country's population was living in

cities 40-50 years back, these areas

are now inhabiting nearly 25 per

cent. Slums along the railway line,

some vacant roadsides, besides

parks, embankments, culverts and

barren lands are the few but several

symptoms of growing urbanisation.

Rural families are driven from their

homes by flood, landlessness,

unemployment, and even by politi-

cal unrest. The environmental

fallout from this process of urbanisa-

tion has been devastating -- creat-

ing various social problems, adding

chronic problems of air and water

pollution, sewage blockage, con-

these problems is to make a virtue of

them. Politicians and civil servants

of today must know that there will be

new leaders tomorrow to assess

their activities. The scenario will be

completely different from the tradi-

tional politicians and technocrats.

Today's insincerity is likely to play a

positive role for tomorrow's failure

Whoever in power must regard

the national problem their own. Our

leadership right now seems to be

without plans even for one genera-

tion. Banning use of polvethylene and

keeping pollutant road transports out

of urban areas are appreciable. Much

more needs to be done. Action must

begin from today to control noise

pollution. The baton has to be passed

from the scientists to the public, and

then it must be translated into political

and legislative action. The first two

steps have already occurred -- now it is

to find vacant places around and the

placid landscapes of our forefa-

thers, and march to secretariat

buildings through uncongested

road. This can never happen again.

If our children and grandchildren

learn to live a healthy life, see the

rivers and wetlands in harmony and

full of biosphere reserve, do not

experience the frequent tragedies of

floods, see suitable traffic manage-

ment everywhere, don't be afraid of

becoming environmental refugees

because of global warming and sea

level rise in future, get well managed

cities and homesteads with cheaper

and healthier provision of basic

services and natural landscapes.

we will surely remain contented in

the houses we live now at this stage

of our old age

We can never go back to our past

The only way of dealing with

gested road and so on.

and repentance.

time for the third.



FOUNDER EDITOR LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 6, 2003

Foreign investors' woes

The government must address them on a priority basis

HE UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh has said in unequivocal terms that the government should immediately address the problems that foreign investors are facing. He also warned that failure in this respect might force the investors to wind up their business in the country.

The warning follows the survey conducted by the Japanese Commerce and Industries Association in which some very specific instances of corruption and irregularities were mentioned. So the complaints about the investment climate are getting louder.

Obviously, the investors' woes have a lot to do with lack of security and poor monitoring and supervision on the part of the government agencies concerned. The decision makers can ill afford to ignore the truth that foreign investment will continue to decline as long as law and order does not improve. Quite a few incidents have taken place in the country in recent times which might raise questions in the minds of prospective investors. The security of business installations and the investors has to be ensured as a matter of top priority.

The decision-makers should also be convinced that the incentive package offered to the investors could be offset considerably if they feel insecure. The FDI came down to \$45 million in 2002 from \$79 million in 2001, according to the 'World Investment Report 2003' prepared by UNCTAD. That is cause for concern since the country is largely dependent on foreign investment for refloating the economy.

It is highly regrettable that we are not performing up to the investors' expectations in the areas which are not linked with the incentives and facilities that foreign investors are getting. Matters can improve vastly if the officials dealing with foreign investors perform a little more efficiently. It appears that lack of communication is also a major hurdle. The point will be made clear by the fact that many foreign investors are not aware of the presence of a one-stop desk of the Bol at Zia International Airport.

The investors have been trying to make their point that they need a more secure social setting for operating smoothly. The government must address their problems in order to ensure that the services and facilities offered to the foreign investors are utilised properly.

Free to move again in Hill Tracts

Quick change of decision gives a positive signal

ITHDRAWAL of the earlier directive restricting movement of foreigners, government officials and civilians in Chittagong Hill Tracts is, to our mind, a decision in the right direction. Though the latest message to the district administration mentioned that the earlier circular on imposing the restrictions created 'unwanted misunderstanding', we are glad that the government did not prolong it and saw the good reason to sort out the

Will our leaders wake up?

DR. F. M. MANIRUZZAMAN

HERE are the placid landscapes of our childhood? Where are the forests full of birds and different species? Where is the animal silence in our countryside? Where are the flowers we gathered near stream waters when we were children?

We have poisoned the air, the water and the land. In our passion to dominate nature, things have gone out of control. Progress from now on has to mean something different if we really want to avoid disaster. We cannot keep up using one place and moving on to the next because our planet earth is very small to accommodate the increasing human ocean. We are running out of land: we are running out of resources and obviously running out of time. For many people, and for many species, it has already happened.

My own involvement started before I knew it, growing up in my village home in Comilla and latter, in Kalabagan at Dhaka. The places were beautiful then having few people moving around. I watched for nearly the last fifty years as the green, open spaces turned now into concrete houses, paved roads and markets; and the clean air turned into poisonous air. In 1950s and even early '60s, the road from New Market to Mirpur was semi-paved. Surrounding Azimpur, Nilkhet, Dhanmondi, Elephant road, Kathalbagan, Kalabagan, Sobhanbagh, Lalmatia and so on were barren, scattered ponds,

ditches and rice fields. The present Sangsad Bhavan, Khejurbagan, Khamarbari, Bangladesh-China Maitri Hall, Planning Commission buildings and Suhrawardi Hospital complex was our 500 acres Dhaka farm. The Dhaka Cantonment was isolated but linked by narrow paved road with Tejgaon old airport.

I remember greeting H.S. Suhrawardi when he arrived in Dhaka from Karachi loosing the honour of premiership. The next day, I remember students' protest march headed by Mawlana Bhasani to the Secretariat and unnecessary pelting of stones by a section of students at USIS, north to the aforesaid building complex and Press Club. The year was 1956.

Now the scenario is completely different. The places where there were little or no human habitation such as Malibagh, Khilgaon, Rampura, Chaudhuripara, Shahjahanpur, Shantibagh,

Rajarbagh, and even Shantinagar-Baily Road area have turned into congested concrete buildings, jam packed roads full of transport and ıman waves

Like most people in my generation, I was brought up to believe in progress. I still do. But now we are at a point where we have to ask ourselves if we are the beneficiaries of our progress, or victims. We have extended our civilised society, modern buildings up to Joydebpur in the north, up to Savar-Ashulia in the west, beyond prestigious and historically important Buriganga River in the south, and up to Meghna Bridge in the east, heading from Syedabad, Jatrabari, Jurain,

square miles (2000 sq. kilometers) of low-lying coastal Bangladesh. which is desperately impoverished and overpopulated. The overpopulated capital, Dhaka city, is being threatened almost every year by water logging, flood, contamination

of drinking water, water scarcity and other political and social upheaval. The publication of Brundtland Our Common Future in Report, 1987, first brought the world attention to the fundamental concepts of Sustainable Development and Save the World. Since then, the Rio conference in 1992 and many other national and international forums related to the world environment took place and is likely to continue in

west, north to south, but the wetlands have been disrupted and wetland biodiversity has been shattered

The concept of sustainable development and environmental impact assessment came lately, though sometimes to be altered by motivated powers as and when wished. This represents an astonishing lack of both vision and common sense. Most of the technologies that will ensure a dignified and secure future for each and every one of us are already in existence or are being developed. We need to listen what is being said and do the best only for the betterment of the future

highways chip away the crop lands base every year

Forest areas are declining mainly as a result of over population and corruption. The responsibility for this lies largely with the government who fail to promote land reform and sustainable agricultural practices as an alternative to forest clearance. The government cannot take drastic action to control corrupt practices prevalent in almost every component of machineries because of party affiliation, whoever there is in power. The government for the sake of the country must declare deforestation a national emergency.

The flowers we grow in the garden, and the fruits and vegetables

Awareness is, perhaps, no longer the issue. Even our children know more about environment than their parents do. But the problem lies with the leadership...The most important step we can take is to send a clear message to our leaders that if they don't protect the environment, they will not get elected. Political leaders must learn to shoulder the responsibility of protecting the environment without delay, and forcefully if needed.

DND and Kanchpur.

If we extend our eves beyond Dhaka, we see the same change in every division, district and upazila Our population now approximates 140 million, which was 35 million just fifty years ago. Not to speak of the earth, the land of our parents and ours is at risk as never before because of over population and indiscriminate exploitation of our imited natural resources.

World's leading scientists and environmental experts have provided an overview of the continuing pressures on our ecosystem for the vast over-populated country of ours. Scientists tell us that by the next century, the environmental struggles will be lost, by that time it may be too late. We must bear in mind that we cannot continue to satisfy our own needs at the expense of those of future generations.

Downstream flooding is the consequence in Bangladesh when most of the country goes under water -- beginning from 1954, then several times up to 1988 when almost half of the country was totally submerged for nearly three weeks, and this occurred more frequently in recent times. According to the best guess of the Inter-Governmental Panel of Climate Change, the global average temperature is likely to rise at least 1.8 F (1 C) by the year 2030 due to global warming. As a result, sea levels will rise from anywhere between 4 inches and 6 feet (ten centimeters and two meters). Lowlying coastal areas would be wiped out of the map. A sea level rise of 3 feet (1 meter) would flood 770

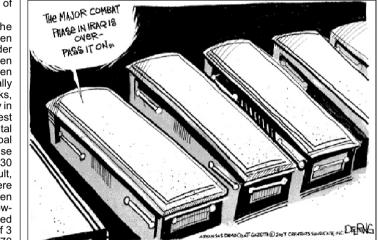
the brief period between December

born of a politically motivated ven-

detta which she had inherited after

the future. Awareness is, perhaps no longer the issue. Even our children know more about environment than their parents do. This is obviously good. But the problem lies with the leadership. We cannot wait for leadership on environmental issues to come from the top -- it is not going to happen

The past decade has made that clear. The most important step we can take is to send a clear message to our leaders that if they don't protect the environment, they will not get elected. Political leaders must learn to shoulder the responsibility of protecting the environment without delay, and forcefully if needed. Since Bangladesh came into being in 1971, the national highways extended from east to



Our country is one of the world's poorest. Land and water as well as food are under constant pressure from a growing population. Over the last four decades demand for food has nearly tripled, spurred by population growth and rising affluence. This rising demand for food has forced the farmers to indiscriminate use of inorganic fertilisers and pesticides. We are already paying some of the ecological costs of imposing Western-style intensive agriculture where they are quite nappropriate. Some scientists hope to boost crop yields through genetic engineering, but it is not certain that this approach will be successful There is little new land that can be brought under production. More-

that we eat were all originally derived from wild species. The government must therefore, place priority on natural forest conservation. Strict observation of plantation campaign will not benefit the nation unless millions of saplings planted every year are managed and kept alive. Groups of plant species must be selected for plantation along different roads and besides waterways to facilitate conservation of biodiversity. We should be aware that extinction of one plant species could cause 30 extinctions of other dependent organisms necessary to maintain ecological balance.

The population explosion has already happened in Bangladesh. We must fix the clock now to maintain a stable population by reducing the birth rate to equal the death rate. Meeting the growing demand for education and family planning among women can only do this. The preferred model is the nuclear family with two children, which results in a stable population. The present growth rate must be reduced even through enforcement of law. The example may easily be set by pointing to nearly one million government employees to follow the model of two children in one family. If that is ignored, there will remain no scope for promotion to next higher position and after 25 years of service compulsory retirement should necessarily be ensured. The present concept of the poor families with many children having extra hands to bring in food and income must be stopped

While less than 10 per cent of the

Toward a sober scenario and a sensible approach

KAZI ALAUDDIN AHMED

T was indeed good to hear from her some words, ostensibly replete with certain bona fide intentions for purifying politics in Bangladesh. The PM's realisation, though belated, was apparently purported to have ushered in a good 1971 and August 15, 1975 had been omen. The overall national interest surfaced as a most crucial point to ponder upon. Her conviction fringed upon an urgent necessity to effect a being raised to power. change in the age-old or rather antiquated type of politics, which, in her opinion, would not serve the interest of the nation. It was high time, she thought that, it was discarded forthwith. This would call for a consensus between the major political parties on a number of national issues. She didn't, however, mention as to who would take the initiative towards that end. It goes without saying that it is the party/parties in power and for that mater, the head of the government who will have to take the responsibility At this point the readers may recall that such a proposition was dished out by the former prime minister and present leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina when in power. Besides airing her considered views on such prospects, she made frantic calls to the leader of the opposition at that time Begum Khaleda Zia on telephone to start a dialogue in line with her present thinking. One couldn't be sure if the realisation of Begum Zia was a mere political ploy to camouflage her inner mind on the contrary. But in her lengthy deliberation in the political Science Association she couldn't eventually keep up the tone of the offer of cleansing the politics. spontaneously emerge when one It needed much more open

heartedness, a positive change in seeks to conjure up a far more responsible reflection in the personattitude towards the past. It required of her to refrain from alluding to the ality of the hon'ble prime minister. It otherwise "controversial lapses and was indeed unbelieveable to the failures" of the post-liberation war viewers that any one in that seat, more so a venerable lady of her government headed by none other than Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibar stature, could act so ridiculously. Rahman. In fact, her appreciation of

Slandering each other, personal vilification, casting abusive remarks, mud-slinging and character assassination have been, for long, an insidious practice and favourite pastime with many of the

Hasina in particular and the nation at large to the effect that she feels very sorry for the poor level of personal relationship between the political leaders. She shall also express her genuine desire to forget all bitter bickerings of the past and her firm determination to start anew with a new slate. Such a projected and a highly magnanimous statement on her part shall include an open-arm invitation to her political

the leader of the opposition Sheikh bond of friendship. In this context I am tempted to recapitulate the apparently genuine lamentations of one very controversial personality in the political arena to-day. I remember his express affectations over the perpetual and pitiable failure on the part of our politicians to develop and build personal relationship at family level beyond their individual political ideology. He cited his own family's example having excellent relationship with Bangabandhu's family for

a comprehensive list of national issues to be taken care of by all the government therefore in a uniform manner. The list will be drawn by a high-powered committee comprising three members from each of the two major political parties and three to be nominated by other parties jointly. The composition of the committee may, however, be open to further discussion to arrive at a consensus. This committee will make its specific recommendations which will be ultimately authenticated by the chief of all the parties involved. The objectives are to be unambiguously spelled out and must include, inter alia, a sacred commitment from the leaders that they will remain morally and legally bound to ensure that they will not indulge in personal vilification hereinafter. Their remarks over ideological differences will also be tiered to the parties only, not to individuals. The language, in this case, should have moderation befitting a civil society. This is just an outline of the scenario which one can imagine at the moment. one would, however, invite others to improve on the suggestions and help develop a concrete matrix for the political leaders, particularly of the two major parties, to consider for implementation. Hopefully, they will grant our national issues the highest 'priority and make sincerest endeavours to reach a consensus. The luxury of their passing putrid remarks at each other must be stopped immediately. The people do not want it any lon-

over, construction of towns and

issue in a day. What had baffled us is the lack of perception to put things in perspective.

Deputy Minister for Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs himself expressed surprise to some reporters about the restrictions. How could that be possible? If the security forces decided to impose certain measures to ensure safety of visitors in the region, they had better consulted the concerned ministry or the government officials. Quite expectedly, the news evoked criticism, especially since the government and the local leaders alike have been trying to project a stable condition in the area. We echo the tribal leaders' sentiments that such restrictions would only run counter to the fundamental ideals of the peace treaty.

Recently there have been incidents in the region that might have had influences on the authorities to take such a drastic step. But one thing they probably had missed was the probable reaction by the donors who have been actively involved in the development work in the region. Many international development organisations, mainly Danida of Denmark, are running many programmes in the area. Had the restriction stayed, there work would have definitely suffered. Others would have got the wrong signal which is not desirable. Once again we appreciate the government for rapidly reacting to the criticisms and solve a crisis that could have been avoided in the beginning.

In spite of the offer towards political leaders in the country. At times, such exchange of castigacleansing politics in Bangladesh

adversary to shake hands and to long despite his father's difference help her re-establish a serene in political ideology with Sheikh personal relationship independent Mujib. Such bond of friendship

Informal contacts between the two entities, not only at the top-most level but also in their respective lower echelons, shall be expected to commence spontaneously. The ground for a formal dialogue and a summit shall thus be prepared...Hopefully, they will grant our national issues the highest 'priority and make sincerest endeavours to reach a consensus. The luxury of their passing putrid remarks at each other must be stopped immediately. The people do not want it any longer.

one has to be doubly sure if the people would have to witness ever again the self-same scenario in the national parliament presenting the prime minister and leader of the house thumping upon her desk enjoying in gleeful smile the wild uncouth and slang harangues of her partymen at Sheikh Hasina. A noted ournalist described such vituperative invectives as those filthy exchanges familiar with the people living in shanties or in red-light areas. He even went to the extent of doubting legitimacy of the stock of those marguders of soher language whom their leader was seen back ing up. However, one would like to believe that it was not she, rather it was a perverted image of some one else. Such a conviction would very

tions go beyond all limits of decency and decorum. Some are used to behave like environmentally polluted ruffians forfeiting their rights to represent the people at large.

This is a staggering account of the scenario the people of Bangladesh have been used to watch over the past two and a half decades or so. It is indeed a perpetual malady and a virile aberration of our nationa dignity. Against such a tragic backdrop the observation of the Prime Minister on the state politics here shall certainly deserve thoughtful consideration. But the question is how soon

Begum Zia shall take a formal initiative. Assuming that she does it soon, the endeavour on her part will have to be preceded by an unequivocal statement from her addressing

of their respective ideological difference. She shall also clearly assure that she will be both morally and intellectually bound to forestall recurrence of the old mimmicks and personalised acrimonies heretofore. This. I foresee. can be the first step towards a long-term settlement. It needs tremendous guts on her part and I believe she has it in store abundantly.

I do not see it as a one-sided game. The whole gamut as envisaged will naturally demand of the leader of the opposition an equal degree of receptivity to instantly reciprocate. I say so because it was in fact Sheikh Hasina herself who had first rose to the occasion making frantic efforts at wiping out past scars towards building a convivial personal relationship an everlasting

between the lion-hearted Sheikh with Muslim league leaders like Khan A Subur and Fazlul Quader Chowdhury had been so strong that Bangabandhu took upon himself personal responsibility to save them from the wrath of the freedom fighters after the war of liberation in 1971. They were kept in jail as a protection measure. Once the re-alignment foreseen

above is established the ice shall be considered to have been broken. During the melting process informal contacts between the two entities, not only at the top-most level but also in their respective lower echelons, shall be expected to commence spontaneously. The ground for a formal dialogue and a summit shall thus be prepared.

The next step shall be to work out

EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

ger

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE

Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

"Police harassment"

The insolent behaviour of a police car driver after committing an accident due to reckless driving was completely overlooked by the police officer who was sitting inside the car. Instead of being apologetic he threatened the occupants of the other car to book them to Gulshan police station. What an act of police atrocity! The police excess in our country presumably is the highest than in any other country. It reminds me a proverb...might is right or a king can do no wrong. What is happening these days? The general public are the sufferers in every case. We are scared of the extortionists, muggers, kidnappers, hoodlums as well as police. I would like to remind our police force one

sober and behave accordingly. Moreover, they should not forget that they are not above law. Humayun Hyder

Iragi oil and

UNSC Resolution 1483 cleared the ambiguity of ownership of Iragi oil by protecting the "initial purchase" of it om any claims resulting in attachment or other similar judicial processes. It turns out that the order extended the scope of protection to American oil companies, outlawing any threat of attachment of oil assets of these companies anywhere in the world as long as they

deal with Iraqi oil. The order covers

thing that please at least be a little bit not only petroleum, but also its Zigatola

Executive Order

revenues.

downstream products such as nary threat to the national security petrochemicals. This blanket immuand foreign policy of the United nity, indeed, applies to any product States". Indeed, in the preamble to that contains any ingredient associthe order, Bush declared "a national ated with Iragi oil. Moreover, the emergency to deal with that threat". order extends the cover to the back-The Executive order also protects end. It provides similar immunity to the Development Fund for Irag from revenues that oil companies earn by virtue of their connection to Iraqi oil. More significantly, immunity is provided to "financial instruments of any nature whatsoever arising from or related to the sale or marketing thereof, and interests therein". This sweeping protection covers investments, loans or any financial instrument that has a basis in Iraqi oil Ironically, while issuing an order that so blatantly favours the oil

companies, US president Bush

the threat of attachment or other similar judicial processes. The fund, which would consist mainly of oil revenues, is expected to finance the reconstruction of Iraq. Interestingly, the explanatory part of the order, which defines entities and terms, points out that the Fund was "established on or about May 22, 2003". The Fund is controlled by US civilian administrator in Iraq Paul Bremer and overseen by a board of accountants, consisting primarily of representatives of multinational

invoked the "unusual and extraordiinstitutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

> The appropriation of the Fund in the hands of the US, an occupying force in Iraq, has significant implications for the way reconstruction contracts, expected to run into billions of dollars, will be distributed. Critics of the Bush administration have pointed out that more than 20 American companies have received contracts since the official closure of the war, on non-transparent terms These companies have significant ties with senior members of the Bush administration. The Order ensures protection for such contracts by protecting the Fund, which will pay for these contracts. Although the international media have ignored the Bush Order,

environmental groups with an interest in energy issues have criticised it.

> There is also outrage in the US that the Order extending protection to oil companies covers not only their operations in Iraq but also on American soil. Even US statutes and laws would fail to apply to the US oil corporations as long as they deal in Iragi oil. One observer remarked: "If Exxon Mobil or Chevron Texaco touch Iraqi oil, it will be immune from legal proceedings in the United States." Several public interest organisations and environmental groups have demanded a congressional investigation into the promulgation of the controversial order. The Sustainable Energy and Economy Network (SEEN), an affiliate of the Institute of Policy

Studies, a Washington-based "progressive think tank", has examined the legality of the Executive Order. On July 23, representatives of the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) and Government Accountability Project (GAP) urged Congress to investigate -- and repeal -- the Order

Jim Valette, senior researcher at the IPS, said that the Order "reveals the true motivation for the present occupation: absolute power for US corporate interests over Iragi oil. This is the smoking gun that proves the Bush administration always intended to free corporate investments, not the Iraqi people." Tom Devine, legal director of the GAP, said that the Order provides "a blank cheque for corporate anarchy, potentially robbing Iraqis of both

their rights and their resources". He remarked that the Order "cancels the concept of corporate accountability and abandons the rule of the law"

Kazi Alauddin Ahmed is an industrial consultant

EarthRights International, an organisation that specialises as a whistleblower on environmental abuses by corporations, termed the Order "outrageous". Ominously, the sweep of the Order is so great that it protects the oil companies, which may be complicit in human rights violations in countries they operate in; provides immunity from lawsuits alleging environmental damages; and applies to workplace contracts, worker safety and many other areas of life in Iraq as well as the US. Sirajul Islam Dhaka