

PM's tough stance

Officials need to match it with deeds

WE welcome the Prime Minister's directive to go the whole hog against the illegal land grabbers to free large tracts of public and private lands from their control. Of significance is the fact that this problem has been identified as a national one by the PM, articulating openly a priority concern that has been in the public mind for a long time. One wonders what is the total acreage of land taken over by fraud and deceit perpetrated by the illegal holders? There is also a need, we feel, to categorise such lands into arable, wetland and forests for ease of handling the issue.

People, particularly those that are the victims of such illegal acts, will look at this directive with a great deal of hope. The instructions from the highest executive must, therefore, be implemented promptly and efficiently so as not to disappoint them. We are all too aware of the many well-intentioned directives having been issued for public benefit that eventually ended up largely unimplemented. Much of the blame for this must be laid at the doorstep of those entrusted to execute the orders. Land matters are such that lend itself easily to many complications and litigations. And, if one does not approach the matter with all the necessary institutional preparation, there is bound to be difficulties in resolving the issue.

There is no denying that all manner of deceit and fraud are undertaken to make these illegal possessions appear valid. Use of political muscle and the existence of a collusive arrangement between corrupt government officials and unscrupulous elements cannot be ruled out either. Regrettable as it is, it is also a fact that this phenomenon cuts across governments and party lines.

Setting up of special bodies at the national and district level is indeed appropriate, but one wonders whether they can function effectively unless vested with appropriate legal authority to address the juridical issues that are likely crop up.

A laudable step as this is, it must be carried to its logical conclusion. Failure to do so might result not only in compounding the problem further but also validating by default acts of the unlawful land grabbers.

DCC drive encouraging

But sustained campaign needed

WE welcome the special 15-day long cleanliness drive Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has launched since Saturday to cleanse the city of its garbage spilling over to the streets and their nooks and crannies. It was not only a much-needed move on its part, it is also something that had to be made to begin to bail the city out of a desperate situation. A campaign such as this is likely to give a nudge to those who are entrusted with the task of keeping the city clean but somehow have fallen into a limbo. This sort of drive should also help build awareness among citizens to be more hygienic in their attitude to urban living. But the key to making any dent on the cleanliness front is sustainability of any programme undertaken rather than doing a perfunctory job of it.

There is no doubt that it can not be a one-off thing taking into account the fact that the rate at which the garbage piles far outpaces the disposal. According to recent studies, the city produces more than 3,500 tonnes of solid rubbish including domestic, industrial, commercial and medical wastes per day. And only 45 to 50 percent of these get hauled up by the DCC, meaning thereby that the remainder is piling up on the roadsides and other places in geometric progression. And that's where the heart of the problem lies.

There are three elements to the cleaning operation -- collection, disposal or transportation, and dumping. The facts and figures say that the DCC is not equipped in terms of manpower and finances to be carrying out any of the three functions adequately, far less effectively. And because of lack of scientific dumping, which has to do with recycling of wastes into organic fertiliser of tremendous value in the end-part of the process, we are being subjected to severe forms of environmental pollution.

We would like to know in clearer terms from the mayor of DCC as to what structural limitations his organisation has; what are the logistical and equipment gaps in the infrastructure that he commands; and what are the financial constraints he faces in carrying out his obligations. He needs to put all of these into a well-thought-out plan with a vision that can be implemented. Otherwise, spurts of drive will create a delusion of something being done but nothing substantial coming off it in reality. We, in the media, can assure the mayor of our all-out cooperation to a sustainable programme of action backed by the right kind of vision that he hopefully will have drawn up before it is too late. We will back it up to the hilt in persuading the government to provide him with the support he needs.

Palestinian State: Unpredictable as ever



M ABDUL HAFIZ

THE slightest of pretexts is good enough for Israel's hawkish Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to shelve the peace initiative painstakingly carried forward to a point of fruition. In Israeli perception there could have been pretexts galore in the past for Sharon to exercise his discretion either to go along a peace initiative or not. But with the demise of Yasser Arafat whom both Israel and the US, its patron, thought to be the only obstacle to peace there cannot apparently be any excuse for scuttling any further peace initiative. The US itself called post-Arafat opportunities congenial to peace-making while Israel showed willingness to do business with the new leadership of Palestinian Authority, yet at the moment an attempt for peace settlement between the Palestinian

Authority and Israel is nowhere in sight. Never before has there been such a vacuum on the peace front.

However, during the mid-March -- in an extraordinary gesture -- the Palestinian militants made a truce offer not to attack Israeli targets if the latter announced a time frame for the release of the prisoners and for the withdrawal from the occupied terri-

After all, Palestine belongs to the Palestinians and not to the settlers from Europe and the off springs of Europeans from America. So, the line is neatly drawn for the Palestinians. The fighting for the freedom of one's own mother land is their right which cannot be taken away from them; nor will its moral position erode simply because Sharon calls freedom

Ariel Sharon agreed on a ceasefire hoping that it would lead to peace. However, there has been no progress in that direction. There is no indication either from Tel Aviv or Washington that a new peace plan is on the anvil. Only hope emanates from President Bush's commitment to the revival of peace process. In his state of the union address on

the Gulf and Lebanon in the Levant the West Asian peace might have slipped out of Washington's priority but the US will hopefully come up with a 'new road map to peace' any time soon. What is however more crucial in this regard is whether Israel will accept such plan and cooperate with the peace brokers and how much the US will be able to withstand Israeli

provided for the coming into being of a Palestinian state ten years later by 2003. Rabin was murdered by a Zionist fanatic and those who followed him -- Mr. Netanyahu and Ehud Barak -- shot down the peace process itself with the full help from the Zionist hawks of Clinton Administration -- Ms Madeleine Albright, Mr Denis Ross and Martin Indyk. Mr Bush announced an abortive 'new road map' in April 2003 providing for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the emergence of a Palestinian state by 2005. Bush himself torpedoed the road map when he started pleading for Ariel Sharon by saying that Israel would have to retain 'some' West Bank land and as such the proposed withdrawal could not be 'total'. Later he also described 2005 as an unrealistic date for a Palestinian state to emerge.

In the meantime scepticism abounds as to what would be the fate of another peace plan that may be announced sooner or later. The whole exercise of peace making, as it appears now, is that interesting game of "going and going round the mulberry bush" played by the small children.

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PERSPECTIVES

Mr Bush announced an abortive 'new road map' in April 2003 providing for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the emergence of a Palestinian state by 2005. Bush himself torpedoed the road map when he started pleading for Ariel Sharon by saying that Israel would have to retain 'some' West Bank land and as such the proposed withdrawal could not be 'total'. Later he also described 2005 as an unrealistic date for a Palestinian state to emerge. In the meantime scepticism abounds as to what would be the fate of another peace plan that may be announced sooner or later.

Sharon rejected the offer summarily bluntly saying that the militants could not be given terror option. With the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza for nearly four decades and with all peace processes either dead or in limbo the Palestinians have no choice but to fight for freedom and their independent statehood. Because, for both bargaining peace one has to do it from position of strength and for fighting its scope is never exhausted.

fighting terror. Were the freedom to come by peaceful means the Palestinians would welcome it as the world at large would. Given the background of the Mid East's murky politics and still murkier interference from outside, there is little possibility of that happening.

Nevertheless, early in last February in a summit hosted by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, Mahmud Abbas, the President of Palestinian Authority, and Israel's

the second February last George Bush called for a two-state solution of the Arab-Israeli imbroglio as before. Since then Washington has not as yet come up with any plan laying down timetable for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territory and the emergence of a sovereign Palestinian state.

As the US is at the moment engaged on bigger chessboard of Mid-East politics that includes Iran in

intransigence -- given her strong lobby working in Bush Administration. The doubt arises from the fates of many similar peace plans in the past which all ended in fiasco.

The peace processes are in progress in one form or other for last one and half decade. It began with the signing on 13 February, 1993 of a declaration of principles by PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. It

Savage contest over colonial crumbs

SYED MAQSUJ JAMIL

BANGLADESH, in fact, the whole world knew little about the Ituri region of Congo till the brutal ambush that killed nine Bangladeshi peacekeepers. This is the second UN tragedy in Congo. Last time, Dag Hammarskjöld, its second secretary general was killed in a plane crash in 1961. Tragedy closely followed the birth of independent Congo. Patrice Lumumba, its first Prime Minister was killed within one year of its independence in 1960. It is painful that so large a country, so rich in resources, should continue to suffer from gang warfare 45 years after its independence. This is not an isolated case of unremitting savagery in Africa. It is a bigger example of the failing civil society affecting governance all over Africa.

The big powers, America in particular, is not paying it much attention in terms of combined efforts or unilateral global initiative. This is unconscionable compared to the attention they are paying to the embattled nations of the Middle East and Asia. Precisely, America cannot be faulted for failing to attend its colonial legacy, because it has never been a colonial power. Judging by history, Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal have a responsibility to attend in the turmoil-ridden states of Africa. They cannot ignore it by attributing it to the primordial ethnic streak in the African past because the states of Africa are the results of their colonial accommodation. America also cannot distance itself from this savage contest over colonial crumbs on the grounds that it was never a colonial power, because by their words they cannot allow the world to fall into evil hands. One however understands that in comparison to the gladiatorial contest of the Middle East, the gangland of Africa is like being caught in an inglorious by-lane shootout reminiscent of Somalia's humiliation.

With the exception of northern Africa and Abyssinia, the rest of Africa has sketchy record of viable kingdoms or of empires defined by marked geographical boundaries inhabited by divergent ethnic groups and tribes. Tribal groups were and still are the major form of bonding among the populace of Africa. It is much unlike Asia and Europe. As for the Americas, statehood was gunned into being by decimating a race of several million native populations into minorities and special reserves.

The history of colonisation of Africa is much unlike the Americas. Abyssinia was the notable kingdom that found place in history. From the fifteenth century, the Europeans started building trading posts around the coastal strip of Africa to meet the growing demand in Europe for its ivory and to secure the slave trade.

In South Africa the Dutch however had ventured far by 1670 building settlements in Natal, Orange Free State, and Transvaal. The Boer or the Dutch settlers were pushed deep into South Africa by the arrival of the British. *Terra Incognita* or the Dark Continent covering the interior of Africa did not attract the Europeans till Scottish explorer Mungo Park discovered the source of the river

concluded on February 26, 1885, with the adoption of a General Act of Berlin Congress to accommodate the conflicting interests of the colonial powers. Northern Africa, the Sahel or the Sub-Sahara region, and parts of west and the southwestern coast of Africa were left to the French. The British were already in control of Eastern Africa by virtue of the discoveries of Dr. David Livingstone and the entrepreneurial skill of Cecil Rhodes. Sudan was left to Anglo-French compact. The seafaring Portuguese were already in command of the southeastern coast, Angola and Mozambique. Togo, Cameroon, and present day Namibia were left to the Germans.

The colonial powers were how-

verable and stable state, like a definite population and a populace with a sense of national identity did not weigh with them. What they left behind were territories with feuding tribes committed only to tribalities and given to outbursts of vicious hostility. Since the beginning of the sixties when the colonial powers started hastily abandoning their African colonies, granting them independence or consigning them to their fate of unattended primal hostility, we have seen a succession of tribal orgies mauling the states of colonial Africa. Congo's brutal turmoil is the most painful and unremitting. When the Belgians left Congo in 1960 the country did not have any mentionable institutional framework for represen-

large population of Tutsis in the Kivu and Ituri regions. They are actively pursuing the claims of their brethren in Eastern Congo who have settled there in large number. To make matters worse, the Hutu majority of Rwanda is also pouring into Congo to save themselves from the persecution of the Tutsis. The ongoing conflict in Congo is between the supporters of Kabila and the supporters of the RCD backed by Rwanda and Uganda. Kabila has Angola and Zimbabwe on his side. The Belgian colonial legacy of favouring the Tutsis over the clear majority of the Hutus harmed the ethnic equilibrium of Rwanda. It has impaired the functional capacity of the state and has rendered its prospect of national

ethnic conflicts is definitely in trouble. The trouble is not of ordinary nature even when compared to the global flashpoints of Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan. However the attention it is receiving is of benign resignation. The Middle East is for America a matter of dominating a resource-rich region of the world. In the troubled states of Africa, America and even the western powers do not have a worthy global sphere to dominate. Going by history, America does not have a colonial obligation to Africa. Such a simplistic rationale will only lend credence to the observation that the foremost consideration for America is to secure its spheres of influence. That, to be sure, takes away the moral mantle from American leadership. As for the former colonial powers of Europe, they have an obligation to the beleaguered states of Africa tailored by them to suit territorial accommodation among the contending powers.

The tailored African states have broken down in sufferings of all kinds. Lost lives, uprooted families, brutally maimed ordinary folks, driven by fear, and hunted down by hunger and disease, because their colonial masters were selfishly callous in carving out states with least regard to ethnic homogeneity and a shared sense of national identity. They are the principal players here and they have the clout and experience of ridding Africa of its ill. Otherwise foreign peacekeepers of UN mission will keep on loosing their lives in regular intervals, like the nine valiant peacekeepers of Bangladesh. Indeed European powers aided by America can rid Africa of this pestilence with vigorous and wholehearted initiative of resolute nature. The point is that do they have the will and the intention to come to the aid of Africa with the required intensity? They have a point to prove here of redeeming their past mistakes and they are surely capable of it.

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Niger in the eighteenth century. It started a competition among the British, the French, and the Belgians, and on a lesser level also Germany, to colonize Africa. The scramble for Africa continued from 1885 to 1910 and within these 25 years almost 85 percent of Africa was colonized. Congo, apparently the course of the river Congo, was more than a matter of academic interest to the Belgian King Leopold II. He commissioned explorer Henry Morgan Stanley to explore the course and the source of the river Congo. The French took alarm and sent Pierre Savorgnan de Brazzaville to block the territorial expansion of Belgian Congo. It is this intervention that constricted the large territory of Democratic Republic of Congo or Belgian Congo to a corridor of a passage to the sea. It separates DRC from the Republic of Congo (or Brazzaville Congo).

Former Belgian colonial territories spread over a vast expanse from Congo to Rwanda and Burundi. Dissimilar and antagonistic tribes populated this large area. Colonial tailoring of their natural habitats consigned them to sharing common statehoods. The rapacious nature of colonial expansion led the European powers to call a conference in Berlin. It began in November 1884 and

ever not guided by the considerations of viable and stable state in drawing the political boundaries of the states engineered by them. Specifically, the territories of the states were drawn in accordance with the paramount need of peaceful accommodation of colonial possessions. The principal consideration of territorial division was to enjoy the colonial possessions without transgressing each other's possessions. It met the exigencies of the time and did not take into account the ethnic stability and equilibrium of the territory under possession. In most of the cases, the colonial states were named after the major geographical features, like a river, a lake or after the names of the explorers. So in independent Africa we have Niger, Nigeria, the two Congos, Northern and Southern Rhodesia (Zambia and Zimbabwe), Tanganyika (Tanzania), Nyasaland (Malawi), Gambia, etc. Besides, the colonial powers were not burdened with any ideological commitment about the future of their acquisition at the time of their liquidation. They were also not encumbered by any compelling grounds like the fate of a large settler population (with the exception of South Africa and Rhodesia).

The foremost requirements of a

tative government or even a nominal sense of national identity for a functional state. In its birth throes, Patrice Lumumba the Prime Minister was killed, its President Joseph Kasavubu cast his fate with the despotic Colonel Mobutu to save off Moshe Tsombe, the warlord of the mineral rich Katanga province.

The cruelest tragedy to strike the land of Congo and to cripple its statehood was the 32-year kleptocratic rule of the plundering despot Mobutu Sese Seko. During his rule Mobutu considered himself as one who personified the national cohesion of Congo and appropriated the state. It was found at the end of his rule that the national debt of Congo equaled Mobutu's personal assets. Laurent Kabila the warlord to follow did not last long. His son Joseph Kabila is trying to pursue the course of dialogue, which should have been followed much earlier in the sixties during the attempted secession of the province of Katanga. He has little clout in Congo and is holed up in Kinshasa. Congo's neighbours, Rwanda in particular, are also no less responsible for its plight. One can rightly wonder how a small country like Rwanda can bully a large neighbour like Congo.

The eastern part of Congo has a

cohesion ineffectual.

The miscarriage of colonial responsibilities has seen a rank growth of homegrown hostilities all over Africa plunging states into functional breakdown, crippling governance, and subjecting human lives to state of primitive survival. Congo has taken a toll of three million lives; the savage band of Fodey Sanko has maimed thousands in Sierra Leone. Liberia born out of the lofty American ideals of rehabilitating the remnants of slavery in the land of their ancestors has failed in bloodshed. Ghana is limping in the wake of ghastly killings started by Major Rawlings. Nigeria has scandalously squandered its oil earnings. Its national cohesion has little functional value in a nation of ethnically divergent groups of Hausas and Fulanis in the north, the ascending Yorubas in the southwest and the chastised Iboes in the east. Ivory Coast once touted as the France of Africa for its cultural refinement, western enlightenment, and thriving trade and commerce has also fallen prey to turmoil with no end in sight. The French had to take the unilateral action of sending its Foreign Legion to Ivory Coast.

Africa in its present situation, with many of its states crippled by marauding tribal gangs and brutal

OPINION

Retrieving the country's image : Adroit handling needed

ABMS ZAHUR

LIKE many other least developed countries Bangladesh is beset with serious social, political and economic problems. Despite its experience of democratic government for the last thirteen years it is disappointing to see the attitude of majority of our senior politicians toward democratic culture. Thus democracy, instead of flourishing, is limping in Bangladesh. If the state of affairs does not improve we may lose the prestige of democratic rule. It appears that we have forgotten the lesson of 1975 when the AL government in its desperation introduced the 'Baksal' regime and ultimately lost the democratic rule.

Needless to say that the present BNP-led alliance, in desperation to capture power made too many commitments which, realistically speaking, cannot be fulfilled within a period of five years. It is unfortunate that even after lapse of about three and half years we fail to see any positive sign of fulfilling their commitments. Even then they have

started soliciting votes for giving them another five years.

It is said that great souls do not have anything to do with consistency. BNP-led alliance appears to be following this principle! It changes its position even in days. Such action, it is a common knowledge, seriously damages the credibility of the government. If any fault or failure of the government is pointed out by any national body or international organisation it hardly hesitates to reject it. It is really difficult to understand as to why a democratically elected government with more than two thirds majority in the parliament should feel shy to admit failure. We know that all efficient democratic governments accept failure. Only a dictatorial regime behaves otherwise. The fact seems to be that the sycophants and touts around the ruling hierarchy are quite capable of hiding the truth from the inner circle. We have seen some thirty-seven years back (1968) how the Ayub regime collapsed just after observing the great 'decade of development (1958-68)'. Ayub abdicated through handing

over power to the then army chief of Pakistan Gen Yahya after he obtained a true report from his principal secretary about the actual political scenario in the then East Pakistan. Ayub rightly did not accept the report of the then Governor of East Pakistan, Abdul Monem Khan, about the political situation.

Ayub was a military dictator. As such he had the privilege of violating the constitutional provision for handing over power to the then speaker of the national assembly, Abdul Jabbar Khan. In case of a democratically elected government the ruling government cannot violate constitutional provision with impunity. Bangladesh constitution provides some unique provision to hand over power to a non-party caretaker government (Art 58). However, this provision has become controversial and efforts are on to make this provision more acceptable to all.

The alliance government is blaming the AL for tarnishing the image of Bangladesh abroad through wrong statements. Such blaming give the impression that the

whole governmental machinery is not competent to challenge the so-called false propaganda. Even if we accept that the statements of the government are true can the government say clearly as to why governmental statements are gradually losing weight? The problem is that the alliance government is in a dilemma. The BNP will have to choose between the cooperation of the western world (in fact international community) and continuing pursuing soft line with the Islamic fundamentalists. We are not happy to hear tough public statements from senior leaders of BNP only about some foreign government, we also want to hear similar statements against Islamic fundamentalists.

We may appreciate the formation of RAB. But killing of a few criminals is certainly no permanent solution to controlling crime. We want to know why common people are barred from knowing the details of the crimes committed by these criminals. So long as money play the most critical part in Bangladesh politics, criminals will continue to thrive. Without adequate analysis of

the problem it appears that government is concentrating on patchwork (like providing RAB with armoured cars). Power corrupts, and absolute power absolutely. If too much power is given to RAB that may corrupt them. It is extremely difficult to find a powerful honest man in Bangladesh. Changing the Bangladesh society (a highly corrupt one) into a reasonably honest one is a very difficult task. Without real cooperation from the common people no government can perform this job through holding seminars or making threats of punishments.

The alliance government is composed of strange mixture of people. Some are freedom fighters, some ex-Muslim Leaguers, some ex-Awami Leaguers, some ex-JP members, some ex-civil servants or military personnel and some efficient opportunists. Jamaat's relationship with BNP is as old as the birth of BNP. However, the most effective relationship developed during the last national election. However, BNP can never accept the anti-liberation philosophy of Jamaat because it will have to remain mod-

erate with secular outlook and believer in democratic rule and culture.

It is indeed an extremely challenging job to rule Bangladesh, a poor disaster prone country with unsatisfactory law and order situation, inefficient bureaucracy (mainly due to politicisation) and corrupt society and political instability. Though BNP-led government loudly claims its achievement (quoting donor and development agencies) it has never reached the goals of its commitments during the last election. Killing of Ahsan Ali Master, SAMS Kibria, Ivy Rahman and attempt of assassination on Sheikh Hasina and failure to provide proper protection to British High Commissioner indicate ineffectiveness of the government. Galloping inflation is threatening the macroeconomic stability.

It is extremely doubtful as to the benefit of BNP to blame AL for all mishaps or misdeeds. It accuses AL of tarnishing the image of Bangladesh abroad through false statements. BNP should consider the following points before accusing

- others:
- How efficient is its administration? Can it handle crises effectively?
 - How much damage has been done due to politicisation of administration?
 - Are the top bureaucrats honestly performing their job or are they just passing their time?
 - Are the members of the cabinet maintaining good understanding among themselves despite their personal differences?

Need for attention of the government has become overdue on improving the performance of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Importance of maintaining good balanced relationship with as many states as possible cannot be overemphasised in case of a developing country like Bangladesh; outburst in presence of foreign diplomats or strong public statements cannot bring satisfactory result. Without a clear policy toward Islamic fundamentalists BNP will not only damage its own reputation as a moderate political party, it may also bring misery for the country. For the sake

of retrieving the tarnished image of Bangladesh the following may be considered:

- Be tough with Islamic fundamentalists;
- Be more tolerant and respectful of the views of the opposition;
- Be more attentive to issues concerning good governance and
- Be more tactful in maintaining balance in its relationship with USA, EU countries, India and China.

We must not forget that self-interest of the country can best be served only through actions based on strong logic and not on sentiment.

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