DHAKA TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 3, 2002

Long on rhetoric in **Johannesburg**

But short on commitments

S the ten-day World Summit on Sustainable Development, popularly known as the Earth Summit, nearer completion, prospects for a time-bound commitment to lofty targets set at the UN Millennium Summit for poverty alleviation and environment conservation look increasingly bleak. While 100-odd world leaders began a general debate on the future of the planet yesterday, environment ministers sweated it out behind close doors to clinch a deal, which could be more face saving than anything else. Again, the talks bumped into dispute between the United States and the European Union over a EU demand for firm, time-bound targets for switching into renewable energy source such as solar power and wind from oil and gas. And again, the poor, underdeveloped countries look likely to get a raw deal out of the negotiations. Although the negotiators sounded hopeful of eventually reaching some sort of a consensus, the plan of action to implement the Millennium Summit targets could well turn out to be patchy and full of ifs and buts. In the end, the underdeveloped countries might return from the Earth Summit virtually empty-handed, with none of their major concerns addressed.

Since the first Earth Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 catapulted environment on to the world's political agenda, the UN conferences on climate and environment issues have invariably turned out to be diplomatic sabre-rattling between the EU and the US. Essentially, however, both have approached the issues from a selfish point of view. While the EU has constantly criticised the US for not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, both share a common ground when it comes to the issue of providing huge subsidies to their farmers, which is blamed for destroying the livelihood of hundreds of millions of Third World producers. Neither the US nor Europe wants to go beyond a vague promise made in the World Trade Organisation for talks on a potential phase-out of this support. Overall, neither has shown any selfless interest in the cause of the poor or the

Unless there is a dramatic transformation of their selfish mindset, the UN summits on sustainable development would continue to end in compromises and failures. And the poor countries would return home with individual commitments such as the \$1 billion US plan for poverty alleviation and protection of natural resources or the \$510 million water and sanitation plan

The developed countries must realise that spending a few million dollars here and there does not hold the solution to the problems they have created in the first place. They must orchestrate their efforts to save the environment with robust financial commitments made to the cause. Today, global warming threatens mainly the poor countries. Tomorrow, they will be threatened by

Pak court orders six hanged for gangrape

Landmark judgement for oppressed

women

E are heartened by and wholly supportive of a stern verdict that a special anti-terrorism court in Dera Gazi Khan handed against six men on Sunday. They have been ordered hanged to death for their role in a barbaric feudalstyle gangrape on Mukhtar Mai (30) whose brother (12) had 'sinned' by an infatuation shown for a girl of a higher tribe. Of the convicted six, four received death verdict for having ravished the woman publicly on the orders of a traditional village council. The remainder two sitting on the council as jurors were instrumental in issuing the edict so that the Pak court found them equally (if not more) liable for the capital punishment.

Earlier, as part of the retaliatory wrath on the lower-stratum family the raped woman's juvenile brother had been sodomised. On top of the abominable crime committed on Mai and her brother, the former was even forced to walk away seminaked from the scene of rape.

The incident brought to a bolder relief the abuses rural women in Pakistan are subjected to (honour killings included). The government in a modernist reaction to such oppressive manifestation of feudal barbarism has very significantly had anti-terrorism courts to attend to such cases. That the so-called fatwawallas are being considered as security risks to the Pakistan society adds a robust new dimension to judicial intervention.

We congratulate the special court, the women's rights groups and the Punjab government on their emphatic success in defending and protecting the weak and the vulnerable in Dera Gazi Khan. We also regard very highly the civil society protestations against the para-iudicial structure that rules the roost, especially in the rural and tribal areas of Pakistan.

One hopes though that the death sentences will be executed to herald an all-out deterrence against such abominable treatment of women in Pakistan.

In different forms, Bangladeshi women, too, have fallen prey to torture and tyrannical maltreatment by rogues among men. There is provision for death sentence against acid-throwing but none has yet been executed for the crime. We have had rapecum-murder victims in our country, the perpetrators deserving nothing short of capital punishment. We also have our version of a fatwabazi structure that occasionally announces its presence by issuing durra (cane-lashing) verdict against women. All this has to be stamped out if we mean to be citizens of the new

Samaritan professor on Bangladesh politics



M. M. REZAUL KARIM

N my return from abroad last week I attended an interesting luncheon meeting. It was hosted by the chief of a renowned international institute. The purpose was to meet a visiting professor from abroad. The professor was no stranger to this land and has been visiting this region since almost a decade. He is, therefore, au courant with regional politics and has been following developments with keen interest. At the luncheon were present half a dozen political leaders.

The professor initiated discussion by making a tour d'horizon over most of the trouble spots of the world, including those of the recent past. He appeared to reassure us that the present political malaise in our country was not confined exclusively to ourselves but shared by many other nations of the universe. We showed we were impressed. But little discourse on his part on the current political problems besetting Bangladesh exposed his primary objective of eliciting our opinion on these issues, with suggestions for possible remedial measures.

Everyone came out with his opinion, which was both relevant and useful. The need for democracy as a sine qua non for development was emphasized. Examples were cited in substantiation and lapses were quoted as unfortunate exceptions. The concept was reinforced by the visiting Secretary General of the Commonwealth, who reiterated it during his meeting with Prime

Minister Khaleda Zia. The urgent need for poverty alleviation, economic and social development, educational uplift, sincerity and earnestness of political parties to redeem their electoral pledges and all such relevant issues figured into discussion. In two-and-half-an-hour lunch at least twenty-five hours of seminar discussions took place in an abridged form. We were happy we paid for the lunch by what we considered our positive contributions to the talks

trolling the fast deteriorating law and order situation throughout the country. Not that they have not done anything in this regard, but the situation has not significantly improved. The administration must be merciless and non discriminatory irrespective of party affiliation of the criminals. Prime Minister's firm declaration to that effect, unfortunately, has not yet matched with deeds. It is well known that thugs, criminals and terrorists do not belong to any one political to know their people, their vocations and idiosyncrasies.

Secondly, the society has been infested with widespread corruption since decades. The practice has pervaded every nook and corner of the society. Besides reinforcing Anti-corruption Commission and making it independent in order to be more effective, appropriate measures for social awareness of this evil and boycott of corrupt elements need to be initiated. Transparency International for the second time put

What the opposition is required to do

The opposition must join the parliament and any reasons advanced by them not to do so are totally untenable. That no congenial atmosphere exists in the parliament and that the opposition is denied adequate time for discourse are far from the truth. On the contrary, ruling party members welcomed the opposition warmly when the latter made a token entry into a parliamentary session. The Speaker also assured

cally stated before the visiting former President of the United States, Jimmy Carter. The opposition not only broke its pledge but did so within a few weeks of their having lost the general election. Hartal is most unpopular and counterproductive. It does not only disrupt citizen's normal life but hinders peace, creates instability and causes irreparable financial loss to the economy, not to speak of shving away foreign investment.

The opposition should respond to the offer of dialogue by the ruling party on various national and international issues. The ruling party alone cannot and should not take unilateral decision on vital issues like allocation of women's seats in the parliament and export of gas. The opposition must come forward and respond positively to the offer of dialogue by the ruling party not only in national interest but its own interest by going along the popular

As the discussions petered to the end, one of those who were present came out with some additional words of wisdom. He said one must seek the root cause of terrorism, corruption and other crimes and strive to eliminate them. Poverty alleviation is the most crucial issue. If the people have income, employment and opportunity of leading a decent life, they will have much less urge for taking up arms for committing crimes. Corruption will also be less rampant and intense, though cannot be wiped out. That is why even the rich nations are not devoid of this malaise. But that must not prove an excuse for us. Those concerned must be well aware of the consequences of gross corruption and must shun it, if not for anything but in their own personal

At the end one may wonder who is this Samaritan professor. But is that necessary?

M M Rezaul Karim, a former Ambassador and

CURRENTS AND CROSSCURRENTS

One must seek the root cause of terrorism, corruption and other crimes and strive to eliminate them. Poverty alleviation is the most crucial issue. If the people have income, employment and opportunity of leading a decent life, they will have much less urge for taking up arms for committing crimes. Corruption will also be less rampant and intense, though cannot be wiped out... Those concerned must be well aware of the consequences of gross corruption and must shun it, if not for anything but in their own personal interest.

However, the good professor had to come in the end with a concrete proposal of identifying issues, which would bolster the on-going process of democracy in our country. He categorically underlined the need for commencing and continuing dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition. This would promote establishment and sustenance of democratic traditions. which is dear to every citizen's heart. We looked at one another, as if none knew more the real significance and absolute desirability of such a process. The professor made his focus narrower still. He asked what specific measures the ruling party and the opposition must undertake to promote their demo-This elicited some cratic goals. lively discussion. What transpired may be summarized as follows:-

What the ruling party could do

The coalition government should be more sincere and effective in con-

anyone who would support, provide and protect them. For this, they generally try to align themselves with ruling party stalwarts. But diehards hardly change their colour and masters. Yet, many act independently. Nevertheless, the responsibility devolves primarily on the government to restore law and order. This can be accomplished if all terrorists, including those who are reported to have the patronage of government party stalwarts, are meted with prompt and exemplary punishment. This would act as positive deterrent.

party. Their allegiance lies with

Manifestation of nepotism and favouritism will merely tarnish party image and harm its over-all interests severely. One must learn from history, especially from recent history. Sincere action by members of parliament may also be invoked and they be held responsible for deterioration of the law and order situation in their respective constituencies. After all, they are expected Bangladesh at the top of the list of the most corrupt countries of the world. What a shame it is! People forget high degrees of corruption hardly go unnoticed, if not unpun-The ruling party must hasten to

redeem the pledges of election

manifesto and citizens are to be

assured that the former is sincere in initiating action to this effect. Half of the nation, the womenfolk, virtually has no representation in the parliament. Separation of the judiciary from the executive, despite repeated reminders from the Chief Justice, is being delayed without satisfactory public explanation. Creation of the post of Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission and independence of the state electronic media are yet to be taken in hand. Actions towards these ends are not only morally obligatory to the party in power, but would contribute enormously to bolster faith of the electorate and help win the next

can raise any and all the issues they wish to do on this highest forum of democracy and can share greater glare of publicity of their issues in all media. Thus their campaign will receive even wider publicity throughout the country The opposition should not go back on its words, expressed loud and clear while they were in power. to their own people and those from abroad, that they would never resort to hartal or general strike even if they were in the opposition. This as

well as acceptance of the people's

verdict at the polls no matter who

won the election was also unequivo-

the opposition that their members

would be allowed even more time to

speak than members of the treasury

bench. The opposition need not be

reminded of what they had done

while in government by extolling

virtues of the parliament as the focal

point of democracy where participa-

tion of opposition political parties is

imperative in order to make it opera-

tive and efficacious. The opposition

The litany of grievances of Ban-

gladesh is long and painful. But as has been truly said by Yashwant

Sinha, India is a big country, It must

behave big by a display of states-

Secretary, is Adviser to Chairperson of BNP.

Yashwant Sinha's Dhaka visit

For "a fresh momentum and dynamism" in relations

ABDUL HANNAN

T is worthwhile to discuss the

outcome of Indian foreign minister Yashwant Sinha's two-day visit to Bangladesh last week. He came here on what was described as a "goodwill visit" after attending the SAARC foreign ministers' meeting in Kathmandu. If the composition of his delegation was any indication, the visit could not have any serious purpose or agenda. He was accompanied by a joint secretary and a spokesperson of his ministry and not at a higher level of foreign secretary or senior officials of other ministries or agencies. Nonetheless, the foreign minister of a country does not visit another country to discuss weather or exchange pleasantries alone but talk shop as well. It was not a private visit and was expected to achieve concrete and substantive results on outstanding issues between the two countries. But when Yashwant Sinha said that although he came on a goodwill visit he held official talks with his Bangladesh counterpart on a wide range of bilateral issues and regional matters of common concern, a note of condescension was unmistakable. To some observers, visit was significant as it took place on the heels of Pakistani President Musharraf's visit to Bangladesh.

Yet, while denying that India had a big brotherly attitude towards its smaller neighbours including Bangladesh, he did not mince words to remind in his meeting with editors and senior journalists in Dhaka that "India is a big country and a geographical reality". In reply to another question on huge trade deficit of Bangladesh with India, he retorted. "it is an economic problem and

should not be viewed with emotion" implicitly meaning that Bangladesh with its poor economy could not think of competing with India. He almost chastised Bangladesh when in reply to another question on frequent killing of innocent Bangladeshi civilians along the Indo-Bangladesh border by BSF firing, he said "the stretch of open border is often used by smugglers, criminals, infiltrators and terrorists" adding that "BSF never opens fire between the two countries should be based on trust and not suspicion. During his visit to Savar martyrs' memorial, in a veiled reference to the Indian support and contribution to the success of Bangladesh liberation war he wrote "our predecessors have left us a construction, an architecture to build upon". But it is perhaps India which has failed to gain the trust and consolidate the architecture by a firm foundation of friendship and cooperation without

However, India has dragged its feet, even backpedaled and shown extreme intransigence to honour and act upon the international agreements it signed with Bangladesh. While Bangladesh ratified the Indira-Mujib 1974 Land Boundary Agreement soon after it was signed, India is yet to do it. Acting on the agreement Bangladesh transferred the enclave of Berubari to India in exchange of lease in perpetuity of Tinbigha corridor to connect with duty free access to Indian market of 40 items in 16 categories of Bangladeshi exports will be implemented immediately. But in actuality Bangladesh will not be able to take advantage of more than seven Bangladesh as a result of this con-

manship and vision, magnanimity and compassion, ethics and justice items as the rest are either not in its dealings with smaller neighproduced in Bangladesh or not sufficient for export. However, according to business circles, cession will not earn more than five million dollars additionally which is

once its "comrade in arms," to use his own words, in the interest of good neighbourliness. Bangladeshi enclaves of Dahagram wide off the mark of its existing huge trade imbalance of nearly three billion dollars on accounts of formal

and informal (smuggling) imports annually from India. Bangladesh tried unsuccessfully to get duty free access to Indian market of 191 products in 25 categories during the last trade talks with India in Dhaka in April 2002 as the Indian delegation rejected the Bangladesh plea on account of refusal by Bangladesh to acquiesce to Indian condition of agreement on request for transshipment, border trade and lifting of ban on sugar and varn import overland.

bours, particularly Bangladesh, once its "comrade in arms," to use his own words, in the interest of good neighbourliness. In support of my argument, I would like to conclude by quoting from a book "Liberation of Bangladesh: Indo-Bangladesh Relation" by the veteran Indian diplomat JN Dixit who writes, "Bangladesh in terms of its territory and demography has to be counted among important countries of the world comparable to any larger European country... India must remain committed to treaties with Bangladesh and complete process of transfer of territories and enclaves as early as possible." As for the ownership of Talpatty island, he writes, "If our jurisdiction over New Moor island is not overriding and of substantive interest, we should reach some sort of compromise with Bangladesh...we must offer to delineate expeditiously the maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal on the basis of acknowledged principles of international law... we must offer expanded transit facilities to Bangladesh for trade with Nepal and Bhutan." The new Indian foreign minister Yashwant Sinha may gainfully begin his study of Bangladesh affairs by taking a leaf from Dixit's book for infusing, in his own words. "a fresh momentum and dynamism" in Indo-

Abdul Hannan is a former Press Counsellor

The litany of grievances of Bangladesh is long and painful. But as has been truly said by Yashwant Sinha, India is a big country. It must behave big by a display of statesmanship and vision, magnanimity and compassion, ethics and justice in its dealings with smaller neighbours, particularly Bangladesh,

on anybody unless its challenge goes unanswered". Such remarks savour of superiority complex, and are incompatible with norms of diplomatic niceties.

However, the Indian foreign minister made pledges to take urgent measures to resolve the outstanding issues at the political level if it is impossible at the experts and institutional level and said that "no lingering or dragging of solution will be allowed". True, left to stereotyped obstructionist mindset of bureaucrats the problems would never be solved and it is time these were resolved in one fell swoop at the highest political level. He assured Dhaka of ratifying 1974 Indira-Mujib Agreement on land border demarcation "at a very early date". These are pious promises indeed. We only hope he will follow up his words with actions in future. Yashwant Sinha said that the ties

resolving the outstanding issues for last 30 years. Bangladesh has made one concession after another without reciprocity. An agreement and protocol to operate passenger bus service between Dhaka and Agartala was signed on July 12 last year by the previous government and operational steps are now under way. Bangladesh and India also signed an agreement on July 11 the same year for restoring regular train service initially between Calcutta and Darshana and later between Calcutta and Dhaka, Earlier Calcutta-Dhaka passenger bus which was pressed into service at the initiative of India was inaugurated by the Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vaipavee in Dhaka in March 1999. Again, in deference to the wish of India, Bangladesh repealed the Enemy Property Act of 1965, later known as Vested Property Act.

and Angorpota in India. After wishy washy dilatory tactics for more than 25 years India now has partially implemented the agreement by allowing the right of passage, not lease in perpetuity, of Bangladeshi nationals through Tinbigha at intermittent hours with interval. It seems India is not serious enough to demarcate the remaining 6.5 kms of border the bone of contention of frequent conflict and flare up by border security forces of the two countries. After the serious border clash at Boraibari in April 2001 resulting in several casualties on both sides, two rounds of talks at the level of joint secretary of home affairs of two countries were held in Delhi and Dhaka to no avail and no further follow up action has since

The Indian foreign minister has said that the agreement to allow

Besides, different non-tariff barriers have been raised by India against Bangladeshi exports. For example, anti-dumping tax has been imposed to discourage export of batteries Bangladesh relation. from Bangladesh. Bangladesh by liberalising its trade has already made open her market for Indian

Bangladesh mission to UN in New York.

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

ETV goes off air

ETV. the first terrestrial private TV channel, a window for the independent focus on human affairs went off air on August 29.

The process may be illegitimate therefore those who masterminded this illegal issuance of license should be questioned. In a grimy trash a red oleanders can bloom. Its roots may be in trash but this is not its accountability, why should it be uprooted?

People love ETV. Then why did the government switch off this popular channel? The programs this channel broadcast are not illegal. The government should respect public interest. We want ETV back. Shamana Yasmin

As with most high profile projects in Bangladesh there is no doubt that ETV benefited from a biased and rigged selection process which helped this channel get the only terrestrial broadcasting license in Bangladesh. This of course could not have been achieved without the active support of well-placed political and influential figures of the then ruling elite

Did I enjoy watching ETV program? You bet I did! But yet I am content with the outcome of the Supreme Court verdict. Do I think the government influenced the verdict - maybe! But whatever influenced the Supreme Court verdict-- even the ETV authorities now reluctantly agree that illegal means were used to obtain the license but that the court should have considered the utility that the channel provides to millions of viewers throughout Bangladesh.

There is no doubt ETV was the only Bangladeshi channel whose programming was up to par with any foreign broadcaster and many of their programs highlighted the problems and injustice faced by the people of our impoverished nation.

Only recently we have seen companies like Enron and WorldCom falter when it was uncovered that the companies used illegal accounting practices and have been manipulating their balance sheet to show inflated profits. Even though no verdicts have been reached in these cases the companies are already in bankruptcy and on the verge of collapse. Did the US justice system hesitate to act against these companies? No they didn't.

However, it is high time for the government to acknowledge that the people of this country want and need independent broadcast mediums that offer entertainment, unbiased news and other programming for the masses. Do they want our youths to grow up watching only Star, Zee TV and MTV? What are the alternatives at the moment? I for one stay well clear of BTV's propaganda channel.

A lesson has been learned that the long arm of the law would catch up with the wrongdoers at some point. But now it's the government's turn to act and prove to us that they understand the needs and aspiration of the people and should invite fresh bids for both TV and Radio broadcasting licenses. Licenses should be awarded to any entity, including ETV, who qualify and meet stated licensing and regulatory requirements and not just to a group blessed by the ruling party.

A. Mannan

Gulshan, Dhaka

Again No. 1 in corruption!

I congratulate the present government for achieving such a noble feat for the country! The only matter of regret is that there is no place above No 1. Otherwise the government would have tried to attain that position as well and I am sure they would succeed! Anando

Topkhana Road, Dhaka

What a coincidence! On your August 29 issues along with the news "Wheatgate scam" and "Most corrupt nation again" we also find "Prime Minister renews vow to curb corruption, crime. Dr. Rashid Hyder

Spray the patients!

Baridhara, Dhaka

This is simply pathetic to see the DCC to spray insecticide in human presence. Farhan

'Letters to the Editor and the reader's right'

I am referring to the recent letters on 'Letters to the Editor and the reader's right'. A 'debate' generally refers to disagreements, contests or dispute but 'opinion' submits to views, attitude and thoughts of a reader

The readers have the right to express their opinion or start a debate on whether or not the President's ouster was ethical, whether or not police action on Shamsunnahar hall was legal, whether or not the curriculum in the English Medium Schools should be changed for national interest or any issue concerning public awareness but never on a topic like "wrong wording in a Rabindra Shangeet".

In "wrong wording in a Rabindra Shangeet" -- the longest ever 'debate' in your daily, it was simply an allegation by Mr. Nazmul Karim that Mrs. Rezawana Chowdhury Bannya has sang a wrong word in one of her songs. There was no reason to start a debate but you have unnecessarily allowed continuing the debate for about two

Please don't let it happen again. Some readers have their 'right' and some readers have their 'choice' but you have your wisdom too. Shayma Karim

North South University. Dhaka

Biman

How does the ticketing system of Biman operate? I had a set of tickets to fly from Chittagong to Dhaka on the 1st of September '02.

As a hartal was declared on the 1st of September. I went to the Biman office and requested for a change of flight from the 1st to the 2nd of September. The ticketing officer, sitting with a computer told me to first get the tickets cancelled, encash the same from another counter and then come back to him for a fresh set of tickets.

When asked why could he not reissue with a fresh date, he replied 'please ask the big bosses'. This is the laid down system, which he has

"English medium

students in trouble"

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

I have been closely following the debate "English medium students in trouble" and I agree that the quality of Bangla in English medium school is not of the same level taught in Bengali medium schools.

I study in Sunbeams, one of the best English medium schools in this country and I think that the Bangla we are being taught is of a very high standard. Most of us have enough knowledge about our mother tongue to communicate with the ordinary people of our country, but do most of the Bengali medium students have enough knowledge in English to communicate with the rest of the

Sheikh Tanjeb Islam Class: VIII, Sunbeams School

Utility bills

am frequently amused to see advertisements by the utility authorities such as DESA, T&T, Titas Gas and WASA notifying us that unless we pay our bills within a certain period of time they will disconnect

these connections. Amused, because according to

various reports published in The Daily Star and other leading newspapers, the bulk of the 'defaulters' are government ministries, corporations and even lawmakers. It really would be interesting to see the numbers of disconnection and outstanding bill amounts, categorised under businesses, govt and semi govt organisations, law enforcing agencies, legislators and private citizens

At the same time I would really like to know as to what sort of redress we the consumers

of such services should have when power fluctuations, frequent outage etc cause us distress in the form of sophisticated electronic items going kaput. Mahmudur Rahman

Gulshan, Dhaka

hundred words.

Announcement:

Due to huge flow of letters it has become impossible for us to accommodate the longer ones The valued readers are therefore earnestly requested not to send letters exceeding in three

-- Editor