

## Parliament should Debate Prokrichi Demands

For whatever it is worth, one must say that there is some novelty in the way the members of Prokrichi and 26 BCS cadres have decided to register their protest. A programme of three-day mass leave is something that was rarely seen in the past. Designed to pressure the government to accept its demands, the Prokrichi appears to be heading for a head-on collision with the authorities. To generate some sort of public debate this paper serialised a position paper from one of the leaders of Prokrichi, which explained in details what they wanted.

What the members of Prokrichi appear to want is a complete overhaul of the present administrative system. The serial that we carried and the readers' response that we got, made us conclude that what the Prokrichi was asking for, was of a fundamental nature, and one that would have a profound impact on our government. Therefore much thought and a lot of discussion were needed before the nation could proceed on the direction that were suggested. Without pronouncing a judgement on the merits or the demerits of the Prokrichi formula, we would say that given the fundamental nature of the suggestions, we should have a wide-ranging national debate on the subject.

In this regard we propose that the issues being raised by Prokrichi be debated in the Parliament. In this regard the government should immediately open a dialogue with them, suggesting a free and open discussion in the next session. On that understanding, we would urge the Prokrichi not to aggravate the matter and desist from further action till the Parliamentary debate is held. The professionals, as represented in this group, have already waited many months, another 60 days wait will not harm their cause. Instead, such a move will create a public goodwill for having given the highest law making body of the land a chance to deliberate on the matter.

What has been puzzling in all this is the way the government has dealt with the whole affair. After the last negotiations, the government has maintained a total silence on the demands and thereby has allowed the situation to drift away. There was an obvious lack of openness in the way the government handled the matter. It should have made public, its reactions to the Prokrichi demands. Demands that were acceptable, and those that were not, should have been clearly stated, and the public should have been taken into confidence.

We regret that the matter has been allowed to drift further and a situation has been created where direct action and confrontation became necessary.

However, we feel that a Parliamentary debate is the best way to proceed in this matter. In the meantime both the Prokrichi and the government should carry on their activities of educating the public in the negative and positive aspects of their respective positions.

## Where Govt Failure is Most Manifest

The mastans are once again at it. No, this is not one of their usual crimes making news in their myriad forms of cruelty and defiance of the law and order every day. It is their muscle flexing between two groups over the control of a city zone. To establish their unchallenged domination, the musclemen fought in Sabujbagh, Lalbagh, and various other places of the city. Khilgaon and Mohakhali have been the recent addition to this mafia-fashion gun battle and indiscriminate use of other lethal weapons including cocktails of enough fire power. In the recent two such incidents, casualty list includes a woman and a young man — all of whom are claimed to be pedestrians — besides the feuding party members. On Friday's incident, an SSC examinee — also a pedestrian — was hit by a stray bullet during the clash between two groups of the bullies, again in Khilgaon.

Surprisingly, the reports carried in the newspapers are categorical that the concerned thanas were unaware of the clashes that continued for several hours. Now this appears to be a bit mysterious. If the mastans can fight for hours without the knowledge of the local thana, no doubt something somewhere has gone wrong. Sure enough, when the mastans commit a crime, they at least try to do it as secretly as possible and without risking their own safety. Of course, the dare-devil types of them disdainfully go on doing their business as if they alone can decide the fate of the innocent people within the spheres of their influence.

Yet this is not the most open challenge the anti-social elements throw at the country's law and order situation. But when they unleash their frenzy in a bid to establish their supremacy over their opponents, they give a damn to the law enforcing agency. And if the law enforcers cannot take them at their heinous act, these elements only have their own way in a more ruthless manner. The way they are flexing their illegal muscle may soon cause to bring down the entire management of different areas in the city. Already, this is the most open kind of challenge the neo-mafiosi of Bangladesh are throwing at the administration. That their unrestrained rise can be traced back to the fact of this government's failure to tackle the problem is undeniable — the Anti-terrorism Act notwithstanding.

Today, people — both in villages and in towns or cities — are living in a kind of fear psychosis. Their rights as free citizens are being undermined by various agencies but by none so blatantly as the mastans. Society today lies sprawled at the mercy of these anti-social goons and the people suffering from such humiliation almost at every step cannot be expected to bring out the best in them. Deprived of security and shorn of dignity, these people are sure to be disgruntled and less co-operative with the administration that has failed to deliver what a government is expected to do.

THE cold war, as we all know well, ended in 1989 but some of the political and military structures erected to fight the war are still in place. As the Soviet system disintegrated, the Warsaw Pact just melted away but North Atlantic Treaty Organization is still alive and kicking. However, no one seems to know for certain why it is still there. After all, its raison d'être was the perception, shared by all the NATO countries, that the Soviet Union and its allies posed a threat to their security. NATO was their response to this threat. Moscow, on the other hand, built up the Warsaw Pact to counter the perceived threat posed by the Western powers. Their fear of the German 'revanchists' was based on historical memories. All this is history today. The NATO powers do not fear a sudden attack from any quarter. The successor power to the Soviet Union the Russian Federation or the CIS, is in no condition to attack anybody. Torn by internal dissension, it has not yet overcome the traumatic experience of the collapse of the political and economic system built by Lenin and his heirs.

The recent confrontation between president Yeltsin and the parliament threatened to plunge the country into a civil war. Under the circumstances one is certainly entitled to ask: Who is NATO's enemy? Its guns are aimed, as far as one can see, at no one in particular. A military alliance without any threat from any quarter is difficult to justify. This, I believe, is the reason for all the awkward questions being asked about NATO. Should it not just wither away? Of course it can take a lot of satisfaction from the fact that it has served the purpose for which it was

# Is NATO a Mere Relic of the Past?

NATO's future will ultimately depend on its most important member, the United States. Will it continue to support the Treaty and maintain its troops on European soil? Will it be swept by a new wave of isolationism? No one knows the answer for sure at this time.

created. But having served the purpose it can exist only as an anachronism. It is out of step with the times.

The break-up of former Yugoslavia and the subsequent blood bath in Bosnia-Herzegovina exposed NATO's weakness as a military alliance. Though the Bosnian episode happened in the heart of Europe and one may say, in NATO's backyard, it was helpless either to prevent the massacre of the Muslims or to resolve the crisis. NATO was not designed to deal with such problems. Its mechanisms, both political and military, are geared to respond to a military attack on the member countries. Absence of a common threat has removed the glue which held all these countries together. In a particular, the Europeans have started wondering whether they need the presence of American troops on their soil when they do not see any real threat to their security. Despite these doubts about its identity neither the Europeans nor the Americans are yet ready to write it off. As a super power the United States will lose an important instrument of its power. Naturally they are busy redefining NATO's role in order to ensure its continued existence.

The eastern European countries, having cut the umbilical chord with Moscow, are seeking new moorings in an uncertain world. Most of them would like to join NATO as members. But what can NATO do with all these new members? Even the old members

do not know what to do with the alliance. So the Americans have come up with a new concept. Les Aspen, the US secretary of defense, has proposed to offer what he called, "security partnerships" to the central and east European countries which are seeking the membership of NATO. Such partnership would strengthen contact among senior officers, set up joint military programmes and even joint manoeuvre. But NATO would not, under this plan, assume any commitment to come to the rescue of these

a newspaper report, expects that the summit will produce a "declaration in principle" which will be a compromise. It will commit NATO to enlarge but with no time table and no candidates. It is doubtful that even such a vague declaration will get unanimous support. Perhaps the alliance will eventually accept the American formula of "security partnership" for the eastern Europeans looking up to NATO for their security.

The dilemma faced by the NATO countries was very clearly explained by Lord Car-

times. And how many times had the circumstances been foreseen and plans made? Only twice. Russian fear of NATO, despite the end of the cold war, seems to be still a significant factor in influencing decision on the question of expansion of the alliance membership. If the eastern Europeans join the NATO it will heighten Russian sense of isolation. Further, it might disturb the growth of trust and friendly relation between the NATO countries and Russia. Given the fragility of the democratic institutions in Russia, the western countries would like to assist and nurture the process by removing possible causes for tension, friction and distrust.

NATO's future will ultimately depend on its most important member, the United States. Will it continue to support the Treaty and maintain its troops on European soil? Will it be swept by a new wave of isolationism? No one knows the answer for sure at this time. But the trend towards reduction of troop strength and military budget is unmistakable. Germany is planning to cut its forces from the 1993 total of 408,000 to 300,000 by 1997. France will cut its troop strength from 411,000 to 371,000. Italy from 325,000 to 287,000. Turkey, which defended the southern flank of NATO will reduce its forces from a 1993 total of 480,000 to 360,000. Belgium will cut its armed forces by half. The United States, which is often described as a global police-

man, is planning to cut its troops from a total of 1,730,000 to 1,355,000. Such reductions will not make NATO exactly a toothless tiger but trend towards reduction is certainly significant. Till it finds its new role in the world its members will, in all probability, under domestic pressures, continue to nibble away at the number of troops and the defense budget. Whether NATO will, as a result, gradually wither away is a matter of conjecture. Much will depend on how the CIS and the Russian Federation succeeds in stabilizing its restless minorities and the newly independent republics along its borders.

Equally important, what will be shape of the power equation between the great powers of Europe and North America and the emerging powers of Asia such as Japan, China and India? There are clear signs that the United States is increasingly shifting its attention towards Asia. Asia has not only become an economic powerhouse but also the major trading partner of the United States. If American eyes are turned more towards the Pacific than the Atlantic, it will naturally affect their attitude as well as policy towards NATO.

For the time being, however, the United States is not planning to change its course and one can see that NATO will be there as a political and military alliance even if it does not exercise any significant influence on world events. Perhaps Lord Carrington explained the situation correctly when, commenting on NATO's identity crisis, he said, "If I had a clear idea of what's going to happen in Europe and the rest of the world over the next 20 or 30 years, then we might be able to redefine what NATO is for."

## ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

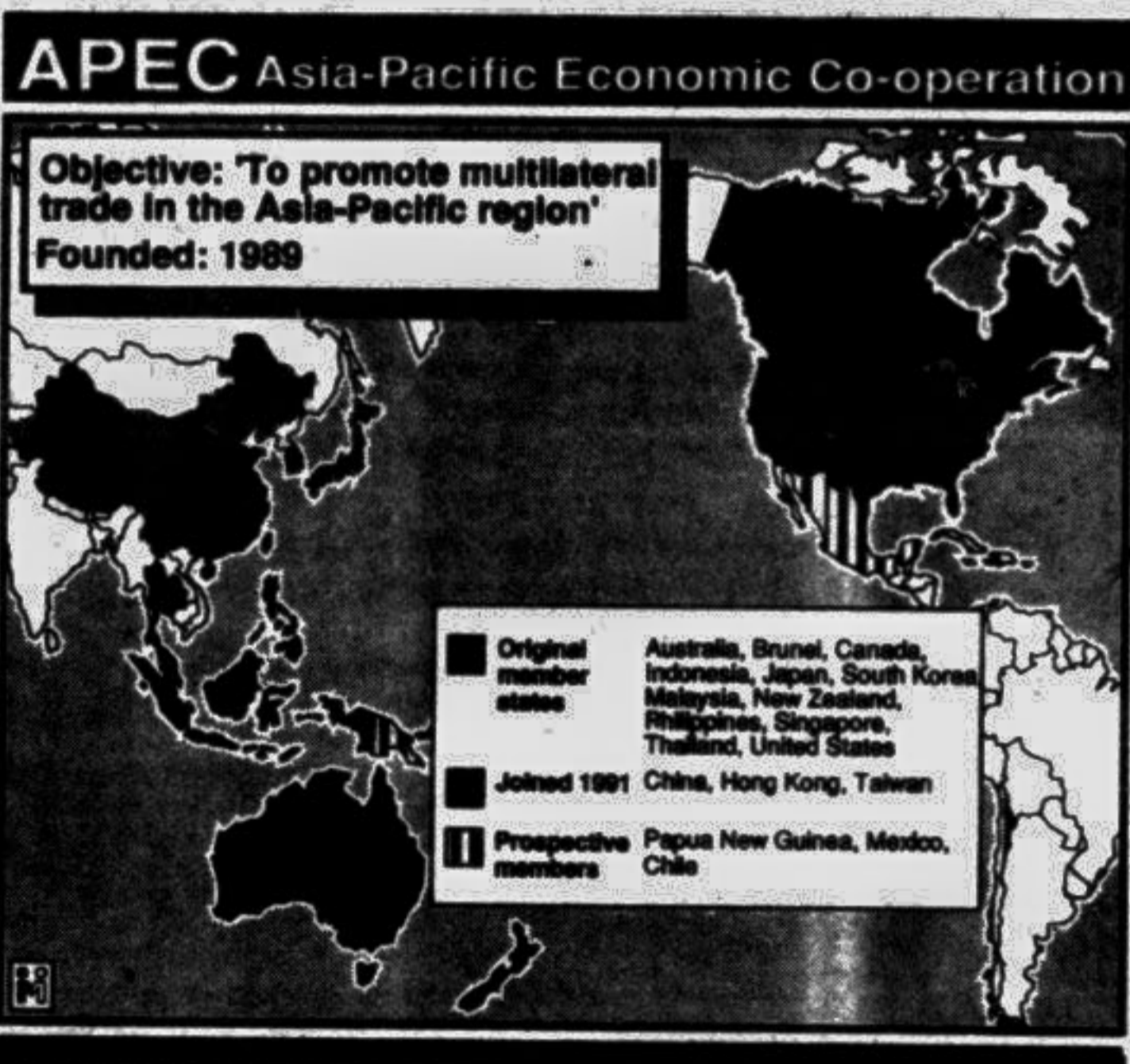
countries in the event of attack from outside. Initially the Russians welcomed the plan but later they changed their mind. In a letter to the western leaders, Yeltsin opposed any early expansion of NATO's membership and proposed instead that Russian and NATO should jointly guarantee the security of the eastern European countries. The latter countries saw in this plan the seeds of "spheres of influence" of Russia and NATO and they all reacted negatively to the Russian proposal. The question is expected to be taken up again on January 10 next year when the NATO heads of government will meet in Brussels. The secretary general of NATO Mr. Manfred Wormer, according to

ington in a recent interview with the Newsweek. Having served as Britain's defence secretary and foreign secretary as well as the secretary-general of NATO he is certainly well qualified to speak on the subject. He summed up the situation by saying that no one knows for certain what is going to happen next. So the NATO countries should wisely leave it alone. Stressing the unpredictability of life he said, "The only thing I ever learned in the defense world is that the unexpected always happens. When I was secretary of defense, I remember asking two questions: How many times since World War II had British troops been engaged in hostilities? The answer was 40

# Trade Tops Clinton Foreign Policy Agenda

Kevin J Kelley writes from Washington

President Bill Clinton is re-orienting United States foreign policy away from the old Atlantic alliance and toward Latin America and the Asian-Pacific nations. After being criticised for badly handling Somalia, Haiti and Bosnia, the President has won praise for getting the Nafta deal approved by Congress. As economic diplomacy gets precedence over political and strategic concerns, Gemini News Service reports on the transition.



cluding the President himself, implied that "enlargement" would replace the 45-year-old "containment" objective as the basis of US geopolitical strategy.

Now that communism no longer has to be "contained", these policy-makers said, Washington will henceforth concentrate on "enlarging" the ranks of Western-style democracies.

"In a new era of peril and opportunity," Clinton declared in a late September speech before the United Nations General Assembly, "our overriding purpose must be to expand the world's community of market-based economies... we seek to enlarge the circle of nations

that live under those free institutions."

That grandiose ambition was quickly shown to have been based on a miscalculation. Clinton had assumed either that "enlargement" could be achieved without significant cost to the military or that the US public would be willing to pay such a cost. As he discovered literally overnight in Somalia, intervention does result in casualties, and they can trigger political convulsions at home.

The deaths of 18 American soldiers in Mogadishu in early October proved that the "Vietnam syndrome" has still not been overcome. Nearly 20 years

after the US defeat in Indo-China, large sections of the public remain traumatised by the spectre of US forces being killed in Third World conflicts. The country continues to resist any attempt to commit troops to protracted combat operations not widely viewed as crucial to national security.

As a result of this misreading of public sentiment, the administration has had to beat a retreat. "Enlargement" is now seldom mentioned, and the effort to fashion an over-arching theory of foreign policy has been all but abandoned.

Stung by the charges of incompetence, Clinton's key advisers have struggled to defend their performance. Secretary of State Warren Christopher suggested, for example, that no one has been able to devise a sure-fire response to disorder in small, poor countries. "As far as dealing with failed states, such as Somalia and Haiti, we are finding our way," Christopher conceded.

But the Secretary and other top officials insisted that the administration is getting it right on the big issues. And their contention has acquired a certain credibility in light of Clinton's back-to-back success in engineering congressional approval of the US-Mexico-Canada free trade deal and in building the framework for closer commercial and political ties between the US and East Asia's dynamism.

Even some of his harsher critics have now been forced to concede that Clinton is proving himself adept at economically-

oriented diplomacy. The administration may still be lacking a coherent worldview, but it has clearly made progress in re-orienting US foreign policy away from the old Atlantic alliance and toward the Asian-Pacific nations and Latin America.

The President's come-from-behind victory on Nafta has at least temporarily overshadowed policy failures in other parts of the developing world.

Similarly, the generally positive reviews given to Clinton's performance at the Seattle summit of Pacific leaders have pushed into the background the fact that he has done little to advance US political and economic aims in regard to the region's two biggest powers — China and Japan.

On other "big issues" as well, the Clinton record is more mixed than his defenders contend. Russian President Boris Yeltsin remains in power partly as a result of Washington's unequivocal backing for him, but hardly any influential US politician has proposed an alternative strategy.

And in the Middle East, the US under Clinton has been a decidedly minor player in comparison to the dominant role in which it was cast during the Carter and Bush administrations.

Clinton is more vulnerable than many of his predecessors to criticism of his diplomatic skills because he lacks experience in world affairs. From the outset of his presidency, the former governor of Arkansas has sought to demonstrate expertise by acting assertively.

The US bombing of Iraq in June was an attempt by Clinton to prove that he is just as 'resolute' as Bush.

As he strives to recover from a string of setbacks, Clinton may again shoot at some target like Saddam Hussein — though almost certainly he would take care to fire, once more, from a safe distance. It is now unlikely that he will commit ground forces to Haiti, Bosnia or any other "failed state." This President may be unshooled in international affairs, but his political instincts are sharp enough to recognise the continued virulence of the Vietnam syndrome.

Along with the "enlargement" doctrine, the tactic of "assertive multilateralism" is being scrapped as well. That was the term used by American UN ambassador Madeleine Albright in September to describe Washington's intention to launch interventions under UN auspices.

The current feuding between Warren Christopher and UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali suggests that the US will not soon again put its forces under UN command as in Somalia.

With the "new world order" proving anything but clear cut, Washington will probably keep floundering in its search for a replacement for the containment doctrine. And unless Haiti or some other "failed state" quickly proves responsive to US administrations, Clinton's foreign policy team could well undergo a major shake-up in the coming weeks.

The No 2 official at the State Department has already been forced to resign, and rumours persist that Christopher himself will be thrown overboard, perhaps along with Pentagon chief Les Aspin and National Security Adviser Anthony Lake.

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## To the Editor...

### Weekly holiday

Sir, It is very much obligatory for Muslims to follow Allah's Commandment as revealed in the Quran. The orders are very clear and with the Hadis which explains it there is no room for any doubt or misgivings. Allah has, nowhere in Quran said that one should close on Fridays his activities in search of bread. Neither there is any order for Muslims to close his office on Fridays. On the contrary in Surah Jumma there is positive order to suspend transactions/activities as soon as we hear the call of Muazzin for Jumma prayer. In 9 and 10 Ayats of Surah Jumma Allah has categorically said (according to translation given by Allama Yusuf Ali) that "oh ye who believe! when the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the day of assembly) hasten/rush earnestly to the remembrance of Allah and leave off/suspend business. That is best for you if ye but knew. And when the prayer is finished then may ye disperse through the land and seek bounty of Allah and celebrate the praise of Allah often (and without stint) that ye may prosper." What could be more clear than this? Then why do we clamour?

Why do we then make an issue of Friday as a weekly holiday to be Islamic? Are we not

flouting the instructions of Allah by declaring total holiday on Fridays and forgetting that in following Allah's Command there is good for us, had we known.

Sabbath is a Jewish and Christian concept. According to Islam we do not believe in Sabbath. We in the third world cannot afford to make three days holiday in the field of transaction with outside world i.e. Friday, Saturday and Sunday or Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

I am sure all those who have read late S. M. Ali's views about the weekly holiday in 'My World' and have followed letters on the same issue in these columns are convinced about the strong arguments in favour of Sunday as a weekly holiday. To my view, anything which contradicts Allah's Command is highly un-Islamic. Let us like good Muslims suspend our activities from 12.30 to 2.30 pm for Jumma prayers and resume after prayers so that "we may prosper."  
A M F Quadir  
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### Dhaka-Washington ties

Sir, Ever since the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent and sovereign state the relations between Dhaka and Washington have been steadily

growing stronger. During the last 23 years the USA has always stood by the side of Bangladesh at times of crisis, natural calamities and need. She also provided us adequate aid and assistance for our economic development. We have also reciprocated the US goodwill and friendship in one form or another the latest being when we rushed humanitarian aid to the flood affected people of the USA this year in whatever humble way we could within our limited resources.

Man is a social being, he can not live alone. So is the case with the state. A state may turn into a skeleton or get ruined if it is ostracised, boycotted or made secluded by other states. The development and prosperity of a modern state whether big or small, rich or poor depends on its contact, cooperation and friendship with other states. We need the friendship and cooperation of the USA as much for the mutual benefit of the peoples of our two countries on the basis of sovereign equality. Indeed the Dhaka-Washington ties demonstrate the benefits of a strong partnership between our two countries.

In a new world order, we feel that the US President Bill Clinton rightly realises the strategic importance of Bangladesh in South Asia. After

the establishment of democratic government in our country, and in the midst of tug of war between India and Pakistan, is it not true that Bangladesh has not only emerged as a balance of power of SAARC but also a bridge of friendship between South Asia and South East Asia? The geo-political importance of Bangladesh today can neither be overemphasised nor overlooked.

We attach great importance to the recent visit of US Assistant Secretary of State Robin Lynn Raphael to Dhaka. We hope she is now well aware of the sufferings of 40 million people of Bangladesh on account of unilateral withdrawal of water of the international river the Ganges by India. We are confident that as a super power the USA would use her good offices for the solution of the Ganges water sharing problem which is a matter of life and death for Bangladesh, in the greater interest of peace, security and prosperity in Asia.

O H Kabir  
Dhaka: 1203

### Operation clean-up

Sir, Why the operation clean-up of the government and semi-government agencies is being delayed, and topmost priority is not being accorded? Only re-

cently the probing of PWD and Telecom have been taken up, with other utility services in the waiting list.

The people-backed BNP government is all the time boasting at public meetings that it was pledge-bound to clean up the administration and introduce good governance, and root out malpractices. But the action is snail-paced and cannot keep pace with the pious wishes. The public is getting frustrated at the unabated pace of corruption, nepotism, indiscipline, malpractices and especially violence at all levels.

What specific programmes have been drawn up to clean up the administration? The master plan and the line of action should be explained to the public, to create confidence. Slow action saps credibility. Many no-action policies are not explained, creating misunderstanding and inviting adverse criticisms even from the well wishers of BNP. Simply talking does not change a chaotic situation. The proof of the pudding lies in the eating. Where is the pudding of deterrence?

BNP has to explain very clearly the role of student politics, specially in regard to the campus violence. If the student front of the BNP is going to be

maintained and strengthened, then other political parties would follow suit. Then it would make no sense to criticise the other parties, however indirectly or vaguely. It needs to be explained how and why the role of the BNP student politics is positive and not negative. BNP never talks critically about JCD and its role partywise and at a national level. Other parties can apply the same objectives. Vague accusations by any side do not cut any ice. Politics is the game of concealing the hidden objectives. The elephant's tusks are only shown. Nobody is fooled.

Why the human system loss is not coming down rapidly? It does not necessarily mean wholesale sacking. The rules and regulations are adequate for detection and punishment. Then why the go-slow policy? Unpleasant decisions have to be faced and implemented. There should be no compromise on possible loss of popularity. How does BNP propose to face this administrative challenge? Strictness is a virtue, not a vice when applied judiciously, and is not misused.

Let us see some fast action, and periodical reporting to the suffering citizens, to whom the government is answerable.

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