

Give the Earth Summit the Right Signal

Few international conferences have been of greater urgency to the global community — and, indeed, to Bangladesh — than the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) opening in Rio de Janeiro today.

By now, most nations, developed and developing ones, are conversant with various aspects of the threat to the ecology of the world, a threat that varies from region to region, even from country to country.

It will be largely pointless for the Earth Summit, as the Rio Conference is called, just to focus on the gravity of the worldwide crisis, without offering a solution.

In fact, several ideas have been worked out in details. For instance, an Earth Council, like a Security Council, dealing with global ecology has been proposed, together with a Commission on sustainable development.

The importance of the Earth Summit to Bangladesh cannot be over-emphasised. As we suggested earlier in these columns — and we make the point again — that our delegation to Rio, must be well-prepared with well-documented position papers, video films on environmental hazards faced by the nation and even a set of projects which, we believe, can be implemented with international cooperation.

More Cricket, Real Cricket

Pakistan's victory in the fifth World Cup cricket held in Australia and New Zealand last February-March, gave yet another boost to the game's appeal in this country.

This scenario has led cricket officials in this country to confidently predict Bangladesh's participation in the next, or at least in the following World Cup.

That, however, deals only with the limited-overs variety of the game. While the limited-overs match has certainly broadened the game's appeal and added greater variety and excitement to it, it is the five-day Test and three or four-day first class match that remains the heart and soul of the noble sport.

STARTING today, all international roads will lead to Brazil. In Rio de Janeiro, the city with the most beautiful vista in the world, leaders will assemble for the Earth Summit.

In April of 1970, I witnessed the famous Earth Day rally in Washington DC. It generated a lot of interest but the movement was outside the mainstream.

Environmental issues have escalated very rapidly in the last couple of decades. Even though warnings on the finite resources of the planet were voiced from time to time until the phenomenal growth of population, trade and consumption in the post-war era world's resources, by and large, were considered to be limitless.

It is not always thus. Since 1986 violent clashes have grown in frequency and intensity. And in the last year the Nyanga taxi rank has intermittently been the site of a war that has split over into the surrounding residential and squatter areas.

In the last clash 16 people died and 200 homes were destroyed. Residents were forced to pack their belongings and flee as gunmen rampaged through the area, firing at bystanders and setting fire to shops.

Within the predominantly squatter area, the general perception is that the South African police were behind some of the shooting. Eye-witnesses said they saw white men in balaclavas torching some shops.

To the Editor...

DESAs system loss Sir, Mr Abu Ahmed's commentary (The Daily Star, May 16) is quite relevant and the authorities might like to clarify how the system loss is going to be reduced.

Putting old wine in a new bottle is no solution. It must be pointed out that the excessive system loss, which is avoidable, is due to the human factors, and therefore not beyond the control of the authorities, provided there is a will not to succumb to misplaced kindness, which has, unfortunately, become a national malady, and at the same time, a panacea for procrastination.

The employees' unions of PDH and DESA are fully aware of the corrupt practices, but they hardly touch on this issue.

ROAD TO RIO

The First Challenge Facing Earth Summit Lies in its Declaration

A. M. A. Muhiith, The Daily Star Guest Columnist, writes from New York



gradual steps by elimination of epidemics and control of diseases, thus causing astronomical population growth. The first billion of humankind was reached in 1830 and in another century it doubled.

Our planet is indeed threatened. The Club of Rome only dramatised the old warning when it postulated 'The Limits to Growth' in 1972.

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In a three-part series, the writer, a former Finance Minister of Bangladesh, looks at all the various aspects, including possible outcome, of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). He has been studying the preparation for his meeting for past two years from a vantage position of a consultant to the United Nations.

The preparatory work on the draft of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development has been completed.

The principles of the Declaration, however, mark a significant progress in the perceptions of nations. There are three major factors which have generated the current concern

for the environment. On all those issues, there has been remarkable convergence of views during the last two decades.

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The principle of co-operation among states to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the earth's eco-system is a ringing message of the draft declaration.

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sources for such comforts. The situation is considerably changed now; it is recognised that patterns of production and consumption must be sustainable. It is not clear though as to how to reorient such patterns.

There is great scope for changing consumption patterns now and the best illustration is provided by energy consumption. In USA per capita oil consumption was 25.4 barrels and use of oil per unit of national output was 16.2 barrels in 1989, when the respective figures for West Germany were 13.5 and 2.4 barrels.

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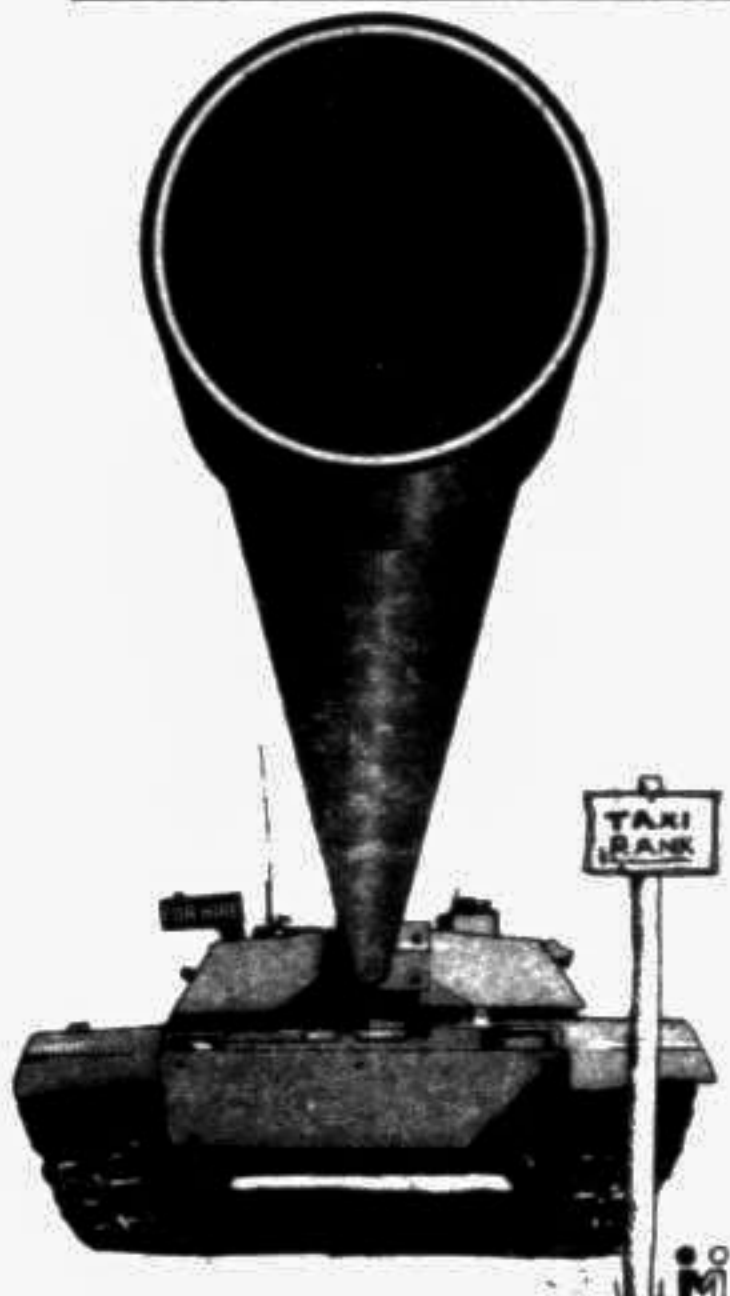
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The Taxi War that Plagues Cape Town after 40 Years

Maira Levy writes from Cape Town

Not the least of the many community troubles that beset South Africa is a taxi war that has plagued Cape Town for years. It has left 100 dead, disrupted communities and drawn claims of South African police complicity in the violence. The taxi war is another product of apartheid and has a history going back 40 years.



guyana's monopoly was suddenly disrupted. Some new arrivals spotted a lucrative gap in the market and started a taxi service for township residents between their homes in the black ghettos and their jobs in the white suburbs and industrial areas.

They dispensed with permits and regulations, flouted the white man's law and pioneered a cheap and reliable transport network could rival the government-owned bus company.

At the source of the violence is rivalry between Laguna and Webta over the lucrative routes between the townships and the white suburbs and central business district.

Wittingly or not, when the South African authorities legalised the black taxi business and began granting permits for those routes they exacerbated the tension.

Repeated peace efforts, involving Archbishop Desmond Tutu, African National Congress (ANC) leaders, the mayor of Cape Town and eminent business and community figures, have all failed to stem the violence.

Peace negotiators say that while Laguna shown a willingness to seek a compromise solution, Webta repeatedly reneges on ceasefire agreements and refuses to consider sharing its lucrative taxi routes.

At stake is a lucrative commercial venture. Gross takings of a single taxi running the route six days a week are put at more than R9,000 a month. A doctor or lawyer earns the same.

But the source of the tension goes even deeper than competition over the most lucrative taxi routes. The Laguna taxi men are a fully urbanised and settled part of the

Webta, it is alleged that the police are using the taxi conflict to harass ANC organisers and disrupt these communities.

A community leader said "This is a political war. It is not over taxi routes and ranks. This is an ANC and South African Communist Party stronghold, and it is an attempt to destroy the area."

About 300 people have been arrested in taxi war-related violence since the hostility stepped up last March. Police say 600 clashes in that time have done R1 million damage to taxis. (\$1=2.3 Rand)

Desperate for peace, township community leaders have implemented a boycott of all Webta and Laguna taxis and suspended all affected taxi services, hoping to force a ceasefire.

MOIRA LEVY is a freelance journalist and works in the media department of a South African think-tank, the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa.

OPINION Tourism in Bangladesh

Perhaps neither any book nor any film can provide the knowledge, treasure and pleasure of that of tourism. Tourism is practical and unique. It is a reality, palpitation of heart, wonder, sensation and a reward. Tourism is a passport to peace. It is also one of the easiest ways to revitalise the economy of a country.

1) Operate a bi-monthly Dhaka-Bogra-Paharpur tour in ordinary buses as above. 2) Operate quarterly Dhaka-Sunderbans tour by coastal ship in collaboration with BWITC, Chalna Port Authority and Forest Department.

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4) Operate a monthly tour to interesting forts at i) Khizirpur (Haliganj) ii) Idrakpur (Munshiganj) and iii) Sonakanda (Bandar) by ordinary but safer motor launch in collaboration with Motor Launch Owners' Association. 5) Operate a bi-weekly Dhaka-Rajendrapur, Dhaka-Sonargaon tour by ordinary buses in collaboration with City Bus Owners' Association or BRTC.

O H Kabir Dhaka