

Dhaka, Friday, November 27, 1992

## Dealing with Landlessness

In a land-scarce country like Bangladesh, the problem of landlessness is bound to be acute. This is understandable. But the degree of acuteness sometimes baffles all rational minds simply because of the brutality, horror and greed involved in the process. A story carried in this newspaper yesterday has ventured to look into the problem from close quarters. The venue, not surprisingly, is Nabagram under Sundalpur Union, Noakhali District — one of the most such crisis-ridden of districts in the whole of Bangladesh. But its problem is typical of all other places in the south and north of the country.

Why the problems of landlessness are aggravating, instead of getting resolved, have been referred to in the report in a summarised form under different categories. No wonder, law has topped the list. It has been found not only faulty but its application has also been arbitrary. The fact that one legal provision is nullified by another is a proof of the inadequacy of the system. For example, when landless farmers take lease of emerging char lands (landmass emerging in rivers) for cultivation through duplicate carbon receipt (DCR) from the District Revenue Office, they are supposed to have completed all the official formalities. But not quite. And there exactly are the loopholes through which the *jotdars* (big land-holders) enter into the scene. Their strong point is that they receive a prior court injunction in their favour, rendering the District Revenue Office's permission null and void. What ultimately happens is that the farmers who have invested in the land their labour and other inputs are driven out of the lands just at the time of harvesting. Indeed, the *jotdars* lie in wait for the right moment to strike the blow. So, there is a need for making laws clear enough and to the effect that one provision does not in any way contradict or supersede the other. If the government offices declare any land as *khas* (government property), they must do so after proper investigation and a mechanism has to be worked out, at least, to keep the land-grabbers at bay.

Next come the forgery of documents and all conceivable forms of malpractices. The complicated nature of land-ownership has always presented with an opportunity for a section of the concerned people to do the bungling with documents. Measures against this type of malpractices need to be improved urgently. To remove the long years' mess, further land reforms ought to be in order. It is at this point we would like to draw attention to the much-vaunted land reforms. Reforms effected so far have failed to beat the opposing forces. There is no reason to assume things are outright favouring the big land-holders. What actually happens is that the moneyed and the influential still find scopes to skirt around the legal bars. A system has to be developed to provide legal and administrative supports for the disadvantaged. If this cannot be done, the inherent weaknesses in the system will be fully exploited to defeat the purpose of settling the landless people.

The fact that rural poverty globally has been on the rise — and this is despite the last 40 years' generous aid — gives us enough reason for re-thinking our ways of treating the socially disadvantaged. If we cannot take up programmes to deal with problems within our means, it is futile to ask others to do the job for us.

## Foreign Journalists' and the Summit

According to reports published, about 100 newsmen are expected to come to Dhaka to cover the SAARC Summit. As fellow journalists we naturally have far more interest than others in the arrangements being made for our foreign colleagues. Committees and sub-committees have been formed to look after them. Without passing any judgement on their work, experiences show that bureaucratic approach to handle media usually proves to be of limited value. The possible presence of the 100 or so newsmen could be the starting point of an effort by Bangladesh to improve news flow from here to the rest of the region, especially the SAARC, which the editor of this paper was talking about the other day in his column "At Home and Abroad." Big conferences attract newsmen, but they are also notorious for turning them off. Officials who cannot, and do not, move an inch without proper authorisation are put in charge of newsmen and women and a relationship of confrontation rather than of co-operation takes over within hours of the time that a big conference starts.

But it does not have to be so. To avoid the usual pitfalls very careful preparation is most essential. The type of preparation the governments usually take is how to control the movement of journalists, how to monitor and, if and when possible, censor the reports sent by them. Of course anything that has to do with security and national interest, we will have to monitor and, when necessary, control. Leaving that aside, most often offi-

Now the Government has passed an Act under which the Upazillas have been abolished and these are now called Thanas. The very term "Thana" indicates geographical areas earmarked mainly for the maintenance of peace, order and tranquility under the police administration. The Thana concept must not be equated with the development area concept for reasons of expediency and wisdom, although geographically they are the same. Each Upazilla should have been divided into Unions rather than the Thana being divided into Unions which should also be taken as small development areas, in addition to their use for other purposes. The lowest units of course remain the villages.

I have still to make a suggestion even when the matter has been complicated by passing an Act under which Upazillas have been equated with Thanas. The whole country is now divided at all levels mainly for reasons of administration. There are Division at the top. Currently at least one Division has been made smaller by creating a new Division out of the former Division. The trouble is that the government does not announce any rationale for its decisions. Even if there is any, the Government does not clearly publicize it for the understanding of the people which must be an established practice in a democracy, how-

# Division into Small Economic Regions — a Development Prerequisite

by MT Haq

ever young and inexperienced it may be at this stage.

### Considerations

Many prerequisites or requisites are essential for the economic, particularly the industrial, development of the country. I am not going into the details of these infrastructural requirements in this paper. What I must indicate is that the whole country needs to be demarcated into a number of economic regions on various considerations such as population, natural resources, human skill, transport relations, markets, both internal and external, and a host of other considerations to be identified by a group of experts. I suggest strongly that a high level committee of experts is appointed by the authorities concerned to consider this question and to make recommendations to the Government. It may be that the Planning Commission can take the initiative in this matter.

### Macro-planning

Recently, I have heard a lot about macro-planning. Trained economists and the bureaucrats experienced in the art of planning will know what it means and there is no dispute

about its importance. It gives the framework of national planning by setting the targets at the national level in the different areas, during a time-frame, very briefly speaking. What is, however, equally important is sectoral planning in the different sectors and what is most important is project planning and project implementation through which the targets set in the macroplan are achieved. I shall feel very unhappy if anyone would think that what I am implying by saying all this is that our planners are not thoroughly acquainted with these matters. In fact our country has still very distinguished, active and talented people, though many have left the country and have made outstanding names in the advanced countries and the international organizations. What I just wish to indicate is that when people in the area of planning and economics talk about macro-planning, they should also refer to the importance of sectoral planning and project planning, because these three things are inseparable.

Another issue to which I wish to refer is that the kind

of economic information that we get in the media to-day is that there is hardly any reference to the time horizon of planning, that is, what is intended to be done in the short-period, the medium-term, the 5-year term and in the long term. These must be there in the Planning Commission documents but most people have no time to read voluminous documents on these subjects and as such small pamphlets to keep the general public informed of these aspects of planning will be extremely valuable. This dissemination of information is especially necessary in a newly democratic country. The information role of the Government is an important function to be fulfilled.

### Spatial Aspect

Earlier in this paper, I have argued for the division of the country into some economic regions for development purposes. So what I am arguing for partly is the spatial aspect of planning which is very important, though it is a neglected field of economic planning particularly in a least developed country like Bangladesh.

But, in my view, the spatial aspect of planning is very important in less developed countries where people cannot move so easily from one area to another. Every economic region, rationally demarcated, will have its own resources of one kind or the other. So let these regions be developed mainly on the basis of their own resources, the government making available all infrastructures needed there.

### Decentralisation

Another basic reason for which the division of the country into some well-defined economic regions is necessary is that there has already been too much concentration of industrial or economic activity in some urban regions. Therefore, a strong policy of decentralisation needs to be followed. This will definitely mean government intervention in economic and social matters. It naturally follows that to eulogize or to glorify private enterprise in an unrestricted manner without understanding its implications is definitely a wrong course of action. The concept of the trickle-down economics is only of very limited importance. This was a burning question even in the

last USA Presidential Election, as we know.

I am not happy about repeating the old things, but after a decade of autocratic rule of H M Ershad, the economy of Bangladesh is in a shambles now and in many areas we have to start from the scratch. Hence old things need to be repeated. The question remains as to how many economic regions the country should be divided into. Now Great Britain, for example, is twice the size of Bangladesh and has half the population of Bangladesh. Great Britain is divided into some 12 Standard Regions. I am not sure about Bangladesh Government's position in this respect. If the government wants to use the present Administrative Divisions as economic regions then the government should say so, although using them as economic regions will be irrational and unrealistic in terms of the criteria only some of which I have indicated above. It will be a realistic policy if for development purposes, on a long-term basis, the country is divided into some 20 or so regions on sound demographic, economic, social and many other relevant considerations. This is an essential requirement for planning purposes.

Dr M T Haq is a former Professor of Economics, Rajshahi University and a retired United Nations, Industrial Adviser.

# Grim Ripa Warns: Beware of 'Jobs Vs Trees' Argument

by Damien Lewis

As the global economy plunges into recession and economic stagnation, the environment is made the scapegoat of the world's woes. The false conflict of "jobs versus trees" threatens the post-Rio Earth Summit process. A Gemini News Service correspondent talks to former European Community environment commissioner Carlo Ripa di Meana about his worries

Carlo Ripa di Meana, Italian Environment Minister and until recently environment commissioner of the European Community (EC), is fearful for the global environment in a world facing an ever deepening recession.

In the Community, di Meana built a reputation as an unyielding and uncompromising crusader for the environment — the so-called "grim Ripa." True to the last, he resigned just before the Earth Summit, in protest at the lack of EC action on the environment.

The false conflict of "jobs versus trees" — embodied in President George Bush's defence of the logging of ancient temperate rainforests in the US — implies that the environment is still a "deluxe factor," said di Meana, and we simply cannot afford to see it like this any more.

"The global recession is already threatening to halt the crucial post-Rio process, di Meana told this year's Wildscreen wildlife and environment film festival. The "bombastic statements of world leaders, that they would achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of Gross National Product in aid to the developing world, are now looking very unlikely."

He believes Europe and the rest of the developed world will be judged on the concrete commitments made in financial terms to the fine promises at Rio. France has already confirmed its pledge to the 0.7 per cent target, but Italy, like many other European countries, awaits the word of the treasury.

"People are now claiming that because of unemployment and the economic crisis, we will lose the momentum of Rio," says di Meana. "The EC became unclear and foggy on its role, as Rio approached, and that's why I resigned. But



CARLO RIPA DI MEANA  
"We mustn't lose the starting point of Rio"

we mustn't lose the starting point of Rio."

The global environmental debate demands brutal truths — even more so now, in the present economic climate — and there is all too often a danger of wrapping it in "eco-

diplomacy." Promised money must be made available, and Rio's failures — like the Forest Agreement — must be addressed.

The legally binding Rio Forest Convention never materialised. This "major failure"

di Meana puts down to the fact that tropical nations, led by Malaysia, Brazil and India, "torpedoed any serious agreement" by refusing to accept limitations on their forests.

But they were justified. There was "truth in their demand" that the developed world's forests should be included in any convention. Di Meana said: "Over the past three years, they've been logging in Siberia at a rate that bears no relation to tropical countries. The US is a similar case."

"It was hypocrisy on our part that made the forest convention a flop." In fact, many of the causes of the global environmental crisis lie in the developed world. In the US, energy consumption is 100 times that in the Third World. In the EC, it is 50 times greater.

Di Meana says: "The EC carbon tax was proposed this year with the aim of building towards Rio. It is the only realistic instrument to achieve the stabilisation of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000, as the EC plans to do. But this proposal has now been suspended, because EC governments say it is not a good time to introduce green taxes."

"Likewise, the US at Rio refused to negotiate over the American way of life, which basically means immense energy consumption. The whole US system is based on high energy consumption and low energy prices. Why are energy saving policies the first to be rejected?"

Bush's "jobs versus trees"

argument is one that has been followed by other world leaders. But Japan and Germany are living proof that there are market and job opportunities in environment protection. They are excellent examples of how in an over-crowded, over-industrialised and over-intensively-farmed world, the environment cannot be a luxury."

Ripa di Meana points to his own country as proof of the costs of ignoring environmental issues: "We have ruthlessly building along the coast, we have scar-faced the country with road systems whilst killing our railways, we have produced a polluted sea on the verge of collapse."

To say now is not the time for environmental policies, when we do not have a single Italian tourist resort not affected by these problems is absolutely unsatisfactory, and we must fight against it."

But the global fight for stronger environmental policies is facing severe difficulties. The Euro-debate over "subsidiarity" — that decisions should be made as close as possible to the citizen, or the national government, rather than at the level of the EC — threatens the EC's strong stance over the environment.

"The more I hear," says di Meana, "the more I fear the EC policy on the environment will

become some sort of sacrificial lamb."

The EC is being heavily criticised; many countries are turning against it. But its environmental policy retains universal support. "To mutilate or axe this policy, for the sake of short-term political reasons, would be folly," says di Meana.

He points out three areas where the EC should interfere in a country's environmental affairs. Many of the EC's pollution problems — acid rain, ozone depletion, polluted rivers and seas — do not restrict themselves to national boundaries, and the 12 member states of the EC must be collective environmental actors.

Secondly, for the single market succeed better common environmental standards are needed, to ensure that the environment is not used as an excuse to erect trade barriers.

Thirdly, as the EC is charged with "improving the quality of life of its citizens," the environment must become a policy area of equal priority to transport, health or industry.

Faced with a global recession, trying to dispel the false argument of "jobs versus trees" has become an even greater battle, says di Meana.

It is in this context that the role of the environmental filmmaker is so important. Dispelling the anti-green propaganda put about by the more-retrogressive world leaders is now a crucial role of the media.

DAMIEN LEWIS is a freelance journalist specialising in environmental issues. He is a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society.

## OPINION

### First Things First

by Shahabuddin Mahtab

PRIME Minister Begum Khaleda Zia categorically informed the recently held Rome Conference that Bangladesh believes in a 'dal-bhat' economy. Clearly, this is a laudable declaration for a government when four fifths of its people live below the poverty line. In an action plan for a 'dal-bhat' economy, we have to provide for at least two square meals a day, the minimum clothing requirements and the barest of shelter

sonal wishes; they must voice the needs and aspirations of their electorate constituents to whom they are responsible. The national priorities are required to be observed, with the confidence and support of the people.

The first things must be tackled first. All development works have to be phased and well timed, so that there is no cost overrun and all works receive the appropriate priority. When dozens of roads, lanes

## 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: children's programme

Talk Theatre' or cartoons from Hans Christian Anderson, would be more appreciated by

Since the bill was not circulated to elicit public opinion, it would be a service par se if the advocates to inform general public of the merits and demerits of this bill.

They may compare in the write-up the relevant clauses of the Special Powers Act, 1974, Anti-terrorist Act, 1992 and that of the existing ones to explain why these Special Powers Act and Anti-terrorist Act are, as some opine, not

Hence I urge upon the government to give priority to the matter and set the process in motion at the earliest.

Saleh Ahmed Choudhury  
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### Tele-communication at thana level

Sir, The tele-communication