

# Basin-wide Management Can be a Practical Solution

by Mahfuzul Haq

## Aid and Conditionalities

India seems to be facing the same predicament as Bangladesh in dealing with the so-called conditionalities imposed on the country by aid agencies and donor nations for a massive aid proposed for this year. According to the latest report, the World Bank (WB) has recommended \$6.7 billion, the same level as last year, for consideration of the Aid India Consortium meeting in Paris later this week.

All this is good news for India which needs all the help it can generate for what a WB official has called the country's "limping" economy. However, as in the case of Bangladesh, the promised aid is not without conditionalities — or to use a simpler expression, strings. They range from massive import liberalisation to simplification in investment procedures, from a thrust in privatisation to fiscal and banking reforms.

In the case of both India and Bangladesh, the conditionalities which are being criticised by a section of non-official experts, seem to have been enthusiastically endorsed by the two finance ministers, Monmohon Singh and M Saifur Rahman. Being technocrats, both run their ministries without much consideration for any political mandate as such. This explains why there were strong suspicions in New Delhi that Dr Singh had given advance information on his last budget to the World Bank. Now, similar fears have been expressed by some quarters in Dhaka about the national budget of Bangladesh. Such suspicions cannot be entirely groundless in so far as an Aid Consortium meeting, whether it is for Bangladesh or India, is told enough about the reform process to give participants a reasonably clear picture of the shape and the contents of the forthcoming budget.

It would be unfair to assume that these conditionalities are being "imposed" only on developing countries like India and Bangladesh. A recent report from Washington by this paper's guest columnist, M Syeduzzaman dealt with problems of disbursement of aid for republics in the former Soviet Union, a massive \$ 24 billion package, which are also linked to the reform process. In other words, it is the change in the aid climate which is at least partly responsible for the increasingly tough and, as some would say, offensive line taken by the aid agencies.

In principle, we are opposed to the way the aid agencies impose conditions on developing countries, often in covert violation of their sovereign rights. We also feel that our technocrats, including finance ministers, are far too easily converted to the WB's position to put up any resistance or even an alternative agenda to the one offered by the aid agencies. Again, if the economy has been badly managed, to the point of becoming a "limping" one, a country like India — not to mention Bangladesh — is hardly in a position to take a strong line against conditionalities.

Here, non-official experts in Dhaka and New Delhi who are angry over the acceptance of conditionalities by their governments must offer their own alternatives, an agenda for progress which reduces the dependence on external assistance. This must be done in firm precise language, not in clichés and jargon. Let the Democratic Forum, just set up here, take this up for a priority research and offer an alternative national budget, before Saifur Rahman presents his next one, an alternative budget that cuts down on foreign aid by a minimum 25 per cent and turns down WB's prescriptions as far as possible.

## Dealing with Diabetes

In observing the Diabetes Day today, we take the opportunity to make it a point that the disease, more often than not, is underestimated. It is a life-time disease and yet can be kept under control when modern treatment is received before it is too late. By doing so, moreover, the patient can live almost a normal and active life. The choice, therefore, lies with the patient to a large extent as to how he wants to spend the rest of his life once the disease has got hold of him. The fact that the disease is largely controllable through following a set of rules in the everyday life provides at least a relative advantage compared to other complicated diseases.

Apart from the curative (if it can be called so) measure, there is a need for being informed of the preventive ones — specially when the incidence of the disease appears to be on the increase. Physical labour or exercise is the first and foremost preventive step towards reducing the possibility of the disease. Overeating has to be avoided at any cost so that the body weight is maintained at a reasonable level. To avoid mental stress and strain, as much as possible, is another remedial measure to keep oneself immune from the disease. All these are health rules one can easily follow, but there is no full guarantee of making one free from the disease even if one has observed the rules punctiliously. But surely, those rules minimise the chance of getting the disease.

Evidently, urban people today are more health conscious than they were before or the people living in villages are. But the farmers and other villagers do enjoy the advantage of putting in enough physical labour almost everyday. That is however not enough to make them totally immune from diabetes. More, both rich and poor run — if not equally — the risk of developing the disease in their system. Therefore, the need for being aware of the disease is a must for all, specially when people cross the age of 40. The problem with the disease, when not in control, is that it invites a whole lot of other complicated diseases — just one of which is enough either to kill or maim a person for life.

This points to the need for extra caution when the slightest symptom is detected. It is absolutely necessary to contact the nearest hospital or report to the diabetic centres — preferably the Ibrahim Memorial Diabetic Hospital, Dhaka. Indeed, the hospital has already distinguished itself for excellent service courtesy of a man, Dr Ibrahim by name, who single-handedly founded a diabetic association and the hospital.

THE Farakka Barrage which has been built ostensibly to augment the flow of Hugli River, has in practice created lot more problems for the co-riparian countries, India and Bangladesh, than it has solved. Recently the flow of the Ganges has been showing higher disproportion between the monsoon and the dry season — extremely low dry season runoff and very high monsoon flow. Some major problems caused by Farakka Barrage are discussed below.

During the dry season the flow becomes considerably lower than design parameter. As a result the minimum flow to Bangladesh is not maintained, leading to a host of problems such as: (a) Drying up of rivers like Gorai and most of Padma, resulting in lack of surface water for irrigation, not only for Bangladesh but also for the Indian districts of Murshidabad and Malda. (b) The Ganges-Kobodak irrigation scheme fails to supply and irrigation water during the dry months. (c) Bheramara power station is facing problems due to lowering of the level of Padma. (d) Overall reduction of surface runoff to the sea, resulting in greater salinity intrusion. (e) Ironically the initial impact of the enhanced flood flow is felt by Murshidabad.

During the monsoon season, particularly when there is high stage in the Ganges, Farakka Barrage can do very little for the mitigation of flood in Bangladesh. Indeed it enhances the flood flow. Siltation in Padma is enhanced due to sudden washout of accumulated silt at the Barrage, causing unwanted land accretion all the way downstream and consequent need for expensive dredging operation to keep the navigation channels open.

The greatly reduced dry season flow decreases the assimilative capacity of all the rivers and their tributaries downstream from the Barrage. As a result the water-borne pollution problems due to agricultural, animal, and industrial wastes is artificially enhanced. One such problem, recently pointed out by the

Indian side, is the pollution caused by the discharge from Carew's Distillery into the Mathabhangha river.

Our study carried out by the author as consultant to BSFC has shown that even after the Carew's problem is solved, the pollution level in the Mathabhangha due to agricultural sources, like jute rotting and animal wastes, will still remain very high during the dry season. It may be noted that Mathabhangha pollution problem has been noticed during early eighties after the Farakka Barrage became operative. Therefore it proves our point that long term solution for the Mathabhangha pollution problem as well as all the other pollution and agro-economic problems caused by Farakka Barrage are to find a sustainable methodology for increasing the dry season flow and decreasing the monsoon flow.

Without going into the ethics and legality of this unilateral method of hydrological deviation, not in accordance with the standard practice among co-riparian countries, it can be safely stated that the Barrage will certainly not lead to any sustainable development of either Bangladesh or India. This non-sustainability has been further enhanced by some recent man-made and natural developments: (a) The left bank of Hugli river has been eroding causing a shift of the river towards the Padma. According to Indian experts, in future the two rivers will merge rendering the barrage absolutely useless. (b) Recently hydroelectric generators have been installed at the Farakka Barrage. In order to maintain the minimum head for the operation of the hydro-generators, the dry season flow to Bangladesh will have to be further reduced, which would certainly not be acceptable.

### A Possible Solution

Clearly the problem of water sharing of the Ganges arises out of the temporal disproportion of the water flow, i.e. too much water during monsoon and too little during the dry season. It has been established that the problem can only be solved by upper

catchment conservancy by means of dams and barrage high up in the Himalayas mostly in Nepal. Upper catchment afforestation will aid the conservancy process even further. In fact such conservancy may convert the Ganges into a constant flow river and Farakka Barrage can then play a very useful role as a mid-stream regulator to the benefit of Nepal, India and Bangladesh. The spin-off would be a huge amount of cheap hydroelectricity to be shared by all.

In fact effective control of devastating floods and draughts in this region is impossible without upper-catchment conservancy by hydro-dams and afforestation.

Now let us examine the projects already planned by India and Nepal in the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna Basins, primarily for the purpose of meeting India's energy needs by hydro-power stations, which would provide the additional benefits of irrigation and flood control.

The Indian study has established that hydro-power would be significantly cheaper in the long run than power produced by coal by a thermal station right at the minehead. Both ESCAP and the Indian recommendations for building hydro-dams were primarily for power production in a far more cost-effective and sustainable manner than fossil fuel based power plants. Now with the added factors of ever increasing flood disasters and expected increased precipitation due to Green-House-Effect, the Hydro-dam option has not only become more desirable but almost essential.

It is universally recognized that basin-wide management of the Ganges, with upper catchment conservancy as the primary factor, will convert the Ganges into an almost constant flow river, thereby solving the dual problems of water-sharing during the dry season and disastrous flood during the monsoon period. It is also recognized that the heavy capital investment required will invariably cause considerable delay in full implementation of the total

### Management of Existing Hydrological Structural Facilities

Some recent structural developments in Damodar and Mayurakshi valleys have already alleviated the flood and irrigation problems of West Bengal. There are good feasibilities of implementing similar facilities in other tributaries of the Ganges, both downstream and upstream of Farakka. It has been estimated that the existing storage dams in Damodar and Mayurakshi basins should have an active storage of about one MIIM, out of which about 0.75 MIIM should be available for the dry season, yielding an average additional flow of 30,000 cusecs. This should make it unnecessary to divert too much water during dry season so that Bangladesh's share need not fall below the agreed minimum of 56,000 cusecs.

Moreover, the reservoir

could be easily managed so that maximum storage is possible during the peak flood period making it possible for Bangladesh to receive its natural share of monsoon flow, thereby sparing Bangladesh and Murshidabad the added burden of a higher flood stage.

There are two more tributaries downstream of Farakka and at least six on the right bank of Ganges between Farakka and Patna which provide good possibility for reservoirs. Implementation of these reservoir schemes would not only alleviate the perennial flood problem and enhance irrigation facilities for Bihar and West Bengal, but would also help solve the "Farakka Problem".

These projects though they are located at difficult and remote sites, were found to be very economical because of superior geological conditions and high head.

The gross and the active storage of the five reservoirs on Koshi basin are estimated to be 2.95 MHM and 2.27 MHM respectively. Out of the total active storage of 2.27 MHM, it should be possible to release at least 1.5 MHM during three driest months, thereby assuring sixty thousand cusec of additional flow, which would greatly alleviate the present low dry season flow, assuring at least seventy thousand cusec minimum flow for Bangladesh.

STRATEGY FOR SOLUTION OF FARAKKA PROBLEM: The strategy for immediate and long-term solution of the "Farakka Problem" may be summarized as: (1) Management of the existing half a dozen reservoirs in the Damodar and Mayurakshi basins in order to ensure enhanced dry season flow and reduction of peak flood flow. (2) Afforestation of Koshi basin and the high lands on the right bank of the Ganges, downstream of Patna as well as on the flood plains of lower Ganges. (3) Initiation of the Koshi dam project. (4) Strict adherence to the agreed water-sharing scheme till the implementation of the above project.

### Financing and Management of Himalayan Hydro-dams

It is obvious that the huge capital investment required for installation of hydro-dams in the upper catchment of Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna is well beyond the economic capacity of the co-riparian countries. Therefore, financing by international agencies would be a prerequisite for such a project to be a success. It has been well recognized that investment in Himalayan hydro-dams is an attractive proposition for international financing organisations, provided the management is well coordinated so that the return from the investment is assured. I would like to suggest the following methodology:

A) An international consortium should be formed in which all the co-riparian countries and the financing agencies should have equity participation. The consortium would be entrusted with the responsibility of installation and management of hydro-dams.

B) Most of, if not all the, international aids and loans for flood control, irrigation and hydro-power production should be channelled through this consortium. Most of the financial equity participation of the co-riparian countries could be on the basis of delayed payment on the resources generated and benefits obtained.

C) The operational modality of hydro-dams would be primarily for flood control irrigation for the co-riparian countries.

D) The hydro-power generated should be shared by the co-riparian countries on cash-or-kind payment basis.

E) The huge amount of "idle electricity" that is expected to be generated because of the flood control mode of operation of the hydro-dams should be utilized by the donor agencies in the most suitable geographical location for running industries, set up as a joint venture between the consortium and the host country.

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## Law of the Jungle Reigns in UN

by Erskine Childers

Western powers took another major step in their relentless conversion of the United Nations (UN) into a blunt instrument of their new world order on 31 March 1992. This time it was the threat of an aviation, arms and diplomatic embargo on Libya.

Given the tone and text of UN Security Council Resolution 748, sanctions will most likely continue even if Tripoli agrees to surrender the two Libyans allegedly involved in the mid-air destruction of a Pan Am airliner in 1988.

In the latest Security Council session, the Arab states, India, China, Uganda and Zimbabwe stated that Libya had shown readiness to respond to the earlier Security Council demand, and that a negotiated settlement was still possible. Privately, many delegates also pointed out that Libya's leader, Moammar Gaddafi, had been quiet internationally for some time.

The Northern powers represented in the Security Council stonily ignored all these representations. Austria, Belgium, Britain, Ecuador, France, Hungary, Japan, Russia, the US and Venezuela then voted for the sanctions. Five Third World members abstained — Cape Verde, China, India, Morocco and Zimbabwe.

Beyond surrender of the two suspects, however, the

Western resolution has a further clause clearly designed to ensure that the sanctions will go into force, and then to maintain a stranglehold on Libya. It states that Tripoli must promptly, by concrete actions, demonstrate its renunciation of terrorism. These actions are not specified by so much as a half-sentence. Libya will obviously be unable to 'demonstrate' such a change in only 14 days.

Stipulating that a state must 'demonstrate' totally unspecified negatives in itself reduces the UN to the law of the jungle. As with the Iraq cease-fire terms, the Western powers can endlessly re-define what they mean.

They can make lifting the sanctions conditional on so-called 'United Nations Inspections', even on the departure of Gaddafi, and in any other way grind down the country as long as they wish. They can also try to use the resolution as a springboard for more draconian action — full economic sanctions, or a military attack like the American bombing raid on Tripoli in 1986 in which Gaddafi's daughter and some 200 other Libyans were killed.

Moreover under the UN Charter, sanctions are supposed to be the next-to-last

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Moreover under the UN Charter, sanctions are supposed to be the next-to-last

resort only after the measures for peaceful redress laid out in Chapter VI have been exhausted — including arbitration or judicial settlement (Article 33.1) and reference of legal disputes to the International Court of Justice (Article 36.3). Yet on the very same day, the world court was in fact meeting to hear Libya's appeal over the dispute under the 1971 convention for suppression of unlawful acts against the safety of civil aviation (Montreal Convention) to which Britain, France, and the US are also signatories.

Using the Security Council to impose sanctions while the UN's own 'principal judicial organ' is seized of the issue would strike at the heart of UN and General International Law even if Libya had shown no other response.

The Montreal Convention requires that accused violators of safety in any signatory state must be apprehended by that state and initially investigated — Libya did just that it promptly arrested the two men, notified the accusing states and began an inquiry.

The convention also requires that all parties to it assist an investigating state. The Libyan Supreme Court asked the three Western powers to send it their charges and their evidence. They refused, fatuously claiming Libya could 'destroy the evidence'.

The Libyans then invited the nations to send their own judges to Tripoli with evidence, to participate in a trial there. This, too, was rejected by the three countries as was the Libyan proposal for holding a trial in 'a neutral state'.

After all this Libya went to the World Court, requesting it to rule where the men should be tried, and in

creasingly impoverished under the West's control of global financial and trading policies. Third World members were generally protected by the USSR and Eastern Europe from Western pressure over their in the Security Council.

Now, Russia and Eastern Europe have fallen in line. Bereft of protection and even more impoverished, Third World countries are confronted by outright threats and bribes — over trading status, debt-relief, credit constitutionalities at the Western-instructed International Monetary Fund, and development aid. Their council delegations reveal in their statements what they really think of these resolutions — as in Zimbabwe expressing 'enormous discomfort in invoking chapter VII'.

The Third World was neatly conjured in the 1980s into losing its solidarity. The Libya case at the UN further indicates that only a revived courage in numbers, and an appeal to Europe to avert a catastrophic North-South divide, may save the UN from the sheriffs of the new world order.

Third World Network Features/IPS.

ERSKINE CHILDERS is a retired senior to the UN Secretary-general.

## 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.

### Sacrifice of animals

Sir, I would like to have the expert opinion on one issue of extreme national interest. It, however, concerns the ritualistic sacrifice of animals each year on the occasion of the holy Eid-ul-Azha. The ritual is said to commemorate the great sacrifice of Hazrat Ibrahim (A). But to what extent we have been able to guide ourselves with the same spirit is a question open to all. 'Qurbani' has turned into an annual show-case for the rich. So, if Qurbani has become a social ritual bereft of its essential value, is there any point in such mindless slaughters? For it is only the principle behind the act that transforms the act to something more than the act and without which the act becomes something less than the act. If we did indeed show our honest readiness in trying to emulate the ideals of the great prophet, could we then

be oblivious to the plight of millions around us? Perhaps only the government knows how much of a drain this is to the national economy. If India had not been the neighbour who knows how many cows would be ground today. Can an LDC like Bangladesh afford to indulge itself gleefully in such mindless practice when its livestock situation is simply dwindling?

Religion is no strict code. It is a philosophy for guiding our lives. The practice of the ideal can and should be formulated according to the time and condition. Many social practice considered sacrilegious only years ago have now been widely accepted by all. Even the most outspoken zealot has to be photographed before going for Hazz. The Shariah Council of Makkah has announced that posthumous eye donation is not inconsistent with the religious code. What is important is to interpret

ethics on the basis of our own knowledge.

I really think it is about time we started talking about it. Meanwhile, a suggestion: Let nobody give a Qurbani alone, and every cow be shared by seven individuals — that way we can at least minimise the loss.

Munier Hossain  
Dhaka Medical College

### "Want and limit"

Sir, Heartiest thanks to Prof Zahidul Haque for his letter "Want and limit" (The Daily Star 3.6.92). Prof Haque, who has been prominent in the letter writing forum of national dailies and periodicals, has the sterling quality to choose subjects of importance. I take great interest to go through them with increasing zeal. I am tempted to add something to what he has said in the letter in question. It prompts me to remind one saying "It is easier to check the first desire than to satisfy those follow it." It is true that a man now finds himself with whatever he has, may soon fall prey to the greed for more, might be owing to various reasons — the prime one maybe his neighbour.

Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay in his famous "Palamou" stated that put a family by the side of a mendicant, he will lose his mendicancy in three days. On the second day the housewife of the family will show her new bangles to the wife of the mendicant and on the following day, the mendicant will apply for the post of magistrate. In fact in Bengali families, the neighbours, help creating sense of want to the members of the family who reside close by.

It is really a thing of vital significance that if an individual is capable to check his first desire of having something which invariably entails the burden of shouldering additional ones in the long run. To specify the point it may be cited that a man who does not own a radio at present and chooses to purchase one, has initially to spend a price for it and then earmark his time to listen to it, to renew the license in time where he has to spend a purse, and then his children might spend a costly study hour in listening to it and the like. For every desire when checked, it is better. And when it is not checked and implemented, it involves some responsibility that would also involve doing things besides losing time and money.

S M Hussain  
Mirpur, Dhaka

### DU campus and children

Sir, Three school children were seriously injured in a bomb blast on the Dhaka University campus on June 7. This incident is not the only one which we are encountering day out and day in. But it was a dastardly act, because those innocent boys were just enjoying their leisure when all on a sudden the attack was made.

So, it is my earnest request to the Varsity authorities — either remove the school from

the campus or stop terrorism in campus area.

I think if the school remains there, some day some boy will fall a sure victim to hoodligans in the Varsity.

Tasneem  
Dhaka

### Israeli atrocities

Sir, Of late, the Israeli forces have increased their air attack on Palestinian bases at various places. They are carelessly torturing the Palestinians and the Arabs and also mercilessly killing them. Israeli atrocities have now crossed all the limits.

Would the United Nations take some stern measures against Israel to protect the armless, innocent Palestinians and the Arabs? Is it not the sacred responsibility of the United Nations to help establish their just rights?

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