Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

Dhaka, Tuesday, July 12, 1994

Where is that Concern, Globally and Nationally?

There is a global view of the demographic down-slide and there are national perspectives of the same. A cut-off point between the two is yet to be established. When the World Population Day was first observed in 1987 the globe's population had touched the 5 billion mark. Yesterday as we went through the formality of observing the Day for the seventh time in an unbroken sequence, the earth's population reached 5.7 billion.

The rate of baby boom is the fastest at the moment: more than 255,000 every day. Since the rising population is concentrated upto 93 per cent in the developing countries of the Continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the issue is practically externalised in the eye of the leadership of the advanced countries. For, they have kept within the safe limit in terms of population. Some even reported a negative growth

Neither the G-7 nor the OECD where most vital decisions on global economic and development issues are made has ever publicly noted the terrifying consequences of the earth's numbers outstripping its fast shrinking finite resources. What can the ECOSOC, the UNFPA, the UNEP or the housing and settlement organisation of the UN do where there is no centralised focus on population issues coming from the apex of the world's politico-economic order? The developed world has tried to sensitise the developing countries on the question by rubbing on the wrong side of their sensibilities - namely that poverty and squalor polluted the environment. It is the former whose contribution to frontierless environmental degradation has been admittedly most palpable. No wonder, there is a murmur these days not to press for any increase in the abysmally low quantum of ODA as a charity but to ask for the price of the environmental use or abuse. Then the peace dividends must come together with a lucrative access of primary, processed and manufactured goods from the developing world to the developed markets. It is an established fact that higher economic growth rates can stem the tide of population in a more effective way than all the family planning devices put together.

This year's theme for the World Population Day being "choices and responsibilities", we urge the world leadership, much that the slogan is directed to where the population growth is unbridled, to reflect a responsibility in placing the required global political will behind the national governments' pursuit of FP programmes.

All this does not absolve us from taking a hard look at our own performance in the population control drive. Despite the showering of occasional praises on our FP campaign, there is little solace from the growth of our population in cumulative terms. During the last three years who ever heard our elected political leaders prioritising controlled parenthood in their speeches whereas they waxed eloquent on attritional political issues alright. The seminars, occasional utterances from the family planning ministry and the Prime Minister's impassioned calls on annual occasions were hardly the stuff that a national movement cutting all corners ought to be made of for a turnaround in the demographic situation. Simply, where is that concern? The rising population is eating into everything and threatening to rob us of our future. At a time like this, political leaders on both sides will have to pull their combined weight behind a national movement wedded to a freeze on the reproductive rate at the soonest.

The Fall of the Champion

Each drama has a beginning and a middle and a culminating climaxing end. This is universally known. And yet this 2,500 old progression, so very well known, excites man with something called 'drama' - the unexpected turns in the train of events. And how can a drama help being dramatic - so predictably that the word should have lost its connotation long long ago.

The finals of the World Cup '94 on Sunday night were reduced from 24 teams to just four semifinalists. Twenty teams fell by the wayside none of whom was dismissable before its actual elimination. Naturally when only four matches are left of the fray, the 48 already played had been gradually hotting up to a certain nerve-shattering crescendo. Of what? Of drama. Drama of unexpected turns, ruthless partisanship and raw spilling emotion. Thank you Havelange for having made at least a score of Americans wake up to the knowledge that there are things more interesting than their provincial complacence can contemplate.

On the way to reaching the last sixteen the matches were mostly exercises in listless attempts to settle down in a pronouncedly unfamiliar ambience. Play was of average to unimpressive standard giving Americans no point to take it

seriously. Drama was even there. Then on the way from sixteen to four — the champions fell. The world — yes, the number of regular viewers of the finals multiplied by the number of finals engagement they have already seen should come to about many times over the total population of the world — was stunned into believing the incredible - loss of Germany to puny and very much politically unsettled Bulgaria.

But what was so stunning about this? This was no fall of an impregnable citadel. For this WC's. Germany — a united one for the first time in decades — had already showed their leaks and patches. One Klinsmann doesn't win the Cup. And Lothar Matthaeus, although drawing first blood decidedly was a pedestrian even as his team was -compared to their '90 Cup outing, that is. This surprise element then did not lay in the champions defeat but in the 20-1 outsider Bulgaria clinching the match.

This match would long be remembered for the Hristo Stoichkov goal that he scored from a freekick taken from 40 yards off the post. It was a dream goal. The German goalie stood stunned glued to his second bar position while the ball was describing a fantastic trajectory swerved into the first bar top corner. The goal that sealed Germany's fate by a Letchkov header was no less

Dhaka and understandably all the nations of the world are agog with the last burst of heated speculations. But can we at this moment of unsurpassed agitation forget the glorious teams that could not make the last four due more to bad luck than anything else. Nigeria and Rumania and Spain and Ireland, we would not forget four fine Did World Cup Advance Consumerism in Bangladesh?

Y all accounts, the brouhaha over the World Cup games had, at one stage, threatened almost to take a nasty turn. The anxiety of the football fans in this country had centred on possible interruption in supply of electricity at a time when a match was being telecast live on the screen. They dreaded the likelihood of the supply of electricity in their area being cut off in the name of preventing excessive load on generating plants, right when a game was being played in a city in the United States and they were seeing it all here on the television screen. For them, it would indeed be a disaster if load-shedding hits

at such times. Soccer enthusiasts were airing their concern as consumers, in this instance, as electricity users. They know that supply of electricity, the service they pay for, is totally unreliable. As consumers, they wanted the suppliers to ensure for once — uninterrupted flow of electricity at least when a World Cup game was on. In the event, the suppliers of electricity responded positively to the consumers' pleas It's not that the electricity suppliers had to put through heroic efforts to turn efficient overnight. Rather, geographi cal location of the United States of America came to

their aid. World Cup matches are taking place in the United States at hours which correspond to late night or early morning in this country. So the electricity supplying agencies were able to tell the consumers with equanimity that load-shedding during the World Cup tournament hours was most unlikely. Late nights or early mornings are not the peak hours for electricity consumption and

hence are not the usual times for load shedding, they could assure their customers with a bit of aplomb. Nonetheless consumers do complain occa sionally that electricity has been cut off when a World Cup game was being played. There are even sporadic reports of football aficionados laying siege on power sub-stations in

It does seem, however, that

the electricity supply authori ties generally try to ensure that power is not cut off during late nights and early mornings. At the same time, load-shedding during the remainder of the day and in the evenings has turned into more of a regular phenomenon. And it descends for longer spells, hours at a time. Here is a trade-off for electricity consumers who also happen to be football fans. It's alright for them as long as World Cup games on the screen are not snuffed out. Other consumers may not bear the irritation and inconvenience with equal composure. Many among them would remonstrate openly. Yet, every home that owns a television set would probably have some members of the family glued to the screen when a match is on. Some of the electricity consumers who are not exactly found of soccer games would also than take the irksome power interruptions stoically. Well, for now at least.

True, load-shedding peaked in recent weeks due to acute shortfall in power generation. All the same, World Cup enthusiasts have been able, by and large, to protect their interests as consumers of electricity. This is because these soccer devotees could readily identify themselves as a distinct class of consumers and

demonstrate their concerns

effectively. They were vocal in raising protests, their mode of remonstrating against power cuts bordering on militancy And the electricity supplying agencies did pay heed to the voice of these consumers.

Strange though it may seem, the World Cup fallout may be seen to have advanced consumerism in this country at least among the football fans. Alas, consumers, in general cannot organise so quickly. They are hardly aware of their rights. Nor do they know the way to protect their

It's not that there are no

ing damages against a wrong or injury done to him However most consumer shy away from taking recourse to such legal actions. Probably they are afraid of the cost of litigation and the time involved. Here we run into an apparent contra diction. Even now, there are some laws at least which are designed to safeguard consumer interests against abuse. Yet, the consumer is reluctant to seek protection under these laws. Then again, institutional framework is needed to administer a law. How can the law help protect the consumer's interests unless he is-

ALONG MY WAY S B Chaudhuri

laws in the country at all to protect consumer interests. Indeed, there are a number of laws, some of them going back to the fifties, which seek to ensure quality and safety proper weights and measures, appropriate mechanism for supply and distribution of consumer products, including among others, food items. agricultural produce, drugs. The problem is, consumers in general are hardly aware of the provisions of these laws and regulations. Besides, enforce ment of these laws rests with designated authorities. Under the circumstances, probably the most the consumer can do to obtain legal redress for infringement of his rights is to seek the intervention of the concerned state agency. He can hardly institute legal ac-

The law of torts perhaps would enable a consumer to bring a civil suit himself claim-

tion on his own.

willing to go for legal action through such institutions?

The answer lies in taking a broader vision of the consumer as a citizen. He feels that he has been wronged but he is not expected to sift through pages of law books to ascertain if there is a cause for legal action against the offending person or organisations. He can of course seek legal advice but that would cost money. What he would like best is to be sure himself first that he has a reasonable case for obtaining legal redress, before running to a lawyer. Nor is an ordinary citizen adept at locating likeminded people quickly to or ganise a protest. So he suffers the injury in silence, all the while muffling his sense of resentment at the way the society is organised.

What the consumer really needs is a consolidated code which would clearly tell him of the areas he can take legal

course of action against someone for hurting his interests. He would then come to know what his rights are as a consumer. He should also be enabled to file his complaint direct to the designated authority and argue his case himself if he chooses to. The option should be entirely his whether he would bring up a complaint himself or let someone else, including a consumer organisation, do it for him and if he would plead the case himself or seek professional help. In short, there should be a consumer protection law. And the law should also provide easy access to the consumer to seek relief under its provisions. Writing in these columns on this very topic, I said as much last year - well, to be exact - on August 2.

There is also the question of coverage of consumer protection legislation. For instance, would the law embrace transactions in goods only or would it extend to services as well, including utilities such as water and power supply, telecommunications, even hospitals. There are other issues relating to bringing stateowned agencies and professionals such as doctors, engineers, lawyers, within the ambit of consumer protection

Reports have appeared in the press during the last couple of weeks or so, that moves have been initiated for framing consumer protection laws. The Consumers Association of Bangladesh had been pressing for long for such legislation. It also bears mentioning that just about a year back, some Asian nations met in Kuala Lumpur to set up a network aimed at carrying out legal reforms for protecting consumer interests.

The network would draw support from the London-based International Organization of Consumer Unions. Consumerism is thus gaining ground

Consumer protection laws usually invite resistance from trade, industry and professionals. The Taiwanese enacted their first consumer protection law this year. It is said that it took them four years to pass the law, mainly because of opposition from the business community. It's good to see that the leading chambers of commerce and industry are being associated from the very start of framing consumer protection laws in the country. This should reduce possibilities of frictions and even a broad.consensus could emerge on a comprehensive legal framework for protecting consumer interests. Every citizen is a consumer after all

seized on the World Cup goings-on as the latest manifestation of consumer concern in the country May be I overplayed it a bit. Yet, the episode does serve, up to a point, to show how consumers react when they believe that their interest would suffer. There are other sings of stirring of consumers' concernsover issue that hurt them. Over the past few months, there have been newspaper reports of a traveller threatening to sue an airline, of a patient planning to bring legal action against his physician or a citizen putting the municipal authorities on notice for compensation under the law. May be all such threats came to nothing. Still, the society should take heed of concerns of consumers.

Buschmann Returns to Democracy — and a Military Jail

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago

Chile has had two elected governments since the ending of the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet. But the jailing of a former underground activist shows that the soldiers are still powerful.

during his struggle against Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet. But when he returned to Chile recently to enjoy the benefits of democracy, he was arrested and imprisoned - by a military Commented his lawyer,

ERGIO Buschmann wit-

hstood intense torture

Hugo Gutierrez: "It is irritating that after five years of democratic rule, military justice and prosecutors have more power than the ordinary judicial sys-

The freatment of 52-yearold Buschmann, a theatre director who headed a huge anti-Pinochet arms smuggling operation, spotlights the shortcomings of the transition from military to civilian rule that has taken place in Chile and much of the rest of Latin America. The Armed Forces may have handed over the presidential sash to a civilian, but they never completely relinquished

"The government rules only insofar as the military let them

Power supply

problem

rial on Power Supply Problem

in the 7th July issue of your

paper. I could not agree with

you more when you say, in the

ultimate para, "All this will

only be possible when the in-

ternal working becomes trans-

accountable for its service".

parent and the system is made

like to borrow two words i.e.

'transparent' and 'accountable'.

To make something transpar-

ent one has to obtain or ac-

quire the willingness either

voluntarily or through a sys-

tem-based design. Unfortu-

nately PDB or DESA and for

that matter host of other

Government, Semi-govern-

ment or Autonomous bodies

maynot just afford to have the

willingness, for obvious rea-

sons, to make their working

transparent. This will have to

be done through a Government

Directive or through a system

designed for the purpose.

Regarding the second word -

accountable — who do you want

to be accountable and

accountable to whom? It is a

common allegation that the

people at the helm of these

organisations take their

postings as a reward of their

services to the government.

They perhaps think that it is

their prerogative to manage

the public bodies in the way

they feel like. This was true for

PDB and DESA until World

Bank's recent strong attitude

regarding the system loss. In

fact the World Bank or the

Asian Development Bank, for

that matter has now become

the most powerful 'boss' of

these organisations directing

them to somewhere along the

From this sentence I would

Sir, I have read your edito-

address.

do so," argues human rights lawyer Maria Salas, pinpointing the underlying contradiction of Chile's political system: a weak political system: a weak political class and a powerful military apparatus.

The Christian Democratic government of President Eduardo Frei is afraid of the military - as was its predecessor - and will do nothing to upset them, which explains its "pragmatic" stand towards Buschmann, whose refusal to speak under horrendous torture won the praise, unofficially, of his dictatorship cap-

After Buschmann's return in mid-June "to exercise my legitimate right to live in my own country," government spokesman Victor Manuel Rebolledo unambiguously stated that "Mr. Buschmann is

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 communica-

tions must bear the writer's real name, signature and

a fugitive of the law and must answer to any charges laid against him."

The government's stand is based on the fact that Buschmann had been on the run since escaping from jail in 1988 while he was held under Arms Control Law charges.

By taking such a position, the government washed its hands of the problem but did nothing to deal with the broader human rights issue: Chile's two post-dictatorship governments have failed to live up to their promise of "truth and justice" in dealing with human rights violations during the Pinochet era.

"It is utterly unfair," says Buschmann, "that those who took up arms to fight against a tyranny are still wanted by the police, and those who ter-

I asked him smilingly how a

rorised our people for nearly 20 years lead a normal and comfortable life."

A few years ago the Manuel Rodriguez Patriotic Front spearhead of the anti-Pinochet struggle and the organisers of Buschmann's arms smuggling operation - became a political movement campaigning for the rights of its members still living underground to be considered full citizens.

Leandro Torchio, one of its leaders, says there are 1,500 such cases. Human rights sources estimate that about 400 Chileans still have matters

to settle with the military courts, a figure that excludes many others who face no formal charges but are still sought by police.

Many of those on the run left the country clandestinely and are living in Europe and Latin America. At the end of the year, they will lose the protection of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Without refugee status and with European countries increasingly tightening their immigration laws, their future looks bleak.

Some of those on the run,

such as 35-year-old Fernando, remained in Chile. "It is not easy to live clandestinely," he says, "but I'm not going to leave the country I fought so hard for.

He respects Sergio Buschmann's decision to give himself up, but "I will never do so, because I do not trust the judicial system."

There have been demonstrations of support for Buschmann. But few Chileans are concerned about the issue.

Fernando sums it up: "We sacrificed everything in the name of democracy, but democracy doesn't give a hoot about us. This is not the type of democracy we fought for.

Luis Tricot is a Chilean

OPINION

For the Love of Bangladesh

People's Republic sounding silence. But why?

Salma Sobhan has done the readers of The Daily Star a great service by placing the grim situation in Pakistan, since the Pakistan Penal Code was amended in 1986, to draw our own conclusions. The implication is that this dear country of ours is bound to suffer the same fate if Begum Khalida Zia's Government follows the ignoble example of the Government of Pakistan.

The time has come for all good men and women to come to the aid of this beleaguered nation of 120 million comprising Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and so on — all equal under law — because all of us fought shoulder to shoulder against the Pakistani Army and its henchmen. The People's Republic of

make a majority." So can a by a gracious act of Her politic. Majesty the Queen of the Great

> We certainly condemn writers and intellectuals who are purveyors of profane and pornographic literature but as patriots we must not throw away the baby with the bathwater. Our protestations must not ruin this fair country. Let .noon take the law in his own hand. Let no one create a communal frenzy by playing up our masses' attachment to religion. Let us ensure the rule of law at all costs. Let the guilty ones have a fair trial before being condemned. Let the Government mind its own business and let us not drag it into God's business.

All actions are to be judged by the motives prompting them. If we examine the motives of the writers of profane and pornographic literature we can only conclude that they are lost souls aping he decadent West. Their lack of pride in their own roots compels them to antics, just to be talked about in this age of media

If such people transgress the limits of decency we certainly have remedies in the Bangladesh Penal Code to bring them to book. If necessary the punishment of imprisonment provided under Section 295 can be raised.

When we examine motives of he groups and organisations which have raised a demand following the furore over alleged violations of section 295 of BPC that these laws need urgently to be strengthened, we find "lust for power" behind their actions. For instance the so-called Blasphemy Bill that has been submitted to the Jatiya Sangsad is a carbon copy of the law passed in Pakistan, keeping intact all its lacunae!

The strategy of these ambitious men-in-a-hurry is to intimidate the Members of Parliament and get them to sign on the dotted line. Because anyone who dares to differ with the so-called Ulema can at once be branded a non-Muslim or an apostate from Islam deserving the death penalty. One the so-called. Blasphemy Law is passed the religious parties get an enormous prestige as the most

- GEMINI NEWS

journalist specialising in Latin American affairs.

"One man with courage can bloody War of Liberation, not powerful factor in the body-

woman in to-day's world. The article, "Blasphemy Law in Pakistan" by Salma Sobhan (Daily Star July 4, 1994) is a step in this very direction. A drop of ink makes millions

Many citizens of the Bangladesh have taken on the role of fence-sitters while a momentous debate rages. whether the Government should or should not adjudicate on religious issues. While the Bengali-language press is full of views both for and against controversial religious issues, the English-language press is conspicuous by its re-

Many English-educated citizens seem to think that the best way to handle a silly question is to ignore it. Responding in words only gives undue importance to a stupid person. They are not very wrong. But eternal vigilance is the price of

We who love Bangladesh dearly and are proud of having triumphantly broken the chains of slavery which bound us to Islamabad in 1971, are in no mood to toe the Pakistani line to national SUICIDE. For the love of Bangladesh

let us not be fence-sitters while a furious debate rages whether we want a theocratic Bangladesh or a modern state with guaranteed basic human rights for each citizen.

Bangladesh was born of a

One does not have to be very bright to guess that their Britain and Northern Ireland! next demand would be a Constitutional amendment that the state must be renamed the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh followed by a Fatwa that a mere woman cannot be President or Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Bangladesh. It is therefore vitally impor-

tant that this evil should be nipped in the bud. Let more people and publications write on the issues of so-called Blasphemy Law and Human Rights issues concerning the disadvantaged and minority groups. In addition to that, for the

love of Bangladesh, let us the readers and writers of the English language press give up it Isolation from the mainstream of the nation's pressing anxieties. We are not ashamed of using English as a cost-effective medium of education, information and entertainment. We can afford to use this foreign language FEARLESSLY because we have been blessed with the cool confidence that we are un-adulterated Bangladeshis. We are not impotent. We admit we have many faults but CYNICISM is not one of them. John Gardener, an eminent American, clothed our thoughts in charming word:

"The cynic says one man cannot do anything. I say only one man can do anything.

All good ideas start with one man. The best advice I ever received was given to me by one man, not a crowd, not by a corporation, not by a Parliamentary body; by just one man, not famous, not terribly important but capable of saying something true to me at a time that I needed it."

The Holy Prophet (SM) said: "acquire knowledge even if you have to travel upto faraway China." He meant to learn wholesome things not harmful things as some of our ambitious brethren are learning from Pakistan.

> Nuruddin Amjad Editor of the Fortnightly Opportunity (a Business Magazine)

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creditable.

performances.

path of recovery. You see, if you were a com-

pany, industry or even a newspaper and when you intend to recruit the chief executive officer or a senior official, you will go for proper advertisement and meticulous selection procedure. But alas - maybe not for PDB, DESA, BRTC, BIMAN, and what have you. For these organisations, a government servant, with no prior knowledge or experience in the line, will get the top position by the stroke of a pen

evant Department. As long as this age-old procedure is in vogue, I am afraid no worthwhile improvement can be foreseen in the future. ANAH Siddiqui, FCA 52 Motijheel CA. Dhaka

from the Establishment or rel-

Attention P D B

Sir. On 4-7-1994 a middle aged man came to my house in the afternoon and said he was from PDB and wanted to discuss some important matters with me. He showed me a hand written statement of some bills and claimed that an amount over Taka 7000/- was outstanding against my electricity consumption. I asked him to tell me the

period of the bills and whether he had brought any 'Notice' from PDB? He said tracked me and requested me to show him all the paid bills prior to the period of 1990. I said that I did not maintain any record of such old bills. He said if the amount of the bill is not settled my electricity line would be disconnected. I then asked him whether

he had any 'Identity Card'? He produced before me a laminated identity card from which I could not down: "PDB Identity Card No 2733, Mr. Md. Hanif Majumdar, Foreman, Shantinagar".

Foreman was involved in collection of the bills? He became nervous and replied that he was specially assigned for the job by the PDB Kamlapur! He said he would come again next day i.e. 5-7-94 and disconnect the electricity line. He has not turned up as yet. Since this is of common interest both for the members of the public and also for the

administration of the PDB. I would request the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources and PDB to kindly investigate into the matter. O H Kabir

5, Hare Street, Dhaka-1203

What is just?

Sir, Is 'might-is-right' right? May be, may be not. Resorting to some kind of might had always been popular with the believers in the proverb, so is with the powermongers, as is evidenced by the application of military or other armed strength to solving any dispute as the first and last means now.

This notion has been upheld by NATO air strikes, supported by the UN, in Bosnia in particular to enforce peace regardless of any prejudice, somehow justified though.

The present world has been shaped by conflicts and confrontations, many being bloody wars, ever since the sense of self interest grew in the homo sapiens, which continue to be the principal cause for drastic change in the habitat. All the armed confronta-

tions, both inter-faith and intra-region and in between, can be attributed to for the new geo-political realities evolving novelty in the philosophy of life at the advent of 21st century civilization. In order to safeguard the improving quality of the uni-

versal ecumene, if so wished by the earthlings for their own sake or for their next generation's, now is not too late to act right toward replacing munitions with better appliances for happy living. M Rahman

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