

PM must be more precise, Opposition should not issue any ultimatum

WE compliment Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for moving forward in the much-belaboured issue of her government's resignation to pave the path for early general elections. However, we must criticise her for not moving far enough. The tentative timeframe, as outlined during her meeting with President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban Monday night, has advanced the crime somewhat, but leaves a lot to be desired. Her plan i.e. the incumbent administration's hand-over of power to a caretaker government after April 17 and election by June 12, actually spells trouble for the Election Commission. If the Hasina government stepped down, say on April 18, and the polls were to be held on June 11, that would give the commission less than two months to make the necessary arrangements. It is an unrealistic proposition, to say the least. Given the logistic reality, it would be a Herculean task for the Chief Election Commission to pull through. We would like to remind the prime minister that it was she who had first aired her readiness to hold elections, whenever the opposition asked for. At this point in time, her indulgence in a date-dilemma, if we may call it so, could send across mixed signal. One might well assume that she's having a second thought. We would expect the prime minister to eliminate the vagueness once and for all, and set forth a definitive and realistic timeframe for the electoral process to begin.

Having said that, we would like to urge the opposition not to nullify the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the early election issue by dishing out irrational demands. They appear hell-bent on issuing an ultimatum to the government from their 'grand' rally at Paltan Maidan today. The four-party alliance must understand that its ultimatum-politics cannot and will not resolve the stand-off. In fact, it might harden the ruling party's position and drag us into further uncertainty coupled with confrontation and violence.

As we see it, now that the ruling party has taken the first step which must be immediately followed by more precise dates. The opposition should for its part show restraint and not move towards confrontation. Mistrust, suspicion and obstinacy could only complicate the issue and multiply people's misery. We expect both the ruling party and the opposition alliance to build on the positive development and go the extra mile to get the best out of it.

Politics and escalating crime

Government must stem the tide of violence

THE nexus between crime and politics has become even more grim than it seemed to be. A survey by two research groups has confirmed our worst suspicions, that armed gangs of professional criminals, patronised by mainstream political parties, are fermenting the growing incidence of violence in the country. It is evident from the survey that political cadre-based activity, focused particularly on student wings of the mainstream parties, has led to an increase in circulation of small arms all over the country. The recipe for violence is obvious. No less than 30 to 40 incidents of gun-related killings are being recorded daily. Monday's daylight killings of three political activists in the capital have provided the latest example of this alarming trend.

We would like to know what the government is doing to stem this tide of violence? So far, it has adopted a high moral ground in its statements, but done little to arrest the escalation in violence that has been traced to its own party activists. A major onslaught on illegal small arms is the order of the day. But whether by design or as a result of misplaced complacency, the government has failed abysmally to get a handle on this problem.

We urge the government not to ignore the issue. The survey has shown that criminal gangs have been exchanging illegal small arms for an illicit and growing trade in drugs, gold and humans. The impact of the cadre-based political activity is thus spilling over into a general rapid escalation in criminal activities that is victimising thousands of innocent women, children and youth.

With elections imminent, the dangers inherent in this criminal-political combination cannot be over-emphasised. We appeal to the highest authority in the land to mount an immediate offensive against illegal arms. It must establish the rule of law.

UN Secretary General and sustainable development

Q K AHMAD

THE Secretary General of the United Nations Kofi A Annan presented a keynote address entitled "Sustainable Development: Humanity's Biggest Challenge in the New Century" in Dhaka on 14 March 2001. He was in Bangladesh for three days during his trip to several South Asian countries. Needless to say that when the UN Secretary General speaks there is a lot of interest among the concerned people. So was it on this occasion and the International Conference Centre where he spoke was packed. I am pleased that I was there too. All those present listened with rapt attention to what the Secretary General had to say. Obviously, the address has reached and will reach many others in this country and elsewhere via newspapers and other means of communication.

Clearly, in his presentation the point of departure has been the recently completed Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Third Assessment Report. One crucial finding of this IPCC Assessment is that global surface temperatures, on average, increased by 0.6 (±0.2)°C over the 20th century and will, it is projected, increase by 1.4 to 5.8°C by 2100 (relative to the 1990s). The globally average sea level is projected to rise by 9 to 88 centimetres by 2100. The decade of the 1990s has so far been the warmest period. It has been found that recent regional climate changes, particularly temperature increases, have already affected many physical and biological systems and that recent increases in floods and droughts have severely affected some human systems. The Secretary General has very clearly and pertinently warned that Bangladesh will face severe consequences of both climate change and sea-level rise. Its coastal areas are extremely vulnerable. Its agriculture which still accounts for 60 per cent or more of

its production base will be threatened and the adverse impact on crop production will spell food security problems for large segments of its population. The likely more frequent devastating floods and cyclones will cause severe human suffering. So will increased water-borne diseases. I am sure the Secretary General's address will act as a very powerful awareness raising shot in the arm regarding possible havoc that this nation is likely to face in the decades to come. I hope policy-makers, researchers and others concerned with environmental management in this country will rise to the occasion and actively and urgently pursue processes towards minimising the impacts and consequences of climate change and sea-level rise.

However, it must be recognised

Century", provided telling data and analyses on the increasing international and national inequalities. I was therefore a little surprised that, in this particular keynote presentation, he has not addressed the issue of inequality directly. In fact, sustainable development cannot be defined with reference to environment only. In this context, the environment must, of course, be protected and enhanced; but sustainable development cannot be achieved unless there are simultaneous processes in place for reducing inequality to an acceptable level within a reasonable period of time. An accentuating inequality will spawn political and social upheavals and disruptions. As a result, not only that sustainable development will not be possible, but also the prospect of environmental protection and enhancement could

improvement in certain social indicators (such as literacy rate, population growth rate and women's status). But the existing sharp socio-economic disparity has further increased in the wake of economic reforms and globalisation efforts that the country has been pursuing. The Secretary General has mentioned "that the poverty that afflicts Bangladesh and other developing countries simultaneously degrades the environment and inhibits their ability to protect it". Although there has been a slight improvement in the proportion of the population below the poverty line, the number of poor people has been increasing in Bangladesh, given that the population growth rate has been quite high. The basic underlying reason for the perpetuation of mass poverty in this country and elsewhere is the extremely limited access of these

both environmental and socio-economic divide related challenges.

With reference to the global community as a whole, the Secretary General has stated that, in responding to the environmental challenges, "the burden of leadership at this juncture falls on the industrialised countries, and in particular the United States, the European Union and Japan." This clearly reflects the reality of a highly unequal global order and indicates the only option available, under the circumstances, to the global community for seeking to construct a way forward towards meeting the environmental challenges in the 21st century. Indeed, the richest 20 per cent of the world's population, most of whom belong to the developed countries, now disposes of 86 per cent of the world's wealth as against about 80 per cent some 10 years

ago. The world is therefore becoming more and more unequal in the wake of expanding and deepening globalisation. He has also pointed out that the developed countries "are responsible for most of the world's past and present carbon emissions. And that they are best placed, both economically and technologically, to move ahead with their own reduction and with assistance for the developing world." This process can move the climate strategy forward while, as suggested by the Secretary General, its abandonment will set back global climate for many years. Indeed, the developing world has a particular stake in appropriate adaptation activities (policies and programmes for responding to vulnerability caused by climate change), for undertaking which they have very

limited capacity and, therefore, need assistance from the developed countries. The developing countries should, of course, do whatever they can towards reducing carbon emissions, given the limited capacity and scope in their possession. The Secretary General has, as outlined above, called upon the developed countries to reduce their carbon emissions and provide assistance to developing countries in the field of environment; and these actions are, of course, crucially important. However, his argument does not encompass the issue of global restructuring for arresting and reversing the glaring and increasing global inequality, the other potent force, in addition to environmental challenges, making for unsustainability of, and instability in, the global order. What the Secretary General has termed "a new ethic of global stewardship" would, I suggest, call for the developed and developing countries, even as they collaborate on environmental protection as indicated above, also to work together towards restructuring the global order to make it more equitable from the point of view of the developing countries. Obviously, since the developed countries occupy the preeminent position in the global order, it is their role that is preeminent in this process as well. Now the question is: will the leaders of the world act in accordance with this new ethic? If they do, the global community can look forward to sustainable development becoming a reality in the course of the 21st century. Otherwise, humanity will continue to be diminished, and the very existence of the planet Earth threatened.

Q K Ahmad is Chairman of Bangladesh Umayyay Parishad (BUP).

What the Secretary General has termed "a new ethic of global stewardship" would call for the developed and developing countries, even as they collaborate on environmental protection also to work together towards structuring the global order to make it more equitable from the point of view of the developing countries. Now the question is: will the leaders of the world act in accordance with this new ethic?

that the environmental challenge is one of the two crucial aspects of sustainable development. The other is socio-economic inequality. In his address, the Secretary General mentions that sustainable development can be constructed by simultaneously treating its three pillars, namely, economic growth, social development, and environmental protection. While the issue of socio-economic inequality may be embedded in the concept of social development, it is important that the issue is squarely addressed in the context of sustainable development. In fact, in the process of economic reforms and globalisation, inequality has been increasing across and within countries. The Secretary General in his report to the Millennium Summit, entitled "We the Peoples: The Role of the United Nations in the 21st

become untenable. It may be mentioned here that equity, sustainability and development have been among the cross-cutting guiding themes underlying the IPCC Third Assessment.

The Secretary General has very perceptibly suggested that the developing countries should "make sure that environmental issues are fully integrated into mainstream economic and social policy." But a question arises: what does 'mainstream' actually mean here? In reality, the integration can be effective in the context of sustainable development only if the mainstream economic and social policy framework is anchored on equity imperatives.

In Bangladesh, there has been, in recent years, some acceleration of economic growth and some

people to resources and opportunities, given the highly unequal socio-economic environments. Hence, the issue of inequality must be addressed simultaneously with environmental challenges in order to construct a sustainable development pathway. The process may be carried forward in terms of formulation and implementation of policies and programmes by specifying two sets of relations, given the prevailing realities: human-natural environment relations focusing on the use of natural resources in a manner that ensures the protection and enhancement of the environment; and human-human relations focusing on improving human relations by reducing inequality. This core approach to sustainable development is applicable to developing countries in general as they face

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Cleaning up after Tehelka: Part-measures won't do

PRAFUL BIDWAI

writes from New Delhi

MR Fernandes' resignation has further deepened the NDA's crisis. Now three of the Alliance's constituents are out. The Samata may be preparing for a showdown. No one should underestimate Mr Fernandes' vindictiveness. Whether Mr Brajesh Mishra and N.K. Singh go next, or NDA dissent boils over, the crisis could worsen, further weakening Mr Vajpayee's pitiable leadership. This only strengthens the argument for his resignation.

Tehelka.com has exposed our biggest-ever public scandal. There is a directness and immediacy about the 100-hour videotapes. Their text says it all. What it says is shocking, revolting and depressing. Shocking because of the magnitude of the corruption in India's Rs 40,000 crore defence deals, stretching all the way to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

There is probably no Indian defence contract that cannot be swung or subverted with bribes. It is not just the politicians who are responsible for this. Equally implicated are serving armed forces officers.

The revelations are revolting because corruption critically affects the health of national defence. When second-rate, unreliable,

expensive weapons are procured instead of first-class armaments, for reasons of bribery, the combat forces are compromised.

The disclosures are also depressing. Instead of coming clean, the ruling establishment has chosen to play a devious game of damage control, or "three-fourths denial and one-fourth admission." It is sacrificing some functionaries, but only to cling to power.

The NDA desperately hopes that

Gupta for his deep personal knowledge of the sleazy trade?

Equally revealing is Mr Jain's valuation of the "deal-making potential" of senior NDA ministers: "With Sharad Yadav, with Yashwant Sinha, we can do 100 percent work... Mamata Banerjee is 70 percent... and Ram Vilas Paswan, again 99 percent."

This raises serious questions about many people who have not confessed on tape, but who have

and above doctoring decisions.

That's why Mr Peter Mandelson had to leave the Cabinet despite being Number Two in Mr Blair's party. He was credibly accused of influencing the Hinduja's application for naturalisation.

Accountable democracies, including the Nehru version in this country, punish malfeasance with loss of office. Nehru sacked political heavyweight and founder of indigenous oil K.D. Malaviya for taking a mere Rs. 10,000 in cash as "politi-

with a difference", led by a man considered to be above petty politics.

The claim stands falsified. The BJP has now become inseparable from sleaze. Even worse is the damage done to the RSS, the BJP's "disciplined" and "incorruptible" conscience-keeper, thanks to its trustee R.K. Gupta's obnoxiously boastful statements. (He was the only broker to demand more money from Tehelka.)

The Tehelka disclosures have

resignation; in any case, "every-one" is corrupt...

The Opposition must not delude itself that this government will leave because of embarrassment alone. It must take the corruption issue to the people, and agitate it as part of a demand for transparency in governance, and a thorough cleansing of the political system.

Ultimately, the system's survival lies in freedom from corruption and greater accountability, especially in defence matters. We have allowed too much secrecy in the name of "national security". An instance is the Subrahmanyam committee's Kargil whitewash report. This "defence-as-holy-cow" attitude must change.

In India, there is a contention between two concepts of democracy: democracy as a system of power, which can be used to partisan ends, and substantive democracy in which public accountability and democratic norms matter. Today's is a historic opportunity to tilt the balance decisively in favour of the second concept.

We must launch a massive grassroots campaign to clean up the system, attack bureaucratic monopolies, politicians' strangleholds and businessmen's privileges. But a precondition is the dislodging of the NDA government.

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the allegations will somehow go away once it has made token sacrifices.

Nothing could be more false. The people will take a long time to erase from their memory the sight of the BJP president sitting at his glass-top table and putting away a lakh of rupees in bribes. The money was being paid to influence a defence procurement decision through Mr Brajesh Mishra, National Security Adviser, no less.

Equally unforgettable are Mr R.K. Jain's stunningly frank disclosures on the minute details of defence rackets. And who can surpass the RSS's own Mr R.K.

been named: e.g. Messrs Ranjan Bhattacharya, Santosh Gangwar and Ram Vilas Paswan. They must speak up.

This mega-scandal is a political and moral issue. But from the purely legal point of view too, the tapes constitute damning evidence, especially when supplemented by diary entries of appointments, etc.

The real issue is not law but political accountability. Those in public life must follow higher standards of probity than common criminals. Criminals must be considered innocent until proved guilty. Holders of public office are not. They are duty-bound to be clean

cal donation" from a dubious source. Even on less stringent criteria, many more heads should roll in the present case.

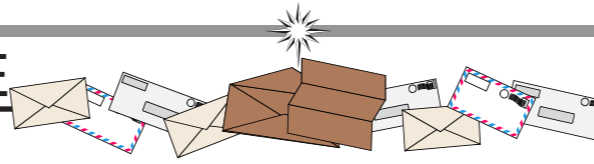
The Tehelka tapes point to the wholesale subversion of governance. The responsibility for this is political. That's why it is incumbent upon Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to resign forthwith.

Within the ruling alliance, the BJP stands out as the worst culprit not least because it is sanctimonious and dangerously hypocritical. The BJP promised to provide *suraj*. It made a particularly strident claim to be uniquely patriotic and the guardian of our national security. It also claimed to be "the party

presented a windfall opportunity to the Opposition. The Opposition has a legitimate role to play in bringing the government to book. It must pursue it relentlessly in the interest of democracy. The more brazen the government's conduct, the heavier the Opposition's responsibility. The NDA can only be disciplined through a combination of parliamentary and public pressure.

One can only hope that the Opposition weak and divided as it is rises to the task. It should tactfully work upon the NDA constituents not directly involved in the scam. It should combat the sophistry of NDA apologists in arguing that further inquiry must precede any further

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



PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.

Generator generating jeopardy



STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

This generator has been lying in the Postgola area opposite Alam Market for about a year, creating a serious hindrance to the local people. An accident may occur at any time. Though shopkeepers and local people have repeatedly requested DESA to remove the generator to a safer location, nothing has yet been done. The generator lies stock-still. Will the authorities ever pay heed to the complaint of the general people?

Society's burden

It is a matter of utter shame that students not only cheat in exams but actually demand the 'right' to do this undisturbed! Social and family values have fallen to such a low level that youngsters believe that the only way to succeed is to cheat. While we must blame the youngsters and teachers who support cheating attempts, the real issue is relevant to society as a whole. Society has to shoulder the burden of advancing values that are negative and encourage success at any cost. Unless this responsibility is accepted, there will be no improvement. Things will become worse.

Pessimist
Dhaka

Friendship with India

When our ministers and top bureaucrats return from India after an official tour, they often come out with the statement that very friendly relations exist with India. But one finds this statement hard to swallow given the reality that India has been refusing to lower tariff barriers for our exports for the last four years and discourages our businessmen from exporting to that country. When we try to do business with a third country like Nepal, the Indian customs and immigration department makes it so difficult that Nepalese businessmen lose interest in doing business with

us. The Indian intransigence in settling long-term issues related to river beds and "shoel" build-up is another example of the problems that continue to plague the relationship. Indian media publicity on Bangladesh, especially on so-called 'refugees' from this country is another discouraging factor.

With all these problems, one wonders how India could be considered a good friend of Bangladesh?

Golam Md Faruk
Dhaka

Approved panel for fatwa

The opinion from a contributor in Saudi Arabia on the fatwa issue (March 14) is good background information on the subject. In Bangladesh, the government should set up a panel containing the names of a few learned persons in the country who will be allowed to offer fatwa formally. This arrangement should be widely publicised in the rural areas through imams in the mosques, the union councils and other local bodies. The present bad and sensitive practice has to be curbed.

AMA

Dhaka

Chief Whip's son, again