

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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 everything in it.

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

THE 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.

In fact, the success stories of privately-owned airlines, the growing passenger traffic in the region, entrepreneurs' interests in the aviation sector and the failure 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 applied 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, Shamsnagar of Sylhet, Lalmonirhat, Ishwardi, Barisal, Patuakhali, Mongla, Thakurgaon and Comilla have provision for STOL service facilities after minor renovation and installing of communication equipment in the strips.

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.

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.

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 between Dhaka and Kuala Lumpur on Biman's route.

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

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 with many actions go against a group of employees who are the members of unions.

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

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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.



NARASIMHA RAO Crisis of confidence

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.

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 malfeasance he appeared soft on corruption.

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).

any steps detrimental to the interest of the concerned house owners. M A Rashid Road 7, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka.

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.

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.

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.

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 balter.

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

Primo Minister following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. He, however, wants the succession race to be deferred till he is cleared by the Supreme Court on the charges of electoral corruption.

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 Thackeray, 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.

— GEMINI NEWS D. K. JOSHI joined the Bombay Free Press Journal in 1946.

OPINION

Stranded Pakistanis

h'on'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.

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.

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, eliminating system loss in WASA and PWD sectors significantly, also reclaiming lands, schools, madrasahs under their occupation, throughout the 86 camps recognised as Geneva Camps located in different parts of 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 electronic media were one with Bangladesh, for expediting 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 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.

Henceforth, it is now hoped that any future agreement that the government expected to sign must refer to the old file pertaining to the era of the Shaheed President Zia-ur-Rahman who successfully tackled this intricate and delicate process wherein forsaid 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. Charty 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