."

in a haystack.

Thakurgaon and Comilla have provision for STOL service facilities after minor renovation and installing of communication equipment in the strips. The STOL aircraft and F-27 had been operating in some of the above routes since 1950s.

Millions of people now travel by air, which is no more a luxury. In the changing world it is an integral part of the modern living. Even some of the affluent Bangladeshis living abroad sometimes want to charter a small aircraft to visit his village residence located in a remote areas of the country.

Traffic load through the ZIA is expected to be doubled by the end of century. Currently some two million passengers travel through the airports, according to official statistics. Taking the growing traffic into consideration, the authorities have undertaken an expansion programme of the airport. A lion's share of the increasing traffic may go to the private airlines if they are allowed for regional and international routes - as Biman has failed to make the best of a secure market. Biman is only able to carry 15 to 20 per cent of the nearly half million outgoing passengers. The other foreign carriers, operating from Bangladesh, are fully using their efforts to draw the passengers.

Biman founded on January 4, 1972 currently has 5,200 employees with six DC-10-30 including two leased recently,

by Asiuzzaman

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

two turbo-prop ATPs and two F-28s to operate 29 international and seven domestic destinations. Its debt and liabilities now stand at more than Taka 600 crore which needs Tk 40 crore as debt servicing per year. Overstaff and huge overhead expenditure stymied the progress of the airlines. Although the Biman authorities claimed the airlines has earned a net profit of Tk 60 crore during the past financial years, a

reliable Civil Aviation Ministry

source said that a lion's share

of the claimed profit came from

the royalty given by private

agency for operating flights be-

tween Dhaka and Kuala

Lumpur on Biman's route per-

mission and from the special

rebate in fuel price provided by

aircraft fuel at a subsidised rate

of 475 US dollar per ton instead

of original rate of 600 dollar.

Biman has also been incurring

losses in its domestic routes

which its officials claimed the

government restricted in in-

creasing fares. It said domestic

tickets are being sold at 77 per

cent subsidised rates but a

World Bank report said the

Biman was supplied with

the government.

subsidy is only 30 per cent. Aircraft shortages also disrupt the international schedule of Biman frequently which also oblige passengers to travel on other airlines.

After repeated attempts, Biman authorities have failed to improve or come out of the situation as many actions go against a group of employees who are the members of unions. As many as six unions are actively working in Biman and

some of it are running "parallel

to be out of those hazards

faced by the national carrier. Its

service and time schedule must

be an improved one, aviation

experts hope. However, at the

same time, they fear unhealthy

and unequal competition be-

tween the nationalised and pri-

vate carriers. Citing examples,

he said that a private airlines

may face stiff government re-

striction and regulations which

may favour the national car-

rier. On the other hand the na-

tional carrier may receive fl-

nancial benefits like aviation

fuel at the subsidised rate and a

package of grants.

Private airlines are expected

administration" in Biman.

fuel price is the major stumbling block for the aviation sector in Bangladesh. In India, the price is fixed at 200 dollar per ton whereas in Bangladesh it is at 600 dollar. Because of higher fuel price none of the foreign airliners are making technical landing and refuelling at ZIA depriving the country of a huge revenue compared to different airport services.

Airlines are also an employment generating sector and nearly four million people are directly involved in the sector worldwide. Air transport also generates a large number of indirect employment. Aviation is also a catalyst for tourism and hotel business. Tourism is now one of the world's important economic activities with the prospect of turning into the largest item of world trading before the turn of the century. Aviation also supports employ-

ment in the sector of tourism. Air transport has also played an active role in developing trade and commercial links. For a country like Bangladesh crisscrossed by more than 200 rivers, air transport may provide a faster freighter services for the traders but so far the Biman has shown little interest to penetrate the domestic and international trade markets.

It is, however, a very cost-intensive sector as only a 25 to 30-seater STOL aircraft would cost the entrepreneur a total of one million to three million Experts point out that high dollars. The price of a 274-

million dollar. So it is a bit impossible for most of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to enter into the trade without extensive support from the foreign companies or government loan. Even after the need of heavy financial involvement. Bangladeshi firms are still eager to join the business. Some of the firms have already completed their preparations and are waiting for the government approval. They have already studied 10 types of STOL aircraft and selected one to fetch on dry lease basis. The firm owner declined to disclose the type of aircraft as part of business secrecy.

seater DC-10 is now around 70

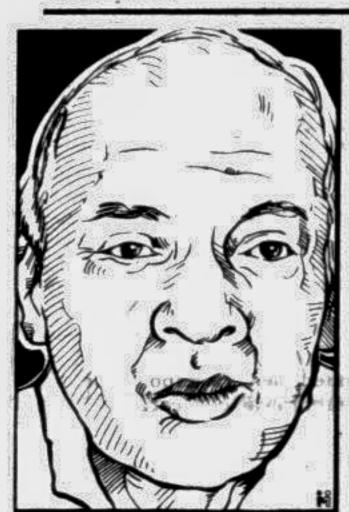
Currently, modern aircraft like Canadian Twin Otter, US made Piper and Cessna, the Kasa of Spain, IPTN of Indonesia, the Dornier-218 of Germany, China-made Y-12 the Russian AN-28 and Czechoslovak L-410, are used for STOL operation worldwide.

This newspaper has already welcomed the government decision to open the aviation sector to private entrepreneurs although the concept of private airlines is nothing new in the region. As mentioned earlier, like the PIA and Biman, the Air India will also trace its origin to a private airline operated by JRD Tata. Currently five private airlines are operating in India and three in Pakistan. Hence, there is much optimism here about the outcome of the present decision on privatisation of the aviation sector, even if it is a modest start.

Economic Upturn Could still Save Rao

D K Joshi writes from New Delhi

Indian Opposition leaders are calling the thin majority of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao on a no-confidence motion in parliament a moral defeat. Members of his party are demanding his resignation. Charges of corruption and administrative ineptitude have been levelled against him. But successful economic reforms could still save India's beleaguered prime minister.



NARASIMHA RAO Crisis of confidence

ernment. The other issue which gave ammunition to Rao's critics was allegations of corruption in high places. When Rao bailed out a supreme court judge in parliament on an impeachment motion on charges of financial maleficence he appeared soft on corruption. The last straw was

million payoff to Rao. The Congress Party is restive. It has to face elections this winter in the four northern states earlier ruled by the Hindu revivalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The most crucial is the assembly election

an allegation by prominent bro-

ker Harshad Mehta of a Rs 10

in Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India.

Congress workers are apprehensive because the state leader is a person who has alienated Muslims and whose personal and administrative image is tainted. They are debating whether they should choose a new leader who can inspire them to fight their main enemy, the BJP, with vigour.

They have also to take into account the political trend at the national level. Congress can no longer treat BJP with kidgloves, as Rao has been doing so far. The communists and centrist elements in the opposition, though tacitly tolerating Rao so far, are bitterly hostile to him. They are prepared to accept another Congress prime minister who is tough on the

On economic reform, even the communists are prepared to adjust because of the change in the world situation. They favour less state control, but want a cautious approach towards multinationals and in implementing structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and the International Monetary

It is increasingly clear that the economic reforms cannot be reversed now that India has turned the corner and its economic is poised for take-off. Its benefits are already visible. Inflation is down from 17 per cent to around six per cent, and

the budget deficit from 8.4 per cent of gross domestic product in 1990-91 to about five per cent. Foreign investment has started to come, although in trickles.

To encourage foreign investment the government proposes gradually to lower customs tariffs to 25 per cent and further phase out import licences. Says Finance Minister Manmohan Singh: "If we stay on course the growth rate could be over six to seven per cent in the

The possibility of tacit support by non-BJP opposition parties to a new Congress leader has started a succession

battle, though unobtrusively. Behind scenes, Congress heavyweights have started mobilising support. Most active of the aspirants

is Human Resource Development Minister Arjun Singh. He is a calculating politician who has built an image of uncompromising BJP batter. However, he is feared for his manipulative skills and opportunism.

The other formidable challenger is Maharashtra Chief Minister Sharad Pawar. He is younger and ambittious, and was the only one who threw his hat in the ring in June 1991 when Rao assumed office as

Prime Minister following the assassination of Raity Gandhi. He, however, wants the succession race to be deferred till he is cleared by the Supreme Court on the charges of electoral cor-

Though close to big business, Pawar has not been able to acquire a national stature and is still considered a regional leader. His friendship with Bal Thackery, the chief of radical Hindu organisation Shiv Sena, is looked on with suspicion. As the south provides the

biggest chunk of Congress members in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the parliament, and as Rao is also from the South, it would not allow the premiership to slip out of its hands. The two southern contenders are Kerala Chief Minister K Karunakaran, a friend of Rao and an astute politician, and Andhra Pradesh boss Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy, a dark horsé. Karunakaran is not acceptable to the communists.

D. K. JOSHI joined the Bombay Free Press Journal in

- GEMINI NEWS

OPINION

Stranded Pakistanis

Nasim Khan captioned "Stranded Pakistanis" vide The Daily Star of 9-7-98, I fully subscribe to his sentiments pertaining to the repatriation of the Rohingya and Chakma refugees which, I borders of peace, ensuring an atmosphere of understanding in the region for the good of the common people.

Mr. Khan also rightly raised the core aspects of repatriation when he mentioned 'efforts initiated and undertaken' by the honorable Prime Minister with the governments of India and Burma. The said words 'efforts and undertakings' I take the liberty to interpret as meaning the legal frame-work agreements, subsequently signed by different ministries of the relevant governments legal framework agreements, subsequently signed by different ministries of the relevant governments and in the case of Rohingyas even with her excellency Ms. Sadako Ogata of the UNHCR. To further elaborate this vital aspect of any agreement, we recall that, his excellency Mr Oli Ahmed, Minister of Communications who recently paid seven days visit to India ending on May 10, 1993 wherein various agreements were signed with different ministries in New Delhi as a follow-up to the agreement earlier signed by his excellency Mr P V Narasimha Rao Prime Minister of India and her excellency Begum Khaleda Zia, Prime Minister of Bangladesh pertaining to the repatriation of

approximately 55,000 Chakma

refugees back to Bangladesh. Fortunately, this Chakma refugees repatriation has led the nation to a unique, unprecedented and most significant aspect of national consensus. What is all the more significant is the fact that, almost the entire political parties, the Indian Government and the repatriation of the Chakmas. Yet, tragedy struck with vengeance and ferocity from the most insignificant fringe group, end result of which is secret to none. This is in spite of all round sky high optimism expressed even till the other day by the hon'ble members of the JS both of the opposition and the treasury benches. Similarly, in case of the Rohingya the

Apropos the letter of Mr. hon'ble DC of Chittagong Mr M Omar Farooq attended/conducted approximately 15 meetings with the authorities of Burma at regular intervals and also with the UNHCR. The last meeting wherein a memorandam confident, will lead to um of understanding was signed by her excellency Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia with her excellency Madam Sadako Ogata of the UNHCR in Dhaka recently.

> Insofar as the perennially stalled repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis is concerned, despite existence of agreements with successive governments of both Bangladesh and Pakistan, this tragic humanitarian problem always gets bogged down once a few hundred are repatriated, the last time on January 10/11, 1993. Hence a travesty of truth to blame any individual or governments as all such repatriation agreements being bereft of the follow-up 'legal frame-work' clauses, spelling out logistical arrangements both in Bangladesh and Pakistan, is not worth even the paper of which it has been written on, irrespective of whether some were actually repatriated on January 10/11, 1993. End result is a no win situation for the average stranded Pakistanis having sold out their entire belongings also a gross loss for Bangladesh having to feed, cloth and accommodate about 250,000

The hon'ble members of the JS at every opportunity raise the question of wheat relief expenses and the repatriation progress of the stranded Pakistanis knowing well the nation stands to gain in crores annually in wheat relief, eliminate system loss in WASA and PWD sectors significantly, also reclaiming lands, schools, madrassahs under their occupation, throughout the 66 camps recognised as Geneva electronic media were one with Camps located in different parts Bangladesh, for expediting of Bangladesh. Some of these lands over the years have received the status of prime land located in Muhammadpur, Dhaka, Firozshah, Chittagong etc. ..., enviously described as goldmines by the buccaneer tycoons of the real estate division. burning night oil, scheming operations to feed the bulldozers.

The leader of the opposition hon'ble Sheikh Hasina has also not been lacking in any manner whatsoever as, regardless of the consequences, she lambasted Ms Benazir Bhutto at the first opportunity when repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis was raised in the SAARC nations opposition parties summit in 1991. In fact this firm and categorical response nipped in the bud the evil designs, if any, of the terrorist defeated forces for

Henceforth, it is now hoped that any future agreement that the government expected to sign must refer to the old file pertaining to the cra of the Shaheed President Zia-ur-Rahman who successfully tackled this intricate and delicate process wherein aforesaid legal framework, monitoring cells consisting of hot lines with Pakistan to solve problems minutely, all such pin-pricks, that occur.

It is hoped that the hon'ble MPs will join the government for a relentless pressure on the government of Pakistan, only which can bring this long stalled holocaust to its logical conclusion. With the departure of more than 7/8 lakhs Afghan refugees, Bosnian refugees have been opted for instead of the stranded Pakistanis who were recognised as the citizens of Pakistan by all successive governments - from Zia-ul-Huq to Nawaz Sharif. Charity should begin at home by first absorbing the stranded Pakistanis. Bosnian refugees may cause some hardship due to language problem, culture, eating habits and dress codes, which stranded Pakistanis can never cause problem for.

In fine, it is earnestly hoped and prayed that, her excellency Prime Minister Begum-Khaleda Zia will give a patient thought to the aforesaid economic and other aspects of this great human tragedy, causing a curse by now. Hence, should immediately rush personalities like his excellency Mr Oli Ahmed or the hon'ble DC of Chittagong Mr Mohd Omar Farooq, both of whom are versatile in this field of negotiations involving some of the most intricate and delicate aspects. Above everything else, is not saving crores of Taka annually constitutes good governance?

> Salahuddin Jamal Firozshah, Chittagong

PWD and Dhanmondi R/A

Sir, I refer you to the letter of Mr Zohurul Huq on the above subject published in your esteemed paper of June 19 last We the residents of the area in general fully endorse his views and we are pained that the matter should be broached at this distance of time since the plots were allotted in 1958. It is an un-disputed fact that

the conditions and circumstances obtaining at the time of original allotment have radically changed and the entire question must now be judged in the context of present situation and realities. For example, in 1958 when the allotments were made, the town planners could not obviously have in their conception that there would be independent Bangladesh and the city of Dhaka would be its metropolis. The present population of Dhaka is more than half a crore and by the year 2000 it will grow upto 1.20 crore as forecast. In this totally changed situation, demand for houses has become simply colossus and it will go on alarmingly rising over the years. To cope with the demand of the people more houses are essentially required for more offices, banks, schools, clinics, hospitals, chambers, medicine shops and so on in all areas of Dhaka.

In Dhaka, Motifheel is practically the only commercial area where international, government and non-government offices of the standard of Dhanmondi R/A can be located. But the availability of accommodation in that area is a Herculean task. Schools, clinics and hospitals cannot be shifted

to Motifheel as the area is simply un-suitable for them. Banks and offices serving the local people cannot also be shifted, leaving the people in un-imaginable difficulties. Government's duty is to mitigate sufferings of its citizens and certainly not enhance them.

It may kindly be noted that Mirpur Road passing through Dhanmondi and the adjacent areas is one of the most busy roads and the houses on the roadside are not at all suitable for residence and hardly any body will hire them for such

Rajuk has taken a pragmatic view and has allowed the nonresidential use of the houses on Mirpur road. Certainly if the then town planners did have any inkling of the future change and development, the lease clauses would have become different and in conformity with

The matter involves another aspect which must be taken into serious considerations. The houses in the area which are let out yield rent income to the house owners which in turn yield income tax and other taxes to the government. They are thus an important and sizable source of tax revenue to stifled particularly in a financially starved country like ours. In many cases houses let out are the only source of income of many persons who are retired or widows to live on. If, at this stage, they are to lose this

will have to starve. We appeal to the concerned authority to refrain from taking

they will be thrown into a grim

any steps detrimental to the interest of the concerned house

M A Rashid Road 7, Dhanmondi R/A,

Govt decision on valuable minerals

Sir, All that is required now is to make a historical decision as to whether we are going to utilise the valuable minerals 'black-gold' of Cox's Bazar worth billions of dollars or continue to throw our national wealth into the Bay of Bengal.

But who is going to make the decision? For the negative part of the decision needs no decision because millions of tons of precious minerals continue to be washed away by the sea water and tidal surge for over last twenty years. It is a great misfortune for a

poor country like ours that none of us is paying any serious attention to our own minerals. We are poor, we want to remain poor - we do not want to change our fate. The government itself does

not utilise the valuable minerals nor allows anybody in the private sector to use the minerals. Is there not a single person

in our country to believe, understand, realise and utilise the valuable minerals spread over from Teknaf in Cox's Bazar to Kuakata in Patuakhali? No, there of course may be a

wherewithal of their existence few persons who believe it and realise it but they are perhaps undone due to lack of decision disastrous position and many of the government.

Dhaka-1203

OH Kabir