Dhaka Saturday, March 13, 1993

## Not Yet upto the Task

If anything, population explosion is the country's most pressing problem. An increasingly growing population eats away any addition to our scarce resources and make a big dent into all our developmental efforts. Hardly do we hear any encouraging or soothing words from any authoritative source. Dr Nasis Sadik, Chief Executive. United Nations Fund for Population Activities, has been an exception and that is not for nothing. She has expressed her satisfaction over the high rate of contraceptive use in the country.

Nasis Sadik's complements are well taken and the government should feel immensely satisfied for this achievement. The remarkable rise in contraceptive use from 30 per cent in 1989 to 41 per cent now is going to have its benefits. By the year-end another two per cent increase will hopefully be recorded. This is a healthy trend. But not good enough for the task ahead. Far more needs to be done to stabilise the population at 230 million in the next 30 years. This will be an achievement unmatched by any other country.

However, if the present trend is allowed to continue then the country may end up having as big a population size as 400 million plus. It is exactly at this point that the question inexorably comes to the fore: is the government doing enough to be equal to the task? The answer obviously is going to be a big No. Efforts must be geared up with an increased sense of resolve for bringing down the population size as quickly as possible. That the government efforts have fallen far short of the target is revealed by a survey result. Rural women have made known their preferences for an average family size of only three but currently this size is about 4.2. This indicates that the family size can be reduced by at least 1.2 straightaway. What is, however, required is that the population planning services must be efficient and increased or expanded to cover the desired level.

The government must admit that something somewhere has gone wrong. How else do you explain the services not matching the people's desire for population control? Nor will the expansion of the government organs be advisable to do the trick. Inter-ministerial and intra-ministerial bureaucratic bottle-necks have been found to hamper the implementation of family planning programmes. Instead, more involvement of nongovernment organisations in the process will provide the necessary impetus for successful implementation of the programmes. NGOs have involved women in the income-generation process and this is highly important. In countries of the South Asian region women's status is too low for them to be a part of the decision-making process. Unless women enhance their social status through earning for them and their families, their involvement in the decision on family size will not be ensured. This is why Dr Sadik has lamented the lower esteem women in South Asian societies receive, and rightly so. The government must, however, play a coordinating role not only in the family planning matter but also in semale education. Education of women helps reap rich dividends more than the same for male - because the beneficial influences are reflected in almost all aspects of family life.

## **Man Comes First**

No one who hasn't gone through it can have even an inkling of how it feels for a landed peasant to lose, overnight, his land and home and start living under the open sky with all in his family. The horror of the situation only increases if hundreds of such families find shelter on an embankment not more than 10 feet wide at the top. The suffering comes from the fact that these peasants having sprawling homesteads, each of which stood at least on a few bighas of land, have been reduced to worst of city slum-dwellers, although sandwiched between the sea on one side and the vast expanse of char lands on the other. If there was one inhuman thing in the world - that could be this, a change in man's overall condition to something so base and ungenerous that it won't allow, even over generations, a family to return to a truly man's state.

This suffering of those that, losing everything, went up the Sandwip Beri Bandh and raised shacks and shanties has been further compounded by two factors. One is nature herself she can, any cursed moment, wash the embankment out. The threat is there for over six months a year. The other factor is man-made. The settlers, if they can at all be called as such, have no legal claim to their forced newsubhuman habitat and stand to be evicted any evil moment

The latter factor, because it is man-related, should have been eminently amenable to reason and a sense of humanity. But the Sandwip embankment people have fallen a victim to exactly a human instrument called the tenancy law. In order to strengthen the embankment by lengthening and widening and adding a few centimetres of height to it, it must be vacated fully. The contractors are already on the job, as reported by The Daily Star on Thursday. And the people living a nightmare - now because of

The question now is - why hasn't the local administration cared to find more suitable accommodation for these people in two long years' time? And when the World Bank project was on the anvil, why didn't they rush to place them anywhere else - there being no shortage of khas land on the island of Sandwip? Now it is very simply the administration to answer where will they go. You cannot shirk responsibility only because they have now no legal claim to any land. All man - every man-is your responsibility.

Our governments, from the apex down to the lowliest echelon, haven't yet learnt civilisation's first lesson. That man comes first. And everything else after that.

HE good old days of the ings, our farmers could see much sought after Sobetter days of an income level nar Bangla is always beyond subsistence - a better dwelling, education for the conceived in terms of rural households with barnful of children and above all, a nutritionally adequate dict. paddy and pondful of fish. The paddy component follows from the image of a bumper harvest.

The main rice crop is harves-

ted in December-January and

it arrives into the markets in

huge bulks within a short span

of few weeks only. If the crop

is good, like this year, the ap-

pearance of a bumper harvest,

although very much seasonal

and short-lived cannot escape

But reality beyond must be

understood. First, average rice

vield of much less than a ton

per acre from miniscule hold

ings, largely share cropped

cannot produce more than

bare subsistence for farmers.

as distinct from landowners.

Secondly, many more of the

poor farmers might have sur-

plus this year to earn a better

cash income. Unfortunately,

collapse of the farm-gate

prices during immediate post-

harvest period negate the hard

carned aspirations of slightly

better days. Benefits would ul-

timately accrue to traders, not

the actual producers of the so-

At the same time, crop

agriculture still possesses the

massive potential for a 5 per

cent annual rate of growth sus-

tained over the next ten years

through diversified as well as

intensive cropping patterns.

And only then, inspite of ex

tremely limited size of hold

called bumper crop.

our attention.

Only then we can loudly proclaim not a single bumper harvest but bumper agriculture. It is an uphill though a feasible task. Indeed, it is a humpy road to a bumper harvest. But if we really strive hard for it, we could achieve it.

### **Diversified Agriculture**

The case for a diversified agriculture as the basis of sustainable five percent annual growth rate may be seen first from the final consumption point of view. Daily per capita consumption of rice in Japan declined from around 11 ounces in 1965 to 7 ounces by 1991 because of rising income and increasing preference for western foods. They prefer and can afford more meat, vegetables and fruits. We had no such transformation, rice was substituted by wheat because of scarcity and therefore the price factor. In fact, we are at such low income level that per capita rice consumption would most probably increase if the rural wage rates should steadily rise and demand for atta might tend to stagnate. This is what economists call high income elasticity of demand for rice at low income levels but with increasing income, demand for rice would tend to get inelastic and might eventually turn negative in the

long run provided high income growth could be sustained over the next twenty years. Anyway, a ten per cent fall in per capita consumption of rice by the year 2000 because of income growth would mean 2 million tons of less rice consumed which if exported lassuming high quality) would mean 700 million dollars worth of export

Agricultures diversification producing more fish, poultry meat, vegetables and fruits would also influence consumption patterns by reducing demand for rice. This is because

of paddy whose gross value would be Tk 10,000 (most probably less). Instead, if horticulture crops are grown, incomes would be few times

The HYV Aus and Aman based strategy for rapid growth in the rice economy will open up the diversification opportunities which will also absorb more labour and at higher income levels. Let us try to identify the ultimate scenario of such a bumper agriculture rather than one single bumper

Arte and office crops are

# WINDOW ON ASIA **Shahed Latif**

The Bumpy Road to a Bumper Harvest

of higher incomes induced by non-cereal agriculture itself as well as greater availability of non-rice foods. Concentration of paddy culture in wet season as opposed to irrigated, dry scason boro cultivation would open up millions of acres of land for a wide variety of crops to be cultivated including animal feeds and fodder in order to increase availability of nonccreal foods. Also, such diversified farming systems, including animal husbandry would generate greater income per unit of land; thus enhancing affordability of foods other than rice. An acre under HYV boro, given the best of

conditions, would yield 2 tons

grown in half the cultivated land and the balance 50 per cent devoted to double cropping. The average yield of paddy exceeds 2 tons per acre and it is not only rice but a wide variety of diversified crops - vegetables, offseeds, feed and fodder, fruits and flowers are all grown round the year. Out of these, flowers occupying less than half a percent of the land might amount to a billion dollar export bust ness which will still constitute only 5 per cent share of the global market for flowers worth 20 billion dollars by the year 2000. -

For this to happen, irrigation should be expanded

rapidly to cover 16 million of the 21 million acres of the net cultivated, land. There will be floods no doubt but its ravages could be contained while dam ages by droughts tend to be marginal

### Expansion of Agroprocessing

The development in crop agriculture as envisaged would cause great expansion of agroprocessing: (1) paddy processing industry including byproduct utilisation alone should call for one or two modern large-scale processing units on the average in each Union Parishad with capacity of 5000 tons of paddy per an num; (ii) Triple cropping calls for mechanisation of farm work for land preparation and harvests in particular; (iii) Irrigation would multiply de mands for several types of machineries and equipment; and (iv) Agro-towns would come up to process offseeds and horticulture crops.

An immediate spin-off of fect of diversified crop agricul ture would be poultry industry followed by dairy development At the same time, emphasis must be given to fish farming where Bangladesh possess one of the significant unexplored potentials of the world.

It is comprehensive development of a large set of simul taneous activities that must be aimed at. However the existing situation recalls the classic ex-

ample where everything need to be done at the same time and therefore nothing gets done as planned. It is the vicious circle of total underdevelopment that must be overcome through an integrated system approach rather than confronting at a particular point in time on only a segment of the circle of poverty and backwardness.

The boro-led agriculture growth have been strategically a wrong source of development. It has put further blockades on the bumpy road to a bumper harvest. Instead, additional rice production should have been sought from primarly ratifed HYV aus and aman. while expanding irrigated acreage devoted to several cold season high value-added crops and export of pineapple. banana, vegetables and flowers forchids). At the same time, fish farming (for example, shrimp culture through hatcheries) should have made substantial progress instead of depending on wild captured fishing till to-day.

It is unfortunate that our agriculture planners, inspite of massive assistance from expatriates at enormous costs. could not but pursue the welltrodden path led by boro one single crop. For God's sake, let us not deepen the crisis further through illusions of the current harvest. The bumpy road to bumper harvest has yet to be traversed.

# Media is Alive, but Not soWell in Central Asia

RIGORY Breigin has a conviction: that while tion remain in the hands of the state, a free press cannot exist.

"It will take only the Minister of Mass Communications to call the biggest Kazakhstan publishing house Dauir and our newspaper will die," says Mr Grigory, Editor-in-Chief of the independent weekly Caravan.

"They will stop printing it. and that's all. And the danger is real for us."

Mr Grigory's concern was shared by other editors from Central Asia, here in a seminar on promoting an independent and pluralistic Asian media organised by the UN Educational. Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

"Free press, you say? What's that? We have nothing of the kind," says Jeren Taimova, Vice Editor-in-Chief of the Turkmenistan evening newspaper Vecherni Ashqabat. "Our mass media is under the complete control of the govern-

Muhabbatsho Mazhatsho, Editor in-Chief of the independent Tajik newspaper Jukhuriat, plays Nostradamus. foretelling that by the end of 1992 only two newspapers will survive in Tajikistan - a communist newspaper and an Islamic one.

"All the independent publications, if they express even a slightest doubt about the political course of the President and the government, are banned right away. The opposition press was forced to go underground," says Albert Musin, Editor of Uzbekistan's Independent Weekly.

"They hunt for me as if I were a beast. They even shake my parents, who live in Tajikistan, trying to convince them to make me surrender to the Uzbekistan authorities."

These editors met in Kazakhstan's capital, and along with about 400 colleagues from 53 countries, issued the Alma-Ata Declaration calling for changes to outdated press laws, the abolition of monopolies in printing and newspaper

Leo Balayan writes from Alma-Ata industries and the establishment, "as a matter of urgency". of resource centres in the Central Asian republics for journalist training and information exchange.

An International Freedom of Information Exchange (IFEX) Action Alert Network to protect journalists and press freedom was also proposed. The declaration points out the need to identify economic bar-

centres, where any publisher can go and, for a normal price. have his newspaper printed. His concern - for an inde-

pendent publishing house - is understandable. Sometime ago, the Kazakhstankaya Pravda newspaper published an interview with the Minister of Mass Communications, Kuanysh Sultanov, who said: "We shan't allow the Caravan weekly newspaper, that uses harmless

An independent media should also make money

riers to the creation of independent media in the region, and to seek alternative methods of acquiring and distributing newsprint, providing printing facilities and organising low-interest credits.

Mr Breigin, the Editor-in Chief of Caravan weekly, says that if Western democracies are really interested in promoting the mass media in central Asia, they should help to create independent printing

advertisements as a cover, to become a political newspaper.

As to the problem of press freedom in Kazakhstan, one example comes to mind, from seminar participant Saltana Alshagirova from Karaganda where she works as Editor-in-Chief of a weekly youth newspaper Friday. There were no problems three years ago, she says, when the newspaper was under the care of a regional communist youth organisation.

"We had a motto then every Robinson must have his Friday," Ms Alshagirova says. Now the situation has completely changed and our Friday needs the help of Robinsons.

"We'd like to become dependent again in order to survive, but nobody will take us Official media get government subsidies and they have preferential taxation whereas in dependent media cannot even dream of such privileges.

Some may blame Ms Alshagirova herself for being in a situation where she earns only US \$5 a month and the members of her editorial staff not more than US \$2.50. An ardent partisan of the "bazaar cconomy" would say that if they can't run the paper properly, if they have no commercial vein, it serves them right.

There may be something in ft. But not everything. This is because the "Declaration of Alma-Ata on promoting an independent and pluralistic Asian media" does not contain even the slightest hint that an independent media should

Our destination is not struggling for growth, but survival. That is to say, journalism is one thing and business is quite another.

During the seminar, the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan invited some of the organisers to his residence. Among them were the President of the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers, Prescott Low and its Deputy General Secretary. Neal W. Swanscott, and European Representative of the World Press Freedom Committee, Ronald Coven.

They asked President Nursultan Nazarbayev about the prospects for the development of a free press in Kazakhstan. The president answered that one must not think that the transition from a dictatorship to a free life like that in Paris can be achieved within one

I agree. But how long will that night last, I wonder. - Depthnews Asia

# Gurkhas Take New Security Role in Hong Kong ORMER Gurkha sol-

Kong may soon be marching back to the Crown Colony - as security guards.

As a spate of major armed robberies in jewelry shops, downtown shoot-outs between police and armed gangs and the burgeoning cases of stolen luxury cars bedevil Hong Kong. many Nepali Gurkha soldiers are hoping to find work here once they leave the army.

Indeed, some 1,000 Nepali ' Gurkhas will be out of the British army within the year in a major military cost-cutting drive. Several of them have already left Hong Kong and are in Nepal on resettlement courses.

World-wide, the Gurkha regiments of the British army are being cut back from about 7,300 to 2,500 by 1997. Over half the Gurkha contingent is

stationed in Hong Kong. Under the terms of their recruitment, they have to return to Nepal once they leave

the army. Hong Kong's tough diers who served in the laws on imported labour also British army in Hong made it difficult for them to come back here.

With up to 5,000 Gurkhas scheduled to be laid-off between now and 1997, there has been considerable concern that merely leaving them to fend for themselves after they leave the army could tempt many of them into being mercenaries for "undesirable" governments or rebel groups.

But now Gurkhas are finding that redundancy from the British army is not necessarily a one-way ticket out of Hong Kong, even though the government has rejected their redeployment in the colony's police force.

The Hong Kong police force, which employs large numbers of British, Australian and other expatriate officers, is committed to "localising" the police in advance as the colony prepares for its handover to Chinese rule in 1997.

The recruitment of large number of non-Chinese police so close to 1997 would be

Former Nepali Gurkha soldiers assigned in Hong Kong may have another security job waiting for them after the army. Yojana Sharma of IPS reports from Hong Kong.

viewed with a great deal of suspicion by China, say Hong Kong officials.

But prospects in the private sector have increased after a spate of gun-battles in Hong Kong's central business district and a rise in car robberies that reached a total of 5,000 luxury vehicles last year.

Security firms now say the government is looking sympathetically at applications to import Gurkhas as watchmen as the demand for high-class security services increases.

The security firm Jardine Securicor was awarded 300 jobs under the government's controlled labour scheme last year. It says it will fill the entire allocation to hire former British Army Gurkha soldiers as guards.

Businessmen feel using

army-trained guards may be a better deterrent to robbers than "a tired-looking man at the door", says one jewelry shop owner who enthusiastically welcomes the return of the Gurkhas in their new secu-

rity role.

Jardine Securicor personnel manager David Ng says it would mean better protection for businesses. "They are not just ordinary watchmen or security guards," he explains. Their military background has equipped them with special

A Hong Kong car park management firm is cashing in on the image of Gurkhas as professionally-trained military men, issuing them with crisp paramilitary-style grey uniforms and maroon berets, unlike the usual drab khaki garb

of local car park attendants. Their whole image is one of

"don't mess with us", said one security firm. Car park firms, meanwhile, say the idea is to give the impression that these men - some of them veterans of the Falklands War - "are ready to act.

Their role is to deter and detect car crime and we believe their very physical presence will be a major factor in achieving reductions," says Paul Simpson, managing director of Wilson Parking, which has hired up to 30 former Gurkha soldiers.

Gurkha watchmen fit in well in Hong Kong where guards from the Indian subcontinent have been traditionally employed — a throwback from the days of the British Rai when Britain employed large numbers of Sikh guards and

policemen in its colonies. But it is becoming harder to recruit enough Pakistani and Indian as guards because of better opportunities for them in Hong Kong's booming construction industry, security

Security work "is a risky job with long hours and low wages", says Ng." (But) Gurkha soldiers are more than willing

to do the work."

What amounts to low wages of up to US\$700 a month is good money for the Gurkhas who face dim prospects at home. Tourism, Nepal's main foreign exchange earner, has been hit hard by the world recession and has reduced employment prospects of former

Gurkhas to virtually nil. Some former British army Gurkhas have also found work at US embassies in Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates and in a special reserve unit for the Sultan of Brunei.

The British Foreign Office has also employed ex-Gurkhas as guards at embassies in Bangkok, Kabul and Dhaka. They are also expected to guard the British embassies in Luanda, Angola and Phnom Penli and serve with United Nations troops in non-combat roles in former Yugoslavia.

## Of ministers' relatives and their lackeys

Sir, Travelling by the steamership 'Rocket' to Khulna, on the 25th of Fcb '93, I had occasion to see how relatives of Ministers and their lackeys waste and spend the tax payers money.

The brother of a senior minister (whose name I do not have the privilege of knowing) was a fellow passenger. His wife was accompanying him. On arrival at Khulna steamer ghat, the following day, i.e. 26th of Feb. '93, I was appalled to find a retinue of servants of the tax payers, Bagerhat Thana, where the 'brother' was headed, down to the UNO all gathered, with govt. transport, waiting to receive the 'brother'. I do not have any thing against the brother being received by the higher ups, its just that when the higher ups are paid from the public exchequer, we object. Perhaps the minister and his lackeys would like to explain, in what capacity the brother was received at the steamer ghat by public servants who had no

business being there. Minister's brother or not, he is just another citizen. Or do the police and the other officials of the thana, do not have anything better to do with their time and the tax payers' money? The man on the street who pays the salary for those pompous individuals, would like a few answers. Let not the ministers forget they are the elected representatives of the people and at some point in time, are accountable for their actions. Would the govt. please look into such flagrant wastage of time and money by the public servants?

P. Haque 77-D, Uttara Model Town, Dhaka.

### Installation of kidney stone crushing machine

Sir, My attention was drawn to the letter by Mr. Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury regarding the delay in installation of kidncy stone crushing machine at PG Hospital. I suppose the news of such machine already

in operation in PG llospital must have escaped his notice. The lithotripter has been lunctioning for the last few months and the cost of treatment is much cheaper than that in India, Singapore, Bangkok etc. Moreover, there is provision of free facilities for the poor.

His accusation relating to the delay being intentional by the surgeons of the hospital had been made out of ignorance. In fact the reason for delay could be attributed to the training imported abroad to the health personnel since the machine being sophisticated has to be operated by skilled personnel.

I wish Mr. Saleh could himself go to the lithotripsy unit at the hospital before making such allegation.

Md Jalaluddin Igbal Mohammedpur, Dhaka.

I accuse Sir, I take this opportunity to accuse the world community of turning a blind eye and

keeping their conscience

closed to one of the world's

Human Rights. No, Sir, I am not referring to any incident that is shaking the world from Angola to Zaire. I have not even taken up pen to protest such gruesome crimes as the rape of more than twenty thousand women in Bosnia-Herzegovina. i am concerned, very deeply, about something which has not been attempted anywhere ever since Hitler's diabolic plan to solve the semetic issue by exterminating the entire Jewish population in Germany. The recent happenings in Brazil is perhaps comparable to only Hitler's final solution in its malevolent objective. In Brazil they are trying to exterminate humanity, in its totality. I may sound crazy. But facts, as published in The Daily Star (A Modern-day Slay of Innocents'.

They have waged a war against slum-children in all big cities in Brazil. The offence committed by these hundreds and thousands of children between the age of six and 18 whose dead bodies are being

most serious violation of found (?) by police or people, is that they are poor slumdwellers. Like all slumdwelling children living in all big cities of the world today they are a social nuisance and many of them are engaged by big crime lords in pimping, drug trafficking and such other assorted crimes. But the solution to this problem, apparently planned by some group or ingenious individuals in Brazil, gives me the creeps! The death squads of Brazil may catch the imagination of some modern day Herod or a Hitler in other places of the world, specially in the third world countries, where slum and shanty town-dwelling children behave in similar manner, and inspire them to try the same solution about the problems of overpopulation and overcrowd-January 28) and other foreign ing of city facilities. journals point to that direc-

We already hear about triage, a new concept of sorting out the fittest and let the uniti die or disappear, from some economists who are worried about world's scarce resources and increasing population. Are Brazil's death squads thinking one step ahead and trying to hasten the process of sorting out human

Apparently the Brazilian government has failed to do anything about it. If the world community remains unconcerned about this planned and organised killing of children in this Latin American country we have no right to talk about such lofty ideals like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. We better wait for the final solu-

Children are the postcrity, aren't they? Apparently the thugs of Brazil seem to think that 'since posterity has done nothing for them they have no duty to posterity - and can try to blot them out. But that's a joke! What's being done in Brazil is not I, as a father of children, implore the world community to do something, now. Time is probably running

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