

The Many Faces of FAP

by Dr Saleemul Huq

From its very inception and throughout its five-year history FAP has generated a great deal of controversy and criticism both locally as well as internationally. The debate has some-times been quite heated.

A Landmark Visit

A hearty welcome to President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Let his three-day sojourn in our proud and tradition-rich country bring to him a sense of satisfaction. And for our two nations let it open new vistas of co-operation. We are truly honoured by the Iranian President's visit.

We value our friendship with Iran for many reasons. The Khomeini revolution did not only put an end to Pahlavi autocracy, it also provided, very courageously indeed, a limiting factor for the apparently unchallengeable Western predilection for big brotherhood. And so added significantly to the sustainability of the world order, however, defective it maybe. Together with this Iran has been a bulwark for Islamic values.

We had very close cultural and historical ties with Iran. Persian was cultivated in Bengal of the Sultans as has not been done outside central Asia. The great mystic and poet Hafiz almost came to visit Bengal but for a last-minute travel hitch. The Bengali mind was once replete with the glories and wisdoms of the times of Nowsherwan as it was occupied with the epigrams of Gulistan, Bustan and Pandnama. Rumi and Jami and Khaqani are as living a legacy of the Bengalees as they are of the Iranians and other central Asians. It is not for nothing that Rabindranath, in his twilight years, went to Iran and anointed his soul with the fragrance of Persian poetry and ecstasy of Persian mysticism. Firdausi and his ponderous epic were such a household companion that many here took Rustam and Sohrab for their national heroes.

President Rafsanjani's visit is designed to initiate, among other things, the opening of the states of central Asia to Bangladeshi goods and manpower. A bonus, outside of the five projected MOUs, that should accrue from this visit will be the broadening of Bangladesh's cultural horizon to those dream climes.

Iran is the seat of one of the most ancient civilisations. And yet it is a modern and truly progressing country. We shall gain positively from the fillip to our old friendship that President Rafsanjani's visit will occasion. We shall exercise ceaselessly to ensure that Iran also gains from this in equal measure.

Diarrhoeal Concern

We have it on the authority of DG Health that incidence of diarrhoeal diseases is already up in the flood-affected areas and that it could worsen with a further recession of water.

The DG has done a good job by issuing a timely warning on a dangerously developing health situation; suffice it to say though, whatever may have been the information upon which he based his assessment, they could not adequately reflect the true state of affection in the country. This is simply because many diarrhoeal cases go unreported.

Indeed the horizonless sheets of water and the emerging slushes of bacterial infestations are a dangerous mix — the first one is anti-transportation and the second the habitat of water-borne diseases. They choke tubewells on top. No wonder, 2,500 doctors and 12,000 health workers are immobilized by the dearth of any special mode of transport. So, let's activate them first for curative and preventive work — in that order — by providing them with engine-fitted boats. As they reach out to the suffering people with ORT sachets, injection, food supplements and, perhaps, water purification tablets the immediate task will have been accomplished. However, the basic imperative is to supply them with adequate quantities of drinking water under some special arrangements. For, how even the ORS will be gulped without the help of a jug of pure drinking water?

What we are really hoping is that water purification units, complete with raft-like inflatable containers, would be stationed in the affected areas. These will take in local water, purify it and then distribute the same.

Aside from throwing in this life-line of water to the countryside, the Public Health Department must make it a point to sink new tubewells — a string of them — in the water-starved areas.

Still a Non-starter!

The power cell, set up on paper some four months ago, as a linchpin in the Energy Ministry, to facilitate private sector participation in power development and determine a suitable tariff structure, still remains a non-starter.

This is disquieting, to say the least. Because follow-up work on the 10 MOUs signed by us with reputed private foreign companies to generate 2000 MW of electricity at a cost of 2.50 billion US dollar, is going to be delayed. The MOUs carry a stipulation that if an accord on power tariff and other terms and conditions were not finalised within a year of signing them they would automatically lapse, unless mutually extended. The exercise for an extension of the Memoranda of Understanding, if it comes to that, is bound to be quite embarrassing, not to speak of the possibility of hitting the dead-end in some cases.

While the World Bank consultant is to join the cell next month to review the MOUs and help us formulate a model Power Purchase Agreement for both sides, our experts must be able to take up their posts soon enough to make things work.

It is understood that local technocrats are shying away from the cell because the salaries and perks being offered to them do not quite compensate for their two-year stay in it. This aspect needs to be sympathetically attended to no doubt; but the over-all approach should be mutually accommodative because we have not quite hit the energy jack-pot as yet. So far as their stakes in the parent departments go, these will have to be protected by all means.

THE Flood Action Plan (FAP) has just completed its first phase consisting of a large number of studies and some pilot projects over the past five years at a total cost of approximately US 150 million dollars. As such it is by far the biggest planning exercise in the natural resource sector in the country's history. The final report was presented to the Cabinet recently and is to be discussed at an international conference to be held in Dhaka on 8 and 9 November 1995. The report as it now stands envisages another planning phase over the next five years to develop a National Water Plan and further investments to the tune of approximately Tk 4,500 crore in the water sector over the next decade.

From its very inception and throughout its five year history FAP has generated a great deal of controversy and criticism both locally as well as internationally. The debate has sometimes been quite heated. An interesting feature of this debate is that the critics and proponents when talking about FAP often do not mean the same thing. This is because FAP has undergone a number of changes over the years and hence it is not always clear which phase or aspect of FAP is being discussed.

In order to clarify the situation and help foster a more

informed debate it would be useful to define these different aspects and phases of FAP so that both critics as well as proponents alike can be clear about which precise aspect or phase of FAP they are referring to when they use the word "FAP".

French FAP: Immediately after the devastating floods of 1988 the French government fielded a team of engineers who came up with a plan to embank the major rivers of the country at an estimated cost of US\$ 10 billion. This image of embanking all the major rivers of the country and figure of US\$ 10 billion became a very powerful one and has been very much the image against which most of the early anti-FAP activities and advocacy had been addressed. However, this French Plan was never a very serious prospect and was very soon superseded by the London Conference in December 1989 where the FAP proper was launched by the government and donors with the World Bank acting as Coordinator.

World Bank FAP: The FAP that emerged from the London Conference consisted

of a series of twenty six components (later to proliferate into more) mostly consisting of studies and some pilot projects to be carried out over a period of five years at a total cost of US\$ 150 million. This, then became the image of FAP for the period between 1990 and 1994, namely a multiplicity of studies with some pilot construction projects funded by different donors coordinated by the World Bank. Although some people, specially amongst the critics, both at home and abroad, were still conjuring up the previous image of the French FAP it became clear over time that was no longer correct. This phase of FAP was associated with the World Bank (although they were not the only donor involved) as they were playing a very close coordinating role and were perceived as being the main proponent (together with FPCCO). Hence the World Bank (as well as some of the bilateral donors) became the focus of the critics, particularly at the international level.

FAP 20: During this phase FAP consisted mainly of studies but also of some pilot construction projects. The

most important of these was the Compartmentalization Pilot Project (CPP) or FAP 20 in Tangail funded by the governments of the Netherlands and Germany. This became the target of demonstrations by local people in Tangail and even led to clashes between anti and pro-FAP groups there. Although this project was only one component of FAP nevertheless it gained great prominence as it was one of the few physical manifestations on the ground of FAP. Thus the image of construction of embankments under the FAP as a whole even though it was one component only.

FPCCO's FAP: The culmination of the studies was the FAP (Draft) Final Report produced by the Flood Plan Coordination Organization (FPCCO) in October 1994 which listed 65 different projects around the country at a total estimated cost of US\$ 2.5 billion over the next decade. This became the subject of much criticism from many quarters including the donors and as a result was modified quite drastically in early 1995. Nevertheless, this version of FAP probably reflects most accurately the

wishes of FPCCO and the Water Ministry on FAP.

Water Management Strategy: In April 1995 a new revised document called "Bangladesh Water and Flood Management Strategy" was released which was a drastic change from the October 1994 document. This focused on a further five year period from 1996 to 2000 to develop a National Water Plan which would incorporate environmental considerations and people's participation as important criteria for water sector planning. This would be followed by an investment phase estimated at Tk 4,500 crore. The authorship of this Report was not clear, nor was its ownership until it was revised and adopted by the Cabinet in September 1995.

Conclusion

The current document has still not resolved the issue of "what is FAP?" For example when the Vice President of the World Bank, Mr Joseph Woods recently visited Dhaka and met with the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia he was reported in the press as having assured the Bank's support for the future phase

of FAP. This was assumed by the press (and presumably GOB) to mean that the World Bank would be making a substantial contribution to the Tk 4,500 crore investment plan, whereas the World Bank's view would probably be that they would support the planning phase only. Thus the different images of FAP continue to confuse the discussions around FAP not only amongst critics and proponents but also between government and donors.

As will be apparent from the above description there are at least five different images which are conjured up by different groups of people when referring to the word "FAP". Therefore, it would probably be helpful in the future to make explicit which particular aspect or phase of FAP one is referring to when using the word.

My personal feeling is that from 1996 onwards (once the FAP Conference is over) it is probably best to bury the word "FAP" (except for historical description) and go on to use the words "National Water Plan" which should hopefully gain a less controversial and more cooperative image in the coming years.

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Aid Privatisation Threatens a Lifeline to the Poor

Michael Prest writes from London

A potentially disastrous cut in the money available to the International Development Association (IDA) — a lifeline to many of the world's poorest countries — will be high on the agenda of the forthcoming annual meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (10-12 October).

This is the greatest challenge to development assistance in years," World Bank president James Wolfensohn has warned.

Caught between a powerful ideological swing towards the private sector and aid cut-backs by many industrialised countries, IDA could become a victim of the accelerating privatisation of foreign assistance.

The United States is leading the onslaught. A militantly Republican Congress has made a virtue of its opposition to aid generally and IDA specifically.

As the soft-loan arm of the World Bank, IDA makes interest-free loans repayable over 35 years. In the financial year to the end of June, it committed \$5.7 billion for 108 projects, making it the biggest source of funds for very poor borrowers unable

to raise finance elsewhere. Washington, the biggest contributor, has already reduced its promised second annual contribution to the current three-year programme by eight per cent.

To add to the squeeze, Germany and Canada followed suit, citing the principle of "proportional burden-sharing." Only an unprecedented all-out public relations campaign by the Bank prevented the outcome from being worse.

The talk on Capitol Hill is of slashing the next US contribution by a third. If that happened, and others cut back proportionately, next year's IDA could be \$4 billion instead of \$6 billion.

In such an event, Wolfensohn was quoted as saying in the London Financial Times, "You'd have to wonder what happens to IDA."

Even more serious, however, is the fate of the next three-year programme — the 11th replenishment, which runs for the period 1997-1999.

Some forecasts suggest that IDA 11 could be halved, leaving many millions of the world's poorest searching for other sources of support. Approaching 40 per cent of

Graphic with portrait of James Wolfensohn and text: "This is the greatest challenge to development assistance in years..." "The new World Bank president is facing a serious threat: major cut-backs to the institution's soft-loan fund. Hardest hit by cuts would be poor countries — and the Bank itself."

IDA goes to India and China, and the bulk of the rest goes to Africa. Geoffrey Lamb, the Bank's representative in London, admits: "We're in a tight spot over the funding of IDA. It there's a knock-on effect through other donors, the World Bank's capacity to as-

ist will be severely constrained." Africa could be hit particularly hard, because few countries in the debt-crippled continent can afford to borrow at market rates and few are attractive to private investment.

And since the Bank's fundamental purpose is to compensate for market failure — to make investments which the private sector shuns — cutting IDA would undermine its whole mission.

It could also undermine its staffing levels. The Bank has been under pressure to slim down, and it would be hard for Wolfensohn to justify retaining the same number of employees if a smaller IDA resulted in significantly less lending and fewer projects.

With so much at stake, Bank staff and officials in donor countries have been discreetly looking at alternatives to IDA in its present form.

An arrangement which reduces US influence is attractive to the Bank because IDA is the main vehicle through which Congress exerts power over it. But it could find that other donors are simply hiding behind Washington's action and are quietly relieved that the US

is taking the heat for cutting IDA. Britain and Canada are probably reducing their aid budgets, and the Scandinavian countries, long stalwart supporters of IDA, are tired of making up the difference when US contributions fall short.

If negotiations on IDA 11 are not wrapped up by the end of the year, the outcome may be a stopgap measure to keep the show on the road until next year's US presidential election provides a clearer idea of which way the political wind is blowing.

But in the long run, IDA seems to be past its peak. Many industrialised countries are losing interest in supporting traditional public sector aid, and as aid budgets shrink, development is being privatised. To the extent that borrowers are forced to improve their policies and make better use of their own public and private resources, that will not be fatal. To the extent, that the poorest are left without adequate support, it is a tragedy. — Gemini News

The writer is an economics writer based in London. He has worked for The Times and The Independent in London and for the World Bank.

To the 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.

'Save Democracy'

Sir, Mr T Hussain in his article under the above heading appearing in the "Opinion" column of your daily on September 12, 1995 has made some strange remarks. How can he say that the gap between the contentions of the ruling party and the mainstream opposition parties is now the narrowest ever?

The oppositions demand is for the government to step down immediately and holding of general election under a caretaker government headed by the Chief Justice. The Prime Minister has agreed to step down 30 days ahead of the date of the next general election. But under Article 57 (3) of the Constitution the Prime Minister after resignation shall continue to carry on office until the Prime Minister's successor enters office.

The Prime Minister has as a matter of fact partially acceded to first part of the opposition's demand, because instead of 90 days, she has agreed to resign 30 days ahead of the date of general election. The Prime Minister to my knowledge has made no comment on the other part of the opposition's demand which is about formation of a caretaker government headed by the Chief Justice for the purpose of holding the general elections. This may be for the fact that there appears to be no provision in the Constitution for formation of such an interim government. So, in my opinion the gap between the contentions of the ruling party and the opposition remains

as wide as ever.

According to Mr Hussain the opposition's main contention that Begum Zia will not be in power during the next election has been resolved with her declaration that she would resign 30 days ahead of the polls. This, apparently was opposition's main goal which has been achieved. If that is the position then there is hardly the necessity of forming a caretaker government headed by the Chief Justice to conduct the polls.

Mr Hussain's concluding remark that the possibility of the President running the shop (interim government) with the help of the bureaucracy seems to be the only solution which may be acceptable to all is to my mind not based on a sound reasoning because the opposition's demand is for formation of a neutral caretaker government in which the President or the Prime Minister shall have no role to play. M Zaman DOHS, Dhaka Cant.

Humiliation of fellow citizen

Sir, It appeared that Bangladesh turned topsy-turvy during the 72-hour hartal (16-18 September). The hartal not only crippled and brought into standstill all our trade, commerce, communication, business, office works and social activities but it also paralysed the wisdom, morality and decency of a section of hartal activists. The call for hartal is the democratic right of the polit-

ical parties but intimidation, compulsion, insult and humiliation etc are violation of human rights.

We bow our heads down in shame, ignominy and disgrace before the eyes of the civilised world and democratic countries when a pro-hartal activist stripped a middle aged gentleman of his clothes on a public thoroughfare while he was going to attend his office. Whither our morality? Are we entering into the dark ages? Let us give up our evil and wicked conduct and manners and behave like civilised people. O H Kabir Dhaka

Musical programme

Sir, Recently the Bangladesh Television had telecast a musical programme in which noted signers from the SAARC countries took part. Hamid Ali of Pakistan, Hemanta Mukharjee and Haimanti Shukla of India, Asafuddowla, Runa Laila and Sabina Yasmin of Bangladesh and one artiste from Sri Lanka had presented melodious songs in the programme. However, we are also expecting to find Mehedi Hasan of Pakistan and Lata of India in the musical session.

We would request the BTV authority to arrange to telecast SAARC artistes' musical programme atleast once in a month. M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor Bangladesh Agricultural Institute.

Eye Hospital

Sir, Dr. Ian Thomson's letter to your esteemed paper published on 19th September 1995 gives a balanced view as to what can and does go wrong in the Management of an Eye Hospital. He contends that

Islamia Eye Hospital is no exception. He suggests no useful purpose will be served in carrying on recrimination of the Management of the Islamia Hospital.

The time has come to make a detailed study as to where the Management has gone wrong. All efforts should be made together and save the name of what was once the most prestigious Hospital in this region. Dr Ian Thomson's letter advocates that constructive role should be played by all the well wishers of the Hospital. Mihir Ali Wari, Dhaka

Beijing Conference

Sir, A lengthy article by Ekram Kabir on the editorial page of September 30 commented on the UN Conference on Women in Beijing. He refers to two assertions of Hillary Clinton: 1) that "freedom means right of people to assemble, organise and debate openly" and 2) that she described as violations of human rights the practices of forced abortions and sterilisation and the denial to women of the "right to plan their own families." These are the only points mentioned.

Later in the article the author states: "Although the Bangladesh delegation didn't feel like that of Mrs Clinton." Perhaps the author forgot toward the end of the article what he had written in the beginning. Otherwise, what he is saying is that the Bangladesh delegation repudiates two fundamental principles of human rights: the right of freedom of expression and the right to make decisions without coercion. I doubt if the delegation members will agree. Father Timm Commission for Justice and Peace, Dhaka

Art Buchwald's COLUMN

Who's There?

"Knock, knock." "Who's there?" "Your friendly political fund-raiser. We sent you a desperate letter and you never answered it. What kind of American are you?" "I'm a good American, but I'm broke. There is just so much you can give to defend the country from Washington." "Are you interested in saving the flag from being burned, putting God back in the public schools, bringing the death penalty back for welfare mothers and ensuring that everyone in the country can carry a concealed weapon?" "I am also interested in paying my son's tuition to college and donating a little something to my pension fund." "Does this mean that you are in favor of abortion?" "Who said anything about abortion? I'm just trying to save the barn, and if I keep giving to the PACs I'll wind up looking for a government hand-out." "Give us \$1,000 for a so-so table at New Gingrich's birthday ball and we'll make sure that an X-rated movie will never play in your neighborhood again." "If I give you the money then I'll have to buy a table for Hillary Clinton's bake-off at Sidwell Friend's school. Isn't there a better way to finance our elections and select our leaders?" "That would require election reforms and the country can't afford them. Suppose I made a package deal for you. For \$10,000 you jog in the morning with Bill Clinton, go to a prayer breakfast with Phil Gramm, exchange one-liners in the Senate cloak room with Bob Dole and help General Powell autograph his book at Borders. It's the same deal we're offering registered lobbyist." "I appreciate the offer, but can I only send in a check for \$100?" "What do you think \$100 can buy in politics these days? You would be lucky to get a seat on a bench in Lafayette Park. When you donate to a PAC you must be certain that the sum is large enough to guarantee yourself an ambassadorship to France." "If I give to a politician, won't I be buying his vote?" "No, all you will be buying is access to him at the Hard Rock Cafe so that you can explain your side of the story." "How much will this access cost?" "It's gone up quite a bit since everyone buying access. I think we could squeeze you into a committee chairman's waiting room for \$25,000." "I don't have \$25,000 to talk to my congressman." "OK. For \$1,000, we'll let you leave a message for him on his answering service." By arrangements with Los Angeles Times Syndicate and UNB.