

# How Famine is Caused and Tackled

A famine can be defined as the widespread shortage of food resulting in mass starvation and death. The shortage of food can be due to low production. In such a situation, famine is technically an outcome of production problem. Moreover, despite a bumper food production in a country famine can break out as a result of problems in supply. The distribution problem in most cases causes misery to the poor and the affluent. Bangladesh, like most of the other agricultural countries, has experienced famine from ancient period. Virtually the ruling elite of the country usually safeguards the interest of the rich causing immense misery and even death to the poor. The famine of 1770 hit the country and pushed the poor people on the verge of starvation. The famine of 1943 in undivided Bengal and the famine of 1974 in Bangladesh may throw some light on the causes and also point to measures that can be equal to the task.

**1943 Famine**  
The famine of 1943 in Bengal caused a complete disruption to the normal socio-economic life of Bengal. This was a major disaster accounting for 15 lakh deaths. This famine could be referred to more as a manmade one rather than a natural one. Large supplies were not ready as a result of general dislocation of grain market. But evidence shows grain was sufficient to meet the situation.

About 20 per cent of the total food requirement of Bengal was imported from Burma. But in the year 1942, when Japan occupied Burma, rice import from that country had been stopped. The existence of an inflationary situation caused due to hoarding and speculation by traders pushed up prices further and made foodgrains out of the reach of the masses. Moreover, existing procurement and distribution system led to worsening of the situation. The output of foodgrains was also affected due to natural calamities. Only in Midnapore, cyclone destroyed about 15 lakh tons of food-

grains. The famine enquiry commission under the chairmanship of Sir John Woodhead in 1944 revealed that the cause of famine was the shortage of food, break down of the normal machinery of distribution and lack of an efficient administrative structure. The relief operations conducted to meet the famine in Bengal were largely ineffective though the provincial government tried its best. The central government of India did not cooperate with the provincial government of Bengal. Restrictions imposed upon the movement of foodgrains from one province to other aggravated the situation.

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Moreover, cyclones hit the areas of Barisal, Patuakhali etc in the year 1942 and the condition of the distressed people was pitiable. Virtually, the famine of 1943 might be referred to the community syndrome which results when economic and administrative structures are under stress and further worsened by several deliberate disruptions which accelerate the incidence. For example, during the Second World War the Allies had conquered several countries and also Allied troops stationed in India had to be supplied foodgrains from the existing food stock. Besides, the railways were controlled by the army and as the food supply was disrupted on the Damodar river owing to flood, the situation naturally aggravated. Famine in 1943 acted as a great shock to the people and caused malnutrition and undernourishment to the poor people. Many people had to sell the last bit of their assets. The famine disrupted the normal socio-economic structure of the country. Consequently, incidence of suicides, epidemics and demoralisation of the people was on the rise. The famine in the year 1974 in Bangladesh should be

examined in the light of the actual situation of the country. During the period 1973-74 Bangladesh had a bumper crop production. But government machinery was very slow to procure a substantial proportion of rice to save for uncertainties. This failure of the government led to unscrupulous hoarding. During the period between May and August, 1974, the country experienced heavy rainfall and devastating flood came in the wake. This flood destroyed standing Boro and Aush crop and delayed the planting of Aman and Aush. Many rural households and livestock were lost in the flood. The price of rice was

rising at the time, especially slowly at the beginning of 1974 and quickly from the middle of the year. The worst period was between July and October. According to Dr A K Sen about one million people died during this period. Many marginal farmers had to sell their land in 1974. According to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, in the period 1974-75 the total rice loss was about 1.54 million tons. The figure of rice loss is definitely a very big amount if it is considered in absolute terms. But famine and its impact must be considered in terms of availability in the market. We have already mentioned that in 1973-74, Bangladesh had a bumper crop which government failed to procure in time. When flood started in May, hoarders took advantage of the situation. Price of rice was Tk 92.11 per maund in January, 1974. When flood started in May in the same year the price went up to Tk 135.68 but in October the price shot up to Tk 251.68. It was beyond the means of common people to buy from the market. Because rural wage rate was Tk 4.91 then while in May it increased to Tk 8.72 but decreased to Tk 8.64 in October. On a comparison between the months of 1973 and

1974 over the changes in wage rate and price of rice we found that the exchange entitlement of the rural labourers declined in the months of 1974. Rice output as well as food availability per head was also higher than in any other year during 1974-75. Moreover, if we look at the inter-district pattern, the famine hit districts — Rangpur, Mymensingh, Sylhet seem to have relatively better supplies of food, and also had substantial rise in rice production during the period 1974-75 compared to 1972-73. In the year 1974, the existence of an inflationary situation together with hoarding and speculation by traders

pushed and affected the price in such way that it increased at a faster rate and the crops were out of the reach of the common folk. There was enough food in the country to feed the entire population but the people were lacking the means to purchase it. Another main reason of famine in 1974 was that a lot of foodstuffs were smuggled to India. Influential circles were engaged in corruption, favouritism and smuggling. In one of the most famine-stricken areas in Rangpur, the average price of rice rose by 219 per cent within a year owing to food smuggling to India. The same happened in Mymensingh. The landlessness and famine of 1974 were implicitly inter-connected. Failures of the wages to buy food compelled the poor peasants to sell their lands and later seek refuge in Langarkhana. According to a BIDS survey, about 45 per cent small and 38 per cent agricultural and non-agricultural labourers were the inmates of Langarkhanas. Moreover, data from BIDS survey indicate that of the total number of households in 1974, approximately 44 per cent sold some type of assets out of which 37 per cent were distressed sale.

Famine is usually a phenomenon of the Third World countries where both production and distribution problems are common. To tackle famine, certain measures are listed below:

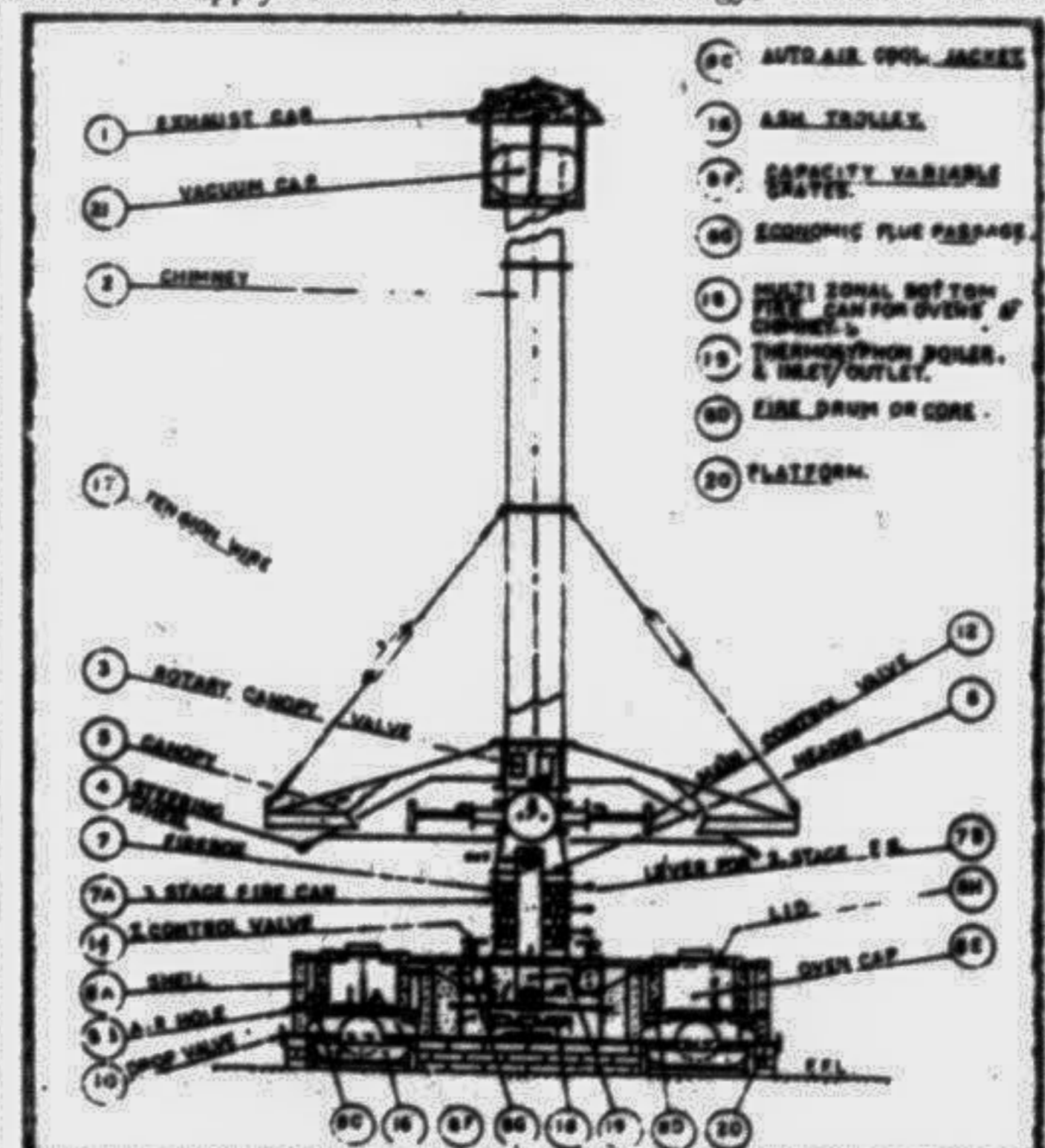
- (a) There should be a fundamental change in the agrarian structure of Bangladesh for removing uncertainty in crop production process. Land reform should be the first step in this respect which will create a large number of small farms through distribution of land from the large holders to the landless and marginal farmers. At the same time, government should supply seeds, fertilizer, irrigation facilities etc to start the production process at a nominal price.
- (b) A proper water resource management can reduce the dependence on nature.
- (c) Development of the effective cooperative by the small and marginal farmers can improve the decision-making process in Bangladesh agricultural production.
- (d) Distress sale should be prohibited by any means. It may be mentioned that many small farmers had to sell their land for food scarcity. In such a situation, some bank branches should be set up in villages and should advance loan to the poor peasants at a lower interest rate.
- (e) Government should improve structure to ensure proper planning to improve procurement and distribution system so that whenever price rises quickly in the market, government can control the situation supplying food through rationing system or open market system. Government should also try to control hoarders so that they cannot hoard food.
- (f) Population growth rate must be controlled at any cost, since population growth rate is 2.36 per cent compared to a cropping intensity of 1.46 per cent. Moreover, higher population growth rate creates demand for more homestead land and thus put pressure on cultivable land.

# Coal-fired Oven with a Difference

Coal-fired ovens have not been popular in our country. The reasons are many but chief among them are the scarcity of coal, emission of smokes in profusion and our traditional dependence on firewood. Moreover, the gas reserve in the country's east has positively discouraged the use of coal for domestic and mass cooking purposes. This has placed some of the districts in the country's south, west and north in great disadvantage. However, where coal is in abundant supply as in India —

multi-mouth; radial-layout; auto-ventilated; mechanical-drive; this central-cooking-range for industrial canteens is a new concept having a whole range of advantages over the age-old traditional system. The system has been highly appreciated by the 67th Indian Science Congress, 1980, by the delegates of the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of the Institution of Engineers (India), 1980 and also by the All India Seminar on Fuel Burning Equipment & Technology, Present Status,

of highest thermal efficiency and process recovery, (b) arresting of massive coal losses by the personal behavioral factors (habits) of the cooks who are of different origins and different practices. In two cases in multi-national companies and one in public sector, coal consumption were recorded to be 565 gm, 769 gm, and 110 gm per standard meal respectively. After commissioning Blue-Master Scheme, the reading was 220 gm of coal per standard meal in each case. Thus the average saving is much above 65 per cent. Standard meal is defined as the average meal-standard for workers as per rule. Standardisation of coal vs meal is thus streamlined, and thus coal budget control has become easier. Capital Recovery: Due to high saving of coal, the capital recovery cycle is found to be complete by 36 months by one shift running and rest period. This unit functions as an earning unit thereafter. Pollution Control at 100 per cent and creation of Congenial Environmental Working Condition for the cooks at work in the hot zone are ensured for the system design, which is a derivative of the initial design purpose of Coal Conservation and out of 20 advantages 19 other advantages are derivatives and shall easily prove worthy. This is a sealed, compact design of concealed flame system contrary to LPO. Butane or Propane gases which are of Open Flame, induced pollution from, after-burnt gases, scattering in the kitchen and elevating the kitchen temperature by flame's radiation. The same is the case with coal gas burners. Coal gas has one more problem of sulphur attack of burners and quick end of life. Blue-Master oven's advantages are almost unrivalled.



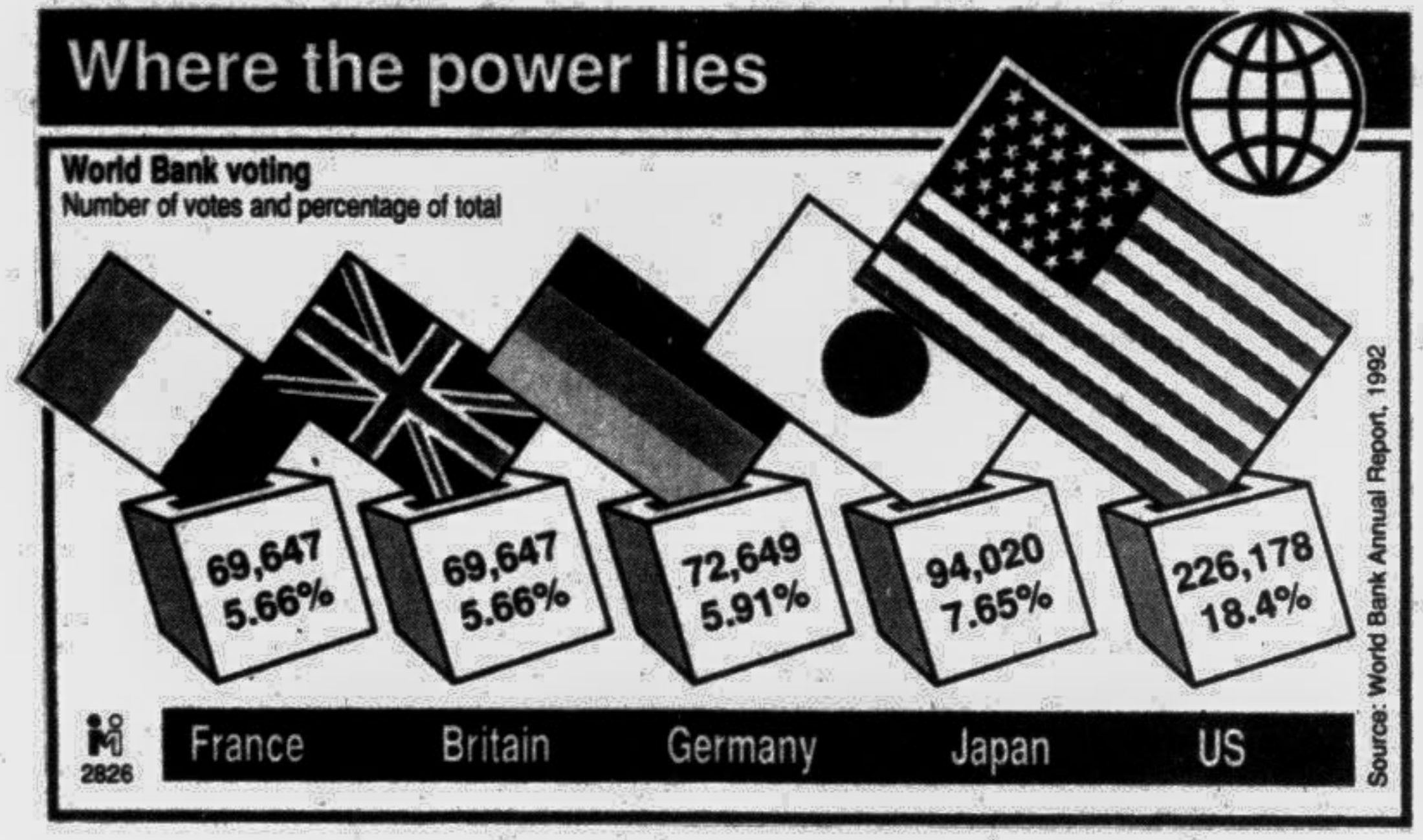
and in places where the supply of gas proves difficult and costly, coal-fired oven is likely to be the real answer to the fuel problem. One such oven brand named Blue-master developed and marketed by Blue Star Overseas & Co, Calcutta, India is so technically advanced that it has not only economised the cost but also got rid of the environment pollution. With concealed-flame: organised by the institution of Engineers (India). Testing has been done on Commissioned Units, in leading multi-national companies and public sector's canteens viz. ICI; Lipton Siemens; Hindustan Lever (Haldia); Hindustan Cables; Hindustan Shipyard; BCCL & ISM successfully during the past decade. High saving of coal energy is the result of: (a) achievement

# World Bank Shakes Up its Men at the Top

A planned overhaul of top management posts at the World Bank is being criticised by some international development experts as unlikely to achieve its stated aim of helping to reduce poverty in the developing world. Three vice-presidential positions are being created by World Bank chief Lewis Preston under a restructuring initiative schedule to take effect on January 1. Preston explained that the move stems from the fact that the bank agenda is now dominated by three categories of development efforts. Each of the new vice-presidents will thus be put in charge of one of these broad areas. Armeane Choksi of India is to supervise human resources development and operations policy. His duties will include oversight of the Bank's education, social, health and population-related programmes. Finance and private sector development will become the responsibility of Jean-Francois Richard, a Luxembourg national. He will address issues pertaining to financial institutions in the developing world, as well as being involved in policy-making in regard to technology and energy projects.

The Bank's existing Environment Department is being subsumed into a new framework that will also include units devoted to agriculture, natural resources, transport and urban development. The entire package will be handed over to Egypt's Ismail Serageldin, who will carry the title of vice-president for environmentally sustainable development. All three sets of responsibilities are currently grouped under the Bank's Vice-President or sector and operations policy. Viswanathan Rajagopalan, the holder of that office, is planning to retire from the global lending agency next September. The purpose of all reorganisation, according to World Bank spokesman Alan Drattell, is to highlight the three areas "better than before, to give them greater emphasis than before." In announcing the management shift, Preston implied that it would not involve any change in the Bank's direction.

and political manipulation while being closed at the bottom to different social and political views. In his assessment of the managerial reorganisation, Hellinger suggested that the plan may have the effect of "marginalising" the issues it is supposed to highlight. He said: "By singling them out and not integrating them with the regional parts of the Bank, which is where policy is made, (the restructuring) could prove to be just a showcase." Some other Bank-watchers contend that its major management issue is the tension between Preston and the 22 executive directors who constitute the policy-making board. The Washington Post has reported that the directors, who represent the Bank's donor-countries, sometime



1987 shake-up, intended to streamline the powerful institution, involved the elimination of some 500 employee positions, along with a far-reaching job reclassification. The Bank, which now includes 172 nations and a staff of 6,500, has reportedly become, somewhat more efficient as a result of Conable's reforms. As the leading industrial nations reduce their own foreign aid, the Bank has been expected to play an ever greater role in the developing world and in eastern Europe. The countries that provide the bank's capital — now estimated at more than \$175 billion — have been urging it to achieve better results from its large-scale lending. But a few former insiders have charged that the Bank remains unwieldy and unresponsive. Michael Irwin wrote in The Wall Street Journal in 1990, that he was resigning as

based in its headquarters in Washington. That is too high a degree of centralisation for an institution that makes loans to more than 100 countries, Irwin maintained. Preston, formerly president of one of Wall Street's biggest investment banks, has himself acknowledged that the Bank behaves in a somewhat "arrogant" fashion. The Washington Post reported last May that the 66-year-old Bank supremo told a private meeting with business leaders that "what's wrong is that we tend to be a bit arrogant. We lecture — and we should listen more." The need for greater decentralisation was also cited by Douglas Hellinger, director of the Washington-based Development Group for Alternative Policies. The Bank actually functions fairly efficiently for an institution of its size, Hellinger maintained, "but it's open at the top to commercial

seek to influence management decisions, which Preston regards as his purview. According to the Post, the Bank chief complained about the director's "divided loyalties," meaning that they are beholden both to their home countries and to the Bank itself. Some directors are also said to be frustrated at the continued dominance of the Bank by the United States, which contributes the largest share of the Bank's funds and thereby has the strongest influence over its policies. Throughout its history, Bank presidents have all been US nationals. Some critics maintain that the Bank operates essentially as a policy agent of the US government, using its enormous financial resources to advance Washington's interests in the Third World. — Gemini News

# Asian Mangroves Being Encased in Malls, Fishponds

MANAGEMENT policies for rapidly-shrinking mangroves are badly needed, before aggressive land developers encase these exotic forest in concrete. The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) is urging Asian scientists to intensify their work for new policies — before mangroves crumble in the rush for shopping malls, salt-beds or shrimp ponds. "Mangroves fill a unique ecological niche," explains Dr Y S Rao of FAO. "They nurture aquatic life, prevent erosion of shores, provide food and incomes. Over a third of the world's mangroves are in Southeast Asia. Some 40 tree species grow in mangroves. Less than half are used commercially. Overall, coastal ecosystems provide livelihood for nearly 60 per cent of the people who live within a 60-kilometre belt from coast. Indonesia has the largest mangrove belts: 3,927,100 hectares. Malaysia retains 570,000 has., roughly double that of Thailand which has 287,308 has. The Matang Mangrove Forest Reserve in Malaysia is considered the best managed mangrove in the world. But this is the exception. The Asian Development

Bank is funding the forestry Research Support Programme for Asia and the Pacific (FORSPA) is looking at the food security implications. FORSPA is supporting restoration of a mangrove ecosystem to find clues that led to better nutrition and conservation. "Malnutrition is rife in coastal areas," says Dr YS Rao, who has been named by FAO to head FORSPA. "Increased outputs should go to communities that work these forests. Shrimp exports to Japan from these forests benefit only a few." In Thailand, pressure is building even on the best developed mangrove forests. These occur on the west coast of the peninsula. Bangkok, for example, burns one million cubic metres of mangrove charcoal yearly. But mangroves have a God-given capacity to grow — if given the chance. Species

in economic planning agencies, mangroves and estuaries are acquiring a new value as their potential for coastal aquaculture is developed. Only now are government aware that mangroves are being degraded at alarming rates. This concerns many Asian countries that meet increasing demand for inexpensive protein by promoting fisheries. Recent studies document relationships between mangroves and fisheries. But most studies so far have been purely descriptive. Former International Rice Research Institute director, Dr MS Swaminathan, has assembled scientists to develop natural resource management policies for mangroves in India.

Work by scientists will, no doubt, produce needed guidelines for sustained management of mangroves. Researchers are already insisting that communities living in mangrove belts be given a fair share of its economic benefits. Unless this is done, FAO notes, they will not conserve the mangroves. Established in 1984, the International Irrigation Management Institute assists developing nations in improving the performance of irrigation systems through better management. It is one of a global network of 17 centres of the Washington-based Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), a consortium of 48 donor countries, international agencies, development banks and foundations, that support agricultural research for development. The CGIAR is sponsored by the World Bank, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the UN Development Programme (UNDP). — Depthnews Asia

# Expanded Role of Irrigation to Ease Food Shortage

IRRIGATION will have to play an even larger role in producing additional quantities of food than it has been doing since the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Irrigated agriculture will have to increase its output by at least 3.5 per cent a year just to feed some 700 million new mouths expected by the year 2000. That's the conclusion of a study looking at future trends facing the irrigated agriculture sector in developing countries, according to officials at the International Irrigation Management Institute (IIMI), headquartered in Colombo, Sri Lanka. IIMI Director General Roberto Lenton says this demand on irrigated agriculture comes at a time when water is becoming scarcer, there are more competing demands for it, and most of the good irrigation sites have already been developed. "There is widespread dissatisfaction with the performance of irrigation projects," Mr Lenton says. "Systems are performing far below their

potential. More water is being delivered than required and it rarely corresponds in the amount and timing to the crop's requirements. This results in crop yields far below their potential. A sister research centre, the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) headquartered in the Philippines. Studies there have shown that the yield of modern rice varieties under irrigation is five times greater than the yield of traditional varieties under rain-fed conditions. At the same time, at least 20 financially hard pressed governments looking to reduce public subsidisation of irrigation and recover costs are beginning to shift projects out of central bureaucracies and into the hands of the users, to operate, maintain and make them self-supporting. The trend of seeking future growth while holding down costs is expected to continue and spread, Mr Lenton says. "It will very probably be the most significant adjustment in irrigated agriculture throughout the 1990s, and may have an important effect on the state of food production and rural

poverty over the decade." Most of the requirements for meeting the targets set for irrigated agriculture are not in place today, Mr Lenton says. "At times the problem seems so overwhelming that there is a tendency to be pessimistic about the opportunities," he says. The need to produce more food with less water for agriculture will be a dominating concern of the future. Mr Lenton also says that a general lack of irrigation system maintenance has caused many systems to fall into disrepair. In China, for example, more than 930,000 hectares of irrigated farmland have become unproductive since 1980 — an average loss of some 116,000 ha per year. Worldwide, an estimated 150 million ha — about 65 per cent of the world's total irrigated area — need some form of upgrading to remain productive. These issues give rise to major concerns about the sustainability of irrigation. In Asia, the impressive rice and wheat production gains of the past 25 years are partially attributed to the use of irrigation, according to scientists at

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