Dhaka, Saturday, June 5, 1993

Human Rights in India

The move by the Government of India to set up a high-powered panel to probe the alleged human right abuses in the country's insurgency-hit states has been long overdue. Although concerned groups within the country have been vocal in demanding such a mechanism, the present move coincides with the publication of reports by regional and international bodies on the excesses committed by army, paramilitary and other agencies in the strifetorn Kashmir. Here, one must also note that, on this score, there has been pressure on New Delhi from Washington, as manifested by statements made by a recent visitor to India, the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, John Mallot.

A bill providing for the establishment of the panel was placed before the parliament early last month. With little known about provisions incorporated in the proposed legislation, there were immediate doubts as to how far the move would help in curbing the excesses reported by the human rights bodies. Now, with clarifications offered by the authorities, there is some hope that the proposed panel might not be a toothless tiger. It will hold judicial authority and investigative powers. This is, in principle, welcome. However, unless all the provisions are known, one cannot applaud New

Delhi's move - yet.

At this stage, a number of questions must be faced. The establishment of the panel for which a bill is now lying before the parliament may take weeks before it comes into being and becomes operational. Then, what is the certainty that it will have a smooth passage? Since it does concern the situation in Kashmir, the opposition BJP would not certainly miss the opportunity of turning the debate on the bill into a tirade against the government. While this goes on the floor of the House of the Parliament, more and more civilian Kashmiris will continue to suffer through torture and abuses, more often than not, without committing any political crimes, see their homes burnt and their lives shattered. While they go through this ordeal, it will be no consolation to them that a bill is lying before the parliament, awaiting its passage to become law.

Does New Delhi need a new mechanism which we certainly welcome, to put a stop to blatant excesses committed by army and paramilitary forces, excesses which have earned for India international condemnation? Aren't there strong enough provisions in the existing system to put a curb on violation of rights of individuals? Is there no such thing as discipline in the army or in paramilitary forces which prevents these government agencies from committing atrocities? In the ultimate analysis, isn't it all a question of a political commitment on the part of the authorities in New Delhi and Srinagar that even militants — whether they are up in arms or just shouting slogans — must be treated in a civilised manner, perhaps taken into custody without being tortured and tried under the due process of law?

When this commitment is lacking, even a highpowered panel with judicial power can do little to change the scenario. The panel cannot function as a peace-keeping force. It can, we assume, investigate complaints. But how many militants in Kashmir or in Assam may risk the displeasure of the army by coming forward to criticise the be-

haviour of government agencies?

New Delhi should have no doubt in its mind where the answer to the tragedy of Kashmir lies. If it is in its firm commitment to put a curb on abuses of human rights, it also involves a sincere search on the part of the government of Narasimha Rao for a political solution. The longer it takes Rao to find the solution, the harder it will be for New Delhi to convince the outside world, not to mention the concerned groups within India, that there won't be any more blood flowing through what was once the beautiful valley of Kashmir.

World Environment Day

A lot is known today about the environmental hazards that mankind faces. Yet, not enough has been done to create the type of mass awareness and trigger massive social action needed to prevent severe and permanent damage to some of the most important elements of environment that are essential for our survival.

We must understand, and in the most unambiguous of terms, that of all the struggles that humanity ever faced, the struggle to preserve the environment is the most critical. It encompasses every aspect of our social and individual existence.

According to the World Bank Report of 1992, one third of the world's population have inadequate sanitation and about 1 billion live without safe drinking water. About 1.3 billion people are exposed to unsafe conditions caused by smoke and soot while 300 to 700 million women and children suffer from indoor air pollution and cooking fires.

The world's population is now growing at 1.7 per cent a year. During the period 1990-2030 there will be an additional 3.7 billion people. Ninety per cent of this growth will occur in the developing countries. Asia will account for 2 billion of this new

growth. The challenge is to provide a decent living condition for all these people through a system of development that produces more, and yet does not damage the environment. Thus the notion of sustainable development becomes the most important concept of our times. Yet the experience has been that our growth has come at a severe cost to the environment — we polluted the air, the water, the land as we produced more and more

goods and services. This must change. We have to

produce more for survival, but we must not destroy the nature to do so.

We in Bangladesh must take up the environmental question more seriously than ever before. It must be incorporated as intrinsic part of every aspect of our policy formulation, and not just be added as an after thought. Population control, in our case, must be the central point of our poverty alleviation programme, which is the only sure way of protecting our environment. A view is often expressed that we cannot afford the extra resources necessary to invest in environment protection. In fact the truth is, whatever is the cost of protection of environment, it is incomparably less than the real cost of its destruction. And for a country like ours, where a very small land area has to support the pressure of such high concentration of population, keeping the ecological balance much of it already lost — is of critical importance.

This year's theme — Poverty and Environment: Breaking the Vicious Circle — brings in the correct perspective of what we said earlier. Let today's observation of the World Environment Day be the starting of a new era of environment consciousness in Bangladesh.

Close Neighbour or Distant Relative

close neighbour is more important than a A distant relative. It is a popular Russian proverb and the truth of it is borne out by recent developments in that country. Located more than 4,000 miles from Moscow, Vladivostok and rest of Russian far east now consider their destiny bound up with the Pacific rim nations like Japan, Korea, United States and China rather than Europe or Russian far west.

ASEAN countries, located next to each other, similarly consider close neighbours very important. Coming up next are the three countries of Indochina — their fate profoundly linked to Thailand, Singapore and rest of Southeast Asia. Through growing trade volumes as well as emerging growth triangles, subregional economic cooperation among South-east Asian countries is being rapidly intensified. There are even proposals to make ASEAN a free trade area by the turn of the century; while from battlefield to the market place is the immediate neighbour's (Thailand) attitude towards

Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The best example, though hardly realised, is that of Australia and New Zealand who in the past used to pole vault across Asia and trade with their distant cousins in

INCE after the inde-

pendence of the coun-

try NGOs in Bangladesh

have been operating their

activities aiming at socio-

economic sustainable de-

velopment of the most disad-

vantaged community. NGOs

have evolved participatory de-

velopment approaches and

principles to meet the felt

needs and expectations of the

community. NGO activities are

based upon on-going develop-

ment experiences and at the

same time NGOs have been ini-

tiating and nurturing alterna-

tive sustainable development

with the objectives of facilitat-

ing socio-economic upliftment

of the community people. Thus

NGOs are assisting government

efforts for poverty alleviation

by involving new ways and

means for development and

replicating those even in the

most remote areas of the

ented development stream

homogenous small, both male

and female, groups are formed.

These groups hold regular

weekly meetings to analyze

their present realities, gener-

ate regular savings and plan fu-

ture activities. Development

education is a toll used for

concentization and organiza-

tion development. In this pro-

cess emphasis is given on total

human development contain-

ing economic, social, familial

NGO activities in Bangla-

desh can mainly be divided in

the following sectors: a. Group

Formation and Organization

Development b. Development Education and Training c.

Income and Employment

Generation d. Savings and

Credit Support e. Health

Services — both preventive and

curative f. Environmental

Development g. Relief and

Rehabilitation h. Action

Research, Evaluation and Mass

HE so-called civilized

in Bosnia-Herzegovina and

Croatia has brought death and

violence to Central Europe's

doorstep yet leaders in the

western capitals particularly

London, are reluctant to stop

genocide in Bosnia-

Herzegovina. But why there is

inaction on their part? Where

their conscience lies? Is it not

a slur on civilization? UN

peace keeping troops are

stationed in Bosnia-

Herzegovina; no-fly zone over

Bosnia has been declared and,

if attacked, UN troops could

open fire in self-defence. But

no action has so far been taken

against Serbs in spite of viola-

tion of ceasefire, time and

again, by them. Vance-Owen

plan backed by the Security

Council dividing Bosnia into

ten ethnic autonomous regions

world is witnessing the

and cultural aspects.

To facilitate people-ori-

country.

Europe, particularly Great Britain. Those were, however, the days of the British Raj and Imperial preference. With the advent of the European Economic Community or EEC, access of their butter and wool into cousin's territories faced increasing restrictions. Finding no alternative, trade with neighbours in Asia increased enormously in the recent past. Better late than never - the realisation has dawned upon Australia and New Zealand that close neighbours are far more important than distant relatives.

Economic cooperation on a subregional basis is therefore bound to expand in the years to come. North-east Asia as an active economic group will soon emerge inspite of the fact that formal diplomatic relations have not yet been established. But neighbourly exis tence cannot be denied and if trade should flourish, let it be so and let all involved prosper together - inspite of what happened in the past.

Geo-political Realities
Geopolitical realities are

unalterable truths it is commonsense. Perhaps during the cold war period, commonsense was forced to be not so common through nuclear de-

In the world today, good cconomics is driving out bad

politics out of circulation. Asia, after decades of ideological turmoils has realised that it is economic growth that must come first. The countries of Asia to the east, south-east and north of Bangladesh (except Burma, next door) have accepted economic growth as the mainstay of foreign policy.

at Beijing. Some would most probably be the case between North and South Korea within the next few years.

Emergence of SAARC must be viewed in this context of rising economic regionalism. India as the closest neighbour is far more important to us as well as rest of South Asia than all the distant relatives that may exist elsewhere in the world. We like it or not, this is

WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

The aspirations are economic not political gains. Consequently, enemies across battle-lines of yesterday have joined hands for promoting trade and investment as well as increased gross domestic products through a rapid sprint to catch up with developed countries of the world. Thus we find that trade and investment between China and Taiwan are expanding by leaps and bounds although there cannot be any formal political recognition of each other. Money talks, and they discussed trade matters recently

the fact of life. We must accept it and try to do our best.

And believe me, a lot can be done. India is short of fertiliser. Import of crude petroleum, ofl products and fertiliser account for as much as 40 per cent of the total import bill of India. Bangladesh can sell atleast a billion dollar worth of fertiliser and natural gas to India. All our surplus tea can be sold to India and Pakistan. On the other hand, we can secure out requirements of cotton and sugar from within the subcontinent and in addition, develop our

and limestone from neighbouring countries.

Volume of Trade

steel and cement industries

based on imported iron ore

The present volume of Bangladesh trade with SAARC countries is not only insignificant, it is hardly growing. In fact in certain years, the trend is downward. Only four per cent of our exports reach the neighbours of the subcontinent and less than ten percent of imports are obtained from them. It is so little that the preferential trading arrangement would tend to be an exercise in utter futility unless trade volume is increased beyond marginal limits of today.

Among SAARC countries, Pakistan is the biggest trade partner of Bangladesh accounting for a major part of our export of tea and 17 per cent of raw jute export. With India, the balance of trade is grossly in favour of India since our export earnings at 107 million taka during 1988-89 amounted to only two per cent of our total import bill from India, not counting the volumes coming through smuggling from across the border.

If this is so, then how close neighbours would be more im-

No, we must go beyond the present trade statistics and try to look at the potentials of future development which are enormous. With India, trade creating joint ventures can expand our exports by 100 times, if not more, within the next few years and it would mean tremendous gains to both the neighbours. Export of natural gas and fertiliser together would be more than the total gross export earnings from garments at present. In fact India can easily emerge as the biggest trade partner of Bangladesh. There is no harm in it. Is is a perfectly logical development and the situation would resemble existing patterns of trade between Canada and USA

portant than distant relatives?

Gains to India would by no means be small since India is presently short of domestic energy resources and supply of natural gas would substantially boost electricity generation in northern states of India.

Therefore, the fact remains that close neighbours are far more important than distant relatives. It is already well established among ASEAN countries as well as in East Asia and is in the process of being established in North-east Asia, In case of South Asia, we ought to be eager to prove the point.

World Environment Day: NGOs' Response

by Alo D' Rozario, Dipak Kumar Ghosh and Qazi Mahbubul Hasan

Communication.

Environmental degradation and pauperization are interrelated. Conservation and development of environment depends on active participation of the people in socio-economic development process. Mass awareness plays a vital role to address environmental degradation and to promote environmental development. Again, this mass awareness should be accompanied by workable polices and realistic approach for combating pauperization. Since their inception NGOs have included environmental activities in their integrated development approach. Environment related major activities of the NGOs include: Social Forestry, Regenerative Agriculture, Safe Water and Sanitation, Promotion of Bio-gas and Improved Oven, Environmental Education and Action Research on Environment Degradation and Conservation.

Different techniques and tools such as formal and nonformal training, seminar and workshop, public rally, popular theatre and folk song, video film, poster, flip chart, leaf-let are used for motivation and awareness of the community. In addition to that people are made aware and trained to mobilize local resources in harmony with their abilities for giving all these efforts a sustainable shape. In this process NGO workers, as a catalyst, help people identify their problems and solution thereof by ensuring people's participation in every phase of the programme such as: planning, resource mobilization, imple-

evaluation. At present environmental degradation and development are the growing concern of the world community. In the light of that many polices and initiatives are being formulated in the country both by the GO and NGOs. And this is the high time to ponder to what extent these polices and initiatives stand in favor of grassroots people. Bangladesh is not that much rich in natural resources. Only a small section of the population consumes maximum of those natural resources. This happens due to unjust social structure and lack of accountability. This unjust situation deceives the greater part of the population to the efforts of conservation and development of environment. For effective, dynamic and sustainable development all these issues are to be given serious consideration. Association of Development

Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB), an apex body of local, national and international NGOs in Bangladesh, took an initiative in 1989 to syndicate the NGOs having environmental programmes and activities on a common platform named "Coalition of Environmental NGOs" to achieve following objectives:

- To find out the root causes of environmental degradation and constraints in relation to programme imple-

mentation. - To develop cooperation among GO, NGO and concerned donor agencies.

 To exchange views and experiences for avoiding misunderstanding and confusion for the upliftment of the acmentation, monitoring and

 To mobilize existing local resources, opportunity, experiences so that appropriate measures can be taken up for solution of environment related problems. Since its formation the

Coalition has been extending all its efforts towards environmental development. Major accomplishments of the Coalition so far include: extension of assistance to the Government in formulating Forestry Master Plan, Thana Afforestation Project and National Environment Manage ment Action Plan (NEMAP) which ensure GO-NGO colla-

boration in planning and implementation of the concerned projects; initiation of dialogues among Government, NGOs, Donors and people from all walks of life; presentation of a position paper to United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development (UNCED) held in Rio focusing NGO's perspective on policy and ac-

Despite different odds, obstacles and constraints NGOs have been venturing their efforts directly and indirectly for environmental conservation and development. At present as many as 155 NGOs put significant efforts in environment related activities. The accompanying table displays information of Social Forestry activities of major NGOs of the year

Considering the urgency and gravity of the issue - environment and development there is crying need for active and sincere cooperation and collaboration between GOs and NGOs to meet people's needs, aspiration and also for accelerating meaningful participation at all levels. In this regard NGOs should allocate significant percentage of their annual budget for the promotion of environmental development activities. The 5th June World Environment Day reminds us of our responsibilities for survival of the present generation and existence of the posterity.

SI	Name of Organization	Homestead plantation No. saplings planted	Strips plantation		Woodlot Forestry		Forest protection	Total saplings planted	Saplings produced in own nursery
			Km	No. saplings planted	Acre	No. saptings planted	Acre		
01	Proshika (MUK)	6,37,216	695	5,74,784	2,369	31,93,710	24,54,70	4,405,710	26,00,000
02	BRAC	13,00,000	1572	29,50,000			S 12	42,50,000	1,47,00,000
03	CARITAS	23,7,591	197	1,62,951		الظال	i ii	400 542	10,00,000
04	Comilla Proshika	3,51,552	80	14,7780	52	52,000	0	551,332	1,58,599
05	RDRS	2,00,000	293	2,42000				442,000	13.00,000
06	Gono Unnayan Kendra	71,000	91	45000		n 28		116,000	
07	Poush	10,000		2003/18/19				10,000	e 76101
80	CDA	29,648	8	6,507		1	1	36,155	
09	RIC	20,000		4000000401				20,000	
10	CONCERN	15,000			H Y			15,000	a a
11	World Vision	50,00,000						50,00,000	
12	Swanirvor	29,20,866		540	i i			29,20,866	
13	SNSP	23,753	114	94,241	District Control			1,17,994	
15	UST	25,888						25,888	
16	Shaw Unnayan	10,276	17	13,872				24,148	
17	CMES	17,701	62	51,126				68,827	
18	SETU	42,849	13	10,710	N D			53,559	
19	Society for Social Service	15,000		100000000			i ×	15,000	
20	BUK (Barisal)	5,000	37	30,000	9			35,000	
21	Seba Manobik Unnayan Kendra	21,052				1		21,052	
22	DNP	2,300	8					2,300	
23	DCI	8,156	N B					8,156	
24	SCI	5,601	64	64,500				70,101	75,000
1	Total	10970449	3,243		2,421	3,245,710	24,5470	18609630	19,833,599

Germany does them."

Tragedy of Revenge Continues in Bosnia-Herzegovina

continued massacres in Bosnia-Herzegovina with a did not receive approval of the mute stance unparalleled in so-called Bosnian Serb parliarecent history. By all counts ment although their self-styled Bosnian Serbs are aggressors leader Radovan Karadzic against an internationally signed the international peace recognised country: Bosniaplan in Athens on the second Herzegovina. A savage civil war

of May, 1993. It may be recalled that Bosnia-Herzegovina was recognised immediately by EC and the United States in April last year as it seceded from the former Yugoslavia through countrywide referendum and became a new country like Croatia in the world map. But Bosnian Serbs, who constitute 30% of the total population, under obvious instruction and guidance of die-hard nationalist Milosevic of Serbia-Montenegro, led a revolt against emerging state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The moderate Muslim-led government of Alija Izetbegovic could not comprehend the situation because of his miscalculation of strategy. Similarly the west failed to 'shore up Sarajevo against Serb threats even be-

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain fore the Republic was first recognised last April', as stated in an article in the Newsweek of 10 May, 1993.

It may be recalled here that with the departure of Josip Broz Tito, who was a unifying force, Yugoslavia bifurcated into five new states: Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovonia and Maccdonia.

It is really a mystery that Vance-Owen continue discussion for political solution despite the fact that Bosnian Serbs continued to flout Security Council Resolutions one after another and declared openly their commitment in favour of a greater Serbia. The long-drawn process of negotiations with Bosnian Serbs is nothing but to allow them time to grab as much territory as possible by the process of ethnic cleansing of majority Muslims in Bosnia. Apart from

these, United Nations rescue operation convoys are accused of abetting the Serb objective of ethnic cleansing by evacuation from front line Bosnian Muslim town of Srebrenica. There is no doubt that Radovan Karadzic along with Milosevic is bent upon creating a Greater Serbia. International law, governing sovereign borders, treatment of prisoners of war and safe passage of civilians from besieged Muslim dominated areas by UN convoys has in fact been flouted by Serb troops time and again, without any punishment being meted out to Serbs.

There is no double standard for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The standard is uniform as declared by Chief prosecutor Justice Jackson of the United States Supreme Court at the Nuremberg War Crimes trial: "If certain acts and violations of treaties are

Serbia-Montenegro have been condemned by responsible international public opinion throughout the last one year of war as amounting to crimes against humanity. Fundamental human rights, as accepted in international law and laid down in international instruments and proponent of human rights by the United States of America, continue to apply fully in situations of armed conflicts and have further been reaffirmed as the

well-recognised principle of immunity of the civilian popu lation from the military attack Here in Bosnia-Herzegovina law of jungle prevails despite the presence of UN peacekeeping forces. What a shame indeed for the world body which failed to take action against secessionist Bosnian Serbs! It is really irony of fate that while Muslims are massa cred the world body is making a farce by continuing their

'discussion' with jugglery of

words.

Bosnian Serb troops depend heavily on the supply line from neighbouring Serbia. Serbian army also joined them in fighting against Bosnian Muslims. Arms, ammunitions, tanks, fuel and auxiliary equipment are regularly supplied from Serbia under the noses of UN peacekeeping troops. On the other hand, Muslim troops are illequipped with small arms and tanks whereas UN embargo on arms shipment to Bosnian Muslims continues. Is it not double standard being persued

by the world body? Meanwhile, President Bill Clinton had made an observation that he does not plan to back out from the proposal of arming Bosnian Muslims and

bombing raids to halt the Serbs. Time is running out. It is not word but deed which could save Muslims against crimes, they are crimes Serb aggressors. Economic whether the United States sanction alone against Serbia does them or whether would not solve the problem. For the sake of humanity, ac-Much of the happenings in tion against Serbs must be Bosnia-Herzegovina is now a taken before the entire Muslim matter of common knowledge. race in Bosnia is annihilated. These acts of barbarism by If Israel could have a state Bosnian Serbs in collusion with

by the courtesy of the British in the territory occupied for centuries by the Muslims, Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina have their inalienable rights to stay, as a matter of fact, as an independent state. If necessary, to avoid further bloodbath and conflict among the ethnic Muslims, Serbs and Croats in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the world body and OIC jointly should evolve a compromise method to unarm and evacuate Serbs and Croats from Bosnia-Herzegovina to stay in Serbia-Montenegro and Croatia peacefully while Bosnian Muslims have to concede a chunk of the territories to both Serbs and Croats. Vance-Owen plan, which has been rejected by Bosnian Serbs through a referendum, is a silly one, devoid of reality, in view of the centuries old animosity among ethnic groups. Nor it ensures safe havens for Bosnian Muslims. Meanwhile, negotiations should also be concentrated on the return of a large number of Croats living in Serbia and Serbs in Croatia to resettle them in Croatia and Serbia. Meanwhile, Muslims in the Kosovo province of Serbia are having nightmares because the Serbian secret police continues to operate equanimity.

If Kosovo became another republic, Serbs insist, this would be the prelude to secession which will not be acceptable to them as they consider Kosovo to be the cradle of Serbian civilization. Therefore, the solution lies with the unification of Kosovo where great majority are Albanian Muslims with the Republic of Albania. This could possibly be done by holding plebiscite under the auspices of the United Nations.

Annonymous letters

Sir, Annonymous letters or telephonic calls have saved the lives of thousands of people all over the world. They have also saved millions of state and public property from total ruination.

An annonymous letter writer or a telephone caller is in no way a "coward". It is obvious that the person who seeks to remain nameless does so to safeguard himself/herself and the family members as well as friends. Truly it is an act of patriotism and love for one's own society.

Regarding the recent move to curb dishonesty, stealing of government money, mismanagement; safeguarding one's due promotion or baring one's undue benefits, etc anonymous letters are received by the authorities concerned (conce-

rning various departments of different ministries). There is no doubt that only 'a letter' will not put an end to everything. The normal proceedings will take and have been taking place to find out the "truth" before any action is taken by the persons in charge. Yet there are people who pretend that they are unaware of all these facts. And someone even does not hesitate to call the annonymous letter writers cowards One should dare to involve

himself in the task of nation building and write annonymous letters to the concerned authorities about irregularities that prevail at almost all levels if he has any knowledge of these misconducts. He can rest his mind in peace as proper investigations shall not fail to follow. Besides, every person shall also be given the

option to 'defend' oneself where his experience may come to a lot of use and help in getting genuine justice. Nathasha Kamal

Bhojohari Shaha Street, Dhaka

Hapless farmers

Sir, As an agrarian country, the whole economic structure of Bangladesh is based upon agriculture. Agriculture is called the life-blood of her economy. But the policy makers of our country seem to be indifferent as to the growth of this vital sector. They tend to comparatively give least importance to the development of agriculture and lay more emphasis on the industrial sector. Hence they are found to make various provisions in the national planning as to the credit and other facilities especially

for the industrialists. Seldom do they make provisions of such nature for the farmers who are mostly the toil-worn people of this country.

This discrimination is due perhaps to the fact that the people engaged in the promotion of industries happen to be more or less urban, educated, well-organised and can always exert some sort of influence on the policy makers as well as the establishment. The farmers of this country, on the other hand, are in general poor, illiterate, unorganised and have hardly any say in the planning of our economy and the political affairs of the state But then they have to looked after, on priority, in the interest of the country itself.

Nitin Roy, Fakirerpool, Dhaka