

Russia in Search of a Strategic Partnership

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Better Pay Your Taxes

The cash-strapped government faces a challenge in making up for the revenue collection shortfall it recorded during June to September of the current fiscal year. The deficit was as high as Tk 318.59 crore and could increase down the year.

The process of reform must begin with the NBR itself and then encapsulate the present and potential tax paying people in the country. As against less than a million tax-payers on the book there are potentially more than a crore to be hauled into the direct tax net.

Macro-economic balance is upset by deficit financing. Bank borrowing by the government has a way of denying the private sector of credit to operate their industries and business.

Garments Stampede

Garment factories, it looks like, have entered an endless cycle of death caused by fire-related accidents. But real fire has rarely been the killer. It is the scare of fire that has been causing irreparable losses of life with maddening consistency.

We have time and again commented in this column that these are not accidental deaths. These are murders owing to human callousness and irresponsibility. What else can one point the finger at Friday's fatal stampede than lack of proper floor management?

We have urged the government repeatedly to make sure that the garment factory owners adopt the little safety measures like broadening and increasing the number of exits including the staircases, arrange fire drills regularly.

Unstable Vegetable Prices

When the first winter vegetables make their appearance in the kutch market stalls of the city, it's some arrival! Green beans at 160 to 200 a kg, it should better have been called Dillika Laddu.

The main reason for abnormal prices in the vegetable market is transportation-related. At the end of the season or when there is a glut, transport cost goes past the grower's price.

There is then the evil of market manipulation. Only a week ago all things vegetable were selling at 10 to 20 per cent less than the current week's price.

NOTWITHSTANDING the disappearance of the great strategic friction, the West's relationship with new Russia is reminiscent of cold war legacy with the Transatlantic community still remaining undecided as to what the former superpower is now to them — an ally, or a client or a mere defeated adversary?

Moreover, much to the disappointment of the Russians the flow of the western financial assistance as a dividend for dumping their socialist ideology at the West in the 1990s.

Nevertheless in the past few years, shared perceptions have brought the two countries closer to each other and with reasons. The West's attempt for the Eastward expansion of NATO has been a source of concern for the both in varying degrees.

are convinced today that the western countries plan to undermine Russia's status further and turn it only into a source of raw materials for the developed world.

Caught between her lofty ambitions and reduced capabilities Russia now desperately struggles to extricate from its present predicaments. Repeatedly rebuffed by the West on the question of NATO expansion and strategic partnership, as the fallen giant looks for an alternative to buttress its remaining strength a rising China emerges as a choice on the agenda of the many in the Russian foreign policy community.

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ularly in central Asian region constitutes another serious irritant, both Russia and China have a shared interest in the stability of this volatile region. Both countries have close links with Iran of which the West is circumspect and even suspicious. They have common distrust of Islamic fundamentalism of Taliban variety which has already caused problems in Tajikistan, a close ally of Russia and along the border that China shares with Afghanistan.

As NATO's forward line moves closer towards Russia, the US has also thrown a security ring around China by concluding a security pact with Australia and Indonesia and roping in Japan for a similar arrangement.

Both China and Russia watch these developments with increasing anxiety. Both have also been discriminated kept out of World Trade Organisation and are occasionally chided for their human rights performance.

of early could not last even beyond mid-50s? Only Chengis Khan could, for sometimes, bring them together under his sway during the medieval age. However, the current phase of Sino-Russian friendship initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Beijing in 1989 was propelled by pressing compulsions on both sides.

PERSPECTIVES

by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz



Also in her desire to prove that she has an Asian dimension to her foreign policy, Russia pretends to turn to the East but in reality its genuine orientation is towards the West and America, where her slavophile culture has some chance of blending and the Russians are more at home in their socio-cultural exchanges with the West.

An Unbeaten Century

by Waheedul Haque

This Victorian votary of British imperialistic hauteur has done a wonderful good turn to the Bengali mind. Bengal is central to his writings. And who knows more than him about the best standards of creative performance of the nations of the world?

NI RAD C. Chaudhuri is a hundred now; yesterday was the 100th anniversary of his birth. Much of Nirad's life is controversial, mostly because he willed it to be so. There will now be no debate, however, about his being the longest living among writers of world stature in all history.

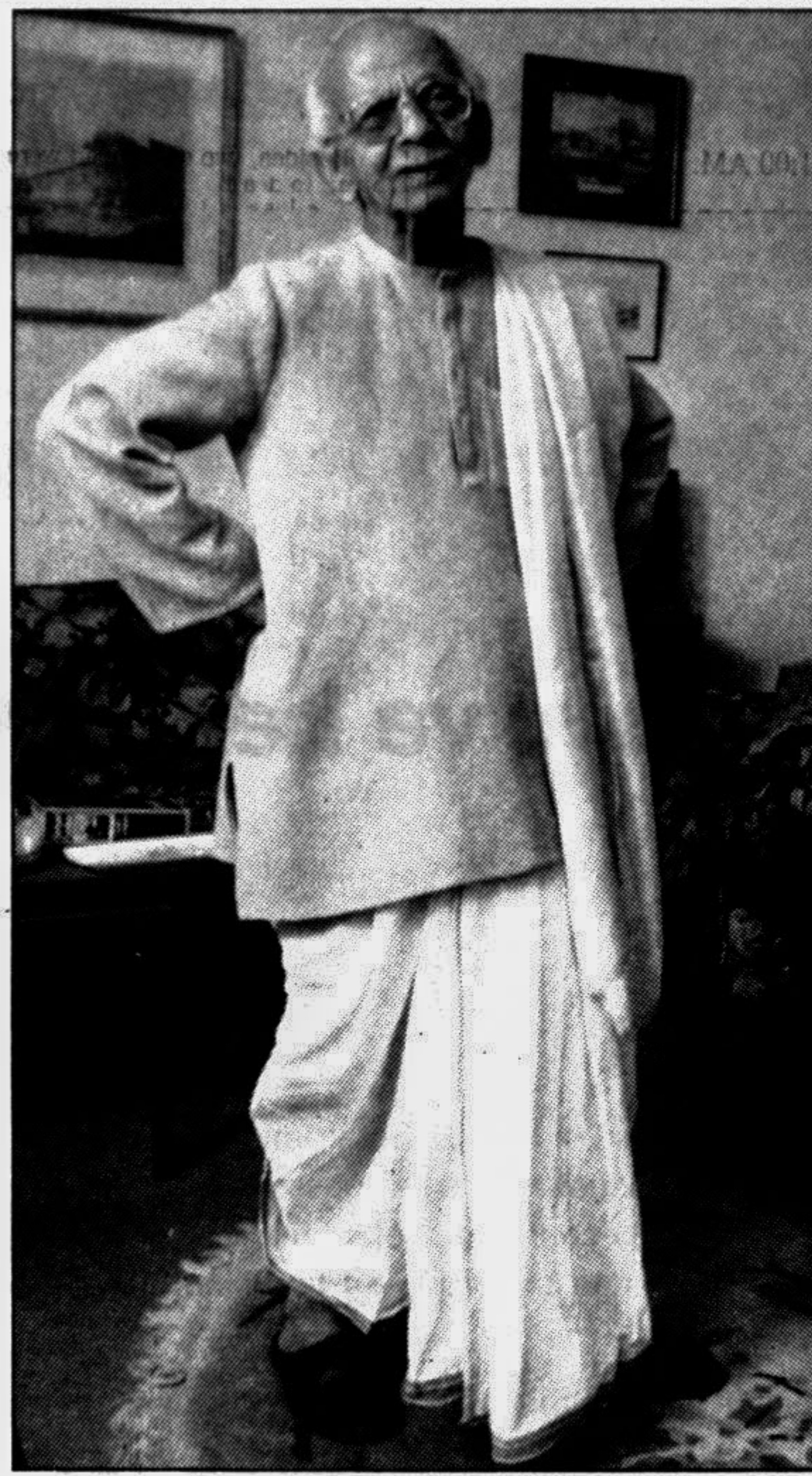
Like all centenarians, Chaudhuri has his own theory of what made him preserve himself and so well up to today's hundred. He says it's all due to his spare and diminutive structure that demanded so little of the material world and was so spared the overwork to assimilate the same.

This go-it-alone man, a man contrary extraordinaire, from the very start in Kishoreganj, and specially in his grooming years in Calcutta, seemed to specialise in creating problems for himself, all because of an unbending mindset shaping up from intellectual moral probity.

come he did everyone of the myriad blocks standing in his way. And perhaps this perpetual struggle to beat all that looked to be eating himself up has kept him so well and for so long. We may both be shocked or agitated by many of his brash comments and observations from an incorrigibly pro-imperialist position and a life-style more English than an Englishman's.

His is a life of unsurpassed scholarship. A recognized authority on Greek and Latin classics as also on medieval and modern continental literature in French, German, Spanish and of course English, he is also an expert in such widely dissimilar subjects as military science and viticulture. He has been too a respected connoisseur of paintings and western classical music. One can suspect that he has Toynbysque group on world history and also a pro-founder than Durantish approach to philosophers and their philosophies.

But this formidable and ponderous Indiana is India as seen by an angry Bengali babu,



Nirad C. Chaudhuri: The Last Englishman — Courtesy: Time

and often times Bengal, very unabashedly, Bengal, its literature and culture and social becoming. Bengal has produced many world figures from S. N. Bose to Amartya Sen in the present century alone. No one of these has introduced Bengal to the world abroad more than Nirad C. Chaudhuri or better than him except of course Satyajit Roy, whose Bengal was, however, an untitled paean to poverty and humanity.

Chaudhuri has waxed eloquent of not looking back, ever. From Kishoreganj he went to Calcutta, never for once to return to the East Bengal — or as he always prided to call himself, a Bangal-home. From Calcutta to Delhi and then to the intellectual El Dorado of Oxford, England. Never wanting to come back to the habitat abandoned. And has anyone noticed, says Nirad Chandra with a hardly suppressed glee, that it has always been Westward Hol? But no, he has indeed not travelled for from his Kishoreganj and his Calcutta. His Oxford retreat of decades is but a cozy Calcutta flat mines the uncountable miles of the great Bengali city. He did not move much — from an angry literary worker to a bitter literary giant is but little distance.

This Victorian Votary of British imperialistic hauteur has done a wonderful good turn to the Bengali mind. Bengal is central to his writings. And who knows more than him about the best standards of creative performance of the nations of the world? He has set his Bankim and his Rabindranath beside the highest and mightiest of the world. Medieval Bengal was provincial. Bengal — Bangladesh and West Bengal — is worse off now at the threshold of the Third Millennium. Nirad C. Chaudhuri derides Bengal for its provincial

more at home in their socio-cultural exchanges with the West. At the moment because of a piece with Washington. Moscow is seemingly turning toward Asia. But there is no guarantee that after a short time when the West offers new inducement to China — and it will — then Asia, China and so-called strategic partnership will not again be forgotten.

It is still more intriguing that Moscow does not advance any definition or elaboration either of 'strategic' or 'partnership' — the buzzword of newly-cultivated Sino-Russian fraternity. In the new cycle of Sino-Russian normalisation, the relationship rests mainly on trade which of course has steadily grown since 1989 Beijing summit — with Russia providing industrial goods, machinery and arms while China supplying consumers goods to each other. The trade does not require any political alliance or strategic partnership. China's trade with not-so-friendly Washington also was up to the tune of \$63bn last year. Such a volume of Sino-US trade did not call for an alliance or partnership. Then for Russia, strategic against whom? Partnership to what purpose? Boris Yeltsin is known both for his notorious unpredictability and expediency in domestic politics. But he cannot perhaps achieve any of his goals with his departure from the fundamentals of international politics.

The problem with Russia in her search for a strategic partnership is the country's amateurish attempt to play geopolitics on the scale of the Soviet Union which is no more there. The problem also lies with her blind ego of being a superpower in yesteryears, while today her clout has diminished immeasurably. Unless she lowers her sight from being expansively global as in the old time to being more modest geographically as well as politically in keeping with her present predicaments she is to face more rebuffs and from all quarters.

rusticity but, all the same, took it into the world abroad with head held high. One thing he never suffered from is a sense of inferiority which begets self-doubt. He bordered on the megalomaniac but was saved by an unsparring pursuit of knowledge and the delight he took from this. And an unsuspected unremitting patriot which, we would insist had at its centre not so much India as it was Bengal.

And how was he vindicated in his confidence as a writer and scholar? He was the one who could, very rightfully, talk through his hat. For he was the only one who could more than get away with that. Regally. His magnum opus 'Thy Hand, Great Anark!' was also his bulkiest — all 979 pages of it. And this comes from a nonagenarian's pen! Look at the man's conceit — he posted the manuscript to a publisher never introduced to him. So that no one could say anything but sheer merit made the manuscript accepted. The publisher accepted it, all the same, but reverently suggested that Chaudhuri reduce the size substantially, first by ditching the profuse quotations from non-English classics occurring everywhere in the text without any translation. Nothing doing, said Chaudhuri, not a comma would go out. They should better return the mss. That was the man. But why am I writing in the past tense. Let me say this is the man as he was for eight decades and more. And we pray he pass as thus. A great Bengali, a great man. Like a very good distance runner he opened up at lap 54 with his character of a debut, 'Autobiography of an Unknown Indian'. He has not yet completed fifty years of publishing. Pray he does it. We wish all Bengal, all of the Subcontinent, to celebrate this small big man. And how we expect to get more volumes from him. He can do it. For, he still can quote at random very long passages from the vast treasury of Rabindranath's poetry. Perfect with page and edition number.

Another thing is sustaining him in his unique aging. Rabindranath's Bengali must be knowing all of the 2200 Tagore numbers, text and tune. There is no one like him. And no one will be.

To the Editor...

Private airline

Sir, I feel very happy to find that another private airline will soon be operating flights early next year from Dhaka to important places like Chittagong, Sylhet and Jessore. This is indeed good news for people living in these places, as currently there are limited number of flights to these places.

The main reason for abnormal prices in the vegetable market is transportation-related. At the end of the season or when there is a glut, transport cost goes past the grower's price. And the grower, unable to pay for transport, starts feeding his cattle on radishes and cauliflowers and sweet gourds.

ernugger for the benefit of tea planters.

I full agree with Mr Abdus Sattar, Chairman of GMG airlines that there is adequate room for a premium air service which will cater not only to business travellers but also to overseas travellers with greater flight frequencies than are generally available in the country now. The limited number of Biman flights between Chittagong and Dhaka now are becoming very unreliable; timings are also not quite convenient and very often, passengers are delayed or flights are cancelled at the eleventh hour causing great inconvenience to passengers.

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'Names for Identity'

Sir, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Mr M H Khan for his kind apology. He proved himself to be a true gentleman, who indeed are rare

these days! Unlike some his letter was not at all rude but just had a question which he was curious about.

Opinions vary from person to person. No two persons will have exactly the same. But you don't have to be rude or harsh to the other person for that matter, especially a lady! You can just express your disagreement, which is always welcome in a debate. To some, culture is more important while to others religion is.

Another thing about our nomenclature is, girls and even boys are not given their father's name as surname. In western countries and even in Arab countries, they are. Otherwise how would one know who the father is? Sometimes each son of one father has a different surname! That they are brothers is also obscure that way. Then after marriage, women are supposed to take their husband's name, but that too they don't. They, for example, write Mrs Farida Begum, which means she is Mrs of Mr Begum! Or Mrs Ali (if Ali is her father's name and was her maiden

name before). See what it means now!

Why are women of our country hesitant to take their husband's name? It makes identification so much easier, because family is a unit in the society. She is now living with her husband and they together with their children make a family unit. If they have one surname, it makes things much easier, rather than carrying her father's name and each child having a different surname. It becomes difficult to connect them, unless told.

Are we following the western rule or eastern or an Islamic one? We don't know.

Dr Sabrina Rashid Dhaka, Cantonment, Dhaka

EPZ at Feni

Sir, Two export processing zones set up by the government in Dhaka and Chittagong have proved to be a grand success. Encouraged by this, the government is setting up some more EPZs in the country. It is felt that Feni is an ideal

place for this purpose, because there is enough government-owned land at Feni Airfield which was acquired perhaps during the second world war. Quantum of land may be around 1000 acres. So the government won't have to acquire any land which involved a lot of money, time and human suffering in this land-hungry country. Feni is well communicated with Dhaka and Chittagong both by rail and road.

So the government should seize this opportunity and should immediately go for an EPZ at Feni.

Zamir Ali Feni

English from Class I

Sir, The present government after its assumption of power formed a national education commission for developing a dynamic education policy on the basis of Dr K Khuda Education Commission report. The members of this commission are renowned and respectable

persons in their respective fields. The recommendations have come up to the ministry and some of the dailies published the same in brief.

The Commission recommended that 'English' (language) will be introduced from Class Three in all government primary schools. I appeal to the Commission and to the government to reconsider the decision before implementing it, because it will create inequality among the students of government and non-government (KG, English medium etc.) schools. Certainly those who are introduced to English language from Class One will be more skilled in the subject. And they will get preference in their further education and in their service life.

So I think English should be introduced from Class One in both government and non-government schools.

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