Dhaka, Monday, May 6, 1991

Changes at the UN

Now that Javier Perez de Cuellar has indicated that he won't accept another term at the United Nations, the search will now intensify to find a new Secretary General for the world body. In fact, lobbying has already begun involving possible candidates and their sponsoring governments. But there are also talks that some permanent members of the Security Council would like Perez de Cuellar, now 70, to stay on for a year or two, after his present second term ends in January next year, while some UN reforms are completed and a new Secretary-General is chosen.

If Mr de Cuellar wishes to be relieved of his post at the end of his present term, the world body, or some of its leading members, should refrain from pressuring the Secretary General, to stay on, even for a year or two. During his two five-year terms, the Peruvian had brought to his office both dignity and integrity — not to mention of his concern for the developing world, which was a bonus for a country like Bangladesh - and had handled a number of explosive issues, such as Namibia, the Iran-Iraq War and the Gulf conflict, with distinction. But he is also a tired old man, long past the retirement age that applies to all UN personnel, barring, oddly enough, heads of agencies and the main UN body. With the United Nations certain to face increasingly difficult issues in coming years, the organisation should indeed have a younger and a more vigorous head than the incumbent, one who may also look at the challenges in a new perspective, with a new vi-

The question is, where will the search start? Since, during the four decades and a half, secretary-generals have come from Europe, Asia and Latin America, it is obviously the turn for Africa to provide a consensus candidate for the job. It could be either Kenneth Dadzi, now the head of UNCTAD, or Salim of Tanzania who had tried and lost in a previous contest. The opposition launched against this so-called regional formula by a section of the US media is based on one important consideration: A consensus candidate is not necessarily an effective one, especially if the choice remains confined to a single region. In our view, the world body should indeed look at candidates from Africa on priority basis — there may be better ones than Dadzi or Salim -but without feeling compelled to choose one of them. Meanwhile, Prince Sadruddin Agha Khan, a respected UN personality, remains a favourite with some western powers.

If the choice is to be made by October, to enable the selected candidate to work with the incumbent until the end of the year before taking over in January, the process of selection should start now but not rushed. There should be intensive bilateral and multilateral discussions which should involve the Group 77, representing the Third World. Here, as a member of many regional bodies, Bangladesh should have its voice heard.

The change in the leadership of the United Nations should coincide with much-discussed and long-awaited reforms in the world body. On this subject, more talks are necessary, especially in the light of the UN experience in the Gulf War. There is also a need to look at the effectiveness of the world body in relation to the development assistance to the Third World. As mentioned in these columns last week, we are in total agreement with experts that industrialised nations must set aside a portion of their earning from the arms sale to raise the level of their contribution to bilateral and multilateral aid programmes to developing countries. Here, the United Nations indeed has a role to play in a strong decisive way. Whoever succeeds Mr de Cuellar must regard this as a major challenge facing the United Nations — and himself.

Environment and Us

Last week's cyclone was nothing short of a human tragedy for Bangladesh. We can always guess at, but may never know, the true number of people that died. And the material loss, well, eventually we will have a clear picture of the damage sustained by our agriculture, industry and economic infrastructure. But another sector of our natural life that has received just as severe a blow, and may cause even more harm in the long run, has been overshadowed by the scale of the human loss.

The country's eco-system has been left devastated by the storm. Widespread tree-felling all across the country over the decades has left only nine per cent of Bangladesh with forest cover (that is the official figure, unofficial estimates put it at around three per cent). The vast majority of surviving forest area is situated along the coast, in the Sundarbans of Khulna division and in the Chittagong-Cox's Bazar-Hill Tracts region of Chittagong division. The killer cyclone uprooted countless trees, reducing the country's green cover. The impact of the forest loss will be manifold. It will reduce the country's own capacity to recycle carbondioxide and thus contribute to the greenhouse effect.

It has been feared for several years now that the accelerating process of global warming was increasing sea level substantially enough to threaten low-lying countries and regions such as the Maldives, the Netherlands, coastal areas of Bangladesh, Florida etc. During the past several years, weather patterns have undoubtedly undergone a change, making it more extreme. The heavy floods of 1987 and 1988 in Bangladesh brought that realisation home to us. At the time, a great deal of concern was expressed about deforestation in the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal and India, as well as the general environmental degradation of the planet. It was recognised, albeit the hard way, that the global eco-system was an integrated whole and nobody was isolated from the effects of weather patterns emerging in another part of the world.

It is surely time to wake up to the environmental time-bomb that is ticking away right under our feet. We have to link up with the rest of the world on this issue by sharing information, conducting our own researches and putting protection of the environment high on the national agenda. The issue is no longer a luxury, since millions of our people are facing future disaster because of ecological factors. The question always is: where to begin? In this case, we should begin by reactivating the strangelydormant International Institute for Environmental Studies that was set up following the flood of 1988. There is simply no substitute for research if we want to plan effectively for a secure future, and the Institute would be as good a platform as any from which to begin.

Many Jostle to Become Next Indian Prime Minister

D.K. Joshi writes from New Delhi

India goes to the polls at the end of May (20, 23, 26) in a confused political state. No one

S the India election campaign gets into its stride everyone is guessing which party or combination of parties will be able to form a government and who will follow Chandra

Shekhar as prime minister. Gallup Polls predict a hung parliament. A snap opinion poll by an agency known as MODE shows 42 per cent favour Rajiv Gandhi for prime minister. Gandhi's computer forecasts a win of 300 of the 543 Lok Sabha (lower house) seats. Even his own party men regard such a figure unreal.

Gandhi's Congress Party lost power in the 1989 general election, but remained the single largest party with 195

The Janata Dal of Vishwanath Pratap Singh, who was prime minister for 11 months, believes a coalition will emerge from the May election of National Front (NF) Parties - Dal and some regional parties - and the Marxist Communist Party-led combine of the left.

Singh is recognised as the main vote-catcher, but the optnion poll shows only 17 per cent back him for prime minister. His claim to the job will largely depend on the number of seats Dal can win in the Hindi-speaking heartland on his slogan of social justice and secularism.

The rightist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) believes it can emerge as a dominant force, if not the majority party.

believes a clear victory by any party is likely and numerous politicians are putting themselves in the running for the post of prime minister. The opinion polls give Rajiv Gandhi top rating, with Chandra Shekhar, the man who took over the post for only four months, as runner-up. But the combinations of parties that might have to make up a coalition are many.

Caretaker Prime Minister

Shekhar is relying on a hung

in the elections. Its ambitions are not taken seriously. although in 1989 it increased

its seats from two to 86. The BJP projects former foreign minister Atal Behari Vajpavee as prime minister. but he says Lal Krishna Advani who built the party virtually from scratch, should have the



V. P. SINGH Keeping silent

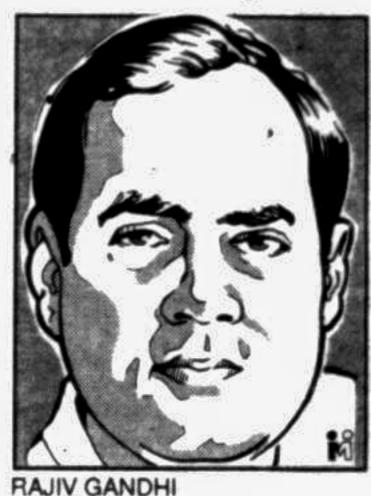
parliament and believes he may be asked again to lead India -- particularly on the basis of what he regards as commendable achievement in his four-month span in the job. His opinion poll rating of 26 per cent is second only to Gandhi's. Women give him



CHANDRA SHEKHAR Deputy talking to parties

more backing than men.

His Janata Dal (Socialist) is not to be dismissed as a party because he made a tremendous impact when he resigned and he has shown that he is prime ministerial material. When he split the Janata Dal and Singh resigned he became prime minister with the support of the discredited Congress.



Unprepared to face polls

In accepting this support he was accused of selling his

political soul to fulfil burning ambition. But after his resignation he was admired even by his critics for standing up to Candhi's political blackmatl. He had also given a political touch to all the intractable problems he inherited and thereby reduced

tensions. Ironically, his two predecessors, Gandhi and Singh, became prime minister in a wave of euphoria while he took over amid bitter criticism and went out on a high note.

If Congress wins the election Gandhi is the obvious choice. His leadership of the party has remained intact despite its humiliation in 1989. No one has challenged him from within and he has dealt with any incipient revolt with a heavy hand.

The NF pins its hopes on a better performance by regional parties such as Telugu Desam of Andhra Pradesh and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam of Tamil Nadu. In 1989 they won only two of 82 seats in the two

On past showing, the NF could form a government only with the support of two ideologically incompatible elements, the BJP and the left. and such a hotch-potch combination would come about only if the popular mandate was for the formation of a non-Congress government. Singh is the front-runner to lead such a government.

The saffron-robed film star turned politician Nandamuri Taraka Rama Rao, who leads the Telugu Desam, is ambittious and his astrologers predict he will become prime minister and he could challenge Singh. whose support for the backward caste he opposes.

The flamboyant septuagenarinan Chief Minister of Orissa, Bijoyanand Patnaik, who says prime ministers from Uttar Pradesh have ruined India (six out of the seven Indian prime ministers since Indian independence have come from that state), is set to challenge any asptrant from UP for the Delhi job.

There is also talk that the Marxist Communist Party Chief Minister of West Bengal, Joyoti Basu, should be considered for the post of prime minister because of the able way he has ruled his state for 14 years.

-GEMINI NEWS D.K JOSHI a graduate of Lucknow University, joined the Bombay Free Press Journal tn 1946 and later the Indian Express.

Primary Education Needs Serious Attention

ducation is traditionally regarded as a social obligation. Of late, it has come to be deemed as an essential pre-requisite in the process of development. Countries which have made rapid economic and social progress, are significantly those that have devoted a great deal of attention to education. No nation can be overall developed without education. So education is the investment and pre-condition for improvement of a backward nation.

Education is a must for and a basic right of a citizen. The constitution of Bangladesh stands for free and compulsory education to all children for removal of illiteracy from the country, and it urges for uniform, mass-oriented, universal system of education suited to the needs of society and thus producing properly trained and motivated citizens.

Emphasis on vocational and technical training should be laid down. Community laboratories and workshops and improvement of school and college lab oratories, intensification of practical courses will go a long way to improve the quality of education.

The prevailing formal prithousand primary schools along with 195,000 teachers have the potentiality of imparting education to most of our children (6-10 years). In 1990, the number of government and non-government primary schools was 37,616 and 9000 respectively.

The number of schoolgoing children was one crore 44 lakh 97 thousand. In spite of 18% allocation in the first five year plan, 47% in the second five year plan and 46% in the third five year plan respectively for primary education, out of the total outlay for education sector. universal primary education programme has not performed and improved satisfactorily. All the previous plans and programmes though indicate about non-formal education as an alernative delivery system for providing education and skill training to the vast multitude of illiterates who are outside the purview of formal education, but no such concerted efforts has yet been made to plan and implement a comprehensive programme on non-formal educa-

Victims need help

your newspaper's excellent

and detailed coverage of

the recent devastating cy-

clone that hit Bangladesh.

Let us hope the heart-

rending pictures taken by

Mohsin, together with the

heart-aching tragedies

written by your reporters,

will move bystanders into

swift action to help the

thousands of unfortunate

victims - for being at the

wrong place at a bad time.

No 'kafan' either

been for a number of times,

a victim of cyclones and ti-

dal waves. But perhaps

never has it been so badly

affected as this time.

Apparently this time it is so

cult to assess the entire

bad that till now it is diffi-

situation.

Sir, Our country has

Star Reader, Dhaka.

your

photographer,

Sir. Congratulations on

tion. There is, however, a profect which has some resemblance of non-formal education. It is the center-based adult literacy activities conducted through Mass Education project that was launched in 1980, discontinued in 1982 and revived again in 1987.

Foundation

Education is the backbone as well as foundation of a nation. If a nation is to be made self-dependent through mass oriented education we must emphasise on fuller implementation of the universal and compulsory primary education. Primary education is the foundation of education system in any country. As much as the foundation of a country is strong, so much so that country will be able to build enlightened citizens in future. If primary education is to be made universal and compulsory, a few practical measures must be taken such as : (a) the number of primary schools will have to be increased in accordance with the ratio of population; (b) the non-government primary schools which are still neglected will have to be upgraded and the pay-scale and other allowances of the teachers of these schools are to be mary education system with 46 finalised very soon for gearing up activities; (c) necessary steps have to be taken in this context so that the guardians are motivated to send their wards to school. If required, the local government administration may be empowered to enforce moral and social obliga tion on the guardians for implementation of this principle.

A social movement and a comprehensive publicity should be launched to motivate the local leaderships in the remote corners of the villages so that they can create real consciousness about the universal education among the common peonon-attainment of primary edu-

The picture of children

While attempts are on

in their eternal slumber is

to reach relief materials to

the remote areas, in the

form of food, water-purify-

ing tablets, and other

essentials, it is indeed

woeful to read that besides

grieving for the dead, the

survivors have not only to

think about their own sur-

vival, but also for the 'kafan'

or the shroud in which the

dead are wrapped before

tunate nation. Neither na-

ture, nor man spares us

Sometimes we suffer in the

hands of man, in the form

of a dictator, when the

miseries of the masses

keep on rising. And when

somehow it ends, comes

the fury of nature, to end

all the bits of hope left out.

Well, in any case it is the

the victims.

We are indeed an unfor-

laid to eternal rest.

really a painful sight.

schooling. While the estimated ment rate of about 74% must be gross enrolment rate is about enhanced to about 90% by the

74 per cent. almost 65 per cent year 2000. Retention and ex-Wastage is alarming. Out of an estimated 4.80 crore adoles-3.40 crore are illiterate.

literacy rate was around 31% in 1990, the ratio between male year 2000 would essentially imand female being 40% and 22% respectively. If we go through the history of other countries in the world, we find that no single country had universal primary education some 130 years ago. In France, the law of 1881 abolished fees in all primary schools and the law of 1882 established compulsory attendance. In England the elementary Education Act of 1870 laid the foundation upon which elementary education was made compulsory throughout England and Wales and in 1891 fees were abolished in all but a few elementary schools. It tool about 32 years to attain universal primary education in England and about 45 years in Sweden. In the Indian sub-con tinent under the British rule a bill on Compulsory Primary Education was first introduced in the parliament in 1912, but lost. Seventy-eight years later, Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990 was passed in the parliament of Bangladesh. which came into force from January 1, 1991.

Participation

A well informed circle is o opinion that it will be very diffi cult to enforce the law and ensure compulsory primary educaple. The steps may be taken in a tion by the year 2000. Out of well-planned way so that such the total population of 11.4 education can be ensured by the crore, about 49% are girls and year 2000. The main reason for women. It is encouraging that the proportion of enrolment o cation is the inequitable nature girls at the primary level graduof formal system and its inabil- ally increased from 36% in ity to reach the vast majority of 1975 to 37% in 1980, 40% in the people. Out of an estimated 1985 and 44% in 1990. To at 1.51 crore primary age group tain the universal primary educhildren (6-10 years) about cation and literacy within a 1.14 crore were enrolled in short time, the base of devel 1990 leaving another 37 lakhs opment must be retained and outside the purview of formal expanded. The current enrol

> There is nothing for us but to try our best to help those afflicted, and pray for the departed souls. None of us has any control over nat-

ural calamities, but we can,

by united efforts, at least

Asma Rahman Eskaton, Dhaka.

diminish the fallout.

All are sufferers

Sir, There is a startling similarity in the pictures of the Kurdish refugees and the Bangladeshi victims of the recent cyclone. In both are written the agonies caused by raw hunger. want, desperation and fear.

The big difference of course is that one is manmade (and could be averted), caused by the brutality of a ruthless dictator while the other, a natural calamity is beyond man's control.

helpless people who are Neutral Observer Dhaka

by Syed Zinat Ali

of them drop out, and the large pansion of the enrolled number organised system produces an of students will contribute to output of mere 25 per cent of the success of universal primary the enrolled children who education and literacy. complete the five years cycle. Continued participation by the parents, parents-teachers' associations, school management cents, youths and adults, repre- committees and communities senting the most productive need to be encouraged for age-group of population, about greater involvement in the vital process of education, both for-The estimated average adult mal and non-formal

The state of education by the ply attaining an intermediate target of universal primary education for children (6-10 years). literacy and life skills for adolescents (11-14 years). functional literacy for youths and adults (age 15 +), utilising both formal and non-formal channels in future.

learning needs of youths and

met through a variety of deliv- Foundation and other organisaery systems. Literacy grammes are indispensable because literacy is a necessary skill in itself and the foundation of other life skills. leadership should be involved to look after and manage these

Some Suggestions

A practical measure may be adopted to gear up the primary education in full swing in the following manner:

(a) Each mosque in Bangladesh may be used as primary school up to class V for imparting primary education to the children (6-10 years) from 7 a.m to 12 noon throughout the

(b) Other media of primary education such as Ebtedayee Madrasah, village Madrasah and Maktab. Satellite Schools. community based instruction. Radio, Television, also can effectively meet the basic learning needs of children.

(c) A knowledgeable circle is Implementation of Compu- of opinion that the government Isory Primary Education Act should have a broad based plan 1990 is considered to be a ma- to set up voluntary primary jor strategy for universalising schools at each village of primary education. The basic Bangladesh with the financial assistance of UNICEF, CARE, adults are diverse and should be OXFAM. NGO Bureau, the Asia

tions along with the donations and contributions from local well-to-do persons. (d) The village and local

voluntary primary schools at each village in collaboration with the villagers for gearing up both formal and non-formal primary education. (e) A permanent fund for these voluntary schools may be

raised for giving monthly allowance to the teachers and maintaining non-recurring expenditure of these schools.

(f) Each student of these schools should be given full uniform and tiffin without any cost or provided from the fund of school so that the boys and girls can feel encouraged to attend school regularly. The village and the local leadership may also create a provision of cultural amusement at each voluntary school for enhancing encouragement of the students to attend their schools everyday.

(g) Adult education programme may be implemented in second shift at the same voluntary schools.

Crisis Management: Expectations and Reality

The tragedy inflicted upon the nation by the cyclone and the associated tidal bore has shown once again how inadequate the government machinery is in coping with a crisis of this magnitude. Evidently history teaches very little. Over the many years, several governments, and a large number of disasters, we have expected the Government to respond more effectively to a crisis such as the present one. Unfortunately there has always been a gap in what the public expects and what it gets. The present government is no exception to that norm.

There were repeated announcements by the Government that due to advanced early warning systems it was in a position to take the requisite steps to keep losses in human life down to a minimum. The fact that the death toll may be 300,000 or more. however suggests that the Government's position, at best, suffered from optimism. Of course, to evacuate around 6.5 million people located in hard to reach islands is a daunting task for any government. Nevertheless, the perception of the Government that the necessary actions had been undertaken gives us cause for concern. It points to a lack of understanding of pre-disaster management.

The example of aircraft and

helicopters damaged at Chittagong Airport as mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament is probably symptomatic of the inadequacy of preparations prior to the crisis. If the government failed to evacuate aircraft, it is not credible that it could show a better performance in the infinitely more difficult task of evacuating people. It must be stressed though, that given the existing infrastructure, very few governments would have been able to significantly cut down the death toll. However, there was a discrepancy in the measures which the Government considered to be satisfactory and those which were actually needed. It is on this point the

government deserves criti-

cism. A competent and re-

sponsible government would

have clearly spelt out the limitations it had to work under concerning pre-disaster man-

Regarding relief and rehabilitation there is again a shortfall in what the public expects to be done and what is being accomplished. Specific examples are as follows:

agement programmes.

First, it is imperative that the quantity, composition, and specific destinations of relief materials be disclosed to the public. This information would allow NGOs, or more informal organisations, and members of the public to provide the type of aid that is required and direct that aid to the worst affected areas. Government is not giving enough information about its relief operations.

Second, very little is being said about how well the local administrative bodies are functioning and if they require assistance from private sources. There is some evidence that local administration is not working very well. Il there are bodies still waiting to be buried in Patenga, the situation in areas such as Kutubdia, Nijhum Dip, and Swandip can hardly be any better. Moreover, the distribution of relief materials in some areas have reportedly become difficult because of lack of administrative manpower. Example of this nature are appearing regularly in the newspapers. Existance of efficiently functioning administrative machinery must be manifest to the people.

The role of the armed forces in disaster management in Bangladesh can hardly be overstated. While reference have been made about the activities of the army, navy, and airforce personnel, visual representation of their activities are necessary.

Third, the damage to infrastructure has been considerable. The public has so far not received any indication as to when Chittagong Port, the meteorological centre, telecommunications, etc., will resume normal functioning, should we wait days, weeks, etc. Non functioning of the Chittagong Port or oil refinery for any considerable length of time will have repercussions on the lives of our people and the economy of Bangladesh Preparation for the consequences of a damaged infrastructure, should be taken within the shortest possible time. If no adverse effects are expected then the nation should be told and assured.

Fourth, the role of the electronic media, particularly, television, is to inform and reassure the public through images of the affected areas and the assistance that is being provided. Uptil now the coverage and analysis of the crises by BTV has been inadequate. Of course, our expectations of what BTV can deliver have been systematically lowered over the years, so its present performance comes as no surprise. The quality of coverage may be due to incompetence or lack of transport to the affected areas, or both. Arrangements could possibly be made to ensure better coverage of the affected areas so that the public may get a better perspective on the extent of the crisis. Dealing with a tragedy of

this magnitude is a considerable challenge for any government. It is clear that the present Government, in spite of the best of intentions, has committed a number of wrong judgement. Hopefully the government will learn from its mistakes. Presently national unity is paramount and to this end unity among the national leaders is both a sufficient and necessary condition. Unless there is unity at the top, it is likely that there will be no unity at the grass root level. Setting aside political differences for the moment may influence the level of assistance provided by members of the public. The decision by an individual to donate half an hour or five hours of his time, or Tk 100 to Tk. 5,000 of his or her resources may depend upon whether our political leaders appear fractious or united.

Syed S. Kaiser Kabir (The writer is an economist

and a former Research Officer at Oxford University. Recently he worked as a World Bank consultant in Bangladesh in a project on Regulatory Framework for Industry.")