

The challenge is even bigger

According to experts, if the pace at which the world temperature is rising at the moment continues unchecked, by 2050 nearly one-fifth of Bangladesh will go under the sea. As a result, besides acute food crisis, at least 20 million people will lose their habitations and become climate refugees, which will cause serious threats to the peace and stability of the country.

HUSAIN IMAM

THE present non-political caretaker government, that came to power on January 1, 2007, under emergency rules apparently with the objective of setting things right for a free, fair and credible election, and transition to a sustainable democracy, has been since then treading through a hazardous path to reach that goal.

They have a road map to march on, and have so far covered two-thirds of an arduous journey along the declared road map without much trouble, thanks to the emergency rules. But now they have reached a stage from where they might find the road ahead much harder and trickier than they could possibly think.

They are now holding dialogues with the political parties to pave the way for the much-awaited national election by the 3rd week of December this year, as promised by Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, the chief of the caretaker government, in his latest televised address to the nation.

The election has to be credible and acceptable to all at home and

abroad and, at the same time, the winner in that election has to be a party that will ensure if possible, continuity of the measures they have undertaken for good or bad during their rule. How far they will succeed in their mission, nobody can say for sure.

What can, however, be said for sure is that the country is passing through very hard times. With the scarcity of rice and wheat world over, soaring prices of essential commodities and food items that have reached a level far beyond the buying capacity of more than half the population of the country, abnormally high prices of crude oil in the international market (\$130 per barrel), crises of electricity and water, lack of employment opportunities, political instability, rise of Islamic militancy - all added together - the country with per capita income as low as a dollar and a quarter per day is facing a big challenge.

The topic I am more interested to discuss here may prove an even bigger challenge for Bangladesh in the not so distant future in terms of a nation's history. That is

about climate change because of global warming.

According to recently published research reports of world scientists, environmentalists and climate experts, it is now proven beyond doubt that greenhouse gas emission (GHGE), caused primarily due to burning of fossil fuel in the mills, factories and vehicles has direct link with global warming, in turn, with negative effects of climate change.

Because of greenhouse gas emission, the world is warming up, glaciers are melting, the sea level is rising, and the world climate is changing - all at a faster rate than ever before. Whereas industrialised and developed countries like America, Europe, Canada, Japan, Australia, now joined by India and China, are primarily responsible for the GHGE, the worst sufferers are the underdeveloped countries.

The way world temperature is rising because of GHGE, if no effective measures are taken right now for substantial reduction of GHGE rate, the dry and the low

level areas of the world, especially regions in Africa and Asia, will be visited by natural calamities like floods, cyclones, tidal waves, droughts, desertification, rise of sea level, etc., more frequently and severely than ever before.

As a result, food security, housing problems, availability of drinking water, in fact the entire economic and social harmony of these countries, will be in jeopardy.

The reason for Bangladesh to be more concerned about global warming is that, according to the available reports (on climate change), Bangladesh and Maldives are two countries that will be worst affected because of global warming.

Cyclone Sidr, that hit Bangladesh on November 15, 2007 and caused havoc to its



south western coastal belt, and then cyclone Nargis of May 3, another severe tropical storm appearing in the vicinity in less than 6 months time, might as well be taken as a red-alert for the governments and the people of this region to get into the serious business of dealing with the consequence of the alarming climate change due to global warming.

According to experts, if the pace at which the world temperature is rising at the moment continues unchecked, by 2050 nearly one-fifth of Bangladesh will go under the sea. As a result, besides acute food crisis, at least 20 million people will lose their habitations and become climate refugees, which will cause serious threats to the peace and stability of the country. At present, our

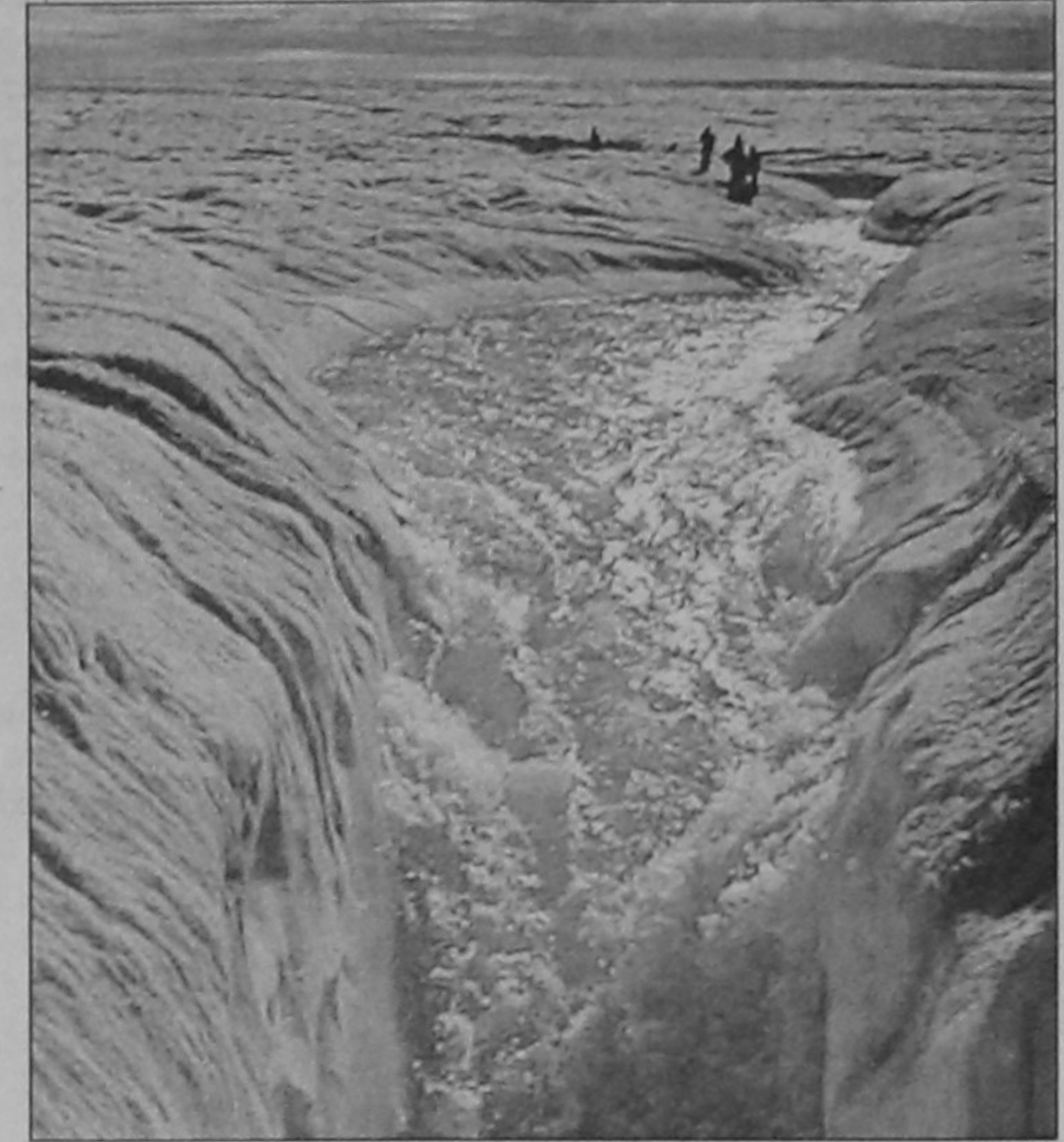
population density is 1000 plus per square kilometer, enough to cause problems of food and housing.

If the population growth rate of Bangladesh remains as it is, and global warming continues unabated, by 2050 we will have 300 million people to live in just about a 120,000 sq kilometers area (reduced due to sea level rise), increasing the country's population density to 2500 or more per square kilometer.

Imagine the situation. Because of rise of sea level, the area of agriculture land is shrinking. Population is increasing. People are cutting forests or using agricultural land to settle their housing needs, making less and less land available for food production. Because of deforestation, the climatic effects are becoming more and more acute.

So grave and ominous being the situation, it is high time for our governments, our planners and the policy makers to adopt comprehensive plans for 50 years or so, which may include, among others, building of higher and stronger embankments along the coastal belt of the country, construction of sufficient number of strongly built multi-purpose cyclone shelters for both human beings and livestock, and growing of extensive mangrove forests along the seashores.

It is also high time we joined



hands with other least developed countries in gearing up the movement to compel the industrially developed countries not only to make substantial reduction of gas emission but also to bear the costs of aforesaid projects as compensation.

More importantly, it is high time we at home gave more attention and priority to increasing production of food grains and agricultural products, controlling

population growth and stopping deforestation.

It is imperative that we make a habit of planting trees around our houses, do not leave any land uncultivated, change our food habits, and provide proper education to our children so that they can become a skilled and efficient manpower capable enough to face the challenges.

Capt. Husain Imam is a freelance contributor to The Daily Star.

A roadmap to wilderness?

If the CA fails to take the route of conciliation rather than confrontation, he will be leading the nation to nowhere as envisaged by the adviser. As highly revered citizen of the republic with apparently no personal political agenda of his own, he should be having no problem reading the pulse of the nation. If he fails to do so, the roadmap to election could be transformed into a roadmap to wilderness.

MOZAMMEL H. KHAN

SINCE its inception in 1971, more than once, Bangladesh has been at the crossroads. The most recent such critical juncture gave rise to so-called 1/11 that resulted in the promulgation of emergency and the consequent suspension of the fundamental rights of its citizens.

The provision of emergency was incorporated in the constitution to tackle a situation "threatened by war or external aggression or internal disturbance." People, by and large, welcomed the emergency with the hope that the resulting CTG would hold a fair and credible election to return the country to representative democracy.

However, since its assumption of

power, the CTG extended its jurisdiction into many arenas which Article 58 D of the constitution does not contemplate.

To accomplish its task, it has included the provision, "any person, convicted of corruption by a trial court, will be disqualified from contesting in any election until adjudication of his or her appeal against the verdict," in the Emergency Power Rule (EPR).

The EPR has given the authorities more or less blanket power to arrest anyone, and put him behind bars without bail for any period of time. The potential principal victims of this EPR are the top politicians, who in general belief, are the main targets of the authority in their pursuit to create a level

playing field for a free and fair election.

The reconstituted ACC under the able leadership of its chief has taken advantage of the EPR to arrest and prosecute, largely the politicians, in its self-professed drive against corruption, albeit corruption has no direct correlation with the "internal disturbance," the main reason given for the declaration of emergency.

So far numerous politicians, including their wives in many cases, have been prosecuted, mostly on broad (in some case vague) charges of "accumulating unaccountable wealth" or "concealing wealth in their wealth statement."

There were stories all around

about the scale of corruption many of these politicians had indulged themselves in. However, charges of conviction against them failed to unveil any specific charges against them.

Since all the convictions have taken place under EPR, not under the normal law of the land, it is yet to be seen how far their convictions have impacted their constituents in terms of sealing their political fate. If the past history of such trials and convictions is anything to take cognisance of, it failed to create any dent in the electability of the convicts. The longest serving finance minister, leader of the so-called "reformist" faction of BNP until the other day, is a glaring example of that resilience.

I personally would like to concur with the belief that the ACC chief is not in pursuit to implement the agenda of any quarter. In fact, his bureau's action, quite to the contrary, has seemingly thwarted such an agenda by throwing the detrimental blow to the reformist group of the BNP.

If it is so, it is the high time for the ACC chief to take a short pause and evaluate if trying the corruption cases under the EPR has been counter-productive to his otherwise noble pursuit. Corruption is an endemic disease in Bangladesh society and it can never be eliminated by a transient law such as EPR. It must be an ongoing process that should be having an everlasting effect.

At the beginning of the tenure of CTG, two of the advisers (one of them is gone since then) were lecturing the nation that it was not their responsibility to rehabilitate the "disgraced" politicians (they meant the two ladies) of the past. However, the subsequent actions of the incumbent government, in fact, did exactly the same.

Sheikh Hasina was not a "disgraced" leader before 1/11 in the first place. It was widely believed that her party would win any fair election before the happenings of 1/11. Her interment since last year and the public perception of little merit of her incriminations in

multiple legal suits has boosted her image not only among her followers but her foes as well.

The BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami are trying to ride on her coat-tails and are demanding her unconditional release. The ultimate crumbling of the reformist faction of the BNP only testified of the resurgence of the political stature of Khalida Zia and has sent the much-talked about reform to the back burner.

Under the above backdrop, the pre-dialogue of the five very articulate advisers with the politicians and the hope, through their optimistic words such as creation of trust, they aroused among the citizens made the nation optimistic.

However, the much-awaited address of the chief adviser (CA) ran not only counter to the optimism the five advisers' disclosures over the weeks have generated, but also poured cold water on that optimism. What he has outlined was nothing new and they are more

of rhetoric than substance.

The main impediment to having a free and fair election at this time is the state of emergency that gave the government the power to arrest any one without even any pre-laid charges and try any one for any "unaccountable income" under EPR, not a difficult charge to frame against millions in our society.

This could be discriminately used against whoever the authorities wanted to debar from taking part in the election. The CA in his address only indicated that the "provisions of the emergency rules pertaining to election would be relaxed or suspended at an appropriate time." In rare unity, most of the political parties who matter, except for a few political orphans, have rejected his address outright.

As it looks now, it is very uncertain if the dialogue would at all take place with the two major stakeholders. In the words of one of the highly prudent advisers: "The situation will become serious if the two parties do not join the dia-

logue. What outcome the dialogue will bring then?"

On the other hand, if it does, the ball would be largely in the court of the government. If it wants to hide behind the legal process, as every incumbent government intends to do, pertaining to the release of the two leaders, the least it could do is to withdraw the state of emergency that would enable the two leaders to get bail and face the legal suits against them under the normal law of the land.

If the CA fails to take the route of conciliation rather than confrontation, he will be leading the nation to nowhere as envisaged by the adviser. As highly revered citizen of the republic with apparently no personal political agenda of his own, he should be having no problem reading the pulse of the nation. If he fails to do so, the roadmap to election could be transformed into a roadmap to wilderness.

Dr. Mozammel H. Khan is the Convener of the Canadian Committee for Human Rights and Democracy in Bangladesh.

Aid agencies await the green light

Until now, the military regime has only allowed a trickle of aid experts into the country and has prevented almost all international relief workers from going down to the worst affected areas in the delta. Military checkpoints on roads leading out of Rangoon have prevented all but a handful leaving the former capital.

LARRY JAGAN

INTERNATIONAL aid agencies are planning to test the Burmese government's promise to allow more disaster experts into the country's worst affected areas. Many foreign staff with the UN and other independent international organisations are preparing to head down to the cyclone-ravaged Irrawaddy delta in the next day or two, according to aid relief workers in Rangoon.

Donors promised nearly \$50 million in aid to Burma on Sunday at an international pledging chaired by the UN secretary general Ban Ki-moon. But the Western countries made most of their financial commitments contingent on aid agencies getting access to the delta, where more than a quarter of a million people are reportedly dead or missing and another three million are barely surviving.

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Rangoon have prevented all but a handful leaving the former capital.

It is still unclear whether we will get better access to the delta, but the signs are good," a senior spokesman with the International Federation of Red Cross in Bangkok, John Sparrow told The Daily Star. "We should have a better picture in a few days time."

Other aid agencies are more sceptical, but also believe it is too early to know. "There is no clarity yet, but we still have too many of our experts on the wrong side of the border," said Chris Webster, an emergency response team leader with World Vision. "They are either here in Bangkok waiting for visas, or in Rangoon waiting for permission to go to the Delta."

Last week the UN chief flew to Burma to meet the country's reclusive leader. Senior General Than Shwe agreed to allow all international aid workers to operate freely and without hindrance," Ban Ki-moon told journalists on Sunday evening in Bangkok en route to New York. "We agreed to establish several forward logistics hubs and to open new air, sea and road links to the most affected areas," he

said.

But many Burmese analysts remain sceptical that the regime will allow free and unfettered access to the delta area. The military is used to having tight control over its citizens, and has an obsessive fear of foreigners, believing their only aim is to overthrow the government.

"There's no way the top generals will allow thousands of foreigners to traipse around the delta area without being tightly controlled," according to an independent Burmese analyst at Chiang Mai University in Thailand. "If they were to do that it would be as good as saying the situation is out of our control - something they could never contemplate, even if it's true."

The Burmese prime minister, Thein Sein even hinted that the regime would not allow free and unlimited access to the worst-affected areas when he addressed the donors' conference in Rangoon on Sunday. But UN experts in Burma are more upbeat and believe the regime is prepared to be more flexible and allow in far more relief supplies and give experts greater access.

"Definitely we are expecting to have freedom of access to the

delta," Chris Kaye, the head of the UN's World Food Program in Rangoon told The Daily Star. "More visas will be granted - especially for those workers from organisations that have a track record in Myanmar. There is still an underlying concern over opening the flood gates to all NGOs to come into the country based on the negative perceptions of what happened in Aceh."

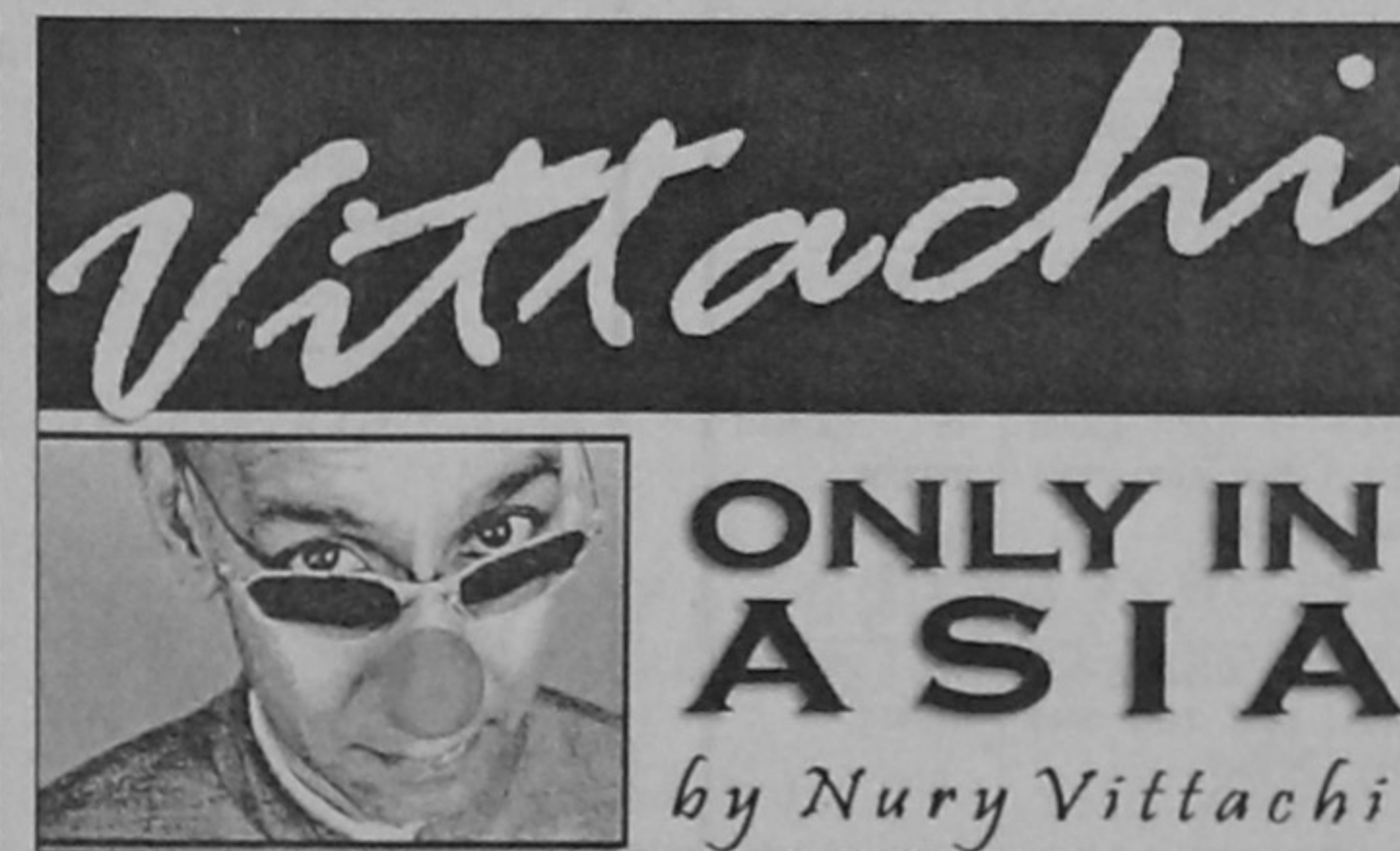
So far the WFP programme has managed to send several international staff to the delta in the last few days without any problems. The WFP boss in Rangoon plans to go down to the delta himself later this week. This is a healthy sign according to the WFP.

"This will mean we can improve the targeting and delivery of assistance to more people throughout the whole of the delta that was affected and not just those areas that we have already been able to get access to with our national staff," Chris Kaye said.

But Ban Ki-moon continues to believe the Burmese authorities are beginning to take notice of the international community's humanitarian concerns. "I'm cautiously optimistic that this could be a turning point for Myanmar to be more flexible, more practical, and face the reality as it is on the ground," he said.

Larry Jagan writes for The Daily Star from Bangkok.

The reason why rock stars find it hard to write the next line



SO many readers wrote in with examples of shockingly awful song lyrics that I could fill this whole newspaper with them. Don't worry - I won't. But I would be interested to see more examples of Canto-pop or other East Asian lyrics. In the meantime, here are 10 astonishingly bad lyrics from international stars.

The title of Phoniest Intellectual should go to Sting, the guy who writes the songs in The Police. In *Don't Stand So Close to Me*, he sings: "He starts to shake/ he starts to cough/ just like the old man in that famous book by Nabakov."

I have some sympathy for these guys. If you have only one brain cell, or you are a typical pop star (oops, tautology), it's hard to think of words, which both rhyme AND make sense. So you write rhyming nonsense or tortuous semi-rhymes.

The first option can be clearly seen in the huge hit *Love You*

girl. It's a mountain. If your husband has spent his weekend showing affection to a local hillock, I wouldn't worry too much about it.

Here are four examples of songs in which the writer starts off well, but loses his thread.

Paul McCartney's *Listen to What the Man Said* goes: "Listen to what the man said, he said: do do do do do do do do do."

Sting came out with a song called *De Doo Doo Doo De Da Da Da*, the chorus of which goes: "De doo doo doo de da da da is all I want to say to you." Profound stuff.

The rap group So Solid Crew closed one of their songs with these words: "I got 21 seconds till my vocal's done; two multiplied by 10 plus one."

Tender by Armi and Danny: "I love you, I wanna love you tender, I just want to be your loving tender."

The second is evident in *Take the Money and Run* by Steve Miller: "Billy Mack is a detective down in Texas/ You know he knows just exactly what the facts is/ He ain't gonna let those two escape justice/ He makes his living off of the people's taxes."

A third trick is to get a rhyme by ignoring grammar, as in *Martian Martian* by Jonathan Richman: "Here come the Martian Martians, they're baking up a Martian pie, I hope the Martians like me and give some to I."

Spandau Ballet released a song called *True*, which went: "I bought a ticket to the world, but now I've come back again; why do I find it hard to write the next line?" Well, maybe it's because you are a typical air-headed pop star, sir?

Perhaps the last word should go to Paul McCartney who admitted lyrics didn't really matter. His favourite songwriter was Little Richard, whose biggest hit goes: "A wop bop a loo mop a lop bum bum; tutti frutti, oh rootie, tutti frutti, oh rootie, ooooh, tutti frutti, oh rootie, tutti frutti oh rootie, a wop bop a loo mop a lop bum bum."

Now that's poetry.

Much more poorly written gibberish can be found at www.vittachi.com

