

'Culture of Secrecy'

The five-day ASEAN-SAARC conference on administrative and financial accountability, organised by Bangladesh Public Administrative Training Centre and the Asian and Pacific Development Centre (APDC), that began last Sunday, has brought out some very important points deserving serious attention of everybody concerned with good governance. The central concern of the participants to the conference, as is, was accountability which, they felt, as we also do, continues to be vague and undefined. A report, jointly prepared by Ekramul Ahmed and Syed Naqub Muslim, hits the nail on the head when it points out that the notion of accountability in administration remains unresolved. More importantly, it is still unclear, as to who is responsible to whom. This question of responsibility is intricately linked to our drive to achieve an accountable administration. After setting up a democratic system we have ministers who are responsible and accountable to the people and to the parliament. Yet the bureaucracy, which runs the ministries that each minister heads, is responsible to none, in the same sense that a public representative is. It is this sense of 'be-all and end-all' of our bureaucrats that leads to the stigma of their harbouring the old colonial attitude, and behaving as masters of the people, rather than as public servants, that they are.

We are all too familiar with the problem. The question is what do we do about addressing it? As the report bears testimony, all previous attempts at reforms and organisational restructuring appear to have borne very little fruit. On the contrary, each time a reform was brought about, it further confused the situation, and brought about stiffer resistance to change. So here we are, forty-six years after the departure of British colonialists, and twenty-two years after the birth of independent Bangladesh, still talking about the 'colonial' bureaucracy and of its 'autocratic' mentality, and not knowing how to change them. The authors of the report, in a remarkable example of looking into the narrow and being candid about what they saw — for, after all the authors are highly reputed senior bureaucrats themselves — talked freely about corruption, and termed it as the 'chief barrier' to development and welfare of the common people. Again, we know the problems, but what do we do about it?

Among the suggestions the report makes, we would like to lend our all out support for the appointment of an ombudsman, as provided for in Article 77 of our Constitution. The idea of special courts to adjudicate administrative wrongs is also a timely one. We wholeheartedly agree with the report when it refers to the 'culture of secrecy' that prevails in our administration, which lies at the root of much of the corruption, maladministration, waste and inefficiency. If only the idea of transparency became widespread, then much of the malaise in our administration would disappear. The suggestion that media play the role of a watchdog, is neither new nor unknown in our society. However, we are yet to play the effective watchdog role that the current democratic environment demands. For us to play that role, the 'culture of secrecy' which assumes that everything the government does is secret, will have to be replaced by a process of thinking that accepts that the public has a right to know everything that a government does, except for issues that deal with national security.

We congratulate the organisers for holding this highly relevant and timely conference, and bringing out some extremely valuable suggestions. The question is, will we see any follow-up actions on them?

Has She been Saved?

Yesterday was January 18. This was the date fixed by a mudarris and an imam on which Dulali Begum was to be flogged with a hundred and one lashes. In public. On charge of committing jena. The appalling news was broken by a vernacular national daily whose correspondent travelled up to the spot — Bhuarhat in Begumganj PS, Noakhali — and challenged the fatwa-givers. A police officer from the Begumganj police station had also reached Bhuarhat on January 15 and promised proper investigation and action in the matter. Still, till the writing of this, no one in the capital city knew what happened to her in the end. The news of the fatwa is shame enough. If any harm comes to Dulali, this state and its laws and justification, this society and its morals and meaning will by a fell stroke be shorn of whatever worth these have been touted to have. The Bangladesh Women's Forum has in the meantime appealed to the Prime Minister to intervene. We feel that the intervention is needed not so much to save Dulali as to save Bangladesh's identity as a civilised polity.

Only a year has elapsed after the virtual lynching of Noorjahan of Chhatakchhara, Sylhet. And a plethora of similar crimes have come to light over this short span of time. We gratefully remember Noorjahan because it is her sacrifice — focused by the media — that has morally bound the government to take an unambiguous position in the matter and obligated it to see that the crime is not repeated. Unfortunately the government has failed in both. It is not known to have taken any open stand in the matter and law has yet to punish any of the perpetrators of the fatwa-associated crimes, perhaps the worst type so far of women's repression — not only killing the woman but humiliating her in public before the sentence is carried out.

The execution of the 101 lashes would be a clear case of murder, the culprits deserving upto death in punishment. But because the way the pronouncement is made and carried out, dangerously erodes religion, morals and society as a whole and completely negates justice and human rights. The government must make it its business to see that everyone involved in such a crime is punished en bloc and in the severest fashion. Punishment here must succeed as a deterrent.

We cry for Dulali. A big shot of her village seduced her with the usual promises of marriage and better life. When the child came there was no one to support her. On the seventh day of her delivery when the teenage girl was dangerously ill, word came of the fatwa. The state must apprehend them and their accessories in the crime immediately and try them and punish them — in a way that can be an edifying lesson for zealots suffering from the same warped attitudes towards man and his rights and wrongs.

Globalisation of Kashmir may Not Resolve the Crisis

RESIDENT Clinton's letter to the Kashmir Action Council, offering to work with it and others 'to help bring peace in Kashmir,' was dated December 27. The abortive talks between the foreign secretaries of India and Pakistan began on January 2. It is obvious that Pakistan foreign secretary Sahayr Khan was in the know of the letter's contents since the Kashmir-American Council is a lobbying outfit.

Whether Clinton's remark emboldened Islamabad to threaten the internationalisation of Kashmir or whether it feels it has no other option, the move is of little consequence. Pakistan has gone over the exercise many a time before. Its eyes have been too long fixed on international opinion, not Indian, which ultimately matters in finding a solution.

As of today, Pakistan has not left any forum where it has not raised Kashmir. When the Shimla Agreement was signed in 1972, it reflected Islamabad's desire to talk to Delhi directly. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then prime minister, told me at Rawalpindi before the Shimla conference that he was sick of going to world chanceries.

True, violations of human rights in the Valley have revived the outsiders' interest, which had flagged because Kashmir was considered a mere territorial dispute. But the violations have been condemned by India's non-government agencies in no less terms. Human rights violations are a sad reflection on the administration. But they are not weakening the hold of security forces. The core of the problem is a settlement.

America is only spoiling the

By demanding the right to rule themselves, the Kashmiris are not asking for the moon. The representatives of people should govern the state. Pakistan does not become suspect if it lends its support to the demand. What makes it suspect is its relentless efforts to globalise the issue.

matter, wanting its presence in the region where China is emerging powerful. Washington's interest is mischievous. This is reflected in the aide memoire it sent to Delhi following US assistant secretary Robin Raphel's remark that America had not accepted the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India. In the aide memoire, America skirted the accession question but went on to say that the J and K included the territory like Gilgit and Balistan, which are now part of Pakistan, the 'Azad Kashmir' and the land which the late Ayub Khan gave to China in 1962 in exchange of certain areas, embraced by Pakistan.

By challenging all existing arrangements, America is only trying to add confusion to the already confused situation. Its veiled threats are to no avail. Will it land its troops in the subcontinent or induct more arms in Pakistan, which is forbidden to receive them under the Pressler Amendment? This may provoke another war which will only spell ruin, not sort out Kashmir.

Ultimately, the two sides have to sit across the table, without indulging in threats. Pakistan's foreign minister Aseef Ahmad Ali has said that there will be a nuclear war between India and Pakistan if the Kashmir problem is not solved. A new entrant to the field of international affairs as he is, Ali does not realise that if a nuclear bomb is thrown on Delhi, the destruction of Lahore, Karachi and the rest will not be far behind. No such

nuclear device has been invented which, if detonated, leaves a neighbouring country unaffected.

There is no go from talks, however long and exasperating. The solution has to be arrived patiently. It will be a compromise, which may not give all that India, Pakistan or the Kashmiris want. But they should never snap the dialogue.

Islamabad has already rejected one option. That is, converting the line of control into an international border.

ment were integrated into one country, Pakistan, at the time of partition in August 1947. This proposal may not even satisfy the JKLF and some other organisations because they want the J and K state to stay in tact.

As for India, the very division of Kashmir on religious basis is unthinkable. Its battered secular structure after the Babri Masjid's demolition will crumble in no time. Already the Bharatiya Janata Party's president, L.K. Advani, has warned New Delhi not to

the agitated minds in Pakistan.

The third option is that Kashmir becomes independent. This status will be difficult for the state to defend and sustain. After all, the maharaja of J and K wanted to stay independent but could not remain so. On the other hand, both India and Pakistan will not agree to Kashmir's independence. The secession of any territory, may fear in India, can begin the process of disintegration. Pakistan has already said that the UN resolutions on Kashmir give only two options: joining either Pakistan or India; there is no third provision.

In fact, it will be difficult for Pakistan to comply even with the UN resolutions because it will have to vacate the territories under its control before the people's wishes in the state are ascertained. There are two more riders to the resolutions: one, the entire state must come under India's control and, two, the normalcy must prevail before the plebiscite is held. Is Pakistan ready to vacate Gilgit, Balistan and Azad Kashmir and transfer them to India? And can the real normalcy prevail for a free plebiscite?

The only possible solution at present — and this may not be palatable to both India and Pakistan — is to soften the border (the line of control) between Kashmir and the 'Azad Kashmir' so that the Kashmiris on both sides become one people. They should be allowed full control over their affairs except Defence and Foreign Affairs, which

should continue to vest in either country, in India for its part and Pakistan for its. The two countries — and the UN — must ensure that the borders are not violated surreptitiously. Otherwise the entire agreement becomes meaningless.

The delay in a settlement does not, however, mean that the situation obtaining in the Valley should continue. The sooner the central government initiates talks with the representatives of the J and K, the better it is for the state and the rest. This will also meet Islamabad's demand to improve the ground situation in Kashmir.

At present, it is the Kashmiris who are bearing the brunt. They have faced hardships and risks, first scaling the range of mountains to go to the other side and then sneaking back through the well-protected border. The reason is that they had vainly tried to rule themselves but found that the ballot box often cheated them and imposed such chief ministers on them as were not to their liking. Even their autonomy — the J and K conceded to the Centre only in defence, foreign affairs and communication — was shipped over the years.

By demanding the right to rule themselves, the Kashmiris are not asking for the moon. The representatives of people should govern the state. Pakistan does not become suspect if it lends its support to the demand. What makes it suspect is its relentless efforts to globalise the issue and cloud the real import of the dispute. It is a writing on the wall that if the fires of hatred and confrontations, now burning uncontrolled, are not quenched, they can engulf the entire sub-continent before long.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

This proposal did not come out of the blue. There is a history behind it. It was Bhutto, then prime minister, who said: "Let the line of control be the line of peace." P.N. Haksar, who conducted the talks at Shimla on behalf of India, says that Bhutto had agreed to accept the line of control as the international border but had wanted time to prepare the Pakistan opinion before making the announcement. (Islamabad's foreign office says there is no such evidence in their records.)

There are three more options. One is that Kashmir goes to Pakistan. An unofficial offer made by Islamabad is that the Muslim-majority areas of J and K be merged with Pakistan, just as the Muslim-majority states of the Indian subconti-

sign even a Shimla-like agreement which, he believes, is against national interest.

The second alternative is that Kashmir remains with India. This is not acceptable to Islamabad because it feels that the integration of Kashmir is the unfinished part of Pakistan. The political situation in Pakistan is such that no government, much less Benazir Bhutto's can stay in power if it gives up the claim over Kashmir.

However, Pakistan's observation at the secretary-level meeting that the ground situation in Kashmir should improve is unexceptionable. Islamabad has said many a time before, both officially and unofficially, that if the temperature in Kashmir were to go down, it would be easier to cope with

Family Planning Programme Sustainability

by Syed Jahangeer Haider

One of the major concerns of cost effectiveness is generation of resources as much as it is to succeed in cost recovery. Currently, in the family planning programme the priority should be cost recovery, and the initial step to cost recovery is cost cut down. Cost cut down again is possible through measures to reduce wastage and missed opportunities. Currently missed opportunities may be curtailed by successful functional integration of services, of both health and family planning, starting from the domiciliary level to the satellite clinics at the village, FWCs at the union, and the THCs at the thana levels. The other alternative for cost recovery is the pricing of the contraceptives; however, pricing programmes should be executed carefully and on experimental basis in

the high performing areas particularly at the urban locale. The current family planning programme is largely donor supported; however over the years, domestic resource investment to the population sector has already increased from about 11 per cent in the seventies to about 30 per cent recently. The present service delivery system, relying on door to door distribution by full-time salaried workers, would be very difficult to sustain, if it were to maintain the present worker to client ratio. In order to ensure sustainability of the programme during the coming years, Government of Bangladesh will have to intensify some of the existing strategies and undertake new measures to reduce the cost per client; these would

include:

- * Adapt strategies of contraceptive method mix commensurate the long term programme goals and objectives.
- * Strengthen and expand social and commercial marketing of contraceptives (oral pills, condom and injectable) and services of Primary Health Care (PHC: ORS, EPI, Fe-folic Acid).
- * Build gradually and increasing reliance on static and satellite clinic service facilities rather than on door step services.
- * Design, develop and implement programmes to reinforce the demand factors of fertility transition through strengthening the intersectoral development programmes such as: i) improving the status of women, ii) raising aspirations

for the girlchild and their education, and iii) designing interventions to induce women's participation to income generating activities, especially in the organised sector.

- * Encourage tripartite coordination between the Government, the NGOs and the private sector to mobilize active support of the community (pressure groups and networks), both male and female, for their interest and participation to contraceptive practices and to stimulate their support for two child family as a norm.
- * Decentralise management decisions and encourage local participation to plan the local programmes.
- * Improve effectiveness of the support-services, such as training, supervision, monitoring, research and evaluation.

Sustainability of the family

planning programme in Bangladesh will largely depend on the critical need for designing and implementing an effective field structure appropriate to sustain the current demands for services and to generate additional demands. The critical need of the programme is to conduct operational research to field test strategies interlinking the major programme components, such as the: i) field workers, ii) the service institutions (FWCs and the satellite clinics), iii) the community (pressure groups and networks), and iv) the G.O./NGO/private sector management into functionally integrated FP field structure for demand creation and dispensation of quality services. Strategies as these should focus client preferences and their need as the priority considerations.

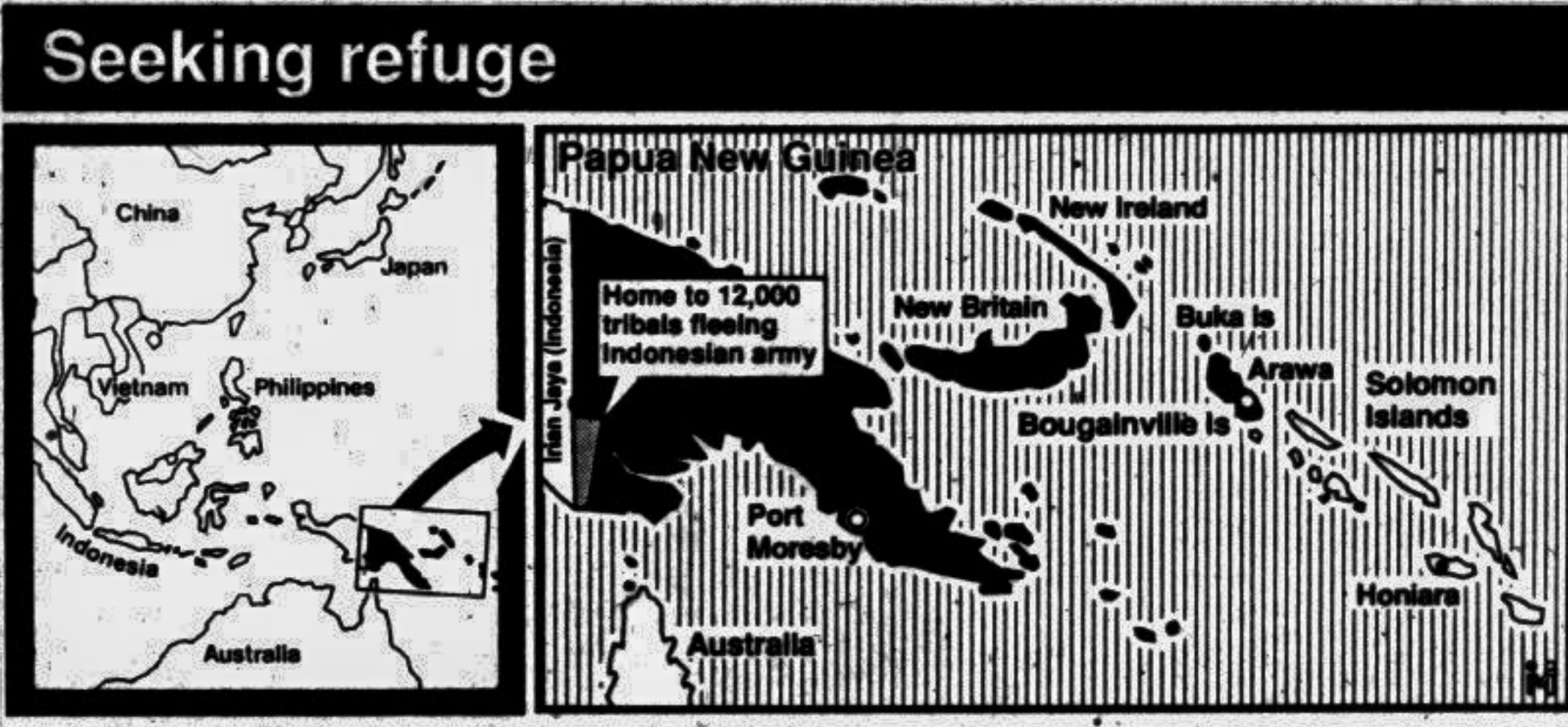
The author worked as World Bank consultant on the above subject in several countries.

THE concept of sustainability refers to cost sharing/recovery and/or resource generation closely interlinked with the institution building, skill transfer and development, and technology effectiveness and its access. Demand for services/product is critical for achieving sustainability. One of the major strategies to strengthen demand is to improve quality, access and affordability of services/products. These are in turn determined by the levels of effectiveness of a programme, and ultimately cost effectiveness is the critical factor by which the level of success of a programme can be measured. If a programme is cost effective, it is also likely to be sustainable. The factors, which affect the level of cost effectiveness of a programme are: quality of services, management efficiencies, technical competence, and the existence of active demands for services among the target population.

The Fight for a Place Called Home

Damien Lewis writes from Niogamban, Papua New Guinea

A decade ago, thousands of tribals sought refuge in the remote highlands of Papua New Guinea as Indonesian troops fought a group trying to free Irian Jaya — the former Dutch colony of West New Guinea. Today, the refugee camps have been declared "unofficial" by authorities trying to move them. The refugees vow to stay on land they trace back through their ancestry.



effort to force them to relocate. In new camps many kilometres away. Despite the elimination of aid and the declaration since 1987 that their camps are now "unofficial," the refugees, all

from the Yonggom tribe, vow to continue fighting a decision to relocate them 70 kms east of Klunga, at a new site in East Alwin. The refugees recently formed a committee with represen-

tatives from all eight unofficial camps to try to oppose the resettlement. The committee has said that all 6,000 refugees want to stay in the border camps because the new camp, is owned by the Awin tribe.

That tribe is seeking payment for the land on which the new camps are situated and the Yonggom predict inter-tribal strife if they are moved there. They also claim the current camps are part of their ancestral home. The 35,000-strong Yonggom live on both sides of an artificial line drawn by Dutch, British and German authorities during colonial times. That line is now the border between Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea. Only about 5,000 Yonggom are official PNG citizens, living in forest villages along the Ok Tedi and Fly rivers. The majority of the Yonggom still live in the Muyu river area of Irian Jaya — an isolated region. Their ancestors originated from what is now Irian Jaya. Some 250 years ago small groups came to the Ok Tedi and Fly rivers, on hunting and fishing expeditions. Many stayed and established small settlements in the region. Like

many tribes in the area, they were semi-nomadic, moving from one living site to another every two to three years as resources depleted. Throughout colonial times, and even after PNG was granted its independence, the Yonggom were able to move freely across the border. Then, following clashes between Indonesian troops and the freedom fighters in Irian Jaya, the Indonesian authorities tried to stop all such movement. They are still pressing for the return of the 12,000 refugees to Irian Jaya. The Yonggom refugees settled on part of a large region which their tribe periodically inhabited. Fearing persecution from the Indonesians, they have no wish to return to Irian Jaya and are happy to stay on their traditional land. One-third of about 10,000 Yonggom affected agreed to the 1987 move. Since then, the tribals remaining in the border camps have survived by hunting and making sago, their staple food. Laborious Awewuk, a committee member, says in addition to fear of tribal strife if moved, the Yonggom also know East Awin has sago palms. There are plenty, he notes, in the border region where the Yonggom are now living. — GEMINI NEWS

DAMIEN LEWIS is a freelance journalist specialising in the environment.

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

University bus
Sir, Dhaka University residential halls can accommodate only a small proportion of its students. Major portion of the students, almost 95 per cent, are non-residents. Per capita investment on resident students is thousand times more than non-resident students. There are only a few buses for thousands of non-resident students. Number of buses is very inadequate to cope with the present need. As a result students are huddled together in the buses. This calls for the urgent need to increase the number of buses. If

the number of buses are at least doubled, this can somehow cope with the need for the time being. Will the university authorities and the Ministry of Education look into it?
Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury
Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka

Judicious use of polythene bags
Sir, The government may kindly review the policy taken over the banning of production of polythene bags for local mar-

keting considering the following points:

- 1) Only those units which are recognised by Board of Investment and BSCIC will be allowed to produce polythene bags to be used as not only nursery pots but also shopping bags strictly measuring 15"x12" in size.
- 2) They will be allowed to import raw materials on the basis of single shift production only.
- 3) They will have to procure BSTT's quality control certificate compulsorily in order to abstain from producing inferior goods to be sold at nominal prices.
- 4) They will have to shift their factories from residential areas to the industrial areas and provide all types of facilities to the workers to combat or prevent the chemical reaction of polythene while engaged in production.
- 5) A spacious shed will have to be built in a safer place, preferably on the outskirts of the city in cooperation with city corporation where waste polythene or used bags will be destroyed for recycling purposes.
- 6) They will have to undertake a motivation programme through mass media to teach people to throw the used poly bags into nearby dustbins and not into drains, sewerage lines or ponds etc.
- 7) All unauthorised units i.e., not registered with BOI and BSCIC must be closed down immediately adopting the following stringent measures: a) cancellation of trade licence; b) cancellation of VAT registration; c) disconnection of electricity lines.
- 8) Commercial import of raw materials for production of polybags should be banned immediately.
- 9) Local fabrication of blowing i.e. polythene bag producing

machines which some engineering workshops have started duplicating causing mushroom growth of poly-bag industries in the country should be declared illegal and a punishable offence.

We think, hopefully, if these measures are adopted by the government the production of polythene bags will come down to such a level which will not be threatening to the environment.

Deen Islam
Kazi Reazuddin Road,
Pasta, Dhaka

Family values
Sir, The world has recently observed the International Day of Family under the auspices of the United Nations. Apart from its biological functions, family as a social institution discharges a great many respon-

sibilities including socialisation of the human beings. Family is the basic unit of all national activities. An ideal family can contribute tremendously to the development of a community and a country by producing well-educated and skilled men of good moral character. In case of rural and agricultural development, a family functions as an equally important and effective unit for bringing about desired changes. In rural community, families control a great deal of socio-economic activities.

Hence extension, community and rural development workers should use every family as a vehicle for realising the goals of rural and urban development programmes.

M Zahidul Haque
Assistant Professor
Bangladesh Agricultural Institute,
Dhaka