### **World Bank on Family** Planning

At a time when Bangladesh needs all the help it can generate from outside to intensify its family planning activities, sharp differences have reportedly arisen between government here and donor agencies, including the World Bank (WB), over the strategy followed by the authorities in Dhaka. Unless quickly resolved, these differences may adversely affect not only our fund-raising efforts but also the family planning programme as a whole. However, in reaching an understanding or rather a full agreement— with WB, we must not evade the issues in question or simply mark time for one side or the other to change its mind.

Judging by a report published in this paper yesterday, the differences touch on some fundamental issues. It is said that after a recent mission to Bangladesh, when it reviewed the progress of population-related projects, financed by the Bank and other donors, a WB-led team has advised the Government here to change its strategy in controlling the population explosion. The change sought by the visiting team, obviously backed by headquarters of various donor agencies, is that instead of adhering to current reversible methods in family planning, such as the use of pills, condoms and IUD, Bangladesh should turn to the irreversible ones, including the highly unpopular practice (atleast in South Asia). of vasectomy. There is no suggestion that the change-over should be a total one. What is asked for is a shift in emphasis, a switch in focus. However, there is a hint that the new focus should provide the basis of the proposed strategy and that this change would influence the thinking among donors on the question of assistance to population-related projects in this country.

The Government of Bangladesh has reportedly expressed serious reservations about the WB's advice. These reservations are undoubtedly based on several valid reasons. In our view, the performance of successive regimes here in reducing our population growth has fallen below all expectations, especially when it is compared to that of Thailand, Indonesia and even India. This is attributed to a number of lapses and failures, such as the weaknesses in the overall programme, inadequate family planning activities in remote rural areas, lack of availability of population control devices and poor co-ordination with the community press and the electronic media. Unless the authorities have raised the level of their performance in the existing activities, thus realising the fullest potential of the on-going programme, any switch in the focus would be premature and, in socio-economic terms, dangerous. There may be no question of any of the donor agencies asking for compulsory application of irreversible methods in family planning, with couples being either forced or bribed to accept the surgical practices which were disastrously tried by the late Sanjay Gandhi in the early seventies in parts of India. The problem is, any publicity given to the government's decision to introduce irreversible family planning methods on wide-spread basis would produce serious repercussions and could even weaken popular support for the on-going programme. Such thoughts are bound to be uppermost in the mind of the popularly-elected government. They should certainly be taken into serious consideration by the World Bank and other aid agencies.

in immediate terms, the best way of tackling what is rightly regarded as the country's "Number One" problem lies in putting in a new life into our existing efforts with increased vigour, thoroughness and dedication and, in a longer perspective, in solving our economic problems, ranging from illiteracy to poor hospital facilities in rural areas.

### A Safer Environment

Inaugurating a seminar on "Engineering for Disaster Mitigation," the minister concerned Abdullah Al-Noman called upon the country's engineers to put their efforts in preserving environmental balance that hopefully will greatly contribute to minimising natural disasters. His emphasis on the role engineers play in a country's overall topographical changes, particularly at a time when huge projects are coming up in everincreasing number, is appropriate.

It is no wonder that the environment issue today figures so prominently at various international fora. For the peril man has been facing, since the discovery of a hole in the ozone layer, is common. In the developed countries, however, the problem though appears to be more acute, programmes involve large funds. And the choice is indeed limited both for the developed and developing countries. One qualitative improvement in the first world, however, is that the common people have become not only conscious enough but also involved in fighting environmental degradation .

Sadly, the point is often missed here by planners and policy-makers — as the minister has done in this case. If the engineers have a role to play in the creation of a safe environment, the commonman can also contribute, in no small way. to a less endangered ecology through his everyday practices. Nowhere is the mindless, irresponsible behaviour of people and awful management of garbage and sewerage more manifest than in the cities where, it is believed, the more conscious citizens live. Therefore the problem has to be squarely faced. A social movement is what stands to adequately address the problem.

As for the disaster management, which is interrelated with environment, engineers and scientists must work together to suggest the ways and means capable of matching the challenge. Even then, it is the policy-makers who should spell out the need and throw their weight behind the formulation and implementation of programmes to be taken. Apart from the logistics what proves to be decisive in evolving a disaster preparedness is the will to take a humane approach to the whole problem.

### RISING TENSION ON THE BORDER

# It's Time to Support Battle for Democracy

ECENT happenings along the Bangla-desh Myanmar border appear to be following virtually the same pattern as before except that the Myanman army seems to have lost its bearing completely.

With the advent of the first Ne Win Government in the 1959, the local army commander launched a major operation against Arakanese Muslims. This was designed to boost the sagging morale of the Myanman army and placate the non-Muslim Arakanese.

The Naaf River border at that time was completely open from our side with the sole exception of a small police outpost at Tcknaf. On the Myanmar side they maintained a fairly substantial presence with a number of patrol boats and other mechanised vessels. The genera Myanman perception of the border contained an element of suspicion. They supposed that the open border policy was designed to promote smuggling of rice from the Arukan side and also to lend marginal support to the Arakanese Muslims in their comings and goings across the border. The latter was based on a small incident at the time of partition involving a delegation from Arakan who waited on Mohammed Ali Jinnah with a plea to include the northern Arakan in the proposed territorial boundary of East Pakistan. The fact that Mr Jinnah refused to even receive the delegation did little to defuse the resultant hostile reaction.

It was against this general background that the army was deployed to commit loot, rape and arson mainly in the districts of Maungdow and Buthidong in the hope that their operations would divert the political opposition of the Arakanese away from the Myanman to the Arakan Muslims. Two things went wrong in the simplistic calculations of the Myanman forecs. The scale of the operation itself coupled with the inhumanity with which it was carried out sent cold shivers down the spine of even the most carried out sent cold shivers down the spine of even the most rabid anti-Muslims. The expected local support failed to materialize.

in Myanmar by Kaiser Rasheed

Moreover, the reaction of Pakistan under martial law was sharp and swift instead of the expected apathy towards a remote and neglected border. Forces were deployed and reinforced by gunboats patrolling the Nauf itiver using the most modern destroyer of the Pakistan Navy anchored off Saint Martin's Island as a base.

It became abundantly clear that unless favourable conditions were created for the immediate return of refugees who had streamed

tried once more to test the resolve of Bangladesh almost as if to reassure themselves that things had in fact changed since the last time. The pattern was the same-loot, rape etc. followed by mass exodus. The response from our side, to their upper surprise was the same as before sharp and predictable. They were told in no uncertain terms that the refugees had to go back and the responsibility for creating conditions in which this could happen was

Myanman armed forces have chosen to launch an attack against a manned outpost on our side of the border: The only thing that this indicates is a sense of desperation on their part. They need to boost their morale in the face of total rejection by their own people and universal condemnation of atrocities committed by them suppressing a clear verdict in favour of a democratic government ...

consequences could be far more serious than they had bargained for. The military presence was such that the possibility of armed conflict along the border could not be ruled out. It was clear that in such an event the pride of the Myanman forces would suffer very considerably. Faced with this double jeopardy-on local support and imminent prospects of a bloody nose, General Ne Win did not hesitate in accepting Field Marshal Ayub Khan's invitation to meet with him in Karachi. In the course of this meeting a communique was signed setting up a "Joint Commission of Inquiry." This resulted in a rapid return to normalcy and restoration of friendly relations between the two countries which endured for more than 20 years.

Again in the early 80s, with increasing internal pressures and strife, the Myanman army

across the border into our territory, the entirely that of the Myanman Government. The normalization process was smooth and expeditious and complete tranquility returned to the border areas once again.

> It is interesting that now for the first time Myanman armed forces have chosen to launch an attack against a manned outpost on our side of the border. The only thing that this indicates is a sense of desperation on their part. They need to boost their morale in the face of total rejection by their own people and universal condemnation of shameless atrocities committed by the army suppressing a clear and unequivocal verdict in favour of a democratic Government headed by Aung San Suu Kyl.

> . It is difficult to justify a policy of "turn the other check" when faced with such blatant, unwarranted and senscless outrage committed on human beings just across the border. When

this results in pressure on one of the poorest countries in the world having to, feed more than 50,000 extra mouths, it becomes even more difficult. When it also entails having to remain unmoved by the fact that the Myannian army did not only carry out operations against their own people on their side but they also launched a military operation across the border deep within

our territory, the situation becomes unbearable. A democratic Government has added responsibilities in so far as not only it has to do the right thing but it also has to be seen to be doing the right thing. There are a number of perceptions both within our traditions as also in our folklore and religion which advise against toleration of injustice. To give the appearance of remaining unmoved by atrocitics and genocide is just not acceptable.

If the people of Myanmar were left with a voice they would demand punishment of such tyrants. We on our part would need to make our position clear to our own people and to the democratic people of Myanmar and to the world community- we will not strike a deal with the ruling SLORC without complete retribution including return and rchabilitation of the refugees with appropriate guarantees against recurrence of such adventurism. In conclusion, it can only be said that the timing is right bet us call their bluff and raise the banner of democratic Myanmar because that is the only civilized things to do.

It can of course be argued that SLORC is on its last legs in any case so why bother. But let us not forget that our people also need a boost of their morale. What could be a better way to du this than to carry the banner of democracy on behalf of one triumphant lady to the rescue of another in distress. Surely there can neither be a more just cause nor a more appropriate

A noted expert on international affairs and a former senior diplomat, the writer served as the Vice-Consul in Akyab in the late fifties.

# Food Line Lengthens for Affluent Society

T EW Zealanders, who once enjoyed one of the in the developed countries, are becoming accustomed to secing food banks set up to help needy families squeezed by the economic recession.

It is the first time since the soup kitchens of the Great Depression in the early 1930s that New Zealanders have had to live with poverty on such a scale.

Partly it is due to the 10 per cent unemployment rate. Additional hardship has resulted from cuts in unemployment and solo parents' benefits imposed earlier this year as the government struggled to reduce its budget deficit.

Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, now has 40 food banks - staffed by volunteers - which provide groceries, vegetables and fruit for the hungry.

"It's not just a one-off parcel, it's continuing need," a food bank worker says. "In many of the cases the children would simply have no food if

WASHINGTON : Famine is

almost entirely man-made and

only partly a result of sudden

natural disasters or wars, says

in Africa by the Washinton-

Prevention in Africa, examines

countries - Ethiopia and

Sudan — and argues for new

sults from a complex set of

circumstances that makes it

difficult for poor families to

cope with short-term shocks

the inability of African nations

to produce their own food or

purchase it has been a major

cause of famine and that long-

term solutions for preventing

famine are tied to agricultural

Based on a four-year study

growth and political stability.

The report suggests that

to the local economy.

It concludes that famine re-

strategies to prevent them.

Research Institute (IFRI).

they didn't get it from us." A social worker tells of a solo father, tears streaming down his face, sending his three children off to school with no breakfast - and no food in the house.

Another social worker says: "It's quite degrading to go to a food bank. But people have to put aside pride and come and ask for food parcels for their children.

Judith, a solo mother of four who uses a food bank, told a television interviewer: "It's more or less like begging."

The government pays welfare benefits to solo parents, unemployed, clderly and pcople who cannot work through sickness but these have been cut or frozen as it insists the country should live within its

Salvation Army welfare officer Roy Thompson says rent, medical bills and power use up most of the money.

A recent report by the Council for Christian Social Services said benefit cuts had forced some families to have to

### Derek Round writes from Wellington

choose between the basic essentials of food, heating and clothing. Families were in debt, could not afford to cat properly and suffered ill health and depression, the report

Council for Christian Social Services spokesman Shaun Robinson said the governincome tax scale ranges from 24 cents to 33 cents in the dollar). "There is clear room for us to increase taxes, and there is no evidence it will be a hindrance to economic growth," he said.

Church welfare agencies report 300 to 700 per cent increases in demand for food

It is the first time since the soup kitchens of the Great Depression in the early 1930s that New Zealanders have had to live with poverty on such a scale.

ment's decision to cut benefits had worked against its thenk of self-reliance. "It creates more need for support," he said. "When people hit that level of crisis it is very difficult for them to be productive."

The council has called on the government to raise taxes so it can reinstate benefits at their June 1990 level.

Mr Robinson said New Zealand had one of the lowest income tax rates in the Western World (the personal

parcels which are made up from groceries, fruit and vegctables donated to the food

The Christian Social Services report was based on a survey of 50 households involving 180 people throughout the country. Most relied on a welfare benefit, receiving NZ \$ 192-NZ \$ 282 (US \$108-US \$158) a week.

Most households considcred an income between NZ \$ 250 and NZ \$ 450 (US \$140-

US 8 253) a week would keep them out of poverty. More than half had their own vegetable garden and spent NZ 8 50- NZ \$100 a week on food and gro-

The report showed beneficiaries becoming isolated from society and cutting sports and leisure activities other New Zcalanders considered part of everyday life. Their children often missed out on school activities. Repairs and maintenance on houses, cars and appliances were unaffordable.

"All the larger families surveyed were going into debt to survive," Mr Robinson said "Depression and despair are widespread." He said families who responded to the survey were probably the "tip of the iceberg."

Anglican Archbishop Brian Davis gave Prime Minister Jim Bolger what has been described as an "ecclesiastical dressing-down" over economic policies when Mr Bolger recently attended a special service in Wellington's Anglican Cathodral.

Archbishop Davis said government policies were favouring the rich and penalising the poor. The Prime Minister was presented with a statement which talked of 'ominous signs of political distrust and distilu stonment that threaten the health of the democratic process and the nation."

Mr Bolger walked back to nearby Parltament House with the Archbishop to assure him the government shared the churches' concern that many New Zealanders were suffering hardship.

Mr Bolger's message is that New Zealand has been living beyond its means many years, that the government's policies are aimed at turning the cconomy around, that interest rates are coming down and inflation has dropped dramatically to 2.8 per cent.

This, the government are gues, is making New Zealand much more competitive in world markets. The government insists all New Zealanders will benefit from - Depthnews Asia

## Africa: Famine Is Man-made

a study on the causes of famine by Joachim Von Braun, director of IFPRI's food consumption and nutrition division, the based International Food Policy report also cites the urgent The report entitled, A need to adopt economic poli-Policy Agenda for Famine cies that would help rural households rebuild their prothe famines of the 1980's in ductive capacity. the world's most famine-prone

"Famines during biblical times were common because of a lack of agricultural technology to combat natural disasters," Von Braun said.

"There is no excuse for famines in the 20th century. They are entirely preventable through changes in domestic policy," he added.

Famine, occurring in virtually all continents earlier in the century, is now confined only to Sub-Saharan Africa. The report notes that countries like India have fended against famine by adopting prevention

A new study argues that famine, now occurring only in Sub-Saharan Africa, is not the result of natural disasters but of faulty policymaking.

The study found small-scale projects in Ethiopia and Sudan that have prevented famine But these have been too small in number and scope. Drawing on their experience and that of other nations, the report recommends adopting specific strategies.

These include providing farmers with "sorghum production packages" with rapid growing seeds, fertiliser, ploughs, and technical assistance. Such packages are already being distributed in Darfur, Sudan.

Sorghum is a critical grain staple in arid Africa. During

the 1984-85 famine, households taking part in the programme had much more food, so that less than half the number of their family members migrated from their homes in

The report also found that Sudan's gum Arabic trees have untapped potential throughout famine-prone areas to provide farmers with a cash crop that generates income for food while protecting the environment from the advance of the desert. But because each tree takes

search of provisions.

five years to mature, work pro-

grammes are needed to sustain farmers while they wait to harvest trees.

"Botswana and Zimbabwe have avoided famines throughout droughts," said Von Braun. They have done this through rural public works projects that provide the poor with a guaranteed income of wages or food, in exchange for the construction of badly needed transportation and irrigation systems."

Ethiopia and Sudan's foodfor-work and cash-for-work projects increased the purchasing power of the rural poor, while creating badly needed infrastructure. But during the 1984-85 famine, these projects came to a standstill due to logistical and administrative problems, according to the report.

"Ethiopia and Sudan are a long way from being able to sustain these projects during criscs, as India has been able to do," said Von Braun. The study also concluded

that famine is inseparable from poverty.

The underlying conditions of famine-stricken households are lack of employment opportunities, limited assets such as cash or livestock, isolation from major markets because of scarce roads and transportation, lack of credit and adequate farm technology, and poor health and sanitation.

"Drought simply triggers famine because poverty exists," according to the report.

The study also found that the ability of poor households to cope in famine-prone regions sharply decline during the 1980's, leaving people in these areas acutely vulnerable to famine in the 1990's.

Even small droughts may trigger famine in the Horn of Africa in the coming years, it

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.

### Public meeting and public suffering

Sir, The autocratic Ershad regime set a bad example and left a legacy as well in holding public meeting here and there any time within the Dhaka city causing immense trouble to the travelling public. Such holding of public meetings greatly disturbed normal office functioning, trade and commerce which is turn accounted for national loss.

It is really unfortunate that the present benign government failed to chalk out a formula as yet for holding public meeting within the Dhaka city area. In other words the present democratic Government and the opposition parties all are following the footsteps of the past autocratic regime in

this regard. It is the sacred duty of the

Government and opposition political parties to look into public inconvenience and safeguard national interest. It is in this context suggested that they should come to a consensus and formulate guidelines for holding public meeting either in Dhaka city or in other big cities towns.

Probable guideline may be: 1. No public meeting may be held on weekdays within the city corporation areas of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi; Public meeting of any political party may be held on Friday only in those city

2. The Government may select particular sites, say Tejgaon old airport, stadium, playgrounds, parks and isolated open spaces for holding public meetings in Dhaka city; similar sites may be selected for holding public meetings in

Municipal the other Corporation areas.

3. All political parties shall have to obtain prior written permission from the respective Metropolitan Police Commissioner for holding public meeting in a particular spot. The concerned Metropolitan Commissioners will notify well ahead of time regarding holding of public meeting at a particular site so that the travelling public may avoid traffic jam and other inconventences.

4. Similarly, officers and employees belonging to Govt autonomous bodies corporation etc shall obtain prior permission from their respective heads of organisation for holding meeting on any issue and notify the venue and time of such meeting well ahead of time. Like-wise, all other organisations such as Truck-Bus drivers, rickshaw and autorickshaw drivers' owners' shall obtain permission from their respective controlling bodies and intimate the

publics. Once a guideline is formulated consulting all concerned, and put into operation rigidly the present practice of holding public meeting here and there causing suffering to the common people may be done away with. Ruhul Amin Crescent Road,

Dhaka.

### Student from abroad

Str, I am student at a college in Dhaka and find it extremely difficult to concentrate on my task.

While other students manage to get together during the leisure or vacations, and do combined studies, I fail to do so as I have just arrived from abroad. I cannot make friends in a hassle. I feel almost paranoid and claustrophobic both at

home and in the classroom. I keep dreaming about my friends I have left abroad instead of paying attention to my lessons. All our teachers are strict, as is expected and natural. I greatly fear the principal as she is like some "mother superior," and more.

Recently there was a great humdrum about some pranks at our college. The teachers and monitors suspect I had a hand in the latest mishap — which I

Would you suggest a change in the scenario ? I will have to cajole my parents for this mother and that will not be an easy task. I also seek advice from kind readers. Murad Ahmed

Dhanmondi, Dhaka.

### More ado than festivity

Sir, While I realise marriages, "mussalmanis," birthdays and other such occasions are matters to rejoice with, I find it hard to be in a festive mood when these do occur.

There is all that ado about how to locate the place of destination, how much to spend for the necessary gifts, when and where to go for the essential gesture of goodwill, and finally, what to wear.

Parents and children are all invited on functions of this type in Dhaka and must all go. I wish there could have been a caravan, led by an elephant for such occasions. Instead of that there is the harum - scarum pell-pell manner of reaching the host in rickshaws, 'babics' and cars on loan.

The gift remains something

we had never dreamt of giving. The host remains too busy even to spare you a fleeting smile.

As for wearing a "sari" on all occasions, which my family insists upon, I find it a trifle overwhelming. This is perhaps my life, before coming to Dhaka has been sans "sari" whenever I wanted.

C'est la vic Farhat,

Moghbazar, Dhaka.

### Articles on literature

Sir, I had been a continuous reader since the launching of The Daily Star. The same is applicable to some of my neighbours. However, we noticed a scarcity of critical articles on literature in your Feature pages and Weekend Magazine. Many readers here are interested to read some items on contemporary literature which will encourage the rising writers of our country. In this respect we request you to print articles from the capable critics of both Bangla and English literature.

Ekramul Kabir Mirpur, Dhaka.