

An Embankment of Hope

by Inam Ahmed

LAUNCH passengers crossing the Meghna river would hardly miss the patch of embankment at Ekilaspur point. The concrete slope of the river bank would shine brightly in the sun. And one can not help wondering why such a patch of embankment has been erected at this point while the rest of the Meghna bank remains unprotected.

The reason is quite clear. If this T-shaped groyne had not been built at Ekilaspur, under Matlab Upazila of Chandpur District, the much publicised Meghna-Dhonagoda Irrigation Project (MDIP) would have been endangered by this time. The Taka 150.4 crore MDIP would have been lost in the river erosion.

The work of the groyne was completed in May this year. The Taka 10-crore project funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) started in April 1991. "Not that it will only protect the MDIP, we are expecting another big result from the embankment", a senior official of the Water Development Board (WDB) told a group of visiting journalists on the project spot recently. "We hope to change the course of current of the mighty Padma."

Ekilaspur is the confluence point of the two mighty rivers of the country—the Padma and the Meghna. As the two rivers have merged, it is a wonderful sight to look at the vastness of water flowing downstream towards the ocean. While going on launch, one would feel lost at the vastness of the water, sometimes even the banks vanish out of sight.

WDB engineers say Ekilaspur has become a major erosion-affected area because the confluence of the Padma and the Meghna shifted northwards from Chandpur to that point in the last 20 years due to shifting of the Padma. The Padma which earlier met the Meghna near Surashwar, has moved about 20 miles north.

Since the Padma flows eastward near Ekilaspur, the combined water mass of the two rivers, about 1.5 lakh cubic meter per second in the peak season, gushes with all ferocity towards Ekilaspur. It hits the

Ekilaspur bank and has made the point most vulnerable, according to WDB officials.

The newly built groyne would deflect the current of the Padma away to the west, an engineer of WDB said. "If the groyne remains stable for some years, the current of the

1988. The groyne, first of its kind would stop such occurrences. This type of groyne was first tried successfully at Damodar Valley in India.

"The MDIP is the hope of the people of Matlab Upazila, we must save it from erosion", a WDB official said. The MDIP

about to be eroded away," Ali said. "We removed all our goods and property and waited for the final strike that would wash away our house. But it did not happen only because the groyne had been completed just in time to save the house." Ali now regularly preys to God

square miles in 1780, has now come to about only 92 square miles.

When all these factors were fed into statistics, the economic rate of return (ERR) of the groyne stood at 12. However, the acceptable ERR to the world bank is a little higher, between 16 and 22. But the embankment was essential considering the economic loss and social displacement the erosion would cause.

WDB officials said to save the MDIP permanently, the embankment has to be extended further from Mohonpur to Amirabad—a stretch of six km. At present the embankment is only from Mohonpur to Ekilaspur 1.5 km.

Broaden the embankment, an additional Taka 150 crore is needed. The government has already approached the ADB for the fund in 1990. The proposal is under their review," a WDB official said.

Ekilaspur is one of the six areas identified for river bank protection under the Meghna river study carried out under flood action plan. It will be expanded until the entire Ekilaspur area is protected, WDB engineers said.

"The MDIP has boosted crop production," a farmer working on a patch of paddy field said. "We now get about 60 maunds of paddy in a piece of one acre land while the production was only about 18 to 20 maunds. That is why the MDIP needs to be protected."

Through the MDIP irrigation canals, the fields now get sufficient water round the year. About 25,000 acres of land out of 34,000 acres are now under the irrigation facilities.

The village now looks like a serene green lagoon with the paddy field moving like waves in the wind. Those who had been made homeless in the previous river erosion are now working hard to get three crops a year.

The farmer who was talking to the journalists suddenly turned back and receded in the lush green — there is much work to be done.

Therefore, the groyne has special meaning to the people. People of the area look at the 1.5 km embankment with hope and expectation.

Padma would be diverted towards the west bank permanently", the official expressed optimism. This would stop or at least reduce the erosion at Ekilaspur.

How long will the embank-

ment last? "We cannot be 100 per cent sure that it will last for ever or a long time," another WDB official said. "But the work has been done earnestly to last for a long time."



The Meghna — Dhonagoda Irrigation Project (MDIP) is the life force of 25,000 acres of land

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If the current could be diverted, the most vulnerable point of the 40-mile long MDIP would be saved from continuous erosion threat. The MDIP had suffered a number of casualties in the past. The embankment had been eroded away in 1987 and again in

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"The river erosion at this point was very dangerous," Rahim Ali, a resident of Ekilaspur said. His house is just about a yard behind the groyne. The house looks like falling prey to the river erosion and get lost like millions of houses have done in the past years. "My house was also

not been yet calculated. "If the groyne could not be built, entire Matlab upazila would have been engulfed by the river in a few years", a WDB official said.

The river erosion has become a major problem for the riverine Bangladesh. Each year the loss due to erosion is calculated to be about Taka 2000 million. Lands have vanished in the erosions. One such example is Haimchar which no longer exists in the map. Similarly, the Sandwip which had earlier the area of 417

Rural Poverty Engulfing Third World Cities

UNLESS urgent steps are taken to address the roots of poverty in the countryside, densely populated cities of the developing world will have to grapple with a sharp decline in living conditions.

This was the grim picture drawn up by Idriss Jazairy, president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), at the organisation's 15th governing council meeting held here for three days recently.

In his traditional address to the plenary session, Mr Jazairy projected that the number of rural poor in the developing world will rise by a third to reach 1.3 billion by the end of this decade.

The trend of population movement indicates that a large part of the burden will spill over to urban areas where the cost of providing livelihood is much higher," he said.

Considering this, he warned: "A solution to the problem of poverty has to be found first and foremost within rural areas, making maximum use of local knowledge and resources."

Mr Jazairy said projects which help protect the rural environment, create job opportunities in the informal sector or strengthen financial institutions which serve the poor have a vital role to play in slowing the drift to the urban areas.

A United Nations agency formed to combat poverty and hunger, IFAD has raised over US\$12.3 billion since its founding in 1977. It has funded nearly 700 food-related projects, programmes and research initiatives in 94 countries.

Last year, the Fund approved 22 new projects and 22 technical assistance grants with a total value of US\$200 million. This figure, he explained, was below the peak level of 1990 but 15 per cent above the average amount allocated by the agency in the second half of the decade.

Mr Jazairy also revealed that the Fund, for the first time in its history, had been entirely responsible for the design of last year's approved

projects. The conditions facing the rural poor in developing countries have become grim, according to Mr Jazairy.

In Asia, home to the largest proportion of the poor, marginal farmers and landless peasants are being pushed beyond the subsistence frontier and into fragile lands, forests and mountain slopes. IFAD's projects in Asia, he said, are designed to reach the marginal farmers, landless people and fishermen, as well as the victims of natural disasters, such as cyclones in Bangladesh.

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Caribbean, structural adjustment in programmes have helped boost exports but smallholder-farmers, with their eyes on the domestic market, have been hit by falling demand. Moreover, jobs have become even more scarce for those without land while investment initiatives have tended to bypass the rural population.

Environmental degradation is accelerating in the countries of the Near East and North Africa, where food production has been in an uninterrupted state of decline for over three decades.

Reacting to Mr Jazairy's concern for the world, poor, the government council approved IFAD's proposed programme of work for 1992, which will amount to some US\$330 million under the regular programme and an

additional US\$66 million under the special programme for Africa (SPA), a 30 per cent increase over 1991.

The IFAD government council also approved the Fund's strategies to improve conditions among rural women, especially the summit for the economic advancement of rural women, to be held in Geneva on 25-26 February. Delegates were united in their call for swift action on the fourth replenishment of IFAD's funds.

In the course of this report Mr Jazairy underscored the intensive work that had been carried out to improve IFAD's understanding of issues related to rural women in development. The findings of hundreds of meetings and consultations at every level of decision-making will culminate in the Geneva Declaration to be adopted by the Geneva Summit for the Economic Advancement of Rural Women.

The governing council's endorsement of IFAD's strategies on behalf of women means that some 565 million women — more than half of the world's one billion rural poor — will benefit from projects and programmes tailored more carefully to their highly specific needs. IFAD's initiative, said Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture, Water Resources and Rural Development, Alhaji Abubakar Hashida, would "sensitise world governments and non-government organisations to the plight of poor rural women."

During the course of the session, the government of Sweden pledged US\$5 million to the second phase of the SPA and the government of Italy an initial payment of US\$800,000, bringing pledges to over US\$88 million.

Summing up at that last day of the conference, the IFAD president told delegates that the organisation had helped fulfill the aspirations of the rural poor "by turning what will otherwise remain wishful dreams into tangible and long-lasting realities."

— Depthnews Asia

Himalayan Kingdom Adopts Two-Child Population Policy

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

NEPAL is seeking US\$100 million in grant aid to push a two-child family policy. Major donors supporting the kingdom met here last March to pledge US\$85 million for population and health programmes. Officials hope the pledge may exceed US\$100 million, part of which will be the form of technical assistance.

The fund will help the democratic government push a two-child family policy in a country where the social status has traditionally been as high as the number of children.

The shortfall will be met either through internal resources or a World Bank loan negotiations for which will begin as soon as the current pledges are completed.

However, government support of population activities could be strained in case major hydro-electric plants like the multi-billion-dollar, 402-Megawatt Arun III get approved.

The two-child policy is part of the US\$138 million government plans to spend on population and health activities under the Eighth (Five-year) Plan (1992-1997) to be launched this July.

Nepal has asked the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to help strengthen the managerial capacity of the Ministry of Health to enable it to attain population goals and improve the implementation of family planning programmes.

"His Majesty's Government is committed to pursue a long-term aim of limiting the desire and need of couples to two children," Minister of State for Finance Mahesh Acharya told the March donors' meeting.

The 1991 census found Nepal's population to be 18.4 million, 27.9 per cent less than the World Bank's projected 19 million. The population is expected to reach 35 million by 2025.

The results of the census, funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is politically significant as the delineation of constituencies for elections is done on the basis of census results.

Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, who himself heads the Nation Population Committee, has accorded a top priority to population and health activities. The Committee recently approved in principle the inclusion of a population policy in the Eighth

(Five-Year) plan.

The government sees the status of women, human resources development and poverty alleviation as major priority economic goals. To achieve these goals, three problem areas — programme coordination, service effectiveness and demand generation — are being stressed.

Mr Koirala said his government's top priority will be the massive mobilisation of both human and capital resources for population control on the one hand and the protection of the environment on the other. "Abysmal poverty is the

said. The TFR is the average number of children a woman is likely to have during her childbearing years (15-49 years).

Although this TFR target is more pragmatic compared to the previous target of 2.5, many donors still believe it is ambitious. Some United Nations experts say Nepal's TFR is unlikely to decline to more than 5.13. One of the reasons is that contraceptive users make up less than 14 per cent of the population.

"It could still be an ambitious goal but it is also a realistic one," asserts Dr Bal Gopal

Because contraceptive users make up less than 14 per cent of Nepalis, the new population policy has been called ambitious. But it is also realistic

common enemy of the Nepali people," said Mr Koirala, whose Nepali Congress party won the May 1991 elections. "It must be stamped out."

Under the new population policy, the total fertility rate (TFR) will be brought down to 4.0 children from the present 5.8 children per woman in the next eight years, the National Planning Commission (NPC)

Baidya, former head of the New Era, Kathmandu's prestigious think-tank, and now a member of the National Planning Commission.

Nepal's TFR from 1985-1990 averaged 5.94 but may drop to 5.13 between 1995-2000. If the goals prove ambitious, they may be revised during the mid-term evaluation, Mr Baidya says.



Winston Churchill is enlisted in the cause of family planning

The infant mortality rate is to decline from 107 to 50 live births per 1,000 while child (under five years) mortality rate will come down from 165 to 70 deaths per 1,000. Similarly, the maternal mortality rate from 850 to 400 deaths per 100,000 live births.

The improvement in family planning and health activities is expected to increase life expectancy from 53 to 65 years by the turn of the century.

The crude birth rate is expected to decline from 37.5 to 27.5 per 1,000 while the crude birth rate will decline from 13.8 to 8.3 per 1,000 by the year 2000.

Efforts to bring down the population growth have suffered from declining death rates high values given to children due to cultural reasons, widespread illiteracy and poverty.

Rural agricultural families need daughters to perform endless household chores, and they need sons for other economic impute as well as to expand the family's lineage.

The motivation for large families is further increased because parents know many of their children are likely to die before they are adults.

Only 34 per cent of men and 11 per cent of women are literate. Only 6 per cent of total births is attended by health workers. Drinking water supply is accessible to less than 29 per cent of the population.

The kingdom's 3 per cent economic growth rate is neutralist by a population growing at the rate of 2.3 per cent. This makes Nepal one of the poorest countries in the world with a per capita income of US\$170.

When it comes to development aid, donors have often complained that Nepal has not only a very poor performance but that her absorptive capacity is terribly low.

This may partly explain why UNFPA's contribution was scaled down from US\$26.5 million in 1980-85 to US\$17.4 million. It declined further to US\$9 million in 1988-1991 and was mainly for the 1991 census.

"Our development goals will be meaningless unless the population growth is controlled through family planning," says Krishna Prasad Bhattarai, former prime minister and head of the ruling Nepali Congress party.

The Poor Lose Again as Indonesia and the Netherlands Snub Each Other

by Stephen Carr

THE outrage was heard around the world last November when Indonesian troops opened fire on a funeral march in East Timor, killing at least 50 people.

Foremost in condemning the massacre was Holland, which announced it was suspending all further aid to its former colony.

Indonesia resented this, saying the action was premature and that the Dutch should have waited for the Indonesian government to investigate the incident.

Indonesia then announced it would no longer accept any more Dutch aid. Foreign Minister Ali Alatas said the move was a "firm stand against the pressure and arrogance displayed by the Dutch government." The aid was also described as a "tool of intimidation" used by the Dutch.

The Netherlands had already angered the Indonesian government in 1990, when it postponed the signing of its aid commitment to protest the execution of four former communists in Jakarta.

Until the current controversy, the Dutch chaired the 24-year-old, Hague-based, Inter-Government Group on Indonesia (IGGI), a consortium of 14 nation and six international development agencies.

Of the total \$4.75 billion pledged this year, the Dutch pledged a relatively small \$91.3 million. More than \$50 million of this has already been spent, but Indonesia has refused the remainder.

Much of the funding from the group goes to Indonesian non-governmental organisations. Some, like the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, get most of their money from Holland. The Foundation, which gives free legal aid to the poor, has an annual Dutch grant of \$350,000 and now says the number of cases it can handle will have to be reduced.

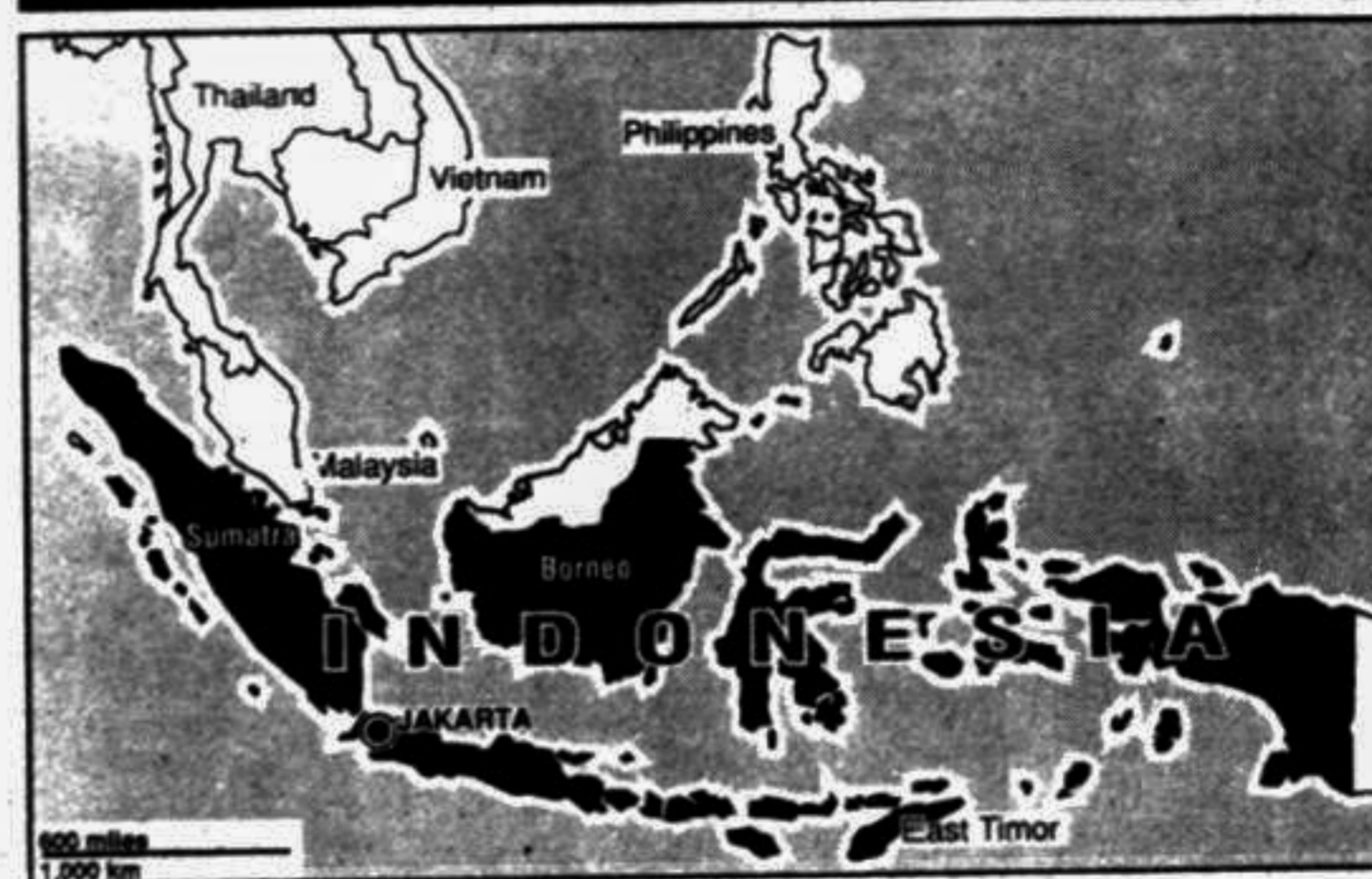
Other organisations, however, do not seem worried by the ban. The Indonesian Environmental Forum sees the new situation as a challenge to stand on its own feet.

There has been speculation that the ban is less about anger with the Netherlands than Jakarta's alarm at the outspokenness of some Indonesian non-governmental organisations. Some have been very critical of their government's human rights record.

Several NGO leaders were summoned by the Minister of

As the Indonesian people get set to go to the polls, the country's government is still coming to terms with its loss of international aid. Outraged over human rights violations, The Netherlands cut all aid to its former colony this spring. Indonesia says the Netherlands is using unfair intimidation. But as the two governments swap threats and terms, Gemini News Service reports on the real losers — charities and non-government agencies that no longer have the money to help the Indonesian people.

Indonesia: economic profile



GDP:	\$96.3bn	Exports:	\$27.4bn
GDP growth:	6.7%	Imports:	\$20.5bn
GDP per capita:	\$527	Main trading partners:	Japan, US, Singapore
Annual inflation:	9%	Currency:	Rupiah
Total external debt:	\$54bn		

Home Affairs to explain themselves, following a forum in Belgium at which they accused Jakarta of human rights violations. Indonesia ranks near the bottom of the UN human rights league table.

Armed forces chief General Try Sutrisno accused these activists of betraying their homeland and said Indonesians abroad should take the stance of "my country, right or wrong."

Home Affairs Minister Rudini said that because local non-governmental organisations are banned from accepting Dutch government assistance, they should no longer take part in NGO meetings, including IGGI.

The Dutch reaction to Indonesia's insistence on the dissolution of IGGI was,

according to a Dutch news agency, one of astonishment. The Indonesian Foreign Minister had visited The Hague only a month before and relations had seemed friendly.

Dutch Development Minister Jan Pronk said he saw no prospect for further aid to Indonesia under the present leadership in Jakarta. New aid, he said, was possible "with a new political generation (in power in Jakarta), but not before."

Indonesia has been ruled by the 'New Order' government, headed by President Suharto, for the past 26 years. Whether Suharto, 72, will run for another five year term in next years' presidential elections has been the topic of much speculation. There are rumours he will step down in favour of army chief Sutrisno.

Meanwhile the World Bank is setting up a new aid donor

group without the dominance of the Dutch. In July, a new creditor grouping will meet in Paris — the Consultative Group for Indonesia — to replace IGGI. The Dutch are invited but membership will not be limited to former IGGI members and the group will not be chaired from the Hague.

The Indonesian government has stressed its quarrel is with the Dutch government and not the private sector. Local groups are free to accept donations from the Dutch private sector, Dutch NGOs or individuals, but they must report all such transactions to the Jakarta government.

Admi Sudomo, Minister of Political Affairs and Security, made threats against dissident NGOs: "We will suspend the boards of executives of delinquent NGOs or dissolve the organisations if they continue receiving aid from the Netherlands' government."

NGOs are not the only agencies concerned about the stance of the Indonesian government. Dutch business people are concerned about the government's separation of foreign aid and overseas business.

"Official aid facilitated our business in Indonesia," said a representative of the Dutch Businessmen's Association in The Hague. He feared for the future of Dutch companies that export goods to Indonesia.

And Indonesians living in the Netherlands may also be affected. The Dutch government provides scholarships for Indonesian students in Holland and their grants now have to be terminated.

While Jakarta has sent enough funds to last until the end of the year, it is now assessing which students it will continue to fund.

The Indonesian government will continue to stress the small amount of the Dutch aid package — some eight per cent of the IGGI total. Sympathisers with this view believe the Dutch have no business lecturing Indonesia on human rights violations after they ran Java like a vast forced labour plantation for the last century of their 350-year colonial rule.

— Gemini News
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