Dhaka, Sunday, May 19, 1991

### A Divisive Move

On the face of it, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif may regard it as an achievement of his government that Pakistan National Assembly has adopted the official bill to enforce the Islamic law or Sharia in the country. Like the Government of the late Ziaul Haq, the ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IDA) has regarded its commitment to the Islamic law as a part moral and a part political obligation, which provided Mr Sharif with the right electoral platform to keep the opposition People's Democratic Alliance (PDA), and its leader Benazir Bhutto, out of office. The ruling party, therefore, assumes that Islamisation of Pakistan, under the umbrella of the Sharia law, provides a lasting safeguard against the return to power of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) or any other organisation that represents the liberaldemocratic forces in the country.

However, this is, at best, a short-term gain for the ruling party in Pakistan, a gain which obscures a number of problems Mr Sharif has been obliged to tackle, without much success. Even in the draft form, the bill failed to please any political group, either on the right or in the middle. While the extreme rightwing Islamic forces, loosely called the fundamentalist camp, did not think that the provisions of the proposed legislation had gone far enough to place the country under the "supreme law of Allah", the middle-ofthe-road forces, represented by PPP and the National Awami Party, saw the move as a retrograde step that would place far too much authority and power in the hands of the clerics and, among other things, endanger women's rights. On this point, the statement by Ms Bhutto has been specific and precise. The PPP leader spoke for a good cross section of the educated people in the country, inside and outside her own organisation, when she warned that the passage of the bill would give the clerics enough power to challenge or even overturn a parliamentary legislation on the ground of it being un-Islamic.

A pragmatic politician, Prime Minister Sharif probably recognised the danger identified by Ms Bhutto. In the first place, he immediately assured his people that he was not a fundamentalist, a statement that angered a section of mullahs who differ among themselves on the definition of fundamentalism, and then he went on to soften some of the provisions of the bill before it was passed by the National Assembly. As expected, the opposition PDA remains as critical of the revised legislation as it was of the original draft. It is now expected to take the matter to the court.

Notwithstanding the political motives of the ruling party, a well-educated modern politician like Mr Sharif should go along with Ms Bhutto in establishing the constitutional guarantee of the supremacy of the parliament. For both sides, it would be a sensible compromise, although this may well result in the erosion of support from the religious parties for the Prime Minister's uneasy

coalition. The challenge that faces Prime Minister Sharif is more than a political dilemma of the kind that successive administrations in Islamabad have faced again and again. This time, it is a challenge - one might even call it a threat - posed against the democratic future of Pakistan, a future in which the country's commitment to modernism as a way of life for its highly gifted people should remain as strong as its obligation to the Rule of Law and fundamental human rights. One must not also overlook the fact the drive towards the socalled Islamisation in Pakistan at this time would be exploited by Hindu fundamentalists in India to the detriment of the country's peace and communal harmony, especially during the election starting on Monday. Taking all this into consideration, the ruling party in Pakistan will be well advised to take a long pause, and use the time for consultation with the opposition, before pushing the bill through the Senate whose approval remains a necessity before the proposed legislation is put on the statute book. If Mr Sharif is out to make history, let him do so by uniting, rather than by dividing, the nation.

#### Insuring the Poor

An innovative insurance strategy looks ready to take off in a major way after only three and a half years of operation. Two insurance schemes known as Swalpa Sanchoy and Grameen Bima, have taken the Grameen Bank concept a stage further, although the former have been initiated by a different establishment altogether. But the idea appears to be similar and the impact is fast approaching that of Grameen Bank. The insurance schemes have spread to four districts since their launching in January, 1988, and now boast over 20,000 subscribers.

The above statistics may seem quite negligible in so far as insurance-policy selling goes — until one considers the fact that all the policy-holders are from the lowest rung of the country's socioeconomic ladder. While the Grameen experiment seeks to alleviate poverty by giving credit to the rural poor to enable them to stand on their own feet, the schemes of Delta Insurance Company look ahead by encouraging the poor to think about saving and actually take a positive decision on it. The monthly premium of Tk. 10 or even the weekly premium of Tk. 6 do not look large on the face of it, but given the meagre income and considerable needs of the target groups, the sums are not at all insignificant. Delta's achievement in persuading people who are perennially in need of cash to start saving through life insurance poli-

cies is therefore considerable. The idea of enticing the very poor, whether rural or urban, to part with their money with an eye to the future, faces many daunting problems. To begin with, for many of the poorest the concept of the "future" does not stretch beyond the next 24 hours. For them the idea of parting with even one Taka without an immediate return is unthinkable. Worse, criminal activities by cowboy operators have eroded public confidence in people identifying themselves as agents of insurance or savings companies. To breach that wall of mistrust is a formidable task. But it is a wall that has to be scaled because the value of saving to the individual concerned as well as the national economy cannot be overestimated. Without a high percentage of the national income being saved, the country will not be able to build up enough national capital for investment. At the individual level, life insurance for the bread-winner gives some sense of security to the family. Given the

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of the population in lower income tential of this sector is enormous. it of social work that makes sound

## Half of World's Most Populated Cities are Asian

APID urbanisation became the dominant demographic trend in the latter part of the 20th century. It is expected to remain so well into the next, even when the global population stabilises.

A two-year study by the Washington, D.C.-based Population Crisis Committee found that megacities are appearing on every continent.

Since 1950, the pace of urbanisation has accelerated enormously, propelled to a large degree by unprecedented rates of population growth in many parts of the world.

The study, which looked into data from 98 cities, identified Pune in India, with a population of 2.35 million, as the world's smallest metropolis. The Tokyo-Yokohama area, home to 28.7 million Japanese, is the largest

Nine Asian cities are in the world's 20 most populated urban areas. These are, aside from Tokyo-Yokohama, Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto, Japan; Seoul, Republic of Korea; Bombay and Calcutta in India: Jakarta, Indonesia; New Delhi, India: Manila, Philippines; and Shanghai, People's Republic of China.

Osaka-Kobe-Kyoto has a population of 16.8 million:

HE venue for the unity

gress and the Pan African

Congress in Harare was not

Cold Comfort Farm, near the

Zimbabwe capital of Harare the

ANC and the PAC - bitter ri-

vals for more than 30 years -

declared their meeting an

newspaper back in South

Africa saw fit to run the story

inated by an ongoing row be-

tween anti-apartheid groups

and the government over

township violence, by details of

the ANC's new constitutional

proposals and by the testimony

from the dock of ANC leader

Winnie Mandela, currently on

trial for kidnapping and as-

and the PAC covered impor-

tant ground in Harare. The two

organisations have been odds

since 1959, when Africanists

within the ANC broke away.

dissatisfied at what they saw as

the dominating influence

within the struggle of whites

and in particular members of

For 18 months, Nelson

Mandela and the then leader of

the PAC, the late Zeph

Mothopeng, mooted the idea

of talks and a common front.

The ANC consultative confer-

ence in December passed a

resolution supporting this idea.

were, by and large, overshad-

But these little nudgings

the Communist Party.

On the face of it, the ANC

Strange, then that no major

As ever, the news was dom-

"outstanding success."

on page one.

sault.

Yet after two-day talks at

exactly auspicious.

meeting between the

African National Con-

Seoul, 15.8 million; Calcutta. 12.8 million; Jakara, 9.9 million; Manila, 9.2 million; and

Shanghai, 9.1 million. The study predicts that fully half of the world's total population may live in cities by the vear 2010.

It found that urban population growth over the last several years differed in several important ways from historical patterns of urbanisation.

In 1950, there were only 10 metropolitan areas with populations of five million or more. By 1990, the world has 33 metropolitan areas with five million people or more. A total of 15 cities have populations of ten million or more and six have populations of 15 million

Cities with more than 15 million people - called hypercities - have reached sizes "off the scale of human experience," according to the study.

These sprawling, congested urban agglomerations are of an order of magnitude unmatched by many cities in the past," the study said.

It found that the world's largest metropolitan areas share many problems, from violent crimes to traffic conges-

Harmony Francisca A. Cabie writes from Manila

tion. "At least, some experts believe that traditional urban economies of scale are becoming dwarfed by the problems of congestion, that some cities are simply too large to be efficient," the study said.

The study also discovered that cities in the world's poorer countries were fast filling up the ranks of the world's largest cities. This trend broke the historical connection between city size

world have been growing by a low 0.8 per cent a year. This rate is expected to decline further in the next decade.

In contrast, cities in the developing regions have been growing at the rate of 3.6 per cent a year. They are expected to maintain this rate through the 1990s. This means a doubling time for these urban populations of less than 20

The doubling time for Africa

#### By the year 2010, fully half of the world's peoples may live in cities

and levels of economic development or political power.

Large cities in developing countries, the study said, are growing much faster than cities in the industrialised world ever had.

London, the first industrial city to top one million, took 130 years to reach a population of eight million.

By contrast, Mexico City's population stood at only a million people just 50 years ago. It now has 20 million people, ac-

cording to the study. Cities in the industrialised is even shorter - only 12 years - as its urban population grows at the rate of 5 per cent. By the end of the current

century, the urban population of the developing world is expected to be almost double the size of that in the industrialised world. By 2025, it will be four times larger. That same year, Africa's population will be three times the size of North America's according to the study.

For cities in developing countries, the quality of urban life in the future depends

largely on their success in curbing population growth, the

Developing countries also need to regulate the sizes of their population not only because of the projected urban explosions. The study said overall rates of population growth are so high in most developing countries that even rural populations will continue to increase despite substantial

rural to urban migration. The rural share of world population is declining but the rural population is still growing in absolute numbers.

In the next 20 years, the study said, the world's urban population is expected to increase by almost 1.5 billion. At the same time, the world's rural population will also grow by 423 million.

"Population pressures have aggravated the grinding poverty endemic to the rural areas of many developing countries," the study said. "Plots of farmland, subdivided to accommodate many offspring, are often too small to support a family. More recently, environmental degradation resulting from overcropping and overgrowing has also

contributed to the migrate

But the study stressed that high birth rates, rather than rural-to-urban migration, re-main the most important factor in urban population growth

in developing nations. In many developing countries, it said, some 60 or more of urban growth results from the excess of births over deaths. Only 40 per cent of less of urban growth to attributed to migration.

A number of factors could persuade urban residents to opt for smaller families. These include the higher cost of raising children, greater economic opportunities, higher levels of education, greater autonomy for women, exposure to mass media, and better access to family planning services.

However, with the current growth rate which means a doubling of urban populations in 20 years or less, developing countries cannot afford the luxury of waiting for these factors to exert their influence on urban family sizes.

Governments have to act now to increase immediately effective contraceptive use through organised family planning programmes, the study - Depthnews

# Old Enemies Team up in South Africa

John Perlman writes from Johannesburg

Opposition to white minority rule in South Africa has traditionally been dominated by the ANC. "Africanists" broke from the ANC in 1959 to form the PAC, and it was their anti-pass laws campaign that led to the Sharpeville massacre of 1960. Now the two groups have agreed to come together under an umbrella Patriotic Front.

owed in the public mind by the PAC's sharp criticism of the ANC's willingness to take part in talks and by the violence that flared between supporters of the two in places like Cape Town and Bekkersdal, west of Johannesburg.

Thus it was no small matter that the ANC and the PAC could come away from Harare with a commitment to form a "Patriotic Front" charged with campaigning for a constituent assembly as the first step towards drawing up a new constitution for South Africa.

The meeting resolved to hold a conference in Cape Town in August which they hoped would draw in all "organisations of the oppressed" which support "the transfer of power to the majority." Those not yet committed to a constituent assembly would be encouraged to give

The ANC would continue talks with the government about removing the obstacles to negotiations. However, there would be negotiations with the government on a constituent assembly until certain conditions were met.

These include the unconditional release of all political prisoners, the lifting of all bans and restrictions on organisations, the withdrawal of troops from the townships, the repeal of all legislation circumscribing political activity and the immediate cessation of all political trials and executions.

The meeting concluded that the apartheid system was the principal source of violence, but resolved to take steps against members who attacked supporters of other organisations, and called for a culture of political tolerance. Both organisations condemned the European Community for deciding to lift sanctions.

For all these steps, the response to this Harare accord in South Africa has been somewhat muted. There is increasingly a wait-and-see attitude to agreements concluded at the senior leadership level.

The much heralded peace talks between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party earlier this year has produced little evidence of reduced violence between the two.

What will the ANC-PAC alliance mean in term of the relationships between the two organisations on the ground?

And will it help shift the balance of political power back towards the anti-apartheid

They have, after all, taken something of a battering at the hands of both the shrewd politicking of the F W de Klerk government and the aggressive expansionism in Inkatha.

The Patriotic Front and its focus on the demand for a constituent assembly could bring much-needed coherence to the anti-apartheid position.

The ANC and PAC believe voting strength and influence established on the basis of representation will sideline conservative forces whose seat at a multi-party conference is based solely on their past willingness to work within apartheid structures.

If the Patriotic Front can gather in the support of other groups on the left, like the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), it could add significantly to the muscle ranged against the government and Inkatha on this issue.

The Patriotic Front could also provide unity of purpose in dealing with the political violence currently tearing South Africa's townships apart. The ANC and the PAC put the blame for the continuing conflict squarely at the door of the

Both reacted sharply to De Klerk's call, endorsed by Buthelezi, for an all-party conference on May 24-25 to seek solutions to the violence. The ANC said it would not attend as De Klerk was not addressing key issues such as the "Partiality" of the police force.

> "discuss violence with the perpetrator." A third affect the Patriotic Front may have is to isolate the Inkatha Freedom Party and Chief Buthelezi. The ANC and the PAC were quick to deny this, hoping Inkatha would attend the August conference and throw its weight behind the call for a constituent assembly. But clearly unity will

The PAC said it would not

wake of the township violence. The Patriotic Front will be an alliance, an umbrella, and not an amalgamation of organisations. There are still strong policy differences that will surely resurface further down

**OPINION** 

Your editorial

Catch Up" (May 4, 1991) re-

emphasises once more the

need to establish women's ed-

ucation as a fundamental hu-

man right in keeping with

modern concepts but falls a

little short of telling us how to

achieve this goal. In my opin-

ion, it is not education so

much (or the lack of it) which

is the inhibiting factor behind

women's inability to catch up

with her male counterpart. It

is, rather, the economic

bondage she is subjected to.

and this holds true at almost

every tier of our social struc-

ture. Certainly, as you say, it is

a situation which can only be

changed once society itself

undergoes radical transforma-

tion, a transformation which

under present conditions

seems rather doubtful for at

least another generation or so.

if you like, their involvement

or participation is national life,

occurred in what are today

known as the advanced nations

of the world, only after a great

deal of hardship, and not eco-

nomically until a World War

forced women into factories

and offices. Although they had

to surrender their jobs in the

factories to men on their re-

turn from the front, they man-

aged to retain a hold on the of-

fice jobs. In the home front

labour saving devices helped

them to be able to manage

both home and job and many

women thus were able to con-

tinue to work after marriage

establishing new precedences.

Even so, despite these ad-

vances, progress in the higher

professions was slow - for in-

stance it was not until 1965

that a woman was appointed as

judge of the High Court in Bri-

tain and, in the oldest democ-

racy in the world, there have

never been more than 29

women MPs at a time in a

House seating 630 ! By the year

1970, in France only 20% of

lawyers were women and only

slightly more than that doc-

Women's emancipation, or,

help offset the political gains

Buthelezi has made in the

Says ANC security chief Jacob Zuma: "It is a historical trend that in liberation struggles there comes a historical time, when the goal of liberation draws near, when all groups decide they must work together to achieve victory. We have decided that time has come for South Africa and that we must work together."

That working together will be but one of the dynamics at work in South African politics. The lifting of EC sanctions indicates that the ANC and the PAC can no longer rely on the West to maintain pressure on De Klerk, who has made steady

To that end it has announced the formation of defence units in every township. It is a controversial move and puts the ANC on a collision course with the government and the police in particular.

Equally these units, if successful, will go a long way towards restoring confidence in some black communities that have been increasingly critical of the ANC's inability to protect them against Inkatha at-

In all these efforts, the Patriotic Front will provide the ANC and the PAC with additional muscle. The acid test, though, will be in how they - GEMINI NEWS

JOHN PERLMAN is a journalist with the Weeklly Mail of Johannesburg.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

#### Import of milk powder

Sir, If we have to spend approximately Tk. 260.00 crore annually for the import of milk powder, the government might as well take up an immediate scheme for rearing up livestock including import of the same if necessary — for setting up dairy firms throughout the country for supply of milk. This would give the young and the old better nourishment and health and save the country in the long run of its recurring expenses in hardearned foreign exchange.

H. Rahman Mogh Bazar, Dhaka.

#### Seeds of corruption

Sir, Corruption has become social institution in Bangladesh. The practise of corruption and grasping of public money and property as well as national wealth by a section of people started soon after the liberation of Bangladesh. Currently the authorities are dealing with the corruption cases of the deposed President Ershad's regime. What about those of the previous regimes? There are many corrupt persons who are living happily and multiplying their ill-earned huge money and wealth. These people even would be seen preaching wise words against current and immediate past corruptions !

I think we need to destroy the seeds to contain corruption completely. Immediately after the fall or end of any regime, corrupted persons manage their immunity and become safe and sound. We demand a White Paper on all sorts of detected and undetected corruptions so far committed since the independence of Bangladesh. Investigations should be made to apprehend corrupt persons who have so far escaped the hands of law.

M. Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural College, Dhaka-1207.

#### No more mud slinging

Sir, The government warned the people of coastal areas time and again of the disaster but many did not pay to them, they were so warned many of time before but then the forecast failed. As a result of this negligence so many people lost their lives and property. The coastal communities always remain prey to natural calamity. However, the government is trying its best to mitigate the sufferings of the victims. The NGO's are working round the clock. The armed forces personnel are engaged in relief work. Different socio-economic organizations have extended their hands of help. The opposition is also rendering help to the distressed humanity. But at this time of critical

functure too we are to hear criticism. Mere criticism would not lessen the sufferings. It doesn't however, mean that we don't want criticism. Criticism is always beneficial

but it should be constructive. The opposition should not criticise and oppose the development oriented activities of the newly formed government, rather they should extend their hand of cordial cooperation to materialise the hopes and aspirations of the long deprived nation.

Mud slinging would not bring any good to us. We all, irrespective of political affiliation, should try our best to tackle the colossal damage the cyclone has wrought. The havoc is so immense that coordinated effort is a must. It has to be faced unitedly.

Sarwar Morshed Monju Chittagong College, Chittogong.

#### Woes of telephone subscribers

Sir, The subscribers of

telephone are made to pay three times more than the actual calls just for nothing. Hardly a connection can be heed to it because, according established these days without 3/4 wrong connections, and when one is lucky to get the desired number he is often faced with another music cross connection where he is sometimes blasted at as an intruder, for no fault of his, in despicable languages. Despite number of complaints we the general subscribers have so far failed to elicit any remedy from the T&T. Subscribers are faced with a fat bill at the end of the month which cannot be contested, however meticulous one might have been in using his prestigious telephone. Secondly, the telephone bills are most irregular and are generally received after the last date of payment. As a result every bill contains arrears which need to be corrected, otherwise the bank would not

> accept payment. This is an additional both-

eration for the subscribers. All these problems are avoidable ones and need to be seen by someone with understanding and sympathy to mitigate the sufferings of the subscribers.

Sir. I know this is another helpless subscriber's cry in the wilderness. But to whom shall we go for remedy and justice may we know? A subscriber with honest income can hardly afford to pay 3/4 times more for being a 'proud possessor' of a Bangladesh Telephone.

A sufferer Moghbazar, Dhaka.

#### Museum gallery

Sir, The other day I had the chance to visit the Dhaka Museum. It was no doubt a good experience, and I had the unique opportunity to see so many things, belonging to our country and it's heritage.

However, I would like to point out that the gallery. which holds pictures of renowned personalities of our country, is incomplete in many

First of all, only the duration of their life-time is mentioned, but neither the date nor the month of the year is said. So if anyone is looking for the date of birth or death of any of our leaders or other known people, they will be unable to find it. Thus in this way the information is not complete. In many places, the spelling of names is also found incorrect.

Therefore, it is may request to the concerned authorities that they may please look into the matter and take appropriate action. For the museum is such an institution that we should be proud of, and many foreign visitors also come to this prestigious institution of ours everyday.

R. Rahim Elephant Road, Dhaka. Women's Emancipation tors. And in Britain during the same year only 25% doctors were female. West Germany fared even worse with 22% and in the United States, as-

> tonishingly, the share was only After the War of Liberation in which women also participated it might have been reasonable to expect that women in this country would be able to throw off their economic bondage and take their place in commerce and industry. and although a few have made the grade, the number of women workers at all levels has been disappointing to the extent the government had to step in to make legal provision for women. Those companies who were required to comply with this instruction did so by employing women in lower positions, even though several were well qualified and capable of performing better jobs, thus filling their quota, which did little enough for women's self-

As social change is the one sure way to alter attitudes, this gigantic task must, of necessity, fall on the government. Fortunately, social change is amenable to manipulation and a great deal can be achieved by utilising the available media, particularly the audio-visual ones like film and television. to project the role played by outstanding women throughout history who will serve as 'role models'. But these have to be depicted in such a way that the ordinary person, male and female, can identify with them. The by now traditional 'soap opera' with which we are all familiar can do wonders in showing the harmful effects of wrong notions and other social evils and can be used to good effect in raising the status di women. Once women can gain respect, education with all its benefits will surely come in its

Sylvia Mortoza