

## New Challenges on the Nuclear Front

The "Star War" is dead. It is a welcome casualty of the end of the superpower rivalry, after the United States had spent as much as 30 billion dollars since 1983 when former president Ronald Reagan had launched this controversial project.

Right from its inception, the move had divided the international community and even the allies of Washington. There were all kinds of reasons for opposing the project, the most important one being the questionable right of the United States to take the arms race to the space, thus provoking the other superpower, the former Soviet Union, to do the same. In fact, there were all the signs that Moscow too had made its first moves.

Has the project been given a decent burial? In some ways, no. While US Defense Secretary Les Aspin has announced the end of the Star War, he has talked about setting up a new anti-missile research programme, based on relatively mundane ground-based technology. The cost of the project in 1994 will be much less than that of the Star War.

Judging by information available from Aspin, Washington appears to be moving in the right direction. The end of the superpower rivalry and the disintegration of the Soviet Union have not brought peace to the world. They have only created a set of challenges, many of them posing new threats to peace and stability in different parts of the world.

In such a situation, one can talk about the reduction of arms race, especially in such a volatile area as South Asia and the Korean peninsula, but not of disarmament. One can also talk of new arrangements, as many countries have been doing in Southeast Asia, which aim at defusing tension. But we have hardly reached the stage when we can start dismantling existing defence systems.

In this context, Washington is certain to continue with its role in a new perspective, and face up to new situations — and new threats.

Perhaps, the biggest threat of all lies in the entry of republics of the former Soviet Union into the international arms market. Reports say that many of these arms include out-dated but dangerous nuclear weapons, sold often to the highest bidders and often to potential political allies. There are also reports that many of these republics do not have funds to dismantle these weapons, while some want to turn to the manufacture of lethal chemical gas for export. For millions of people living in these republics, there is also mounting concern over lack of safety measures in many of their nuclear power plants. Many of them are potential Chernobyls, just waiting to cause havoc throughout the region.

It would be absurd to suggest that the international community — and, for that matter, the United States — are unconcerned over the situation. What is not clear is what the world can do to bring the situation under control. On this issue, we have heard precious little from the Vienna-based International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEC). In fact, the new issues facing the world today may not necessarily fall within the mandate of this particular UN body. It is also doubtful if the United Nations has done any work on the subject. Maybe it is time for the world body to initiate a set of studies on what's really going on, studies which distinguish between rumours and facts and then, with a good deal of homework, set up an international conference. The United States must indeed play a pivotal role at such a meeting, a position it has earned by its decision to put an end to the Star War.

## Our Expectations Grow

This was only too expected. The SSC examination mode is going to be changed on some important points. It is highly gratifying that the decision taken at a very high policy making level has at its core all the recommendations made in these columns of The Daily Star. We had very pointedly maintained that a) a candidate must get a pass in both the objective and essay-type, or better-creative parts of the questions on a subject, independent of each other; b) question bank for the selection of objective questions be done away with; and c) the changes be effected after a reasonable time gap. We have, however, been disappointed on one point. We expected that the changes would come into effect in 1995.

The present mode is a totally untenable one creating, in the name of evaluation, a kind of anarchy that would do good neither to the students nor to the nation. Even a year more of it would do so much harm to so many more people's lives as also to the education system. Saturday's policy-making meeting could have taken place earlier and the policymakers could very well have decided on 1995 so that the students now reading in class IX could take their SSC exams under the changed mode.

There is one very good aspect to the happy development. The changes have been decided upon in the light of the four Secondary Education Boards' experience-dictated conclusions on the present marking system, the two separate types of questions and the question bank. We would now want to know from the policy-makers whether the boards were a party to devising the present absurd thing? If not, that's bad enough. There shouldn't be ever anything wholly imposed on the boards in matters of examinations at the SSC and HSC levels — something very exclusively the preserve of the boards. There can be more knowledgeable persons in the ministry but to act without the feedback from the boards is sure to land the wisest of experts into academic quicksand. And if the boards were a party to this, the dependability of the persons involved must forthwith be opened to questions.

Now that government has proved amenable to better ideas than its own, our expectations tend to grow. We take the occasion to remind the government that the aberration of judgement as manifested in the present SSC exams mode came only as an act of desperation in the face of the phenomenon of universal copying. The present rules have capitally failed to make the students to pick up the book and read it. The very approach of curbing copying through examination mechanism is so very wrong. The fact of the matter is — the students do not get any education in the classrooms largely because there is no education imparted there. As long as this continues, copying would continue too, invincibly. How will the government ensure that schools and colleges would do their job of imparting education in their classrooms? The government must find answer to that first before it has the right to fault the students with a 'fail' seal.

# Agricultural Produce: Expanding Storage Facility a Must

THE height of feeling running against smoking in this country as elsewhere, makes one hesitant to write on a topic which concerns cultivation of tobacco and its marketing. I hasten to declare that I am no longer a smoker. I gave up the habit, not just for health reasons but also after seeing the indignities that a smoker has to go through these days. Travelling by plane, there was a time when the non-smokers had to find a nook to huddle together. Now a days, smokers are sequestered in a corner. For the comfort of the smokers, ashtrays used to be placed conveniently on meeting tables and, now? It's quite probable that you would have to leave the room and find a secluded spot outside to smoke your fag!

So much for the plight of smokers. However, the issue at hand is the plight of the tobacco growers in the country, the difficulty they are facing this year selling their produce which, surely, is going to impoverish them further. Broaden the dimension of the problem a bit to embrace the general issue of marketing of agricultural produce, covering the question of storage facilities for farm products. Then perhaps, you do have an issue which merits serious consideration.

As it often happens in the case of agricultural crops in general this country, tobacco farmers face a bleak prospect this year as they can't market the product. According to a report appearing in this newspaper recently, a group of reporters from Dhaka visited the Kushtia region, the second highest tobacco growing area of the country, and saw for themselves, the deplorable situation of the farmers there. Tobacco cultivation in Rangpur region, the principal growing area, is also reported to have expanded significantly and the same is probably true of other regions, such as Chittagong, Manikganj, where tobacco is

grown. It appears like the same story all over again as it happened with the last autumn crop when the farmers, small and marginal ones especially, had reportedly been selling off their produce at throw-away prices immediately after the harvest to meet their immediate need for cash. In point of fact, cash hungry farmers disposing of their harvest at prices below the cost of production, is only too common a phenomenon in this country, recurring year after year. To cite another recent instance, there is a report appearing in a national daily the other day, recounting the story of the growers, in Narail district, strapped for cash, selling crops like onion, garlic, turmeric, papper and ginger, at nominal prices immediately after the harvest as they lack storage facilities. Nor can they take their produce to other district and cities to sell, the report adds, as they find cost of transportation too high for them.

It is a fact that the farmers, particularly those among them who cultivate land on small and medium scale or are share-croppers, have little holding power. Bank financing in the agricultural sector is restricted to loan for productive purposes — in this case for raising the crop. Banks could lend separately for marketing the produce but normally they don't, particularly since the loan is advanced against hypothecation of the entire crop and the credit package normally covers cost of marketing anyway. In short, banks don't extend 'consumption loans' to the farmers. To meet his immediate need for cash, a farmer is thus often obliged to borrow from the informal money market. Arrangements could perhaps be considered for creating facilities for area-wise common storage of farm produce against which the farmers concerned could draw advances from time to time, depending on the going mar-

ket price of the commodity stored; until such time that these are sold off. Storage charges could also be realised from final sale proceeds. A farmer could then wait for a better price for his produce without getting strapped for cash for meeting his immediate needs. Of course, where the farmer has taken a loan from a bank against crop hypothecation, the concerned bank also would have to participate in the arrangement.

It is understood that the government has taken up a some such scheme with foreign assistance. However, product and area coverage is limited and the progress slow. It may not also be a practical proposition for the government to operate such a programme in a big way. One solution could be to persuade the

staff of the concerned government department also chose to remain silent. They also would have known in advance that a significantly higher acreage was being brought under tobacco cultivation which would lead to supply glut and price slump.

In a situation like this, normally the solution would be to arrange preservation and storage of the crop for a longer time to allow for its disposal over a period of time. For tobacco, the answer is redrying. Redried and packed into bales, tobacco needs much less storage space and can be preserved for two to three years. For instance, if bank financing could be arranged, exporters could buy up excess supplies, redry and store these for meeting future export needs. Perhaps it is too late to do anything for the growers in the Kushtia region which produces flue cured virginia (fcv) tobacco as the harvesting season

would nearly be over by now. Harvesting of Rangpur tobacco (air cured virginia or acv type) starts in August. So, still there is time for the authorities to look into the problem.

Excess could just be destroyed. This would please anti-tobacco groups. But then, who will compensate the grower?

ACCORDING to an agency report, the monetary system in Bosnia-Herzegovina has completely broken down and is in a total shambles. There are six currencies in circulation in that country. The Bosnia-Herzegovina dinar, printed in Switzerland, is officially the national currency. However, this currency, it is stated, is not normally available in the capital Sarajevo. By the time these notes were ready for delivery from the Swiss printers, the story goes on, Sarajevo was already under siege by the Bosnian Serb forces, who did not allow the money to be flown in. So the government circulated another series of notes known as 'Sarajevo dinars'. The national currencies of Yugoslavia and Croatia circulate in the areas of the country controlled by the Serbs and Croats respectively. The German mark is the only currency readily accepted everywhere in the country. The US dollar also is accepted but usually at par with the Deutschmark (DM) although in the European market, you would need anything between 1.55 to 1.60 DM to buy one US\$.

All this is but a small measure of the tribulations of the people of that country, of the Bosnian Muslims. And, seeing what has been happening there, the three pleasant years spent by us in the late sixties in former Yugoslavia, seem like a dream. I was then posted as Commercial Secretary in the Belgrade embassy of the then

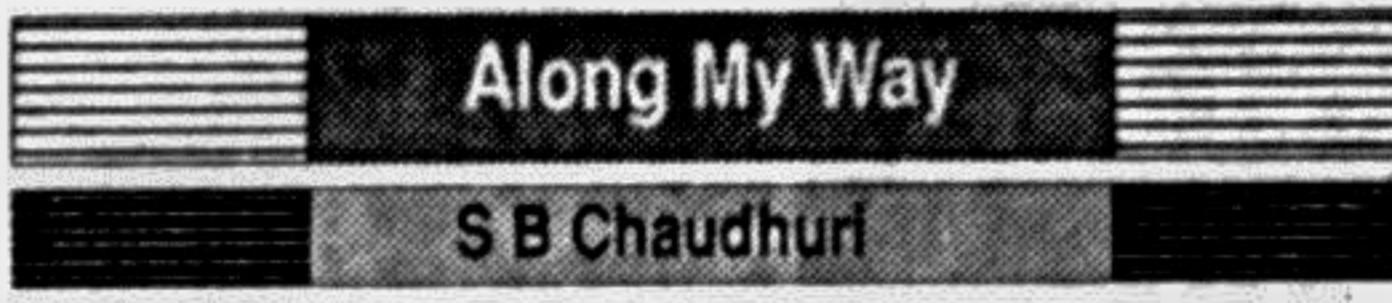
Yugoslavs themselves called their capital, Beograd — the White City. In those days, Yugoslavia's imports from the then East Pakistan consisted mostly of raw jute for its three jute mills, goat skins, Comilla cotton and kapok.

I had to travel around the country quite a bit and it was a change to be woken up in Sarajevo by the muzzzin's call to prayer.

In those days in Yugoslavia, everywhere people were friendly and it defies imagination how the same very people could indulge in ethnic cleansing, committing heinous crimes and unmentionable atrocities. What madness seized these people!

The Yugoslavs in those days were quite adept at cutting jokes at themselves. Their national airline, Jugoslavijnski Aero Transport (JAT) was not renowned for punctuality. So, they would say, JAT stands for 'just any time'. Warning against hasty business deals with someone known to be exceptionally shrewd and crafty, they would quip, 'make sure all your fingers are there after he shakes your hand'.

I had offered a filter-tipped cigarette to a new acquaintance in Belgrade. "Ne no", he said refusing it, "ne pushim filterno — I don't smoke filter (cigarette)". Then, pulling out an ordinary cigarette from his own pack, he said in broken English, "smoking filtered cigarette is like you wash your foot and your sock — how to say —" he muttered, tugging at his socks. Obviously he was fumbling for the right words. By then I could catch a glimpse of his thoughts and said, helping him out, "like washing your feet with socks still on". He nodded happily, taking a long pull on his cigarette. "Smoking one after is like you wash your feet with socks on".



NOOs to get into such a programme. The government could even consider applying the BOT (build-operate-transfer) or just BT (build-transfer) technique for rapid industrialisation, to the agricultural sector as well and build up storage facilities for farmer produce, for eventual transfer to the private sector. Private sector exporters of agricultural products, as also traders in grains, might show interest in such a programme.

Turning to the immediate problem of the tobacco growers, it is stated that buoyed by good prices for tobacco in years in a row, farmers have expanded area coverage from about 90,000 acres in 1990 to more than 1,20,000 acres this year. Quoting official sources, the report published in this newspaper says that at about 50,000 tons, the tobacco yield this year would touch the highest level since 1984. Production in 1991 is said to have been 33,000 tons. Even

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## No Further Flap on FAP, Please

by Rashed Mahmud Titumir

PRIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to inaugurate in Dhaka, today, the four-day, Third Conference on Flood Action Plan (FAP). This is the largest on-going flood protection project in Bangladesh. Besides the officials of Bangladesh, representatives from the donor countries, World Bank (WB), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other agencies, Jaitiya Sangsad (Parliament) Members, experts, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) representatives will attend the conference to review the progress of FAP studies to minimise flood problems and recommend proper water management policies.

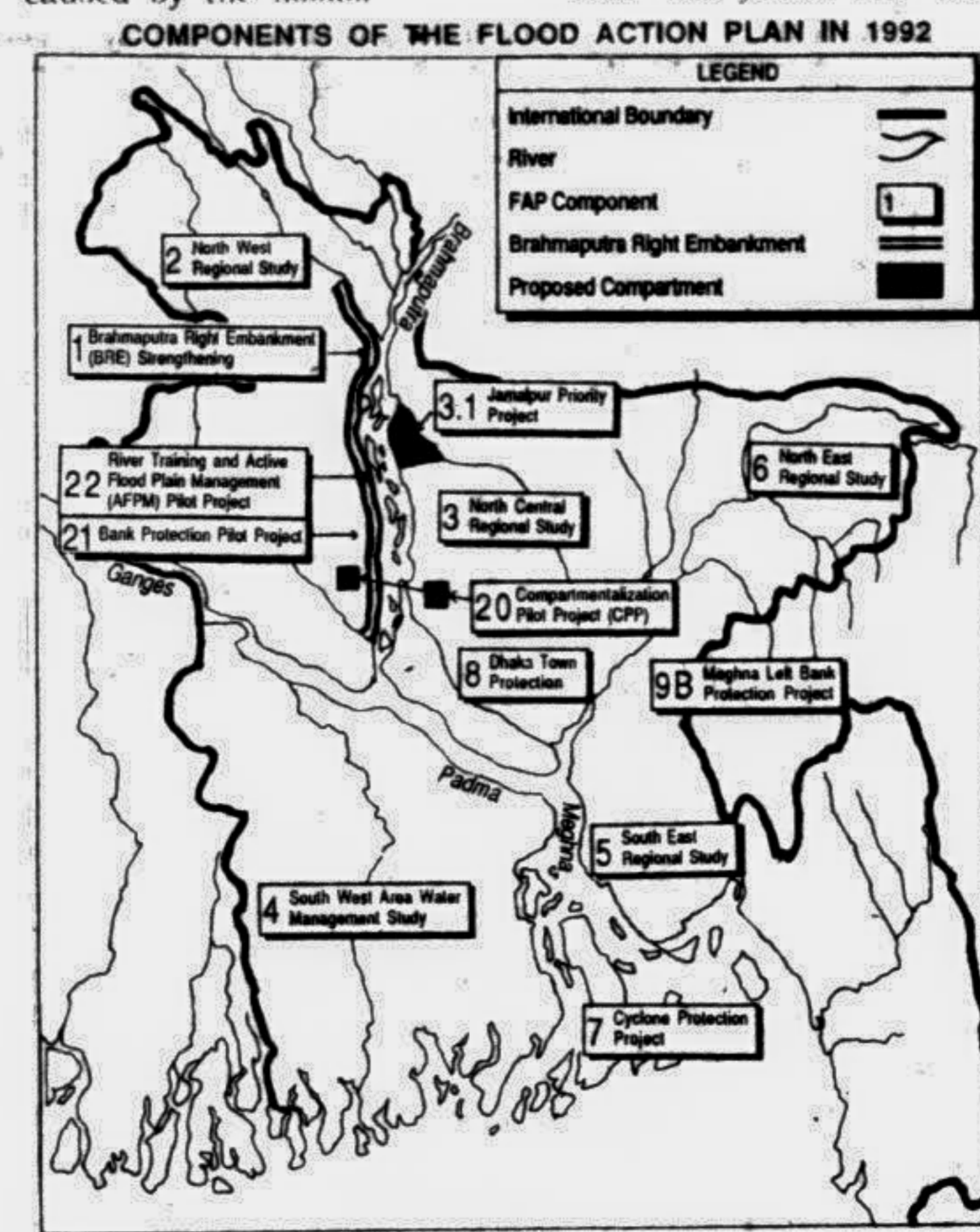
However, the FAP was never ratified by any freely elected parliament and was propelled by a variety of donor and local interests, under the active patronage of Ershad regime. Nor has it ever been intellectually defended against the grave and disturbing reservations expressed by concerned academics and professionals from both home and abroad.

Following the disastrous floods in 1987 and 1988, in July 1989, a resolution was adopted in the Group of Seven (G-7) communique in Paris to give the flood control effort of Bangladesh a coordinate shape. The then Bangladesh authorities requested the WB to act as coordinators to prepare and develop a five-year FAP from 1990 to 1995. The FAP was proposed by WB in December 1989, and was formally endorsed at a joint meeting of the government and donor representatives in London in the same month and subsequent Dhaka conference in January, 1990.

A total 14 donor countries and agencies are funding the programme, which, at the time of enunciation was divided into 26 components of which 11 were on regional basis, while rests were supporting studies. By January 1993, publicly available information indicated that the whole range of known FAP activities consisted of at least 33 separate components. Amongst these, 16 were main components or their derivatives, 14 were supporting studies and three were 'non-numbered' FAP components.

Launched in the wake of two devastating floods, the 500

million US dollar FAP consists of two major components, both to be completed by 1995. Of the amount, 150 million dollars is being spent on studies, and 350 million dollars on emergency repair of damages, caused by the floods.



Source: Based on World Bank and FPCO. Notes: Only those FAP projects which have clearly specified geographical locations are shown on the map. FAP components have changed to some extent from those proposed in the original plan document. The latest known situation in November 1992, based only on information which is publicly available, has been indicated above.

Eleven Guiding Principles of the final draft of 'Action Plan for Flood Control' was initially defined with the help of commercial firms, and subsequently authorised by the Ershad Regime. These so-called guiding principle have never been debated in any public forum yet.

Intellectual dissent within the country, during the Ershad period was harshly repressed, and individual professionals and leaders of the scientific community were victimized in certain instances. The most outrageous instance of this was the premature retirement of

Dr. M. M. Rahman, the then Executive Vice-Chairman of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), in a flimsy technical pretext. Over the years, FAP has

evolved a complex institutional structure for management of its planning and coordination activities. A variety of government agencies handle different aspects of FAP management. On the other hand, over a dozen agencies follow their respective internal procedures for project management, and their activities are coordinated by the WB. In most FAP components, consortia of multinational and local firms have been appointed as project consultants.

In fact, the National Flood Council (NFC), headed by the then President and Implementa-

tion Committee (IC), chaired by the Minister of MOI/WDFC did not meet at all during 1992 and technical committee, which included representatives from all relevant ministries and governmental agencies, the FPCO and Panel of Experts (POE) ... and the World Bank's Resident Coordinator met only twice.

In effect, Review Committee (RC), comprising FAP consultants, represents the views and interests of these agencies rather than providing any policy level review and supervision of FAP activities by elected representatives of the people. The RC thus functions as de facto FAP 'management-supervisor' and its members have little in the way of direct accountability to the people of the country.

During the second FAP conference in March 1992, it was claimed by World Bank, that "the recommendations of the (first phase) study should be available by mid 1992, so that arrangements can be in place for the initial FAP projects." However, the first three years of FAP went by without any tangible steps being taken towards setting up an enduring institutional framework for its implementation in the future.

The views on FAP and its future, as expounded by the WB document June 1992, corrected the narrow focus of the earlier version. "Now all the regional environmental concerns more rigorously. Moreover, at the initial stages focus was more on flood mitigation which are now leading to integrated water management."

However, evidence from the FAP studies themselves indicate that critical adverse impacts are likely to occur, if such a strategy is implemented in the coming years. There appears to be a somewhat clinical attitude in terms of experimenting with Flood Control and Drainage and/or Irrigation (FCD/I) structures using the people and environment of Bangladesh as guinea-pigs. This can be concluded from what is stated in the documents of FAP "these projects provide a rich

diversity of experiments in the Bangladesh environment and are valuable guides to FAP planning."

Alarming evaluation of the consequences on the wetlands and bio-diversity in Bangladesh, which may result from import of some FAP projects are found within the reports of the FAP studies themselves. The North-West Regional study has shown concern that "irreversible changes to the role of wetland function would result if the traditional approach to flood protection were adopted in FAP projects." And it continued that "the most significant adverse effect would be the loss of the remaining wetland functions and process upon which many important survival strategies, livelihoods and quality of life depend."

The study further notes that among the 200 or more "species of mammal which were once common in Bangladesh, over half have now disappeared or are seldom found... The loss of habitats has been so significant that little can now be done to restore the balance in the areas."

Preliminary view from fisheries' experts involved in FAP components indicate that FCD/I structure have been the single most harmful factors in bringing down naturally available fish stock and capture fisheries output levels in Bangladesh. The FAP 2 Draft Final report expressed concern that "there are no readily available perfect substitutes for capture fisheries. Although culture fisheries can increase output of certain species, the cost involved in completely making up lost output would be enormous."

The report further expresses the concern that "drainage congestion due to new projects is likely to increase the area of stagnant water bodies, which would be most suitable for vector breeding of malaria and cholera."

The FAP 2 Draft report noted that "The cumulative impacts of this loss on poor people already caught in a state of on-going nutritional decline over the last 50 years could be dramatic. For Controlled Flooding and Drainage (CFD) projects to continue to actively contribute to this state of affairs without well-targeted and proper mitigation, funded directly within the project costs, would be unacceptable."

Whereas the Narmada Project (Sardar Sarovar) in western India, has displaced hundred of thousands of people, according to the experts, the cumulative build up of FCD projects under FAP could lead to millions of people being displaced in Bangladesh.

It is apparent, the floods in Bangladesh are caused mainly due to forces operating outside its boundaries. So, the experts view that a regional and international effort has to be initiated.

Evaluations of many FCD I

Even according to 'proceedings of the second Flood Action Plan conference': "This left little time for interventions and discussion from the floor. It also meant that there was little scope for bringing up thorny and sensitive issues outside the pre-defined agenda. There was not enough time for all questions to be asked, let alone be answered."

Much of the apprehension about FAP and its potential efficiency arises from the past performance of older FCD structures. Furthermore, many of the existing FCD structures have turned out to be 'counter productive' in the sense of damaging or destroying healthy environments. The prolonged water logging of the polder in Beel Dakatia and the predatory forms of shrimp-farming practised in many other polders of Greater Khulna provide *prima facie* grounds.

Despite impressive gains, frequently shown by the World Bank, the WB is forced to publish, "the development challenges facing Bangladesh remain formidable... The proportion of the extremely poor (those unable to afford a daily intake of 1805 calories) has risen from 22 per cent in 1985-86 to 27 per cent in 1988-89."

The government, as the primary custodian of the rights of its citizens, is a key actor in the implementation of development projects such as FAP. Needless to say, the people's interests depend critically upon government policies and the roles of its concerned agencies.

In conclusion, a suggestion would be made for a reappraisal of FAP. Given the enormity of the task, the multi-faceted nature of its impact, and the misgivings about FAP that exists in many expert circles, such a step may be in the best interest of the country.

The writer is a staff member of The Daily Star. He would like to acknowledge his debt to studies on FAP by Research and Advisory Services, Dhaka.

## To the Editor...

"Songs of and for life" Sir, Ms Parveen Anam's write up of May 12th (Dhaka Day by Day) was a moving one, and it brings forth the nobility and gentleness of the human mind. When we are swamped with greed, avarice, corruption and brutality all around us, such kind of acts, that came from Mr Saadi Mohammad, brighten us, even though for a short while.

The giving of oneself is the most precious gift that can be bestowed on others. Let there be more like Mr Saadi Mohammad and the late

Ranada Prasad Saha in our society. Shahabuddin Mahtab Siddheswari Road, Dhaka.

## 'Letter writers' rights'

Sir, I extend my sincere thanks to Ms Nazia Chowdhury of Dhanmondi, Dhaka for her letter dt 7/4/93 letter writers' rights written in response to my letter of Feb 24, 1993. But unfortunately I failed to find out any concrete opinion in her letter concerning the main issue, i.e. whether a letter-writer should send copies of his/her letters to more than one newspaper or not? I think,

Ms Nazia needn't had to make such a lengthy discourse just to communicate her elder brother's comment. However, regarding the suggestion put forward by Ms Nazia's elder brother that I should confine my writings only to my professional discipline — I'll try to act upon it. But it is not imperative for anyone to just concentrate on one's own subject of profession. One should not live happily for his own without caring for his neighbours and others. That is a selfish way of living. The crude reality is this, people working and living in countries like USA and of Europe needn't have to think

for others, and matters other than their professional subjects, because they're not only getting handsome salaries but ample opportunity to build up their career in their respective professional lines. Where's the time and energy to think about the ugly situation prevailing inside the homeland, and to do something so that majority poor compatriots can also have a taste of the elixir of happy life!

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