

Air-Pollution in Dhaka City Civil Society Initiatives Required

by Dwijen Mallick

The civil society groups could press the government departments and agencies to enforce the rules and regulations and at the same time they could campaign for raising awareness among the drivers and the owners of vehicles to abide by the rules.

DHAKA City is beset with a number of socio-environmental problems. Of them, increasing air pollution is the worst problem posing a serious health threat to the city dwellers. The deteriorating air quality in city is a result of rise in population, unplanned industrial activities and unprecedented growth of motorized vehicles.

In Dhaka city, the main contributor of air pollution is the transport sector followed by industrial units, garbage and other biomass burning by the slum dwellers and burning of coal and wood by the large number of brick fields in and around the city.

The five major primary pollutants of air including suspended particulate matters (SPM), sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, account for more than 90 per cent of air pollution in the city. The concentrations of some of primary pollutants in the air of Dhaka are very high. Automobile emissions, particularly unburned carbon, smoke, soot, fumes etc., constitute particulate in air. Unburned hydrocarbons and their photochemical reactions involving oxides of nitrogen produce smog.

The emission of carbon monoxide is dependent on operating mode with pick emission at the idling speed. The sulfur dioxide in the air comes from burning of fossil fuel particularly from industries and power generation. Burning of sulfur containing fuel in automobiles is a significant source of Sox.

Further, a major source of emission of nitrogen oxides is also the exhaust from motorized vehicles. The primary emission sources of hydrocarbon include incomplete combustion of fossil fuels, evaporation losses from engines and storage areas.

The auto-rickshaws, tempos, buses, minibuses and trucks discharge excessive amount of unburned carbon in the air. It has been reported that at present about 160,000 motorized vehi-

cles operate in Dhaka metropolitan area which include 80,000 cars, 40,000 auto-rickshaws, 16,000 trucks, 1,500 buses and 22,500 other vehicles.

The number of vehicle is increasing day by day. There are also a good number of vehicles coming in and going out from the city in different parts of the country everyday. Further, most of the newly registered vehicles are reconditioned. The poorly maintained vehicles including highly polluting auto-rickshaws and tempos in the city without effective exhaust control have aggravated the situation making the ambient air of Dhaka city extremely polluted and deprived the city dwellers of breathing in fresh air. Beside the vehicular emission, the effluent of different industrial establishments and waste dumping stations, which are poorly maintained and controlled, also pollute air of the city.

The Department of Environment (DoE) conducted few studies on air quality in recent time and found that there are high level concentrations of SPM and other pollutants in the air of the city. The available data show that Farmgate area has the highest concentration of SPM followed by Tejgaon residential area while Agargaon residential area has the lowest concentration of SPM. On the other hand, air in the Tejgaon industrial area has greater amount of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen than that of both Farmgate and Agargaon. Lead is another element of air pollution in Dhaka city. Farmgate area has the highest concentration of that deadliest pollutant followed by Tejgaon and Lalmitia, another residential area of the city.

It was also found that the

volume of traffic movement mainly regulates the air pollution in Dhaka city. The concentration of pollution in the air varies between peak hours and off-peak hours. It was found that the maximum concentration occurs at peak hour at about 2 pm, the concentration falls during 4 pm and again increases at about 5 pm.

The increasing air pollution caused by vehicular emission, industrial activities, waste generation, burning of other things etc., affects human health and also damages the properties of natural resources. The pollutants enter into the body through throat and nasal cavities and pass to the lungs which are either absorbed into the blood stream or move out of the lungs by cilia into the throat. The particulate cause respiratory diseases and damages to the material plants. Fine particles of lead compounds emitted by petrol engines using leaded fuel cause lead intoxication and mental retardation in children. The oxides of nitrogen and sulfur are also harmful to human health. The high level of air pollution from vehicles has already caused different lung-related diseases such as headaches, nausea, irritation of eyes, risks of miscarriage etc. to innumerable city dwellers.

Pollution control and improvement of city environment in a growing city like Dhaka is a huge task. Only the government departments cannot undertake the challenge. The city dwellers, particularly the organized civil society groups and the NGO community should come forward primarily to keep pressure against any kind of pollution and raise public awareness among the concerned people. The civil society groups can also press the government to formulate and enforce necessary policy for regulations

and thus they could help control of air quality in the city.

A good news is that a roundtable discussion on 'Improving Air Quality in Dhaka City: Citizen's Initiatives' was held at the National Press Club in Dhaka recently. It was organized jointly by the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) and POROSH.

The main objectives of the roundtable was to discuss the degrading status of air quality in the city, its effects on human health and eco-systems and finally, to develop a set of recommendations to initiate immediate actions by the concerned agencies and different stakeholder including civil society groups for improving the quality of air in the city. The function was attended and addressed by a group of professionals, representatives from different civil society groups, government officials, academics, researchers and development partners.

After having a lively discussion, the meeting came with a set of recommendations for action for both government and civil society groups. The major recommendation include the following:

- Meaningful coordination among the related government departments, agencies and people to establish and enhance to reduce the air pollution in the city.
- All two-stroke type engine vehicles must be gradually phased out with offering alternative job facilities to the vehicle drivers. All old, defective and obsolete engine vehicles emitting black smokes must be removed from the road or drastic action should be taken if rectification, replacement or removal is

- not done by the owners of the vehicles;
- All vehicle drivers must be given basic lessons on air quality and environment when learning driving. Examination on driving must be taken to know their attaining performance/knowledge on these. The NGOs and civil society groups could motivate the drivers and owners and could arrange training and workshop to this end;
- There must be continuous study to ascertain the quantity of harmful oxide substances present in the air and undertaking projects/steps for their removal always at the point of origin or use;
- Monitoring stations to assess air quality quantitatively, or qualitatively must be installed at points of crowding of vehicles or people like points at Mahakhali, Farmgate, Sonargaon area, Fulbaria bus stand, Jatrabari bus stand, Gabtali, Mog Bazar and like such places;
- Major polluters like factories, industries must be asked to pay for air pollution or fine might be imposed on them and that resources could be re-allocated for planting trees and environment friendly treatment of wastes;
- City cleaning programme must be geared up. All lakes of Dhaka city must be kept clean. Civil society could play vital role in this field;
- Trees are to be planted along the city streets, high ways and in the open places of the city and their proper growth and protection must be ensured at all cost. City dwellers must be encouraged to plant trees or supplied with saplings free of cost. The citizen groups could play important role in this field, and;
- Finally and most importantly, the civil society groups could press the government departments and agencies to enforce the rules and regulations and at the same time they could campaign for raising awareness among the drivers and the owners of the vehicle to abide by the rules and thus they could improve the deteriorating situation.

—BCAS Feature

Green Illusion

by Klemens Ludwig

Germany is swamped in a controversy about a study which says sustainable development can be only achieved only when the consumption of resources is reduced and the relations between the North and the South are put on a more equal level.

IN October 1995, a study about the future of the industrialised world created a great deal of interest. The publishers of the book were the church-based relief association, Misereor, and the environment protection group Bund. These organisations do not normally issue public statements. However, making a change from their normal position, they asked the Wuppertal Institute for climate, environment and energy to do a study on how to extend hospitality to all the people on the planet without jeopardising the natural resource base for subsequent generations.

The fundamental thesis of the study is, that man has to regulate his consumption of natural resources and improve his energy use in order to establish a sustainable relationship with nature. At the same time, man will have to create an equitable relationship between the countries of the North and the South. In the long run, only these two aspects can guarantee sustainable development for the whole world.

In German-speaking areas, the proposals gained a lot of attention and provoked controversial discussions. English and Italian translations have already been completed. The English translation, 'Greening the North: A post-industrial Blueprint for Ecology and Equity' is available in many industrialised and developing countries.

Hundreds of reviews, comments and articles on the study were published in leading newspapers and magazines, as well as many institutions in Germany. The reactions ranged from enthusiastic support to harsh rejection. In the newspapers, the criticism was mainly positive, though many journalists emphasised that the study does not take the economy into consideration in the decision-making process.

Theoretically, everybody agrees that ecology is important, but when it comes to practical steps, many people do not know what to do. The highlight of this study is that it not only argues at the theoretical level, but shows how the vision of sustainable development can become a reality. 'Greening the North' brings ecology and justice together for the South.

The negative criticism comes from two different points of views. Traditional leftists

and feminists reject the study, although the motives and arguments are completely different. Research institutes closely linked with companies or economic scientists as well as traditional trade unionists claim, that economic growth is the key to progress.

They are deeply convinced that men have 'dominion over the earth...' and allege that the study looks at the world from the point of view of nature.

Humankind, they say, is much more than nature. The specific task of people on Earth is, to harmonise economy, social complexity and ecology. They feel that they have good reasons to be optimistic about the future, while the study shows a lack of confidence in the ability of people to solve problems.

Instead of trusting the common sense and the free-will of the people to initiate the changes, the critics voice danger over experts deciding on what people should consume. This is indeed a very sensitive issue within the German society. When a member of Parliament of the Green Party, Halo Suitold, recently demanded a restriction of flights in order to reduce carbon dioxide emission, she was heavily criticised, even by her own party members.

'We miss one decisive word in the whole study, the word 'capitalism'. This is the essence of a statement issued by the Development Policy Action Groups (BUKO). From a leftist position, this reflects the strongest argument against the study, claiming that the Wuppertal Institute provides solutions only within the capitalist framework which is directly responsible for the problem. It does not raise the question of political and economical power within the country as well as the international community. Institutions like the World Trade Organisation or General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs are not questioned.

Since the study does not go to the root of the problems, the critics claim that the social and economical dimensions that accompany the necessary changes are completely left out. In the eyes of the Development Policy Action Groups, what the study lacks is not the result of the author's naivete, but fundamental change.

The criticism of the feminists is quite similar. Without

analysing the situation of women within a patriarchal society, the consequences of the study mainly affect the everyday life of the women. Most of the concrete proposals are a step back for many women, the critics argue. The study gives men progressive arguments to ban women, since all that women have achieved is more time and mobility as a result of throw-away products and fast food, a second car, etc. that can be no longer accepted, according to the demands of sustainable development. This dilemma cannot be solved without questioning the patriarchal society.

Under the present situation, autonomy of women is superior to ecology, feminists say. They even claim to be ecologists. The more autonomy individuals have, the argument goes, the less repressive is the society.

Representatives from Christian organisations, like the German Catholic Youth (BDKJ) also criticised the study as it does not analyse the economical system which leads to the destruction of the environment.

Another basic point of criticism brought forward mainly by social scientists is that the study covers the well educated middle-class, but provides no concept for the growing number of unemployed and poor people in the North. For these people, survival is the problem, not sustainable development.

The Wuppertal Institute is very open to the criticism. The authors emphasise that they do not have final solutions, but want to be part of a development which has been initiated by the study. The way to a sustainable economy is long. In response to the criticism the authors make it clear that they don't believe in political pressure in order to change the habits of the people.

Instead, they want to convince people and open their eyes. The authors openly admit that they do not pay enough attention to women's questions, the growing number of poor people and the social and economic dimensions of the changes. But they are not willing to give up the basic position — that sustainable development can only be achieved when the consumption of resources can be reduced and the relations between the North and the South can be put on a more equal level.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

Human Toll of Nuke Tests — a Lesson for South Asia

Beena Sarwar writes from Hiroshima, Japan

KAZAKHSTAN is full of sick children," said women's rights and peace activist Urukuz Ileyeva, showing paintings by children of beautiful green fields and valleys.

"This is our land, once so clean and pure — and now full of environmental hazards," added Ileyeva, who is from Almaty in Kazakhstan.

The Semipalatinsk Polygon, the nuclear test site there, was closed in 1989. But the vast, sparsely populated Kazakh steppe, which has 17 million people in an area of 2.7 sq m, has seen more than 400 test explosions above, on and underground between 1949 and 1989.

At an anti-nuclear conference organised by the Japanese NGO Gensuikyoku here recently, Russian and Kazakh experts made it clear why they found South Asia's nuclear tests in May so disturbing.

"We are still suffering from the radiation effects of tests done by China and Russia," explained Tatiana Leschenko, an eye specialist who is also president of the Union of Nuclear Test Victims in Barnaul, capital of Russia's Altay region bordering Kazakhstan and China.

"We have suffered from the Semipalatinsk test site. We cannot be indifferent to these latest tests by India and Pakistan who have many other problems to solve," she added.

Her husband Alexander Leschenko, a former Soviet army officer, joined the anti-nuclear movement in 1989 while still in service. "I knew about the problems of my old army men who served on the Semipalatinsk test site, and illnesses of their children."

He joined the internal anti-nuclear movement known as Nevada-Semipalatinsk, and then the Union of Nuclear Test Victims which lobbied for a law to entitle officers and sol-

diers in Altay with radiation illnesses to medical compensation and care.

Altay and Kazakhstan are affected by the operation of the Semipalatinsk test site in Kazakhstan and the Labnor site in China. Radiation has hurt agriculture near these areas, say activists.

Studies show an unusually high ratio of people there with cancers and other soft-tissue diseases, as well as nervous system imbalances, neoplasms and congenital abnormality.

Maidan Abishev, president of the Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement, talks about Renata Ismailova, a bright-eyed, smiling 17-year-old who is just 55 cm tall because of exposure to radiation while in her mother's womb.

Japanese activist Shunji Tsuboi, who led an 18-member team to Kazakhstan in May to study nuclear test damage there, says between 1.2 to 1.5 million people have been affected by them.

The group divided into two, one for Semipalatinsk near the Russian border, and the other for Zharkent near the Chinese one. The team based itself in Kurchatov, a secret city constructed 150 km from Semipalatinsk for the purpose of keeping military secrets on nuclear testing.

Testified Tsuboi: "We saw the shocking ruins where the first nuclear test explosion took place, in 1949. People think that the A-Bomb Dome in Hiroshima City is the only existing testimony to the damage caused by nuclear weapons."

"They should see the Polygon ruins, which have been exposed to broad daylight. A mountain blow up, its remains lying around — it looked like a scene from hell. I am not exaggerating," Tsuboi added.

"And as we interviewed the village people at schools, hospitals, institutes, we learnt of the terrible consequences of the nuclear tests which affected virtually everyone in the vicinity of the Polygon," the activist continued.

One activist, Maidan Abishev, called radiation-related illnesses and deaths as genocide of the people of Kazakhstan.

Across the globe, in what was once the former Soviet Union's arch enemy, the effects of the US nuclear tests and its uranium mines are also claiming victims.

Among them is a Navajo Indian from New Mexico, Dorothy Purley, who worked as truck driver delivering high-grade uranium ore to the mill site in order to support her family in the Indian reservation where she has lived all her life.

"Every day we bury somebody," she said sadly, referring to the deaths by cancer and other radiation-related diseases that have depleted her community. Accompanied by her daughter Carlotta, Dorothy spoke of her three miscarriages, caused, she believes, by eight years of high exposure to uranium.

The US government began mining for uranium in her village, Laguna Pueblo, in 1935. But Purley, who has cancer of the immune system, says her people were not told when the uranium would be used for, or that mining it would be dangerous to health.

"Now my people and myself continue to suffer as the Japanese Hibakusha do," said Purley, using the Japanese term for witness-survivor of the A-bomb. "We are also Hibakusha."

Also calling themselves Hibakusha are the Chernobyl clean-up workers — more than

7,000 Lithuanian men aged, between 18-40 years, who took part in the decontamination and clean-up operations (1986-1989) after the Chernobyl disaster in the Ukraine on April 26, 1986.

Dr Gediminas Rimdieka, director of the Sapiaga hospital in Lithuania, says 5,709 or 79.8 per cent of all Lithuanian Chernobyl clean-up workers are registered at his hospital.

The 1,569 cases of diseases presented to the State Chernobyl Expert Commission include 390 cases of psychic disorder related to the cleanup. A total 259 of the registered workers have died, including 48 who committed suicide.

Permanent personality disorders were diagnosed in 26.8 per cent of the workers and 71 per cent had post-trauma stress disorders.

"While treating them, one feels that they think themselves as the condemned because of their work at Chernobyl," he said. Rimdieka says some workers had been on 'military' training as a pretext for drafting them to Chernobyl without informing them of the real situation.

Nearly half are unemployed because 'employers don't want to hire Chernobyl Hibakusha' who are perceived as being often ill, hence bad workers," he added.

The continuing human fallout from nuclear testing and accidents around the world mean only that they are paths to be shunned today, activists argue.

The nuclear tests by India and Pakistan, despite the growing world opinion against such testing, will not bring any physical but psychological harm, especially for those who have faced the effects of ionising radiation before," Rimdieka said.

IPS/APB

Nigerian Fraud Criminals on Worldwide Rampage

Lagos fraudsters posing as senior government officials have become over-night millionaires by tricking people around the world into providing them with a foreign account number and as Sam Olukoya reports for Gemini News Service from Lagos, they are beating the law with bribery, wealth and death threats.

DESPITE intensive efforts by the US, Nigeria, Britain and other European countries, Nigerian international criminals involved in advance fee fraud are proving hard to stop.

The fraudsters are mainly based in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, where well-organised international syndicates are also involved in drug trafficking, kidnapping, ritual killing and armed robbery.

They send scam letters to millions of people around the world. Lately they have also been using the electronic mail. They particularly target people in the US and Europe.

They get the names and addresses of their victims from telephone and business directories. They introduce themselves as senior Nigerian government officials seeking a foreign account into which to transfer huge sums of public money.

They claim the money is the proceeds of failed or over-invoiced contracts. They offer to share this dirty money with their victim if he provides a foreign account into which the money can be transferred.

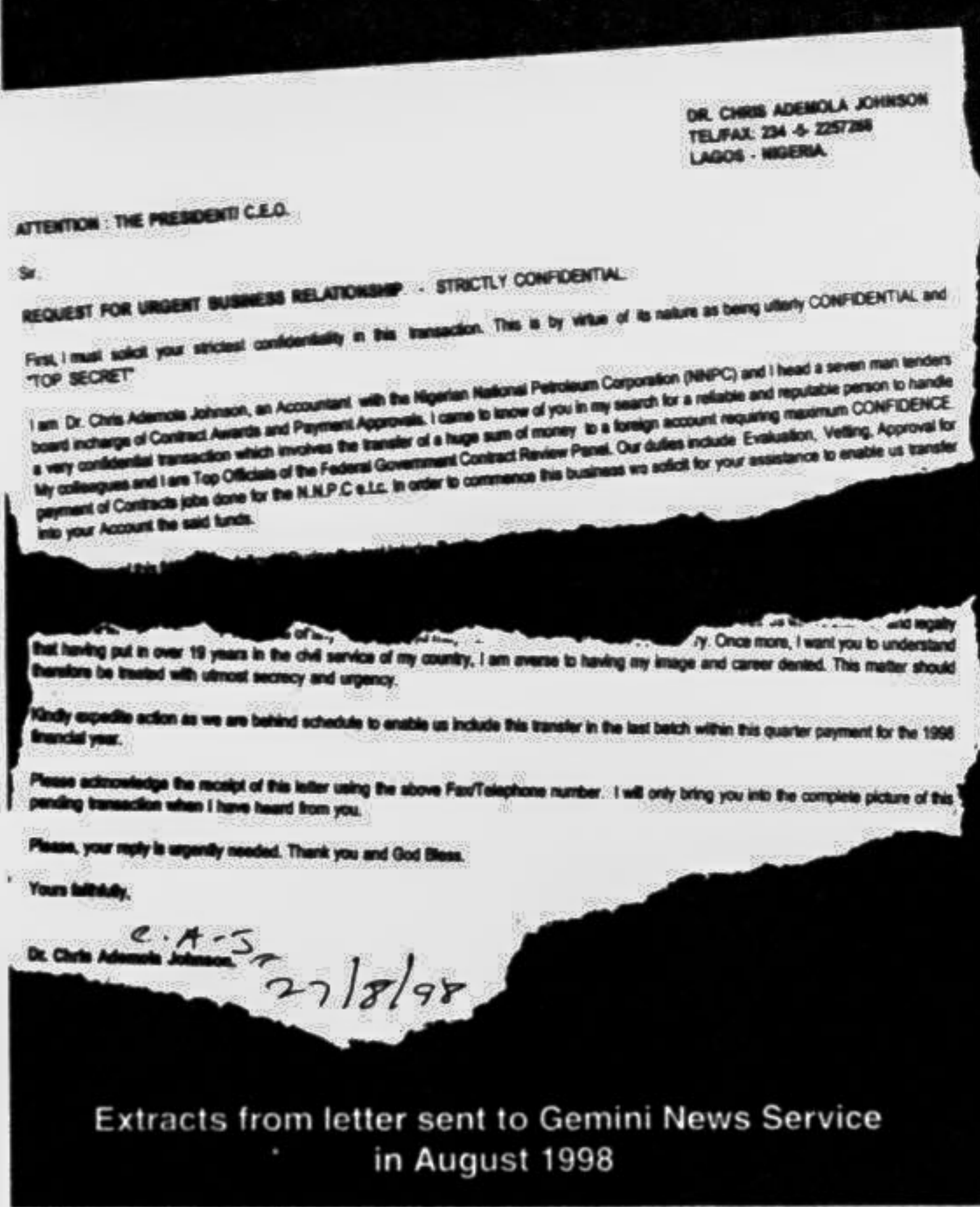
One letter addressed to the International Olympic Committee, IOC, headquarters in Switzerland requested Juan Antonio Samaranch, its president, to provide an account into which \$10 million would be transferred.

The fraudster said he was a senior Nigerian sports official. The money was described as part of what the Nigerian government raised for the Atlanta Olympic Games. It was up for grabs because it was not officially recorded.

Samaranch was promised 25 per cent of the money if he provided a foreign account into which it could be siphoned. Samaranch told the Nigerian authorities about the letter.

Thousands of recipients of these letters around the world have proved gullible. They have been tricked into parting with tens of thousands of US dollars

Dear reputable person...



Extracts from letter sent to Gemini News Service in August 1998

have collaborators in the Nigerian Postal Services and millions of letters go free through the use of fake franking machines.

Immigration officials procure fake visas for foreigners invited to Nigeria by the fraudsters. Britain, US and Germany too countries whose nationals fallen to the fraudsters. US secret service agent James Caldwell, an American says US citizens lost \$100 millions last year.

Few stand any chance of recovering their money. The fraudsters know how to beat the law. When arrested and charged in court, they are rarely convicted or made to refund any money.

All they need to tilt justice in their favour are their wealth and death threats to scare their victims from coming to Nigeria to testify against them. Some Nigerians believe the victims deserve what they get.

They feel that by accepting the invitation to defraud Nigeria the victims were themselves accomplices in crime and just as guilty as they are.

Nigeria is under severe international pressure, especially from Britain and the US, to stop the fraudsters. Britain believes the Nigerian authorities are not doing nearly enough.

Not many Nigerians sympathise with Britain. Newspaper columnist Tunde Obadina of the Lagos-based Vanguard newspaper, said Britains was concerned because it perceived its citizens to be losing a lot of money. He added: If the frauds involved actual transfer of money from Africa to Britain the authorities would not have been so concerned."

Nigerians, he argues, still recall that in the early 1980s Britain was not helpful when the Nigerian government sought its assistance to recover millions of dollars illegally transferred to Britain.

The writer is a journalist with 'NewsWatch' magazine.



by Jim Davis

Nepal Ahead in Contraception

KNOWLEDGE of contraception is nearly universal in Nepal, according to the 1996 NFHS Family Health Survey (NFHS): 98 per cent of currently married women knew of at least one contraceptive method. The most widely known method is female sterilisation (mentioned by 96 per cent of women), followed by male sterilisation (90 per cent), the injectable (85 per cent), the pill (81 per cent) and the condom (75 per cent).

Thirty-five per cent of cur-

rently married women have used a modern contraceptive (usually female sterilisation or the injectable), six per cent a traditional method. Urban women are twice as likely as rural women to use a method (50 per cent versus 27 per cent).

Contraceptive use has risen with education, from 26 per cent among women with no formal schooling to 52 per cent among those with at least a secondary education.

Thirty-four per cent of non-

users said they do not intend to practise contraception in the future. For women under 30 it is because of the desire for more children (35 per cent), religious prohibitions (16 per cent) and fear of side effects (13 per cent).

Fifty-five per cent of the currently married women who know of a contraceptive method had not discussed family planning with their husbands in the year preceding the survey; women between 25-29 were found to be most likely to have discussed family planning with

their husbands.

Overall 90 per cent of women approve of the use of family planning methods, and 70 per cent believe that their husbands too approve. Joint approval rises with the wife's level of education, from 65 per cent of couples in which the wife was shown to have had no education to 81 per cent where the wives had primary schooling to 90 per cent where the wife had attained higher or secondary education.

— WFS/News Network