stability and the social fabric

are threatened as populations

multiply and justly demand

His recommendation that

on a large canvas the Basin of

the great rivers has to become

in ecologically responsible re-

gion in order to secure ecolog-

ical security for all" can be ex-

tended to urge that we would

better secure peace, security

and progress for all our peo-

ples by promoting cooperation

within the broadest possible

equity and opportunity."

Dhaka, Friday, December 27, 1991

How to Curb Smuggling?

The twice put off anti-smuggling drive is now scheduled to start from the New Year's Day. The very fact that the planned drive needed to be postponed on two occasions forces us to conclude that the whole scheme was not thought out well in advance. While we are fully behind the government's effort to curb smuggling, we wonder if going after the shopkeepers in the city and raiding their outlets is the right way of going about this important task. What is the rationale behind going after the sellers of smuggled goods only instead of going after the suppliers also? Obviously there are well established routes following which the contraband goods enter the country; there are carriers who bring these all the way and then there are the people who receive the goods at this end and ultimately sell them to the retailers. Some of the contrabands enter through the airport under the very nose of our Customs officials. Travellers from abroad bring in goods which later find their way into the local market. Without stopping these goods at any of these points, why has the government chosen to raid the shops in the city? After all the shops are the very last link in the smugglers' chain. The obvious method to curb smuggling would be to stop it at the point of entry - not after they have already passed through many hands and after the original culprits have profited from their action.

There are many reasons for smuggling to exist; the most important being economic. As long as there is effective demand for these goods in the local market, the authorities will be fighting a losing battle to stop them from coming in. The authorities can fight smuggling with punitive steps. with legal actions and with economic measures; the most obvious being improving our own productive capacity. But the problem is that largescale smuggling mitigates against that very prospect. Here lies the challenge for our policy makers - how to mix a package of incentives for our industrialists with effective deterrent measures for the illegal traders, so that smuggling is forever stopped.

Included in the list of banned items is the spillover into the local market, the garment products from our own industry which are meant for the foreign market only. The spillover occurs when there is damage in production or due to missed delivery deadlines. They are then sold in the local market at a very cheap price, enabling our poor and low income groups to afford reasonably good textile products. If these items are banned from the local marke, then where are they to go? All these and other related issues need to be well thought out by the policy makers if effective steps are to be taken to contain smuggling. What we need is a comprehensive policy package, not stop-gap measures.

Stinking Colombo Performance

A sport journalist reporting from Colombo for a national daily has written that he felt ashamed to cover the Bangladesh-Pakistan soccer encounter of Tuesday. Another national daily has asked for a national enquiry into this stinking sport scandal of losing to Pakistan consecutively for the second time in the SAF Games. As responsible professionals, they haven't so much rued over the solitary goal defeat which could very well have been a freak. They would not accept the way the defeat was fashioned - almost systematically and deliberately - right from the selection part of the stink-story to the inept performance of the coach during the match.

Pakistan should have, by the going of the game, won by at least there — they dominated it from start to finish. Is that believable? Our midfield was worse that absent for not only one of the duo remained busy with keeping away from the ball but the other gave a special show wrong passes. Goalkeeper Mohsin was completely beaten at least four times. That's a record for both a goalie to be beaten in such a match as also for the ball failing to get to the net even after well past the goal-tender. Pijush should be hailed as a national hero for clearing three out of these four.

What does our Colombo soccer performance signify? It is clear that our football has fallen deep into not-so-much a professional as a commercial hole. Are we caught up in the Calcutta soccer syndrome of stars being worshipped by millions and producing less than mediocre football? Our stars have long surpassed in the size of the purse — by as much as metres. And football madness here is fast catching up with that of Calcutta — with a matching concomitant rise in soccer corruption.

Losing to Pakistan is shameful enough — the latter being by assessment a far inferior side. The Colombo scandal was, however, about Bangladesh beating itself and quite shamelessly, why did they do it?

All of those involved in ridiculing our national image as a footballing country and stomping around with bulging bags of money must be made to pay for their part in it. But the clubs would intervene and save the culprits. The clubs and their federations have a very big hand in the making of all such cases of ignominious sport performance. The government, which foots the bill of all sporting activity in the country and also of all the outings made by our sportsmen and their managers, must take the Colombo humiliation, in soccer as well as in all other events, as an occasion for mounting a thorough overhauling of the whole sporting sector.

the decade of the nineties as it completes 20 years of its independence. The year, 1991, marked an end of a period of long authoritarian rule and initiated a process for restoration of democratic governance. This change was the result of a mass movement fuelled by widely shared perceptions that

a democratic framework of

governance was imperative for

A transition to democracy in Bangladesh coincides with similar transitions in our own region and in other parts of the world. The scale of the change globally suggests that we might be at a juncture of history, which marks a transition from one historical epoch

to another.

How will these tidal waves of global change impact on our society and our region in a question with which we must necessarily be concerned Caught up in the midst of transition and change in our own societies, we are engaged in stock taking and soul searching, seeking new directions and strategies, which would help us to move towards fulfill ing the survival needs of our

people, and also their larger

aspirations, which remain un-

This South Asian dialogue. which we are initiating, provides a timely opportunity to share our concerns and in particular to assess the impact of these changes on our societies. At the global level there are assessments being made as to who will be the winners and losers in the emerging global dispensation. In these assessments most, if not all, of us in this region are counted among the losers. This should impel us to concert our efforts with a sense of urgency to make our own assessments. Together we need to explore the potential and possibilities that exist in our societies, and in our region, for strategies of

T ASHINGTON : As Cuba

Cuban revolution, daily life in

Cuban cities has become as

difficult as it was during the

dire mid-1960's when even

the most basic necessities

were scarce or simply unavail-

ment. Cuba is coming to re-

semble other Third World na-

Fidel Castro remains as opti-

mistic in 1991 as in December

1956, when he told the 11

bedraggled survivors of a

guerilla invasion of Cuba that

"the days of the dictatorship

At 65, Castro continues to

run Cuba as if he were leading

a team of television adventure

heroes. Denouncing Soviet

President Mikhail Gorbachev's

dissolution of the Soviet Com-

munist Party and the "myth of

bourgeois democracy", Castro

has reasserted his faith in

Leninism and the Cuban brand

facade, however, Castro con-

cedes that Cuba must make

critical adjustments in the face

of the drastic slashing of Soviet

aid and trade. Without the

Soviet oil subsidy, Castro has

had to offer a debt-for-equity

swap to creditors and legalise

some private service opera-

tions. Cuban foreign debt is

thought to be around US 8 bil-

Behind his proud oratorical

are numbered".

of socialism.

Shorn of its vanguard role

approaches the 33rd

anniversary of the

Bangladesh and South Asia — Priorities for the Nineties

regional cooperation, which might improve our chances of being among the winners, or at any rate to shape things in a way, that the gains and losses from global change are more evenly distributed.

We need to evaluate our post-colonial experience the high hopes and aspirations with which we welcomed independence and the disappointments and frustrations leading in some cases to the distillusionment that is visible

in each of our societies, independence had promised freedom, equality and social justice. The post colonial state

by Dr. Kamal Hossain

to nurturing democratic values and an environment in which the rule of law, respect for human rights, a free press and other democratic institutions can gather strength. To make the State more responsive to people's priorities, we need to adopt strategies to empower disadvantaged sections of the population. We need to explore ways in which we can cooperate in strengthening democratic institutions in our respective countries. A recent practical step was the exchange of regional teams of ob-

servers in the elections held in

cial concerns. A text of development put forward by one of our economists may well be bottom 50% of our popula-

These strategies of develcontributed to growth of mili-

priority needs to be given within our countries to resolve ethnic conflicts and to contain the growth of fundamentalism.

These efforts towards building an environment for regional cooperation are premised on the conviction that such an environment would open up enormous possibilities for all-round cooperation. Cooperation in generating the technologies of the future, in shared R & D and the development of South Asian centres of excellence must be an integral part of our survival strategies for the further. Developing common strategies

Thus while the problem which faces us are daunting and the record of the last four decades is one of many failures and missed opportunities, nevertheless, through these four decades, we have through experience arrived at a point where in each of our countries we are renewing our commitment to the common goal of peace and stability within our region and, in our own socicties, to economic and social change in the interest of our peoples within a democratic political order. In pursuing these objectives, we believe more dialogues and increased interaction between our people and non-governmental or-

ganizations at all levels could

significantly contribute to-

wards building an environment

for more effective regional co-

operation in South Asia.

A former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh and a noted lawyer, the writer is a member of the presidium of Awami League. The article here is based on a talk delivered by Dr Hussain at the South Asian Regional Dialogue (SARD), a non-official forum of intellectuals from SAARC countries, held in Delhi on December 16-18. At this meeting. Bangladesh was represented by Dr Hussain, Prof. Rehman Sobhan, Dr Meghna Guha-Thakurta, Dr Pasil Uddin Mahtab and Mr Fakharuddin

commended: To what extent does such development improve the conditions of the

> opment would call for a greater degree of regional cooperation than political realities in our region has so far permitted. Unresolved issues and ethnic and sectarian conflicts have vitiated the political climate. Political tensions have

Today we need to assess our experience · · · in order to identify the main impediments to nurturing democratic values and an environment in which the rule of law, respect for human rights, a free press and other democratic institutions can gather strength.

was to represent people and promote the greatest good of the greatest numbers of bringing about social and economic change within a democratic political order.

As we evaluate four decades of experience, we find that there is a considerable gap between what was expected and what has been achieved. We need to ask whether the post-colonial state itself has measured up to expectations. While in some of our countries the state shed even the pretence of democracy and assumed an authoritarian character, in others though the democratic framework was preserved it has faced pressures from time to time from authoritarian tendencies and ethnic and sectarian conflicts.

Today we need to assess our experience and in order to identify he main impediments

a number of our countries. Some of us had the privilege of being election observers in more than one of our neighbouring countries. A regional human rights organization to monitor human rights and the observance of certain shared values stemming from our common commitment to upholding universally recognized human rights might be another useful initiative that

may be added to our agenda. What are the basic common objectives on which we could arrive at a consensus? Clearly the first on the list must be peace and stability in our region. This would be followed by a commitment to development in the interest of the people in each of our societies Development today must mean sustainable development, development which must be sensitive to environmental and so-

tary expenditures to unacceptable levels. In some of our societies it has critically contributed to the breakdown of democracy and the emergence of authoritarian structures. In others it continues to divert resources away from priority areas of social and economic development.

This is why our effort should be directed to improving the political environment in our region. We should move our governments to attach the highest foreign policy priority. if this not already being done, to a resolution of outstanding issues and removal of sources of tension. Ethnic conflicts and revival of fundamentalist tendencies in some our societies not only threaten political stability, but by their very nature, also have a negative impact on relations between countries in our region. This is why high on global and regional issues will enable us to secure our goals, national and regional more effectively. Co-ordinated development strategies will help us to optimise use of resources and more effectively serve the shared goals of development for the benefit of all our peoples.

The challenges that face us and the possibilities that exist are well encapsulated in the words of George Verghese in his inspirational study on the WATERS OF HOPE: The glaring contradiction of the largest concentration of the world's most poor unable to garner the bounty of one of the world's richest natural resource regions in which they live is an indictment that can no longer be evaded. Not a little has been achieved over the past 40 years. But not enough. Political

Cuba: Just Another Third World Country

Despite the proud rhetoric of President Fidel Castro, Cuba is on the way to joining the economically troubled majority of the nations of the South. Saul Landau, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Policy Studies, examines the response of the maverick island nation to the 'new world order' of the 1990's.

in the world socialist move-The limited economic liberalisation has not been matched by political relax-Nevertheless, President ation, however.

To understand the Cuba leadership's apparent inflexibility, one must look to the lessons that Castro learned during his long career and has converted into unbreakable political guidelines.

Central among these are his views on dissent. In 1868 1895 and 1933. Cuban independence and social justice movements were foiled by division. Vowing not to commit the same mistakes as his predecessors. Castro has equated public dissent with treason.

From the beginning of the revolution, Castro has insisted that opening the country to fractious political debate encourages "imperialism" (the United States) to re-enter and devour its old, albeit informal,

possession. To enforce unity. Castro has maintained a semi-siege mentality. Just as Washington policy-makers are driven by the notion of punishing Castro. Cuba's President is fixated on maintaining the facade of

Cuban oneness to avert US aggression. Dissenters have been punished, often with prison

The Cuban revolution's unifying themes - pride, sovereignty, accomplishments of nationhood - served for nearly three decades to camouflage burning issues around religion, race and gender - themes that Castro has finessed through reforms and slogans.

Socialism offered mass participation, but not choice, without which spiritual life was less than fulfilling. National heroics became substitutes for personal or community initiatives. The compensations were that Cubans had better medical care, education and social services than other Third World

Cubans watched the physical transformation of their nation along with its leap onto the global political stage. From 1959 until the late 1980's Cubans could play roles on several continents.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Third World liberation has become untenable.

An historic era ended, and with it, Cuba's role as vanguard.

Cuban troops have left Africa. Cuba plays no part in current Middle East maneuvering. Revolution is dead - or at least dormant in Latin America. Strip the outdated rhetoric

from the speeches and resolutions of the recent party congress, and one discovers that Cuba has become just another Third World country except for the role of the Cuban state. Castro himself has conceded that Cuba's global role has diminished dramatically while its domestic problems are shared by the vast majority of nations in the

In the 1990's, free market dogma assigns the Third World state to service foreign capital, police its population and maintain a cheap and docile labour

Cuban state institutions, however, still dominate the society.

The Cuban state discourages initiative, hoards and wastes resources and inhibits not only

other avenues through which

discussion, but decision-making itself. Once and agent for positive change, the Cuban state is now an albatross on the

backs of the people. Castro has insisted that markets which existed long before the rise of commodity production mean capitalism. And capitalism, of course, would mean the death of the

Cuban socialist experiment. Socialismo o muerte' (socialism or death) has become the official slogan. The

joke on Havana streets is that the two words will appear as synonyms in the next dictionary. But this doesn't mean collapse is imminent.

It does indicate that Leninism and the facade of Cuba unity is as outmoded as the US dogma of the Cuban "threat". As capital begins to dictate the limits of Cuban socialism. Castro cannot keep Cuba closed politically and invite half a million European and Canadian tourists each year, along with investors hungry for quick profits.

Some Cuban-Americans translate the daily roster of complaints amidst Cuba's precarious economic situation into a prediction that Cubans will rise up like the people of Eastern Europe and overthrow the government that has brought them into the grim present reality.

OPINION

Women and Environment

Nahid Rahman

Bangladesh-a land of rivers became a liberated nation on December 16th 1971. The small deltaic region on the shores of Bay of Bengal encompasses an area of 143, 998 square kilometers where millions of people live-although not in comfort. It is one of the poorest countries in the world with a GNP of only \$179 and an annual population growth rate of 2.2%.

With such a high growth rate accompanied by limited development activities a tremendous pressure is being exerted on the environment. Women form an integral part of the pressing since they have been long dependent on it either directly or indirectly for obtaining food, shelter, clothing, air to breathe and earning a livelihood from. This environment is in danger and women have a lot to lose by

turning their back to it. Natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, and tidal bores are regular encounters for the 110.3 million people of Bangladesh of which 48.6% are women. The socio-economic framework has been contributing significantly towards the high malnutrition and anemia rates in women in general and pregnant women in particular. The infant and maternal mortality rates are amongst the highest in the world today. If a woman is not performing the traditional role of motherhood then she is employed elsewhere which necessarily is not an indication of a better situation because here too she is unsafe, exploited and deprived.

Physical Environment : Due to a close frequency of natural disasters the level of pollution has increased causing an ecological imbalance. The resultant killing of birds and animals, destruction of forests, erosion and increasing salinity all these are directly linked to woman because she gets her sustairence from these.

A large number of the gar ment industries earning substantial amount of foreign exchange for Bangladesh have woman employees where they encounter chemically treated fabrics and dust from cloths while working in uncongenially

small areas. Exploitation by male colleagues is also a regular feature for these women. Her lack of education affects her efficiency and her ability to speak up in her defence.

The sericulture industries in this country are also dominated by woman labour force where she grows silkworms, takes care of the cocoons, and feeds the bred insects. Continuous exposure to this is hazardous for health which is often ignored by the employers and owners.

Woman brick-breakers with their little infant/infants inhaling dust particles are also regular sights on the streets. They receive less pay for equal work

As major industrial activities are limited to tanneries: pesticide and fertilizer factories; textile, paper, sugar and oil mills only they have become some of the major offenders of the environment.

Biological Environment: Typhoid, paratyphoid, shigellosis, streptococcal infe-ctions, diphtheria, hepatitis, amoebiosis etc. are some of the most common form of diseases microorganisms of which are found in polluted water. Many communities depend on such sources for meeting their daily requirements including drinking. The situation is worse during the regular flood season.

Pesticides like DDT is still in use, Chemicals like azo dyes (used by confectioners) which are known to cause cancer and banned drugs are still used and found across Bangladesh.

A woman's environment is her immediate surrounding which includes the many physical, biological and psycosocial facets. Simply putting an end to all the mentioned activities or issues will not help since the country is already plagued with poverty. Issues have to be identified first, alternatives must be sought and awareness must be created at the various levels before any positive impact can be found.

Local governments, NGOs and individuals have a crucial role to play in this as human development cannot be achieved on its own, by a fews; if requires participation by allboth men and women.

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Of files and cases

Sir, This has reference to "Executive Tips" published in The Daily Star on December 23. Thanks to Mr. Shahabuddin Mahtab for admitting

I had the opportunity to see some files where I found that a file was opened by a Dealing Assistant and he laid the 'foundation' of the case. The file went to the Head Assistant who either added or subtracted something then it was placed to the Section Officer who placed it to the Deputy Secretary. Then it was placed to the Joint Secretary, who carried it to the secretary for decision. Then on its way back the file again travelled through those hands. If the applicant is lucky enough he would get a reply. But in majority of the cases the file travels twice or thrice and following the same

top -bottom route. One would only be surprised (or dismayed) enough to find that the major portion of the order minute sheet bears the 'learned' opinion of the 'hon'ble' Dealing Assistant and his bosses either wrote, "place it before so and so", or "discuss" etc., but no one took any responsibility in making any decision.

All these things happened due to absence of accountability of the public servants to the people and usurpation of

power by illegal means. The anti-dote ,however, is democracy. Let us unitedly work to protect it.

M. Saleem Ullah Advocate Motifheel C/A, Dhaka.

Teach the Burmese a lesson

Sir, The border incident of 21st December perpetrated by Burmese forces is not an isolated incident. It is a deeprooted conspiracy will planned with sinister design. So many brigades at Bushidong and Mongdong sub-divisions are not created over-night given the mountainous terrain that devides Yangon and Arkan divisions. These were brought - in several months before for what?

Thailand, China and India are militarily superior to them. Burmese authorities are so afraid of China and Thailand that they are maintaining false friendship with them at the cost of un-favoured border trades and smugglings. India is not the best choice.

So they have chosen Bangladesh, which in their opinion is militarily inferior and politically weak democratic government, to create an international incident to 'divert the Burmese people's attention' and create some kind of communal violence in-

side Burma. They have done this before 1988 student uprising and on many other occasion since Ne Win took over in Burma. Also they want Bangladesh to accept Rohingya Muslims as Bangladeshi citi-

The International Terrorists Affairs journal pointed out that Israeli Intelligence MOSSAD' had trained Burmese military intelligence personnel. Burma has no economic or cultural relations with Israel, then why a fullfledged Israeli embassy in Rangoon, instead of Saudi Arabia's where Burmese Muslims go for Hajj in hundreds? And there is nearly 15 per cent Muslim population in Burma. Why Burma appointed a Israel trained ambassador in Dhaka? The attack on BDR outpost is a naked violation of Bangladesh's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The government must teach the Burmese a lesson. For what more excuse we are waiting for, when they are even refusing the friendship call of pro-

posed flag meeting? Major (Retd) Anisur Rahman Mymensingh

BTV quality

has turned deaf ears to it. As a annually. Besides, there are

the TV authorities earn quite a substantial amount to money. What good return do we subscribers get against our money ? We do not even get a good technical performance from the technical wing of the BTV and as a result we are to fiddle with our TV sets once in every five minutes to get a proper focusing, colour etc. and in spite of our best efforts, we fail to get a good reception because seventies and early eighties I happened to know a TV Engineer who used to keep on hammering the person conthere was any distortion or defect in transmission. Constant supervision is necessary, aesthetic side of the programmes. The less said about it, the better. In those days our drama and cultural programmes on TV used to be of seeing that.

the present democratic gov-

A M F Quadir

Sir, Numerous letters came out from time to time in vari-

ous newspapers complaining about the technical performance of Bangladesh Television. Everyone seemingly result none gets good reception on his TV coloured or black & white. There are as many as 5,30,000 viewers all over Bangladesh who pay about ten to fifteen crore Taka in the form of domestic licence fees

someone, somewhere is negligent of his duty. During the cern over the phone whenever otherwise we do not get good results. I am not touching the such quality that people across the border used to hanker for We are deprived of viewing the CNN and BBC News through satellite because it will serve a particular coterie adversely. When other viewers in this sub-continent are enjoying it, why can't we? If the public sector fails to deliver the

goods, private sector may be given a trial. All we want is an improved quality of our TV both in its technical and cultural performances with all the latest technology. We want our money's worth. We refuse to be fooled any longer. We appeal to

ernment for redress. Dhaka-1207