

FIGHTING POVERTY AND POPULATION EXPLOSION

Poor Third World Countries Must Have a Share in the Affluence of the First World

by Md Asadullah Khan

THE spectre of global population increases with concomitant decrease in the land fertility rate, shrinking of crop yield, and environmental catastrophe. And all these dire scenarios haunt the nations of the world. For reasons not known even to many scientists, natural systems are on the verge of collapsing. Statistics in between 1985 to 1989 reveal that food production per capita fell in 94 countries. Not to speak of other places in the world, even in the US crop-yields per acre declining because of air pollution and build up of salt and chemicals. Thailand had to ban commercial logging in 1989 when its forest resource fell from 29 per cent in 1985 to 19 per cent in 1988. The Philippines also suspended logging in most provinces. Canada predicts that within 16 years all the old-growth forests will be gone, its wheat belt has lost half its organic material and is eroding badly, costing farmers \$500 million to \$900 million in lost crops. Water system and aquatic area have been so much polluted that global fish catch fell by 4 million tonnes in 1990. With all these scenarios that loom so ominously, Gustave Speth of the World Resources Institute warns that human number and impacts have grown so large that they are eroding, on a global scale, the natural systems that support life.

Global population, according to United Nations projections, will increase to about 13 billion by 2100. Taking a liberal statistics that consumption grows at just two-thirds the rate of the past 25 years and the world would be producing about 20 times as much as it is today, that growth rate can hardly be sustained.

To create habitat and find means for livelihood, desperate people chop down trees for fire wood leaving so few trees that local and perhaps global weather patterns change. People over-cultivate land until it gives out, permanently lowering the planet's ability to feed its denizens. It has been explicitly clear by now that people can't escape the misery they are passing through by a little bit of charity and loan funds available from western donor countries and that often when anointed with self-interest of the nations. Ironically, poor people can be stopped at the borders of the affluent countries but poverty can't be stopped. Poverty travels in the form of drugs, terrorism, global warring and AIDS. The solution, according to many pragmatists, is to put the developing regions of the world, where 90 per cent of future population growth is expected to occur, on a sustainable path. Otherwise, these endemic problems will affect the more prosperous areas of the globe with devastating and debilitating consequences.

In our region the poverty situation due to crop-loss resulting from drought and excessive flooding, sometimes four times, in a monsoon season, as it happened this year can be attributed to our neighbours' careless and selfish handling of the natural

vegetation and forest resources. For generations, Nepalese and Indians at the upper tributaries of the Ganges, chopped the wood they needed, almost indiscriminately, to meet the growing needs of fuel. The denuded slopes of the Himalayas sent flood water pouring over countries downstream i.e. Bangladesh causing heavy inundation and destroying standing crops and homestead kucha houses of the poor people of Bangladesh. The horrifying consequences that we witness now in the form of crop-loss is most worrisome.

Without a shadow of doubt and contradiction, environmental scientists now agree that the developing countries in the South are now suffering due to the growth of the North. America and Europe burned so much coal and oil to feed their industries that the atmosphere may be reaching the limits of its capacity to absorb the emitted carbon dioxide with the possibility of falling into a disastrous greenhouse effect. The rich nations chopped down so many trees to feed their furnaces and build their houses that have resulted in an imbalance weather patterns in the world. The developing nations may legitimately be demanding that the developed nation pay up

the difference between the cost of development and development without. The price tag may be \$70 billion a year on top of current \$54 billion in foreign aid pouring in this region.

The White House "Deland estimates" reveal that the market in environmental goods and services-everything from smokestack scrubbers to waste disposal comes to \$200 billion a year. While the United States balks at contributing a few million dollars to sustainable development fund, Japan agreed to kick in one quarter of the total requested - as much as \$25 billion a year.

Solutions to counter the effects of population growth and control of environmental hazards without causing massive assault on the mother earth have been envisioned. Now villagers in Nepal are using solar water-heaters to provide hot showers to trekkers.

Some villages have mini-hydro-power generators that exploit small falls - no dams needed - to light their huts. With the increase of awareness, local conservation committees preserve the land that attracts tourists, using the foreign currency to finance health clinics for women and children.

Increase in the use of refrigerators allowing people a

cool place for storing food materials and other purchases as well as air-coolers for comfortable working atmosphere leads to build-up of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) which would thin the ozone shield against cancer-causing sun-rays. Work has started in China with the \$20 million aid package along with technical advice from the US to build environmentally safe refrigerators. Chinese researchers are now busy testing several non-CFC models and are contemplating to go into full production soon.

A surge of hectic activities have gripped the advanced countries, especially the countries that have abundant solar radiation, to limit the use of non-renewable energy sources that spread pollution and greenhouse effect. Solar energy project in Argentina worth \$1,50,000, sponsored

by the Argentine and German governments, will supply energy and running water to rural dwellers who would otherwise burn polluting gas. Sadly enough, in spite of the fact that Bangladesh receives abundant sun-shine throughout the year, we have hardly made any head-way in this area of technology diffusion so vastly needed in a power-starved country. In Peru, and WWF project helps the Yanacocha Indians cut strips of forest. Re-seeded by birds, bats and wind, the strips grow back and yield 60 times as much wood per acre as conventional logging.

Unless the western countries have softened their attitude towards conservation of safe life in a spirit of global co-operation, it is apprehended, India, China and Bangladesh may be dragging their feet over phasing-out

chemicals that destroy the ozone layer until they get cash of about \$50 million in a year to meet their new standards. The fact is those who make \$200 a year should not pay so that those who make \$10,000 a year can breathe clean air.

Population bomb is the most threatening fear for the world and pose a greater alarming prospect for our country. In 1970 the world population was growing 2.1 per cent annually, and till 1994 it grew at 1.7 per cent on a global basis (for our country it is still 2.2 per cent) and world population is now about 5.4 billion. Happily, China, Thailand, Singapore and Costa-Rica have all tightened a grip on their once sky-rocketing populations.

The world, now divided into two distinct groups - haves and have-nots - is fomenting another form of Cold War in sharing the bounties of the nature. The have-nots living in the South point out that the haves in the North, which has 25 per cent of the world population, consumes

70 per cent of the planet's energy, 75 per cent of the metals, 85 per cent of its wood. One child in the West consumes as much 125 in the East. There will be no brake on population growth as long as despair over astronomical infant mortality rates and eking out a living from garbage heaps and unforgiving land that drives women to bear five, six, seven or eight children continues.

Eliminating that despair, especially by lowering infant mortality rates and rising the status of women, is how Europe, America, Canada and Japan and other nations managed to cap family size. If history is any guide, it will take a few more generations to lower death rates for dampening birth rates. But we don't have much time at our disposal. The developing world must slash its population growth within the next 10 years. One model is China's draconian one-child policy: it is heard that couples who have more children are fined as much as \$2000 and can be fired from their jobs.

Pathology of Medical Facilities

by Dr Nurul H Choudhury

EVERYDAY a large number of Bangladeshi patients leave the country for better treatment abroad. Patients with swollen purse go to the USA, UK Thailand or Singapore and the less privileged ones to India. Going abroad for treatment is nothing new in Bangladesh. What is noteworthy is the sudden increase in the number of such patients in the recent years. It undoubtedly puts a strain on the national exchequer. Naturally, the government has valid ground to be concerned. A responsible government should be more worried about why such a large number of patients leave the country for treatment than about the loss of foreign exchange. The reasons are not far to seek. When a very influential person of the ruling party, being a doctor himself, went to Singapore for surgery, the matter became crystal-clear. Again, the news item in *The Daily Star* of September 14 and 15, on the alleged negligence on the part of the doctors and staffs of the *Islamia Eye Hospital*, Dhaka, made the point all the more transparent. These events are enough to shake our confidence in our doctors, not because our doctors are less-qualified, but because most of these doctors give priority to earning more money than serving the cause of humanity. Money is important, no doubt, but it cannot be more important than human life.

Most of the reputed doctors are attached to government hospitals, and are allowed private practising beyond their duty period. Their preoccupation with private practice often interferes with their duties at the hospital. Many doctors have their own clinics. These clinics or the private chambers do not have enough room to accommodate the waiting patients. As

a result, the doctors will try to examine as many patients as possible, putting an extra pressure on their own mental and physical capability. Consequently, they will have less time to listen to the patients' problem carefully and diagnose effectively, not to speak of establishing sufficient rapport with these patients. Such a situation is bound to end up in wrong treatment, often endangering the patients' life. There are instances when a patient's ailment diagnosed as cancerous by our doctors, declared totally wrong by the doctors just across the border. Another important factor is the low cost of treatment in India. A middle class patient, who can afford it, goes to India for better treatment at a low cost. When one of my colleagues requiring eye surgery, contacted a leading eye surgeon at Dhaka, he was given an estimated cost of Tk 25,000.00 for the surgery. He then went to shankar netralaya, a private clinic in Madras and got it done for only Rs. 6000.00. What is amazing is that the clinic has given him a card to produce anytime in future to receive free consultation.

The shankar netralaya has become one of the leading eye clinics in the subcontinent. Its doctors update their knowledge through E-mail linked with the US hospitals. Recently, the Indian Door Darsan announced that all district level hospitals in India will be linked through E-mail with other major hospitals of the country to facilitate regular consultation amongst the doctors. Thus, while the Indian government is trying to serve its people in a better way, the Bangladesh government has failed miserably to retain what we already had, in the capital as well as in the dis-

trict headquarters, clinics are mushrooming everyday. Most of these clinics do not fulfil the basic conditions laid down by the government - they do not have well ventilated rooms, oxygen cylinder, anaesthetists and trained nurses. There is hardly any example that the government has ever cancelled the licence of any of these clinics!

There is another piece of information which many people may not know. In the mofussil areas, each doctor has paid-agents to recruit patients. These agents, in most cases rickshaw-pullers, collect the patients right from the railway station or inter-district bus terminals, and drive them straight to the chamber of a doctor or to his clinic. It clearly demonstrates the state of mind of the doctors and their competition for earning more money.

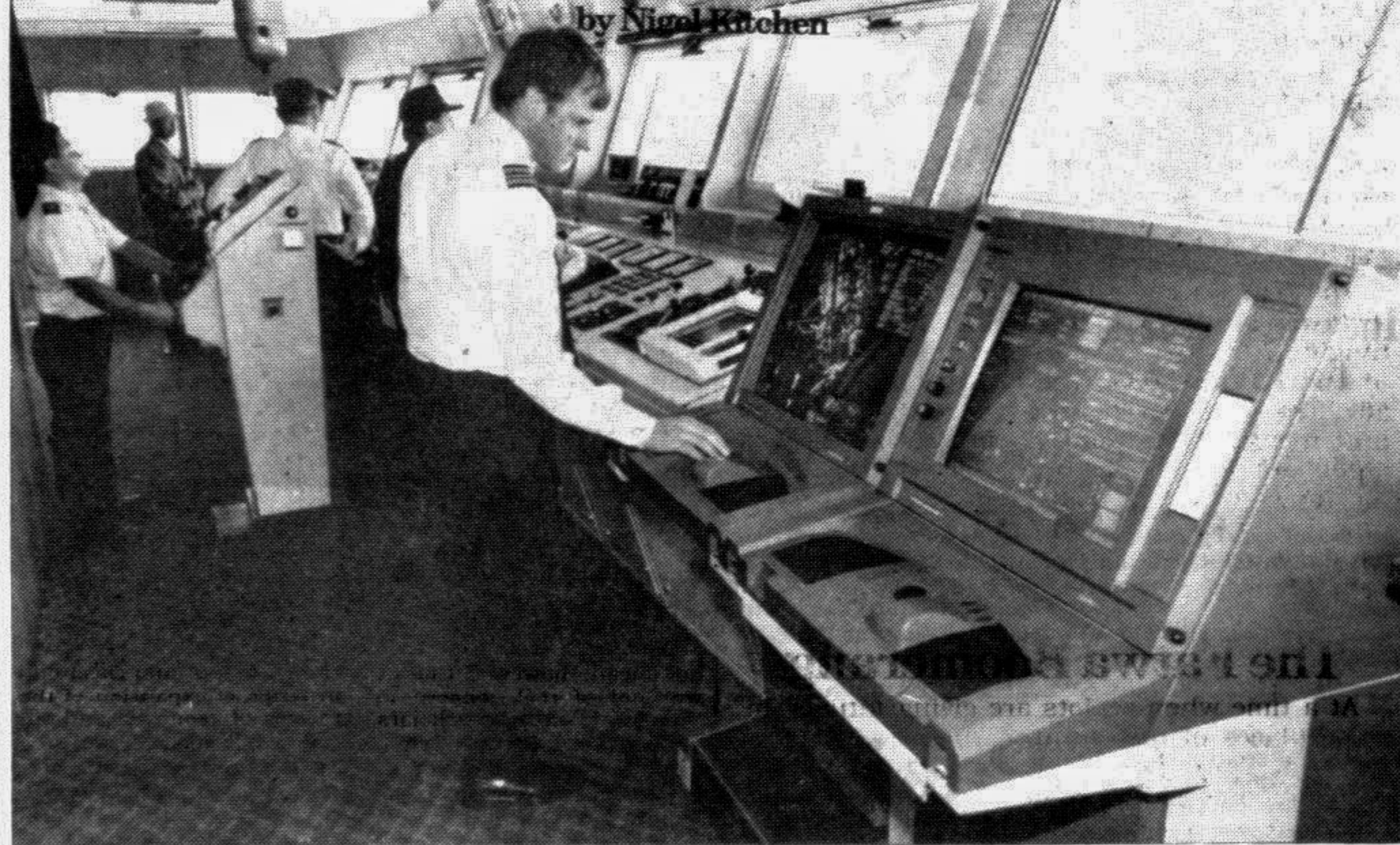
Recent unfortunate incidents at the *Islamia Eye Hospital* has exposed the appalling conditions prevailing in the sphere of health care in Bangladesh. Eyes of twelve patients, whose cataracts were operated on, were removed allegedly for fungal infection (*The Daily Star*, September 14 and 15). The hospital tried to cover up the incident of fungal infection by holding the patients responsible for their own miseries. The newspaper, on the other hand, alleged that the patients, after their surgery, were handled not by the nurses but by the sweepers! The newspaper also reported that a doctor of the same hospital 'mistakenly' removed the eye of a patient who was promised free cornea grafting. In other words, negligence or improper care on the part of the Hospital authorities may have been the prime cause of the infection which resulted in the loss of

eyes of so many patients. By any standard, it is a criminal offence and the persons responsible should be given exemplary punishment so that doctors who deal with our life should be more careful and humane from now on. They should also be reminded that the patients in Bangladesh are not like cats or dogs. If such an incident had taken place in any other country, the government would have felt duty-bound to arrest the persons involved first, then try them. Instead, our government has performed its solemn duty by constituting an inquiry committee. Our previous experiences suggest that the government usually forms an inquiry committee following any such serious incident merely to cool down the public wrath and not to punish the offenders. None will be surprised if the 'criminals' get away with such first degree criminal offence because of the interplay of various crosscurrents. Such a view emanates from the fact that the government seldom publishes the report of the inquiry committee.

In order to prevent the occurrence of such incident or any fatal negligence on the part of any doctor in future, the government should take stern action against those responsible for the mass extraction of eyes at the *Islamia Eye Hospital*. Any attempt to influence its decision by any quarter should not be entertained. In other words, politics should not be mingled with the question of life and death. Concurrently, the government should also review the entire system of medical administration and take positive action to provide basic medical facilities to the less privileged ones in the society.

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Inmarsat Establishes UK as Satcoms Centre



New navigational aids from Kelvin Hughes recently installed in the wheel-house of the QE2.

THE development and administration of maritime satellite communications (Satcoms) has had its base rooted in the UK since the establishment of Inmarsat in 1979. While Inmarsat is an internationally-owned co-operative and the satellite communications market is served by equipment manufacturers from all over the world, a large number of UK companies have played a leading role in developing Inmarsat services and pushing the boundaries of information technology (IT).

Since its formation to serve the maritime community, Inmarsat, which has its headquarters in London, has evolved to become the only provider of global mobile satellite communications for commercial and distress and safety applications, at sea, in the air and on land.

Since 1993, Inmarsat-B, a totally new satellite communications system, has become available worldwide and the then fledgling Inmarsat-M system has grown to full maturity. Meanwhile, the long-established Inmarsat-A and Inmarsat-C systems remain the mainstay of maritime communications.

Leading Player

A leading player in the GMDSS sector is Marine Electronic Supplies (MES) of Southampton, on the south coast of England. In 1992 MES supplied and installed the first full GMDSS package to the 3,435-cum-m LPG carrier, Tarquin Glen, built by Appledore Shipbuilders for Liquid Gas Shipping (LGS), of Edinburgh.

Two companies who have enjoyed success in developing marine-based IT systems to improve ship management operations and cost effectiveness of satellite communications are Marinet Systems, of Liverpool, and Rydex Industries, while the latter is headquartered in Vancouver, Canada, it recently established in London Rydex Marine Technologies (Europe) Ltd, with the UK-based ship-owning and marine-services company, Manley Hopkins, to develop dedicated systems for both large and small European ship operators.

In a major project involving some 43 container vessels, the US company SeaLand Services Inc has opted for a Rydex managed private communications network linked to the MCI Network. Rydex will be responsible for implementing the vessel - and shore-based technology and the continuing management of the entire network.

In a further highly technical project, the Norwegian chemical-tanker management company Jo Management provides control over the remote local area networks on each of its vessels. Rydex's automated message exchange (AME) is used across its fleet to integrate PC networks on-board vessels with shore computers and communications systems.

Approaching Maturity

Three factors have emerged recently to influence the pattern of Satcoms purchasing. The most visible of these is the global maritime distress and safety system (GMDSS). As the new safety system approaches maturity and increasing numbers of shipowners opt to, or are required to, offer its benefits to their sea staff, so the picture of their preferred equipment choices takes shape. It has emerged quite clearly that Inmarsat-C is universally accepted as the primary system for GMDSS compliance.

Running side-by-side with this is the emergence of ship-shore data transfer as a vital tool in ship operations. Computers in shipping are now commonplace and operators need connectivity with their ships at sea. Inmarsat-A, and its digital successor, Inmarsat-B, provide this capability. A typical new-building today has Inmarsat-A or B for operational communications and a GMDSS installation based around Inmarsat-C.

Legislative Pressure

With increasing commercial and legislative pressure for well-managed vessels, an infrastructure for effective communications is essential, according to David Favre, Rydex's international marketing director.

Rydex has operated a public managed service (Rydex SSCN) for about 18 months, and this has proved popular with both companies with small fleets and larger companies that use e-mail networks.

Integrated communications are becoming a priority

for the marine community. Led by ship management companies, the industry requirements for management information are pushing the message handling suppliers to new levels of software sophistication.

The demand is for information to be delivered to office desks throughout the world, linking into different public networks and company office mail systems and all at the lowest cost.

Office Network

At Liverpool-based Marinet Systems this demand is being met by a recently developed system to allow one owner's fleet, managed by two separate companies on different continents, to be linked together in an office network. The company claims that such a level of integration would not have been possible two years ago.

Swedish tanker owner Argonaut AB now has a communications network incorporating all its fleet, with half its tankers being managed by Hong Kong-based Wallem Ship Management, and the other half by the UK company, Uglund Bors. All the ships are equipped with Inmarsat A systems, but similar links could be effected with one of the newer B or M Inmarsat terminals, or even a cellular phone system with the appropriate modem.

Using Marinet communications software, the eight Argonaut tankers are now part of an integrated system linking the ships to the worldwide offices of the owning company and the two ship management companies.

Ship-to-shore satellite transmissions from an Uglund-managed ship are sent to a remote gateway in Marinet's Liverpool headquarters for onward transmission. This can be forwarded in three different ways: as a cc - Mail message to Argonaut's Stockholm headquarters; as a telex to Uglund's UK office; or on a 4,400 public network to wherever in the world the message is required.

Transmission Possibilities

For a Wallem-managed ship the onward transmission possibilities are different as the satellite message is first sent into AT & T's Easilink gateway in Hong Kong. From there it can be relayed either



to Argonaut by fax or telex; to Wallem over the company's e-mail system; or over X.400 global networks to anywhere in the world, including other ships.

The market for the supply of communications services is increasingly volatile, says Haydn Jones, ABB Nera Ltd's marine systems manager. He said that communications packages are varying all the time and that ship owners were not always aware of what packages were available.

As an aid, ABB has developed a program, called TM 2000, for providing guidance to ship owners on least-cost trafficking, which works on any IBM-compatible PC. The program, which ABB believes will improve the ability of ship owners to influence on board financial control and shore-based management of costs, also provides a mechanism for billing and yields an accurate picture of communications costs.

Mr Jones said that e-mail is increasing in importance as it takes over from telex, and that ABB was intending to provide e-Mail transfer of TM 2000 radio traffic accounting.

ABB's Inmarsat B equipment, Saturn Bm, is being targeted at high-volume communications users such as cruise and passenger ships as well as the commercial sector. The company says that owners installing Inmarsat equipment should take account of the fact that by using B they can reduce call charges by up to 50% over A.

It believes that those considering the use of Inmarsat M should be aware that call costs for fax and data can be up to 75% lower using B.

ABB's complete range of Inmarsat A, B, C and M equipment is used on the P & O's cruise flagship, Oriana, together with GMDSS radio equipment, including VHF and HF transceivers with DSC.

Kelvin Hughes recently supplied advanced navigational equipment for installation in the wheelhouse and chartroom of Cunard's flagship, QE2. The range of integrated electronic systems included radars, chart displays and plotting tables.

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