

### Another 'Grim' Report

The World Bank's annual report warns us yet once again about the grim prospect for Bangladesh's economy. What the report says should not come to us as a surprise. The "ominous convergence" of the causes of low economic growth that the report talks about is perhaps more true for Bangladesh than any of the other countries grouped together as "lower growth economies" (God forbid, we get another abbreviation, LGE). As identified in the Bank's report, rapid population growth, ecological vulnerability, large number of absolute poor, and deeply rooted domestic and external macro economic problems are the fundamental constraints facing countries like Bangladesh.

To overcome the problems of low growth, the WB identifies the following areas for urgent and 'resolute' action: a) infrastructure development; b) prioritization of public investment programme; c) improving external competitiveness and d) creating an environment conducive to the growth of the private sector. It is said that "exceptional skills" will be needed in managing economic policies if these problems are to be addressed effectively.

Natural calamities, resource constraints and such other limiting factors aside, it must be stated, and stated boldly, that a part of our problems is our insincere governments of the past, which were more interested in exploiting the people than in improving their lot. The nine years' rule of the autocratic Ershad regime not only failed to give the country any positive direction but also took the country further down the abyss of poverty. So the first thing we need is being serious about our own development. The coming to power of a democratic government provides us the first real opportunity, in many years, to seriously address the problems that lie ahead. Prioritization of public investment essentially means that we must try and reduce as much as possible unproductive expenditure and keep a lid on government wages, diverting that money to the productive sectors. We must realise that we cannot spread our limited resources too thinly over a wide range of investments but concentrate on the ones where the value for the money in terms of social development will be the highest. There should be no confusion in the minds of the policy makers as to the importance of investing more resources on infrastructure building. It is only through better infrastructure that we will be able to attract more private investment — both domestic and foreign — for our growth.

The warning contained in the World Bank's report about the "grim prospect" for countries like Bangladesh should not escape our attention. We must be aware of the fact that with east Europe and Soviet Union now becoming serious competitors for global investment, the possibility of the "lower growth economies" to be able to attract western investment becomes less and less. We must therefore look east to Japan, and to comparatively smaller economies like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, etc. To be able to do so, we must institute the type of economic reforms that the Asian "Tigers" like South Korea and Taiwan had in the sixties. There is an urgent need to make our state sector more efficient. The economy is being bled white through the inefficiency and corruption of the publicly owned enterprises.

The people are looking forward to a sincere and vigorous move by the new government to get the economy going again. There is no time to waste.

### Unipolarity and the UN

The 46th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which convened on September 17, faces a world radically transformed. The collapse of communism and rise of nationalism in the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics finally put an end to the bipolar world which had existed since 1945. On the political and military fields, that bipolarity has now been replaced by a Washington-centric unipolarity, which is understandably causing some consternation in a number of world capitals, especially among smaller nations.

Paradoxically, the Gulf conflict, which established Washington's position as the lone superpower, also gave a long-overdue and badly-needed boost to the role the UN could play in the present-day world. The fact that the US felt it necessary to obtain a UN mandate for its leadership of the anti-Iraqi coalition from August, 1990 till today, showed the UN to be a — and only — world body capable of lending legitimacy to allied actions. In the process, the UN has regained its position as an effective forum for decision-making and arbiter in world disputes.

With its credibility enhanced, the UN is now in an ideal position to undertake what is probably the most pressing task facing the world today — alleviation of Third World poverty. The issue of economic development in the Third World is not a new one, but the intense ideological rivalry in the recently-defunct world order meant that no comprehensive effort could be undertaken without paying a stiff political price. The UN already had vast technical and administrative resources and experience to tackle the situation. The only thing lacking was political will. There is little doubt that if the UN and its member-states can now show half the determination to combat world poverty as it showed in challenging the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, then underdevelopment will soon be a thing of the past. No matter what kind of world order we live in, so long as poverty and hunger are not eradicated, this planet will remain a fundamentally unstable place. The UN is now the perfect forum in which to make the vital political decisions, and its various agencies can implement them worldwide.

At the same time, the UN should seriously consider the question of security and sovereignty of small nations in a unipolar world order. It is not enough for small nations to rely on the goodwill of a single superpower to maintain their national independence. While UN assistance to developing nations should be without strings, allowing countries to freely choose their own way of life and path of development, the UN Security Council should also become the guarantor of those nations' independence. We certainly hope the world body would not have to sanction another Gulf-style mass intervention to uphold international law, but small nations also need to be reassured that the UN would act just as decisively if their independence was threatened.

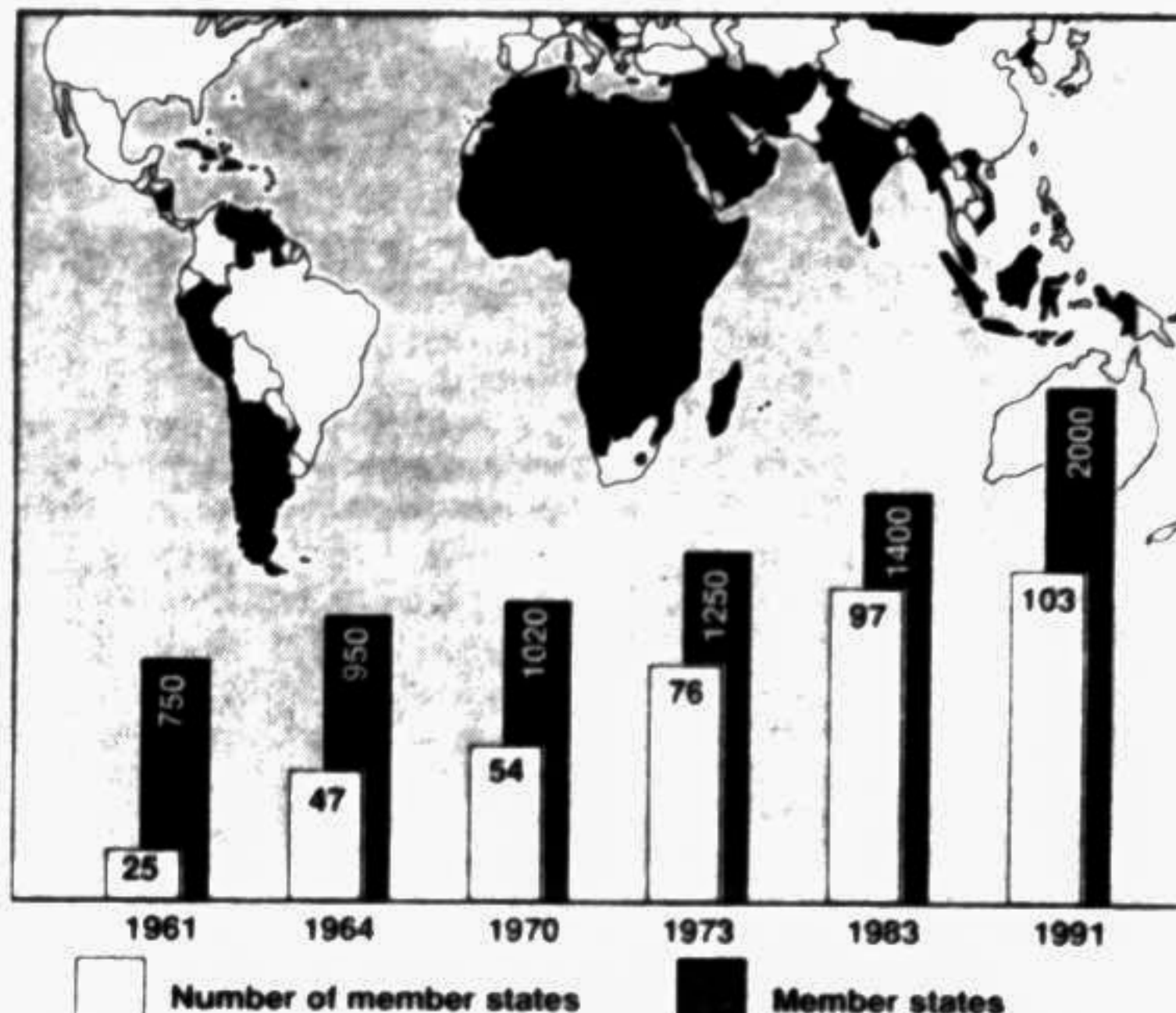
# The Spirit of NAM Refuses to Lie Down

Kabral Blay-Amihere writes from Accra

When delegates arrived in Ghana for the Non-Aligned Movement's Ministerial Conference, many critics felt they were simply assembling for the burial of a movement which acted as buffer between the ideological power blocs of East and West. What possible role could NAM play in the new world order following the ending of the Cold War? Optimism replaced funeral rites on the agenda.

## The Non-aligned Movement

Non-aligned Movement was conceived at Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, 1955. 29 nations attended. First summit was in Belgrade, 1961. Number of full members reached 103 when Mongolia was admitted at 1991 Ministerial Conference in Accra, Ghana



Non-alignment means not tying yourself with military blocs of nations or with a nation. It means trying to view things, independently and trying to maintain friendly relations with all countries. NEHRU, FIRST INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, 1961

for peace and stability. Detente, easing of tensions between the East and West, and now the virtual collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc have necessitated a re-assessment of its role.

Jerry John Rawlings, Head of State of host country Ghana, set the agenda when he told delegates from 96 countries and 18 organisations that the Accra meeting should "establish a common strategy, outline common courses of action with clear priorities, and set out timetables that reflect the urgency of the situation in the Third World."

For Rawlings, the real issues were whether "our movement can retain its sense of purpose and its moral power to influence world affairs, and whether it can solve old and new problems."

The pre-conference mood of foreign ministers and other leaders was summed up by JOC Jonah, United Nations Under-Secretary for Political Duties, representing the UN Secretary-General. "Although the Cold War has subdued considerably, the common interests of certain countries would warrant the continued relevance of NAM," he said.

Speech after speech echoed this position. Said Tram Quan Co, leader of the Vietnam delegation: "NAM is indispensable

because it embodies the noble objectives of the majority of mankind who are found in the Third World."

The 32-page Declaration credited NAM's role in ending the era of East-West Confrontation: "The profound transformation of our world has not occurred by accident. NAM has contributed its share to these changes, thus vindicating its original purposes."

With the Cold War over, the Declaration urged the international community to match its will, resources and determination against the problems of underdevelopment and poverty — the "enemies of humanity."

The role of the United Nations in the international system came up for consideration at the summit, with the Iraqi delegation criticising the part played by the Security Council during the Gulf crisis.

The Declaration said the new world order must be rooted in the principles of the UN Charter and urged democratisation in the UN, based on the respect of the sovereignty of member states.

The NAM summit, long considered a forum for lengthy speeches and rhetoric, this time sought to be different and dealt with really practical issues.

A Nigerian suggestion for a NAM bank was adopted, as was

Ghana's proposal to set up a permanent NAM secretariat to implement resolutions. The next summit of NAM heads of state, to be held in Indonesia, will further discuss these proposals.

A committee is also to be set up to monitor events in South Africa, enabling the Movement to react promptly to developments, to speed democratisation and the end of the apartheid regime.

At the end delegates praised themselves for a successful conference, but in spite of the self-congratulations, critics feel doubts about NAM's future role were not resolved. Says one diplomat: "What the delegates did was to put a 30-year-old vintage wine in a new bottle. The rhetoric was still evident, hushed only by new realities."

The Accra meeting did not answer the challenge posed by Rawlings for "evolving a common strategy" to deal with the serious economic problems most NAM members face.

Some critics believe that the Group of 77 developing countries and the United Nations system are better equipped to deal with economic issues. One consensus arrived at in Accra was that NAM should co-operate closely with the Group of 77 on these matters. One delegate said: "We can really do without the fanfare and pomp of these summits."

Misgivings notwithstanding, Accra did not become the burial ground of the Non-Aligned Movement. NAM marches on. — GEMINI NEWS

KABRAL BLAY-AMIHERE is a freelance journalist based in Accra, Ghana.

# Uncertain Future for Axed Gurkha Soldiers

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

Britain's drastic reduction of a unique fighting force has many Nepalis worried

THE Gurkhas march on as a highly trained fighting force in the British Army. But some, reluctantly, are coming home.

These soldiers, small in stature compared with their British-born comrades, are renowned for their physical fitness and fighting spirit. Off-duty, their conduct is polite and modest. But their traditional side-arm — the wicked-looking kukri or curved knife — symbolises their readiness to engage in hand-to-hand combat on the field of battle.

The morale of those about to be demobilised will not be high. They are bitterly aware that at a time when the national economy is far from booming, many are likely to face unemployment.

Here in Nepal, families that have come to count on regular remittances from serving relatives have been grumbling ever since it was announced, on July 23, that the number of Gurkha soldiers in the British Army will be cut from 8,000 to 2,500 men.

The reduced force is considered appropriate for a trimmed down British military. The Gurkhas will now be based on two infantry battalions and supporting units. As a first step, two battalions will be merged in 1992.

"It is a sad thing not just for the Gurkha brigade but also for the British Army," says Major Chinta Bahadur Gurung, the highest ranking Gurkha. A 30-year veteran, his father also served in the British Army.

Not all Nepalis are dismayed. Hiranya Lal Shrestha of the United Marxist Leninist party calls the Gurkha force a "stigma" on Nepal's non-aligned foreign policy. "All Nepalis serving in the British Gurkha should be called back", he says.

But there have been sharp reactions over the troop cuts among ordinary citizens as the Gurkha recruitment is a major source of revenue for this cash-starved kingdom.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala is certainly unhappy over the prospects of

providing livelihood and employment for the returning soldiers. "It will be of course a great burden to us," he says. But since they are trained in various skills, he adds, Nepal should be able to employ them for other purposes.

"I told the British ambassador that the Gurkhas should be reduced phase-wise so that I may be able to rehabilitate them properly," Mr Koirala says.

The Gurkhas have served with distinction in the British Army, forming an elite force often sent to trouble spots — in recent times in the Falklands and in the Gulf war. But the relaxation of world tensions, the dismantling of the Warsaw Pact, US-Soviet arms reductions and confidence-building measures between East and West have many countries —

including Britain — trimming their defence budgets. The British Army itself is undergoing a troop reduction of about 25 per cent, in contrast, the Gurkha cut has turned out to be 69 per cent. The British government has said it is exploring ways to find jobs for the men who have to leave the force.

British Prime Minister John Major proposed at the recent G-7 meeting in London the formation of a permanent peace force under the United Nations, with Gurkhas forming a part of it. The proposal failed to win a consensus of support.

Mr Major has also suggested deploying the Gurkhas to protect vulnerable monarchies in the Middle East. Gurkhas are currently serving in Brunei and Belize and, as part of the UN peace force, in Cyprus.

The Gurkha troop reduction — involving the release on to the labour market of disilluminated but highly trained soldiers — could have some security implications at a time when tensions are building up in the Himalayas. There is the pro-democracy movement in Bhutan as well as political tensions in Tibet, violent independence movements in the Punjab and Kashmir and the growing influence of communist parties in Nepal itself.

A British Embassy spokesman in Kathmandu said Gurkha units would be retained in the British Army even after 1997 when Hong Kong passes on to China. There are now 4,900 Gurkhas serving in Hong Kong.

The present garrison of British and Gurkha troops in Hong Kong will be gradually withdrawn, starting with the reduction of one battalion in 1992. Major General Peter Duffel, who served in the British Gurkhas for 30 years and now commands all British forces in Hong Kong, says

Gurkhas will not suffer disproportionately from the cuts.

He says the cuts are not as dramatic as they first seem, as there were already plans as early as 1989 to reduce Gurkha numbers in connection with British withdrawal from Hong Kong. "I am confident that they will be fair and equitable," he said of financial compensation arrangements for Gurkhas affected by the reductions.

There are now talks on ways of rehabilitating returning Gurkhas. Optimism has been expressed by Lal Kaji Gurung, chairman of the Nepal Ex-Servicemen's Association which earlier urged both Nepal and Britain to reconsider the reductions. "We are going to work with villagers on projects like the Green Revolution," he says.

Mr Gurung says the Ex-Servicemen's Association will find employment for 3,000 ex-Gurkhas on livelihood projects, and more if the projects are successful. — Depthnews Asia

### Chile

## For Exiles, Another Drama Begins

Driven out of their country by the oppressiveness of a military dictatorship, Chile's exiles face another kind of hardship on their return. Enrique Martini of IPS reports from Santiago.

UNDER the slogan 'We Are All Chileans', a government agency exhorts citizens to welcome back exiles who fled the hardships of the previous military dictatorship and are now returning home to face new ones.

The director of the National Office of Return (ONR), Jaime Esponda, said exiles who suffer from problems of basic subsistence and lack of employment were "in a situation which is not the responsibility of the government".

He asked owners of businesses to help their returning countrymen and "set aside old prejudices and fears and receive them in a patriotic spirit".

The nine-month-old ONR has helped 8,885 people come back to Chile, 86 per cent of them during the current government headed by President Patricio Aylwin.

Esponda said that, as of

July, 48 per cent of the heads of households who came to the ONR office were unemployed, meaning that 1,277 returned families were without income and "living in very precarious conditions".

After the military coup d'etat on Sep. 11, 1973 against socialist President Salvador Allende, some half a million Chileans fled to 50 countries in Latin America, Europe, Asia, Africa and North America, according to humanitarian organisations.

Barriers to the return of the last group of some 3,000 exiles, maintained by the regime of Gen. Augusto Pinochet, were lifted shortly before the October 1988 plebiscite in which Chilean voters rejected

Pinochet's bid for another eight-year term.

Most of the exiles were legally permitted to return long before that date but were reluctant to do so because they were unsure of political and economic conditions in Chile.

"They all want to know how to come back and whether they should do so or not," said Catholic bishop Tomas

Gonzalez who is in charge of the exile programme of the Bishops' Conference.

Since the plebiscite, slightly more than 20,000 people have approached the ONR for help.

On a recent European tour, Gonzalez told Chilean exiles in Europe they should "prepare their return very well."

He warned them of the

possibility that they would "feel like exiles in their own country" and that the economic situation remained difficult.

The largest group of exiles is in Sweden, which is home for 35,000 Chilean exiles.

Esponda called exile "an archetypal mark of the division of the Chilean family which we all wish to overcome."

He said the ONR, which was criticised at the time of its creation, provides the returnees alternatives in terms of work, education, and social benefits.

A law which took effect in late August grants returned exiles the right to exercise their professions, based on degrees

granted in exile. Chile does not recognise professionals trained outside the country.

Most of those who go to the ONR for help are between 30 and 40 years of age, and 45 per cent have college education, Esponda said.

Another proposal still pending in Congress would allow exiles to bring back five thousand dollars' worth of household goods, 10 thousand dollars' worth of professional equipment, and a vehicle, all free of import duties.

The governments of Germany, Denmark, Holland, Norway and Sweden have promised US\$5 million in support of the exiles' assistance office. Only one million dollars of the pledged amount has arrived.

The ONR also receives assistance from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as well as the International Organisation for Migrations.

### To the Editor

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.

#### "Dhaka Day by Day"

Sir, I am a regular reader of your paper and am pleased to say that I am satisfied with the coverage of national and international affairs as well as the quality of the articles printed in your paper.

The column of "Dhaka day by day" is sometimes both interesting and informative. The articles are often based on entrepreneurs and housewives who have taken the initiative to start small business from their homes. But I have noticed that the addresses of the workplaces or outlets are not always given and therefore would request that the respective addresses be mentioned in the articles to enable the read-

ers to become patrons of such endeavours.

I would also like to know if anyone can contribute to this column or do you have set writers.

Shameen Beg,  
500M Rd 8, Dharmandi,  
Dhaka.

(We accept freelance contributions for the column "Dhaka Day by Day". — Editor)

#### J & Z mis-translation

Sir, I have been dreaming for years of expressing sentiments in respect of the above subject; but fortunately for me, Mr Bashir Al Helal has done it in a far better manner than I could have done, for which I convey through your

columns my humble gratitude. While dwelling on the subject, it is interesting to note that I have met hundreds of ethnic Bangladeshis who are unable to pronounce 'J'; instead, they use 'Z' which is alien to Bangla, at least alphabetically. For instance, I have met with several who not only pronounce, but also spell 'Raza' in place in Raja.

Another matter which I would like to discuss for Mr Bashir Al Helal, especially as he is associated with the Bangla Academy, is one of mis-translation.

The English Oak has been praised in both prose and verse, and ships made of the sturdy Oak wood helped England to 'Rule the waves'. But it is most unfortunate that 'Oak' is translated into Bangla as 'Bot' which is a wild variety of fig (Anjeer in Arabic), and its wood is not only unusable as timber, but also of very low grade as fuel.

Similarly, 'Olive' is a fruit grown in the Mediterranean climatic zone, and Olive Oil is widely in use as a cooking oil

all through the Middle East including southern Europe. But again, unfortunately, it has been translated into Bangla as 'Jalpai' which is akin to the olive oil in resemblance and its acid taste. If it is impossible to coin a name for Olive in Bangla, we could have borrowed the Arabic name 'Zaitun' as we have already borrowed several thousand other words from Arabic, Persian and Urdu.

Will Mr Bashir Al Helal and his associates in the Bangla Academy please do something to correct these and similar other aberrations in translation?

Anwar Firoz  
17, Babu Khan Road, Khulna.

#### Austerity

Sir, On September 16, in an advertisement in your paper Bangladesh Management Development Centre has invited "tenders" for renovation and maintenance works of its administrative building which is to be completed at a cost of Taka four lacs seventythree

thousand eight hundred only!

When the country faces dire consequences due to the April cyclonic destruction and the present flood situation how can BMDC think of spending such a big amount for not so urgently necessary 'renovation'? One would be nearly amazed to see the Centre at present with its newly decorated rooms etc. which must have cost quite some lacs taka! The newly set computers, air-coolers in different rooms, costly carpets, bath-rooms fitted with glazed tiles, will all speak for themselves. In your very paper several letters appeared about BMDC affairs. But it seems no one is concerned nor the proper authorities have much to do.

What is shocking is that such things go on when it is said Justice Abdur Rahman Chowdhury hoped (Star, page 2, 18-9-91) — that for establishment of democratic values this 'government would keep its commitment to the people and try to maintain maximum austerity at all levels'. Why not the 'investigating reporters'

visit some of the government, semi-government and autonomous organizations more frequently to let the people have a real picture about how 'public money' is being used to make 'austerity' fruitful!

Ruhul Amin,  
Dhaka.

#### Poverty alleviation

Sir, With much interest I read the article titled 'World's poor likely to be worst victims of environmental dangers' by Nazmul Ashraf in your issue of Sept 20.

Ashraf has creditably highlighted the issue of ecological degradation due to deforestation, high population growth, greenhouse effect etc. I fully endorse the view of introducing comprehensive poverty alleviation programme under democratic and decentralised order.

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