

Cairo Conference

The Cairo conference on population and development starts today. It should have been the most important conference for the future of humanity...

Let us try to understand what the United Nations is trying to achieve through the world conference on population and development. Once every ten years the whole world gets together...

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...

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.

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.

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.

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...

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...

Will UN Population Conference Reach a Consensus?

THE third United Nations sponsored International Conference on Population and Development opens in Cairo today. Sept 5. The UN puts on such a conference once every 10 years.

Such is the plethora of the points and counterpoints being made about the issues in dispute that it gets to be difficult at times to see through the maze. It is said that the language of the draft plan of action encompassing future global population policies had to remain fluid enough to suit the diverse nature of the participating nations' economic conditions, social cus-

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 about.

First comes the consideration 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 difference in growth rates.

deny humanity a sustainable future. The world then should show an increased awareness of the perils of population explosion and act with more determination 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 docu-

choice, they opt for fewer children. 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 access to quality health-care services that include reliable information, counselling and medical care to enable them to terminate pregnancies in

incompatible with the tenets of religion and moral values. Such 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, national legislations can but only follow, leading to calamitous consequences for the world.

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 sanctioning 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 to 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 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 proportion 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 world.

WHILE the Cairo conference strives to strengthen linkages between population policies and sustainable development, it may be of interest that there is a school of thought 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 — that is what they say.

ALONG MY WAY 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 legislation 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

A gnawing suspicion is 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 convincing.

All political parties have 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 prisoners in private, and a new decree allows police and military detainees to be held up to six months.

The rhetoric of Council Chairman Lieutenant Yahya Jammeh is also that of someone 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 invented democracy? The Greeks? The Romans? Europeans, not Africans.'

The 10 civilian members of the government, who outnumber two-to-one the AFPRC, have made occasional tentative promises that there would 'of course' be an eventual return of constitutional rule, but the

ing football jokes, asks them 'If you want Jawara back, give a big cheer.' The crowd obligingly roars while the interpreter 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 accepted that their venerable hero had feet of clay.

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.'

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 family.

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,' explains local Red Cross secretary-general, Alassan Senghor, stressing that their purpose is purely humanitarian.

At one rally, Jammeh said: 'Anyone in prison is a blood-sucker. 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 hospitalized: 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 astonishingly 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

the coup. 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 Gambia.

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 unacceptable social and legal wrongdoings have indeed very acceptable reasons! Furthermore, I'm often intrigued by reading, 'carrying of arms, explosives and other harmful/lethal weapons is banned,' on such and such dates at specified places — when and where are they permitted?

I am hopeful that at least The Daily Star shall be more choosy 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 national 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

walls of stranded Pakistanis in a choked 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 all-out support and wide coverage to the grievances and sufferings of stranded Pakistanis.

What made Alhaj M 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-economic conditions of this suffering community even on humanitarian grounds. All families of the affected stranded 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 than 50,000 stranded Pakistanis from all camps of Dhaka city, Adamjeenagar and Narayanganj 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, Citizens' National Committee for Repatriation of Stranded Pakistanis, Karachi. The meeting ended with a fresh vow to go for action programme including emmass court arrest, self-immolation, etc. if their demands were not met within a reasonable time limit.

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 time to think, decide and react.

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

Reforming the Civil Service

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 ac-

countability, decentralization of power, increasing involvement of the private sector to provide services to and on behalf of the Government.

Ms Janefer in her deliberation 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 bring 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 Moyeen 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 ground 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. Mottus Samad Choudhury Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet