

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.

These worries, which are at the core of the most serious long-term problem facing Bangladesh, are not of Dr. Rogers's alone.

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.

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?

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.

Get the Pests, Prevent the Damage

There are no reliable figures for what the recent all-engulfing floods in the northern districts 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

While 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.

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; (ii) 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) enhancement of efficiency of tax administration etc.

Budget 1991-92: Alternative Thoughts

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.

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.

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.

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.

Railway, Biman Organisations like Railway and Biman etc. can also be gradually handed over to private organisations only to save the nation from colossal losses.

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 goods. Such taxes have two dangerous consequences:— (a) The nation has to import almost all goods from pin to plant 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.

(To be concluded tomorrow)

Where Counting the People Raises the Political Dust

The most populous country in Africa, Nigeria, is about to try again to count its people. The military government of President Ibrahim Babangida is carrying out a census as a preliminary to the promised transition to civilian rule in 1992.

In charge of the operation 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 government of General Yakubu Gowon.

Any major dispute over the 1991 census could put in jeopardy the whole programme for transition to civilian rule. But Musa says: "I am not just optimistic. I am confident that the census will not only be successful — it will be the last to be riddled with the controversy of inflated figures."

All three censuses held since independence in 1960 have caused trouble and the real population total of Nigeria remains a mystery. The yardstick for all planning purposes remains the obsolete 1963 figure of 55 million.

United Nations experts project a figure of more than 100 million, but the respected economic Professor Samuel Aluko says: "Talk of 100 million is a farce. We are not more than 70 million."

The first census in Nigeria 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

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.

Southern Nigeria were amalgamated by the British colonial administrator Frederick Lugard. 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.

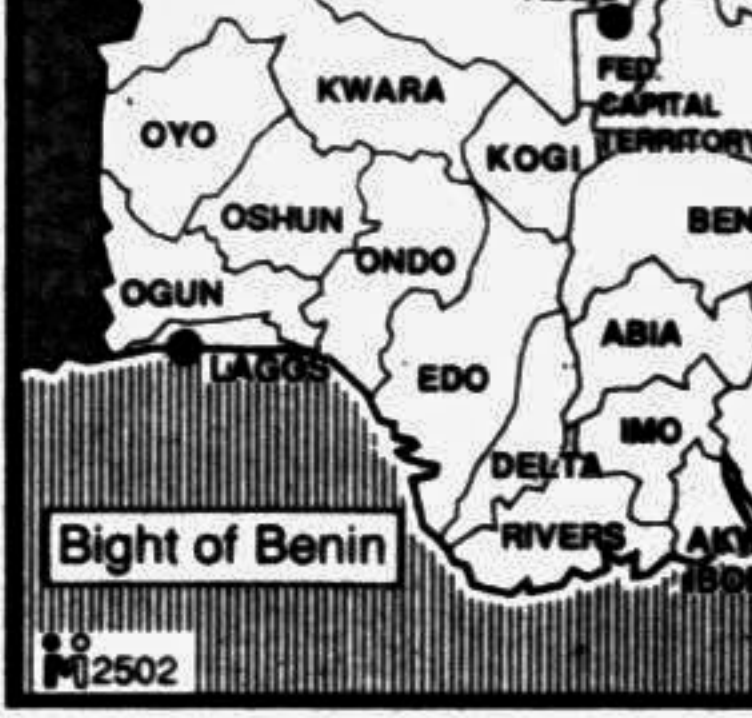
When the 30-month civil war ended in 1970 a nine-point programme by the Gowon government for the return to civilian rule included conduct of a national census. Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, retired Chief Justice of the Federation, became chairman of the National Census Board and the count took place at the end of 1973.

It showed that the six northern states had 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 calculations.

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 380,000. 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 concentrations of people in Africa and the capital Lagos, had phenomenal growth?

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



General Olusegun Obasanjo, head of state from 1976-79, wrote in his autobiography that the 1973 figures were scandalously inflated and that Gowon had been promptly informed at the time.

Can the next census be any 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 revenue 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 many groups with vested interest would be engaged in 'a sort of race as to who is going to have the highest inflation (of figures).'"

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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 Borno.

Broadly, equity seemed to have emerged from the exercise. Reactions were extreme. Others went on the rampage — not because new states had been created but because boundaries were unanticipated and unlikely capitals had been named.

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

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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 Non-aligned 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.

Emphasising that the 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.

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.

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 anywhere, he added.

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To the Editor...

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.

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 mortal blow.

Eid on the same day across the world. It has been observed that Eid is being celebrated 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.

which used to be followed at the time of Hazrat Omar (R). Recently the Weekly Dewanbag published an article titled "Sattiy ki aqidney Eid kara shambhah?" 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.

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

weekly drama and drama series which earned a wide reputation. Those dramas normally embodied with socio-political 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.