

Kofi Annan's reform strategy for the UN

What are the options for Bangladesh?

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JUST six months before the sixtieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, Secretary General Kofi Annan has thrown a new challenge to world leaders: accept his major reform plans with a view to bringing the global body "fully in line with today's realities." In a major speech before a special session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 22 March in New York, Annan introduced his sixty-three-page report, which inter alia, calls for expansion of the Security Council, adoption of guidelines to determine when military action can be authorised, radical changes in the existing mechanism for stricter observance of human rights, boosting of global trade and development, and the much-needed sweeping overhaul of the UN bureaucracy. He also announced that his plan, which he called a "comprehensive strategy", should be agreed upon at the anniversary summit of world leaders in New York next September.

Some reforms of the United Nations were long overdue. The world body, created in 1945 "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war", has grown from 51 to an astounding 191 members. Simultaneously, the global power structure has changed drastically, and so have the threats and challenges. It may be recalled that, in view of widespread demand for reform of the UN, Kofi Annan had constituted a 16-member high-level panel of independent experts under the chairmanship of the former Thai Premier Anand Panyarachun in 2003. The group, which included eminent persons from different regions of the world, submitted an exhaustive report in last November. After months of careful consideration of that report, Kofi Annan formulated his reform plan and presented it on Tuesday.

Recent sharp and bitter divisions over the Iraq war, charges of corruption and mismanagement in the oil for food programme, human rights violations in Sudan and elsewhere, and revelations of sexual exploitations by some UN peace keepers in Congo, also created new imperatives for the restoration of UN's credibility.

On the sensitive issue of expansion of the Security Council, Annan announced his desire to raise the Council membership to 24 from the existing 15. However, he left it to the world leaders to decide between the two options recommended by the panel: (a) to add 6 new permanent members as well as 3 new two-year term members, or (b) to create a new tier of 8 semi-permanent members

chosen for renewable four-year terms and 1 additional two-year term seat added to the existing ten. Importantly, the right to cast vetoes under both the options has been kept restricted to the original five Permanent Members, that is, United States, Britain, France, Russia and China. The last expansion of the Council, incidentally, had taken place in 1965, when the size of the council had been raised from 10 to 15.

The prime contenders for the Permanent membership – Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan (commonly known as big 4) – as well as other aspirants like Egypt, and Nigeria / South Africa would obviously prefer the first option and if possible, with veto powers like the original five. In the past their bid for permanent membership,

support terrorism" are made aware that such a policy is neither acceptable nor an effective way to advance their cause.

He emphasised the divergent perceptions about common threats to security in different parts of the world. At the same time, he noted that a nuclear terrorist attack on the United States or Europe would have devastating effects on the whole world, but so would the appearance of a new virulent pandemic disease in a poor country with no effective controlling mechanism. He stressed that the world must respond as vigorously and collectively to HIV/AIDS and poverty as it does to terrorism and proliferation of weapons.

Turning to development issues, he

How far they can be persuaded to go along with this radical reform will be seen in the coming months.

The panel had also outlined a policy for severely dealing with any "sexual exploitation" by the UN peacekeepers. Annan has been concerned about this recent development in Congo, and he had urged the member countries contributing troops to prosecute wrong doers in the absence of any UN authority to do so.

He mentioned that the mandates of the UN personnel had become outdated, and asked the UNGA to authorise him to conduct a one-time buyout authority "so as to refresh and realign the staff to meet the current needs".

How will the global community react to Kofi Annan's comprehensive reform

The best option for Bangladesh on the expansion of the Security Council would be to go along with the NAM position, which primarily views the Council reform process as a composite package encompassing both expanded membership and democratisation of the decision-making process. As the largest Least Developed Country, Bangladesh should give priority attention to Annan's comments on the development issues.

however, had been opposed by their archivists in their respective regions, that is Argentina, Italy, Pakistan and South Korea. How the challengers would react to the latest proposals remain to be seen. But one thing is certain; there would be hard bargaining and tough negotiations on the expansion proposals at the UN. Annan, however, has urged members to reach a consensus, and not to postpone action on this vital issue.

Annan underscored the imperatives not to jeopardise the core mission of the United Nations of furthering international security and development. He proposed that the Security Council should come up with a new set of guidelines to determine when military action can be authorised, an issue that has sharply divided the entire membership.

In an apparent reference to the Bush administration's doctrine of preemptive strikes to protect American interests, Annan said, "In today's world, no state, however powerful, can protect itself on its own."

Washington will be skeptical about this proposal, but will certainly appreciate its pronouncements on the sensitive issue of terrorism. Annan endorsed the revised definition of terrorism as "any action intended to cause death or serious bodily harm to civilians or non-combatants with the purpose of intimidating a population or compelling a government or an international organisation to do or abstain from doing any act."

He said that a convention underlining these concerns should be drawn up by year-end so that those who are "tempted to

reminded the developing countries to improve their governance, combat corruption, and adopt an inclusive approach to development to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). At the same time, he urged developed countries to increase the amount they allocate on development and debt relief, to give immediate duty-free and quota-free market access to all exports from least developed countries, and commit to themselves to spending 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product on official development assistance by 2015.

The UN Chief expressed concern at the membership of some regular violators in the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC), which he thought had created a "credibility deficit", thereby adversely affecting the reputation of the UN system as a whole. He suggested that the existing 53-member Commission should be replaced by a smaller Human Rights Council; the membership of this Council would be elected not on the existing basis of regional endorsements but by a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly so that those elected "should undertake to abide by the highest human rights standard".

United States and some western countries have always opposed membership of countries like Cuba, Libya and Sudan in the UNHRC. Naturally, Annan's proposal will please them, but Third World members could perhaps perceive this proposal as a western move to interfere in their internal affairs on the pretext of human rights question.

which primarily views the Council reform process as a composite package encompassing both expanded membership and democratisation of the decision-making process. The mainstream NAM members are, reportedly, leaning towards the second option of semi-permanent members in order to maintain some degree of leverage on the newly inducted permanent members. If that is true, then Bangladesh should have no difficulty in joining this group.

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the bodies of the Roman citizens, it should never pass through their thought, eyes or ears." On the other side Plautus (c. 250 to 184 BC), the poet to give first evidence of Roman crucifixions in his writings said that slaves had been executed on the cross 'from time immemorial'. The word means what sinless Christ in his innocent, yet violent death, for sinful Man is full, free and final. The Gospel according to St John, the most spiritual Gospel as it is popularly known among Christians, records this utterance at John 19:30. According to God's eternal plan Christ came to this world to lay down his sinless life on the cross as a ransom for the redemption of sinners. He gave his life and shared the fate of a slave-criminal. The greatest love and gift that one can show for others is by giving up one's life for them. At the time of his death Jesus said that he completed and finished the work for which he came into this world. His God-ordained mission was fulfilled. Now that all the excruciating physical pain, mental agony and the spiritual desolation over Jesus could say with satisfaction that he accomplished his divine mission by fulfilling the demand of the Old Testament law and of sin.

As the sinless Son of God Jesus paid the penalty that was due for us. God in His mercy and grace withdrew the punishment that was due for us on the one hand, and in his mercy he allowed his Son to die on the Cross. Therefore, the Cross of Jesus is the universal Christian symbol. The fact of Christ's death has altogether changed the meaning of the cross.

The Cross is one of the visible reminders for Christians that Christ, as the Lamb of God, paid the ransom-price for their redemption from sin's demand, which is eternal death and separation from God. In the Cross of Jesus we see him, not only as our Savior, but also as the Supreme Model of self-giving love and forgiveness. He is our Substitute and Vicar. He is also Reconciler as he has reconciled us to God from Whom we got alienated because of our greed and pride. In as much as he paid the price for our redemption he also represented us in our penitence and confession for our sin. He bore our sorrows and also our iniquities. He perfectly identified with us in our human predicament. Christ is also our Pioneer in innocent suffering by exhibiting God's glory and power over all that threaten life. Christ is our supreme example for any suffering that we may be enduring for truth and justice in our society, in our family, the wider world at large, in every aspect of our human relationships right here on earth. He himself is the good news of freedom from any kind of bondage and oppression, whether physical, mental or spiritual.

The fact of Christ's accomplishing mission follows his commission to his followers not only to believe in him but also to follow his commandment: to love God and to love others. The Cross of Christ speaks to us. Unless the meaning and motive of the sacrificial death of Christ is personally internalised the word of our mere faith in him is a mockery. Jesus has called his disciples to bear their own crosses. This is his call to each one of us. We continue the work that he started in faith and trust in God so that our innocent suffering will bear fruit in transforming lives.

Reflecting on the Cross someone has said, "Because we children of Adam want to become great He became small. Because we will not stoop, He humbled himself. Because we want to rule, He came to serve."

But God's mind is so different from the human mind. Rightly prophet Isaia wrote about God declaring: "My thoughts are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours." (Isaiah 55:8-9). God chose that very cursed death for His son as the way for His salvation plan for man. Paul, the greatest interpreter of Christianity wrote: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and a folly to the Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:18). On the third day after his crucifixion His sinless son God showed both his grace for mankind and His justice demanding punishment for sin. Hence is the Cross of Christ.

While talking about the death of Christ on the cross we must take a note of the fact that being crucified was a curse from God according to Mosaic law. "Cursed is the one who hangs on the tree (cross)". Jesus' own disciples even could not think that their master would be crucified. Crucifixion was incomparable to any other form of execution in so far as physical pain and mental anguish is concerned. Cicero wrote, "The idea of the cross should never come near

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