Dhaka, Friday, November 1, 1991

#### Flood and Embankments

A US specialist on Bangladesh floods, Peter Rogers has warned that extensive construction of embankments would have disastrous impact unless adequate drainage measures were installed. A professor of environmental engineering at Harvard University, Dr. Rogers said that engineers involved in building coastal embankments had also not given sufficient thought to the problem of sediment build-up on channels flushing out rivers into the Bay of Bengal.

These worries, which are at the core of the most serious long-term problem facing Bangladesh, are not of Dr. Rogers's alone. A number of Bangladeshi researchers have also voiced concerns about construction of embankments along the coast or in the interior without sufficient thought given to environmental issues.

There are many areas in the country surrounded by embankments designed to keep flood waters out. The land in those areas is invariably lower than rivers flowing around them, often as a result of ill-planned embankment construction. Consequently, once an embankment is breached - as so often they are - and the low-lying land within it flooded, the water has no way of getting out. The resultant water-logging causes as much damage, if not more, than normal flooding would have, had there been no embankment. Also roads and highways built haphazardly through rural areas have contributed to blocking normal water flows and causing floods and water-logging.

Now, that may well seem too simplistic an explanation for an issue of such complexity. But the question then arises is : have we done enough research into the feasibility of embankments as a flood-control instrument? Have there been much study or debate about the environmental damage such construction could cause, including lifting of river levels above the surrounding landmass? How much do we really know about our coastal embankments and their effects? The answer to all that is a negative one. Or at least, if there has been a great deal of study and debate, the results have remained known to a privileged few and not to the public at large. As a result, the public has no way of knowing if constructions did in fact comply with findings of such studies.

At present, the massive Flood Action Plan (FAP) is nearing its survey phase. But there is some apprehension in academic circles that the FAP may be heavily biased towards physical construction.

Flood control is perhaps the most crucial area of public interest in Bangladesh today, and as such, deserves to be made the subject of the widest possible debate, involving people with as many views and angles of logic as possible. The public must be satisfied that whatever decision that may be taken, would be taken with the best long-term interest of the country in mind.

### Get the Pests, Prevent the Damage

There are no reliable figures for what the recent all-engulfing floods in the northern districts have done to the standing agricultural crop. It must have been a case of huge loss amounting by no means to less than 40 per cent of what could be harvested had there been no waters. Now there is reliable report from the north that 80 per cent of the paddy to be harvested in a matter of days has been destroyed by a new species of insecticide-resistant pests and that the fields to be reaped somewhat later in the first days of December - the 'Aman' mainstay, that is - are also under attack of the same pests.

The above is sufficient to panic all far-seeing people. We do not fear that our government would panic and lose its head. We would rather have it to take the things for what they are - very openly — and desist from politicising the looming challenge. They must prepare for a great fight with not only food shortage but more so with possible breakdown of an efficient and just distribution flow. Even a small blockage here or there could end up in high degree of human suffering.

The brown fly-sized pests — 'badami gachh phoring' - are lapping up the white sap-like kernel in the paddy shells and even rendering the hay stalks unfit for cattle consumption. And they are happily going about their job as all available pesticides are failing to take any effect on them. If the government is interested in saving the crop that hasn't already been destroyed, - one cannot conceive of other choices for them — they will need to broach the problem in a mighty big way serious and sincere all the way. The size of the problem precludes it to be an exclusive baby of the Agricultural Extension Department. Perhaps dispatching a crack team of top entomologists and other agricultural scientists to the spot would be eminently helpful. That team must be able to find answers and cause action before the exercise becomes irrelevant and unpaying. Any sensible person would expect government to act on the problem in a matter of days.

Recognition of the problem at hand is the first step towards coming to grips with it. Our officials do not have a particularly bright record in this respect. And then again they had to be told that situation in the northern districts warranted urgent action on their part. We sincerely urge upon the government to take care that in the war against the pests they do not waste any time in taking effective actions. For in that case the damages would be beyond any costs to repair.

## Budget 1991-92: Alternative Thoughts

HILE presenting the Budget for 1991 - 92 financial year the Finance Minister said that for want of local currency no government in the past had been able to utilise foreign loan received/ promised by donor countries. He emphasised that internal resources shall have to be increased in order to meet the requirement of Revenue Budget as also to contribute to annual Development Budget. Any reasonable man has to appreciate any intention to increase internal resources, but may well differ sharply on the process and/or steps thus adapted including imposition of new taxes. In order to contribute to

the extent of 14% to the development budget the Finance Minister has placed a surplus revenue budget of Tk. 419.84 with a new tax of Tk. 250 crore. In addition to new taxes the steps he has taken to increase internal resources are (i) introduction of developed system for collection of taxes: (ti) easy and simple procedure for payment of taxes: (iii) proper check against evasion of taxes; (iv) widening of tax areas: (v) introduction of developed system of tax on imported goods; (vi) enhance ment of efficiency of tax ad ministration etc. And to implement these the government

HE most populous cou-

count its people. The military

government of Presi-dent

Ibrahim Babangida is carrying

out a census as a preliminary

to the promised transition to

is Alhaji Shehu Musa, chairman

of the National Population

Commission. His position is

unenviable. He knows that

controversy over a previous

census helped to hasten the

collapse of the first republic

and the overthrow of the gov-

ernment of General Yakubu

1991 census could put in jeop-

ardy the whole programme for

transition to civilian rule. But

Musa says: "I am not just op-

timistic. I am confident that

the census will not only be

successful - it will be the last

to be riddled with the contro-

since independence in 1960

have caused trouble and the

real population total of Nigeria

remains a mystery. The yard-

stick for all planning purposes

remains the obsolete 1963 fig-

ure of 55 million. A provisional

figure of 77.76 million was

posted after the 1973 census,

which was eventually can-

project a figure of more than

100 million, but the respected

economic Professor Samuel

lion is a farce. We are not more

was conducted in 1863, a year

after the British colonised

Lagos. Another took place in

1911 and a third was held in

1921, seven years after the

protectorates of Northern and

many from the Third World

are questioning the right of

Western states to formulate

and impose this order on the

States is taking the lead in

defining the proposed new

order, Malaysian Prime

Minister Mahathir Mohamad

warned that Western nations

do not have the moral or legit-

Nations general assembly re-

cently, Mahathir said "a few"

nations on their own have

taken it upon themselves to

determine the new world

order, (but) how can we be as-

sured that a new world order

formulated by any one country

or group of countries will be

the post-Cold War era was a

recurring theme reflected in

the general assembly speeches

Ghana's Secretary for

of others, including China,

The proposed new order in

Addressing the United

imate right to do so.

good for everyone?"

Venezuela and Ghana.

Observing that the United

international community.

"a new world order",

The first census in Nigeria

Aluko says: "Talk of 100 mil-

than 70 million.

United Nations experts

celled.

All three censuses held

versy of inflated figures."

Any major dispute over the

In charge of the operation

civilian rule in 1992.

ntry in Africa, Nigeria, is

about to try again to

has decided — (a) setting up of a tax office each in all new districts: (ii) division of existing tax offices: (iii) creation of new areas for taxation; (iv) formation of a strong committee to find out persons and/or institutions eligible for taxation: (v) setting up of separate training and inspecting division in order to increase the efficiency of internal administration; (vt) creation of a few post of appellate commissioner to bring discipline in dispensation of justice and setting up of appellate tribunal. The Finance Minister said that given the "sincere political will" and if steps proposed can be "translated into practice" internal resources would provide for fund more than expected. But if there is lack of political will and if steps suggested

stand assumably at zero. **Avoiding New Tax** in reply to the question as to whether new taxation to the tune of Tk. 250 crore imposed in the budget could have been avoided, I may say with all emphasis that yes, it could have been. The Finance Minister has frankly admitted in his

cannot be implemented in

letters and spirit contribution

to the development budget will

by Muhammed Ayenuddin

speech that a lion's share of the revenue budget is spent to meet the loss incurred by the government owned industrial units and trading concerns. While citing example he has confessed that loss of Railway over a few years is Tk. 150 crore each year. According to him Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, Textile Mills Corporation and other government owned industrial units follow the same suit. Total loss of all these institutions each year is to the tune of about Tk. 1000 erore. The Finance Minister has further admitted that this year also an amount of Tk. 683 crore has been earmarked for providing subsidy to the government owned industrial units and trading concerns. In addition to all these losses and subsidies a huge amount of foreign loan has been invested in these units. But the nation gets no return from them. However, the Minister has not suggested any step either as to how the colossal losses incurred by the government owned units could be stopped and when it would really be stopped.

More confession of the guilt

cannot exonerate one from the damage done. So the government must come with the practical solutions to the problems the nation today is badly faced with. Our economically down-trodden people are neither ready nor capable of shouldering huge burden of old and new taxes. They have suffered much since independence and further sufferings will lead to a situation one may not even imagine of. So the suggestion is to sell outright through share-market all those government owned industrial and trading units for which Tk. 683 crore subsidy has been earmarked in this year's budget. This action, if taken will bring twofold results - (a) The nation will be saved from giving subsidy of Tk. 683 crore in addition to their recurring losses and (b) as a result of this saving no new (amounting to Tk. 250 crore) will be required to impose, for even meeting with the proposed new taxes we shall be left with a surplus of Tk. 433

Railway, Biman

Organisations like Railway and Biman etc. can also be

vate organisations only to save the nation from colossal losses. By adapting this process government can earn a huge some of money which can easily be invested in our development budget. Thus we can get rid of unusual dependence on donors and their unwanted guidance. It may not be out of place to mention that if affluent most America can sale out government owned Amtrack Passenger Train to meet the deficit of their revenue budget why the world's one of the poorest countries like Bangladesh feel shy to do it ! The era of autocratic rule ended yielding place to democratic one to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of our economically depressed people. So the duty of the democratically elected government in this direction is enormous. They are to be pragmatic. Neither emotion nor sentiment be the basis of any action. Only reason should get the uppermost in arriving at a decision.

gradually handed over to pri-

It is again a matter of great concern for any prudent citizen to find out that revenue budget of Bangladesh is based on taxes imposed on imported dangerous consequences:- (a) The nation has to import almost all goods from pin to plane in order to support the revenue budget causing serious hindrance to the newly born local industries who are capable of producing many goods now brought to the country through import but incapable to contest with them in the market. (b) If there is instability in the international market for any reason or war starts between donor countries, import of goods may not be possible and in that case there shall positively occur great deficit in revenue budget

goods. Such taxes have two

And deficit in revenue budget means there shall be no money to make payment of the salary of government and semigovernment staff and other incidental cost of the administration. Meeting such a situation government will then have to have printed paper-notes causing uncalled for inflation to the further distress of the common masses. So we shall have to find out ways and means to produce export oriented goods in the country so that we can earn foreign exchange enough to support our revenue and development bud-

(To be concluded tomor-

# Where Counting the People Raises the Political Dust

by Chuks Iloegbunam

Two development in Nigeria are causing apprehension because of the effect they may have on the transition to civilian rule planned for later next year. One is the holding of a national census due to take place in the coming weeks. The other is the sudden decision of the Babangida government to form nine new states, making a total of 30 and causing initial unrest. The census is the biggest worry because previous attempts to hold a census have all come to grief.

Southern Nigeria were amalgamated by the British colonial administrator Frederick

A census in 1952-3 came up with a figure of 31 million. The first post-independence count in 1962 suffered from poor logistics and an all-male enumeration team being denied access into Muslim purdahs in the far North. The exercise was cancelled without the figures being published.

When the 30-month civil war ended in 1970 a ninepoint programme by the Gowon government for the return to civilian rule included conduct of a national census.

Sir Adetokunbo Ademola. retired Chief Justice of the Federation, became chairman of the National Census Board and the count took place at the end of 1973. Five months later Gowon announced the provisional figure of 79.76 million.

It showed that the six northern state has risen 72.4 per cent since 1963 while the overall increase was only 43.3 per cent. The West had posted a fall of six per cent while the East had grown by 11 per cent. The statistics laughed in the face of all demographic calcu-

Politically the accuracy of the count was not the main point of dispute. To the South what mattered more was that the North, which had 29.6

million population in 1963 had gained a further 22.2 million (nearly double) in ten years while the population of the South, put at 28.1 million in 1963 had appreciated by only

Population growth in the region has generally risen more in the South than in the North. How could the new figures demonstrated a reverse trend when Eastern Nigeria had one of the densest con-

SOKOTO

KEBBI

COSHUN

OGUN

LAGG

Bight of Benin

**M**2502

KWARA

380,000.

centrations of people in African and the capital Lagos, had phenomenal growth? If the 1973 figures held, it

meant that the long politically dominant North would now have its political position entrenched.

When Gowon was thrown out his successor, General Murtala Muhammed, cancelled the census. As time passed it became clear that the exercise had been a national swindle.

BORNO

BAUCH

TARABA

W PLATEAU

CAPITAL

KOGL TERRITORY

more successful? Ademola and Alhaji Ahmadu Kurfi, secretary of the defunct National Census Board, says "a good head count in Nigeria is hardly possible as long as the allocation of revenuc and representation in parliament are tied to census figures." In March a trial, census was held. Kurfi told the press in August that the results had been rigged and he predicted that the full exercise could see a worse distortion since the

General Olusegun Obasanjo

head of state from 1976, 79,

wrote in his autobiography that

the 1973 figures were scan-

dalously inflated and that

Gowon had been promptly in-

Can the next census be any

formed at the time.

to have the highest inflation (of figures)." As well as the census, peaceful transition to civilian rule also depends on the state structure of the country. This

many groups with vested in-

terest would be engaged in "a

sort of race as to who is going

has just been changed again. In 1987, when there were 19 states, the government created Akwa Ibom and Katsina States. Although this fell far short of expectation, Babangida said that no more agitation for new states would be tolcrated for the remainder of his ad-

ministration. Three years later he re-

lented. It had become clear that many ethnic groups and minorities were disadvantaged. When word was put about that more states were to be crated after all, all sorts of interest groups began canvassing in the newspapers for the creation of every conceivably

On August 27 Babangida marked his sixth year in power by announcing nine new states, making Nigeria a country of 30 provinces. In the South the igbo states of Anambra and lmowere split, the one yielding Enugu State and the second Abia State.

Oil-rich Bendel State, the oldest, created by legislation in 1963 out of the former Benin and Delta provinces, was also split in two : Delta and Edo. In the Yoruba country a fifth state was formed : Oshun.

Kogi State was carved out of parts of Benue and Kwara States. Adamawa and Taraba States emerged from the former Gongola State, hitherto about the largest geographically. In the far north Kebbi State was carved out of Sokoto, Jigawa State from Kano and

Yobe State from Borne. Broadly, equity seemed to have emerged from the exercise. Reactions were extreme. Some people celebrated. Others went on the rampage not because new states had been crated but because boundaries were unanticipated and unlikely capitals had been

After a bout of violence new apprehension has arson as to what could follow the census.

, - GEMINI NEWS CHUKS ILOEGBUNAM is a London based freelance journalist. He is a former assistant

editor of Newswatch Magazine,

This would include the

#### HILE they agree the world may be ripe for Third World

### A Challenge to New World Order

Foreign Affairs Obed Y. Asamoah said "the new world order does not call for the capitulation of the Third World to any superpower even in a unipolar world."

He added that "the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) has no room for those who covet the distinction of being wards of superpowers".

As the world moves towards the 21st century, said China's Foreign Minister Qian Qichen, the people of all countries are confronted with the question, "where is our world going and what kind of a new international order should be established?"

Any proposed new international order, he noted, should conform to the principles and purposes of only one institution: the United Nations and its charter.

Developing nations agree that a "new world order" needs to be established but question the right of Western nations to define and impose such order on the rest of the world. Thalif Deen of IPS reports from New York.

assembly was meeting at a time when a new international order was being defined, Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez told delegates that the importance of such an exceptional time must not be weakened or tarnished.

"Let us move now from East-West confrontation to a North-South dialogue that will lead to a single united world," he said, calling on the United States and Cuba to end their confrontation which began in the context of the Cold War.

"Let us have confidence that Cuba will open itself to the Emphasising that the universal concept of democ-

racy as we would all wish, and that the US will open a dialogue that puts an end to sanctions that have lost all justification and validity," he told the

assembly.

Speakers pointed out that if the new world order is to be accepted by the international community, countries should respect each other's sovereignty, treat each other as equals and try to seek common ground while putting aside differences.

As the Malaysian Prime Minister told the assembly, "if democracy is to be the only acceptable system of govern-

ment within states, shouldn't there be also democracy between the states of the world?" "In the United Nations, we

are equal, but five are more equal than the rest of the 166," he said referring to the veto powers of Britain, France, China, the United States and the Soviet Union — the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Clearly, the states of the world are not equal - not in the United Nations, not any where, he added.

Third World states also say there needs to be an end to the arms race in the new world order, as well as the reduction and elimination of all weapons of mass destruction.

Mahathir told the assembly that the United Nations, which is playing the role of inspector in Iraq, should extend that role to overseeing "the destruction of all nuclear weaworld's five major nuclear

pons everywhere."

powers - the permanent members of the Security Council - and countries such as Israel and South Africa, believed to possess nuclear It is also felt that the pro-

posed new world order should end the widening gap between North and South. The Chinese foreign minis-

ter said it was necessary to establish, step by step, a new international economic order. Ghana's foreign affairs sec-

retary was more explicit: "The 85 per cent of the world's population who live on 30 per cent of the world's income are not asking for charity."

In a new world order, he said, developing nations should seek better prices for their commodity exports, favourable terms of trade, low interest rates and a reduction of debt burdens.

"Although the ending of the Cold War has benefited peace all over the world," he argued, "much remains to be done to secure this peace."

weekly drama and drama

series which earned a wide

#### Imported books

Sir, In a news item from Chittagong dated 10th October, 1991 it has been reported that Mr. Abdullah Al-Noman, while inaugurating a book fair informed the audience that a Cabinet decision has been taken to ban import of all foreign books, excepting books needed for research and reference. If the above mentioned decision is given effect to, very few books can be imported in this country. If the governing idea is to prevent books, journals and other publications, which are against the cultural mores and moral standards of this country coming here, there may be some reasons for it. In this case those harmful books, etc. can be

specified by Government order/ orders and banned to enter this country.

It is in our interest to import books from other countries for education, pleasure and enlightenment. The proposed ban may be in the interest of our publishers and printers but for the vast population of readers, scholars and students, it would deal a mor-

Shahabuddin Mahtab Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka

#### World celebration of Eid

Sir, The Eid moon sighting, which doesn't occur simultaneously everywhere, is a great problem for celebrating holy

Eid on the same day across the world. It has been observed that Eid is being celebrating by the Muslims of different countries on different dates which is indecent and virtually not in conformity of Islamic law. This problem has been continuing over the decades. But there seemed none to solve this.

However, looking into the problem and towards strengthening the image of Islam, a great saint of present Muslim world, Sufi Samrat Hazrat Shah Dewanbagi (M. A.) has found an excellent solution to the problem. He has rescarched the Holy Quran and the Hadith including Fekah for a long period. At last he has been successful in working out an eight-year-cycle calendar

which used to be followed at the time of Hazrat Omar (R). Recently the Weekly Dewanbag published on article titled "Sattyi ki akidiney Eid kara shambhab? " laying down details of the said calendar. This may lead us to celebrating Eid as well as other important religious functions on the same day across the world.

Md. Didar Hossain Miah Manager, Janata Bank Palash Branch, Narsinghdi.

BTV drama Sir, After quite a long time BTV has presented a humourous weekly drama on October 24 which I believe, has been enjoyed by all. My heartiest greetings and thanks

to the playwright, the producer, the director and the artists of the drama. The incaptivating performance by the actors and actresses deserve a bagful of praises and compliments.

After a few barren months, BTV viewers spent an hour in laughter and enjoyment. In recent days, drama fans are disappointed and frustrated at the lackluster performance and poor stories presented by the BTV. It seems the dramatists and drama producers of BTV do not bother about the need and taste of the people. Entertainment is the last thing they intend to give the view-

There was a time when we witnessed a good variety of

reputation. Those dramas normally embodied with sociopolitical panorama, reflecting the hopes and aspirations of the general masses, left a touch of humour and entertainment in the hearts of the people. Even people of West Bengal used to talk very highly of BTV dramas. Things have turned topsy-turvy since then. It has aptly been said by a

spend time with trashes. This right attitude, I presume, the BTV authorities must exemplify.

Hubert Francis Sarkar Stngtola, Dhaka

writer that it is better to see a

masterpiece twice than to