

# FOCUS

## FAP Put on Back Burner

by Dr Saleemul Huq

THE 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.

preparedness and flood proofing, especially for people 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 well as some protection interventions. Much 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.

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

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.

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."

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

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 incorporated had been a demand of CEN from the very beginning of FAP. Hence, CEN welcomed the new thinking by FPCO and was prepared to offer its coop-

erations. 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.

UNDP and Jamuna Bridge

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The Chinese authorities and the organisers of the world Forum on women have reached agreement on all their problems. A Chinese official said today after a threat emerged of a boycott because of police surveillance.

But Forum organisers declined to confirm immediately that there had been any agreement, and journalists present said they saw no visible change in the pervasive police presence.

Xu Zhijian, Secretary-General of the Chinese organising committee, said the "misunderstandings" had been resolved.

He said a member of the Forum's own facilitating committee, Supatra Masdit, "expressed satisfaction over the excellent work" done at the venue site.

Convenors of the NGO Forum, at Huairou, 50 kilometers (30 miles) northeast of Beijing, had issued an ultimatum on Saturday, giving the Chinese until noon on Sunday (0400 GMT) to end the surveillance or face the threat of a boycott.

The Executive Director of the Forum, Irene Santiago, had said: "If by midday tomorrow 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 boycott."

According to a member of the NGO Forum Committee, the Chinese government has deployed 5,000 people to snoop on the meeting of about 17,000 women.

Human rights delegations, 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 eavesdropping or recording conversations, and that some of their workshop equipment had been seized.

Xu also said he had "heard" from the press about the ultimatum, but called the threat a "very irresponsible action taken by a tiny group."

"All questions concerning intimidation and of censorship within a designated UN site," said Dorothy G Thomas, director of the Women's Rights Project for New York-based 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 said.

"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.

— *Dephnews Asia*

## Police Surveillance and Demos Mark Beijing Conference

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

— photo Shehzad Noorani, UNICEF

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.

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## The Scribe after Humour

by Rakshat Puri

is obvious in their ways of description and character portrayal. One, who is too often dismissed in our times as some kind of cliché, is P.G. Wodehouse; he scores especially with his descriptions of laughter. Aunt Dahlia's guffaw in *Much Oblived*, Jeeves left the "impression of a hyena which had just heard a good one from another hyena." In the *Code of the Woosters*, "Madelaine 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 a 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 humour-cooking. Where there is smoke there may very well be fire; but the humour write can tell you that where there is smoke there is not always a paratha (stuffed, friend chapra). And if there is, it has probably burnt to a lovely black crust. So he turns to the dough again in desperation.

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

one to always have company and never be alone, there is also a kind of chronic predicament, as someone remarked, quoting from writing 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 typewriter before him, and waiting for inspiration.

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 inventive, "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 bellows! 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, what he learns is simply this: everything is matter good enough for humour, 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

candidate for ridicule. Princes, priests, politicians, scholars, intellectuals, students, peasants, workers describing them and their doings 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

by Christopher and Joe Fernandez

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

Those willing to join the 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-value plants.

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 and processed heroin yearly. Asian nations, in general,

late. God is indeed incomparably 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.

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The author is a freelance writer.

## Security Tactics Set Poor Tone for Conference

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 personnel.

This creates an aura of

ignored the 1990 election victory of pro-democracy forces led by Nobel peace prize winner Aung San Su Kyt, 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."

A US State Department 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 diplomats 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 Myanmar's military rule.

Washington was also irked that the junta, known as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC),