

Mixed Signals from Rio

A number of disappointments, a couple of major and some minor ones, turned the Earth Summit into what many ardent environmentalists regard as a near-failure. Among them, the first and foremost is the refusal of the United States to sign the legally binding bio-diversity convention aimed at protecting plants and animals in danger of extinction, a refusal that brought into a sharp focus the isolation of Washington on the overall approach to global environment.

The second major disappointment relates to the failure of the industrialised nations to pledge anything more than \$2 billion, less than one fourth of what was expected as an initial financial commitment to tackle the environmental problems facing the developing world.

Both the failures may well have long-term impact on the global battle to protect our environment. From the isolation it faced in Rio, Washington could well develop a siege mentality and stay away from consensus, even where other industrialised nations are concerned. On the other hand, the lack of funds would most certainly hinder the implementation of Agenda 21, adopted at the summit, which would require \$125 billion to put into effect.

However, realism demands that these disappointments are put in the proper perspective and judged in the context of what the two-week long meeting in Rio achieved. It did not produce a miracle or even a major success, but it did produce a new sense of direction in the protection of environment and promotion of development. It is now up to the international community, especially the United Nations, to follow the new charted course and develop the programme drawn up in Rio to its fullest potential.

With two major treaties signed by all participants, including the United States, and a non-binding 800-page blueprint for action at national and international levels adopted, at least the stage has been set for fundamental environmental reforms, not in isolation but in harmony with development, a point repeatedly stressed by delegates from the Third World. True, at the US insistence, the global warming treaty did not set specific targets for the reduction of emissions of carbon dioxide. However, a number of industrialised countries have announced their individual targets, while many have pledged to raise their annual contribution to environment-related projects once developing countries start taking firm actions to safeguard their ecology. If these are welcome signs, they also place enormous responsibility on all concerned, including on a developing country like Bangladesh.

We assume, a number of programmes submitted by Dhaka have been included in the Agenda 21. We also hope that when another meeting is held, not necessarily at the summit level, before the end of the year to discuss national plans, as suggested by President Bush, Bangladesh will send a well-prepared delegation to the meeting. The leader of our delegation to Rio did a good job in presenting the environmental problems facing Bangladesh, judging by the report published yesterday. However, we maintain — the point we made in our editorial on this subject two weeks ago — that our delegation should have been led by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia herself to give our presence in Rio the importance that a summit conference deserved.

Lingering Eid

Throw a glance at the front page of any national daily after the festival Eid (either of them), and one invariably finds a photo showing an office room inside the government Secretariat, with empty chairs and tables with not even a scrap of paper heaped on them. "The Eid feeling lingers on", the captions always read. Nobody bothers to calculate the cost to the national exchequer — meaning the tax-payer — that is regularly incurred by this practice of taking an extra day or two (or four) off just because employees and officers cannot seem to shake off that lingering Eid feeling. Worse, nobody seems to have given much thought to how this expensive and wasteful bouts of absenteeism could be prevented. The attitude among official circles is almost as if this is just one of those things that one has to take in one's stride. What is conveniently forgotten is that the money lost due to work stoppage and payment of wages without production does not belong to those government departments or agencies, but to the tax-paying public.

At a time when the government is desperately trying to cut down on current expenditure and raise production and efficiency in the public sector, whether in offices or factories, such wastages cannot and should not be tolerated any longer. However, this is not to suggest that the government should go out and put absentees on summary trials. Far from it. It is well understood that one of the major reasons why such absenteeism exists is the rural roots of a great many people who work in Dhaka. Eid holidays are just about the only times they get to visit their families left behind in the villages. It is never possible for them to spend just one full day and return promptly. It would be almost inhumane to expect them to do so. The solution, therefore, must be found in a restructuring of the holiday periods themselves.

At present, both the Eid holidays consist of three days each, which does not give people enough time to travel to their districts, have a good time and return on schedule. The Government should think about extending the holiday period for one of the Eids while reducing the other, thus enabling people to have at least one proper Eid with families. Or the government may consider extending both the Eid holidays, and remove certain other days from the government holiday list. The year is sprinkled with odd closures anyway, and it would not cause too much of a social dislocation if some of these single off-days were tagged to the Eid season.

LAURENCE Summers, who is the World Bank's Chief Economist and is responsible for this year's World Development Report which is devoted to the economics of the environment, has actually suggested that it makes economic sense to shift polluting industries to the Third World countries.

In a memo dated 12 December 1991 to senior World Bank staff, the Chief Economist wrote, "Just between you and me, shouldn't the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the LDCs (less developed countries)?"

Summers has justified his economic logic of increasing pollution in the Third World on these grounds.

First, since wages are low in the Third World, economic cost of pollution arising from increased illness and death are least in the poorest countries. Mr Summers thinks that the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that.

Secondly, since in large parts of the Third World, pollution is still low, it makes economic sense to Mr Summers to introduce pollution. "I've always thought", he says, that "under-populated countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles or Mexico City".

Finally, since the poor are poor, they cannot possibly worry about environmental problems. The concern over an agent that causes a one-in-a-million change in the odds of prostate cancer is obviously going to be much higher in a country where people survive to get prostate cancer than in a country where under-five mortality is 200 per thousand.

The World Bank apologised for Mr Summers' Memo. But that does not alter the fact that the World Bank has, in fact, been financing the relocation of pollution-intensive industry to the Third World. As steel plants close in the North, the Bank helps the expansion of steel manufacture in India. It has financed the displacement of millions of tribals to build Chandil and Icha dams of the Sovernarekha project to support the expansion of the Tata's Steel Plant at Jamshedpur.

It continues to finance super thermal power plants to

International Institutions Practising Environmental Double Standards

by Vandana Shiva

Recent statements and reports from the World Bank and GATT indicate that the North-dominated international agencies do not view the global environmental crisis in terms of a 'common future', but in terms of environmental 'apartheid' in which the North grows richer and cleaner and the South grows poorer and more polluted.

facilitate the relocation of energy-intensive industry to the Third World. When fertiliser surpluses grew in America, the World Bank gave credit to push chemical fertilisers on India.

The World Bank's practice shows that Summers' Memo is not an aberration but is consistent with the vision of an environmental apartheid, a separate development, for the North and South.

The North benefits in four ways from this arrangement of apartheid.

First, Northern businesses are able to sell, through so-called 'transfer of technology', obsolete production systems and products which they would otherwise have to dump because of stricter environmental problems at home.

Secondly, Northern banks, including the multilateral development banks like the World Bank, are able to make interests on loans and credits given for the transfer of environmentally unsound technology.

Thirdly, the resultant financial debts given the North more political and economic control over the Third World through International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditionalities and structural adjustment loans, which push the Third World further into borrowing and debts.

Finally, the increased pollution and environmental degradation in the Third World is also used as a new reason for control through green 'conditionalities'.

The Third World is thus pushed inexorably into deeper debts, deeper poverty, deeper environmental degradation, and a deeper erosion of its sovereignty and democratic structures. The malaise that allows these processes to grow is not limited to one economist called Summers or in one agency like the World Bank.

Apartheid seems to have

become the way of thinking of all the dominant powers of the North. Apartheid is, in the final analysis, a racist world view which moralises injustice on grounds of the false assumption of the superior status of the white race and the inferiority of the rest of us. We can be polluted and poisoned because we are lesser beings in the eyes and minds of those who want to rule the world. A brown or black child does not deserve the same protection from health and environmental hazards because he or she is not white.

This apartheid philosophy is fast emerging as the ruling philosophy in the North. It finds its echo in Dr Maurice King's paper in the *Lancet* in which he recommends that health care should be removed from children in the Third World and they should be allowed to die because Third World populations are a burden on the planet. Apartheid is also the underlying philosophy of the recently released report from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on Trade and the Environment.

On the face of it, GATT's recently released report is against environmental imperialism. It refers to the US decision to ban imports of Mexican Yellowfin tuna because fishing methods led to the killing of dolphins that swim about the tuna shoals. The GATT ruling says, "A country may not restrict imports of a product solely because it originates in a country whose environmental policies are different."

GATT's report on Trade and the Environment appears to be against protectionism in the North but is, in reality, the recipe for an environmental apartheid. When it comes to issues of environmental protection, GATT says that countries are not clones of

each other. They have a sovereign right to declare different environmental priorities and policies.

However, when it comes to intellectual property rights (IPRs) and patents, GATT insists on a uniform law globally. IPRs are in effect instruments of control over biological resources and biodiversity which is concentrated in the Third World. When applied to living resources and life forms they are ultimately laws about the environment.

Environmental laws are thus given a different status in GATT. They are treated uniformly and as 'global' when they relate to controlling the resources of the Third World. All countries are treated as clones of each other in the case of patents on life forms. On the other hand, when environmental laws relate to pollution and hazards, the Third World is treated differently. 'National Sovereignty' is used to justify the localisation of pollution in the Third World but 'National Sovereignty' is sacrificed to justify the globalisation of access to the biological wealth of the Third World.

The environmental 'bads' inherited from the North are thus made the South's exclusive legacy. Environmental 'goods' like biodiversity which have been the South's heritage are transformed into a 'global heritage of mankind'.

Some Third World elites and governments will be happy with this arrangement of apartheid because it allows them to participate in the robbery of people's resources, and it frees them of social responsibility to protect their fellow citizens from pollution and other environmental hazards. The resources that they hand over to global powers have been taken over by them from local communities. The pollution they invite will not be theirs to suffer. A part of the South will thus be jubilant with

this face-saving device of 'National Sovereignty' being used for 'free' export of resources from South to North and 'free' import of pollution from North to South.

The worlds 'freedom' and 'protection' have been robbed of their humane meaning and are being absorbed into the double-speak of corporate jargon. With double-speak are associated double standards, one for citizens and one for corporations, one for corporate responsibility and one for corporate profits, one for the North and one for the South.

The US is the most sophisticated in the practice of double standards and the destruction of people's rights to health and safety in the Third World. On the one hand it aims at keeping regulation for safeguards restricted to its own geographical boundaries, while on the other hand through Super 301 it aims at destroying the Indian Patents Act of 1970 and replacing it with a strong US-style system of patent protection which is heavily biased in favour of the industrially developed countries.

The World Bank and GATT consider the transnational lack of patent protection as unfair trading practice. It does not consider the destruction of regulation for public safety and environmental protection as unethical and unfair for the citizens of the Third World. The Northern agencies want to limit and localise laws for the protection of people and universalise laws for the protection of profits. The people of India want the reverse — a universalisation of the safety regulations protecting people's right to life and livelihoods and a localisation of laws relating to intellectual property and private profits.

All life is precious. It is equally precious to the rich and the poor, the white and the black, to men and women. Universalisation of the protec-

tion of life is an ethical imperative. On the other hand, private property and private profits are culturally and socio-economically legitimised constructs holding only for some groups. They do not hold for all societies and all cultures. Laws for the protection of private property rights, especially as related to life forms, cannot and should not be imposed globally. They need to be re-strained.

Double standards also exist in the shift from private gain to social responsibility for environmental costs. When the patenting of life is at issue, arguments from 'novelty' are used. Novelty requires that the subject matter of a patent be new, that it be the result of an inventive step, and not something existing in nature. On the other hand, when it comes to legislative safeguards, the argument shifts to 'similarity', to establishing that biotechnology products and genetically engineered organisms differ little from parent organisms.

To have one law for environmental responsibility and another for proprietary rights and profits in an expression of double standards. Double standards are ethically unjustified and illegitimate, especially when they deal with life itself. However, double standards are consistent with and necessary for the defence of private property rights. It is these double standards which allow the life and livelihoods of the people and the planet to be sacrificed for the protection of profits.

And it is these double standards which support the emergence of an environmental apartheid in which the last resources of the poor are taken over by the rich, and the poor are pushed into 'pollution reservations' to live with waste, because they themselves are treated as waste, to be dispensed with either through poisoning and pollution or through population control and denial of health care to children as Maurice King has suggested.

An environmental order which is full of contempt for the poor of the Third World and tries to even rob them of their right to life cannot be the basis of our common future. — Third World Network Features.

Vandana Shiva is a leading environmental scientist in India.

Lankan Native a Rising Star in Tory Party

Harold Pieris writes from Colombo

Mr Deva's rise is part of the impact that blacks and Asians have just started making on British politics

RELECTING the changing electoral patterns of Britain's ethnic community, the recent general elections on April 9 saw the election of the Conservative Party's first Asian Member of the House of Commons.

Born Niranjan de Silva Deva Adithya, "Nirj Joseph Deva" as he is now called, is a Sri Lankan Aeronautical Engineer. He was elected to the Bedford and Isleworth Constituency in England with a majority of 2,086 over his white Labour Party opponent. With an ethnic population of 37.5 per cent, the seat was previously held by the Conservatives with a majority of over 7,000.

Nirj Deva perhaps portrays how Asians have come to adapt to British ways. Described by his mother and sister who live in Colombo as a "traditionalist", it would appear that Mr Deva is very much a man of the establishment.

As a matter of interest Mr Deva's Maternal grandfather, the late Dr M G. Perera, was an elected member of Sri Lanka's first post-independence Upper House, or Senate. His mother and brothers and one sister live in Colombo and are quite proud of his achievement.

The son of an eye specialist, the late Dr Kingsley de Silva Deva Adithya, Mr Deva was educated at St Joseph's College,

Colombo. Migrating to England in 1967 as a 19-year-old schoolboy, he entered the University of Loughborough, where he became involved in politics.

At a time when the Conservatives were rather in the dumps (in 1974), and the Asians and coloureds were identified with the Labour Party, Mr Deva joined the Conservative Party.

He was elected President of the Loughborough University Students' Council. At that time, he was probably the only Tory President of Student's Councils in entire England.

This was followed by an invitation from the Duke of Rutland to contest Charnwood, in the Leicestershire County Council, which was a Labour ward. The invitation was accepted but Dr Deva, who was still a student, lost the election.

Still, that election brought him within the Tory orbit. In 1979 he was appointed a political officer of the party. Mr Deva was a member of a committee under Sir Geoffrey Howe which planned the Tory Manifesto in 1982.

He also became a member of the Bow Group, the think-tank of the Conservative Party which included 14 Cabinet Ministers and 120 Members of Parliament. He was elected Chairman of the Bow Group in

1981, beating 19 others, and became the first ever coloured Chairman of the group.

This appears to be a significant step in his career since among previous Chairmen have been people like Sir Geoffrey Howe. He was also the Editor of *Crossbow Magazine*, the magazine of the Bow Group.

He first contested to the House of Commons from the Labour stronghold of Hammer-smith where he was defeated by an incumbent in 1987. He mother recalls a reception at the Carlton Club, London, following the election, where then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is said to have told him that he should continue in politics despite his defeat.

Mr Deva had associated himself closely with Mrs Thatcher whom he believed was Britain's greatest leader since World War II. He sees present

Prime Minister John Major's promise of a classless society as bad blow to the Labour Party. But the fact that he is a member of the Exclusive Carlton Club also stresses how Mr Deva has had to adapt himself to the British way of life to gain

acceptance.

But why did he an Asian choose the Tories usually identified with Anti-Immigration laws, for instance. The reason he says is that "it is the Party which one chose as its leader Benjamin Disraeli who was a Jew. The party which later gave a woman, Mrs Thatcher, the opportunity to be Prime Minister, and then chose a son of a common man, Mr Major, as its present leader."

"It is a unique party," he says. The Conservatives, Mr Deva argues, do not divide by class or colour while the Labour Party does so.

"I am a British person in the sense of value, language and religion. I do feel I can represent the ordinary British person in this sense," he says. Immigrants are also basically Conservative, he adds.

"There is individual freedom in the concept of a property-owning, share-owning democracy — in the idea of less bureaucracy and more enterprise, in the idea of innovative, productive thinking as opposed to centralised co-operatively," he says.

Therefore, I earnestly request the concerned higher authorities to kindly consider the introduction of International Relations in at least the secondary and higher secondary levels to inject the students its basic concepts who want to have higher studies in International Relations and provides them an opportunity to become at least a teacher after passing out the Honours or Master's.

Mr Abdur Rouf
Department of International Relations, DU.

Mr Deva's rise within the Conservative Party is commendable especially for an Asian. In 1986 he was appointed a Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Greater London. An office dating back over 700 years, this had not been held by a non-British born person until Mr Deva was appointed. The office is akin to that of a governor and the Lord Lieutenant represents the Queen during ceremonial occasions in Greater London. He has been on parliamentary delegations to Rhodesia and South Africa.

Mr Deva's rise is also part of the impact that blacks and Asians have just started making on British politics. Constituting 4.2 cent of the electorate, the blacks and Asians

have become the deciding factor in some seats. Which is why a comment by a right wing Conservative MP on immigrants caused the Conservative leadership of distance themselves from this statement.

Some analysts say the more successful members of the Asian community are indeed gravitating towards the British establishment and thus the Conservative Party. The Conservative Party in turn appears to welcome them since are chipping away at what was once a Labour bloc vote.

An Asian as a Minister in the British government? If there were to be an Asian appointed, Mr Deva would be no doubt a front runner.

— Depthnews Asia

OPINION Garment Industry and the Multifabric Agreement

Shahabuddin Mahtab

On May the 29th an important meeting was held under the chairmanship of Mr Nazim Ahmed Chowdhury, Commerce Secretary, where the principal subject of discussion was that, by the end of next year (1993), the garment manufacturers of our country will no longer be able to import into Bangladesh fine quality fabrics which we are now doing under the Multifabric Agreement. The MFA is both a warning and, at the same time, a challenge to us — whether we can produce the finest quality fabrics in the world within the country. We may pose a question to ourselves here; if we can import the finest cotton, and the high grade machinery (in some cases we already have it), what prevents us to produce the finest quality fabrics in Bangladesh? Why should we fail in our workmanship?

It is because more of "government" and the bureaucratic delays that the real entrepreneurs are painfully suffering now. A true entrepreneur takes a perspective and a pragmatic view that he is there to earn a profit of ten to fifteen per cent per year, over a long period of time. If we want to survive as a nation on a respectable basis, we cannot and must not go in for a hundred per cent profit. Our answer to go for such short term 'kills' is a very clear 'No'. We are in a world of fierce competition — with Thailand, Sri Lanka, India, South Korea, Taiwan and many others, who are all there in the field with the full backing of all the con-

cerned sectors. There is now the World Bank warnings for reducing our work force which over the years have accumulated a lot of fat. It is said that Bangladesh has the great advantage of cheap labour. This is clearly not so. In our case, we are employing ten workers when the optimum number should have been three. It does not give us a clear edge.

When the other countries have dialogues between the government, the employer and the employee, we are working in an adversary situation where we are ready to cut each other's throat. We forget the basic truth that Bangladesh is now facing a tough international market in the garments sector. A democratic government has no need to be hesitant when a hard option has to be taken. The government is there for the good and welfare of all the people, and not for the profit of a coterie/coterics.

We would like to take into account another factor, which has already done a serious harm to our garment industries. Price, quality and maintenance of a perfect schedule of delivery are the sine qua non for the shipment of garments. "Failure to deliver as promised, adds to the cost of manufacture, increases overheads, loses orders, and lowers overall efficiency of the whole plant." Let us now ponder that the bonanza is bound to vanish too soon. But let us not flag or fail; the truth is: "Honesty always wins far more than dishonesty".