

PRSP implementation agenda

National ownership and commitment key concern

THE statement made by World Bank vice-president Praful Patel in the aftermath of the recently concluded three-day PRSP implementation forum meeting hit the nail right on the head. Mr. Patel regretted that the meeting had not been a bipartisan one, and underscored the need for the PRSP to have national ownership, the implementation of which needs the support of both major political parties.

One of the main problems we have in Bangladesh is the tendency for everything to be turned into a political football. However, many issues of national importance need to be placed above politics if the nation is to make any headway on them.

The PRSP is definitely such an issue. Poverty alleviation is clearly an apolitical national concern. The details laid out in the paper have been long in coming and have no political component to them whatsoever. The paper is intended purely as a means to tackle poverty.

As such, it should be above controversy, and discussions on its implementation need to include all parties and stakeholders, not merely the government. The strategy needs to be owned by both opposition and government on a national basis. Both sides need to accept and commit to it, and the strategy laid out needs to be followed, regardless of who comes into power in the next elections.

Indeed, we would like to see both government and opposition also agree on the 11 point implementation plan so that we know that come what may the PRSP initiative will be followed and there will be some predictability to our public policy.

It is no use having a far-reaching strategy paper that is subject to shifts in government or the national mood. When it comes to poverty alleviation, strategies must be drawn up with the input of all, and once decided upon, all parties must agree not to play politics with the strategy and to sincerely implement it.

Too often in our political culture important things are not done because of partisanship and the lack of ownership at the national level for positive change. Poverty alleviation is far too crucial an issue to similarly let languish.

A good riddance, long overdue

We demand a situation report on Biman submitted to the PM

THE new State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism, Mirza Fakhru Islam, has his job cut out. Biman, the national airlines, is passing through a grave crisis. The recent hajj flight fare controversy which ostensibly led to the unceremonious exit of his predecessor merely scratches the surface of a deeper trouble plaguing Biman. And, this is where the emphasis per force has to be laid.

The mere change of guards will not be enough; in fact, it has a way of skirting any accountability exercise in regard to past misdeeds and their author. It often amounted to letting wrong doers off the hook.

The government still has one year of its tenure left and that's enough time to address the problems that Biman is facing, or a least to make some determined efforts to bring things back to order. The national airline has been incurring heavy losses and it is left in dire straits now. Regrettably, at a time when other airlines are expanding their business, Biman is finding it increasingly difficult to keep itself afloat. It's fighting a losing battle with corruption and mismanagement, strident trade unionism, anomalies in purchases, poor passenger service and a host of other problems that have turned it into a national liability. The airline has lost reliability due to its failure to maintain schedules. And as far as aircraft purchase is concerned, experts are pretty much convinced that many wrong decisions were taken in the past. This is something that only added to the predicament of a losing concern.

A number of suggestions have been put forward to regain the commercial viability of the national airline. But nothing tangible has been done so far to achieve that goal. Biman has not yet found a strategic partner, nor does it enjoy the operational freedom considered to be the foremost condition for success in the highly competitive aviation industry.

All things considered, we would like to say this: now that a new minister is saddled, we want a task force constituted to go into the entire gamut of Biman affairs -- manpower, management, purchases, fleet inventory, maintenance status, route mapping, flight operations, ground services etc. -- and submit a comprehensive report on their findings to the prime minister. Let it be made public subsequently.

Understanding the riots in France

KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

THE mayhem we have been witnessing in France for the last several weeks is deeply disturbing because once again the gulf has widened between the Muslims and the Christians. The riots were not totally about economic deprivation -- because Catholics and others who are equally poor did not join the rioting Muslims.

Undeniably, the unrest among the North African and other minorities in France was rooted in decades long socio-economic exclusion of the minorities by the successive French governments, though the initial spark was provided by the accidental electrocution of two Muslim teenagers fleeing from the police on October 27.

Social neglect meant denial to the Muslim minority by the majority community of equal recognition as French citizens. Economic neglect mostly in the form of unemployment meant denial of opportunity to the minorities for vertical socio-economic movement in French society. Migrants were regarded as rootless short-term utility maximisers, unfit for assimilation into French society with French values, thus denying them the inherent elements of multiculturalism.

Though historically assimilation has been viewed in coercive terms, France was till recently portrayed as a country practicing a liberal agenda, distinct in varying degrees, from other European countries. France's repeated attempts to embrace multiculturalism, now being torn to shreds, were not only to resist class-based theory of race relations embraced by xenophobic politicians but also to honour the series of agreements reached between the European Union and the Arab League that guaranteed the Muslim population in Europe would not be forced to adapt to the customs of the host countries.

Professor John Crowley (of the University of Paris-Dauphin) summarises the class-based race relationship paradigm as containing some of the

following elements: the most fundamental relations in modern society are those of economic class; immigration is determined by the economic requirements of advanced metropolitan capitalism; and migrants invariably belong to the working class.

France did not restrict immigration from North Africa and other African countries because they were willing to do dirty and dangerous works which white French citizens refused to do. Besides, these immigrants were largely invisible as they resided in

observed that "among a generation of Muslims born in Europe, a significant number have nothing but contempt and disdain for their native lands and have allegiance only to the Muslim ummah and the lands of their parents."

He strongly criticises the Arab European League for rejecting any idea of assimilation or integration into European society and the AEL founder Abu Jahjah for terming assimilation as "cultural rape." Europeans are concerned that France's Muslim popula-

A word of caution to the Islamic world would be in order: but for the finite energy resources the non-Muslim world can do without the Muslims (one only has to look at the volume of interaction among the developed and the non-Muslim emerging economies), but the Muslim world cannot do without them. For the sake of a stable and prosperous world, both sides have no other option but to cooperate with one another.

shantytowns at the periphery of the large cities and their presence was also generally ignored in public and political debates. But the slum clearance decision of the French government brought the immigrants into the residential mainstream and the oil shock of the seventies brought into focus the efficacy of the contribution of the minorities to the French economy.

As the debate on immigration policy gathered momentum, the French Right politicised xenophobia against the immigrants while the French Left argued for the cultural independence of the immigrants. Chirac government's attempts to reform the nationality law that provides citizenship at the age of 18 to foreigners born in France foundered in the face of opposition by liberals and immigrants. The ongoing riots appear to have hardened the French government's attitude exemplified by Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy's threat to expel from France foreigners caught rioting.

European media have started to reflect the hardened attitude against the Muslims in particular, which had remained submerged for years. One prominent commentator has

tion estimated at five million -- the largest in Western Europe -- could be the precursor of enacting "the nightmare of permanent conflict" replacing "the sweet dream of universal cultural compatibility."

Given the fear that French Muslims could be a constitutive element of "permanent conflict" it may be useful to find out their number. As the French law does not allow census of religious adherents, the Muslim population is variously estimated to be 5 to 6 million or even 8 million, as opposed to the number of European Muslims at 12 to 20 million.

But a survey conducted by the Institut Français de l'Opinion Public found that 36 percent described themselves as observant believers, 20 percent claimed to attend Friday prayer, and 70 percent as observed Ramadan. The Institut found one million Muslims with no strong religious or cultural ties with Islam. Paradoxically, while the first generation of Muslims was not seen as immigrants either by the government or their employers or even by themselves, the second generation, mostly born in France, and as such being French citizens with little bond with the country of origin, often feel like

immigrants.

But then it would be an oversimplification to describe all second generation Muslims as embittered and discriminated because there are non-religious and atheist individuals of Muslim extraction. The question to be faced is whether those denied the opportunity to better themselves and often victims of police harassment after 9/11 can be brought back into the fold of national cohesiveness or "societal security" to use the term of Danish sociologist Ole Waever.

spread of radical Islam amongst the descendants of the Muslim immigrants invited to come to Europe to shore up the European economies after the Second World War, the Jihadist network now spans from Poland to Portugal. Citing the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam by a Dutch national of Moroccan extraction, they blame the inability of the European governments to regulate the entry of immigrants and also for their utopian dream of a multicultural society of diverse communities living

in harmony, "offering oppressed nationalities marked compassion and remedial benefits" for the vandalism, delinquency, and crime stemming from Muslim immigrant enclaves throughout Europe.

Many influential Europeans including Oliver Roy, a top adviser to President Chirac, are increasingly taking the position against "appeasement" of radical Muslims, seen by them in the refusal by the Amsterdam City Council to ban the book, The Way of the Muslims, preaching radical philosophy against the grains of liberal values, on the ground that the ban on the book would contravene the principle of the freedom of expression. Many Europeans are now convinced that the French riots have amply demonstrated the failure of multi-culturalist philosophy that a country can absorb a population holding vastly different values from those held by the host population without negative consequences to both the parties.

They differ with the oft-peddled sociological view that socio-economic differences between the Muslim disadvantaged groups and the mainstream European society can account for the explosion now happening in Europe and challenge the "apologists"

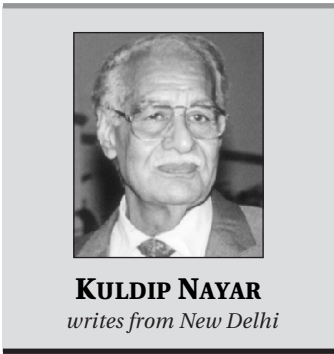
to look for the reasons for the lack of socio-economic advancement in the internal function of the group itself. They argue that the root cause of Muslim rage against the Judeo-Christian civilisation is their inerrant belief that the Muslims are already in possession of the final revealed truth, leading to an inherently superior way of life, inhibiting adaptation to a technically more advanced society.

In fine, if the European Muslims, suffering from identity crisis, express their discontent through apocalyptic nihilism then they would be expediting the process of "spiraling progressive alienation" from the mainstream Western society. Madrid and London bombings and Van Gogh killing have strengthened the hands of the European politicians in their demands that their citizens master "Britishness" (in the case of the UK), or adopt "Dutch values" (in Holland) or accept laïcité (in French schools). The Muslims who inhabit the developing and the least developing parts of the world and are heavily dependant on Western money and market should not put at stake their economic and technological advancement for the sake of a radical group of people who believe in a return to seventh century Arabia.

The responsibility for extinguishing the fire ignited by the Islamists, partly due to Western negligence typical of metropolitan-periphery relationship, lies equally with both. The challenge is immediate and immense. A word of caution to the Islamic world would be in order: but for the finite energy resources the non-Muslim world can do without the Muslims (one only has to look at the volume of interaction among the developed and the non-Muslim emerging economies), but the Muslim world cannot do without them. For the sake of a stable and prosperous world, both sides have no other option but to cooperate with one another.

Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

Beyond the boundaries



KULDEEP NAYAR
writes from New Delhi

I didn't find anyone from the media. But I watched the editor of an Urdu daily, Aziz Burney, offering Eid namaz at Rajghat, Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi, to atone for the bomb blasts at Delhi. His wife recited the Quran, and their two children sat in reverence. Burney had felt appalled over the crime a few Muslims had committed, tarnishing the name of Islam.

Burney's is a welcome gesture because there is already a whispering campaign among the Hindus -- thanks to the RSS-BJP combine -- that the Muslim population in India does not speak out against the acts of terrorism in the country. This is not true. I have read statements by several Muslim leaders, a few from Kashmir as well, condemning terrorism. They have bemoaned the bomb blasts at Delhi in no less strong terms.

Indian Muslims have, however, a point when they ask why it should be incumbent on them to condemn terrorism every time some incident takes place. Since most of the perpetrators of blasts have turned out to be Muslims, the community unfortu-

nately has to bear the cross. But I must add that the Muslims in India are different from the Muslims elsewhere. For example, during the Taliban-Al Qaida days in Afghanistan, Muslims all over the world participated in the sectarian war in the name of jihad. But not a single Indian Muslim rallied behind the call of the so-called holy war.

The Indian Muslims are, indeed, angry that the cross-border terrorism

ducted to Kandhar, heads the outfit.

Despite the solemn assurance by President General Pervez Musharraf, first to former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, and then to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, not to allow the terrorists to use the Pakistani soil for their activities, cross-border terrorism continues. Maybe, Musharraf is helpless. But the general impression is that he is not doing enough. Only the other day did the

where they had killed the French men some time ago.

At one time, the Pakistan President would himself argue that it was a "freedom struggle." He has become silent after Manmohan Singh has said again and again: "Terrorists cannot be freedom fighters." However, the thinking of the Pakistan establishment has not changed. One of Musharraf's senior ministers, who admitted the other day that he pro-

whether the Indian and Pakistan Prime Ministers discussed Kashmir at the Saarc summit at Dhaka. But terrorism must have been discussed since this was very much on the mind of Manmohan Singh after the Delhi blasts. The recent incidents at Srinagar are reportedly the handiwork of the new branch of LeT. The Pakistan establishment should realise that such incidents are bound to have an adverse effect on the peace process. It

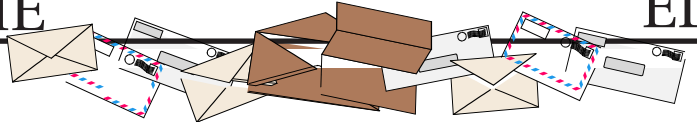
opening of the LoC points. The real reason for the delay, as a dispatch by the Gulf News foreign editor points out, is what an Indian official said: "We cannot say this publicly but it is not because of landmines or land-slides. It is because of Pakistan. They simply do not want to accept Indian help or relief. Geography and history dictates that we must help but they don't want to accept our offers."

This may well be true because some in the Pakistan establishment and most among the fundamentalists do not like greater contact between the peoples of the two countries. New Delhi has taken some unilateral steps -- giving visas to senior citizens at the Wagah border -- but Pakistan has not reciprocated them. The number of Indians getting visas has gone down in spite of Islamabad's repeated statement to increase people-to-people contact.

The Pakistan establishment has a lot to explain, because the Saarc spirit is defeated by discouraging contacts among the people in the region. With Afghanistan being a Saarc member, people-to-people contact has to increase. A new set of possibilities has arisen in the region. Manmohan Singh said in his speech at the summit that the right to transit passage should be applicable to the Saarc countries. It means that Dhaka can send its goods to Pakistan and Afghanistan through India. It also means that Pakistan can send its goods to Nepal and Bangladesh through the Indian highways. Above all, it means that South Asia as an entity is beginning to take shape.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

English around the world

The world has become smaller. Cultural differences have been annihilated by globalisation. Language plays a significant role in the process of globalisation. English has proved its viability and practicability to be the common language of global people. The big and industrially independent countries of the world used to put less emphasis on teaching this language to their learners. But now the situation has started changing in response to the practical needs of the time and to keep pace with the race of globalisation.

The Asian Association of Teachers of English as Foreign Language, China National Advisory Commission on Foreign Language Teaching, College English Teaching and Research Association of China, China Research and Development Center for Foreign Language Teaching and Learning and

Higher Education Press of China jointly organised an international conference in Beijing from November 4 to 6 at China Resource Hotel to exchange views and ideas about how to develop the standard of English in Asian countries. More than five hundred scholars, researchers, teachers, educationists and critics gathered in the conference. More than one hundred papers were presented in the conference. The world famous professors from Asia, Europe, America and Africa attended the conference. This writer also presented a paper. The participants shared and exchanged their views and ideas about teaching, learning, teaching methodology and overall situation of English in non-native countries. On the basis of this conference the writer has tried to focus some light on the situation of English in China and Japan, the two giants of Asia in respect of resource, economy and industrial development.

Complaints often arise when people come to talk about English learning. Students spend many years learning it, usually from junior middle school in the past and now from elementary school grade 3, but their ability of using the language is limited. How to learn English more effectively and efficiently has become a great concern to the people of China. In Xi'an there are 14 kindergartens under experiment, 3 in Shenzhen, 1 in Beijing, 1 in Wuhan, some other kindergartens from Shanton, Guangdong, Ningbo, Zhejiang, Fuzhou and Shenda are also involved in the programme. The English Immersion Programmes are also being carried out in many elementary schools, one of which is Lujiaoshan Elementary School in Wuhan. The first immersion kids are now junior middle school students whose English capability has been recognised not only by their parents but also by the schools and education authorities.

Immersion refers to the language learning model of using the second language as the teaching language. This turns the second language teaching to the integration of language teaching and curriculum subjects. This division depends on the following four principles. First, the curriculum subjects in school offer the natural basis and settings for the second language acquisition and give children chances to communicate in the languages where children can learn the second language effectively. Second, the important and interesting learning contents give the children the motivation to master the second language and stimulate them to use it. Third, the acquisition of children's first language is the process of combining the language and the cognitive contents in which their cognitive and communicative abilities develop at the same time. So does the second language. Fourth, the regular and functional characteristics of language

change with the situation. The teaching model of combining the language with the curriculum subjects offers children broad and different situations to use the language.

Computerized Assessment System for English Communication (CASEC) is a computer adapted test developed in Japan which aims to measure English communication proficiency. Bangladesh can share some experiences of these two countries.

Md. Masum Billah
Material Development Specialist (English)
BRAC Head Office, Dhaka

Enayetullah Khan

The death of the veteran journalist, Enayetullah Khan, is a great loss for the nation. Especially, in this time of political confrontations, the nation would have been benefited if he could continue his mission through journalism. Personally, I used to read his thought-

provoking and well-articulated pieces in the New Age and Weekly Holiday. I also had the opportunity to meet him and listen to his speeches on some occasions-- the last one, probably a year back in a UNDP sponsored conference on the prospects of human rights commission.

You have rightly noted that "He was by far the best among us; courageous, articulate, clear thinking, highly political and refreshingly outspoken. His was a life totally dedicated to journalism. Unabashedly opinionated and unreservedly expressive about his views, he was an icon for us who took up journalism as a profession."

Uddata Bikash Dhaka

Readjust prices of oil

We, the middle class citizens, are in a real dilemma due to frequent change in micro economic policy. In most of the situations, the government takes some

deceptive decisions that ultimately leave the common masses-- just to make happy its elite satellites. The recent price hike of oil across the globe above \$70 per barrel is an example of how things are being dealt with. The people of our country whose per capita income is no more than \$467 would expect to get supply of oil at a subsidised price because oil spiral has a correlation with the prices of all other daily necessities. On the excuse of global price hike, the government had taken the initiative to adjust the price with foreign market that led to the new transportation fare of Tk.88 per km.

The oil prices went down last week. But we are still bemused to observe the standstill stance of the energy ministry because no initiative has yet been taken to adjust the prices with global market.

Kumar Krishna Biswas
University of Dhaka

Simple solution!

An uncle of mine required a few cardiac tests such as ECG and Lipid profile. We went to a famous cardiac hospital where he did the tests. Everything was all right until the day of report delivery. They handed over a report to us with the name of some other gentleman. My uncle was astonished and enquired at the office to which they responded with a simple solution. The report findings all remained the same while they only typed my uncle's name in place of the unknown gentleman's name and gave us a fresh print-out! We were outraged at their behaviour and their work-- is that how they treat heart patients?

Finally, they agreed to let us have the same tests again free of cost but we wonder what happened to the gentleman whose name was written on my uncle's report when we first received the report.

Whom can we rely on?
Rizwan Shamim
Ramna, Dhaka