Dhaka, Wednesday, June 3, 1992

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. After years of preparation at national and regional levels, the meeting of government leaders and voluntary organisations, probably the largest in recent history, will be looking at the very question of survival of mankind and seeking ways and means for averting the disaster. In this sense, the Rio Conference is being held when "humanity stands at a definite moment in its history", as has been aptly said in one UN document and quoted in the accompanying article on this page 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. While the nature of threat varies, so do the causes, despite a number of common elements existing in several forms of environmental degradation. Sadly enough, most of these common features are present in Bangladesh today, from population explosion and deforestation to warming of the atmosphere threatening the disappearance of part of the coastal areas into the sea and frequent natural disasters.

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. There is no denying the fact that considerable work in this regard has been done, not only in the preparation of a draft declaration but also in the formulation of some tentative proposals for dealing with the crisis. The Earth Summit will, we hope, generate the political will on the part of participating heads of governments to face the crisis. However, this political will can remain an abstract proposition. almost a myth, unless the conference produces the necessary mechanism to carry out the followup actions in which the Non-governmental Organisations(NGOs) work alongside official bodies.

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. Some thoughts have also been given to the idea of enlarging the terms of references of the International Court of Justice to enable it to take up cases where the ecology of one country is threatened by another, to give just one example. Then, there is the question of setting up a fund, estimated by some experts to be about \$10 billion, to implement projects under what is being described as the environmental revolution. The Earth Summit should have little problem in getting firm pledges for this fund but only if all countries would agree to divert part of their saving from defence cuts to ecology and 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. We should also aim at being elected to the Earth Council, or whatever it may be called, and be as visible as possible in this new drive to save our environment. Seen from this perspective, we have the uncomfortable feeling that while the choice of Foreign Minister ASM Mustafizur Rahman as the leader of the delegation is a good one, his delayed departure for Rio some 48 hours after the opening of the meeting shows bad planning. We also feel that our delegation should have been led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia herself to emphasise the importance this country attaches to a conference that may be most crucial for our survival. We are afraid, we are not sending the right signal to Rio.

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. The success of that South Asian state, following India's triumph back in 1983, has reinforced the feeling that the cricket world is a constantly shrinking one where the previously-huge gap in playing standard among nations is closing steadily. With Sri Lanka's performance improving by the year, South Asia's challenge for world cricket supremacy is now a real one.

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. The next tournament in 1996 may well be too optimistic a projection, but the chances of us taking part in eight to 12 years time are perhaps not all that hopeless, given the steadily increasing quality of the game at home.

That, however, deals only with the limitedovers variety of the game. While the limited-overs match has certainly broaden 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. For Bangladesh to be recognised as a true cricketing nation, it has to develop the players and management necessary for twoinnings matches at the first class level. We need to reorganise our domestic programme with the goal of qualifying for Test matches in the near future. That would mean introducing a local first class league tournament, with two-innings matches played over three days. If we can persist with such a programme for several years without hitches (a tough job in the sporting world of Bangladesh), only then can we hope to produce the coaches, managers and, most important, players with the skill and temperament necessary for the real thing. Cricket Board officials, while not neglecting the limited-overs tournaments. should start laying the foundation of long-term cricketing excellence.

ROAD TO RIO

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. For over two

years preparatory work is

being done for the UN Confer-

ence on Environment and De-

velopment (UNCED). In the

search for a global order in the

wake of the momentous

changes in the recent past this

is a landmark gathering. In one

of the documents of the

Preparatory Committee meet-

ing held earlier in New York it

is aptly stated that "humanity

stands at a defining moment in

nessed the famous Earth Day

rally in Washington DC. It gen-

crated a lot of interest but the

movement was outside the

mainstream. It was more a

concern of the youth and the

rebellious. In 1972, UN Con-

ference on Environment held

in Stockholm gave legitimacy

to environment movement.

Incidentally, the Secretary

General for that Conference

was a Canadian go-getter Mau-

rice Strong, who happens to

be the Secretary General also

for the Rio Conference. Stock-

holm Conference established

the UN Environment Pro-

gramme (UNEP) and a few

years later UN Habitat was set

up. They are the main agencies

for environment in the inter-

national public sector. This is

not to deny that other agen-

cics, notably World Bank and

UNDP, also play major roles on

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 con-

sumption in the post-War era

world's resources, by and

large, were considered to be

limitless. The perception

eroded first with the advent of

the steam engine. Prior to this

discovery only manual labour

and cumbrous, heavy and im-

mobile equipment could ex-

ploit natural resources in any

significant proportion and

hence the exploitation re-

mained limited. Steam power

increased human capacity for

exploitation of nature enor-

mously. This was followed in

Environmental issues have

issues of environment.

In April of 1970, I wit-

its history."

The First Challenge Facing Earth Summit Lies in its Declaration

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



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 remaining parts of the article will appear on Thursday and Friday.

gradual steps by climination 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. But the next doubling was achieved in fortyfive years. The strains on the environment cannot but be heavy. Third, growth in production for human consumption has been phenomenal since the second World War.In ten years from 1958, the advance in science and technology on the one hand and expansion of trade and investment on the other resulted in exploitation of as much resources of the earth as was exploited in the previous millions of years of its existence. Naturally, ecological balance, protection of the environment and preservation of life-supporting systems assumed great

importance in the last quarter of this century. Our planet is indeed threatened. The Club of Rome only dramatised the old warning when it postulated 'The Limits to Growth" in 1972. Since 1984 the World Watch Institute has been issuing its annual State of the World report. The message is not of doom but of ways towards sustainable development. Green movement all over the world is making its presence felt not only as a pressure group but also in legislative representation. In the most recent phase the end of the cold war has brought con

cerns for environmental security to the forefront. In just two decades the stage has been set for the commencement of the environment revo-

The preparatory work on the draft of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development has been completed. There will be a Charter incorporating twenty-even principles. The draft Declaration begins by affirming that "Human beings are at the centre of

gained a momentum of its own with the unfolding end of the cold war. But its fate is uncer tain. The financial and institutional arrangements that will provide the underpinning of any programme of action appear to be in doldrums at this

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

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.

concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." Then it goes on to retterate "the sovereign right" of states "to exploit their own natural resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies." But the principle of cooperation by states "in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the earth's eco-system is the ringing message of the Declaration. The question is whether this Declaration will be platitudinous or effective in real life. The principles of the Declaration in order to be operational need an action programme. Agenda 21 developed with high expectations

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

CONSUMPTION ISSUE: remember speaking to a group of somewhat radical young people in Washington in 1971 where I lamented that if 6 per cent of world's population continued to consume 60 per cent of world's resources there would be very little left for the billions of inhabitants of the third world. The response received was that you could not deprive people who had the means and technology to air-condition a stadium from such comfort only to provide room for the future good of people who have yet to learn the trick or amass the re-

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. In 1865 William Stanly Jevons had warned as follows: "We have to make the momentous choice between brief greatness and longer continued mediocrity." The technological achievements of the time were not in a position to consider alternative ways such as pollution control, conservation of natural resources, recycling of wastes, greater use of renewable resources or environment-friendly lifestyles.

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. Surely US consumption levels admit of drastic reduction without reducing out put growth through technological fixes and habit changes. (For one thing the price of a gallon of oil in US at the time was \$1.33 as against the German price of \$3.05). President Carter launched to "Global 2000° study which presented a precarious picture of ecological degradation and suggested

There is great scope for

changes in consumption patterns. The Study was so unacceptable that the successor administration refused to publish it as an official document. Instead Herman Kahn produced a rebuttal in 1984 under the title "The Plentiful Resources". This mentality seems like a thing of the past now. Even though modalities for curtailment of consumption are yet to be found, it is accepted that high consumption levels are an ecological nightmare. Rio Declaration enjoins states "to reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption," It may take years to adopt operational programmes in line with this declaration of intent but still it is a step forward. POVERTY ISSUE: Another welcome development is the

recognition of the causal rela-

tionship between poverty and

environmental degradation.

Deforestation and desertifica-

tion are direct results of poverty. In search of fuel for cooking food the poor denudes shrubberies and trees. In search of foreign exchange they allow reckless logging in their forests or dumping of dangerous wastes in their land. With the end of the cold war, it is crystal clear that most refugees are indeed economic refugees. They are felling from vulnerable or inhospitable environment - sinking coast lands, drying pastures or fuel short habitations. They are fleeting from unemployment and starvation. They are fleeing from absence of shelter and unmitigated deprivation. Rio Declaration asks all states and peoples "to cooperate in the essential task of cradicating poverty as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development". Targets of eradicating poverty by the year 2000 and restoring ecologi cally vulnerable areas by 1995 are expected to be established Here also operational programmes have to be awaited so that the targets do not remain only expressions of good inten-

A former Finance Minister of Bangladesh who has also served both the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank as the representative of this country, the writer contributes to this paper from time to time.

The Taxi War that Plagues Cape Town after 40 Years

Moira 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

OME days the huge taxi rank in one of Cape Town's troubled black townships is peaceful. Vendors ply their wares. People queue to buy meat and sizzle it on open fires. Youngsters working for the taxi operators hustle for passengers, yelling loud the destinations to outbid their ri-

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 spilt over into the surrounding residential and squatter areas.

It has left 100 dead, disrupted communities and drawn claims of South African police complicity in the vio-

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

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 shacks.

The soots of Cape Town's bloody taxi war can be traced directly to the effects of apartheid and the separation of South Africans into racially segregated residential areas.

The story goes back almost 40 years, to the formation of the "African Taxis," an organisation of taxi driver/owners

gunya'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.

of apartheid and has a history going back 40 years.

They called themselves the Western Cape Black Taxt association (Webta) and bore the brunt of the pressure from the white authorities for running illegal taxis.

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

In the formative years, the taxi pirates were regarded as the people's heroes. Webta was officially launched in 1987, amid much pomp and fanfare at a three-day celebration, having taken of the might of the white establishment, it gained recognition from the powerful nation-wide South African

Black Taxi Association. All that has now changed. Webta started swapping its dilapidated and rusty motorcars for flashy fleets of minibuses. Allegations grew of nameless and faceless white financial backing.

At the source of the violence is rivalry between Lagunya and Webta over the lucrative routes between the townships and the white suburbs and central business dis-

Wittingly of 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 Lagunya shown a willingness to seek a compromise solution, Webta repeatedly reneges on ceasefire agreements and refuses to consider sharing its lucrative taxi routes. More serious are charges from the community that Webta has police protection and support.

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 Lagunya taxi men are a fully urbanised and settled part of the

Cape Town community, with

Lagunya regards its Webta rivals as Johnny-come-latelies, relatively new arrivals o the urban scene, who still have one foot in the rural sector.

close links to the ANC.

Beneath the taxt war hostility is a clash of world views and values. The taxi conflict therefore intersects with other significant cleavages in Cape Town's black townships, between long-established "insiders" and those who arrived in the city in the Eighties.

The conflict gained a political flavour when two ANC leaders, members of the peace committees, were shot dead last year. Lagunya is largely based in township areas known as ANC strongholds. By aiding flict to harass ANC organisers and disrupt these communi-A community leader said

Webta, it is alleged that the

police are using the taxi con-

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 Lagunya taxis and suspended all affected taxi services, hoping to force a Gemini News ceasefire.

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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. How thrilling it is to see the flowers burgeon in the spring, enjoy the sunset at Cox's Bazar beach, hike through the tea gardens of Sylhet, visit the Sunderbans, meet the tribal people in Chittagong Hill Tracts, go down the memory lane in Paharpur and Mynamati ! But whither tourism in Bangladesh? What is Bangladesh Tourism Corporation doing in the public sector? They are operating taxi scrvice, have opened a few restaurants and hotels, and are running a duty free shop. How worthy all this is in the context of tourism? Is this all to develop and promote tourism in our country? How many foreign and domestic tourists are enjoying the facilities of Tourism Corporation, and what amount of foreign exchange and local currency the Corporation is earning per moth or annum? We would request the Bangladesh Tourism Corporation to do away with its obtru-

promotion of tourism in our country. 1) Operate a monthly Dhaka-Cox's Bazar and Dhaka-Rangamati tour in ordinary

sion and kindly take the fol-

lowing simple and economic

measures for development and

buses in collaboration with Bus Owners' Association or BRTC.

3) Operate quarterly Dhaka-Sunderbans tour by coastal ship in collaboration with BWITC, Chaina Port Authority

pur (Hajiganj) ii) Idrakpur (Munshiganj) and iii) Sonakanda (Bandar) by ordinary but safer motor launch in collaboration with Motor Launch

5) Operate a bi-weekly Dhaka-Rajendrapur, Dhaka-Sonargaon tour by ordinary buses in collaboration with City Bus Owners' Association or

6) Operate a daily city sightseeing tour from Zia International Airport for the transit passengers in collaboration with foreign airlines offices

tional and international characteristics of development and promotion of tourism. Situated in the Macro Asian Corridor of transcontinental air traffic connecting Europe, Asia and Australia, Bangladesh is the unique country in the world having no communal, racial and ethnic problem, so to say We have a very bright and wide scope to develop and promote

to move forward.

DESA's 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. We can be efficiently unruly, but we do not know how to be tough, and how to handle unpleasant situations (such as: what the blocked trucks were not towed away and the Demra-Aricha road cleared within 30 minutes in spite of all unwarranted opposition?).

The employees' unions of PDB and DESA are fully aware of the corrupt practices, but they hardly touch on this issue. In what way are they cooperating with the authorities in reducing corruption? Why those who are corrupt should go scot free and derive all the benefits to which the honest workers have the right? Protecting the wrong doers is not a legitimate union activity. This type of information is never released to the press for the information of the tax payers.

ferrying residents between the

taxis, these drivers who later

changed their name to the La-

gunya Taxi Association — an

acronym for the three town-

ships of Langa, Guguletu and

Nyanga — operated strictly

within the law, trading only

outside the white residential

grants came in from the rural

areas in the early Eighties, La-

Whin large number of mi-

In their distinctive Sedan

major black townships.

Machines act, and the actions are predictable (symptoms and diagnosis). Human beings react, and the reactions cannot be predicted all the time. Therefore the main thrust for reducing the system loss is to tackle the undestrable human factors. In a corrupt atmosphere, the system loss cannot be reduced, in spite of all platitudes.

While initiating direct action on corruption, indirect action should also be set in motion, namely, competition. The monopoly must be broken. For competition, there must be at least three parties, not

Technologically, the cluster system of power generation

may be carefully examined visa-vis the traditional national grid system. The consumers welcome the Government's indication that certain areas of power generation might be opened to the private sector. Also, the coal reserves have

to be tapped commercially on top priority basis for making available an alternative source of energy for the prime movers, especially due to lack of piped gas supply in the northern region.

We hear a lot of talk on reducing the system loss, but there is hardly any concrete information to provide guideline for public opinion. Corrective measures should be well publicised. A Mawaz

Dhaka

Want and limit Sir, Can anybody fulfil all his

demands in life? The answer is 'no' because there is no end to an individual's wants. If we give him wealth, he will crave for more. If we give him honour, he will soon find it less and want more! So this is the na-

ture of the human being. Of course, there is no restriction to fulfil or realize one's wants through honest struggle and actions. One must work hard to fulfil his desires and should not adopt unfair means in that. In our society, perhaps a large number of people have involved in or associated themselves with unfair practices to fulfil their wants. So the rate of corruption has increased alarmingly. To contain the cvil trait of corruption, individual rectification is indispensable. One must not strive for fulfilling his wants before coupling his inherited capacity with his acquired ability. There should always be a consistency between an individual's wants and capability to achieve that. When every individual will

start thinking satisfied with what he has, then it won't be much difficult on the part of the individuals, organized in groups, to eradicate corruption from the society.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute. Dhaka

2) Operate a bi-monthly Dhaka-Bogra-Paharpur tour in ordinary buses as above.

and Forest Department. 4) Operate a monthly tour to historical forts at i) Khizir-

Owners' Association.

and luxury bus owners.

Bangladesh has all the na-

tourism. What is needed is sincerity of purpose and honesty

> O H Kabir Dhaka