Dhaka, Friday, April 9, 1993

Chance for Afforestation

Much as the environment may have become the issue of the 90's, little so far has been done to restore the physical order of the country. However, the story that appeared on the business page of this paper yesterday looks quite encouraging. The programme basically is nothing new, it is the approach that makes it different. Proshika, a leading non-governmental organisation (NGO) has done an admirable job of ensuring participation of the growers at the grass-roots level.

indeed agro-forestry and social forestry are the catch-words for environmentalists today. But as their name suggest, they remain but a programme on paper if the participation of the local people cannot be ensured. Most of the tree plantation campaigns in the country failed in the past because the post-plantation care, so necessary for the success of the drives, was next to nil. Proshika was the first organisation to identify the problems and got into business to tide over the problem. It carried out its first few programmes on a trial basis with startling results and only then did it decide to expand the programme to wider areas. 'Wood-lot' Programme, developed recently, is one in which the concept of full participation and sharing of the benefits is really at work.

Proshika's part in the whole exercise is rather supervisory. What it does at times is to play the role of a bargaining agent between the beneficiaries and the local authorities. In fact, it advocates the cause of the poor organised groups and help mediate the contract of the land leased and the benefits to be shared. But it does more in that it supplies the plants free of cost and, more importantly, help develop the mechanism by which the entire programme is kept under constant surveillance by the growers themselves. The model has proved highly effective because of the incentives provided for in the process. Social forestry follows the same patterns and principles, ensuring for the farmers a reasonable share.

The idea has, to a small extent, been incorporated by the latest government tree plantation drive. Hopefully, this will ensure, albeit marginally, some post-plantation care and vigil and account for the survival of more trees this time than ever before.

What was needed was an organised effort to be backed up by a well-drawn plan for the whole country. The saplings distributed surely could make the country greener, if not replenish the lost forest resources. In the context of the scientists sounding the warning that Bangladesh is on the brink of environmental disaster, this was however, one of our pressing priorities. If the homework were done properly before, distributing the saplings, their survival rate would have been much higher. This was essential because it was the only nation-wide programme. The model Proshika has presented could be adopted in toto, if for nothing else, but for the sake of economic benefits the poor were expected to derive at no extra cost on anybody's part.

Eventually, however, such mutually satisfying programmes have to be taken. I would be taken to be taken.

After all, the agro-forestry is not going to be highly attractive for the farmers simply because of the acute scarcity of land. The combined cultivation of crops and trees on small plots will hardly be a lucrative idea. Only in areas where no other crops other than trees have much of a prospect, the proposal sounds okay. Proshika has already proved the point, let others - including the government — follow the example.

Consumer Rights Movement

An Australian woman is planning to sue the country's state-owned Qantas Airways. The reason? In spite of her asking for a non-smoking seat she was forced to sit in the smoking area during a nine hour Sydney-Bangkok flight. This resulted in her becoming sick, which in turn ruined her holidays in the 'Land of Smiles'. The airlines has already given her a voucher to make a second trip. But it is the time she lost, and the suffering she had to undergo because Qantas could not give her the desired seat, are what remains to be compensated for.

The question is how far does the right of a airline passenger go? Quite for, we think. When one buys a plane ticket, it is not only for the ride, but also for a safe and congenial ride, one which will not force someone to be exposed to a health hazard. We hope the Australian judges find in favour of the passenger, so that the right signal is sent to all the airlines.

The incident brings out clearly how far the concept of consumers' rights have advanced in some parts of the world. In Bangladesh the consumers are at the mercy of what is being dished out. Consumer protection laws are either vague or are unknown due to its unuse. Take the most dramatic example. Recently some 350 babies have died due to badly prepared, or substandard paracetamol syrup. Yet we know of not a single case of parents suing any of the pharmaceutical companies. Forget about the subtle or indirect violation of consumer's rights. When we do not take legal action against such vicious and deadly violation as illustrated by the paracetamol incidence, then there must be something seriously wrong about our notions of rights and wrongs. The reluctance of people to take legal action is. to some extent, due to the cumbersome nature of our legal process, which many try to avoid.

We feel that the paracetamol incidence has brought out the need for a conscious and powerful consumer movement. There are a few bodies that do such work. But they need to be organised better, and given more support in the form of a movement. Such a movement will put on alert the substandard producers and manufacturers and reward those who adhere to quality control.

We eagerly wait for the day when we will be able to sue a bus owner for polluting our roads with deadly exhaust putting at risk the lives of thousands of rickshaw passengers and padestrians. For the moment, however, we should seriously look into ways of bringing to the fore laws that protect consumers and think about how we could build a healthy consumer rights movement.

N the distant fifties and sixties, economists and specialists in international relations would often indulge in a particular pastime: they would probe into the relevant data, and reach their judgement on the comparative quality of economic development of the two Asian giants, India and China. Much of that exercise would new seem to be

ancient history India and China have ceased to belong to the same economic league. China has, continuously for the past eight to ten years, maintained an annual rate of economic growth of around 10 per cent. Both agriculture and industry are booming in that country, the dollar value of China's annual exports has jumped twenty times in the course of the past decade. In fact, the Chinese leaders are now concerned about the prospect of an overheated' economy resulting from high exports, which could cause an inflationary spiral. There is talk of initiating steps to slow down activities in the special export processing zones until the danger of inflation abates.

In India, while prices have risen relentlessly, very modest economic growth has of late taken place. The spurt in farm production induced by the new agricultural strategy a quarter of a century ago has petered out; the rate of growth in farm output throughout the 1980's has been below the rate of population growth. Food imports are back on the government's agenda. The annual rate of industrial growth has been hovering around 3 to 4 per cent in recent years; if power generation and mining are excluded from consideration, the performance in the manufacturing sector would turn out to

RESIDENT Bill Clinton

appears poised to make

a major departure in

Americans sympathetic to the

Roman Catholic minority in

the British- controlled Protes-

sumed that a US negotiating

role in Northern Ireland would

increase the chances of a set-

tlement of the 25-year-long

armed conflict. These Irish-

Americans further calculated

that any settlement would have

to include changes in the

political status quo, under-

which the Protestants are able

to maintain Northern Ireland's

link to London, while the

Catholics are unable to achieve

their goal of uniting the terri-

The special-envoy notion

was strongly resisted a first by

both the British and Irish gov-

ernments as well as by the

Republican White House and

leading Irish-Americans on

Capitol Hill. A shift occurred in

the mid-1980s, however,

when Daniel Patrick Moynihan,

a New York Democrat, intro-

duced a Senate resolution

urging the Reagan administra-

tion to appoint such an inter-

supported by other prominent

Irish-American politicians, in-

cluding Senator. Edward

Kennedy. Their new approach

in turn signalled a change in

outlook on the part of the

Dublin government, since US

lawmakers of Irish descent

usually consult closely with the

Irish embassy in Washington

on policy initiatives affecting

Moynihan's proposal was

mediary.

tory with the Irish Republic.

Proponents of the plan as-

tant-Majority province.

in Northern Ireland.

A DAILY STAR SPECIAL

India, alas, is No China

by Ashok Mitra

Any comparison between China and India, in their economic performance, now seems to be ancient history. Both the countries have travelled a long distance, but they have moved in contrary directions.

be even less satisfactory. Employment in the organised industrial sector has in any case declined steadily over the years. During the prime ministerial tenure of Ratty Gandhi, high government spending gave a boost to service activities. Such spending however also contributed to the rise in prices, and the nation's vast majority of poor people gained little from the expansion of such service sectors as banking or tourism.

The much greater contrast between the two countries is in their respective external economic accounts. Foreign capital has begun to flow into China in an impressive way. Even so, not more than 5 per cent of the country's total capital stock is owned by outsiders. Moreover, the bulk of the capital flow is the contribution of the overseas Chinese. Since there is a comfortable expert surplus end the infusion of external capital mostly assumes the form of direct investment, the country's foreign debt is as good as negligible. India's total external debt, on the other hand, is 80 billion dollars. roughly 50 per cent of the country's national income. Most of this indebtedness is to

foreign banks and financial institutions; non-resident Indians have not even a 5 per cent stake in this aggregate debt. The magnitude of India's borrowings since the mideighties has landed her into a debt trap: the country has to borrow afresh 7 to 8 billion dollars every year to meet the servicing obligations of past debts alone: the overall burden therefore rises with each year.

The programme of economic reforms initiated in 1991 has not made much of significant differences to the Indian situation. The impact of this programme has been severe on the poor and middle classes. The reforms were undertaken with the expectation of an impressive increase in the inflow of foreign capital taking place as a result. That expectation has been belied. In the aftermath of Ayodhya, the prospects of foreign investment have dimmed further. What is equally perturbing, the widespread civil disturbances in the country over the past weeks have had an extremely adverse effect on exports; receipts from tourism too have shrunk dramatically.

Globalisation - the most outstanding feature of the re-

led to any perceptible improvement in the country's general economic performance, nor to its level of exports. Ayodhya and its aftermath have pushed back the economy further. The country's finance minister was recently heard to remark that if China could absorb the shock of Tienmien Square and re sume, after the shortest posst ble interruption, her progress along the fast track of economic growth, no reason exists for India's not being able to recoup, as easily, from the economic consequences of the demolition of the Babri mosque and the events set in motion in its train. The analogy does not quite hold. China has a monolithic political system, and, while there has been in recent years considerable relaxation of administrative controls, the Communist party maintains a tight rain over the processes of the economy. The episode of the Tienmien Square was not allowed to disturb the tenor of the nation's on-going economic activities The overseas Chinese, responsible for more than ninetenths of the annual capital in-

flows into the country, were

forms programme - has not

not excessively bothered by the outburst of student restlessness. There was, for a brief few months, a slowdown in visits by experts from abroad and perhaps a marginal drop in tourism; but as the economy continued to surge forward and political tranquillity got fully restored, the foreign exports soon returned in strength, and so did the foreign tourists. It also needs be added that since China is still not an 'open' country in the sense India is, it is relatively easy to regulate the flow of information about domestic happenings to the outside world.

India used to take pride as the world's largest, and most open democracy. Globalisation of communications has rendered the country even more open; the tribulations the nation is going through since the Ayodhya incident are now being laid bare by the device of satellite communications minutely, hour after hour, and day after day, to a global audience. The rest of the world is learning that the world's largest democracy harbours within its fold powerful authoritarian forces who swear by bigotry and religious fundamentalism; that many millions

by invocations the intent of which is to drag the nation into the dark recesses of prehistory; that major cities, including the country's industrial and commercial capital, Bombay, are threatened by ugly communal strifes; and that the country's ruling party is producing fresh evidence of organisational and ideological confusion which is rendering it increasingly incapable of coping with the situation.

in the country are bewitched

These facts about India are being beamed everyday by the satelitte channels. They are, not surprisingly, having a negative effect on investors' confidence about India; the country's general credit rating has sunk to an extremely low level. The finance minister's tongue-in-cheek statement will not alter the circumstances. India, the leaders of her government should have the humility to realise, is no China. The Chinese have succeeded in building their economy, on their own, and their leaders are in full control of the nation's political processes; India, in contrast, has a wobbly political structure and cannot survive without substantial foreign hand-outs. Both countries have travelled a long distance over the past four decades, but they have moved in contrary directions.

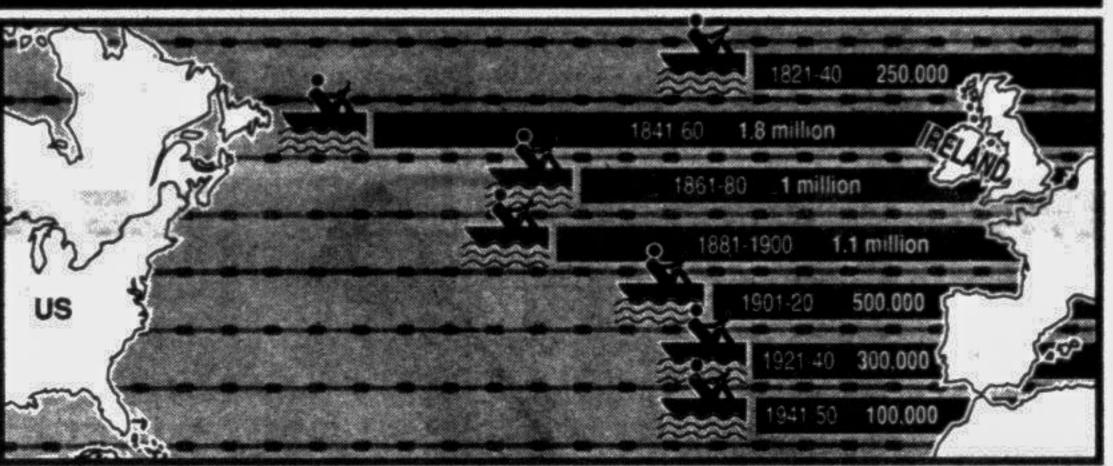
The writer, one of the bestknown newspaper columnists of India, whose weekly commentary, "Cutting Corner" appears in several papers in his country, is a former Finance Minister of West Bengal. The above article, syndicated by Mandira Publications, New Delhi has been made available to us for exclusive use in Bangladesh. We expect to use the column by Mr Mitra from time to time.

Clinton Gets Ready to Take Gamble over Ireland

Kevin J Kelley writes from Washington

United States foreign policy by President Bill Clinton plans to send a special envoy to Northern Ireland. The name of appointing a special envoy to former President Jimmy Carter is being mentioned by many Irish-Americans for the job. help broker a peace agreement Supporters of the plan say a US negotiating role in Northern Ireland would increase the A proposal for direct US chances for a settlement of the 25-year-long armed conflict which has claimed 3,000 lives diplomatic involvement in and caused billions of pounds in property damage by IRA bombings. However, the British Northern Ireland was first offered ten years ago. The idea establishment is less than enthusiastic about they envoy. originated among Irish-

Irish emigration to the US



Source: Times Atlas of World History

Ireland.

Irish officials and their US congressional allies were coming to realise the growing political power and independence of Irish-American activists concerned about Northern Ireland, It was this same recognition that led Clinton to pledge during the 1992 presidential campaign that he would name a special

Grassroots lobbying groups like the Irish National Caucus, founded in 1974 by Rev. Sean McManus, had begun in the early 1980s to exert influence over local politicians in states

with significant numbers of Irish- American residents.

By mobilising this constituency McManus's Caucus and other organisations achieved success in their campaign on behalf of what known as the MacBride Principles. This set of anti-discrimination criteria is intended to curb the religious prejudice that has long consigned Northern Irish Catholics to economic and social inferiority.

As proof of Irish-American political strength, a total of 13 states and 40 cities have now affirmed the MacBride Principles. Each of these governments is prohibited by law from doing business with any US company operating in Northern Ireland that does not agree to respect the MacBride

A similar degree of pressure has been applied by the same groups in regard to the issue of a US special envoy. As a candidate, Clinton saw that he might gain an important share of votes by embracing a cause popular among some Irish-Americans who had previously voted for Reagan and Bush.

He has surprised many observers by making the fulfilment of his special-envoy

pledge one of the first foreign policy initiatives of his administration.

McManus believes that the 46-year-old President has a different view of US-British relations from that of Reagan and Bush. He says: "Clinton is of a generation that doesn't share the sentimental, World War Two attachment of England. He still thinks there's a 'special relationship' between Washington and London, but he differs from other presidents in seeing that as a reason why the US should in fact be playing a role in Northern

By signalling his determina tion to appoint a special envoy, Clinton has persuaded the British government to drop its resistance to the idea. Following his first meeting with the new President, Conservative Prime Minister John Major said Britain would have no objection to this initiative.

British officials have sought to downplay the significance of the move, contending that the envoy would be charged with only "fact-finding" responsibilities. It has also been suggested in the same quarters that this emissary be instructed not to talk with representatives of the Irish Republican Army.

Britain itself has refused to include IRA supporters in the several rounds of talks among Northern Irish parties that London has sponsored in recent years.

McManus and other Irish-American lobbyists are seeking to ensure that no such conditions are placed on a US envoy. "Of course this diplomat would be engaged in fact-finding." says the Northern Ireland-born Catholic priest.

"How else does such a mission proceed? But the objective must also be for the US to act as an honest broker that will encourage a settlement involving all parties. If the US can talk with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation), it certainly can and should talk with the IRA."

Former President Jimmy Carter, who has become something of a roving peacemaker, is McManus' first choice as special envoy. He says Carter has expressed a willingness to serve in that capacity if asked. Two African Americans former United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young and Rev. Jesse Jackson - are mentioned by McManus as others who would command

respect from all sides. If he does appoint a special envoy, Clinton will be taking a considerable political risk. The opposing forces in Northern Ireland have frustrated all attempts at resolving the conflict since it erupted in its current form in 1968. More than 3,000 people have been killed during that time in a province with a population of only 1.5 million, and billions of pound in property damage has been

Although US involvement could conceivably help break the political stalemate, the odds are greater that such a step by Clinton will ultimately lead nowhere.

caused by IRA bombings.

- GEMINI NEWS KEVIN J KELLEY is Editor of the international affairs Journal Toward Freedom and author of The Longest War, a book on Northern Ireland.

Io 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

The burnt-out cases

Sir, S Korea and Taiwan remind us of the title of a famous novel "The Burnt Out Case". Let us only hope the next name will not be Thailand. What is suspected to have happened was that these two countries were cleverly encouraged and offered incentives to export more and more to feed the vast US market. The take-off and artificially sustained growth rates were designed to be faster than the infrastructure could sustain for long; with the result their economies burnt out within a decade. A 200m sprinter cannot be groomed to be a marathon champion.

Now, despite the disparities in GATT, the industrialized nations (mostly the West against the Third World) are employing subtle new tactics on the developing countries and imposing unreasonable terms and pre-conditions, and interfering in the national planning policies as pre-requisites for the sanction of foreign

aid. The creation of new blocks

in the West are restricting the export markets of the poor. The stress is to open up imports from the West, to create new markets outside the First World, due to high labour costs and zero or below zero population growth rates. Many poor nations believe in population planning, ignoring the germs of possible genocide tactics. The "Developing Economic" was created outside and imported. Now we may be facing the second generation of this malpractice in an updated Bangladesh may be a victim

of such manoeuvres, without adequate means to fight back (as Malaysia can, for example). Our national policy makers are aware of such subtle propaganda. The creation of economic blocks in Asia is being resisted, while political instability is encouraged in outside areas to keep the factories running, so that, according to octopus economy, the ratio remains 8:2.

Bangladesh is as yet not even an eligible case to be chosen as a target for burning out

by the beginning of the next century. But, unfortunately, united we fight against ourselves. There appears to be a deliberate move to break up a big country in south Asia. It is time for the regional neighbours to get together and resist the outside machinations To fight for survival is not a crime. Alif Zabr

ETG bills

Sir, Electricity, Telephone and Gas authorities are giving advertisements and warnings of disconnection to the consumers/subscribers for paying bills regularly but, unfortunately, the system of payment of bills is becoming complicated day by day. Earlier, Telephone bill could be paid at the nearest branch of Janata Bank or Agrani Bank. Now, for the whole South zone of Dhaka, one has to pay a Telephone bill only at Janata Bank, Dhaka College branch.

It is to mention here that Electric bills (both domestic and commercial) for a large area of Dhaka, Municipal and Gas bills from any locality of Dhaka are also accepted here. For all these, four kinds of bill scroll number is given from one counter only. So, there is a long queue for which it takes atleast three hours to reach

the counter. Only one person

at this counter puts the scroll

number and makes entry in four different books. Separate counters for putting scroll number as well as payment of ETG bills could reduce this rush. Sufficient staff helping in the counters where there is much rush could ease the subscribers. The short notice of Telephone bill is another reason of rush in this branch of Janata Bank. Though 7th March was the last date for payment of the Telaphone bill of January '93, the bill was received only on the 6th March '93. Since it takes more than one month to reach to the subscribers, the T&T authorities should give at least a period of one month to pay the bill at a suitable time.

The number of subscribers/consumers is increasing day by day. ETG authorities should allow to pay any bill at any branch of any bank (private or govt.) rather than squeezing it to one particular branch of one particular bank. This will save time of a subscriber-/consumer and encourage him to pay bills regularly along with the arrear, if any.

Zafar Shaheen Elephant Road, Dhaka

Islamic laws

Str. This refers to Mr Mohammed Mohiuddin's write-up which appeared in 'The Daily Star of the 19th March. Mr Mohiuddin writes - "Religion

is a private affair of individuals whereas politics is related to programmes of mass orientation". But Muslims have never accepted the view that religion is a private affair of the individual and as such has no bearing upon the social and political relationship of the hu-

man being. Islam embraces in its spheres not only those act and performance to which the followers of many other religions confine the application of the word "worship", but all aspects of individual, communal, national and international activity. The Holy Quran, Hadith and Sunnah have given clear directions how to operate dayto-day individual and state affairs of the Muslims. If Islamic laws and principles are followed and implemented strictly, there arises no question of so called 'fundamentalism'. An Islamic state is a welfare state which is responsible to maintain a fair distribution of wealth among all its citizens and ensure equal opportunity to all.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

Sir, The recent air dropping of food relief by the US over Bosnia in order to allevi-

ate the plight of besieged Bosnian Muslims seems to have yielded no real sign of relief to the hungry mass so far. Rather, in desperate attempt to collect food, many innocent Bosnian's have become easy prey to the pounding artillery guns of marauding Serbs. The unhindered crime perpetrated by the Serbs on Bosnian Muslims has evoked lot of table talks at the UNO but virtually without resulting in any posi-

During the Gulf War, we witnessed the allied forces detecting and destroying Scud missile batteries in Iraq with pinpoint accuracy aided by satellites.

tive step to halt the atrocities.

So why then is it not possible now for US in same manner to locate the Serbs' artillery positions and silence the firepower which is wreaking havoc on the helpless Muslim population in Bosnia.

In my opinion, dropping of

bombs first on Serbs artillery sites before airdropping food relief over Bosnia could atleast have helped Bosnian Muslims to escape the wrath of Serbs' brutality. At present the air dropping of food mission could be seen as a sheer mockery, where one is trying to fill a bucket with a hole without plugging the hole first.

Mock mission

Md Jalaluddin Igbal Mohammadpur, Dhaka