

**A** MID the "culture clash" over how to deal with the world's growing population, with the Vatican and Muslim countries billed as flies in the ointment, one key element of the debate has largely been ignored. Missing from the discussions has been the link between poverty and large families.

Blaming the Pope or the mullahs for population growth seems misplaced when the world's two most populous countries India and China, both neither Catholic nor Islamic, continue to have the largest number of the poorest people.

That there are more and more people on this planet every day is not an exaggeration but the fact that most of the growth is taking place in the developing world worries the West, whose population is stagnating.

Predictably, most of the Western media had pre-empted the just-concluded United Nations sponsored International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, repeating the standard Western line that the population bomb is ready to explode.

Many Southern leaders, notably Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, wanted the issues to be discussed in relation to cultural differences between the secular West and the supposedly "believing" developing world. But in essence the issue is one of economics.

It is not the educated middle class but the poor, living in appalling conditions, crammed in the slums of Bombay, Cairo or Rio de Janeiro, who have the most children. It is not because, as is often assumed, that they are uneducated and ignorant but because they are pragmatic.

In the absence of any social security most poor people in developing countries depend on their children. Children are seen as economic assets, who can work to supplement the family income. Where infant mortality is rife, parents want to have many babies to ensure that enough survive to look after them in their old age.

The question is: are people poor because of over-population and not enough resources to go around or is population growth a result of the poverty of so many people?

In fact, in the last two decades the rate of growth of the world population has fallen from 2.2 to 1.7 per cent and is expected to go down further.

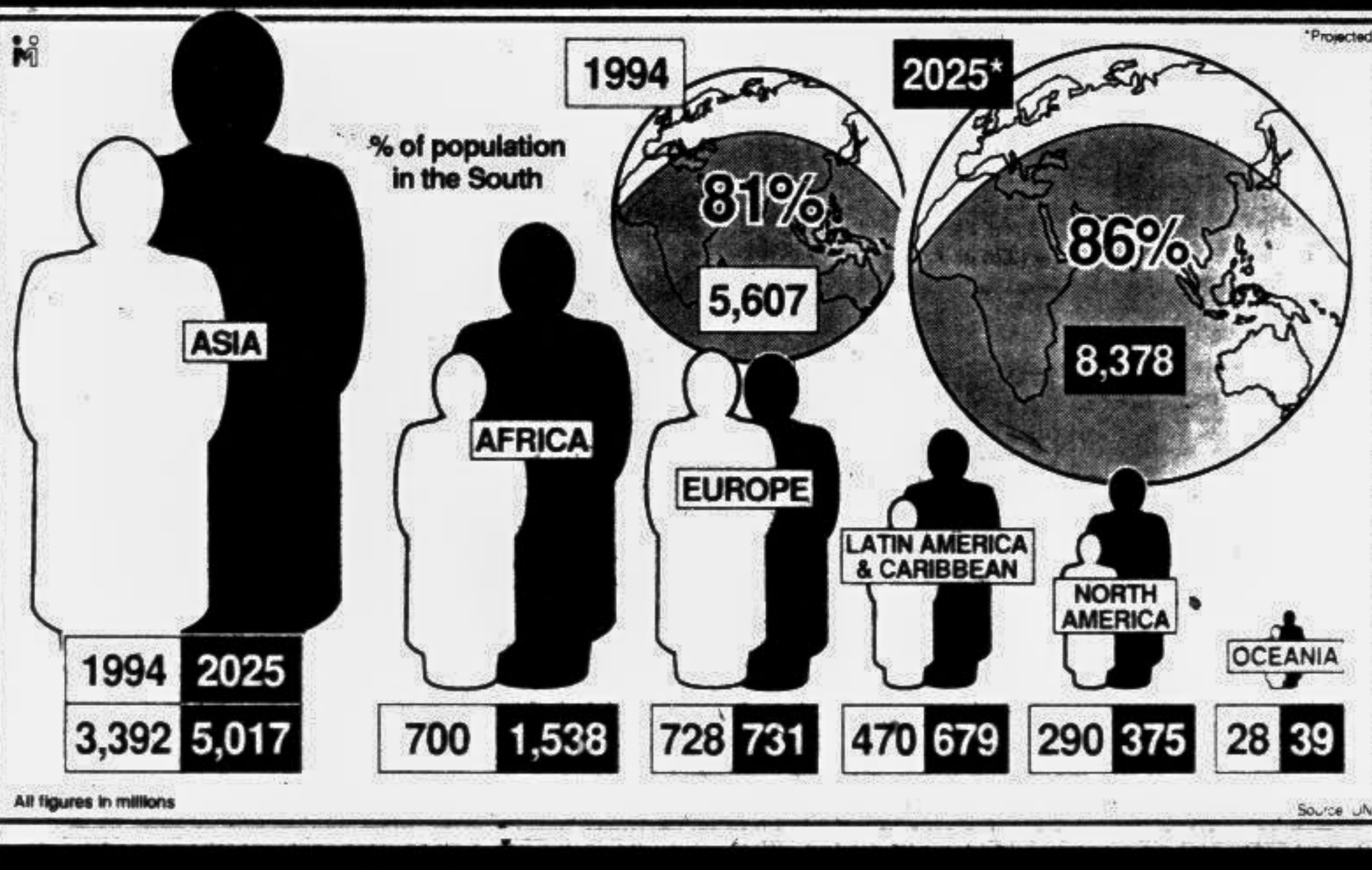
And, despite predictions of doom from many Western

## Looking beyond the Cairo Caravan

by Daya Kishan Thussu

The global population explosion was being hyped as the latest doomsday scenario by Western experts and media at the just-concluded Cairo conference. But are there too many people because they are poor and ignorant or is their poverty the reason for having more children? Gemini News Service investigates.

### The demographic divide



think-tanks, the world's food availability has more than kept up with the growth in population. If the food supply can be increased at the current pace or even at a slower rate, there will be enough food for a stable global population of 10 billion in 100 years.

The issue is not so much of scarcity of resources as their uneven distribution.

According to the latest UN Human Development Report the gap between the haves and have nots among and within nations has widened. The income disparity between the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent of the world's population has doubled over the past three decades.

Today the richest fifth of the population control 83 per cent of the world's wealth while the poorest fifth account for barely 1.4 per cent of the global income cake. An average person in the North consumes

12 times more energy than one in the South.

Yet the poor are blamed for depletion of the world's resources. Warnings of catastrophes are legion. And more often than not the experts are wrong. For example, the prophets of doom were saying in the 1950s that India would face famine if its population were not controlled. Despite a three-fold increase in population since independence, there has been no famine, unlike during colonial times.

Similarly, all the wars, famines and droughts in Africa have not stopped the population doubling over the past three decades. It is projected to nearly triple in the next 30 years. By 2025, according to the UN estimates, the ratio between the North and the South will be one to five. And unlike in the North, in the poorer parts of the world the population is mostly young.

To reduce the population pressure the UN wants to invest in educating women. That famous phrase of the 1990s "empowerment" of women was being banded about during the Cairo conference.

Yet at the same time women in developing countries have been hardest hit by cutbacks on welfare spending imposed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Under their so-called Structural Adjustment Programmes, now being followed by more than 70 countries, millions of women have been denied access to a decent education and adequate healthcare.

Unless the poor are given a secure future they will continue to have more children. No amount of cajoling and spending on family planning programmes (often peddled by the big pharmaceutical indus-

tries selling "birth control") is going to make much difference. Increasing living standards, lowering child mortality and improving the position of women will motivate people to have fewer children.

Twenty years ago, during another UN-sponsored population jamboree at Bucharest, the slogan "Development is the best contraceptive" was adopted. It seems few took notice of it in the developing world but in the West it spurred on the huge "development industry" to "educate" the "wretched of the earth."

The assumption is that the poor who "breed like rabbits" need to be told, by middle class Western "experts," how to control their birth rate. This patronising attitude often borders on racism.

It is not that the absolute number of new arrivals worries the West but their distribution — most of the additions to the global population is going to be brown or black. Instead of Africa or Asia, if the population of Europe or North America was to double in the next 30 years perhaps the debate would have taken on a different hue.

One does not hear of many Japanese programmes to tell villagers in Bangladesh or Burundi about how to treat their women. Is it part of a deep-seated Western fear of being swamped by the Third World at a time when the European men are losing their fertility?

According to some accounts the sperm count of males in Europe has halved since World War Two. Researchers believe the reason lie in the Western lifestyle — too much of processed food — and pollution.

If the growing number of family breakdowns and teenage pregnancies are any indication, it is a pity that Western society seems to have forgotten how to raise a family — now the state has to tell people how to be a caring parent or a good spouse.

The West should look to itself before lecturing the Third World on how to plan a family.

DAYA KISHAN THUSSU is Associate Editor of Gemini News Service.

**ERRATA**  
Some errors inadvertently crept into the article "Odyssey..." in last week's magazine. The errors are so obvious that we choose not to name them. We regret the lapses.

## Constitution is Hot New US Export Item

Jim Fisher-Thompson writes from Washington

**A**S more nations take the road to democracy and integration into the world economy, the successful pattern for government-citizen relations that the US Constitution provides has become a much sought-after commodity, says law professor and author Bernard Siegan.

Siegan, who teaches business and constitutional law at the University of San Diego, recently authored the book "Drafting a Constitution for a Nation or Republic Emerging into Freedom," published by the George Mason University Press of Fairfax, Virginia.

Siegan said he was spurred to write the guide after providing constitutional advice to the governments of Argentina, Armenia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, the former Czechoslovakia, Peru, Poland, and Ukraine. In 1990, he helped Bulgaria prepare a draft constitution.

The scholar recently told an audience at the Heritage Foundation — a conservative think tank in Washington — that the US Constitution has an answer for the world's problems today: less government.

"I've been selling the US Constitution around the world because it is unique in the protection it gives liberty," he said. This is what made America prosperous and secure and what nations emerging from authoritarianism seem to want the most, he added.

In his constitutional guidebook the scholar writes that "government" should be powerful enough to protect the people against their foreign and local enemies and domestic perils and excesses. It must never be powerful enough to oppress the people or inhibit their wisdom and productivity". Therefore, "as the foremost legal document, the constitutions of the emerging states must reflect and advance their existing commitment to a free society."

His main goal as an authority on constitutions, he said, is to help countries that were formerly subjected to communist political and economic regimes pull themselves together after the collapse of their chief role model, the Soviet Union.

In a world economy that they were not really a part of, such countries were like ships adrift at sea, said Siegan. "And the best way I have suggested for them to find their way out

of that problem" and back onto the path to freedom and prosperity is the US Constitution — the document best suited for them to emerge into "the modern world".

Siegan's recipe for success in a modern society is: — privatization and a guarantee of property rights; — establishment of an economic environment that provides a level playing field for competition and encourages foreign and domestic investment;

— control by government of its spending and taxing, and the guarantee that the judicial system — the courts — are "available to enforce contracts."

For nations that labored under planned economies, especially those in Eastern Europe, where most business was owned and operated by government, Siegan said, was to "move the economy from the public to the private sector."

He admitted that at the time the old systems fell — in the early 1990s — he did not fully realise "how great the task was going to be."

For example, in Ukraine, where he worked as a consultant, the constitutional expert said: "I spoke to many managers of firms who never had any idea of the competitive world. They were told what to do and how to do it with very little initiative being shown on their part."

And critical to the privatization process is a judicial system, guaranteed by a constitution, that acts as an underpinning of individual and group rights. But during his discussions in Bulgaria, he said, "I learned that people are not as respectful of judges as we are in this country".

The Bulgarians' fear, he explained, was that judges, whom many people regard as nothing more than "government clerks", would nullify laws passed by the National Assembly. So "the idea of a specially selected group of lawyers that would constitute a constitutional court (like the US Supreme Court) — confined to interpreting the constitution — overcame much of this concern."

The US Constitution has brought "liberty and abundance" to the American people, Siegan explained, chiefly in three ways: executive, legislative, and judicial, into coequal powers.

— by limiting the powers of each branch of government through checks and balances, such as executive veto and judicial review of legislation; and — by protecting the individual rights of citizens from what many believed in the 18th century was the repressive potential of the majority.

Basically, the belief of America's Founding Fathers was that government should be "limited and minimal" and would best operate and succeed by letting people exercise liberty. This is still the best way to advance a society's political and economic goals, Siegan asserted.

The proof, he added, is that "when we look around we see that the most prosperous countries are those where government is limited." As an illustration, he described Slovakia, where people still believe in "scientific socialism", and where there is 14 per cent unemployment, compared to the Czech Republic's rate of 4 per cent. The difference, he pointed out, is that the Czech "are allowing maximum freedom in the marketplace."

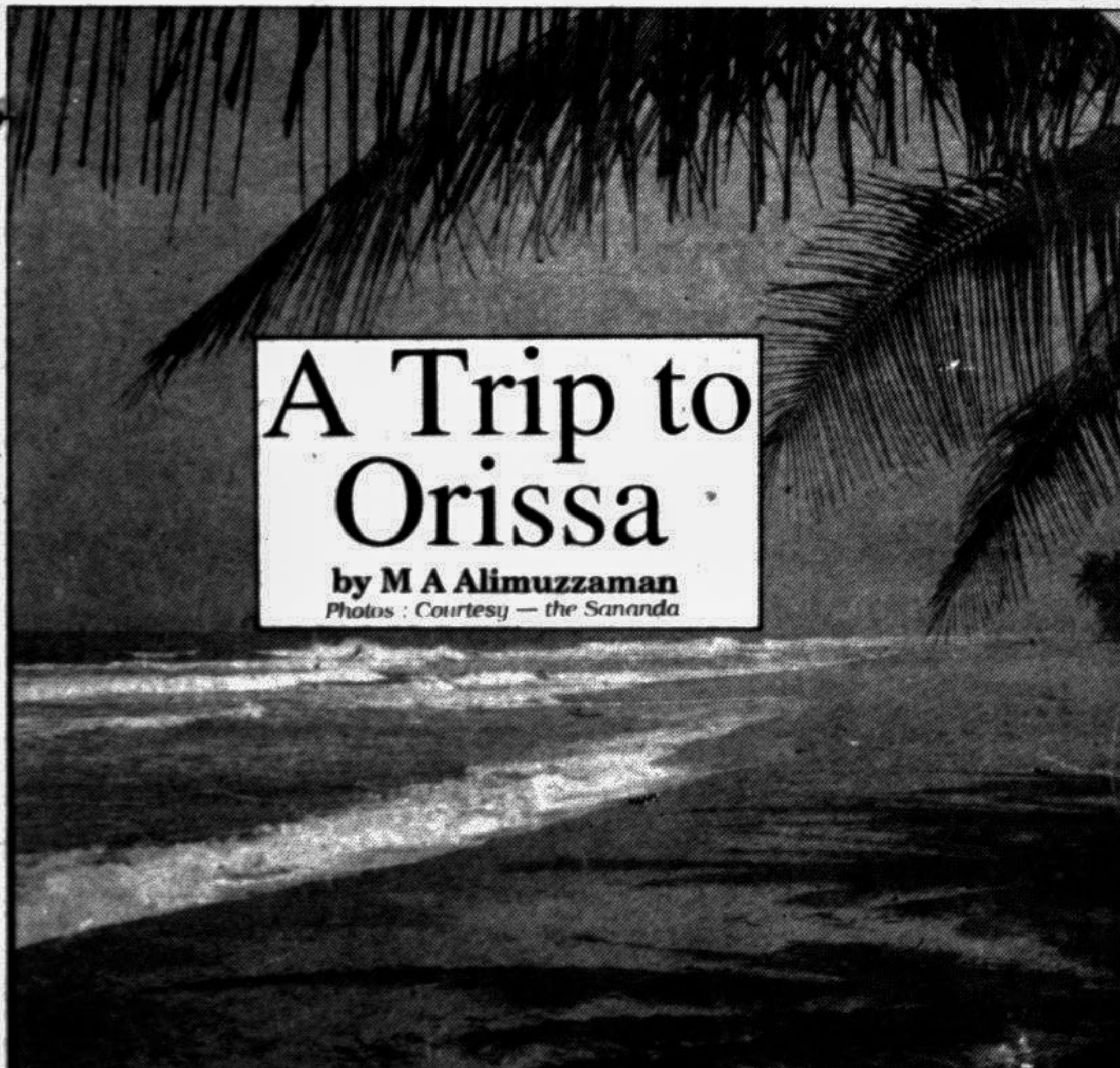
Eastern Europe is not the only region that has benefited from political and economic liberalization, according to the scholar.

In Argentina, before the election of President Carlos Menem in July 1989 and his economic shock therapy, inflation ran at about 3,000 per cent a year, Siegan told his audience. After a serious privatization campaign and further government retrenchment from economic control, the inflation rate is now around 8 per cent and the nation's annual growth rate is 8 per cent.

Siegan said that at one point, Menem "even sold the streets." After the state-owned airline and other large industries had been sold, he explained, of 211,000 kilometers of road owned by the state, of which 54,000 kilometers were paved or approved, 10,000 kilometers were privatized through concessions. Private companies have to maintain the roads and are allowed to collect tolls. Big potholes have disappeared without burdening the treasury.

The message here for others, said Siegan, is that "Menem's medicine" — free markets — works.

The author is a USIA Staff Writer.



## A Trip to Orissa

by M A Alimuzzaman  
Photos: Courtesy — the Sananda

**M**Y daughter Rumana is a student in Orissa, India. The journey to her college usually takes one day and one night if connecting flight and train are available from Dhaka and Calcutta respectively. And usually these are available. But this time we were surprised when the travel agent told us that no seat in any flights to Calcutta was available before four weeks. My daughter was getting desperate as her classes were already on. After some anxious waiting ranging over a few days we were given the good news that the Biman authorities would place a DC 10 on 10th February but the return date could not be given. We had no choice. And when we went to get the tickets, the travel agent bought us the Executive Class tickets as the

Economy Class tickets were not available. However, we then hurried to the bank to buy some foreign exchange.

Finally, we reached Calcutta at around 8 pm. There were not much complications in customs clearance and baggage collection. We, however, observed slight change in the arrangement for customs checking. An officer was standing in front of a desk. He was checking the passport and customs declaration of each passenger and asking if there was anything to declare. The reassuring thing was that he was not taking much time and was not in a harassing mood.

After the official formalities we were looking for the taxi. We noticed the international pre-paid taxi service counter. We were told this counter was open round the clock and op-

erated by the Bengal Taxi Association. The pre-paid taxi service personnel asked us about our destination and then fixed a taxi for Rs 82. I only wished if we had such a round the clock service at ZIA. This could have saved us from asking for government transports or from requesting friends at odd hours to give us lifts or receive us at the airport.

We reached our destination without any difficulty. It was 10.20 at night. I had no change. I gave the driver a 100-rupee note. The driver and the helper were in "one voice" to say "Dada we keep the change." I said, "Why? In fact the fare would be only Rs 50/- while the Association has allowed you to take Rs 80/- for safe journey. Then why extra?" Rumana intervened and of-

fered the driver Rs 10 as tips. Our good family friend and all the members of his family were waiting for us. The good news was that he had already bought two tickets for us.

Next day in the evening we started for Howrah station. The taxi charged us Rs 5 each as it was a shared taxi, there were other passengers. The train started just at 9 as scheduled. The destination was Sambalpur, an ancient district in Orissa. We had two sleepers reserved for us in the Sambalpur Express. It was a three-tier compartment with sleeping arrangement for 48 passengers. The three-tier arrangement perhaps could make the train fare reasonable. All middle class passengers. The compartment was clean. The toilet was run-down but

for a list of 48 passengers two toilets were not that dirty. Water and light was there. Although 48 passengers — male, female, children — were travelling in the compartment the environment inside was calm and gentle. All were talking gently in low voice. Some were taking their dinner. I regretted, we had early and consequently light dinner at 6 o'clock at Calcutta — we could have it at the train. There was no interference from anybody. I thought it was necessary as the journey was for the whole night.

The ticket collector came in due time. He was very much concerned seeing our luggage under the lower berth. He requested us to take the light ones to us at the upper tiers for safety. I took up my hand

bag and put it by my side. The TT again showed up and requested me to take my shoe on the third tier. I complied appreciating his gesture and concern for the safety of our luggage.

We reached Sambalpur at 9 am — after a long twelve hours journey by the fast train which had stopped at only three or four stations en-route.

Before leaving the station we found tickets were being sold in advance. Rumana did not like the idea that I should stay at Sambalpur alone as I

was not keeping good health. So I decided to buy the return ticket to go back by the evening train at 4 o'clock. The queue was long. We noticed one counter for the ladies and Rumana bought the ticket for me. We went to a hotel for a wash. The hotel offered us 20% discount for short stay. It was Rs 40/- for eight hours. I had no time to bargain. Moreover rickshaw fare would offset the rent savings, if any.

Rumana, being a foreign student, had to report to the Police Super. We went to the

SP's office but could not complete the work. It appeared that three photographs were needed but Rumana had only one. It was decided that she would send the photographs through her friend and the office would send her the passport through a messenger — quite flexible and accommodative.

Rumana's college is about 20 km off Sambalpur. We boarded a bus which charged Rs 3/- each. It was about an hour's journey and the bus was

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## Shillong — where the Clouds Come to Rest

by Parveen Anam

**T**UCKED away in the Khasi hills, pecking through the clouds yet braving the onslaught of time, stands the elegant town of Shillong, in the state of Meghalaya in the North Eastern part of India.

A sojourn in Shillong is well worth the effort and time spent in getting there. Most accessible from Bangladesh from Sylhet via the Tamabil border, its a three hour drive uphill through the little town of Dawki on the border. The road from Sylhet to Tamabil is of course another story of failure of the Roads and Highways Dept. It's a road, which although under construction for a long, long time, has got progressively worse.

However, once the formalities of the immigration and customs are over at the border outpost, you can walk across past the red and white bar and into Dawki, to be cleared very quickly by an efficient, affable customs man on the India side. The immigration formalities have to be completed at the local police station — a little bit into the town, where you drive down in the transport set to receive you from the hotel you have booked into at Shillong. It is easier to cross the border on foot and board the vehicle on the other side than try and cross over in your own transport from Bangladesh. That would require a few further weeks of formalities with the authorities, definitely not worth the trouble. The hotels in Shillong

are perfectly capable of looking after you and your transport needs.

The drive upto Shillong itself through beautiful mountain roads, past roaring waterfalls is an experience not to be forgotten. It's certainly best to have the local drivers on those roads as the clouds may come down very suddenly, reducing visibility to zero and on unfamiliar hair-pin bends, that might be a bit uncomfortable as well as dangerous for a driver unused to the mountain roads.

It is cold up in the hills, as is to be expected but the fires and the heaters manage to warm the coldest amongst us and the sunshine every day keeps the days bright and pleasant. Motorable roads throughout Shillong make it particularly attractive. At a height of 5000 feet, Shillong romantically derives its name from Shyllong, the deity who is supposed to dwell on the Shillong Peak, overlooking the town. The view from this peak is panoramic and breathtaking.

Beautiful places to visit within Shillong itself, make it particularly attractive. Wards Lake, made by William Ward the Chief Commissioner of Assam, in 1893-94, practically opposite the Pine Wood Hotel is a serene place with boating facilities. The hotel is an enterprise of the Meghalaya Tourism Corporation and is comfortable and efficient, with an aura from the days of the

Rej. The days are mostly sunny with of course the occasional burst of thunderstorms and rains, which add to the beauty of the place because it cleans away the dust or whatever there is of the dust. For Shillong is a surprisingly clean town, with the locals claiming it to be the cleanest hill resort in the country. Looking at the neat roads and elegant parks and gardens, it is easy to believe them.

The Golf Course in Shillong boasting an 18 hole ground, not only adds to the beauty of the town but can also boast proudly as being one of the best in Asia. The Shillong Club, another reminder of the days gone by was made by the British in the year 1878 and has managed to retain its old age charm.

No description of Shillong would be complete without mentioning Cherrapunjee 56 kms away. It is known to receive the world's heaviest rainfall. If one is lucky and the clouds have held their peace on the day one visits this exotic spot, the view is breathtaking, with the plains of Bangladesh clearly visible in the distance. The world's fourth largest falls, the romantic Nohkalikai Falls are a spectacular sight in Cherrapunjee.

If is were not for the problems and the hassle in getting a visa to visit Shillong, it would perhaps be justified in saying that this lovely little town could easily have been one of the most well loved tourist spots in this part of the world.



The famous Gandhamardan near Sambalpur