Dhaka Sunday, September 11, 1994

OIC's Resolve and Reality

With a perfect sense of timing and a pronounced motivation at being aggrieved by certain international developments, Foreign Ministers from the 50-nation OIC sat in a 3-day extra-ordinary session which ended in Islamabad Friday last. The host country Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto set a tone of self-criticism on the inaugural day describing the Islamic world as being weak, divided and open to exploitation by others. On the second day, the air was rept by a defiant mood as the OIC resolved to provide weapons to the Bosnian government, individually and collectively, if the arms embargo against it were not lifted by the UN Security Council. On the final day, a communique was adopted by consensus touching on the Kashmir and Bosnian questions in some concrete terms.

But the fratricidal war in Afghanistan was left out, except for a mention in the speeches - in deference perhaps to the UN initiative being launched by its Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali himself to revive the wrecked peace talks.

On Kashmir, the OIC has established a contact group. Its Secretary-General Hamid Al-Gabid is to be in touch with India, Pakistan and the 'true representatives of the Kashmiri people' to promote a just settlement of the issue. India has been harping on bilateral approach as against Pakistan's unceasing efforts to internationalise the question pegging it to human rights. Now the newly-introduced element in the OIC resolution seeking to associate some Kashmiri leaders with the talks is most likely to be spurned by India. New Delhi did not grant visa to some Kashmiri representatives who were invited to the Islamabad conference. The strong support expressed at the conference for a referendum in Kashmir may sound like a vindication of Pakistan's known yearning for a vote in the valley. But this no longer presents a simple choice between Pakistan and India because of a third dimension to it which is the longing for liberation among certain groups in Kashmir. The question has admittedly become convoluted and complex over time, so much so that while the people of the valley suffer and the world takes note of it there is no way it can be resolved except through a serious dialogue between the disputing countries which the Simla Accord had envisaged. Mere scoring of diplomatic points over each other cannot add up to any genuine and comprehensive solution of the problem.

On the Bosnian question, the OIC has been able to get its act together at a time when the situation has brightened now with policy changes emerging from the West itself. The US is committed to lifting the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims after October 15 if, by that time. the Bosnian Serbs should fail to accept the peace plan. However, the OIC's consensus statement has done well by warning against any relaxation of economic sanctions on Serbia and Montenegro and demanding free access of Red Cross to the detention camps there. Obviously OIC is belatedly showing a sign to exert its pressure as a lobby.

The extraordinary session was aimed at unifying the positions of the member-states on the burning issues confronting them and take such common stances on to the floor of the United Nations. But somehow considerations of bilateral relations and economic ties with countries out side the fold have often influenced individual OIC countries' approaches to problems which cried out for a collective posturing. One has to wait and see what fate awaits the consensus reached at the Islamabad conference.

Staying in Poultry Farming

About 250 poultry farms in Satkhira district are on the verge of closing down. Continued losses incurred by the farms have forced them to take the unfortunate move. Unabated price escalation of poultry feed coupled with infiltration of smuggled Indian eggs into the market has been cited as the cause of the loss in poultry business. It is distressing news that so many poultry farms in that district have to face a premature closure in an agro-enterprise once thought to be holding great future for the country.

Satkhira is not the only district running short of poultry feed. Other areas in the country are more or less beset with the problem. That district may just be a test case. Other areas may soon follow suit. In that event the otherwise prospective poultry farming in the country may end up being a futile exercise. The signs are quite disturbing. At the time the import of Indian eggs was allowed officially. the poultry farms' association here went on a virulent campaign against it. In the name of our fledging industry's growth Indian eggs were banned and the owners of the country's poultry farms assured the consumers that they would supply eggs at a price not exceeding Tk 10 for each hali (four).

That assurance has come to nought. The price has shot up to Tk 14 a hali. It is exactly here that the predicament of the egg producers and traders can be clearly understood. There is no reason why they should eat up their words unless they find themselves in a desperate situation. The fact is that a countrywide poultry farming must develop an allied, and even accessory, mechanism for making the products - eggs and meat - competitive. For competitiveness is the

name of the game.

Unfortunately, the country has opted for modern poultry farming without developing a strong feed-producing industrial base. We are just paying for not thinking of a comprehensive plan required for the development of an industry full of prospects. Not that our people are any less enterprising than their counterparts beyond the border. What however ails them is that in the absence of a comprehensive plan — that ought to come from the policy-makers — they can not come out of their shells. The opportunities are limited. It is important that with new ideas and methods, the supporting avenues must also be opened for the people to take advantage of. In the case of poultry farming in which people have shown tremendous interest, the development of allied agro-industries would have proved doubly beneficial. First, it would create more jobs for people in rural areas and then make poultry products cheaper. That is vital for staying in today's competitive market.

The International Conference on Population and Development: The Bangladesh Perspective

United Nations on social issues, this one has attracted Population policies and considerable public and media programmes are basically de attention. Indeed it has given termined at the national level. rise to a very heated interna-So one may ask: what is the tional debate, an acrimonious purpose of these elaborately controversy, in which strong organized and costly conferemotions have been aroused. ences? I have a feeling that The Pope, as the head of many people in the Third the Catholic Church is in the World will not fully comprehend the reason for the furore centre of the controversy. A number of Islamic countries over the conference. These UN conferences normally aim at have also joined the Pope in a campaign against some of the building a global consensus. The existence of such consenrecommendations contained in the draft Programme of Action sus, it is assumed, assists the of the Conference. Abortion international community to rights of the women is the key pursue common goals in the issue. Terms such as "reprofield. For instance, a global ductive rights", "fertility consensus on population will regulation" and "pregnancy ensure that national and intertermination" have been used in national programmes of the member states and the interthe document but the central issue on which the two sides national organizations working are battling is the right of in this field will be consistent women to terminate preg and mutually supportive.

HE International Confe

rence on Population

and Development has

opened in Cairo on 5 Septem-

ber, 1994. Unlike other global

conferences organized by the

nancy at will.

Since United States and

some of the western countries.

notably the Scandinavian na

drafting these recommenda-

tions, they have been pitched

against the Vatican and the

pro-life activists in many west-

ern countries. Some of the

fundamentalist Islamic coun-

tries such as Iran have made a

common cause with the Pope

on these issues. The very high

interest of the international

community in the conference

is reflected in their level of

representation. US Vice

President Al Gore and several

prime ministers including

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto

of Pakistan attended. Prime

Minister Khaleda Zia got cold

feet when she heard about the

controversy and decided that

HE people of Quebec

main a province of Canada or

become independent. So the

most likely outcome of their

September 12 election is

victory for the party backing

independence for the province

- and then a "No" vote in the

subsequent independence

referendum which the party

be a price to pay if they go

their own way, and that is rea-

They know that there will

Most supporters of separa-

tion believe that English

Canada will have to negotiate

with an independent Quebec

and that there would be a

common market and eventu-

But many anglophone Cana-

dians warn that the rest of the

country may be so upset that it

will react irrationally - a

veiled threat of violence. A

worst-case scenario sometimes

conjured up involves a seces-

sionist Quebec stripped of its

northern territories and cer-

tain other areas, leaving the

francophones in these places

in a position akin to the

Furthermore, argue anglo-

phone Canadians, the United

States might force an inde-

pendent Quebec to change its

economic policies, which are

too government-directed for

and able. An independent

Quebec would rank about 15th

in the list of the world's most

powerful economies and would

probably be an open, tolerant

of creating better understand-

ing between "the two founding

nations of Canada" such a re-

sult would simply ensure a

continuation of the love-hate

relationship, like that between

the French-speaking Walloons

and the Dutch-speaking

How has this state of affairs

Quebec was very different

35 years ago, when the

Catholic Church was extremely

Flemings in Belgium.

come about?

The danger is that instead

But Quebeckers are proud

US tastes.

society.

Catholics of Northern Ireland.

ally a common currency.

promises.

son for hesitation.

cannot make up their

minds whether to re-

it was safer to stay at home.

tions, were in the forefront in

But the search for an international consensus on popula tion policies is a somewhat recent phenomenon. In the first world population conference held in Bucharest in 1974 the poor and rich countries clashed over whether there was a population problem at all. The rich countries held out the spectre of a "population bomb." Unless the population growth rate was slowed and stabilized, they maintained, the predictions of Malthus would become a real ity. The poor countries said that it was not population but poverty and economic backwardness which was the problem and what they really needed was help in developing their economies.

As the Washington Post put it, the poor countries "suspiciously wondered whether it

wasn't all a plot to keep them small and weak." By the time the second international Population Conference was held in Mexico City in 1984 the climate shifted dramatically. By then, the developing countries had recognized. albeit grudgingly, that their population was growing too fast and that the growth rate was frustrating efforts to develop their economies.

However, the United States. long a major supporter of fam-

resource ratio as well as the current population growth rate, we have really no choice but to opt for a programme to reduce the growth rate. Indeed, it is essential for our survival. According to demographers, our population will double in the next thirty years That means by the year 2025 we will have 240 million people jostling for a living space in an area of 54 thousand square

A sobering and almost

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

ily planning programme in the poor countries, reversed its policies under Reagan and abruptly withdrew its support to such programmes. Obviously Reagan was courting the antiabortion votes in his re-election campaign. President Clinton has, once again, extended the support of his administration to the programme of global population stabilization. Vice President Al Gore. while defining the US position said. "We're adopting a more holistic approach here in Cairo. Availability of contraception, increase of child survival to encourage smaller families: education and empowerment of women; and the economic development to make it easierto establish the others."

In Bangladesh there is really no controversy over the goals of our population policy. Given our man-land and man-

frightening prospect! Under the circumstances, can Bangladesh afford the luxury of getting involved in the controversy? Our population programme must not only be maintained but expanded and broadened to make it more effective. The policies that the proposed programme of action contains and outlined by Vice President Al Gore is certainly one that we in Bangladesh can easily live with. The draft programme, in my view, has focused on the right priorities. It recognizes, for instance, the centrality of women - their health, education, employment and social status - as crucial for the success of the programme. As Mr. James Grant, the distinguished Executive Director of UNICEF said, "The draft programme captures the simple truth that there will be

no sustainable development.

no stabilization of population no solution to environmental problems or true democracy as long as half the world popula tion is the subject of gross discrimination and abuse." He further pointed out that the Cairo consensus, if it emerges out of the debate without significant change, avoids blaming the poor, especially poor women, for having too many children.

instead of coercion, any new approach to population policy must broaden the rights, opportunities and choices of women. The broad direction that the programme indicates is certainly a most progressive and enlightened one; Bangladesh has no reason to be afraid to support such a

policy framework. While the family planning programme of Bangladesh must continue to receive the strong support from every quarter within the framework of a national population policy. it would be counter-productive to get involved in the controversy over abortion rights. Quite apart from religious considerations abortion offends the moral values of many people. It certainly offends mine. The law should, however, permit the termination of pregnancy, under certain welldefined situations. Resort to abortion as a regular method of population control will only provide an weapon in the hands of the religious fundamentalists and obscurantists to create a controversy where one does not exist in Bangladesh today. The debate in Cairo is really an extension of the long-standing fight be-

ponents of abortion in the United States and other western countries. It is linked with the very rigid position of the Catholic Church which not only opposes abortion but condemns contraception as Given our demographic situation we cannot possibly, in good conscience, take a posi-

tween the supporters and op-

tion against contraception. The Islamic countries which have joined hands with the Vaticani do not face population problems as serious as ours. So prudence dictates that we must not be drawn to this global population politics. We should, instead, focus on our own priority to stabilize our population at a sustainable level at the earliest possible

It is difficult to understand

why Prime Minister Khaleda Zia chose to cancel her visit to Cairo to address the Conference. This was an excellent opportunity for Bangladesh to thank the international community for the assistance we have received over the years for our population programme and also to highlight our achievements as well as our needs. On account of the high density of our population and our firm national commitment to a population stabilization policy, the participants would have listened to our statement with special attention. Neither the Pope nor any Ayatullah will solve our population problems. So while they may fight their own battles we must do what is best in the national interests. It is a pity that the Prime Minister missed a' chance to present the Bangladesh case to an important international fo-

There is no doubt that this Conference will leave a lasting imprint on the policies in this

Love-Hate Struggle for Hearts and Minds

F Papineau-Riel writes from Ottawa

Ordinary Canadians, both anglophone and francophone, are tired of the seemingly endless debates on the status and future of the French-speaking province of Quebec. But the issue refuses to go away. As yet another election approaches (September 12) in which secession is a key issue, a Gemini News Service correspondent explains the Quebeckers' case.



influential and the Quebeckers saw themselves as Canadians or at least Canadiens français (French Canadians). After 1960, Quebec invested massively in education and health and used the provincial government and state-owned companies to "re-take" control of its own economy. A "Quebecois capitalism" devel-

With an economy that they increasingly control and a strong provincial government, Quebeckers already act to some degree as if they were an independent nation.

They generally consider themselves a majority (in Quebec) rather than a minority (in Canada). Most of the Quebecois media, apart from Radio-Canada, do not have correspondents in the rest of Canada, apart from a few in Ottawa, who in any case cover issues of interest to Quebec.

Quebeckers have always feared assimilation. Most immigrants sent their children to English schools and hoped for jobs in Montreal, then almost entirely dominated by the English language. The trend changed in 1977 when the PQ

government made French the only official language in Quebec for public signs and ruled that new immigrants settling in Quebec must send their children to French schools.

An important section of the English community in Quebec regarded the changes as a negation of their basic rights: French-speakers saw the changes as the best way of guaranteeing the survival of a small society of six million francophones in a sea of 300 million North American anglo-

phones. About 100,000 English-

speakers left the province in the following years rather than

accept the changes. Yet anglophone Quebeckers continued to have their own education schoolboards, uni versities, hospitals and numerous mass media, unlike most francophones in Englishspeaking provinces who always had to fight hard to obtain even minimal rights.

Even today, Montreal effectively remains more bilingual than the federal capital Ottawa.

At the time of the 1980 referendum in which only 40 per cent of Quebeckers voted in support of negotiations for "sovereignty-association," the federalists of Quebec were attached to "their" Canada and to "their" Rockies thousands of kilometres to the west. Now they seem more interested in staying with Canada for economic reasons, to avoid paying the possible price of separation. The love for Canada has gradually vanished.

An important element in Quebeckers' sense of alienation was the rejection by two provinces in 1990 of the Meech Lake Accord recognising Quebec as a "distinct so-

ciety." Such experiences show the near-impossibility of finding a trade-off acceptable both to Quebec and the rest of Canada, The negotiation process itself makes it difficult: for the

Charlottetown agreement which emerged in 1992 from a new round of constitutional negotiations but was rejected by both Quebeckers and English Canada — Quebec had to negotiate with nine other provinces, the federal government, two territories and

scheduled AGM, deprivation of

three indigenous associations. If Slovakia had to negotiate as one against 15, it would probably have separated from the Czechs much earlier.

There are telling parallels with Czechoslovakia, where positions between Czechs and Slovaks became so polarised that parties in favour of compromise almost disappeared when it came to an election, and in the end a referendum was not even needed to agree the split

In Canada, the Conservative Party that attempted to work out two constitutional agreements was wiped out at the last national election, leaving the separatist Bloc Quebeccis in Quebec with 54 provincial seats out of 75, and the Liberals and Reform Party in the rest of Canada strongly opposed to negotiations with Quebec nationalists.

More recently, the province of Alberta threatened to reconsider its financial interests in Quebec in the event of a PQ election. And a recent poll showed a huge majority in Ontario opposed to granting Quebec the status of a

"distinct society." It is unfortunate that English Canada now tends to threaten Quebeckers instead of trying to win their hearts again. There seems to be a widespread feeling in English Canada that Quebec is abusing the political system and has an overwhelming influence on the federal government.

It is true that since 1968 the Prime Minister of Canada has almost always been a Quebecker, but if they were so advantaged by federalism, why did Quebeckers vote last year for the Bloc Quebecois instead of supporting Jean Chretien's Liberal troops?

English Canadians tend to regard separatists as traitors and refuse to see that their own behaviour has helped convince so many Quebecois to give up on federalism.

F PAPINEAU RIEL is a Canadian who works mainly in journalism and communications related to international issues.

Lothe 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.

DU International Hostel

Sir. I'm an inmate of what is officially called the International Hostel situated in the Dhaka University campus.

The prevailing conditional in the hostel (IH) at present has caused our lives to become measurable. At present we cannot receive any foreign calls whether it may be from our parents or any other party. Then the privilege of making domestic calls from the hostel phone even after depositing the appropriate amount in cash is no more there. To watch TV it has to be after 5.30 pm no matter how important an earlier TV programme may be.

There had been numerous incidences of asking the students to vacate their respective rooms just after the unofficial results indicating they have passed. One such student

whose unofficial results turned out be false after the official results were published had to face extreme difficulty as the hostel authority had already thrown him out of the room, and ultimately he had to be a guest of another resident who was sympathetic enough to keep him until his final departure. In the meantime repeated appeals by him to the hostel authority to hand over his room back went unheeded.

Added to all this, there is yet another rule saying that no female is allowed to enter IH irrespective of being a foreign national, a local mother, sister or any other relation or friend. The hostel authority by their action, even went to the extent of depriving a large group of residents, from a neighbouring country, of food, as they expelled their mess cook apparently without any obvious rea-

Under these circumstances,

it has been very difficult to stay in the IH. In other words, it has literally become a jail in disguise with so much restrictions. Even the highest authority in Dhaka University, the honourable Vice Chancellor when approached, in this matter, he appeared to be of not much help.

Therefore, I earnestly request and sincerely hope that the hon'ble Minister of Education or Hon'ble Minister of Foreign Affairs will kindly take appropriate measures to bail us off from so called jaillike restrictions of the International Hostel and allow us some relief.

A concerned resident

Economic policy

Sir. We fail to understand the double faced economic policy for our country being pursued by our government and by the World Bank.

While on the one hand our government and the World Bank stress the need for market economy and privatisation of our various trade, commerce, industries, establishments and enterprises, on the other, for instance, they are maintaining silence on the transfer of the management of Hotel Sheraton and Hotel Sonargaon from public sector to private sector.

Well, would the transfer of the management of these two hotels from public sector to private sector harm the interest of the overseas financiers? Would not the transfer of the management of Hotel Sheraton and Hotel Sonargaon from public sector to private sector help encourage open competi tion, boost hotel industry, attract foreign investment and develop tourism industry in our country?

The problem with us is that most of the time we follow a half hearted policy and try to live in a limbo. We strongly urge our demo-

cratic government that instead of following a half hearted (or double faced) market policy they must follow either of the two and thus enable our econ omy sail smoothly.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203

Company secretary

Sir. Seemingly, absence of fair play by issuers to build investors' confidence, frequent incidents of virtual cheating, fake balance sheet, absence of

shareholders of dividends. non-disclosure of sufficient information on the accounts to shareholders — all contributing to erosion of investors' faith came up of late for appraisal by experts in the capital market. Non-compliance of the provisions of the Companies Act, 1913, Securities and Exchange Commission, Dhaka Stock Exchange is primarily the cause of such loopholes. It is so because as yet it is not mandatory in our country to appoint a company secretary. In neighbouring countries, including India, it is a must. A law graduate or chartered accountant usually qualifies to be a com

pany secretary. Duties of a company secre-

tary, broadly grouped, have been the statutory duties duties in relation to directors. shareholders, the public, administration of office. In absence of a company secretary, the above activities are done in a haphazard way. So many major lapses usually remain, and, as a result, poor performance both at private and public levels takes place.

Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) appears to be active to create a healthy environment wherein the capi-

tal market can grow spontaneously. SEC is massively empowered to do so. In this context, we, the investors, urge upon the SEC to make it mandatory to appoint Company Secretary where the paid-up capital of a Public Ltd Company is Taka 2.5 crore or more and whose shares are quoted on Dhaka Stock Exchange.

Fazlur Rahman C-581, Malibagh Chowdhurypara, Dhaka.

Coaching centres Sir, Bangladesh is a poor

country. Here majority of the population are illiterate. Here it is hard for the middle class and lower middle class to maintain private tutors for their children. In this context, I believe coaching centres can play a great part. There a student may take coaching in as many as, say, six different subjects at minimum the tuition fee. So I believe the low earning guardians may favour the option to send their wards to coaching centres of their choice rather than opposing it.

Sheikh Farid V/14, Nurjahan Road, Maham-

madpur, Dhaka