FOCUS

HE draft final report of the first phase of the Flood Action Plan (FAP) was released in April and was expected to be endorsed by the Cabinet in time to present to a Donors' Conference in May to get financial support for the next phase of activities. The expected endorsement from the Cabinet did not happen and the Donors' Conference has now been postponed, perhaps for September.

Draft Final Report

The draft final report which was dated March 1995 and officially entitled "Bangladesh Water and Flood Management Strategy" (no longer mentioning FAP) consists of a multi-color, glossy document of 22 pages which lists the following main actions to be taken in the next five-year phase (1996-2000)

· Formulation of a strategic national management plan for the first twentyfive years of the next century, which will identify an investment programme that balances the conflicting demands of different water uses (e.g., wet and dry season agriculture, fisheries, water transport, water supply. salinity control). Planning criteria and guidelines would be developed to ensure that all programmes and projects are developed with full participation of local communities, and are technically, economically, socially, environmentally, and institutionally sound.

· Institutional strengthening of water sector organizations, involving reorganization and strengthening of planning organizations (FPCO, WARPO), enhancing the capacity of the main agencies responsible for designing, constructing, operating and maintaining projects (BWDB, LGED, WASA, DPHE, local councils, and increasingly the private sector); and facilitating inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral coordinaand cooperation. Emphasis would be given to training and human resource development, upgrading of inter-disciplinary planning and technical skills in key areas, and institutional re-

 Implementation of a portfolio of priority projects designed to protect from flooding over 10 million people living in urban, coastal and some riverine areas; protect vulnerable industrial areas in Dhaka and other cities and towns; improve flood

HERE is, clearly, mu-

ch thought, practice

and rehearsal that

goes into the narrating of

yarns, jokes, funny stories.

Ask this scribe! He can tell

you in pretty ghastly detail

about the kind and quantum

of silence that often, too

often, follows the narration of

a story meant to spread good

cheer and laughter. There

was that occasion when at a

reception, we were gathered

and telling each other quirks

and whimsical japes and

jokes, and somebody quote

the much-too-often quoted

To keep your marriage

With love in the marriage

Whenever you are wrong

Whenever you are right

So I came out with that

quote of Bob Hope's about

Zsa Zsa Gabor : Have you

heard this one ? I said. From

Bob Hope about Zsa Zsa Gabor

she got married as a one-off.

and it was so successful that

she decided to turn it into a

interruption in the flow of

the conversation, and then

the flow continued without a

break, as if I had never ut-

tered a sound. I seemed to be

myself a bit of a chortle

which was hastily stifled at

the reception to the quote. I

And of course I did not pick

out the lesson, but there was

one in the episode for anyone

to pickup a quip or yarn that

is too near the skin bites.

There was also another

aspect to be discovered

which came to this scribe's

mind long after: that wit is

only a distant relation of hu-

mour, if at all it is. Aristotle

called wit cultured insolence.

And humour, as somebody

said, whose name is not nec-

essary because I cannot re-

member it. is emotional

Both wit and humour do

chaos recalled in tranquility.

of course depend, in their

different ways, on play of

words. But humour is pri-

marily, and even essentially.

intended to rouse laughter.

Wit may summon laughter as

its fall out especially from

those not involved. But it is in

the first place a kind of

clinching debate-winner, the

point of a thrusting rapier.

wounding as it scores. Some

major humorists have also

been wits however, and this

didn't feel very big after that.

the only one who permitted

There was a just a slight

post-wedding

friend's

Ogden Nash:

brimming

admit it.

series!

FAP Put on Back Burner preparedness and flood proofing, especially for peo-

ple living in unprotected areas, enhance agricultural and fisheries production in some areas, and implement environmental management plans. The total cost for the next

five years upto 2000 will be approximately \$350 million consisting of some further studies as will as some protection interventions. Much

by Dr Saleemul Huq studies and ending with a list of 65 projects involving a cost of over \$2 billion to be carried out over a period of 10 years. The single biggest project identified and prioritized was the Ganges Barrage at about \$500 million.

The contrast between the FAP Report of October 1994 and the BWFMS Report of March 1995 is quite striking. Whereas the former made some attempt to summarize

an "independent review mission" consisting of foreign experts led by Dr Just Faaland of Norway and national experts led by Dr Fasihuddin Mahtab, who carried out their mission during March and April. They reviewed FAP documents and held numerous meetings with many groups including the government, NGOs. donors and academics and shared their findings at an

Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) has pointed out that the main recommendation of the BWFMS Report of having a national water sector planning process with people's participation and with environmental considerations



We as supposedly designed to protect from flooding over 10 million people living in urban, coastal and riverine areas.

photo Shehzad Noorani, UNICEF

emphasis has been laid on people's participation and environmental soundness and studies. It has proposed setting up of Regional Environmental Management Research and Education Centres (REMREC) under FPCO/ WARPO in each of the five FAP regions.

1994 Report on FAP

The March 1995 Draft Report Contrasts sharply with the earlier "Report on The Flood Action Plan" released in October 1994 by the Minister for Water Resources which was a much larger (over 150 pages) document giving a summary description of the outcomes of each of the FAP component

the different FAP component studies and develop a list of projects as an outcome of those studies (albeit not very clearly) the latter report seems to ignore the outcome of the FAP component studies almost totally and sets out a new national water planning paradigm for the future which seems to derive very little substance form the FAP studies.

Indeed it has been remarked that it has drawn much of its main thrusts more from the critics of FAP than the proponents and has even ended up "re-discovering the wheel."

> UNDP Report Meanwhile UNDP fielded

open meeting in Dhaka in April. Their report entitled "Flood and Water Management: Towards a Public Debate" dated April 1995 took a critical view of the FAP activities so far and recommended that it was too important an issue to be dealt with by technocrats and experts alone and that it should become a subject of public debate involving all the stakeholders.

NGO Reaction

Reactions from the NGO community to the latest BWFMS Report and to the efforts by the World Bank and FPCO to present and discuss the new report has been cautiously supportive. The eration. However, it remained critical of unnecessary and hasty decisions to go for construction work and reiterated its call for a moratorium of any construction including FAP 20.

Although it did not satisfy CEN's demand for a truly independent review of FAP. CEN welcomed the UNDP review and particularly supported the recommendation for an open public dialogue and debate including all stakeholders.

FAP-20 and Jamuna Bridge

An added complication to the FAP debate was the closure of the northern intake of the Dhaleswari river by the

Project or CPP) by a Dutch and Bangladeshi team of experts in May this year made some very critical observations about the performance of the project and particularly of the consultants. However, it concluded by recommending that the project be completed with a change of consultancy. **Institutional Aspects** One of the most important aspects of the whole FAP and its future has been the

Jamuna Bridge Project stop-

ping the flood water from testing the CPP concept (see

box). A review of the FAP 20

(Compartmentalization Pilot

institutional aspect which has yet to be satisfactorily dealt with. The Flood Plan Coordination Organization (FPCO) was created as a temporary organization under the Ministry of Water Resources to coordinate the FAP studies and is due to be dissolved by 1996. The question is: what is to happen to it and what, if anything, is to take its place? One proposal being suggested in an expansion of the existing Water Resources Planning Organization (WARPO) into a Water Resources Manage-ment Organization (WARMO) which will consist of a merger of the existing WARPO and FPCO. Whatever is the final decision, it seems that for the time being the fate of FAP is doubtful as some projects are simply being taken out of the FAP portfolio by different donors (e.g. Coastal Embankment Project of World Bank and North East Regional Project of CIDA) and some support activities like SWMC and GIS are having to find new

Conclusion

The present and shortterm future prospects of FAP are still unclear. The donors are expecting the Cabinet to endorse the FAP reports and present them at an international conference, now expected to be held in September. This conference is expected to resolve the outstanding issues and give the future direction for at least the next five years. The NGO community is also awaiting these events while planning their own conference on FAP to coincide or precede the one by the government. The future remains unclear.

Director of the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies. an independent policy-research institute.

tate. God is indeed incompa-

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The author is a freelance

rably the greatest humorist. We prove it in our being. So the scribe can start-just describe faithfully! That is all that a humorist needs to do - describe people and their affairs faithfully.

India Perspectives.

The author is Executive about the ultimatum, but called the threat a "very irre-

sponsible action taken by a tiny group." "All questions concerning

and the organisers of the solved," he said. world Forum on women have Salamo Fulivai, a member reached agreement on all

any agreement.

Police Surveillance

and Demos Mark

Beijing Conference

The Chinese authorities

their problems, a Chinese of-

ficial said today after a threat

emerged of a boycott because

clined to confirm immedi-

ately that there had been any

agreement, and journalists

present said they saw no vis-

ible change in the pervasive

General of the Chinese organ-

ising committee, said the

"misunderstandings" had

Xu Zhijian, Secretary-

He said a member of the

Forum's own facilitating

committee, Supatra Masdit,

"expressed satisfaction over

the excellent work" done at

Forum, at Huairou, 50 kilo-

meters (30 miles) northeast

of Beijing, had issued an ul-

timatum on Saturday, giving

the Chinese until noon on

Sunday (0400 GMT) to end

the surveillance or face the

the Forum, Irene Santiago.

had said: "If by midday to-

morrow we do not have an

answer (from the Chinese).

we will ask the different

(NGO) groups what they

want to do - whether they

want to protest, to riot or to

the NGO Forum Committee.

the Chinese government has

deployed 5,000 people to

snoop on the meeting of

Tibetan groups and Lesbian

militants said they had been

especially singled out. They

complained that they were

being followed or filmed at

every step, that plain-clothes

policemen were eavesdrop-

tions, and that some of their

workshop equipment had

Xu also said he had

'heard" from the press

been seized.

ping or recording conversa-

Human rights delegations,

about 17,000 women.

According to a member of

The Executive Director of

threat of a boycott.

boycott."

Convenors of the NGO

But Forum organisers de-

of police surveillance.

police presence.

been resolved.

the venue site.

of the Facilitating Committee, declined to confirm whether there had been

complaints have been re-

She told journalists that the panel was meeting, "and continuing to evaluate the progress achieved in improving the conditions related to security transportation facilities for the disabled and the facilities

in general." AFP reporters at the site said they found no perceptible change in police presence, and several expatriate Tibetan delegates said they were still being filmed and dogged by plainclothes police at every step.

Two groups of demonstrators faced off with police in Huairou on Sunday, when they tried to breach a Chinese ban on taking protests outside the venue of Non-Governmental

Iraq. Libya and Brazil staged a half-hour protest against the UN embargoes on Libya and Iraq. Holding up banners, they

Organisation (NGO) Forum.

About 60 women from

tried to move the protest outside the Forum venue and into the streets, but they were immediately stopped by Chinese police and pushed

In another incident, about 100 women, led by a Moroccan based group called Maghreb Eagalite (Maghreab Equality), protested about a venue mixup for a workshop on alleged abuses of women's rights by Islamic fundamentalists.

They took the protest up to the main gate of the Forum where they scuffled briefly with police before also being forced back.

The Chinese authorities have barred any unauthorised demonstration outside the sprawling 105 acre site. which is technically UN soil for the duration of the 10-day Forum that began Wednesday.

They have also said they will not tolerate any perceived anti-Chinese protest within the compound. - AFP

Security Tactics Set Poor Tone for Conference

T work, in prison and in their own homes. the human rights of women are violated and many governments participate in the violence or ignore it. according to a Human Rights Watch report released Sunday.

The portrayal of widespread abuse of women comes as delegates from more than 150 countries gather in Beijing for the UN international women's conference that starts Monday.

Researchers with Human Rights Watch said Saturday they were pessimistic about the prospects for Advancing women's rights at the conference because of opposition from conservative governments and religious groups.

They also complained that China's security tactics at a companion meeting of voluntary organizations set a poor tone for the conference.

Participants at the NGO Forum, being held 50 kilometers (30 miles) outside Beijing have been followed. videotaped and photographed by Chinese security person-

"This creates an aura of

intimidation and of censorshop within a designated UN site," said Dorothy Q Thomas, director of the Women's Rights Project for New Yorkbased Human Rights Watch.

Refugees are raped by police. military and immigration officials; inmates are sexually assaulted and harassed; girls are abducted to brothels in other countries; and employees are physically and sexually abused.

The findings are not new information was gathered over five years and some of it has been published elsewhere - but the 450-page report is intended to prod governments into action.

"Governments in too many countries are party to the violence and intimidation that combine to deny women their right to participate as full citizens of their countries." Thomas told reporters.

Governments need to adopt and enforce laws that protect women from violence and discrimination and impose criminal and civil

penalties on violators. "Before we even get commitments to action which are long overdue, we have a little bit of a problem getting commitments in principle which we thought had long been won," Thomas

"We are facing a threatened rollback on the university of human rights for women," she said.

Among the findings in the report are :

- Rape is a form of repression used by security forces in Bosnia, Peru. Somalia, Haiti and Kashmir.

- Many Burmese, Nepali and Bangladeshi women and girls are lured by fraudulent job or marriage offers from abroad to escape poverty, and

the forced into prostitution. - Hundreds of Asian domestic workers flee to their embassies to escape assaults in Kuwait, yet only a handful of abusive employers are investigated or prosecuted.

- In Brazil, more than 70 per cent of all reported cases of violence against women takes place in the home, but many women who report such abuse by the husbands

face police who do nothing.

The Scribe after Humour by Rakshat Puri is obvious in their ways of de- one to always have company candidate for ridicule. scription and character por- and never be alone, there is Princes, priests, politicians, trayal. One, who is too often also a kind of chronic scholars, intellectuals, studismissed in our times as predicament, as someone dents, peasants, workers desome kind of cliche, is P.G. remarked, quoting from writscribing them and their do-

Wodehouse: he scores especially with his descriptions of laughter. Aunt Dahlia's guffaw in Much Obliged, Jeeves left the "impression of a hyena which had just heard a good one from another hyena." In the Code of the Woosters. 'Madeline Basset laughed the tinkling, silvery laugh which was one of the things that had got her so disliked by the better element." A woman in The Inimitable Jeeves "had a penetrating sort of laugh. Rather like a train going into a tunnel" etc.

Let us, then return to the scribe, sitting before a blank sheet in the typewriter before him and wondering about what and where to begin and how to keep going till he reaches the end. Some old jokes come to mind in such a situation; and with them the thought that if good and great music can be heard many times and even seems better with repeated hearing, why not also good jokes and funny stories? But a voice from the mind's unlit corners says very clearly that this is only a poor attempt at rationalisation music is music and a joke is joke. So the scribe, serious about humour and mournful at having to make people laugh for earning his supper. wrestles with words, memory, syntax and all that he feels can go into humourcooking. Where there is smoke there may very well be fire: but the humour write is smoke there is not always a paratha (stuffed, friend chapti). And if there is, it has probably burnt to a lovely black crust. So he turns to

the dough again in despera-Some people who pontificate on the innards of humour always remark with much emphasis that the best humour is that which the humorist turns upon himself. This seems to assume a basically schizophrenic situation in the humorists; he is supposed to be a kind of wit and victim at once. While it may be comforting to reflect that being schizophrenic enables ing on the wall somewhere 'So I am cured of

schizophrenia but where am I now that I need me?" That is precisely the situation of the humour-writer, sitting before a blank sheet placed in the type-writer before him, and waiting for inspira-Somewhat outlandish

thoughts and memories are bound to come to him. This scribe recalls. for instance. one time in Lahore when he admonished a peasant who, going by in his bullock-cart, was hurling unmentionable epithets at his oxen, including the invective. "May snakes bit and sting you !" When this scribe asked disapprovingly. "What will you do if the snakes get at the oxen and kill them?" the peasant smiled broadly and said " Oh don't worry, I mean only dead snakes attacking with their tail ends !" This scribe retreated trying to look graceful in his sheepishness. It is not the kind of thing that could go on the blank sheet if the intention were to send the reader into bellows of laughter... actually ripples are rewarding enough, let alone billows! So the scribe sits where he is, and the blank sheet continues to stare at him now inviting, now brazen faced.

However, as with everyone and everywhere, the scribe learns with experience. And with patience. The realization dawns on him, as it were. can tell you that where there What he learns is simply this everything is matter good enough for homour, and every person is made essentially to laugh at (sometimes also, of course, to laugh with) Only that is sublime for each person what each person decides arbitrarily for himself is sublime. If this realization turns a person into a cynic. then the humorist in that person is lost. If he can continue to marvel at the work of God in making things and people as comic as they are the feeling is not too common - he is on the way to laughter and making laughter. The fact is that everything and everybody is a

ings precisely, and without blinkers, is to produce humour. To try and look for

sublimity in all that surrounds us would be to become like the man who had to put on contact lenses to look for his spectacles. To live and to function in order to live, is to be absurd: ridiculousness is man's es-



Asian Countries to Forge Alliance against Drug Traffic

EVERAL Asian countries are about to forge an alliance to fight the of drugs from the Golden Triangle, reputedly the world's largest heroin producer aside from Colom-

Malaysian Deputy Home Minister Datu Megat Juinid Megat Ayob said the United States would help finance this coordinated effort to curb the worsening drug

problem in the region "Individually. Asian countries cannot act against the poppy farmers in Burma (Myanmar), which forms a major part of the Triangle, as the activities are controlled by (Burmese) drug lord Khunsa and his army," Mr. Megat said. "We need an international force to pressure Khunsa to stop his operations. He uses drug money to finance his army to fight Burmese government troops.

The idea of a US-spon-

Those willing to join the

value plants.

sored Asian pact on the Golden Triangle was disand processed heroin yearly. cussed between Deputy Asian nations, in general,

welcome the US initiative but feet that any pact on the Golden Triangle can only succeed if it deals with the reality of Myanmar's opium production and its increasing transit through China.

US Diplomats in the region say Asian nations are urging Washington to "set aside its human rights concerns and resume anti-drug trafficking cooperation with Burma's ruling junta and include China as well."

> Bent on punishing Myanmar's Junta in the late 1980s, the US halted a multimillion-dollar anti-drug programme with Yangon under which US \$ 9.4 million was spent in 1987 and US\$ 45 million in 1988. Washington was also irked

that the junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC)

forces led by Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Su Kyi, who is in her fifth year of house arrest without any charge of trial. "About 60 per cent of

heroin sold in the US comes from Southeast Asia," said an American diplomat in Kuala Lumpur. "Heroin addict populations in Asia are increasing as well following an expansion of poppy growing areas."

report in April 1994 said" in producing more than 2,500 metric tons of opium last year, Myanmar accounted for about 90 per cent of the total from Southeast Asia's Golden Triangle." The consensus of diplo-

Myanmar's military rule.

- Depthnews Asia.

ignored the 1990 election victory of pro-democracy

by Christopher and Joe Fernandez

Home Minister Megat and Dr. Lee Brown, President Bill Clinton's chief adviser on narcotics, who was here re-

alliance include Hong Kong. Singapore, Thailand, Laos Japan, Malaysia, US, Germany and Australia. Bangkok is already working with the US. Germany and Australia to replace poppy crops in Thailand with other high-

Mr. Megat added the US was serious about stamping out the drug flow from the Golden Triangle as it had spent about US \$ 22 billion on Heroin cases. He said the Triangle, which spans Myanmar. Thailand and Laos. turns out from 2,500 to 3.000 metric tonnes of raw

A US State Department

mats in the region favours the US-sponsored Asian pact on the Golden Triangle. But the question is how to bring Yangon, if not China, into the picture without dignifying