UNCED to Talk Steps to Combat Environmental Degradations

by Inam Ahmed

Bangladesh Getting Ready to Join Confce in Brazil

In the year 1992, heads of state from all the countries of the world are expected to meet in the capital of Brazil. The agenda will be one of the most alarming issues of present time — environmental problems.

The world leaders will participate in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to discuss world measures on environment.

Each country has been requested to present a paper on what it is doing on environment for itself, and how it identifies the main environmental issues. Bangladesh will also participate in the conference, and say what it is thinking about its own environmental problems.

The drafting of the paper is already under way. It was supposed to have been completed by the 1st of July, but the recent cyclone delayed it. Bangladesh has taken time till the current month to finalise the paper. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is playing a consultative role in preparing the report for Bangladesh. Winston Temple, the acting resident representative of UNDP for Bangladesh said recently in an interview to this correspondent that this conference is very important for each country as measures to combat environmental degradations will be formulated during the conference. Also a set up for financial commitment to combat these problems will be made there. "For that, the nations will have to understand that environment is not a national boundary issue", pointed out Temple, "the conference will try to make all feel that this is an interlinked world."

This is not the only issue for which UNDP has extended its helping hand to Bangladesh. The organisation is giving technical assistance in a number of fields which will help us combat the environmental issues we are facing.

UNDP views that Bangladesh is one of the countries with great environmental problems. The environmental issues of the country are hardly any different from the global issues. Every year, 18 million hectres of forest equal to the size of UK is being lost. With this, 100 kinds of flora and fauna species are being wiped out from the earth. One billion people do not have a supply of pure drinking water. These world trends are similar to the situation of Bangladesh. Lack of fresh drinking water, the depletion of forests and population pressure is disbalancing the ecology of the country.

Although Bangladesh does not have problems like industrial pollution as yet, this will become another problem sooner or later with increasing industrialization to face these issues, we need a legal frame-work and programmes for which assistance and funding is required. UNDP is assisting Bangladesh in these respects.

Presently, UNDP has a six million dollar project on forestry. The fifth country programme in Bangladesh which began on July 1 has an additional 157 million dollar budget. 38 per cent of this amount is allocated for national resources and environmental management.

The National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) is also being formulated with UNDP technical assistance and funding. The projects under NEMAP include environmental legislation, chemical pollution, surveys of ecological areas, national trends in resources use, defining environmental standards and assisting the private sector in implementing environmental measures. This integrated plan is likely to be completed by 1992.

"Different donor countries and agencies are very likely to support these pragmatic steps to protect the environment of Bangladesh", William Temple commented.

Another major contribution to the environment programmes will be the Coastal Area Resources Management (CARM) to be finished this year. This programme gets meticulous attention after the cyclone. It will seek ways to avoid the salinity of the coastal areas caused by both shrimp farming and natural causes. Reduction of salinity is specially important for the protection of Sundarban. The programme will also identify the income generating activities compatible with the environment. "The area has to be developed in the context of sustainable development." Temple expressed the views of UNDP.

As floods have now become a yearly incident for Bangladesh, this phenomenon is being seriously discussed in different forums. Bangladeshi scientists and environmentalists are now working on the Flood Action Plan funded by different donor agencies. The plan is composed of 26 projects needing 150 million dollar for formulation and additional 460 million dollar for implementation.

Disaster preparedness project will get priority in the FAP. This project includes early warning systems for flood. Shifting of people and relief operations will also be emphasised in the project. But shifting of people needs adequate number of shelters. UNDP will fund their shelters. Another important project, the environmental study funded by USAID will be completed by 1992.

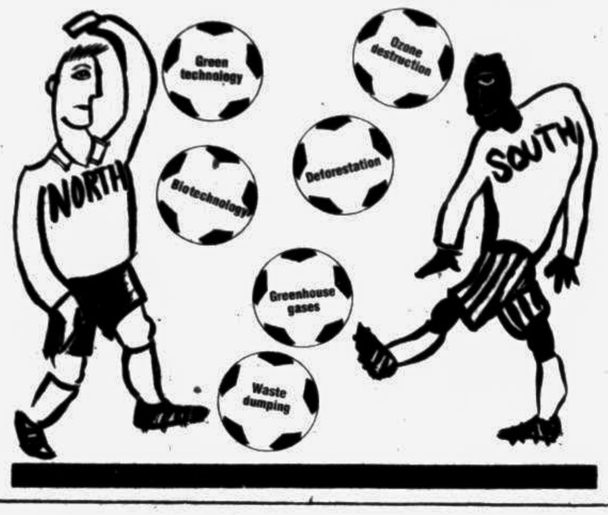
All these programmes and projects will go to save the lives of probably not only millions of lives but to save the future of a nation. Because if mother earth starts taking revenge for its exploitation, Bangladesh will be the most innocent victim.

Protecting environment: A distant goal?

1989 Dec UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) set up

1991 Oct UNIDO Conference

1992 June Ministers from 150 countries meet in Rio de Janeiro to sign treaties to protect the environment and promote sustainable development



Manila Prepares Master Plan for Forest Development

FOREST village as well as logging companies will play a big role in halting the plunder of Philippine trees.

Communities which depend on forests for livelihood and corporations logging it for profit will work hand in hand with the government to reduce the Philippines' deforestation rate to about 4,000 hectares a year in the next 25 years.

This is an ambitious plan for a country which has a deforestation rate today of about 100,000 hectares a year.

But convinced that forests remain the nation's centrepiece in the preservation of its environment, the government's new Master Plan for forest Development has much more in mind.

Reforestation is its major concern, enlisting the support of local communities by recognising their access to forest resources. It believes that placed in the hands of capable managers — mainly communities and logging companies — a 4,000-hectare annual deforestation rate is attainable.

Without the kind of interventions it recommends, the Master Plan estimates deforestation will drop to only about 60,000 hectares a year. According to the government, deforestation decreased in recent years, from 300,000 hectares a year in the late 1960s to 150,000 hectares in the 1980s.

One reason for this is the sharp increase in reforestation. In 1989, it hit the 100,000 hectare mark, exceeding the annual deforestation rate. A National Forestation Programme hopes to reforest another 1.4 million hectares of denuded areas by the year 2000.

Logging is banned in critical areas, including virgin forests in mountain with slopes above 45 degrees and 1,000 metres above sea level. Out of 159 Timber Licence Agreements issued, only 62 remain.

The Master Plan for Forestry Development will try to make a coherent approach in forestry. It was drawn up by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) with the assistance of the Asian Development Bank and the Finnish International Development Agency (FINNIDA).

The Master Plan was prepared jointly by the DENR and a team of private consultants — Jaakko Poyry Oy of Finland and MADECOR of the Philippines. The Master Plan will be reviewed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation.

The Philippines is working overtime to regain its forest cover, or at least protect the remaining ones. In 1945, more than half (55 per cent), or 16.6 million hectares of the country's land area were covered with forests.

Today, only about 6.69 million hectares remain. Virgin forests total less than a million hectares. Some 1.79 million hectares are non-productive.

Inadequate forest development, management and conservation efforts — combined with rampant logging, slash-and-burn farming and fuelwood collection — resulted in the devastation of the country's forests. Soil erosion, siltation, flash floods and drought followed.

Philippine forestry, and the consequences of its destruction, reflects he region's dilemma: preservation of the environment or fast-track development. As the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific notes, "economic and social development in the region has proceeded in recent decades with little concern for the environmental consequences."

The environment will be one of the issues which will be tackled by the Fourth Asian and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Social Welfare and Social Development, to be held October 7-11 in Manila.

In recent years, concerns have been voiced over the plunder of the nation's forests. Which is why the Philippine Master Plan for Forestry Development hopes to maintain the remaining productive forests — about 2.5 million hectares.

Logging, for example, will be banned in 980,000 hectares of old and critical forests. These include old growth trees, mossy and marginal forests, mangroves, swamps and national parks and reserves.

Reforestation is expected to reclaim brushlands, its area to be reduced from today's 2.4 million hectares to less than one million hectares. Areas covered by grasslands will be reduced from 1.5 million hectares to nearly half a million hectares.

As a result, according to the Master Plan, there will be a significant drop in soil erosion, from 2.2 billion tons a year to 1.3 billion tons a year by 2015.

Plantation areas for timber will increase to about 3 million hectares by 2015. Timber forests will be managed through a mix of operator-managers from local communities and corporations.

About 192.6 billion pesos (US$6.9 billion) will be needed to implement the Master Plan over 25 years, from 1991 to 2015. This means an average cost of 7.7 billion pesos per year.

The government will shoulder less than one-fourth (22.5 percent) of the total cost. Foreign financial aid will be a big component for the entire 25-year period — nearly half (45 percent) of the total cost.

A Tent City Keeps Going, with Food Aid

For some 90,000 Filipino evacuees from a volcanic disaster zone, a return to anything like a normal life is a distant prospect. by Paul Icamina

PALAUIG (Philippines) : It is called "Tent City," where more than 22,000 evacuees are huddled under makeshift tents of blue plastic.

The evacuees are here on higher ground, away from the volcanic mudflows unleashed by rains and storms from the slopes of erupting Mount Pinatubo.

Some tents have mushroomed into thatched-roof huts, signifying the occupants have been here long enough to be innovative. They know that it will be a long while before their homes are no longer threatened by mudflows. Some villages have already been buried up to the roofs in volcanic mud.

Since evacuees started arriving in July, many babies have been born. Some have been given names fit for the times : Vulcan, Phivolcs (for the Philippine Institute of Volcanology) and Eva — from "evacuation centre."

Most have been here for weeks — like Mila, a young housewife from the village of Batonlepoc. Her children travel to school in government buses which came all the way from Manila. She and her children, with 145 other families from Batonlepoc, are served by the same health worker they had back home.

Tent City is remarkably well-ordered. A water pump has replaced an open well which used to serve Mila's and other families. They have been promised two communal toilets, one each for men and women, to replace latrines.

Among the visitors has been a team of psychiatrists from the Department of Health, briefing social workers on the effects of stress and dislocation. There are busy scenes in two classrooms where Aeta tribal children are being instructed.

Understandably, some evacuees are bored, like Aurora Torres, 75, who wants to open a sundries store but has no capital. "We long to go home to our farms where we can earn," she says.

Others, too, are out of work. And while food is provided free, other things need to be paid for — like batteries for radios, a little coffee and charcoal for cooking; a 40-peso (US$1.50) sack provides a week of fuelwood for one family.

The Department of Trade has set up a tent where handicrafts are taught, but few people attend. Recently, about 1,500 evacuees were hired in a "cash-for-work" scheme to build a river dike against mudflows.

Tent City is host to over 4,200 families, 40 per cent of them tribal Aetas who come from the forests on and around Mount Pinatubo. They have little prospect of going home soon.

Also stuck here are many lowlanders, whose villages are on the banks of rivers overflowing with volcanic mud. "In Botolan town alone, more than 5,000 people from ten villages cannot go back for as long as five years," says Emilia G Fernandez, the provincial head of the Department of Social Welfare and Development office. "Those areas are covered with mudflows metres thick."

She says relocation sites for Tent City evacuees have been identified. Each family will be given 100-spuare-metre homelots, a half hectare as a farmlot, 5,000 pesos (US$185) to build a house and 580 pesos (US$25) worth of farm tools.

"Our food supply is adequate, although we're now down to a one-day reserve," Ms Fernandez tells representatives of the World Food Programme (WFP). "But then supplies are trucked in every other day".

Tent City receives part of a US$ 867,752 emergency food aid allotment released by WFP, a United Nations agency, right after the eruption started. Under the food aid scheme, some 90,000 evacuees (including 15,000 tribal Aetas) receive a daily ration of rice, dried fish and cooking oil. This includes 21.5 metric tons of canned and dried foods (pork and beans, sardines, potted meat, noodles and biscuits), 2,070 tons of rice, 90 tons of cooking oil and 68 tons of dried fish.

It has been a busy time for the WFP in the Philippines. In less than 12 months, three successive disasters visited the country — the July 1990 earthquake, the typhoon which hit central Philippines late last year and now the Pinatubo eruption which started on June 12.

After each of these disasters, the WFP promptly granted emergency food assistance. After the earthquake, for example, the WFP released US$ 381,044 of emergency food aid for 114,000 people.

In April, the WFP also granted emergency aid of 3,800 metric tons of rice for 11 central Philippine provinces affected by last year's typhoon. The US$ 995,980 aid will benefit some 76,000 families most seriously affected by the typhoon.

"When Mount Pinatubo erupted there was a request for emergency food aid from the government," says Mrs Sushma Ahuja, WFP's representative in the Philippines. 'We acted on the request right away." In fact, for immediate release, the WFP asked the government to provide foodstuffs and rice which the WFP replenished later.

The WFP was established in 1963 as the food-aid organisation of the United Nations. Its purpose is to provide food aid to support economic and social development projects. In the typhoon-affected provinces, for example, recipient families are encouraged to do voluntary work in the rehabilitation of village roads, irrigation channels and so on.

The WFP also provides food during emergencies, almost always in kind. Rice for Mount Pinatubo evacuees was purchased from Burma while the cooking oil and dried fish were brought locally. Sometimes, the government advances the rice which is then replaced by the WFP, as has happened during this crisis.

Others, too, have pitched in. Tents have been provided by the governments of China (which also gave US$ 200,000 in cash) and Singapore and from the UN Development Programme. Rice has come from China and a variety of food from the United States. Other items of aid which have come from different sources have included water purifying tablets, shovels, soap and latrine-building equipment. More than 50 countries have pledged assistance.

About 150,000 of 400,000 evacuees are housed in the evacuation centres. "We are feeding not only those in the centres but some of those outside also," said President Corazon Aquino. "At 25 pesos (just under a dollar) per head, it comes to 10 million pesos (US$ 370,300) a day." — Depthnews

A pathway lined with coconut timber widely used in construction, in southern Philippines.

Pakistan's Creative Truckers Run into a Road Block

by Najma Sadeque

THE metallic studs and whorls which make lorries in Pakistan more like mobile art displays than vehicles are under fire from energy conservationists.

But it is not just the moulded and beaten tin strips which are coming in for criticism: so, too, is the special design of the driver's cab, adapted by truckers to meet their long-distance needs.

The colourfully decorated trucks are very popular in Pakistan and have even earned a place in the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Quebec.

Drivers love to paint their vehicles, covering every square inch in dazzling colours, with battle scenes, glamorous women and floral designs brightening up the bodywork. The metal additions compete the picture. They are nailed on in strips and patterns that glint in the sun.

But they make the sides of the trucks uneven and that, says the National Energy Conservation Centre (Enercon), increases air resistance and thus fuel consumption.

Most trucks also carry a mechanic who doubles as relief driver. Since the only stops are for refuelling and meals there is a need for a sleeping area in which one man can take a nap while the other takes a turn at the wheel.

For decades truckers have used a wooden "cradle" structure built directly above the driver's cab, like a crown. This protuberance also increases air resistance.

In addition, overloading of trucks is common among traders anxious to get the most out of each journey. Truckers stack their cargoes high but by loading vertically they raise the centre of gravity and increase instability.

Countless accidents have occurred, especially on uneven and mountainous roads as the tectering loads disturb the balance of the vehicle.

The combined effect of the adaptations is considerable aerodynamic drag, which pushes up fuel consumption.

A study by Enercon has found that about three-quarters of the drag is created by pressure on or around the front corners of the truck or trailer, and that 15 per cent occurs at the rear of the trailer.

It recommends that truckers get rid of the encumbrances. It suggests that a sleeping area could be built inside the vehicle behind the driver's seat. Many drivers, however, are unaccustomed to sleeping in an enclosed space, preferring to sleep in the open.

Enercon reckons that a typical streamlined truck running 12,000 kilometres (7,440 miles) a month could cut fuel consumption by 7 per cent a month. With 72,000 trucks on the road, says the Centre, that would amount to 241.92 million liters of fuel or Rs. 259 million (US $10.72 million).

Set up by the government in 1986 with the help of the US Agency for International Development, Enercon has also demonstrated the energy savings which can be obtained by vehicle tuning, a method of adjusting engines to obtain maximum efficiency.

In two projects spread over six months, it was found that fuel consumption for 600 properly tuned cars in Karachi and 1,200 cars in Islamabad was cut by 11 per cent and carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions were reduced by more than 40 per cent. Information about the results, however, has been given little publicity.

Crushing Weights Threaten Bangkok

MOVEMENTS of people inside a country have many causes.

People leave the countryside and enter the towns to make more money — but then, when they become richer, they move outwards again to get away from urban noise, smoke, tension, etc.

When epidemics strike, the towns are emptied. When economies grow fast, they are filled to bursting.

When governments fail to improve urban roads and services, businesses move out to rural areas (where wage costs are often lower, but transport costs may be higher). So, because the local urban governments lose tax income that way, they invite businesses back again with special incentives.

Thus the country-city flows are like in-and-out tides. At the moment in Thailand, for instance, the tide is flowing swiftly into the cities, as the economy has burst into high growth. The movement is expected to have a significant effect on the growth of the population as a whole.

In 1990, the population growth rate in Thailand was about 1.4 per cent, at which level the population doubles in half a century. The total fertility rate (the number of children per married woman) is estimated to be 2.3, a level very close to the replacement level of 2.2 children.

The fertility rate is expected to decline further, although at a slower pace compared with that of the last 20 years. Variations are expected among the regions of the country. By the end of the century, the fertility rate is expected to decline to about 2 and the population size would grow to approximately 64 million.

So Thailand is facing a "demographic transition" — that is, low fertility and mortality rates plus large migrations from countryside to towns and cities. But the worst problem will lie in the cities.

Thailand faces serious challenges over urban population growth. In 1990, the urban population is estimated to be about 18 million, accounting for 32 per cent of the total population of 55 million.

It has been estimated that the urban population would increase to about 25 million or about 39 per cent of the total by the year 2000. This growth has resulted in serious shortages of basic urban services and environmental problems. These require huge amounts of investment to rectify.

Those who have visited Bangkok at intervals over the last 20 years will know very well what has occurred. A middle-class housing boom began in the 1970s, as trading incomes rose, so suburban sprawl began to surround Bangkok.

Then, to widen the roadways, the "klongs" (canals which crisscross the city) were covered over, or became open sewers. These klongs of clear water used to be lined with beautiful houses, each with its stone stairs where the private barges could tie up.

The policy of closing over the klongs, which seemed right at the time, created a smelly network of stagnant water in their place. Then high-rise buildings proliferated, and the real threat became clear.

Bangkok is built on wet mud. It is sinking under its own weight of buildings and contents and people.