

Environmental and Social Concerns Must be Recognised

by Kamal Hossain

IN the newly restored democracies, the first task is to ensure that we retain what we have regained. The democratic process has to be nurtured and sustained. We know from past experience in South Asia and other parts of the world that a restored democracy passes through a difficult process of transition. Democratic institutions are fragile and remain vulnerable. After long years of authoritarian rule, the social environment and the apparatus of government are afflicted with authoritarian habits of mind and work. The holding of an election and the establishment of a democratic framework cannot by themselves deliver what is expected. Democracy raises the expectation of people. There is a legitimate expectation that with the end of authoritarian rule, there will be an overall improvement in the quality of life, that arbitrariness and corruption will be replaced by the rule of law and accountability. The failure to fulfil these expectations and the resulting disillusionment poses a threat. It is essential, therefore, if democracy is to be sustained, that it must deliver. But, how?

Creative strategies are needed which will strengthen the democratic process, nurture democratic values and create conditions in which people can actively participate in making critical choices. They must be taken into confidence so that they are aware of the daunting reality that has to be transformed, of the difficulties that are to be faced and surmounted, if real development is to take place. False promises or raising the expectation that a quick fix or easy solution is at hand are recipes for disaster. A development strategy has to be devised through active participation by the people which will reflect consensus both as to ends and means. Lessons have to be learnt from past experience.

Development strategies devised by authoritarian regimes and their bureaucracies without popular participation have been conspicuous failures as these were insensitive to their wider social impact. Thus the

integrated agricultural development programme adopted in Nepal in the seventies aimed at increasing agricultural productivity had improved the condition of wealthier farmers but had bypassed small farmers and agricultural labourers. Similar had been the experience in Bangladesh in the eighties where an evaluation of the Integrated Rural Development Programme found that: "Differential access to credit and other inputs among the IRDP membership resulted in both a more dramatic differentiation among those with and without access to the HYV package and, as importantly, land consolidation and land fragmentation. Landholding patterns became more and

more skewed among the membership in concert with differential access to resources... The takeover by larger farmers of rural inputs and initially innovative development programmes has enhanced and stimulated the process of inequality already in operation. Rather than generate a climate in which all rural producers were encouraged and able to enhance their productive capacity, the Green Revolution, and the implementation of the IRDP, served to heighten the disparities among rural poor." (A Z M Obaidullah Khan, *Creative Development*...)

The devastating floods of 1988 in Bangladesh generated serious discussions not only in the country but internationally on alternative flood protection strategies. A discussion forum organised by the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council produced a report underlining the need to take social and environmental dimensions into account when designing flood control structures. Thus, it pointed out that fish, which was the major, if not only, source of protein for the children of the poor, had already been drastically reduced as a result of constructing polders and embankments. If this

trend were to continue, many fish and aquatic plant species could be lost altogether. It gave examples of major irrigation projects which had left many fishing villages in decay because of the resultant lack of employment in the fisheries sector. The report urged that a sustainable flood protection strategy should take into account the agronomic, social, economic and environmental effects of water control structures on other flood plain components such as fisheries and forestry, as well as the differential impact of flooding on different categories of farmers.

There is much to be learnt from the mistakes of the past, in particular, women and children, the poor and the vulnerable? Is it likely to favour the privileged and the powerful? Will the implementation involve procedures which would enable the more powerful to pre-empt the benefits, or lead to corruption? How will it impact on human rights?

Structural adjustment programmes to which we have often had to submit under compelling circumstances, as a result of irresponsible economic management and financial indiscipline, an inevitable legacy of corrupt authoritarian regimes, can exact high economic and social costs. Conventional adjustment policies

involve measures which can result in rising prices and higher unemployment and thus impose serious strains during the period of transition. Special efforts are therefore needed when devising adjustment programmes to allow for implementation in phases and to provide safety nets for the weak and the vulnerable. It has been persuasively urged that "adjustment policy with a human face will remain a sham — an attempt to paint a smile on a face with tears" — if it is seen only as a matter of change in the macro-economic policy of governments. Instead it must involve a move to a more people focused process of adjustment, a more fundamental restructuring, a shift to much greater self-reliance, to decentralisation, small-scale production and community action, empowerment of people and households." (R Jolly, *Adjustment with a Human Face*...)

The kind of development strategy which we should aim for is one which would: "seek to alter the structures of power, of economic benefits and of institutions which deprive people of their human rights. This new strategy calls for the mobilization of the poor

in their countries for self-reliant development... Such strategy also calls for the return of civil rights of which they have been deprived in many countries. The obstacles to political and economic organization should be eliminated. Beyond this, of course, popular control of government and accountability of officials through systems of checks and balances and periodically conducted free and fair elections by secret ballot are among the important manifestations of people's participation in development... It is a fundamental principle of democratic politics that all great decisions of government must be shared decisions. Development under the rule of law requires the eager

equality and non-discrimination is essential; and the achievement of a degree of individual and collective self-reliance must be an integral part of the process... This elucidation of the components of the concept of development has now been accorded formal recognition in the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Right to Development... Article 1: (1) The right to development is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right to development. (2) All human beings have a responsibility for development, individually and collectively, taking into account the need for full respect of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as their duties to the community, which alone can ensure the free and complete fulfilment of the human being, and they should, therefore, promote and protect an appropriate political, social and economic order for development... This recognition is the end-result of over a decade of dedicated effort by protagonists who resolutely argued against the view that the supposed imperatives of economic development required "trading off" of the civil and political rights for the realisation of economic, social and cultural rights.

To be concluded tomorrow. A noted lawyer of the country Dr. Kamal Hossain is also a former Foreign Minister of Bangladesh. He is a member of Awami League presidium and the convenor of Democratic Forum, recently set up here. This article is based on a lecture delivered by him at a regional conference recently held in Colombo.

A sensitive assessment will need to be made of the impact of a development project or programme not only on the environment but of its "social impact" — which would involve taking into account such matters as: How will it affect different sections of a community, in particular, women and children, the poor and the vulnerable?

Stricter Laws No Answer

During the one and a half years the government is in power, it has developed, it seems, quite a special liking for newer laws. But few, if any, of the new laws have been intended to address the backlogs it has inherited from the past regimes. Instead of doing away with the black laws that were framed to serve the purpose of autocracy, newer ones have been passed. Right now under consideration of the government is the need for a new bill seeking stricter legislative power for dealing with the terrorists, muggers, robbers etc. No one disagrees that the high incidence of mugging, raping, looting, robbery etc demands a strong step for bringing such incidents down to a tolerable level — if not for their total elimination which seems rather impossible.

If anything, the contentious issue is the step or the strategy itself. Have the existing laws proved insufficient to deal with the problem? Nobody in his right senses will think that the laws have outlived their efficacy. The important point is if the existing legal provisions have been thoroughly used to derive as much benefits as they are capable of delivering. Clearly, this was not done. Even an autocrat like Ershad provided a few touches to the criminal legal order and actually forced the terrorists and anti-social elements on the run temporarily, but all of those were more of an eye-wash than anything substantial. One cannot forget that the Special Powers Act (SPA) is still there. The subsequent tightening of laws has more or less remained a paper work. The one now being contemplated will add to that paper work only.

Tight legislatures, when the existing ones have not found their proper application, are indeed fortuitous. If anyone is to blame for the all-pervasive social insecurity, it is the authority responsible for application of the laws. Why should we shift the executive failure to the arena of the judiciary? Actually that is what is being indirectly done. It is not that the criminals are apprehended too often and the court fails to mete out the punishment they deserve. The intriguing question is that even if the culprits are brought to book, they are — more often than not — let go before they have been produced to the court. The authority knows better than anybody else how this happens. This is enough proof why the making of laws stricter cannot deliver the goods for society. On the contrary, tightening of laws has often ended up with doing more harms than good to society because of arbitrary application of those provisions making the innocent often the victims.

That the application of laws is far from the mark has been brought to the fore by Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury's failure to recover the bangles snatched from the wife of a most vocal opposition MP. Still ironical is the fact that just at the moment the Home Minister was boasting improved law and order situation during his tenure in the Jatiya Sangsad, almost at the same time a car of a deputy minister was stolen. No argument that laws are inadequate to nab the snatchers. What has happened is that the anti-social elements have enjoyed enough omission and commission from the administration for a long time and now they are out to establish mafia-like rules. They have thrown a challenge to the government and the government must respond ably. Making new laws is however not the answer, rather within the range and scope of the existing laws the criminals have to be dealt with without fear or favour. The law enforcing agency should be allowed to do their job freely within the purview of laws but, at the same time, without undermining their accountability.

An Initiative from Mubarak

It is a happy coincidence that Egypt celebrates its National Day today against the backdrop of an initiative taken by President Hosni Mubarak to give a new momentum to the Middle East peace process. The joint press conference he held in Cairo on Tuesday with Israel's new Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin, his guest, offered much hope for the continuance of the process, without hinting at any substantial progress as such. The fact that Mubarak lost little time in inviting Rabin for the first Egyptian-Israeli summit in six years was, in itself, a major move — and a bold one at that — and his announced decision to return the visit suggests that neither side wants the momentum to weaken.

The victory of the Labour in the Israeli election has indeed set a new process in motion, a process in which both the United States and Egypt are becoming increasingly involved. As the Egyptian leader put it at the press conference, his interest now lies in persuading other Arab states, especially Syria, and the Palestinians to take their rightful place in the new scenario. It is a difficult undertaking. There is just too much deep-rooted distrust separating the Arabs from Israel, not to mention the suspicion that some Arab nations feel even about Egypt. Again, Israel, under the new administration, is still to demonstrate its credibility and to prove that it is genuinely interested in the "Land for Peace" formula as a way for resolving the age-old crisis.

The role that Egypt has played so far in its efforts to bring peace to the strife-torn region has earned our praise. It has been a difficult role. The task ahead may also be a challenging one. On this auspicious day today, a friend of Egypt, like Bangladesh, can only wish well to President Mubarak and his government, and indeed to the people of Egypt, in their continuing struggle to open a new era for all peoples in the region.

Illicit Drug Trade Booming in Former Soviet Union

Eve Kouidri Kuhn writes from Vienna

MORE than a million Russians are addicted to cannabis or heroin-related drugs, according to a group of high level United Nations experts.

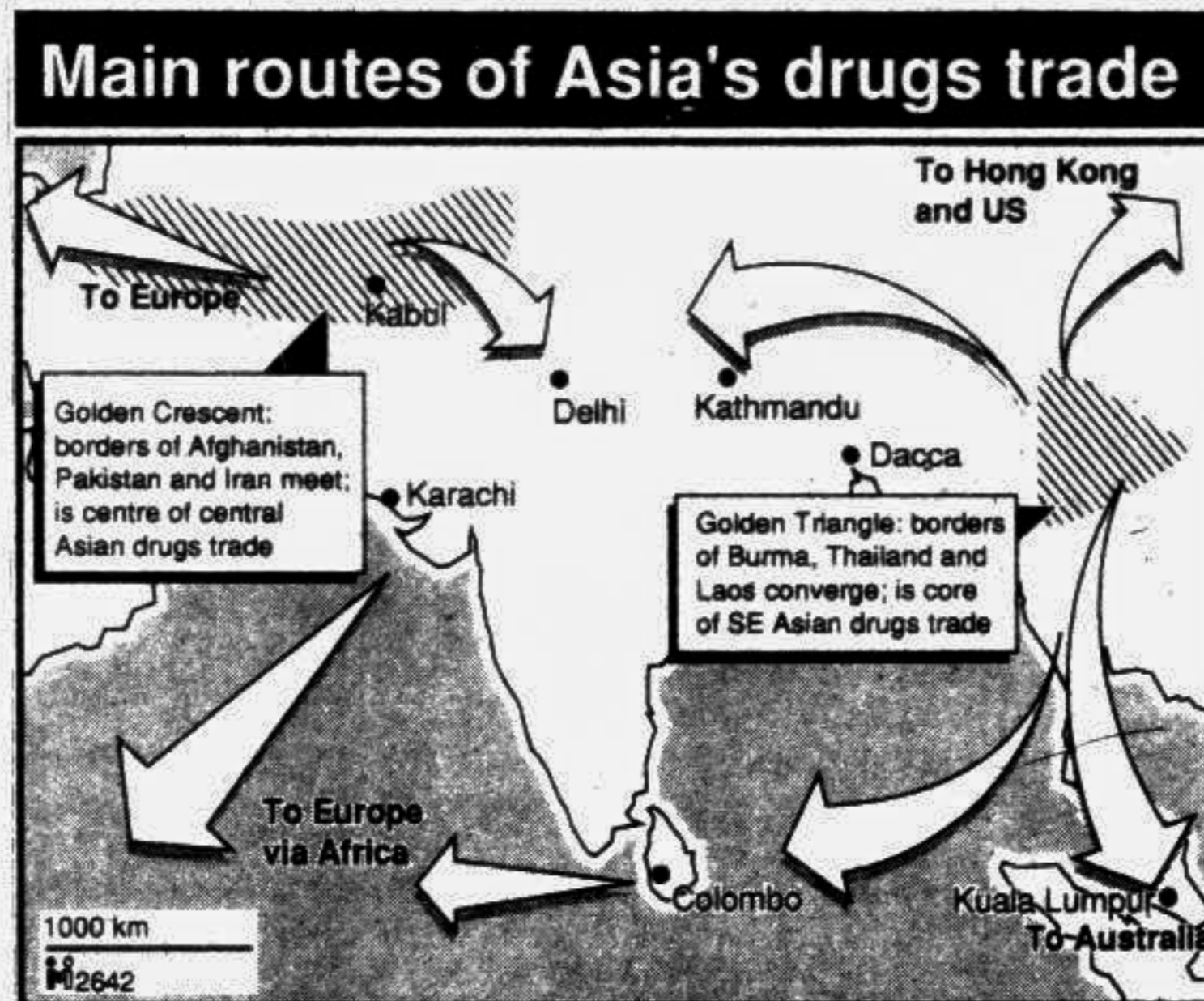
There are reported to be 100,000 poppy plantations growing wild in the Russian republic. The group also found evidence of a million cannabis fields in the seven former Soviet republics it visited recently: Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Russia.

Now the UN Drug Control Programme is trying to establish or strengthen links of co-operation in the field of drug control with the new republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) before the situation deteriorates.

The fact-finding mission was headed by the former Colombian Minister of Justice, Enrique Parejo-Gonzalez, accompanied by experts from Hungary, Austria and Canada. One of them, Bernard Frahi, with the UN Drug Control Programme in Vienna, says that there were some surprises on the trip.

"The Russian addicts do not yet know cocaine or crack as we had expected," he says. "We could see that the problem is not as dramatic as we expected, but on the other

A recent trip by the UN's drug control programme revealed that drug smuggling flourishes in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. There are hundreds of thousands of hectares of cannabis and poppies with more than a million addicts in Russia alone and only a rudimentary customs system to patrol the flow of drugs.



hand we have to be pessimistic for the future. All the countries that we have seen are countries of production of cannabis or poppy."

The extent of opium poppies and mutant plants — reported to be growing around the Chernobyl facility — now appear to be exaggerated, says

Frahi. "We spoke with the authorities in the Ukraine and Belarus. We spoke with scientists. They told us that there were no mutant plants. They also said that in the past, poppy grew wildly in the area and the pollen spread naturally by the wind, but not in large quantities."

While there is no poppy cultivation in the area, there are some wild plantations that people use. In the past, everybody cultivated poppy for cooking but after the law changed in 1987, cultivation became illegal.

In some republics, poppy and cannabis are planted for illicit purposes and the derived narcotic drugs are either used locally or exported to other countries. Most of the cannabis and poppies, though, grow wild; Frahi says there are more than 140,000 hectares of cannabis in Kazakhstan and 60,000 hectares in Kirghiz-

stan. "The problem is huge," he says. "All the new republics have obtained their independence and are now open. At the same time, there are no controls at the internal borders between the new republics. Also, controls at the external borders with China, Afghanistan and Turkey are inadequate."

"Today all the countries are trying to organise their customs committees which are now based in Moscow. They lack everything, such as equipment and training, so that they can become effective," he says. The experts reported that they could not find any proof of foreign organised criminal connections with the Italian mafia or Latin American cartels operating in the former Soviet Union.

"We discovered that there are some criminal organisations trying to occupy fields and regulate the distribution of

drugs, but large international criminal organisations have not infiltrated the region yet," Frahi says.

Last year, the international police commission Interpol estimated that 70 per cent of all heroin discovered in western European countries was coming from the Golden Crescent of southwest Asia and 30 per cent from the Golden Triangle of southeast Asia.

"We have heard that there are some connections already bringing heroin through the Caucasus region (Azerbaijan and Georgia) above the Black Sea into Europe," Frahi says.

"It was also noted that as the new CIS republics develop open market economies and create convertible currencies, there is a potential for money laundering of illicit drug trafficking profits," says the report.

The UN's drug control programme will try to help with legal and technical assistance and with law enforcement. All will have to be done quickly before the criminal organisations discover what before now has been a relatively unexplored drug market. — GEMINI NEWS

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To the Editor...

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.

"BTV to relay CNN programme"

Sir, A news item which appears in your esteemed daily on July 12 with the above caption indicates that the BTV will start relaying transmissions of CNN programme from 7.00 am to 1.00 pm every day from next month. This is really a bad news for many parents like me because the live coverage which will be seen in Bangladesh from 7.00 am to 1.00 pm is the programme of 7.00 pm to 1.00 am in the other part of the world and their late night programmes of 10 pm to 1.00 am often include pornofilms which are meant for adults above 21 years of age. So the college and university going students will very much like to leave their classes to enjoy these demoralising films when their fathers will be in office and mothers in the kitchen. As you know, that every-

thing emanating from the West is not good for our society, our government should restrict the relay say, from 7.00 am to 10.00 am, to save our children from obscene programme of the West. A A G Kabir Juar Shahara, Dhaka.

Postal service

Sir, Recently I wrote a letter in this column of your esteemed newspaper ventilating some problems of the Mohammadpur Housing Estate Post Office. It is a great pleasure to notice that the authorities have taken some effective measures toward solving the problems. The renovation of the post-office building has been started and certain improvements in the service have been made. We congratulate Bangladesh Post Office for their sincere efforts to offer better customer services. We

Manpower clearance for Oman

Sir, I draw the attention of the concerned authorities through this column. The Manpower Ministry made a rule a few years ago that any person travelling to Oman for employment can get the clearance only after the attestation number arrives at the Bureau of Manpower. This previously used to take three weeks. The matters have now gone from bad to worse. One of my relatives has received a visa to work in Oman. The necessary documents were attested by the Bangladesh Embassy on 17th May. We inquired with the Manpower Bureau on 14 July and they told us that the attestation number has not yet arrived. During my visit to the Bureau of Manpower I have found hundreds of other people making the same inquiry. I just wonder how a poor

country like ours can afford to dilly dally with foreign employment. We cannot provide employment. We do not have enough foreign exchange. And yet we do not pay any attention to help the people who have got employment through their own source! This sort of rule and carelessness causes great harm to our country. A lot of people I have met at the clearance counter have said that if they do not go to Oman quickly then they will be sent back because the employers do not want to believe that it takes such a long time for the number to reach the clearance department. Will the authorities look into the allegation? A Bangladeshi

The richest people of Dhaka city

Sir, My attention was drawn by the interesting 'Opinion' note on "Safety and security of Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara" by Mr. Jamaluddin Ahmed, a former Prime Minister, published in your newspaper on 14th July. Mr. Ahmed writes, "Safety and security of the residents of the locality are at serious stake." But who are these residents? Besides the foreigners, they are some of the richest people of Dhaka. Dr

Kamal Siddiqui and three of his former colleagues at the National Institute of Local Government have recently published a book entitled 'Social Formation in Dhaka City' (University Press Limited, 1990) which includes a 24-page chapter on 'The richest people of Dhaka city'. It is based on findings of an in-depth study of the richest people of the city. According to the authors: "... the single majority (44%) of the respondents (meaning 68 of the richest people of Dhaka) live in the Gulshan/Banani Residential Area" (page 176).

The whole chapter offers extreme insight and illuminating information about the richest people of Dhaka including those living in Gulshan-Banani. Let me quote directly from Siddiqui et al: "Interview with selected respondents showed that the first big amount of money (i.e. primitive accumulation) was acquired by the Dhaka city richest in one or more of the methods described below:

- a) Theft, embezzlement, forcible occupation etc involving government funds and stores and abandoned property; and heavy kickbacks taken by bureaucratic power holders against favours dished out.
- b) Involvement in smug-

gling, narcotic trade, hoarding, black marketing, currency racketeering, under and over invoicing etc; c) Defrauding and permanently defaulting big loans taken from NCBs and DFIs; d) Commission agency out of multi-million dollar 'projects' or purchases financed generally by foreign aid and in collusion with the state power; e) Unearned income through reselling of permits, imposition of sanctions, issuance of arbitrary notification and creation of artificial scarcities." (p 192).

It seems that the "richest people of Dhaka" are in absolute good company with the "hijackers and smugglers." In any case, the attack on the Chinese Embassy was a despicable act and largely speaks of the weakness of the law enforcing agencies who are otherwise quite vigilant in such exclusive areas.

There is obviously a need for maintaining safety and security of not only the neighbourhoods of the richest people but also those of the middle class and of the poor. The richest, however, can afford to organize the security of their own neighbourhoods. N Islam Dhaka.