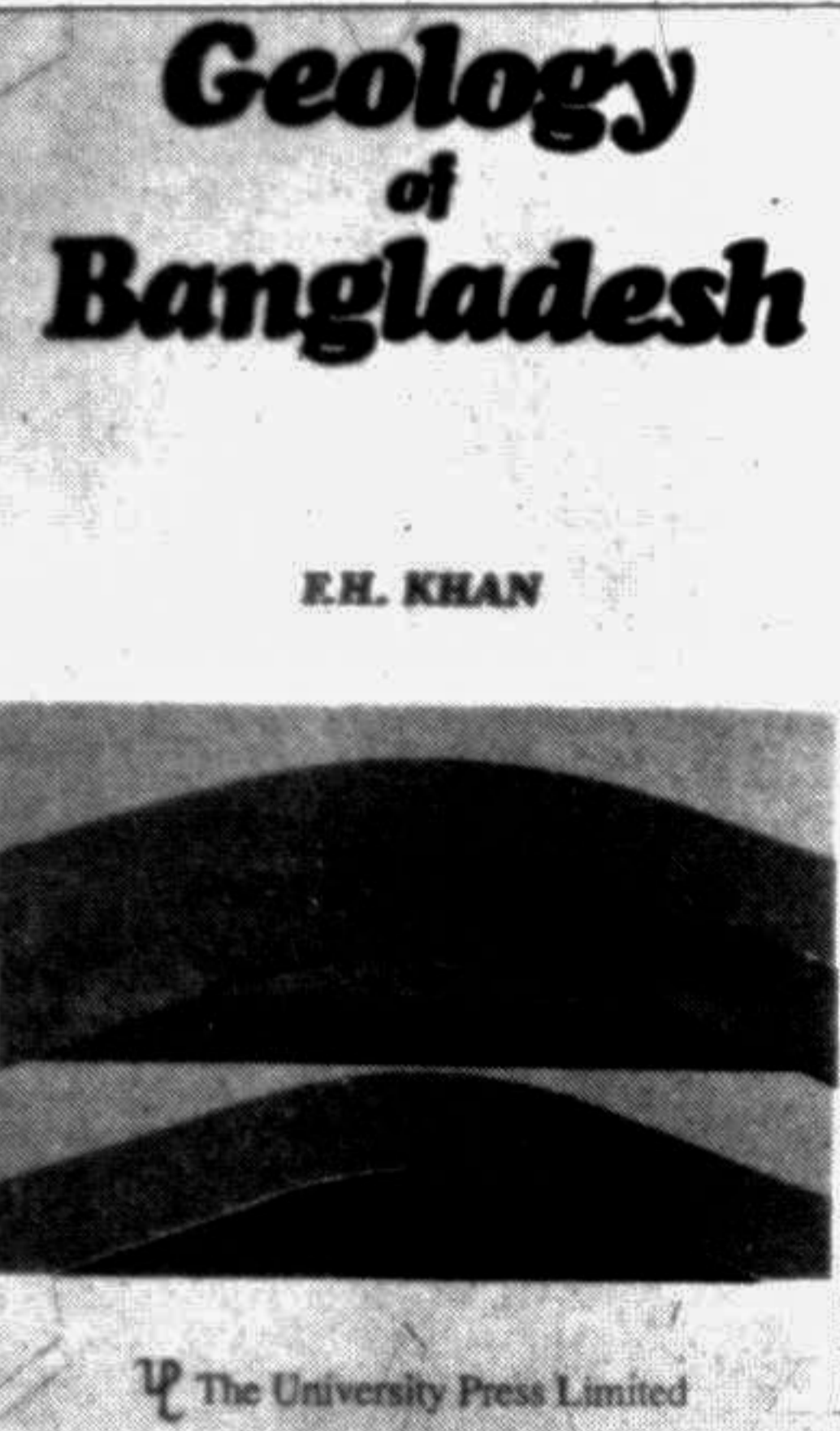


Feature

Environment

Delving Deep into Bangladesh Soil



Book Review

Geology of Bangladesh

by F H Khan

Publisher: The University Press Ltd, 1991

Price: Tk 390

book cover successively the physical geology and stratigraphy with detail individual chapters on Pre Cambrian Era, Mesozoic era and Cenozoic Era. The geological structure and tectonic aspect of Bangladesh are covered in the last few chapters of the first part.

The stratigraphic description of Bangladesh starts with a brief outline on the Pre Cambrian Shield in the north western part of Bangladesh. The Gondwana sediments with its significant coal reserves have been excellently covered with data on the extent, thickness and nature of coal seams and field areas. Individual geological units of the Paleozoic system and Mesozoic system have been described in good details.

The Chapter on Cenozoic Era (Chapter 7) deserve special comment. Most of the sediments of Bangladesh are of Cenozoic age and these are most widely distributed in both subsurface as well as in the surface exposures of Sylhet, Comilla and Chittagong belt. Also, all the natural gas and oil reserves of Bangladesh are stored in these sediments. Evans (1932) first proposed the stratigraphic divisions of these Cenozoic rocks of Assam-Bengal region which has been used for all practical purposes till today; yet there are controversies and difference of opinion regarding the question if Evans' subdivisions can still be used for the whole of Bangladesh area.

Specifically, the units of Miocene-Pliocene age i.e. Bhuban and Bokabil Formations (Surma Group) — the two most widely distributed units in Bangladesh are not easily resolved in the field and the geologists working in Bangladesh lived

too long with this problem without somebody pointedly offering a solution. Dr Khan's statement, "the classification of the Group seems to be arbitrary and consists of subdivisions unsuitable for regional mapping" deserves special merit in spelling out so clearly a subject only vaguely argued by the geologist working in the field Dr Khan further stated, "Had the Bhuban and Bokabil Formations together been made a single formation... it would form an excellent mappable unit between Jaintia and Barail at the bottom and conspicuous Tipam Group at the top. But the subdivision of the group into Lower Bhuban, Middle Bhuban, Upper Bhuban and Bokabil units consisting of similar types of rocks... exhibiting striking lateral variation and paucity of fossils make these units regionally unmapable on the surface." This is a suggestion that should be seriously considered by the Stratigraphic Commission of Bangladesh responsible for officially designating formations for the geological sedimentary successions of Bangladesh.

The book is rich in data which otherwise would have been locked in official files of experts engaged in geological investigations. I believe had Dr F H Khan been living today, he would certainly have loved to bring further editions of this valuable book enriching his chapters on hydrocarbon (Part II). This book is a major contribution to the geological literature on Bangladesh.

(Reviewed by Dr Badrul Imam, Associate Professor, Department of Geology, University of Dhaka.)

A Chicken-or-Lagoon Question

It sounded like good business sense to set up another Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise in a Caribbean tourist spot like Curacao, just off the north-eastern tip of South America.

But recently, area residents told the Colonel to pack up and leave, suspending a plan by businessmen to fill the Salina Lagoon to build an outlet of the famous chicken specialty restaurant chain on this island.

The natural wonders of Curacao, a 444-square-kilometer island that is the largest of the Netherlands Antilles, have been the ransom paid in exchange for a development based mainly on trade in petroleum products and tourism.

The island, a modern trading post, is heavily dependent on transnational oil companies but is lately experiencing a tourism boom.

Curacao's allures include a dry climate, desert-type vegetation and divi-divi trees permanently bent by the northeast trade winds plus scores of bays, lagoons and wetlands that ring its coast.

These days about one-third of the lagoons that once existed here have already been filled.

Salina lagoon is on the

ready been filled over the past twenty years and is now the site of a hotel and other buildings.

Another important inland waterway, the Spaanse Water Lagoon, has become a rich neighbourhood where yachts and sailing boats abound. It is now so crowded that the water is heavily polluted, Raveneau said.

At 300 Antillean guilders (about US \$ 166) per square meter, land is expensive in the Spaanse water area, and people have been illegally building islands in the lagoon.

"They take a bit of reef there, enlarge it and make it into an island," Raveneau continued.

But she pointed out that the lagoons area nursery for sea fish, providing nutrients for small fry, which in turn are food for larger fishes. Thus, the sea close to land becomes poorer in fish when the lagoons are filled.

The mangroves bordering the lagoons serve as a cleaning filter for water that flows from the land. "Without the buffer of the lagoons, sand and dirty water flow unchecked into the sea, killing the reef and everything which lives in it," Raveneau added.

the Autonomous Dutch Caribbean territory has a hand in the landfills.

In October, protests by residents of the Zakito community forced the island administration to shelve a project to expand a state-owned water and electricity utility, which itself stands on a previously filled-in portion of the Zakito Lagoon.

Warm water and chemicals discharged by the utility into the unfilled section of the lagoon are killing the mangroves there, Narain said.

Although Curacao is a small island with only 190,000 inhabitants, it suffers many of the environmental problems found in both developed and developing countries. Carbon dioxide emissions spew out of over 50,000 private cars and some 10,000 other transport vehicles.

Clouds of black smoke belch out of Curacao's 70-year-old oil refinery, which is one of the largest in the world.

Quirino Richardson, head of the Environmental Service: "The environment has become fashionable. Many, including policymakers, pay lip service to environmental protection but do nothing."



THE University Press Ltd has published a comprehensive volume entitled "Geology of Bangladesh" written by Dr F H Khan. First of its kind, the book has met a long demand of readers for a reference text on geology and mineral resources of Bangladesh. Dr F H Khan who passed away just before the book was out in the market deserves credit for documenting his vast experience and knowledge on geology of Bangladesh in the form of a text book.

Dr F H Khan was engaged in the service of geological set-

ences i.e geological organizations in the capacity of a geoscientist and later as Chairman of Bangladesh Mineral Exploration and Development Corporation. After retirement he continued his work as a Consultant geologist and during this period the final shape of the book was formulated.

The book was written in much the same style as the classical geology text like "Geology of India and Burma" by M S Krishnan and "Geology of India" by H Wadia — the two books that the students were referred to for regional geology of the area and surroundings

although both the book only covered Bangladesh area in no more than two pages. Thanks to the University Press and the good efforts of Dr F H Khan that a proper reference text on geology of Bangladesh is now available.

The essence of the book is contained in the first part of the book which deals with mainly stratigraphy of Bangladesh; the second part covers petroleum aspects under the general heading of hydrocarbons. The book has a third part dealing with deep aquifers in Bangladesh. The twelve chapters of the first part of the

Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples of the Rainforests

by World Rainforest Movement

REPRESENTATIVE S from forest-dwelling communities from the Americas, Asia and Africa met in Penang, Malaysia, to discuss their situation during a four-day conference from 12 to 15 February.

The conference produced a 'Charter of the Indigenous — Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forests' and passed a unanimous resolution setting up the 'World alliance of the Indigenous Tribal People of the Tropical Forests'.

The historic new alliance unites for the first time Indians from Amazonia, central America and the southern cone of South America, 'pygmies' from Africa, tribal peoples from India and Thailand, indigenous peoples from the Philippines, 'Orang Asli'

and Dayak peoples from Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo, indigenous peoples from Indonesia, as well as Melanesian peoples from New Guinea.

The Charter, which sets out the alliance's demands,

ter declares.

The alliance demands respect for the human rights of forest-dwelling peoples and above all their rights to determine their own ways of life and ways of organising. The forests

forests puts heavy pressure on their territories and forests, calls for land reforms to secure the livelihoods of those who live outside the forests.

In place of large-scale development projects, logging,

Indigenous and tribal peoples from tropical forests all round the world have united to create a new alliance to confront the destruction of their territories and forests.

goals and principles, advocates a new approach to development and conservation in the tropical forests based on securing the rights of the forests' original inhabitants.

There can be no rational or sustainable development of the forests and of our peoples until our fundamental rights as peoples are respected," the Char-

dwelling peoples' representatives at the conference called for an end to the violence, slavery, debt-peonage and land-grabbing which they endure and for the disbanding of private armies and militia.

The Charter also sets out in detail the common demands of all those in the alliance to the ownership of their traditional

mining and other destructive practices, the Charter advocates an alternative development approach based on securing the lives of those who live in the forest and promoting small-scale community initiatives under the control of the peoples themselves.

The Charter condemns the

territories and, recognising that 'landlessness outside the damage caused by logging is a crime against humanity' and calls for the suspension of logging concessions on indigenous territories.

One of the first acts of the alliance was to denounce the uncontrolled logging in Sarawak and detention of the native people.

Similar resolutions were also issued calling for an end to oil palm and colonisation schemes on the Island of Sibur in Indonesia, a recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights to their territories in Peninsular Malaysia, Panama, Nagaland, West Papua, Argentina, the Philippines and Thailand. — Third World Network Features

brink of becoming just one of many, said Yvonne Raveneau, head of Amigoe di Terra, the Curacao chapter of the international environmental defence organization Friends of the Earth.

Two-thirds of the Rif Lagoon just outside Willemstad, the capital of Curacao and the Netherlands Antilles, has al-

Environmentalists here feel that Curacao has taken a step backward in terms of treatment of its lagoons. "It had been the policy of the government to stop the filling of lagoons, but that has changed," said Lloyd Narain, head of Defensa Ambiental, a Curacaoan environmental organization.

Even the administration of

"They say they have to make choices, and these are based on what will get them reelected," Richardson added. "But the environment invariably loses when it has to fight, for example, against job accretion." Curacao is currently suffering a 15 to 25 percent unemployment rate.

— IPS

World Bank Starts Turning Green

by Daya Kishan Thussu

THE 1992 World Development Report reminds one of an old Indian saying: "The cat eats hundreds of mice, and then decides to go on a Haj (pilgrimage)".

The report, entitled "Development and the Environment," issued weeks before the Earth Summit, marks recent attempts by the World Bank to make up for its previous insensitivity to environmental issues.

Despite the disastrous environmental impact of the Bank's existing lending policies, environmental concern is now high on its agenda.

The report says: "Without adequate environmental protection, development will be undermined; without development, environmental protection will fail."

The report also admits that the Bank has committed errors of judgement in the past, such as supporting environmentally destructive development projects. These include the construction of huge dams (Sardar Sarovar Dam in India and Pak Mun Dam in Thailand) that ignored the demands of the local people, many of whom were displaced by "development".

The report admits: "It is now clear that numerous public investments, often supported by development agencies, including the World Bank, have caused damage by failing to take environmental considerations into account or to judge the magnitude of the impacts."

The Bank's previous belief in growth as the solution to poverty and environmental quality is also reviewed: "Some problems are associated with the lack of economic development... but many other problems are exacerbated by the growth of economic activity", it now concedes.

The stark message of the report is that poverty is increasing, more people are drinking contaminated water and more are dying because of water-borne diseases. "Sustainable poverty reduction is the over-arching objec-

tive of the World Bank. It is the benchmark by which our performance as a development institution will be measured," claims Lewis Preston, the Bank's president.

This begs the question: What has the Bank done in the last 40 years? What happened to its over-riding mission to reduce poverty in the Third World?

A recent UNDP report estimates that the gap between rich and poor has doubled during the past 30 years, with the richest fifth receiving 150 times the income of the poorest fifth.

The policies of the Bank

have reflected the world's changing political climate. In the 1960s, it focused on economic growth to reduce poverty.

During the 1970s, its policies shifted towards redistribution with growth, as it recognised that economic growth alone could not bring about equitable development.

Throughout the 1980s, which it later termed "the lost decade," the Bank played a dominant role in promoting structural adjustment policies in much of the Third World. In effect, it amounted to asking may developing countries to open up their fragile

economies to Northern-based transnationals.

Now the Bank seems to be suggesting that only market forces can protect the environment. The report appears to champion privatisation, calling for more reliance on markets and less on governments to promote development.

"Distorted incentives are often particularly evident in the behaviour of state-owned enterprises," the report observes.

"This is important because many sectors in which enterprises are prominent — power generation, cement, steel and mining — are heavy polluters."

"Thus," it goes on, "the environment can benefit if the managers of state enterprises are made more accountable and are exposed to the same competition as is the private sector."

One welcome aspect is the Bank's recognition for strengthening the civil society in developing countries. Until recently the Bank favoured strong governments — which often meant military dictatorships — to implement structural adjustment programmes. Now it recognises that "strong public institutions and policies for environmental protection are also essential."

Another positive element in the report is its concern for women. Policies for efficient growth can complement those for environmental protection, the report says. Improving education for girls may be the "most important" long-term environmental policy in the developing world, it says. Women hold the key to prosperity because they control both their own fertility and the fertility of the soil.

The report criticises the developing world for its inefficient use of environmental protection and suggests that governments should be more friendly towards the market, work with it rather than against it.

It also suggests that "new

technology is less polluting than old. Developing countries with open markets will be able to gain from importing clean technologies in use in industrial countries."

However, the report does not say how the transfer of improved technology from North to South can be improved.

The report calls for an end to the \$230 billion in annual subsidies given for energy in Third World countries. However, it offers no mechanism of preventing or regulating transnational companies from selling excessive petrochemicals and agrochemicals to the Third World. It is also silent about why the price of fossil fuel is so low in the Northern countries that are the worst polluters.

For the Third World the moral of the report is clear. The North seems to be saying: "Environmental protection is our concern. We shall promote our lifestyles by bombarding you with our TV but you must continue to live in austerity and we shall tell you what to do with your environment. Buy our technology to keep your environment clean."

The report, coming when the reduction in tension with the end of the Cold War could lead to a reallocation of resources from military to developmental spending, concludes that sustained growth in the Third World will still depend on the economic policies of Northern countries which must "promote robust, environmentally responsible growth."

It is to be seen whether the renewed emphasis on the eradication of poverty and protecting the environment goes beyond yet another well-drafted and apparently well-meaning report. — Gemini News

Daya Kishan Thussu holds a PhD in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and also teaches a course on Third World Development at Britain's Open University. He is Associate Editor of Gemini News Service.



World Bank projects: welfare or waste?

Environmental Summit for Survival

THE Earth Summit, the popular name of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development to be held in Rio de Janeiro next summer, will be the biggest meeting ever convened in human history.

Although no one seems to know exactly, there are likely to be more than 50,000 people present, including some 15,000 government representatives, more than 20,000 from non-governmental groups, some 6,000 journalists, hundreds of business corporations and many concerned individuals from the fields of science, economics and agriculture.

It is a gathering of the tribes — something that takes place when lots of people divided by nations, creed, class and specialisation feel the need to protect their very existence and their future.

The fact that it is going to be a huge gathering is not impressive itself. It is true that the size of a congregation determines the weight and momentum of the decisions taken, but the familiar process of speech-making and drafting of a consensus document called the Rio Declaration or Earth Charter, or whatever, becomes an end in itself unless all that energy produces a convergence.

Each group must go away with a clear idea of what needs doing and what they must do when they go home, so that there will not be a return to business as usual.

Besides, by the very nature of an inter-governmental conference, it is the governments which will be producing the final document and not the unofficial people present, who are the most likely to be the principal "actors" on the scene when it comes to action. People, alas, are always suspected by governments of being the problem and not the solution, although the reverse is generally the case.

The man who is putting it all together, Maurice Strong of Canada, is a veteran at putting these five-ring circuses on. He ran the first ever, 20 years ago

in Stockholm, when the very world "environment" meant little to anyone except those who worried about atmospheric pollution and about the absence of birdsong in the silent springs of the West — caused by DDT, which had killed off the insects on which birds feed.

At the time of that conference, Indra Gandhi voiced the opinion of many developing countries when she said, "we can afford a bit of environmental pollution". What she meant was that the Third World

Sri Lankan journalist and author Tarzie Vittachi is concerned that development will not be given the necessary weight at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in June, "because Western governments are not interested in discussing the eradication of poverty."

needed industry to earn foreign exchange for development and to provide work for its people. Since then, environment has become a subject of daily conversation in probably all middle-class households.

There is a lot of excitement about global warming, the greenhouse effect, holes in the ozone layer, the havoc caused by acid rain and the depletion of the rain forests which provide our oxygen. And, of course, there should be. But the poor three billion of the globe's population are not, as far as anyone can judge, overly bothered by all of that.

Their concern is poverty and its fall-out: the lack of jobs for themselves and their growing children, the lack of decent housing, the lack of adequate bus services, the lack of means to buy enough food, medicine and clothes, the lack of accessible clean water to drink and wash with, the lack of firewood to cook their meager meals and warm them-

selves where it is cold, and the lack of seats in the local schools even when free tuition is available. Deprivation is their environment.

That is why development is yoked to environment as the theme of the Earth Summit. Strong has worked prodigiously to prevent the materially developed countries from trying to shunt development aside and concentrate on resource depletion and conservation of the natural environment alone. Development is very much on the agenda, but the Western powers are not interested in discussing the eradication of poverty.

All that was effectively aborted by President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher during the 1980's. They do not want to see it spring back to life.

The governments of the Third World, mostly represented by the elite class, may be expected to indulge in their mouldy rhetoric about development and their plans to alleviate poverty. We have to look to the non-governmental organisations (NGO's) to make the case for "the people" with empathy and some passion, since the poor, alas, will not be there to speak for themselves.

But bureaucrats have a way of not finding enough time and Strong may not be able to have his way on this. The best bet, in my view, is the conference newspaper, which is expected to be produced and distributed by the Third World journalists who will be there.

The so-called "mainstream" media, despite its recent willingness to report environmental concerns, is still wary about United Nations meetings. Most of the journalists who have inscribed their names in Rio are Latin Americans and Third Worlders. The Western press has a derogatory acronym for such assignments: 'Mego', which stands for 'mine eyes glaze over'. But if the big guns of the West attend, their press will be there in droves because power is the staple diet of the big media.