

## National Conference Due

Home Minister Major (Retd) Rafiqul Islam has shown a rare degree of sensitivity to the portfolio he holds. During his return from Tungipara the other day, he gave his insight to some journalists in an informal chat with them as to how he wanted to run his ministry. He is in favour of treating criminals as individuals all of whose character flaws may not have been hereditary. Terrorists might have had in many cases such reasons as social deprivation and family troubles behind their choices of wrong ways of life. The home minister is considerate enough to give the wayward a chance to return to normal life.

This is not a radical idea as such, but for a minister in charge of home affairs to think in this line is really something new. When the initiative comes from none other than the home ministry it is bound to have a special significance for the terrorists. Hopefully, many will feel inspired to avail of the opportunity — provided that there is a guarantee of their safe conduct, and for their security — both financial and social as well.

So here is a hint of a qualitative change in administration the home minister is talking about. The emphasis is on the reform of character. This however does not rule out strong measures to deal with crimes and criminals of incorrigible kinds. In fact, the administration that keeps open the process for correction has a greater right to get tough with criminals.

The home minister's focus is on a more humane and civilised society. The minister is aware of police excesses and the legal loopholes for some of these to thrive on. So he has made it a point to instruct policemen to behave well with all and to take special care in dealing with women and children. The minister sees the acute need for some legal reforms to improve upon the colonial legacy. He has in mind the important ingredient of governance — the police-public relations.

We find all this extremely encouraging. Now we would like to suggest that before the home ministry actually gets on with the business, let him call for a national conference on all the issues involved in the maintenance of law and order. This conference should include representatives from the opposition, former inspectors general of police, legal experts, human rights and women activists, prominent advocates of children's rights will have to be there at the conference. This meeting of minds, to be followed by open public debate will help formulate right policies in this vital area.

## Much-awaited Push

The G-7, nicknamed 'rich men's club', has shown an increased understanding for the plight of the world's 40 poorest countries at its Lyon summit this year. The group of the seven leading industrial democracies in the world adopted a package of debt-relief measures for the LDCs. This is featured by: a) going beyond a two-thirds write-off of the bilateral debts; and b) subsidisation of the relief coming largely through the use of IMF resources. In other words, both bilateral and multilateral options are taken to ease the accumulated debt burden of the world's most impoverished nations.

The sympathetic tone and temper of the move is perceptible in the official recognition of the differing impacts of globalisation on countries in varying stages of development. While it yields instant benefits to the rich nations, countries with the least competitive advantages in terms of technology, trade and investment, tend, by contrast, to be marginalised under globalisation. Inequalities grow during the adjustment phase. That the poor countries' trial over the teething time has received a consideration of the leaders of super-rich nations is, to our mind, the most pleasing aspect of the outcome of G-7 summit.

Highly welcome as the steps to write off the debts of the poorest countries are, they would have had a fuller sigh of relief if the level of ODA flow to them were upped by the industrial nations of the world simultaneously. In fact, the Official Development Assistance as percentage of their GNP has only declined in collective terms. A greater transfusion of development funds into the poor economies would have lessened their very need for borrowing money on stiff terms from the developed world. Rather than periodically going through the motions of writing off the debts in a charitable fashion, why not make the missing critical investment to help the poorest countries to their feet?

## Stem Speculations

Hopefully, BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia would formalise her status as the Opposition Leader in Parliament by taking oath as MP sooner than later. This is so much expected of her that none needs be surprised if it takes place today.

Her delay in taking oath has admittedly been a matter of animated suspense and, therefore, of some speculation, even though BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has spared no efforts to explain it away.

"She was said to be sick, and has had difficulty in deciding which one of the five seats she had won in the June 12 elections she would retain. Now that she is back to party meetings she has successfully recovered from her illness and should be in a position to take oath."

Begum Zia is the opposition leader for the whole country anyway, so how does it matter which of the constituencies she vacates for the by-elections and which one she keeps to formally represent? It does not reflect very well on the party hierarchy that so much time has elapsed in hesitancy to give advice to Begum Zia on the point. Yes, there must have been pressures from the constituencies she had won in not to drop anyone of them, but that is exactly where her top party aides come in to play a role.

Begum Zia needs taking the oath immediately to put the sneaking speculations to rest.

# NEMAP: Moving from Participatory Planning to Participatory Implementation

by Dr Saleem Huq

Initial Environmental Examinations (IEEs) and Environmental Quality Standards (EQS).

did not specify in enough detail the issues they had identified, although they acknowledged that most of their concerns had been addressed in a more general way.

On the issue of their participation in future implementation of NEMAP there was extremely positive response and the challenge now would be to ensure their active participation in implementation of NEMAP.

**Industries:** Both the public and private sector industries have expressed a positive and mature attitude to taking some responsibility for ensuring a clean environment. However, they have a number of legitimate concerns about unnecessarily draconian measures which put an unbearable economic cost on them for compliance. The way forward seems to be to engage in a constructive dialogue on a sector by sector basis (e.g. fertiliser industries, cement industries, tanneries, textiles industries, etc) to develop environmental guidelines including needs for Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).

**Training, Education and Awareness:** One of the major cross-cutting themes that came out of the NEMAP exercise was the need for more training education and awareness raising on environmental issues. However, the interesting aspect about the need for awareness raising was that people were generally quite aware about environmental issues and problems and did not need any more general messages on environment. What they needed was specific information on what they could, and should do which went beyond mere slogans to plant more trees. The challenge ahead, therefore, is to prepare and disseminate specific information for ordinary citizens to empower them to become active agents in improving environmental conditions around them.

Similarly, in the area of education and training there was a strong desire to incorporate environmental messages of a more practical type into the curricula at all levels ranging from the NGO informal schools to primary, secondary and tertiary levels as well as on-the-job training for people already working in government and non-government sectors who need some environmental training.

The interesting aspect of the education and training issue was the level of enthusiasm reflected by both the students as well as teaching professionals. The aim will therefore have to be to incorporate environmental courses of a suitably practical nature into all levels of education in the country. This is no doubt a lengthy and arduous task but in the long run, may be the most effective.

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