Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali

#### Dhaka, Monday, September 5, 1994

Cairo Conference The Cairo conference on population and development starts today. It should have been the most important conference for the future of humanity. especially for countries like ours with extremely high population density. But instead it has become a most controversial event with religious leaders from various faiths declaring their opposition to some sections of its draft report. The Vatican has launched a virulent attack on such suggestions as legalised abortion. In a surprising unity of the Christian and Muslim religious leaders, the latter group has also called for the boycott of the conference. In our own country, religious groups have condemned the conference. and termed it as a conspiracy against Islam. Some p, ress reports had these groups claiming that the Ca iro Conference was a conspiracy to flood Isla mic countries with the dreaded disease. AIDS. So n such for an informed debate on the subject of the C'airo Conference.

Let us try to understand what the United Nations is trying to achieve through the world conference on population and development. Once every ter vears the whole world gets together under the UN auspices and plans for a better management of global population. More than anybody else, it is the developing countries that benefited most from the global plan that were prepared and adopted in the earlier conferences. It was due to the earlier conferences that international support was mobilised and funds generated, bringing expertise to the high population growth developing countries. Let us not forget that Bangladesh it self has been, and continues to be, a substantial beneficiary of the UN effort at family planning. The success that Bangladesh has achieved is, to a considerable extent, the result of international and UN assistance.

The Cairo Conference is to adopt a 20-year plan of action, with widespread implication for the growth and health of humanity in the years to come. One important aspect about the UN's work that has to be remembered, is that practically nothing is done without consulting the member states. Every step of preparation for a world conference, - like the one that begins today - goes through an elaborate consultation process. Every word of the controversial draft document, went through several preparatory conferences, during which all countries made changes and gave approval. It is absurd to think that delegations of all Muslim and Christian countries allowed such offending ideas to pass, as has been reported in our press. The absurdity of the claim became further clear when one realises that the conference is being hosted by a Muslim country, and the UN body which is organising the event — UNFPA — is headed by a Muslim woman from Pakistan.

We believe much of the propaganda against this conference is motivated, and based on selective, out-of-context and biased reading of the preparatory document. The propaganda to boycott the population conference is absurd, and self-defeating for Bangladesh. We regret that Begum Zia felt obliged to cancel her participation, but the reason for it, we understand, is more political, than anything else. We are glad that, at the last moment, PM allowed the health minister to lead our delegation, ignoring the obscurantist posture propagated by the religious right. Bangladesh, we are sure, will work with all countries, to produce a plan of action which will strengthen our democratic, cultural and humanitarian values.

#### A Courageous Act

Vice-Chancellor Emajuddin Ahmed has done about the most correct thing in the circumstances now prevailing at the Dhaka University. He has sent letters to the leaders of the political parties appealing for their help in containing student violence in the campus. And he has, in a rare flourish of forthrightness on the part of anyone holding responsible non-political office, implied in his letter that the leaders have a say in how their respective student wings conducted themselves and this was time the leaders put that to good use to free the campus from terrorism. We not only welcome his initiative, we endorse and support it strongly.

It is ages that the holders of the position of chief executive at our universities have been anything other than plain yes-men. It is through their default that Mr Ahmed's act of a very plain necessity, neither more nor less, has come to assume the character of a courageous deed. Right from the inception of our new state, student fronts of the ruling party had an eminent role in campus violence.

Awami League was no exception to this and the ruling BNP is famously carrying on with the tradition. Through the years, successive governments have tended to have as VC people politically congenial and reassuring for them — which hit a peak in the very open and bare expression of politicisation of that office, in the appointment of the founder of the Zia Parishad in Rajshahi as the chief of the university there not long ago. When such is the history, Mr Ahmed's courageous act, although losing somewhat in impact for choosing as the occasion one which did not feature the ruling party student wing's involvement, gains tremendously in significance. If the parties so want, there wouldn't be any terrorism in the campuses from tomorrow. Now that the leaders of the parties have been addressed very plainly on the subject, the onus should rest on the parties squarely.

It is very difficult for one who has lived with the weird ways of our politics for long to believe that things are indeed so simple. But at least from now on, if the violence continues, we shall be left with the simpler explanations of either the parties — all, some or any of them — do not feel confident enough of their hold as to neutralise their armed cadres in the universities, or they have no effective control over their student wings. Before Mr Ahmed's letter, the parties enjoyed the fact of no one holding them responsible for both campus violence or its elimination. Now that opportunity is surely on the way out. The parties should heed the change in the society's attitude the letters may set off and prepare in good to repudiate arms as a means of controlling the campuses.

toms, moral and religious compulsions. All the same, drafted this way, the document also lends itself to a variety of interpretations, often conflicting. What follows in these columns now, has mostly been culled from news media reports. Chances of slip-ups remain. Still, it's worth a try to find out what is the tumult all 1984. Like the earlier two, the

third United Na-

tions sponsored Inter

national Conference on

Population and Development

opens in Cairo today. Sept 5.

The UN puts on such a

conference once every 10

years. The first population

conference was held in

Bucharest in 1974 and the

second, in Mexico City in

Cairo conference also will fo

cus on global population

growth and its implications for

the human society and eco-

nomic development. The con-

ference will then draw up a

plan of action for the next

decade - based on consensus

among the participating na-

tions - numbering 150 or so.

As it happens, certain compo-

nents of the draft plan of ac-

tion to be considered by the

conference, have generated

waves of controversy world-

wide. Impassioned arguments.

heated debates - even anger -

featured the phase marking

the run-up to the conference.

Indeed, it is a question if the

conference would reach a con-

sensus on a programme of ac-

tion for next decades, or de-

generate into acrimony - end-

ing up on a note of discord, as

points and counterpoints being

made about the issues in dis-

pute that it gets to be difficult

at times to see through the

maze. It is said that the lan-

guage of the draft plan of ac-

tion encompassing future

global population policies had

had to remain fluid enough to

suit the diverse nature of the

participating nations' eco-

nomic conditions, social cus-

· growing in the mind of

the public that the

title of the Armed Forces

Provisional Ruling Council

(AFPRC) in The Gambia might

not be accurate. The word

"provisional" is looking less

been banned in the wake of

the July coup, together with

any publicity by or about them.

A Red Cross official was barred

from meeting military prison-

ers in private, and a new de-

cree allows police and military

detainees to be held up to six

The rhetoric of Council

Chairman Lieutenant Yahya

Jammeh is also that of some-

one who plans to stay in

power. At a rally in the capital,

Banjul, Chairman Jammeh.

punching the air-like a football

star, asked the crowd: "Did

anyone here lose a dog? Did

anyone lose a chicken? People

didn't believe a coup could be

bloodless. But now? Not even a

dog or a chicken lost! "It was

better than elections," he

added, and asked. Who in-

vented democracy? 'The

Greeks? The Romans? Euro-

the government, who outnum-

ber two-to-one the AFPRC.

have made occasional tentative

promises that there would "of

course" be an eventual return

of constitutional rule, but the

The 10 civilian members of

peans, not Africans.

All political parties have

convincing.

months.

Such is the plethora of the

it closes on Sept 13.

First comes the considera tion of global population growth profile. The low. medium and high variants of the United Nations population projections range from a low of 7.27 billion people in the year 2015 to a high of 7.92 billion. The UN alternate projections put the world population by the year 2050 at a low of 7.8 billion people and a high of 12.5 billion. By and large, it is the population policies pursued by the nations of the world in the coming decades that would make the differ ence in growth rates. The lat est projections come from the annual report of the UN Population Fund, published last month. According to the re port, world population hit 5.66 billion this year and would grow to 6 billion in 1998, 8.5 billion by 2025 and 10 billion by 2050, assuming continued declining fertility. There will thus be too many people crowding the earth, runs the argument, unless a more balanced population growth is ensured. There are dire forecasts that unbridled population growth will only increase the incidence of poverty and hunger, malnutrition and disease, worsen environmental degradation and, above all,

deny humanity a sustainable future.

The world then should show an increased awareness of the perils of population explosion and act with more de termination to contain the growth rate. The target is to stabilise the world's population at 7.27 billion by 2050. Subsuming a heightened international concern over the issue, the draft action plan for the Cairo conference seeks global consensus on certain guidelines for shaping population policies in the next decade. In effect, the docuchildren

So then, the issue is to create a population policy framework that would enable women to exercise their choice about family size freely. To this end the draft plan of action seeks inter alia, empowerment for women to apply their rights in family planning. Among other things, the document also says. Women should have ready ac cess to quality health-care ser vices that include reliable in formation, counselling and medical care to enable them to terminate pregnancies in

a measure, they assert, would only encourage premarital sex and other forms of licentious behaviour. They are not impressed by arguments about reproductive health and safe motherhood. As for the draft action plan's proposals being non-binding, they aver that once an international right to abortion is established, na tional legislations can but only follow, leading to calamitous consequences for the world.

incompatible with the tents of

religion and moral values. Such

The draft plan of action contains certain other highly controversial proposals too For instance, the move for acceptance of non-traditional families, is-being read as sanc tioning single mothers and homosexuality. Likewise, the recommendation urging participating countries to promote responsible and healthy reproductive behaviour among the teenagers has been interpreted as encouraging secret illicit sex.

It also needs be noted that population growth rates vary from country to country. By and large, increase in population has come to be regarded as an overwhelming affliction for the poorer countries. It is estimated that most of the population growth in the coming decades will occur in the poorer nations - some say as much as ninetyfive per cent of it. Population is growing slowly in most of the rich countries - is even in absolute decline in some. The propor tion of geriatric people is on the increase in richer societies. Some of the richer nations also allow controlled mi-

gration of people from densely populated countries. Developing countries themselves have come to acknowledge the need for reducing population growth. Yet, even at the 1974 Bucharest conference developing countries were heard expressing misgivings that the talks of a population programme were really meant to keep the poorer nations off world's resources. Let us hope that the Cairo conference will not revive fears of richer societies trying to impose their norms of social behaviour on the poorer nations of the

Y HILE the Cairo conference strives to strengthen linkages between population policies and sustainable development, it may be of interest that there is a school of though who believes otherwise. There are mainstream population economists who argue that the scarcity of world's exhaustible resources is at most a minor restraint on economic growth. They concede that under conditions of high fertility, negative effects of population growth are clearly discernible at the individual and household level. However, looking at all the forces at work in the economy, matters appear less definitive. They also note that there is no statistical evidence of a negative connection between population increase and economic growth. Rather, they believe that population growth unlocks resources. The more people, the more geniuses -

# ALONG MY WAY

Will UN Population Conference Reach a Consensus?

#### S B Chaudhuri

ment attempts at refining the focus of action on population issues by identifying women as the catalytic agent for limiting the size of the family and this

is where trouble erupts. It's not so much a question of equality of men and women. Indeed, that is not an issue at all. Rather, it is a question of recognition of the importance of women's contribution to family planning. As the UN Population Fund asserts, recent findings contest the view that poverty is the main barrier to increased recourse to family planning. Instead, it says, these findings identify a direct link between individual choice and family size and when women, even poor women, are offered a real

those cases where it is allowed by law, if they so decide. "Does this proposal advocate legitimizing abortion as a means of controlling family sizes? . Proponents of the move assert that it does not. The proposal, they say, does not endorse abortion as such. Rather, it seeks to establish women's right to safe, legal and voluntary abortion. They also point out that the recommendations would not be binding anyway Women can exercise the right to abortion only if national leg-

islation permits. Opponents of the move disagree. They say that the proposal is designed to establish universal right for women to demand abortion when they decide so. This, they argue, is

# Provisional' Wears Thin in Coup that Harmed No Chickens

## Rosemary Long writes from Banjul

The recent coup in The Gambia ended 30 years of democratic rule but was bloodless and did not seem to shake the country's easy-going amiability. But there are signs that the young soldiers in charge may want to stay on longer than was first suspected.



Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh: "We are not here to harm you"

promises have a hollow ring Meanwhile, the marketing of 29-year-old Jammeh is pursued with youthful enthusiasm Surrounded by his entourage he stands on the McCarthy Square dais, arms wide, appealing for love and trust. The master of ceremonies vells: "Are you all happy to be here? I don't hear you. Let me hear you one more time: Are you happy to be here?" The crowd obliges with roars.

Later Jammeh, after crack-

They believe their new leader when he tells them "the nations, coffers have been plundered for 30 years." They believe him when he says "we will root out corruption."

ing football jokes, asks them

"If you want Jawara back, give a

big cheer." The crowd oblig-

ingly roars while the inter-

preter shows his frustration at

their mistake. The crowd does

not, so far as anyone can gauge.

want President Sir Dawda

Kairaba Jawara back. Not the

youth, anyway. They have ac-

hero had feet of clay.

cepted that their venerable

The rally in Banjul was one of a series around the country. the revolution's roadshow. prefaced by acrobats, drummers, dancers, griots (traditional historians and folklorists) singing and telling stories and extolling the new order. A fun day out of the fam-

Simultaneously, the AFPRC's sterner side displays itself without the razzamatazz. The Red Cross's Dakar-based representative. Hans Leuenberger. was refused permission to talk to military detainees in private: the AFPRC says one of its intel-

ligence officers must be present. "We are not spies," complains local Red Cross secretary-general, Alassan Senghore, stressing that their purpose is purely humanitar-

At one rally, Jammeh said: "Anyone in prison is a bloodsucker. We will show no mercy." The former Inspector-General of Police, Pa Sallah Jagne, was one of the captive officers. He is said to be hospitalised; no-one has said why. On a surprise visit to the Royal Victoria Hospital in the capital, Chairman Jammeh was told there was a serious shortage of blood for transfusions and that even parents sometimes refuse to give blood for their children. "Report any such cases to me." he said ominously.

Bribery of officials is to stop. Late-coming to work is to stop. Giving money to phoney religious figures is to stop. Nepotism is to stop. Tribalism must not be tolerated.

These are all proscriptions which would undoubtedly change The Gambia for the better. Jammeh is an engaging personality. He has a social conscience. He seems gen-

uinely appalled at the inequalities and elitism which have flourished, begrudged but accepted by the majority, for so many years. "We are not here to harm

you. We love you," he tells the crowds. The soldiers are now less evident in the streets Tour operators cautiously promise to resume flights, if

there is a demand. The new leader is astonish ingly accessible. A European visitor went to State House to deliver a letter to him. "Do you want to see him now?" one of the soldiers asked. Three Christian and Islamic leaders asked to talk to him about the peremptory seizure of heads of organisations suspected of corruption or mismanagement and were immediately received.

Griots, trade unionists business people and village chiefs have all been invited to visit the young lieutenant and make their positions known. "We don't mind criticism." the Chairman has said.

Local newspapers have produced some of their best, most vociferous and intelligently worded commentaries since

that is what they say.

But accepting criticism does not mean acting on it. "We will not compromise," said Jammeh when asked to go easy on suspected "plunderers of the national coffers" - his favourite phrase. Will he compromise on the

restoration of a system of elected constitutional government? A time-table has been requested by the donor organisations which have until now supplied much of the money in the "plundered" coffers, but the question has been sidestepped.

Perhaps to the poorer Gambians, living, as the Chairman has reminded them. in substandard housing, with inadequate services, lack of education and insufficient nutritious food, the constitution is less important than the promises at the roadshow rallies of new schools, incentives for farmers, an efficient and honest civil service, a fair share of the cake for all.

"If you want us to go back to barracks, we'll go back, shouted the Chairman at his rally. But it was the emcee who asked the question directly: "Are you happy?"

- GEMINI NEWS

ROSEMARY LONG is an award-winning Scottish journalist, now living in The

### 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.

#### 'Road and Watery Deaths"

Sir, Like many of your timely and appropriate comments, your editorial of 29 Aug, "The Road and Watery Deaths," will go unfortunately unheeded, and untimely unnecessary deaths shall continue to occur.

Your consciousness in saying, "The journals tend to condone the unnecessary road killings...... is appreciable. Add to those expressions, "The reason for the murder is believed to be .....?" The reason for the suicide...... ." It is a consolation that murder, suicide and so many unaccepta ble social and legal wrongdoing have indeed very acceptable reasons! Furthermore, I'm often intrigued by reading "carrying of arms, explosives and other harmful/leathal weapons is banned," on such and such dates at specified places — when and where are they permitted?

am hopeful that at least The Daily Star shall be more choosing and balanced in its reporting.

M Haque DOHS, Dhaka

#### Repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis

Sir, My attention has been drawn to the news item published almost in all the na. tional dailies of August 12. 1994 about the press conference held by Alhaj M Nasim Khan, leader of Stranded Pakistanis at National Press Club on August 11, 1994. He: had to narrate the woes and

wails of stranded Pakistanis in a chocked and emotional voice even after 22 years of independence. I myself could not control my tears after reading in newspapers. However, I am extremely thankful to the national and international press media for extending their allout support and wide coverage to the grievances and sufferings of stranded Pakistanis.

What made Alhaj M Nasim Nasim Khan hold this press conference despite his sickness and weakness? Besides the delay in repatriation the illegal and inhuman demolition of shops by city corporation at the Geneva Camp, Mohammadpur on August 7 had prompted and necessitated the urgency of holding the press conference to draw the attention of world conscience and he has successfully attained his objective. It was indeed a day of horrors on the 7th instant when city corporation authorities with heavy contingent of armed police forcibly demolished shops at Geneva Camp where poor, innocent and oppressed stranded Pakistanis had been conducting their petty business since inception of the camp in 1972. The corporation authorities including the Honourable Mayor did not bother a little to consider the socio-econo conditions of this suffering community even on humanitarian grounds. All

families of the affected st-

randed Pakistanis have been

turned into street beggars,

they have no option but to face

starvation and death. They

have lost their only means of

survival as well as what they

had earned for the last 22

years were destroyed in

moments. So far we are concerned we . strongly protest and condemn this unilateral action of the Mayor of the City Corporation because he has done that within 22 minutes which could not be done for 22 years, even by the previous autocratic regime. On the other hand, we fully appreciate and endorse the timely and appropriate action of leader of stranded Pakistanis M Nasim Khan to overcome the crisis created intentionally by the vested quarters. We also express our sympathy and solidarity with the poor stranded people who have lost their sources of livelihood.

The general meeting of stranded Pakistanis on Sunday, August 14, '94 at the North Gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque in Dhaka and overwhelmingly attended by more the 50,000 stranded Pakistanis from all camps of Dhaka city, Adamjeenagar and Narayangoni is a clear indication and demonstration of their unity. integrity and total faith in the experienced, able and sincere leadership of M Nasim Khan. It was a remarkable occasion which also witnessed the presence of Mohtaram Janab S Hassan Shareef, General Secretary, Citizen's National Committee for Repatriation of Stranded Pakistanis, Karachi. The meeting ended with a fresh vow to go for action programme including enmass court arrest, self-immolation, etc. if their demands were not met within a reasonable time

Taking the continued sufferings of stranded Pakistanis into account I would most earnestly appeal to Govt of Bangladesh to abandon the programme of demolition of shops/camps of stranded Pakistanis till their repatriation is completed and demolished shops/camps be kindly reconstructed at government cost and help the victims to

earn their livelihood for their survival to show atleast minimum of respect to human rights. At the same time, both Govts of Pakistan and Bangladesh should come forward with firm determination, will and courage to implement the contents of Joint Declaration of August 12, 1992 and resolve this long-lingering issue of repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis, after all, they are also human beings and creatures of the Almighty Allah. I hope if the government applies the same spirit, courage and determination as applied with Chakmas and Rohingyas, there is no reason why the issue of repatriation of the Stranded Pakistanis will not be resolved. It is the high

Abdul Mannan Convenor Citizen Committee of Pakistanis Stranded in Bangladesh Saidpur, Nilphamari

#### Reforming the Civil Service

time to think, decide and re-

Sir, Recently, I represented my Institute at an Employers' Forum programme organised by the British Council, Dhaka under the auspices of the Ministry of Establishment. Two papers on "Reform and future trend in the British Civil Service: Implications for the management of a reformed service" and "Management for the millennium" were presented by Ms Diana Stanley and Ms Janefer Braines respectively.

Ms Diana in her talk described how the British Civil Service has been undergoing changes as per the demand of the time and how the Civil Service personnels are actively working to offer better services to the people. The main features in the present reform in the British Civil Service are: reduction in the size, more accountability, decentralization of power, increasing involvement of the private sector to provide services to and on be-

half of the Government. Ms Janefer in her delibera tion stressed on the need for creating more facilities for the woman managers and employees in the organizations. She presented the findings obtained from the 'follow-up' session of the Bangladeshi lady officials who have availed training under the British Technical Assistance programme. It has been revealed that the woman personnel need more cooperation from their male colleagues in discharging their organisational responsibilities. Women also need facilities like separate toilets, common room etc in the offices for them.

The Establishment Secretary of the Govt of Bangladesh, Mr Habibur Rahman in his speech informed that the government is contemplating to bringing about changes in the civil service. The areas of changes as stated by Mr Rahman includes: recruitment transfer, ACR, promotion cadres, coordination, audit and accounts, human resources development etc. He said that the government is actively working for introducing a result-oriented management system by clearly defining the role of the government and its affiliated agencies.

It is sincerely expected that the civil service in Bangladesh will be reformed soon keeping in view the greater public interests and ignoring petty group interests. Let Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia take a bold step to bringing about reforms in our civil service as it was done by the former British Prime Minister Madam Thatcher.

M Zahidul Haque Asstt Prof. Deptt of Agril. Extension Bangladesh Agricultural Institute. Dhaka

# ADP implementation

Sir, in a National Economic Council (NEC) meeting held in Dhaka recently our State Minister for Planning Dr Abdul Moveen Khan has said that of the Taka 9.600 crore revised ADP, Taka 8,983 crore has been utilised and the ADP implementation for the fiscal year

1993-94 stood at 94 per cent. We would be grateful if our State Minister for Planning kindly let us know a minimum of 20 projects, showing public money spent against each, for our information and knowledge and accountability of works and performances of various relevant government organisations. O H Kabir

Dhaka

#### Pollution of the Surma Sir. The Surma is a very

well-known river of our country. For the last many years it has been observed that a kind of strong chemical is drained into the river as waste from the Sylhet Pulp & Paper Mill, Chattak. The gravity of the pollution is not noticeable in rainy season due to high volume of water flow and flooding, but in winter when the water flow is low, the fish of the river become unfit for human consumption due to heavy presence of the waste chemical. Last year I had been to the

Mill in Chattak and saw how they manage the waste which is from a strong chemical already used to decompose bamboo and other raw materials in a process which ultimately turns the raw material into soft pulp. I personally cannot accept the way waste is grounded and drained. I do feel that our country's environmentalists should look into this serious matter and suggest the concerned authority how best they should take up a proper 'waste management policy' without polluting water and the environment as well. Motius Samad Chowdhury Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet