

Also high on the list of popularity, is Danie Botha. He is a true 'boerseun', and perfect husband for a lot of Getruidas and Hetties and Annas. Then there is Carike Keuzenkamp. Her husband is a Nationalist, but she can hardly be held responsible for his ignorance, ek se. Also Ken Mullen. Okay, so he's a 'rooinek', but he surely makes the ovaries flip, from a woman's point of view. And then, the 'Griekse boertjie'. He is a genuine convert to the Afrikaans faith.

The Afrikaans new wave, Johannes Kerkorrel, and the Gereformeerde Blues band, Koos Tonteldoos, Nataniel, etc. are what was termed 'hippie music' a few years ago.

Classical music, 'Bach se gelag', is for most a noise not unlike 'tannie' Annatjie's chickens make, when they realize they're being chased for ultimate feasting purposes. For an elect few, it is cultural enlightenment, to possess classical music, to display it where everybody can see it, never to listen to it.

READING is not a high priority, and that is putting it lightly. It includes the two local newspapers, which are largely anti-government in their approach. For the woman literary works are still Susanna M. Lingua, C.F. Beyers Boshoff, Konsalik, Edgars' newest fashions magazine, Russells' monthly furniture offerings and some articles in the Huisgenoot. Those few ignorami who read the perverse Johannesburg English dailies are automatically communists, atheists or traitors, or a combination of these. Imagine some of the reactions to Andre P. Brink, Etienne le Roux, Breyten Breytenbach etc.

Going to the movies is impossible, the movie house now being a second hand furniture store. There are four video shops. As far as these go, videos in which Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rambo, Claude van Damme, or lately George Segal, display their pugilistic prowess will always be popular. The more gore, the merrier.

Theatre is a visit by Mike Schutte, or Martino, or the Alabama student choir. "Hey, ek se, old Mike can not only wrestle, he tells lekker jokes too, huh?" "That Martino is a genius. How else can he shoot that chick from the canon into the kas?"

Dining out is the Spur, for a kingklip measuring ten by ten centimetres (it lost some of its juice en route), or 'Oom'

Kallie's Chinese take-away, with a variety of dishes that 'skrik vir niks'.

FOR THE 'true liberals', there is the Bergwater Hotel, with an owner who admittedly votes National Party. The hotel is theoretically open to all races. In practice, a coloured person will not enter the public bar, not unless he wants to get seriously hurt by the blue blooded 'Afrikaner seuns' who frequent the place. The a la Carte restaurant is also not open for coloured people, by management order. If a coloured person should want to stay for the night, a room, separate from those of the white people, will be allocated.

Politics for most is hating anybody who differs with the Conservative Party, Jaap Marais, the AWB, or in the case of the Wit Wolwe, if you can find them. The fraternity that beds black women now and then, write it off as a little indiscretion, and keep it secret at all costs. Often the same people boast about how many 'swartgatte' they nearly killed, and describe in detail what the black's fate will still be.

Politics is also big 'Afrikaner seuns' hitting small black Sunday school children having a picnic in a park, with sjamboks. The excuse for this action; they will grow up to be terrorists one day.

Political rallies are a chance for the guys, especially those with 'kwaai vrouens', to break away for a while.

CONCLUSION:

PERHAPS, I have not presented a balanced picture of Louis Trichardt. This is not for lack of trying. The simple fact is that, the more I searched for this balanced picture, the more worms I uncovered.

I do not for one moment suggest that Louis Trichardt has not got any decent and clear-thinking people. There are indeed a lot. Unfortunately, they are more than often overrun. I believe the Afrikaans proverbs apply. 'n Stil bek is 'n heel bek' and 'Liewer bang Jan as dooie Jan.'

Finally a reminder, albeit clichéd: A small rotten spot on an apple will eventually spread, and decay will set in over the whole apple. The fruit will have to be thrown away. Louis Trichardt, and a lot of corresponding towns, especially in the Transvaal, have grown alarmingly big rotten spots. ●

— JOHAN G.C. PIEK

FAMINE

WE DID not realise that we were to witness a famine. It was 1974, a few short years after the emergence of the state of Bangladesh. The country was still grappling with staggering problems inherited from colonial times including the disastrous 1947 partition of the Indian subcontinent into a disparate Moslem nation of two widely separated parts — Western and Eastern Pakistan — and the largely Hindu India. The eastern wing which comprised most of the former Bengal was to last just 23 years before it seceded from Pakistan after a bitter and bloody liberation struggle. But in early 1974 relief operations were giving way to development

projects and various specialised agencies were arriving. That was why we were there — to assist the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute in developing the technology for greater food production.

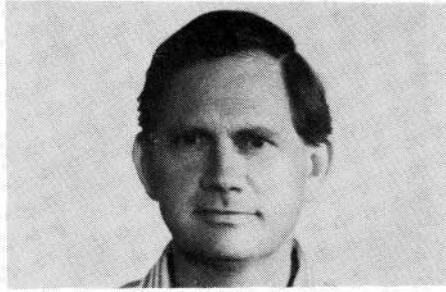
We were living in Dhaka and slowly coming to terms with the pervasive poverty which reached right up to our garden walls. Clusters of emaciated families living in the streets. Solitary women with baby on hip begging for food. Swarms of beggars on street corners, at traffic lights and on river ferries pleading for alms from travellers

trapped and vulnerable in their cars and rickshaws. The ghastly, misshapen bodies of children deliberately maimed at birth crawling or wheeled in carts chanting for baksheesh. Gaunt figures straining every fibre as they pedalled rickshaws overloaded with people or goods for a daily pittance. Long queues of the poor squatting patiently in the road for a meal of rice and vegetables offered by a sympathetic Bengali family. Children, scrawny cattle and wretched pyedogs scratching and sniffing together through piles of garbage tipped on vacant lots. This was the reality of Dhaka, this was the normal situation.

BUT IT was to get much worse. As the famine took hold and people in the countryside were denied even a

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minimum diet they descended on Dhaka in ever increasing numbers in the hope of finding food, shelter and work. Thousands occupied the verandahs of old houses, railway platforms and any open space. Whole families settled along the capital's main roads and thoroughfares, jampacking the broken pavements in huddles of bodies and meagre possessions. Some survived on food from official soup kitchens and private handouts. But many, particularly the young, the old and the disabled did not.

UNTIL FAIRLY recently famines were inherent in the Indian subcontinent. In the 19th century, seven great famine affected more than 200 million people. The severe famine of 1876-1878, believed to have resulted in more than five million deaths, finally prompted the British administration to develop an appropriate strategy for combating famine; the comprehensive Bengal Famine Code still serves as a guide for handling relief.

The Great Famine of 1943 in which one million to two million people perished in Bengal remains a controversial issue to this day. Of this tragedy much has been written which is emotive and misleading. What does emerge clearly is first, that the famine was mainly a rural phenomenon and second, that deaths were not from starvation alone.

Many died from epidemics of cholera, malaria and smallpox. The shortage of food grains was variously ascribed to excessive monsoon rains, an outbreak of ice disease, an inefficient war-time administration and corrupt officials.

Research has shown that there was in fact enough food in the region to feed all the people. The traditional explanation, known as food availability decline (FAD), does not take into consideration

the relationship of food with people. The basic cause of famine is that the poorer sections of society are unable to get enough food. That is, food entitlement works against the poor and the system fails to deliver food to them. Farm labourers and the rural landless suffer the most because while the food price rises, the wage rates fall in absolute terms. The poorest sections of the community then die quietly of starvation and disease — sometimes alongside large stores of grain. It is now generally accepted that the main cause of the 1943 famine were the increase in the rice price due to inflation in the booming war economy; an uneven expansion in income and purchasing power; speculation and hoarding; and administrative panic and failure to import food from other provinces.

THE OFFICIAL death toll in Bangladesh's 1974 famine was put at 26 000 but the true number was undoubtedly higher and may have exceeded 100 000. Thus compared to the past this was a minor famine. Some authorities still contended that the primary cause was the severe floods which affected the three annual rice crops: winter rice, pre-monsoon rice, and wet monsoon rice. Indeed the 1974 floods were the highest for 50 years. But once again, as the rice price soared the wages fell and it was the farmworkers and small farmers who suffered the most. Hoarding and profiteering pushed up the price and corruption was rife.

Famine beckoned again with the even higher floods of 1987 and 1988 but prompt and effective distribution of massive supplies of food relief and medicine by the military government — under the watchful eye of international observers — averted large-scale starvation. So hopefully the terrible famines of the Indian subcontinent, where thousands or even millions of people perished, is now a thing of the past.

TO THE severe crises of economic recession, the AIDS epidemic and political instability as democratic reforms sweep across our subcontinent, now comes drought and famine of cataclysmic proportions.

What are the lessons for South Africa from the Indian and Bangladeshi experience?

It is common to most or all famines that farm tenants, the rural landless and small farmers, especially those in remote areas, are the most vulnerable. They are

the hardest to reach and often the first to be affected by local food shortages. This happens even when there is sufficient food available in the region as a whole — and in Southern Africa there is a shortage of between seven million and 10 million tons of food grain.

Thus the first priority is to mount a campaign to provide food relief for the poor in remote country areas. It may be necessary to subsidise the cost of food grain to hungry, destitute populations and take strong measures to control prices. The region's transportation and communication systems must be geared up to handle the passage of the largest tonnages of *incoming* grain ever to be transported in Southern Africa.

South Africa's existing infrastructure and expertise must not only be used to bring relief to her own people, but should also be made available to her neighbours whose systems are far weaker. We must make great efforts to curb hoarding and profiteering — always liable to flourish during such desperate times. Lastly, food aid must be channelled through proven, experienced organisations which are directly in contact with the poorer in society.

IN THE longer term it is essential to develop a national food security scheme fully integrated with the existing network in the SADCC countries to the north. An early-warning system for spotting incipient food shortages is absolutely necessary and a national food grain reserve of at least one million tons should be established.

Greater public awareness of the food security question is necessary. It will be mutually advantageous to pool the region's agricultural know-how on basic food crops. South Africa can contribute its valuable knowledge of commercial agriculture while the other countries have much to offer concerning small-holder agriculture. All of these objectives could be served by forming a strong regional NGO. This body should include representatives from all famine-prone sections of society so that they can be involved in policy and strategy decisions.

Surprisingly, some positive features may yet emerge from the present situation. The famine throws the spotlight on the region's agricultural sector — an area often misunderstood and sometimes overlooked by some government planners and many economists. And inevitably the tragedy will bring together Southern Africa's previously embattled countries and demonstrate their unavoidable interdependence. ●