

Health Service: Preparing for Emergency

by Dr A K M Kafiluddin

There is every reason to believe that disasters will remain with us. The frequency of disasters has nearly quadrupled in Bangladesh during the last three decades and some scientists attribute it to the continuous ecological and environmental degradation on the global scale.

During the past decade (1987-1996), approximately 170,000 people had been killed by disaster-related injuries in Bangladesh. This is equivalent to an annual average of 17,000 people being killed every year due to natural disasters in Bangladesh. On an average, the country faces a major natural hazard once every second year. Various scientific studies have shown that every year, there are some eighty tropical cyclones occurring around the globe, out of which about four (roughly 5 per cent) form in the Bay of Bengal bordering Bangladesh on its southern coast.

The per capita GNP lost due to natural disasters is estimated to be 20 times greater in the developing countries including Bangladesh while the damage to infrastructure and livelihood may cause a setback for economic and social development programmes amounting to many years.

Disasters also disrupt services essential for human survival like shelter, water supply, food stocks, distribution systems and sanitation. Epidemic diseases more deaths than cyclone. Disaster also causes higher incidence of psychosocial disorders including disaster syndrome in Bangladesh. People of Bangladesh are vul-

nerable to the effects of floods and drought because they are forced to live on marginal lands, they are poor, they are excluded from welfare and education services and political process of a country. Population growth is also a major factor in increasing vulnerability to disaster.

Environmental degradation is becoming an ever greater threat to the future of children, environmental destruction in the form of deforestation, overgrazing, pollution and global warming, appear to be responsible for the increased incidence of droughts and floods in various parts of the world including Bangladesh.

From the facts described above it is evident that there should be a health sector in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to anticipate the impact on health on potential emergency situations and initiate predisaster measures to provide timely, adequate and appropriate response.

The regional director WHO/SEARO said that in the case of Bangladesh, advanced preparedness contributed much to the success of its response as was evident during the recent tornado, floods and cyclone. The creation of an emergency

management reporting mechanism within the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare; health sector linkages with the national emergency management system, emergency buffer stock and inter-agency collaboration in emergency management are some of the important features of the ongoing Bangladesh emergency and disaster project in the health sector.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare is committed to institutionalise the emergency preparedness programme for greater sustainability. A development project to establish the Bangladesh Centre for Health Emergency Preparedness and response under the ministry with an investment cost of approximately \$7.5 million is awaiting final approval by the government.

Bangladesh also attaches importance to the Yokohama strategy and the plan of action for a safer world that resulted following the world conference on natural disaster reduction held in Japan in 1994.

Yokohama strategy and plan of action provided guidelines for natural disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation which call for more local training, better information flows

and stronger linkage between relief and development programme.

The followings are the broad objectives of the BHCHEPR:

- (i) To reduce vulnerability by creating awareness in the country;
- (ii) To improve the rapid response capability in the fields of health, medical and surgical care;
- (iii) To contain outbreaks, provide relief and arrange for rehabilitation;
- (iv) To undertake applied research for better monitoring and to improve management practices;
- (v) To strengthen the capacity of the people of Bangladesh to cope with natural disaster;
- (vi) To reduce the vulnerability of women, children and old people to disaster;
- (vii) To empower the community to identify their own problems and solve them by themselves;
- (viii) To help to deal with trauma with rapidity;
- (ix) To provide effective approaches to post-disaster rehabilitation;
- (x) To prevent uprooting people from their homes and communities; and
- (xi) To strengthen the vision world-wide to end deaths from famine, starvation and nutritional deficiency diseases in the community of the present decade.

The activities of the proposed centre would be to: (i) Undertake pre-disaster prepared-

ness programme and training in identified vulnerable areas; (ii) Organise co-ordinated health, medical and surgical response in areas affected by disaster; (iii) Conduct epidemiological surveillance and take immediate steps to contain any outbreaks; (iv) Collect necessary and useful data/information and maintain linkages with other organisations working in the health sector; (v) Establish a library with database information system to support research activities; (vi) According to world Summit of Social Development, the political commitment is to safe-guard the achievement of social development through disaster reduction measures.

The Government of Bangladesh by formulating a health sector emergency preparedness programme which reflects a major shift from an ad hoc response and relief mechanism to a well-integrated set of health preparedness interventions will remove Donor's fatigue by changing today's piecemeal disaster management style. The impact of emergency relief is short-lived, it increases dependence and doesn't ensure overall development of a country. Whereas with far lesser amount of investment, far-reaching impacts and developmental goals can be achieved if these investments can be utilised during normal period for designing appropriate technology for vulnerability reduction, disaster prevention and mitigation programmes of the country.

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Subcontinent's Cyclones

Lalit K. Jha writes from New Delhi

Of all the countries surrounding the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh suffers most from storm surges. The main factors are shallow coastal water, convergence of the Bay and high astronomical tides.

THOUGH only seven per cent of total cyclones in the world occur in the Indian subcontinent, they are much more disastrous than at other places.

In the subcontinent, India alone has a 7,516 km coastline and nine of its 25 states have a seafront.

Besides inaccurate predictions, a study says, the reasons for massive and regular destruction in the subcontinent are the low lands along the eastern coast of Bay of Bengal and considerably low-lying huge deltas such as the Gangetic and Irrawaddy deltas.

Cyclones in the subcontinent occur more during the months of May, June, October and November," says Professor S.K. Dube, head of the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi.

"Out of these four months, the devastation is more in the months of October and November," Dube added.

Referring to the recent cyclone in the western Indian state of Gujarat, which killed thousands of people and destroyed properties worth millions of dollars, Dube said it was part of the occasional destructive cyclones formed in the Arabian Sea.

On an average, about five to six tropical cyclones form in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea every year, of which

two to three may be severe. More cyclones occur in the Bay of Bengal than the Arabian Sea and they cause greater destruction. "The ratio is 4:1," Dube said.

The scientists have warned that the risk is only going to increase in the future. More people will be exposed to severe storm surges because of increase in population densities through the combined effect of natural population increase and loss of coastal zone due to the rising sea-level.

Storm surges are extremely serious hazards along the east coast of India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

Dube worked with other scientists, including A.D. Rao and P.C. Sinha of the IIT, T.S. Murty of the National Tidal Facility, Australia and N. Bahulayan of the National Institute of Oceanography, Goa, on a paper titled *Storm Surges in the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea: The Problem and its Predictions*. In the study, the experts provide an overview of cyclones occurring in the subcontinent.

Of all the countries surrounding the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh suffers most from storm surges. The main factors are shallow coastal water, convergence of the Bay and high astronomical tides. The problem is compounded by thickly populated low-lying islands, favourable cyclone track and innumerable inlets including the world's largest river system (Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghala).

Between year 1800 and 1996, Bangladesh witnessed about 40 devastating cyclones. The cyclone of November 1970, which claimed more than 300,000 lives, was recorded as the dead-

liest in Bangladesh, the study said.

In South Asia, cyclonic disaster cause heavy loss of life and property, damage to the coastal structure and agriculture which lead to huge economic losses every year. This makes real-time monitoring and warnings of storm surges that much more critical, says the study.

In India some coastal strips are more vulnerable to tropical cyclones, the study says. Among the most susceptible ones are 24 Paraganas, Midnapore and Cuttack on the eastern coast, and Junagarh, Kutch, Ernakulam and Jamnagar on the west.

The scientists have argued for an action plan to educate people living in those areas giving practical training about how to reduce the damage and devising ingenious ways to cope with the consequences.

"The destruction could be reduced if the surge is predicted at least 24 hours in advance," Dube told IANS. "The prediction should clearly distinguish between the series cyclones and those likely to cause little harm as people cannot be evacuated for every storm."

According to Dube, the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences has developed a real storm-surge prediction system.

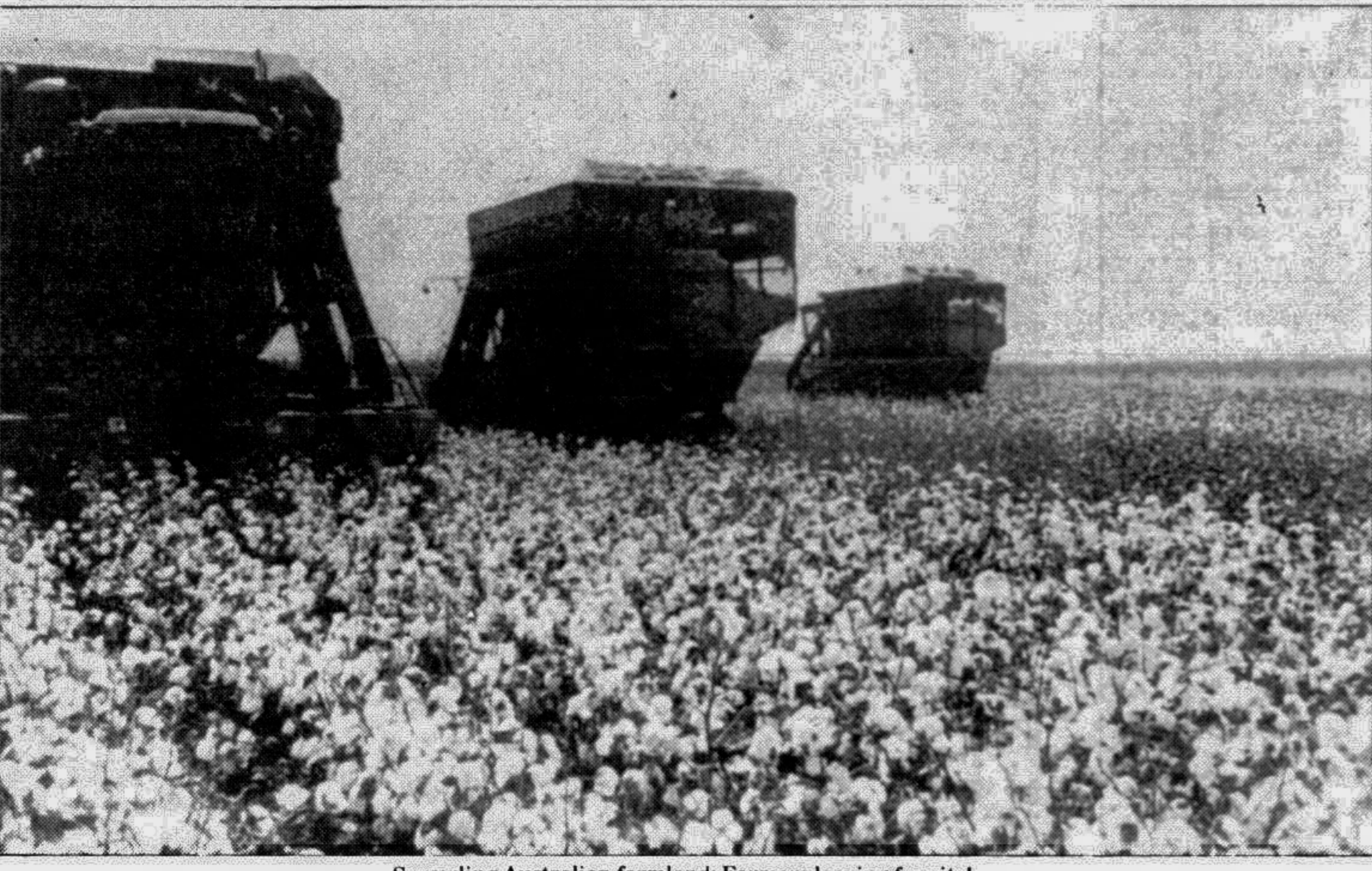
The scientists say that the issue of increase in sea-level as a consequence of climatic warming and greenhouse effect is of grave concern to Bangladesh. "The projected worldwide rise of sea-level during the next 100 years will be particularly hard-felt in the low-lying regions of West Bengal in India and Bangladesh," they warn.

— IANS

Rise of Right-wing Party: Alarming Trend in Australia

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

It is not unusual for a right wing party to emerge in a democratic country. France's National Front, Austria's Freedom Party, Denmark's Danish People's Party, Italy's Northern League, Czech Republic's Republic Party, late Enoch Powell's Party in Britain and the perennial Presidential challenger Pat Buchanan of the US are some of the instances in point. These parties come and go like a "comet", creating unnecessary divisions for a time in society.



Sprawling Australian farmland: Farmers leaving for city!

statements on the Aboriginal community in Australia. This expulsion from the Liberal Party made her a martyr in the constituency and she got elected. Subsequently, she formed her "One Nation" Party in late 1996.

The One Nation Party (often called by critics "Divided Nation Party") has declared policies of simple solutions for the complex ills of the society and economy, such as high unemployment among youths and elderly people (three times above the national average of a little over 8%) drug addiction, increased taxes, low commodity prices including gold, adverse effects of the Asian crisis on Australian exports, insecurity of the wheat and sheep farmers emanating from an increasing competition from a global economy, manufacturing industries' economic rationalisation and technology.

The policies of One Nation Party include halting of immigration to zero levels (Australia's population stands at 20 million), protectionism of Australian goods with high tariffs, scrapping of restrictions on gun-laws (a major vote-grabbing item from rural people), prohibition of acquisition of Australian business or enterprise by foreign investors, opening of Government Trust banks with abnormally low 2% interest, introduction of national service for youths, abolition of land rights of the Aboriginal people and non-compliance with the UN Declarations & Multilateral Treaties.

Prior to the Queensland election, Ms. Hanson's statements on the pork industry put Prime Minister Howard on the defensive for allowing Canadian pork flooding Australian markets to the detriment of Australian pork producers (although Australia's balance of trade with Canada is in favour of Australia) and this issue made her a champion for the pork traders and farmers.

The One Nation Party also blamed the high migration rate in Australia for the present high rate unemployment. Australia has a high current account deficit and high foreign

debt levels, though the present government was able to produce a surplus budget, low inflation (less than 2%) and low interest rates (5%).

Why is One Nation Party attractive to some farmers in the rural areas?

In the past the farmers and rural people had unequal power to influence the policies of the government. The modern technology, opening up of foreign goods in Australian markets under the terms of World Trade Organisation and manufacturing and computer industries have overtaken and left behind wheat and sheep farmers in the rural areas. The myth that Australia would collapse without wool and wheat has exploded.

Another change in the rural areas is that the children of the farmers are not interested in continuing hard manual work of farming and sheep rearing. They are moving to the cities for white-collar jobs. As a result, their once thriving towns have become empty shells from where the infrastructure and services (post office, schools and banks) gradually disappear.

Worst of all the farmers have lost their political power and clout. Now Ms. Hanson has promised a return to the values and confidence of the "glory" days. A section of farmers have fallen to the empty and unattainable promises of Ms. Hanson who says they can go back to an era that began to disintegrate nearly 50 years ago. One Nation Party has tapped into the mood of a section of rural voters who do not fully realise that the dynamics of world economy have changed forever and it cannot be turned back to the 1950s.

The populist and quick-fix solutions advocated by Ms. Hanson naturally attract some sections of the rural people who are frustrated with their increasing diminution of income and their perceived neglect by the major parties. During hard times, they need scapegoats and Ms. Hanson has cleverly created some culprits and pointed her fingers to the Asians and

Aboriginal people and suggests in the interests of "patriotism" that "we need an Australia for Australians".

Furthermore, although the Asian (mainly from South East Asia and North Asia) population is less than 2 per cent in Australia, Ms. Hanson has tapped into this perceived threat by suggesting that Australia is being "swamped" by Asians and under the danger of becoming "Asianised". Most of the people in the farm lands wish to go back to their earlier days when there was full employment and the white-policy of Australia kept the Asians away from migrating to this country and "taking their jobs".

The recent Australian High Court decision that the pastoral leases by the farmers do not extinguish native title claim by the Aboriginal community was perceived by the farmers a threat to their farm and grazing lands. Ms. Hanson has fueled more support for herself by deliberately declaring that "the farmers are going to lose their lands to Aboriginal people." Another major concern of the rural areas is strict gun-control laws which Hanson has cleverly made an issue and supported liberalization of gun-control laws. She claims to speak for a majority of the mainstream Australians and claims that her party will address the problems of Australia, neglected by the major parties.

One Nation Party leaders and supporters appear to have conveniently forgotten that Australian exports to Asia constitute about 62 per cent since Europe has become a fortress for Australian goods. The irony is that "One Nation" party "for all Australians" is in fact dividing the nation. Ms. Hanson's panacea for the ills of the society with policies that are divisive, racist, economically unsound and un-Australian (fairness and justice to all).

Role of Major Parties

The major political parties considered the formation of One Nation Party as a mere passing phase—a flash in the

pan. They did not take it seriously, and felt that a party with such obsolete and absurd ideologies will not be able to obtain support from the people. Therefore, they did not bother creating any strategies to convince the voters that their policies do not provide any solutions to the issues confronted by Australia and other industrialized countries. They failed to point out that the policies of One Nation Party will lead to a severe economic contraction and recession with dire adverse consequences on the farmer's income, and exports, tourism, admission of foreign students in Australian Universities and foreign investment would directly suffer because of the corrosive, quick-fix solutions touted by the One Nation Party.

The major blame appears to rest on Prime Minister Howard. When Ms. Pauline Hanson made her infamous speech in the Federal Parliament in September 1996 attacking "the Asians", Mr. Howard allowed it under the pretext of "freedom of speech". He ignored the statements made by Ms. Hanson inside and outside Parliament thinking that any attack on her would give prominence to Ms. Hanson. Although, the Labour Party leader Kim Beazley attacked her economic policies, he avoided the immigration issue.

The equivocation by the Prime Minister, some observers believe, gave Ms. Hanson an opportunity to galvanize her party. Though Mr. Howard now attacks Ms. Hanson and her policies "as deranged and simplistic solutions", observers feel that it is now too late and too little. The damage that has been inflicted on Mr. Howard's party in Queensland may even destroy his chances of re-election as Prime Minister at the forthcoming election.

The grumbings about Prime Minister Howard's political management are loud and clear. The success of One Nation Party has led many Liberal Party leaders to criticise publicly the stance taken by their leader. Many of the enlightened voters of the Liberal Party are annoyed with Mr. Howard and it is

Conclusion

It is not unusual for a right wing party to emerge in a democratic country. France's National Front, Austria's Freedom Party, Denmark's Danish People's Party, Italy's Northern League, Czech Republic's Republic Party, late Enoch Powell's Party in Britain and the perennial Presidential challenger Pat Buchanan of the US are some of the instances in point. These parties come and go like a "comet", creating unnecessary divisions for a time in society. Fortunately one thing common is that they constitute a tiny minority.

One should not ignore the fact that the recent Queensland results in Australia demonstrate that 75-80% did not vote for the One Nation Party. This implies that Australians by an overwhelming majority are not racist, support multiculturalism and openness with other countries (despite the emphasis on Pauline Hanson by the international media).

One can observe this openness and tolerance in Australia, where there are diverse people being in harmony, where all kinds of ordinary delights and cultural functions from Asia and the Middle East and other parts of the world are being enjoyed by all Australians. A majority of Australians believe immigration is beneficial and opens up Australian society. In recent times, former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser publicly said: "We can, more than anything else, identify ourselves with Asia more fully by opening the door more widely to those who would prefer to live here."

Furthermore, Australia is essentially a land of immigrants except the Aboriginal community. Both the major parties are deeply committed to a non-discriminatory immigration programme and multiculturalism. The former Liberal Party leader Dr. John Hewson (1990-95) has summed up in one sentence the attitude of the overwhelming majority of Australians when he said: "Pauline Hanson brings out the worst in some Australians. He is right."

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The Wig and the Walkman Shortcut to Exam Success!

The student had connected the earphone to a walkman hidden in a belt-bag concealed under his shirt. The walkman played a cassette with recordings from the textbook on ancient Indian history at slow speed.

AN undergraduate history student here has created a history of sorts in the use of unfair means in examination.

In a hi-tech attempt to pass the annual examination, which he couldn't do in two previous attempts, the student used an earphone concealed under a wig, newspapers have reported.

The student had connected the earphone to a walkman hidden in a belt-bag concealed under his shirt. The walkman played a cassette with recordings from the textbook on ancient Indian history at slow speed. The system was apparently used to answer the questions during the annual examination, papers said.

The student, from Delhi University's Kirori Mal College, was caught by the vigilant principal, Bhim Sen Singh. The principal, on a routine check, was apparently surprised with the student's dishevelled hair.

"Why have you grown your hair so long?" a curious Singh asked the student.

As the principal touched his long and dishevelled hair, he wig came off in his hands. It left the principal bewildered, and the student petrified, newspapers said.

It was a chance discovery

and I was quite shocked," the principal was quoted as saying. The earphone and walkman were seized. The student was later allowed to answer questions on a separate answersheet as he had reportedly threatened to commit suicide.

The issue is now being examined by a disciplinary committee of the university's examination branch, university officials said. The committee would match the answers written with those recorded in the seized cassette.

Use of illegal means during the examinations has been a common phenomenon throughout the world, with students always trying innovative methods to pass examination without studying. Several state governments have even tried to pass legislations providing for strict punishment to erring students.

In the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government has introduced legislation under which a student caught using unfair means can be put behind bars. As a result of the strict legislation, the success rate of students in the state has reduced dramatically.

— India Abroad News Service

And Justice for All

The draft statute presented in the just concluded United Nations meet in Rome on the establishment of an International Court of Justice (ICC), has given great thought to cases of violence against children and women. In the last two decades two million children have been killed in conflict; more than 4.5 million have been disabled; more than 30 million uprooted from their homes; more than 10 million have been gravely traumatised psychologically; more than one million have been made orphans or lost contact with their parents.

The draft statute states that the ICC should take measures to protect the privacy, physical and psychological well-being of

victims' and witnesses, especially in cases of gender-related violence. It stresses the need to destroy the notion that rape and gender-related violence against women of particular communities, in times of conflict, is an inevitable, unfortunate by-product and recognise it for what it is — a horrifying military strategy as evidenced recently in Rwanda and Bosnia.

The statute further lays stress on the need to include women in investigative teams because experience shows that women who have been sexually assaulted feel less inhibited when talking to women. The draft statute will remain open for signature in New York until December 31, 2000. (— WFS/News Network)

Pauline Hanson and Her One Nation Party

Ms. Hanson ran a fish and chip shop in Ipswich town in Queensland and became a Councillor in a local Council. Thereafter she sought nomination from the Liberal Party (Conservative Party) to be a candidate for the Federal parliamentary seat in Oxley. Ms. Hanson was nominated by the Liberal Party as a candidate from Oxley, a constituency in Queensland at the federal election in March 1996. A few weeks prior to the election, she was expelled from the Liberal Party because of her racist

