

Feature

Environment

NEMAP : Participatory Rhetorics, Project Wish List and Consultants Cornucopia

by Dr Zahir Sadeque

THE National Environmental Management Action Plan (NEMAP) was initiated in 1989-1990 by the newly established Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) with funding from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The NEMAP exercise was preceded by International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) sponsored National Conservation Strategy (NCS), which was completed in 1987 and published in 1991. The first and second drafts of NEMAP reflected a interventionist approach largely drawn upon conservation needs outlined in the NCS. Interestingly, both NCS and early drafts of NEMAP were produced by a team headed by the same person, a retired civil service official. Although the contents of these two reports were presented in different structured form, the findings, conclusions and future strategies were very similar. Therefore, the twin efforts in environmental and natural resource management planning remained essentially within same mode of thinking.

The NEMAP formulation and finalisation process remained dormant since the publication of the second draft in November 1991, and was rekindled after in late 1992 with the hiring of an international and a national consultant. This new crew reworked on the initial draft and prepared a third draft in 1993, a summary of which was presented at a donor-local consultative group meeting. The process got a fresh boost early this year when International Development Agency (IDA), the loan giving arm of the World Bank, issued an ultimatum to Government of Bangladesh to the effect that if NEMAP is not finalised by this fiscal year all future loan commitments to Bangladesh will be facing uncertainty as part of IDA's worldwide conditionality on environmental conservation and sustainable development. Since then, beginning this year the NEMAP process was again underway, this time with national consultants only.

The other unique aspect of the NEMAP finalisation process is the adherence of the so-called participatory and consultative process in eliciting and incorporating affected people's and other stakeholders' opinion and views in the finalisation process. This unique and laudatory process started in February and culminated in the National Workshop held at Dhaka on June 29 this year. In all, twenty-three grassroots level workshops were conducted in various parts of the country, followed by five regional workshops, eight professional level workshops and finally the National Workshop, held at the International Conference Centre, Prime Minister's Secretariat, Dhaka. The National Workshop was inaugurated by the Prime Minister herself and was attended by ministers, parliamentarians, heads and representatives of donor and diplomatic missions and others signifying the importance of the workshop attested by all concerned parties.

The latest and final effort (in finalising the NEMAP document) has in addition to holding workshops, circulated

NEMAP process : a critical review

The main thrust of recent renditions of the NEMAP formulation process documentation is its participatory and consultative mode. As has already been mentioned, the grassroots level, regional and Dhaka based professional workshop were held to elicit views from cross-section stakeholders. Ostensibly the purpose of holding such consultation meetings were to encourage people's participation

in their everyday lives, more than 6 million French people suffer from a level of noise which is harmful to their health. Most of them are city dwellers. The public authorities, supported by the town councils, are fighting this scourge.

The city of Nantes, which is the capital of the Loire region (with half a million inhabitants), has taken an original approach to the problem, based on the idea that, in order to fight the enemy, it is better to know it well first.

For that purpose, a qualitative study of the sound environment in the city's historical centre was made with the help of modern acoustic equipment. It is a technical "first".

It was carried out by a psycho-acoustician from the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS), together with urbanists, local technicians and several specialists from the nuisance department at the Ministry of the Environment.

The noise-analyzer in question can be compared to a medical stethoscope. It enables the "heartbeats" of the city, its rhythm, its silence and its discords to be listened to, recorded and interpreted. From data gathered in a given street or a given square, it is then possible to draw a picture of the sound landscape which can be used by the municipal services.

Recording the noises of the town

In the course of several series of walks, each lasting two hours, with 30 specific points for making sound recordings, the equipment

registered sound sequences representing different times of the day. These walks, which were repeated in the morning, the afternoon and the evening, created a sound picture of the noises of the city from the quietest to the most deafening.

The "urban stethoscope" consisted for the most part of a digital recorder with microphones which were specially

designed to ensure the accurate location of the noises during the playback.

As all sound phenomena can be broken down into a series of elements that can be listed, the sound sequences recorded were arranged in six different sources. They are:

— background noise, which measures the moments of silence or "false silence"

— the sounds of nature (birds, wind, fountains etc)

— urban activity, linked to mechanical noise (cars, buses, motorbikes, road and building works)

— human presence (commercial and leisure activities and general bustle)

— language and communication (intelligible voices, mu-

stries/wildlife, industrial/urban specialist, social scientist, economist and finally a planner type. The omission of a biologist, sociologist and economist is the most critical lacuna in the NEMAP formulation process. Presumably, the biologist and chemist support may have been provided by BCAS through an oversight function, but the missing social and economic expertise became painfully exposed. Also, the role of an experienced planner could have made a lot of difference.

The NEMAP process as it has so far continued seems to be still obsessed with developing a grandiose project list. This is symptomatic of a very biased and myopic view of environmental management. The conventional wisdom of "Command and Control" thinking gave way to conservation minded projects. Never to perceive what resources is that going to take and how much of that precious resource is available at the disposal of planners and decision makers. The benefits of policy reform and institutional strengthening could perhaps achieve much more than combined outputs of all these projects. For instance, if stumpage and harvesting fee for forest resources is brought in line the true value of these products, forests of Bangladesh would have been spared the destruction that it has faced in the recent decade. If severely polluting industries like tanneries, textiles, paper and pulp manufacturers were provided with financial incentives to minimise wastes, waterways of Bangladesh would have been cleaner than it is today. If the environmental legislation were finalised by now instead of the procrastination that it is going through, and if the government was serious in refraining from being the biggest polluter, environmental management would have been a much easier task for everybody. If the intended beneficiaries and area residents were consulted as equal partners in the design of large physical projects (water resources, agriculture-irrigation, water supply-sanitation), physical environment would have remained cleaner and biological resources would not have met the fate of extinction as they are experiencing now.

A planner would do more harm to the cause of environment if they present a plan that may be technically correct but so ambitious and unprioritised that it throws off policy and decision makers due to the fact that resources are finite and priorities are overwhelming. Therefore, in short, I feel that the approach of listing numerous projects without prioritisation is an exercise that is neither going to help the cause of environment nor does it provide decision makers a balanced choice that is implementable.

Finally, the NEMAP documentation process, I believe, has so far been an activity that has had too little coordination and lacked intellectual leadership aimed at synthesising country's needs, priorities and planning goals. The process, it seems has gone in a way that can be best called consultant driven. The recent reincarnation of the process has had the benefit of several local consultants; a hydrogeologist, a civil engineer, a geographer, a journalist and a woman, presumably a WID expert (UNDP: Status Report on NEMAP, June 1994). The composition of the team, it seems is overly water expertise inclined. After all, environment in Bangladesh is much more than water alone. Clearly missing was a botanist/agriculturist, fish-

principles and finally the philosophy of political leaders and policy makers.

The consultation process must have had the intent that, representative local people would participate in the discussion, identify problems that affect their lives and seek solutions that incorporates their participation. People's participation in plan formulation should exactly mean that type of *modus operandi*. Instead of that the grassroots level workshops were presumably managed and moderated by NGO representatives and the NEMAP entourage. In any event the output of grassroots level workshops and reports about the workshops do present evidence of a consultation process which may be a joint meeting between NEMAP formulators and selected NGO representatives, but not necessarily people's participation, as claimed by NEMAP team and their sponsors.

As already mentioned earlier, several versions of NEMAP report (an ongoing effort for the last several years) is available. The major thrust of these reports was to identify number of projects to mitigate environmental stress of critical and threatened ecosystems and existing natural resource management practices. The Second Draft of NEMAP identifies, describes and recommends 34 projects for different sectors. Each of these project descriptions also provides schedule for TOR, PRODOC, TAPP, PVP etc for formulation. Implicit is the idea that many or most of these projects will be donor financed and form part of the national planning exercise (Five Year Plans, Annual Development Plans etc). Actually major portion of the NEMAP report occupies description about these projects. A relatively small section of the report (Chapter 2) discusses objectives of NEMAP and major environ-

mental issues of the country and sectoral concern and strategy, reiterating findings from the already completed NCS report.

The major weakness of such an approach in planning is its superficiality and wishful thinking. Firstly, these project portfolio in entirety or in part was never discussed with potential donors who are eventually expected to fund these projects. Neither were they discussed in donor consultative group (LCG) meetings. The NEMAP formulators should have also consulted and analysed donor financing trends, priorities and interests if they were pinning their hopes for donor financing of this rather long and ambitious wish list. If the consultants perceived funding would come from Bangladesh Government, then, NEMAP document should have analysed the planning framework of the government. It should have undertaken a exercise to analyse the perspective of national planning, resource availability, allocation

and priorities and finally the philosophy of political leaders and policy makers.

However, how much of it is going to be reflected in actual planning exercise and how much resources are going to be allocated for this goal is the real issue. That should have been the guiding principle for the NEMAP consultants in formulating a project list. A prioritisation should have been there. List of planned activities should have been prioritised according to their relative urgency and importance in maintaining a pace of development that is sustainable.

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overdue to produce a final version amidst all the fanfare and support from the highest political and governmental authority, is eagerly awaited by all concerned citizens of the country. However, the glaring omissions that were pointed out speaks of the typical bureaucratic non-chalance and superficiality, both on the part of the government and the donor. As owner of the document MOEF should have been more proactive in providing the guidelines and philosophy upon which the plan should have been built. As financier of the NEMAP UNDP should have been more cautious in quality control and forthcoming in providing intellectual leadership in producing the NEMAP document.

Conclusion

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expressed are his own and not

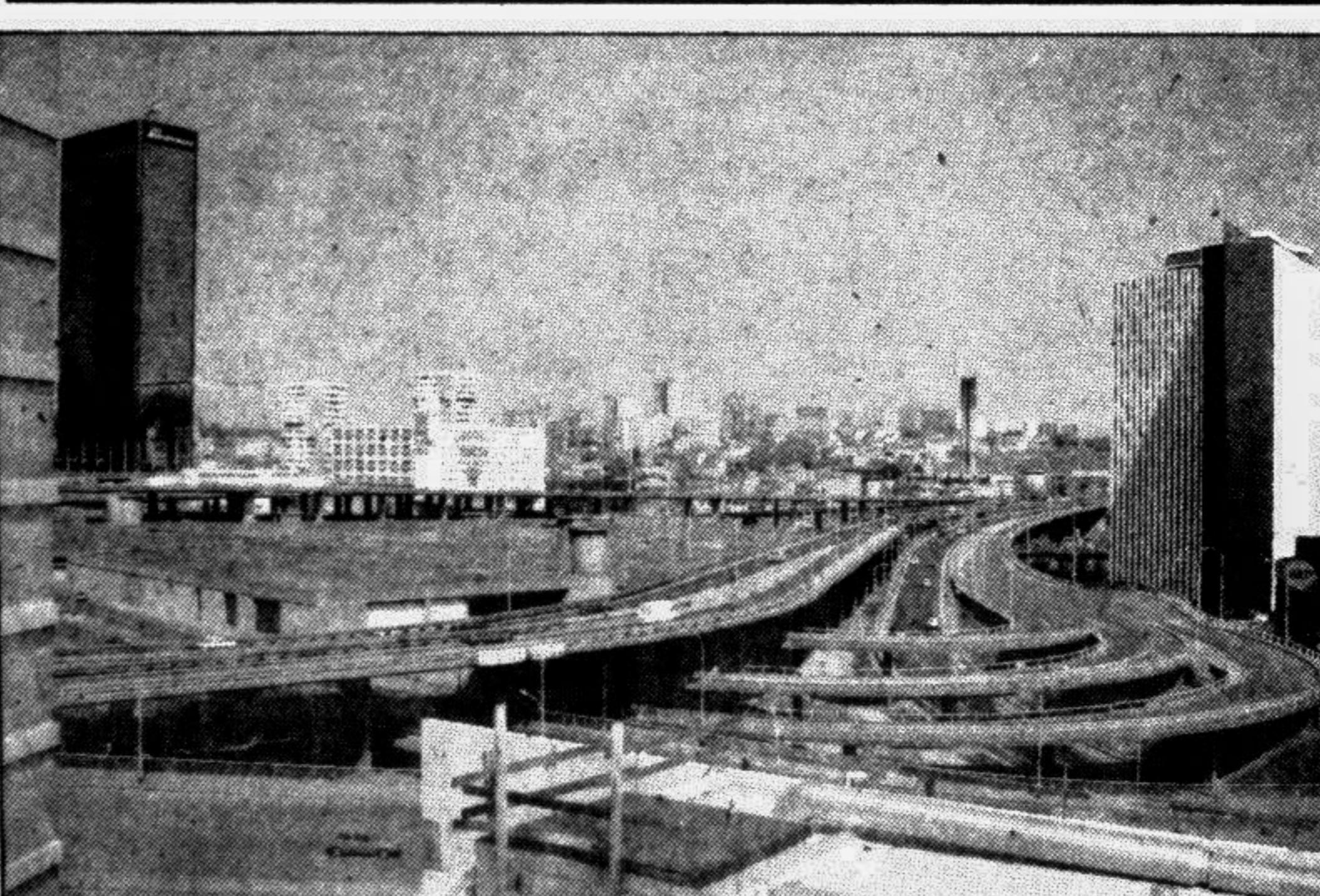
to be attributed to the organisa-

tion he works for.

Listening to a Town's Heartbeat

by Antoine Bauer

In order to fight noise more effectively, the city of Nantes has installed a sophisticated acoustic system. It makes it possible to establish a map of the town's sound environment.



A sophisticated installation erected for combating of environmental sound pollution in a town.

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The NEMAP process, long

Water Dampens Peace Hopes and Whets the Appetite for War

by Barry Chamish

AS the Middle East peace process moves forward, an old problem blocks its path: water.

Dividing the region's scarce water supply between Israelis, Jordanians, Palestinians and possibly Syrians is a critical problem. With technological solutions such as piping water from Turkey or desalination too expensive, what water there is must somehow be shared or no peace will ever be reached.

The water issue is stumping

the Israeli planners of the current peace process. It is intractable already but the

"mixing religion with their water. Their position is that rain comes from Allah and that since practically all of Israel's coastal rivers and wells originate from West Bank rain, we are stealing their rainwater."

The Palestinians have demanded that Israeli repay them for all the water stolen since 1948 (when Israel was created in what had been Palestine) — over 40 billion cubic metres. "I told them to get off their high horses and start being serious," Ben Oz says. "Their compromise was a demand for repayment of all water used by Israel since 1948."

A Palestinian delegate to the water talks with Israel, Rejwan Hadad, argues that "the Israelis want everything to stay the same. They'll keep pumping all they need and we'll get a fifth the amount they use per person."

While the Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians are deadlocked over the fact that there just is not enough water available to support three societies, the inclusion of Syria into the equation could make Israeli concessions impossible unless the Syrians show great sensitivity to Israel's needs.

Thirty per cent of all the water in the Sea of Galilee drains in from the streams of the Golan Heights. In 1966, Syria tried to turn northern Israel into a desert by damming the water. Israel responded by bombing the dam sites, an act which contributed to the outbreak of the Six Day War the following year.

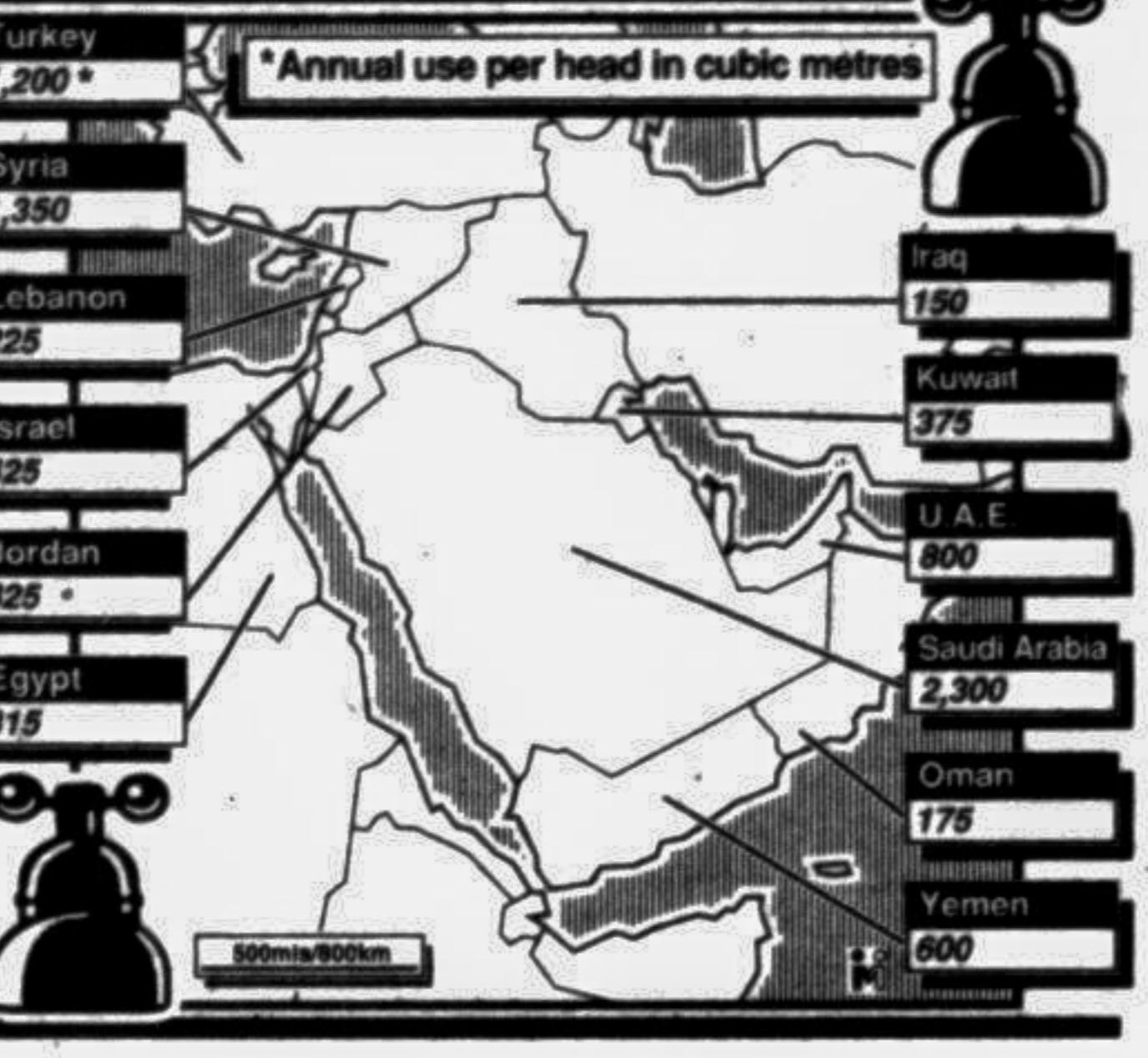
In the past decade Israeli farmers have greatly increased the efficiency of the Golan waters by constructing a series of reservoirs that conserve practically all the rainwater that falls on the Heights. By doing so, they block as much water as they formerly used, thus keeping the Sea of Galilee in balance.

Few doubt the great threat to peace posed by the water debate. Martin Sherman, a geologist and political activist, believes that if the Syrians took over the entire Golan Heights they would use the reservoirs to capture all the rainwater flowing to the Sea of Galilee.

"They'll claim they have the right to do what they want with rain that falls on the Golan," he says, "and there will be another war over water."

— GEMINI NEWS

Water pressure



growth of population in Arab countries will, according to a government report, cause such a shortfall by the year 2010 that armed conflict is a real possibility.

"The likelihood of war over water is there," says Gideon Tsur, Israel's national water commissioner. "But after the war ends, there still won't be enough water to go around."

A confidential report by Tel Aviv University's Institute of Strategic Affairs predicted in 1991 that any future peace negotiations would be complicated because the "other side will demand every last drop of water."

It has proved prophetic. General Uri Sagiv, head of Israel's Internal Security Services, told the Cabinet recently: "The problem of water cannot be solved by diplomatic means."

Of the 1.8 billion cubic me-

Garden City Turns Green

Spic and-span Singapore wants to be the world's greenest country by the year 2000. Kunda Dixit of Inter Press Service reports.</