

Full Throttle to Meet Food Crisis

Our run of good luck with food output may seemingly be at an end. Poor rainfall at this time of the year compares badly with what we had during the last three years which gave an unbroken series of good cereal harvests. What reads gloomier is that the rainfall has been measured at 35 to 50 per cent less than even the recorded figures for the decade that had preceded the good turn in food output in 1990. The saving grace is that the comparisons are all based on end-July figures and there is still a month or so left in the current year before we can conclude with any degree of certainty that a dreadful drought has hit us. We have seen some downpour already, though not on a countrywide scale.

It has to be a miracle rainfall to make up for the water deficit of at least 30-40 per cent. All in a little more than a month's time. Beyond that point in time should an extensive downpour be missing, we would have — God forbid — a full-scale drought. Since, however, the dry conditions are practically prevailing, though in a more acute form in the northern region of the country than in the southern parts of it, Aman cultivation is critically impeded. Only 9.86 lakh hectares of land could be brought under transplanted Aman up to July 31 whereas the target for the year is 50 lakh hectares. In the northern region seedlings are sown while in the southern parts mostly seeds are sown. For both the forms of cultivation, timely rains are extremely important. In the first case, seedlings cannot stand on parched land and in the second, the seeds sown would need nurture by rain to grow into rice plants.

Much as we keep our fingers crossed and hope against hope that rains would come in a plentiful measure, it is only by using the existing irrigation network full throttle and adding a supplementary capacity to it that we can do the catching up with the sowing season in the first place. Then we keep up with the redoubled irrigation activity for reaping what we will have sowed.

This strategy is needed to avert the double tragedy of drought and famine. The food availability position looks reassuring for the present with six lakh tons held in reserve and another five and a half lakh tons being in the pipeline. Such statistics are soothing only up to a point — till such time as a crunch does not come at the end of a production season when the total yield would be known.

Irrigation-wise, where are the specific actions due? First, the inoperative pumps need to be made operational. Secondly, the old practice of hiring deep-tubewells should be revived. Thirdly, a steady supply of diesel which propels the pumps has to be ensured at the reduced price that the budget has stipulated. Fourthly, the use of chemical fertilizer in the same plots and for the same crop over and over again has been damaging to land fertility. There has to be a way out of this. Last but not least, costs of production have to be kept at a tolerable level, if necessary, by a special programme of assistance.

As we adopt the damage containment programme there should be a constant monitoring of the cereal prices. The present market trend has a way of influencing the future prices specially when the former is set against a speculative background. From the growers' point of view they too stand to gain from stable prices. Their day-to-day subsistence is helped while they can be sure-footed in their work hoping to get a remunerative price in the end.

Giving Local Fish a Chance

With the beginning of The Fish Fortnight '94 yesterday the nation's attention should be drawn to an issue of serious concern but hardly recognised as such. There is, without doubt, merit in the observance of a fortnight on any issue of common concern for the general public. But as our experiences show most such occasions fail to sustain the tempo and the paperwork into reality beyond the time of their observance. Mostly a managed affair — and that too confined in a select few with limited scope and range — they fail to create the right motivation for the people to take up the issue quite seriously. In fact, the observance of the occasions is more a ritual than a planned and result-oriented move to bring about a real change in the situation.

This is however not to say that the ongoing fish fortnight is going to meet the same fate as others of its kind have done in the past. It can very well be different in its approach and contents of its programmes. But reports published so far do not seem to be encouraging enough. Apart from some ritualistic functions organised at the high level, nothing is known about the field-level programmes touching the lives of those who are actively and closely associated with fish cultivation and fishing.

The theme, as lofty as ever and perhaps sound hackneyed by now because of over-use, is the boosting of pisciculture through expansion of modern technology. At this point question obviously arises if the ground has been prepared for receiving any technology branded as 'modern' at the village level. Before introduction of anything untraditional and foreign, people are needed to be acquainted with some of its rudimentary aspects. In case of the cultivation of High Yielding Variety (HYV) paddy, the relevant authorities are responsible for a massive bungling.

This present stress on modern pisciculture does not depart from our national need and aspiration. But at the same time we would like to be assured that introduction of all the foreign fish species is not at the cost of our indigenous ones. Can we rest assured that after a decade or two the fish farmers won't be told to revert to the cultivation of the local varieties after the experiments with the imported ones have failed, following the pattern of the use of chemical fertilizers? A number of indigenous species have already been extinct or are on the verge of extinction. The reasons are many and varied. The authorities concerned have hardly attempted to address them. Admittedly, some of the conditions that existed before and were necessary for the local varieties to thrive are irretrievable. And this is where the challenges exactly lie. We welcome modern technologies and introduction of newer varieties of imported fish but at the same time demand research and experiments with indigenous species for their survival and continued proliferation.

EFFORTS to organise a coalition to fight grand corruption at national and international level by focusing on the misuse of public power for personal benefit and identifying potentially useless development projects is being taken up as a primary agenda of the recently set up Transparency International (TI).

The organisation comprising of eminent international personalities both from the developed and industrial world and which includes business executives, media experts and former politicians, is now seeking to establish national chapters in several countries including Bangladesh.

The Board of directors of Transparency International is headed by former World Bank executive Dr Peter Eigen while the Advisory Council is chaired by Dr Alberto Dahik, Vice President of Ecuador. Oscar Arias Sanchez, a Nobel peace laureate and former Vice President of Costa Rica and Andrew Young, former US Ambassador to the United Nations, are also included in the Advisory Council that is likely to be expanded to include other reputed personalities shortly.

Dr Kamal Hossain from Bangladesh and Frank Vogl of the US are the two Vice Chairmen of the Transparency International that also has the involvement of Ian Martin, a long-time Secretary General of the Amnesty International.

Dr Peter Eigen, Chairman of Transparency International, in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star in Dhaka recently spoke about the broad objectives of the new organisation. He stated that grand corruption had acquired a global phenomenon and has almost been taken for granted. No institutional move had been made in the past to focus on the extensive phenomenon of corruption, particularly in international business and commercial transactions, Eigen pointed out.

Explaining that TI's concern is a humanitarian one, Dr Eigen said that corruption is causing sums of money to be misallocated by public officials in dozens of countries.

Funds, originally earmarked for new schools, hospitals and institutions to serve the most needy, are often channelled into projects of negligible social value by officials receiving kick-backs from commercial contractors.

Dr Eigen who has worked

with the World Bank for 25 years and has a legal background said, "Development efforts in many Third World countries were undermined and destroyed by corruption. Good investments were negated. Damaging investments were started."

Speaking from his own knowledge he said, projects worth several million US dollars initiated by industrial countries were driven 'not by the needs of the people, but by the needs of corruption'.

He said huge projects, which were mainly capital intensive were always encouraged to allow 'kickback payments'. Many of these projects in the developing countries become 'white elephants' and are generally counter-productive.

Dr Eigen giving a general instance said, where a road worth 10 million dollars could be built for creating access to the farmers to take their produce to the market was instead witnessing a super-highway being constructed of say 500 million dollars, which was not only a capital intensive project but was increasing the debt liability of the developing country.

Source of corruption, to a large extent, Peter Eigen pointed out, is the North. In most OECD countries, it is a practice to promote exports through bribes. It is also 'legal' in most OECD countries to 'bribe' foreigners, Eigen informed.

Bribes given to foreigners for promoting exports and projects were even tax deductible and companies of industrialised countries were also entitled to get insurance coverage on their overseas investments, including on the portion they have invested to promote a business venture, although in the end it may not materialise.

Referring to a study conducted by George Moody Stuart for Transparency International, Dr Eigen revealed that the arithmetic of corruption varied from country to country. For instance five per cent of 2,00,000 US dollar may be interesting to a senior official below the top rank; 5 per cent of 2 million US dollars is in the permanent secretaries' (directors/generals)

Transparency International

Containing Grand Corruption

by M Anwarul Haq

area, 5 per cent of 20 million dollars is real money for a minister and his key staff while 5 per cent of 200 million US dollars may attract the serious attention of the head of state.

The real pressure in the grand corruption stakes comes on when the project is a big one. This does not mean, however, that at the bottom end of the scale a fairly modest offi-

supply to South government, it will be (inevitable) that grand corruption plays a major part in the agreement.

A typical example given in the study states that a commission-seeker often makes his approach through a third party, but some examples of the direct approach to a Permanent Secretary (Director General) after two or three de-



Dr. Peter Eigen

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cial may not be determined to secure a pay-out which would be beneath the notice of his masters," the study mentioned.

Politicians and even officials in the South are conscious that their term in office may be brief, a factor which contributes to their importunity. It follows that the most attractive projects are those in which the full purchase price, or at least a very substantial deposit, is payable at an early stage, so that a large portion of the total agreed commission is due before there is any risk of the intended recipient having left office," the study stated.

The study, however, notes that while there will certainly be some exceptions, it is generally true that in the main categories of big contracts of

tailored discussions on the technical and economic merits of a project may be. "By the way, I have a son at college in the US. If your company does this job, could you help with the bills? And perhaps an airfare for his summer vacation? I don't like to ask but it is costing more than I expected."

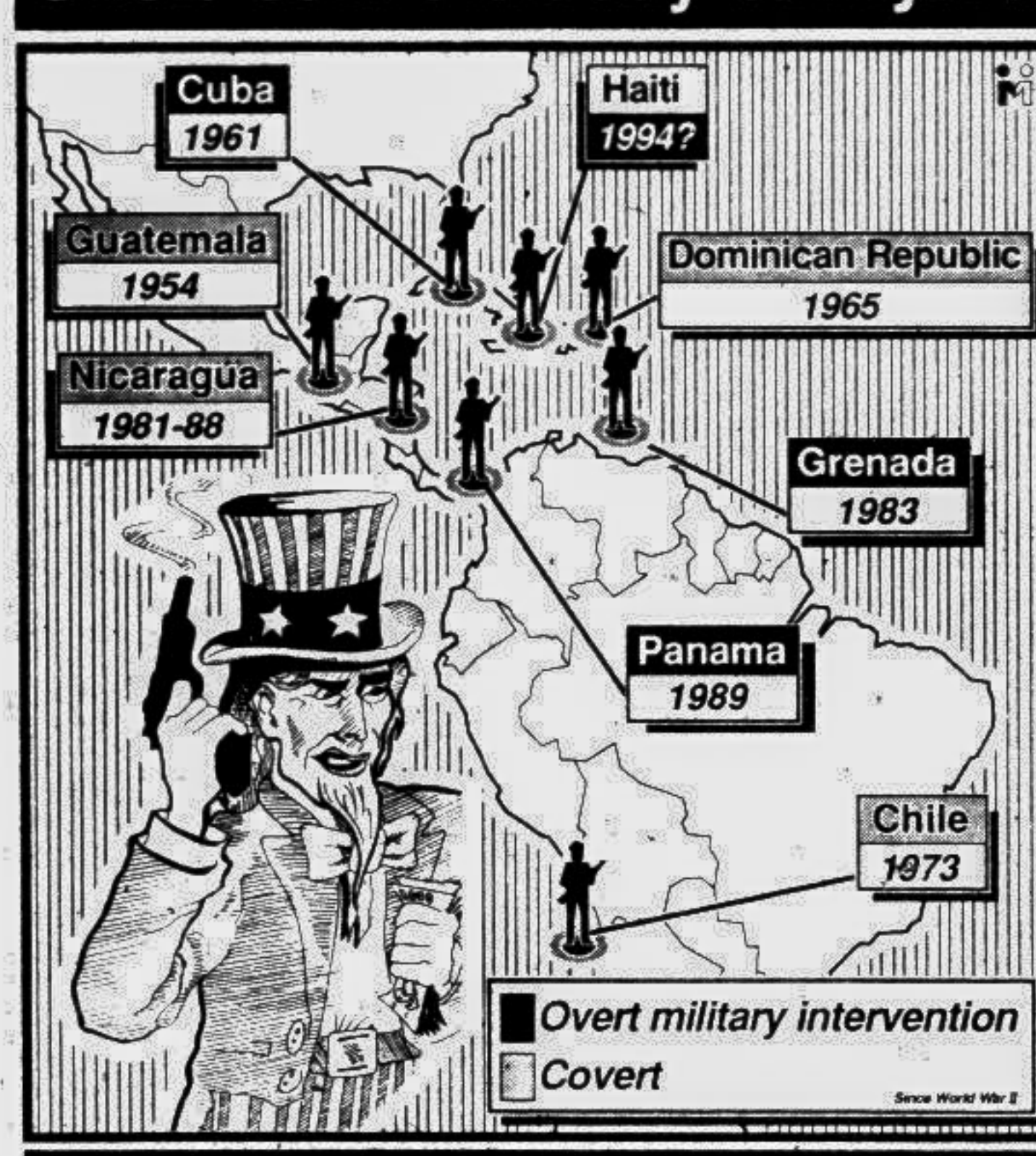
Another instance cited in the study is a minister, on first meeting, after a favourable briefing by his PS as saying: "The government wants this project to go ahead but there is going to be general election next year. If the opposition wins, they may not want to proceed. It would help very much if a contribution, say 5 per cent of the project value, could be made to our party funds."

Hidden Dangers of Jettisoning the Junta

Luis Tricot writes from Santiago

UN go-ahead for a US invasion of Haiti might evict the current dictatorship and lead to a return to power of the ousted President — but it sets a dangerous precedent, argues a Gemini News Service correspondent, and marks a significant shift in the politics of the Americas.

Uncle Sam's bloody backyard



Resolution 940 is based on a section of the UN Charter that allows for the use of force in case "of a threat to international peace and security." But

Haiti — less than a third the size of the US state of Maine, with a badly armed and trained army — poses no threat to the most powerful military ma-

chine in the world. President Bill Clinton stated that "our only aim in Haiti is to spare poor people from being murdered, tortured, raped and deprived of the possibility of leading a decent and normal life."

But the US supported and financed the previous Duvalier dynasty from the outset, and trained the dreaded *Tontons Macoutes* (state-directed thugs), as well as the Generals now in power. Some observers believe that its real interest is still political rather than humanitarian.

The Clinton administration got entangled in the Haitian affair in the hope that it would provide an opportunity to make up for earlier foreign policy fiascos; an ill-assorted bunch of corrupt army officers would not dare to challenge US might.

They were wrong. Cedras and the right-wing movement that supports him have repeatedly defied the international community. The expulsion of a Human Rights Mission from the UN and Organisation of American States was the culmination of a policy of contempt towards any form of external pressure.

Despite US threats and the UN's economic and military blockade, a reign of terror still prevails in Haiti. The junta — headed by Cedras, Colonel

Philippe Blamby and Police Chief Michel Francois — is a brutal dictatorship with no popular support.

No Latin American government recognises the Port au Prince regime. Nonetheless, they were reluctant to support any form of direct military intervention. The Mexican Ambassador to the UN, Victor Flores, pointed out that "military interventions in our hemisphere have been invariably traumatic."

Uruguay, Venezuela and Cuba, among others, opposed the Security Council resolution. But though most countries in the region do not support intervention, neither of the two Latin American representatives on the Council — Brazil and Argentina — voted against it. Brazil abstained and Argentina voted in favour.

Argentina has become Washington's unconditional ally in the continent. It will be part of the invading "multinational" force: President Carlos Menem plans to send 600 troops.

It is an open secret that President Aristide was all but forced to send a letter to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali demanding "speedy and decisive action" by the international community to end the Haitian crisis.

Aristide did not want an invasion, but the US did not

chapter. It would not be the function of national chapters to undertake investigations of individual allegations of corruption. However, it would be considered appropriate for a National Chapter to monitor the effectiveness with which existing investigative authorities handle complaints and develop a national strategy for containing corruption.

"No action shall be taken by a national chapter which might prejudice the interests of the movement and no one in the name of TI can be authorised to make public statements involving specific allegations of corruption," the Transparency International manual states.

One of the success stories of the Transparency International is the acceptance of an anti-corruption pledge in Ecuador that was signed by the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of all bidders who participated in a 600 million US dollar pipeline.

The TI hopes that other governments would also be able to initiate similar anti-corruption pledges for larger tender bids.

"We are optimistic that both the developed countries and the developing countries will realize the need for having greater accountability and transparency to eliminate corruption. It would benefit the companies concerned and also the people where projects are being taken. The most important aspect is that it will reduce the cost of projects," Eigen pointed out.

How is Transparency International hoping to fund such a world-wide movement, if not a crusade?

Dr Eigen mentioned that not more than five per cent of funds would be accepted from one single source. One third of total funding would be from private sources including companies, one third from government sources and the other third from trusts and institutions.

Responding to a question Dr Eigen said that contributions from all types of institutions including multi-nationals would not compromise the position of his organisation, "as no single government or institution will be in a position to exert influence."

He reiterated the broad philosophy of Transparency International (TI) saying, "We would investigate the mechanisms of corruption — looking for corrupt systems, not for corrupt people."

want the problem to drag on any longer. The first and only democratically elected president of Haiti gave in.

The Clinton Administration is going for the planned invasion with or without Aristide's approval. Haiti's 7,000 strong army are preparing for the "Battle of Haiti", as they have already named their largely symbolic effort. They stand no chance against the overwhelming superiority of the US.

The military result is, however, irrelevant. What really worries many Latin Americans is that the UN move has made the concept and practice of national sovereignty and self-determination redundant. Resolution 940 has legitimised the use of force in order to resolve an internal crisis.

It shows that once again, the UN — and the Security Council in particular — have become an instrument of US foreign policy rather than a pluralistic international forum.

The inhabitants of Cite Soleil shanty town in Port au Prince, the poorest of the poor, staunch supporters of Aristide, may welcome the possibility of having their President back home. But the price may prove too high.

What will happen tomorrow if Washington decides that the Zapatista National Liberation Army represents a threat to US interests? Will it invade Mexico under the umbrella of the UN? Or, by the same token, will the US invade Cuba once again?

Whatever the answer, neither the UN nor continental politics will be the same again. **LUIS TRICOT is a Chilean freelance journalist writing and broadcasting on Latin American affairs.**

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.

Divided society

Sir, Today the citizens of Bangladesh seem to have been divided into many sections such as fundamentalist, secularist, leftist, rightist, communal, non-communal, pro-liberation, anti-liberation, and many more. Perhaps the British colonialist forces could not have divided the people in so many sections or classes in spite of their best efforts. Why all do not think that above all they are one people, ethnically?

Could we not divide ourselves according to virtues and

vices, such as honest and dishonest etc? Our society could have gained some values this way. Isn't it?
A citizen

Safety at schools

Sir, In the west, in many countries like the USA, UK etc schools have become rather like prisons with the introduction of many sophisticated security alert systems/measures to combat vandalism, protect children and staff from intruders and to cut truancy among students. Among the measures being introduced by educa-

tional institutes are, surveillance cameras, schoolroom smoke alarm systems, sensor alarm system linked to security company, swipe cards at main approach for access or intercom system, concealed drain pipes to prevent intruders climbing roofs, personal alarm gadgets by teachers, sprinklers to stop fires, high fences and even security guards with dog etc, etc.

A study recently revealed that in UK, in each of the country's 24,000 schools, eight incidents of vandalism, theft and/or arson occur on an average every year. And the problem is quite acute in our country also but yet to be monitored for sake of statistics including the cost of such losses.

To quote a figure to understand the situation, the insurance companies in UK put the amount per year at £ 100m.

Schools are getting better as far educational facilities are

concerned but lack of discipline is rather getting into there and coupled with the general lawlessness, urge for easy money, destruction for the sake of pleasure and the like are forcing many authorities in taking such measures.

Yet schools should not become prisons or be isolated from the communities, anywhere, whether in the west or, in future, in Bangladesh.

Col Mirza Shafi (retd)
Administrator, MIT, Banant, Dhaka

Doctors' strike

Sir, Once again the government doctors resorted to work abstention throughout the country on August 10, and the sufferings of the ailing patients in the government hospitals know no bounds.

We observe and experience that the standard of services in

the government hospitals is deteriorating day by day. This time the main reason for the doctors' strike was the suspension of some doctors who were found absent unauthorised from their duties in Gazipur and Tongi by the government vigilance team.

We know that according to government service rules and regulations no government officer whether he is a member of BCS (Admin), an engineer, a doctor, an agriculturist, a gazetted officer or an office assistant, clerk or peon is supposed to indulge in any activity prejudicial to the interest of the government.

If a government servant remains absent from duty unauthorised and if no disciplinary action is taken against him, would not other government officers and his own staff members follow in his foot steps? How would the law and order and discipline be main-

tained in the government offices and hospitals and how the administration of the country would run?

Sometimes, we feel that BMA (Bangladesh Medical Association) is behaving more like a political party than a welfare organisation.

We urge our democratic government to ban all illegal activities, hartals and strikes, by government offices and hospitals in the interest of public service.

We would welcome any government servant resigning from government service and joining any political party rather than indulging in activities prejudicial to the interest of the state and welfare of the people, drawing full pay and allowances without rendering any public service.

O H Kabir
Dhaka