

## Not another new education policy!

MANZOOR AHMED

HERE have been reports in the media to the effect that the Cabinet has decided to formulate a new education policy. This is not only unnecessary, but also certain to be counter-productive.

It has been *de rigueur* for every new regime since the Pakistan era to set up an education commission and attempt to formulate a new education policy for the country. There have been half a dozen such efforts since liberation starting with the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission. None have been implemented and several reports have not even been made public and perhaps cannot be traced in the official archives. It is as if the preparation of a policy has become a substitute for action or a way of not facing up to the reality.

The reason for deciding to have a new policy has not been explained in the news reports. A new education policy, after some three years of deliberation and consultation, was presented to and approved by the Parliament in January, 2000. There were critical comments about the process followed in preparing the policy and its content and priorities by academics and various concerned groups. It was also observed that although the policy document was presented to the Parliament, there was not much serious discussion of the issues and it was given a

stamp of Parliamentary approval casually without even a day's debate. Moreover, it was not clear what this approval meant in respect of implementing the policy. Were there to be new enabling legislation, a planning process, new allocation of resources, setting an order of priorities?

These are legitimate issues that demanded answers. The new government that came to power after parliamentary election in

writing a new policy has not been explained publicly. This is all the more problematic because of the poor record of implementation of past policies and the way policy-making and policy statements inevitably became contentious.

The major educational problems that the government as well as the public are seriously concerned about do not require new policies. Freeing educational institutions from the siege by

existing policies. There is a large measure of public agreement about these concerns, although there may be divergent views about how these can be addressed. The problem is in respect of effective implementation of policies applying established rules and regulations rather than setting new policies and rules.

Some recent decisions of the government raise doubts regard-

political influence on management of educational institutions. This cannot serve either good management or effective policy implementation in education.

The present government seems to have misgivings about the recommendation of the Education Policy 2000 regarding extending primary education up to class eight within a short time. It has put this goal on hold. The government also has been debating how to respond

education or not is also a question of details of implementation of a policy objective rather than a major policy issue in itself. The same can be said about campus politics -- the key question is how to free the campus from criminal and illegal activities by some students and non-students, aided and abetted by political parties. A new education policy is not needed for taking necessary measures against this unacceptable situation.

There is no basic differences of views about major objectives and principles of Education Policy 2000. There is also a high degree of unanimity about major afflictions of our educational system. Plain common sense, universally recognised pedagogic principles, and good management practices are not against existing policy, laws and rules. It is necessary to devote all energy and resources to implementing and applying widely accepted good principles and practices within the framework of existing policies. It will be a waste of scarce managerial capacity and academic expertise to rewrite policies that is bound to stoke controversy and impede further the actions that must be taken. The idea of another new education policy at this time deserves to be nipped in the bud.

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October a year ago appropriately wanted to review the policy, assess its various implications and decide implementation priorities. A Committee headed by Prof. M. A. Bari was appointed which duly handed in its report. But it has been an opaque process and little is known publicly about what the report contains and what the government reaction to it is.

Now it appears that the decision-makers intend to go for a new policy document rather than work on implementing existing policies with whatever adjustments that may be necessary. What compulsion the government feels about

criminal elements patronized by political parties, minimising politicisation of routine educational decisions such as those about personnel and contracts for buildings and supplies, better accountability of teachers and administrators, improving and expanding facilities, filling large numbers of vacancies in teaching and supervisory positions, improving skills and capacities of education managers, and ensuring in general better learning achievement by pupils -- the demands that are being voiced persistently by the public, the parents and the media -- are not inconsistent with

ing intentions and judgment of the government about implementing policies purely in the interest of good education. A case in point is the instruction from both the Ministry of Education and the Primary and Mass Education Division to the effect that managing committees of education institutions should be formed in consultation with the local MP and the Minister in charge of the district. There are set rules for formation of these committees consisting of elected, ex officio and nominated members. The requirement to seek the advice of the local political bosses is to institutionalise extraneous

to violence and criminal activities on campus. These issues illustrate the point that attention is needed on implementation of sensible measures that would not and need not violate existing policies. For instance, there is no debate about the desirability of extending the duration of the present five-year compulsory primary education; hence it is not a policy issue. The debate is about how quickly the extension is feasible and, at the same time, how the quality of the extended primary education can be improved. Whether the present junior secondary stage should be managed as part of primary

## UNESCO and human development

QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

NOVEMBER 4 was the founding day of UNESCO. On the occasion, this year enthused all the member states it must have the significant announcement of President Bush -- that the United States will return to the UNESCO, the specialised branch of the United Nations, after 18 years of the voluntary withdrawal. His announcement came as a great surprise to his friends and foes alike on the floor of the General Assembly of United Nations in the second week of September. "As a symbol of our commitment to human dignity, the United States will return to UNESCO. This organisation has been reformed and America will participate fully in its mission to advance human rights, tolerance and learning."

UNESCO which stands for United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, and comprises of 189 member states now, gives top priority to its educational programme. UNESCO's constitution says that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed". Building these defences through international intellectual co-operation remains UNESCO's prime objective. The object of UNESCO, to quote its constitution, "is to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed ... by

the Charter of the United Nations."

### Literacy Decade

Proclaiming the decade of 2003-2012 as Literacy Decade, the UN General Assembly stated that creating literate environments was essential for eradicating poverty, achieving gender equality and ensuring sustainable development. It also chose UNESCO to lead the Decade. Its objectives include: reducing the absolute numbers of illiterate people, espe-

radio. The newspaper costs the price of a kilo of salt for my kids." Godfroid and millions like him have no desire to read and write because they do not see the direct benefits. They think it will not change their lives. For Professor HS Bhola, a literacy expert, "reading and writing are the second culmination of our humanity after speech. By failing to provide literacy, we deprive people of being fully human" he says. For Claudia Harvey of UNESCO, "it's

ence held in Paris on October 5, 1966 under the auspices of UNESCO adopted the Magna Carta for teachers world over known as "The UNESCO/ILO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers". Again at the 26<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference it was decided that a World Teachers' Day should be observed and accordingly October 5 was chosen in view of its historic importance due to adoption of the "Recommendation."

signs of a looming teaching crisis. The study found that the number of school-age children had outpaced growth in the number of teachers worldwide in the 1990s.

The study concludes that "developed countries are also facing a difficult future", since the teaching workforce is ageing. Although pupil-to-teacher ratios remained fairly stable in the 1990s, the ageing workforce presents the prospect of severe teacher shortages in future.

those of "equally qualified professionals in other fields" in developed countries.

The report found: "In those countries where teachers enjoy relatively good employment conditions, education tends to be given high priority and is of higher quality."

### Bangladesh and UNESCO

Bangladesh became a member of UNESCO in October 1972 in pursuance of Article VII of UNESCO Constitution. Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO has also been set up by the government with the Education Minister as its Chairman and 69 government and non-government members in the field of education, science and culture. The activities of Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO apparently, are not up to the mark. However, the assistance of UNESCO can contribute significantly to the development and appropriate management of human resources in Bangladesh, especially in the field of teachers' training; curricula development; popularisation of science/literacy programmes; youth development; elevation of the social status of women; exchange of scientists, litterateurs, teachers and cultural workers; preservation of our cultural heritages etc. The varied and rich experiences of different nations and national commissions for UNESCO in different countries can also be helpful and gainsome for us.

Professor Quazi Faruque Ahmed is Secretary General, Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Associations (BFTA) and President, Bangladesh College Teachers' Associations (BCTA).

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cially women and those living in places where illiteracy rates are high, notably Africa and South Asia; creating dynamic literate environments and making a demonstrable improvement in the quality of life of those who take part in literacy programmes. The Decade is about giving a voice to the voiceless. Literacy is important, says Adama Duane of the UNESCO Institute for Education, "because it's the key to the toolbox that contains empowerment, a better livelihood, smaller and healthier families, and participation in democratic life." But Godfroid Bimenyimana, a 57-year-old Rwandan farmer says, "My life is tilling the soil. I don't need to read. The news? I listen to the

moral issue. Can we justify excluding 877 million from participating in the modern world just because they are rural and difficult to reach?"

### UNESCO in the eyes of teachers

Why is UNESCO in high esteem in the eyes of teachers worldwide? To recall a few words of history, it was at the first session of the UNESCO General Conference that a delegate requested to "draft and promulgate a world Teachers' Charter, which would tend to 1) ensure the material conditions of the teacher, 2) raise his moral condition, 3) protect freedom of teaching". As a follow up to this, a special inter-governmental confer-

### ILO-UNESCO study on teachers

A decline in the status and working conditions of teachers is creating a severe shortage in the world's classrooms that could provoke a slide in education standards, according to a study by UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The study has worrying implications for economic growth, suggesting that future workforces could be less skilled. It also has worrying implications for global sustainability, since many analysts link low levels of education to higher birth rates. Sally Pazton, executive director for social dialogue at the ILO, said: "What we are seeing are the first

There is also concern about a generation gap between teachers and students, with the study warning that "the knowledge and skills needed by students has changed dramatically" since many teachers in developed countries received that training. The "quality and relevance" of much in service training in developed countries was also questioned. John Daniel, Assistant Director General for Education at UNESCO, said a common factor behind the world's shortage of teachers was "the diminishing status of teachers and a concomitant decline in working conditions in many countries."

Teachers' salaries fell in developing countries in the 1990s, and remained significantly less than

## 'Their god is freedom, their law is war'

BILLY I AHMED

THE Chechens are an indigenous group of Muslim multi-ethnic mountain herdsman and farmers, who lived in the North Caucasus for thousand of years. They speak a distinct Caucasian tongue, which is non-Slavic, non-Turkic, and non-Persian. Russian novelist Mikhail Lermontov wrote of the Chechens in 1832: "Their god is freedom, their law is war." The last census in 1989 put their number just over 1 million.

Chechnya is approximately 15,000 sq km (5,800 sq miles), sitting on Russia's southern flank, it has an 80 km (50 miles) frontier with Georgia along the 5,000-metre (16,000-foot) Caucasus ridge.

Chechens converted to Islam in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Enforced atheism under Soviet rule has given way to an Islamic revival among some Chechens. Russia has drawn attention to foreign Arab fighters in Chechnya and accuses rebels of links to radical Islamist groups like the Afghan Taliban and al Qaida, though their influence in the region is hard to gauge.

The mainly Muslim North Caucasus includes the Russian provinces of Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachayev-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan.

It may be of interest that, while the majority of the former Soviet Union's 48 million Muslims gained independence with the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the Russian Federation still contains over seven million ethnically and linguistically diverse Muslims. The two groups of these "internal Muslims" -- the Tatars and the Chechens -- are important to the Russian Federation basically for two key reasons. The first is economic: both Chechnya and Tartarstan possess substantial oil reserves. The second reason is political: of all the former Russian republics and autonomous regions, only Chechnya and Tarstan refused to ratify the 1992 Russian Federation Treaty that established Yeltsin's present Russian Federation.

Kremlin immediately attacked both de facto secessionists, which led to the root of conflict and eruption of a long bloody warfare. The conflict between the Chechens and the Russians is a centuries-clash. When Chechnya's southern neighbour, Christian Georgia, agreed to a union with Moscow in 1783, the Muslim north Caucasus' charismatic local chief Sheikh Mansour led a holy war in the 1780's. The Chechens never accepted Russian rule and the war prolonged for 47 years, finally ending in 1864.

Josef Stalin, who accused Chechens of helping Germans during World War II, sent the entire nation into exile, killing about one-third of them on the trek to Kazakhstan. The separatist movement gradually gained momentum and Chechnya broke away from Russia in 1991 and Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev declared independence and proclaimed one-man rule there in 1993. Russian troops invaded to oust Dudayev in December 1994, setting off a 13-month war that killed up to 30,000. In 1997, Russian soldiers killed Dudayev. Fighting resumed in 1999, after raids by Chechen rebels into neighbouring region and bombings that killed some 300 at apartment buildings in Russian cities. Russian leaders blamed the bombings on

Chechens.

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in bloody battles in 1994 and 1995. Besides killing thousands of civilians, the war devastated towns, ruined infrastructure, cut off essential utility services like power, heating and water to most towns and villages and led more than 200,000 people to flee to ill-supplied makeshift refugee camps in neighbouring Ingushetia.

In 1994 Russian force invaded, but were forced to withdraw with an estimated 80,000 deaths. The cease-fire agreement ending the conflict left Chechnya's national status in limbo until 2001.

Moscow regards Chechnya as part of the Russian Federation; the 1993 Constitution written by former President Boris Yeltsin does not acknowledge the right of any territory to secede. The North Caucasus', republics command mountain passes into the South Caucasus where Russia is jockeying with the West for influence over those post-Soviet states and control over output of potential vast Caspian oil fields.

Russia appears to be staking all on military victory and has consistently ruled out talks with Chechens. It is said a pro-Moscow Chechen leader serving prison time for embezzlement, Bislan Ganomirov, was pardoned by President Yeltsin and sent to Chechnya, perhaps to head an eventual puppet government. Most analysts believe Russia can capture Chechnya's towns and cities, but doubt it can win an extended guerrilla war against Chechnya's highly-motivated and fast moving irregular forces.

Before the fighting began, the population was 1.1 million -- two-thirds ethnic Chechens and a quarter of them Russians. Nearly 400,000 people lived in the capital Grozny, which is now in ruins. Tens of thousands of civilians are believed to have died in fighting.

After fighting in 1994 and 1995, the situation in Chechnya had calmed somewhat when a kidnapping in January 1996 prompted the Yeltsin regime to make moves toward allowing the creation of a separate state. That never materialized, however, and Putin has turned the move into anti-separatism. To drum up support from the Western powers he tried to use the 9/11 incident also against the Chechnyans of having link with al Qaida. Irene Khan, Deputy Secretary of Amnesty International, reports of severe violation of human rights, such as sexual abuse, rape of women and children by Russian officials.

Chechnya has also become a major embarrassment for Moscow on the international stage because, on one hand, Russia now appears to be indecisive and weak, and on the other hand it appears as an overbearing, brutal bully.

Incompetence mixed with brutality is a pitiful combination. Where that corrosion will stop nobody knows. Indeed this inability to visualize an outcome or resolution to use military power, a conflict termination strategy in other words, is a major aspect of the profound strategic failure represented in Chechnya.

But Putin has vowed to tromp the separatist movement, and this has fuelled the discontent in Chechnya that led up to the last week's horrible hostage drama.

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