

The Bumpy Road to a Bumper Harvest

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.

Naftis 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.

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 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.

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.

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 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.

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?

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

THE good old days of the much sought after Sonar Bangla is always conceived in terms of rural households with barnful of paddy and pondful of fish. The paddy component follows from the image of a bumper harvest.

But reality beyond must be understood. First, average rice yield of much less than a ton per acre from minuscule holdings, largely share-cropped cannot produce more than bare subsistence for farmers, as distinct from landowners.

At the same time, crop agriculture still possesses the massive potential for a 5 per cent annual rate of growth sustained over the next ten years through diversified as well as intensive cropping patterns.

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.

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 (assuming high quality) would mean 700 million dollars worth of export earnings.

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



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 season 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 non-cereal foods.

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 damages by droughts tend to be marginal.

Expansion of Agro-processing

The development in crop agriculture as envisaged would cause great expansion of agro-processing. (i) paddy processing industry including by-product 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 annum; (ii) Triple cropping calls for mechanisation of farm work for land preparation and harvests in particular; (iii) Irrigation would multiply demands for several types of machineries and equipment; and, (iv) Agro-towns would come up to process oilseeds and horticulture crops.

An immediate spin-off effect of diversified crop agriculture 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 simultaneous activities that must be aimed at. However the existing situation recalls the classic ex-

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 primarily rainfed HYV and aman; while expanding irrigated acreage devoted to several cold season high value-added crops and export of pineapple, banana, vegetables and flowers (orchids). 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 well-trodden 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 so Well in Central Asia

GRIGORY Breigin has a conviction: that while the means of production 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 Daur and our newspaper will die," says Mr Grigory, Editor-in-Chief of the independent weekly Caravan.

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).

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 barriers 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.

Gurkhas Take New Security Role in Hong Kong

FORMER Gurkha soldiers who served in the British army in Hong Kong may soon be marching back to the Crown Colony — as security guards.

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 laws on imported labour also 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 hand-over to Chinese rule in 1997.

The recruitment of large number of non-Chinese police so close to 1997 would be viewed with a great deal of suspicion by China, say Hong Kong officials.

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.

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

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 sub-continent have been traditionally employed — a throwback from the days of the British Raj 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

firms say. 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 Penh and serve with United Nations troops in non-combat roles in former Yugoslavia.

Children are the posterity, 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 out!

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To the Editor...

Of ministers' relatives and their lackeys

Sir, Travelling by the steamer ship 'Rocket' to Khulna, on the 25th of Feb '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 anything 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 kidney stone crushing machine at PG Hospital. I suppose the news of such machine already

in operation in PG Hospital may have escaped his notice. The lithotripsy has been functioning 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 Iqbal 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

most serious violation of 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, January 28) and other foreign journals point to that direction.

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 found (?) by police or people, is that they are poor slum-dwellers. Like all slum-dwelling 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 over-population and overcrowding of city facilities.

We already hear about trials, a new concept of sorting out the fittest and let the unfit 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