

We Must Involve People in Afforestation Programme

BIDS must Not Fall apart

The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), most prestigious social science research organisation in the country, seems to be heading for further chaos and crisis. A report published in this newspaper yesterday is very categorical about the inflexible stands the government side, represented by Planning Minister Zahiruddin Khan and the researchers of the institute, have taken. The problem dates as far back as February 1992 when an acting director general was rather arbitrarily appointed by the planning minister to hold office beyond a stipulated period. Thus the conflicting interests came to a head-on clash in January this year when the internal pressure was mounting for a full-time DG. The process dragged on only to explode on May 22 with the appointment of Dr S A Latifur Reza to the post.

On the face of it, Dr Reza's appointment is not illegal but no doubt contrived. The way he has been pushed into has angered the BIDS's most vital assets, the researchers. The action also defies agreed formula, if not the constitution of the institute. Clearly, the manipulation resorted to in overlooking the natural and consensus candidate has done little credit to the final appointing authority or to the minister who heads it. National academic and research institutes should better be left alone by the government, the political appointments of which are bound to create needless controversies and bring the entire set-ups to a standstill.

In recent times, political considerations have overtaken the more essential prerequisites — the quality and credibility — for appointment to positions respectable on their own merits. When the government goes for such a move, it does knowing full well what repercussion it will cause. The resentment of almost the entire BIDS research fellows can be ignored only at the risk of serious fall in the quality of research, for which BIDS is so well known. In the process, the institute becomes the immediate loser but in the final analysis it is the nation that has to pay most dearly.

We do not know what tempts the government to impose decision in the matter of appointment to such venerable positions. What we however know is that the snow-balling effects of such controversies will take the high-profile organisations to nowhere. Robbed of their impartial and unhindered academic atmosphere, such centres of excellence will only stoop too low to claim their high performance. Even without questioning the competence of the new BIDS DG, one finds the prospect of the head of the institute and his colleagues working together very discouraging.

Social scientists or people involved in research works are not always expected to be free from personality clash but if the government also considers the matter to be an issue of personal ego — instead of settling such disputes, if there is any — there is little hope of salvaging the situation. Both Shilpakala Academy and Bangla Academy stand witness to the government bungling and the addition of the BIDS fiasco will only stretch the damaging streak of the authority to a new limit. It will not take long to feel the disincentive both on the home front and beyond. An institute like the BIDS attracts talented young researchers only because of the non-partisan character and congenial atmosphere of the organisation. Its lofty image abroad will get dented after so much undesirable developments. The authority seems bent on destroying the institutes which have, through years of unflinching devotion from a few scientists, risen to eminence.

It will indeed be foolhardy on the part of the government to stick to its unreasonable stand. Better it should come to a negotiated settlement with the striking researchers who know their job better than others. If today's board meeting can arrive at the right solution, the BIDS can still be saved from falling apart. We hope everyone will co-operate to achieve a positive result.

A Tribute to Salisbury

One pays a tribute to Harrison Salisbury who passed away on Monday at the age of 84 with the sad feeling that with the death of one more doyen in the newspaper field, a chapter in the English-language journalism is virtually coming to an end. In many ways, it has been a glorious and a challenging era, marked by reporting of the rise of Nazi Germany, the Second World War, the Stalinist terror in the Soviet Union and changes in the domestic scene of the United States, including the assassination of John F. Kennedy. With journalists like John Gunther, James Reston and Walter Lippman, Salisbury remained an outstanding figure on the scene. A winner of a Pulitzer Prize as early as in 1955 for a series of reports on the domestic scene and author of some 20 books, including the best-seller, "The 900 Days: The Siege of Leningrad", this former staffer of The New York Times demonstrated again and again what good, balanced and in-depth reporting was all about, whether it related to an armed conflict in a foreign country or to a domestic problem.

The success in reporting failed to divert the attention of Salisbury from several innovative fields. As the assistant managing editor of the New York Times, he designed and eventually launched what was initially called "opposite-editorial page" and which is now better known as "op-ed" page. No newspaper can do without it, on the two sides of the Atlantic or even in Asia.

If the growing popularity of "op-ed" pages in newspapers in different parts of the world brought satisfaction to Salisbury during the years of retirement, the state of reporting may have left him somewhat puzzled, if not sad. If the kind of investigative journalism that brought about the fall of Richard Nixon got the endorsement of Salisbury, the circulation-grabbing, mud-slinging, chequebook journalism which has become part of the newspaper field in the west surely left him both sad and angry. His reaction to what has been going on, not just in Britain but also in other parts of Europe and even in some cities in the United States, might not have been that of an old-timer, of a conservative who was in touch with the new realities. We believe, it was one based on enduring values of good journalism, values which may well have another resurgence even after the memory of Harrison Salisbury starts fading away.

CORRIGENDUM

We regret that due to a mechanical error in yesterday's editorials, two paragraphs which originally belonged to the leader on Mixed Results from Tokyo, were included in the first editorial on water-logging in Chittagong. We sincerely apologise the mishap. — Editor

THE United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or the Earth Summit, as it has come to be known, held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in June last year, has spawned quite a number of fora and action groups at international, regional and national levels. The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the Earth Council, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored CAPACITY 21, the Southern Networks for Environment and Development (SONED) — are but a few on the list. And, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is very much there.

All such organisations and activists have kept environmental issues very much alive during the past year or so. As is usual with such global movements, controversies also have arisen. Questions pertaining to the roles of North and South in world affairs have cropped up afresh. As a matter of fact, SONED had been set up during the UNCED process itself to act as a catalyst for views of the South. There are many in the South who argue that global environmental action programmes are in fact designed to hold back rapid industrialisation of the developing countries and to deter use of their natural resources by them. However, there are many others who consider these talks as mere political rhetoric.

In this continent, the Environment Congress for Asia and the Pacific (ECO Asia 93) met in Japan for two days from June 30. The ECO Asia 93 provided a forum for the region as a whole to discuss and debate follow-up action on the Earth Summit. Bangladesh also participated in the Congress. Earlier in the same month, the World Environment Day was observed in this country too as elsewhere in the world.

All these goings-on provide an occasion to take a look at our situation — specifically, the management of forest resources. First, a quick look at the current scenario. Forest sector contributes 2.5 per cent to the country's GDP and around 1.3 million people draw benefit from forest related activities. The global land utilization statistics show that the area coverage of forest and woodlands, as a proportion of total land area, stands at 31 per cent. In our case, it is just 10 per cent.

In a now familiar pattern the world's remaining superpower has once again hit a Third World country. Once again a largely pliant media in the Western world has repeated, parrot-like, lies, half-truths and quarter-truths from the United States establishment about why the attack was conducted. Experts have been found to justify and defend what is indefensible.

The ostensible reason for raining 23 cruise missiles on Baghdad was Iraq's alleged role in a plot to assassinate former US president George Bush when he visited Kuwait in April.

President Bill Clinton did not wait for the trial to be concluded in Kuwait, but decided to act unilaterally without even a semblance of UN authority. This action, following a history of unlawful military interventions in the Third World, gives the US the title of rogue state that the Western media often use to describe such countries as Iran, Libya, and North Korea.

Following on from the bombing of General Farrah Aided, one of the 14 "warlords" in Somalia, this raid appears as an image-booster exercise for an inexperienced and beleaguered president.

Since the action in Somalia there has been talk of a "Clinton Doctrine", under which the US is to act as enforcer of world peace, with its ability to deliver instant air power and rapid reaction forces all around the globe.

A nervous-looking Clinton told the world on TV: "While the Cold War has ended, the world is not free of danger, and I am determined to take the steps necessary to keep our nation secure."

Keeping a nation secure, which (despite its numerous military operations the world over) has not been attacked since 1941, requires strong defences. And any talk of weakening the armed forces is anathema to a military-industrial complex which remains America's largest export industry.

It may be no coincidence that only days before the raid, the US Defence Secretary Les Aspin told the press that he opposed defence cuts. Clinton is under pressure to renege on his campaign promises to cut the defence budget and divert the money into reviving a flagging economy. The administration wanted to cut next year's defence budget by \$10 billion and a total of \$124 billion from defence spending over the next five years.

The Pentagon, the weapons industry and the Congressmen in whose home states arms are manufactured, are lobbying to prevent this.

Even unilateral restrictions on extraction of forest products often cause dissatisfaction, especially among the people who live in an around forest lands. Press reports emanating from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet regions often speak of the unhappiness of the local people over such restrictions. If allowed to continue, the situation might even degenerate into frictions in the society.

Rural communities are often largely dependent upon forest resources for daily needs like food, fuel, fodder, medicinal plants and shelter. Denying them an equitable access to the use of forest resources is almost like denying them means of livelihood. Besides, local communities are usually in a better position to take up the responsibility of maintenance of forest land. It is largely a question of making them aware of the need to sustain the environment and sharing with them, products of the forests around them, in a fair and equitable way.

Sustainable management of forest resources will elude us unless active participation of people in the process is secured. Simultaneously, they should also be made aware of the scope for forest resource conservation, for instance in the area of energy consumption, by introducing and popularising use of various new means of

could yield handsome results. Presumably, FMP covers other issues related to agro-forestry and non-wood forestry. Questions concerning lease use of appropriate technology and research to raise productivity of forest land, supply of input, also need to be tackled. Appropriate legislation and law enforcement would be another area calling for immediate attention. The Forest Act of 1927 needs to be revised and updated. New institutional arrangements envisaged in the FMP would probably entail creation of an autonomous National Forestry Board, replacing the present Bangladesh Forest Industries Development Corporation. Seen as a fully autonomous organisation, the board will have enterprises under its jurisdiction which would be run on commercial basis. The enterprises themselves will be autonomous while the board will develop procedures and guidelines for production and marketing. The board would also handle such matters as planning and programming, finance, monitoring and evaluation, foreign trade, research, technology development, conservation. The Board might also manage state owned forests and forest lands.

Forestry reorganisation programme a welcome move in itself, must not ignore the human factor in the equation. Tightening of the law or, for that matter, its strict enforcement, will not stop depletion of forest resources. The right of the people to share forest resources has to be explicitly recognised and acted upon. A ban on extraction of forest products to protect environment may not work at all. The reported seizure of 2.75 lakh cft of fuel wood, 1.10 lakh cft of timber, large quantities of other forest products, such as bamboo and creepers, by the forest check posts over the last three years or so, bears testimony to this. And, these seizures probably show only a fraction of what actually comes out of the forests through unauthorised channels. It almost seems as if denudation of forests proceeds hand in hand with afforestation!

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cooking as represented by solar box cookers, bio gas and charcoal sticks.

THIS year's country-wide monsoon tree plantation drive got off on July 3. This is a good programme. Introduced last year, the campaign aims at securing peoples participation — making afforestation a social movement. This year, forest department is said to have raised more than a hundred million saplings at its nurseries. More saplings would be available from nurseries set up with NGO and private initiative. Imagine what a difference it will bring to our environment if all these saplings are planted, nurtured and permitted to reach the fullness of life.

ALONG MY WAY

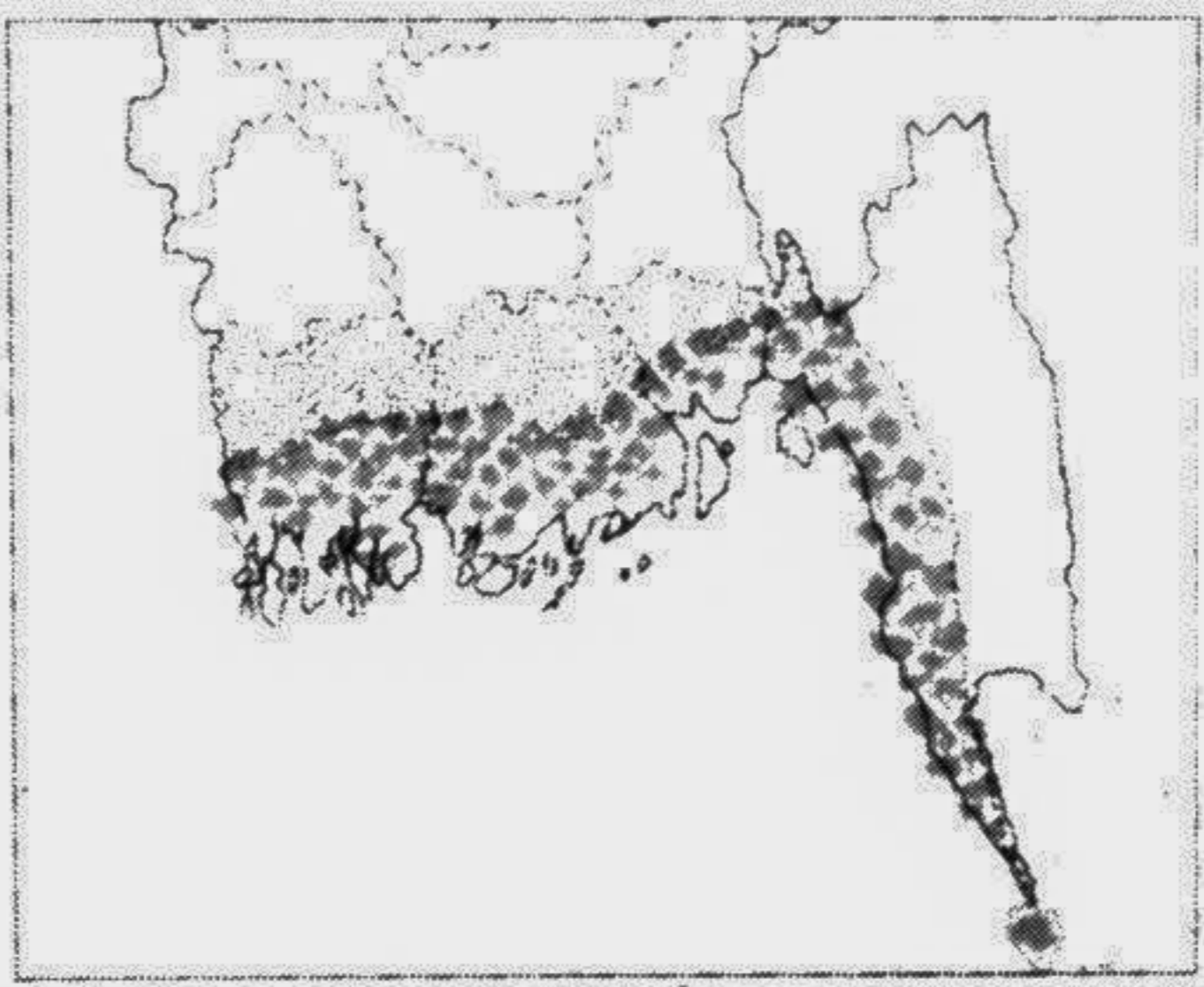
S B Chaudhuri

Bangladesh Coastal Area Green Belt Movement by CARDMA

by Hasna J Moudud

COASTAL area of Bangladesh was once covered by forest. The forest now restricted to the Sundarbans, world's largest compact mangrove forest. In response to all out concern expressed at the Earth Summit on the disappearing forest and its rich living resources and Coastal Area Resource Development and Management Association (CARDMA) proposal at a national workshop held in 1988, CARDMA is launching the following action plan calling for a Green Belt covering the entire coastal area:

- 1. Save the Sundarbans and save the Royal Bengal Tiger from threat of extinction.
2. A Green Belt of cover the entire coastal area connecting its eastern deforested area and the vast open space in the central coastal line with the Sundarbans in the west.
In 1993 CARDMA has pulled together its resources and local support in meeting the challenge. We are formally inaugurating the Green Belt project during the tree plantation season, June-July, 1993, from



Noakhali. We are inviting you to join our voluntary efforts by donating a plant or enough plants to cover a forest area to be earmarked by sign board acknowledging the friend of the coastal Green Belt.

The trees to be planted are of local variety, some well known for its medicinal qualities and used for making lasting dyer. Traditional plants which once thrived in the area need less carving. Women and young people of the coastal char areas have offered their voluntary services towards free maintenance.

CARDMA is a non-political, not-profit, specialized NGO registered in 1987. CARDMA has contributed in the environmental policies and decision making since its formation and is open to those who are interested in an integrated and sustainable development and conservation of bio-diversity in the coastal area. Coastal area of Bangladesh constitute a vital part of Bangladesh's frontline struggle against environmental degradation, please be a friend of the Green Belt Movement by participating. We welcome your valuable suggestions.

The writer is Vice President, Global 500 Forum and President, Coastal Area Resource Development and Management Association (CARDMA).

Why Bashing Saddam is Boosting Bill

by Daya Kishan Thussu

The missile attack on Baghdad, say critics, has once again shown the disregard that the United States has for international law. The act had no support from the United Nations and was a unilateral response to an alleged Iraqi plot to kill former president George Bush. Gemini News Service's Associate Editor argues that hitting Baghdad is part of a bigger agenda to send a message to the developing world that it is Uncle Sam who holds the big stick.

secure." Keeping a nation secure, which (despite its numerous military operations the world over) has not been attacked since 1941, requires strong defences. And any talk of weakening the armed forces is anathema to a military-industrial complex which remains America's largest export industry.

It may be no coincidence that only days before the raid, the US Defence Secretary Les Aspin told the press that he opposed defence cuts.

Clinton is under pressure to renege on his campaign promises to cut the defence budget and divert the money into reviving a flagging economy. The administration wanted to cut next year's defence budget by \$10 billion and a total of \$124 billion from defence spending over the next five years.

The Pentagon, the weapons industry and the Congressmen in whose home states arms are manufactured, are lobbying to prevent this.

The President also has an image problem in his relations with the military. He has been called a "Draft Dodger," a reference to his not fighting in Vietnam. His stance on gay soldiers has been unpopular with the top brass. Clinton has also appeared weak and vacillating over the situation in Bosnia. Now was the time for him to appear to be firm.

The timing of the raid on Baghdad was significant. This is precisely the time when Croats and Serbs are discussing the partition of Bosnia whereby the Muslims, who constitute 45 per cent of the population, are being forced to accept only 10 per cent of the land.

But sending in forces to Bosnia is dangerous. Somalia was an easy target. And so is Iraq. By raiding Baghdad, the media attention has shifted once again towards an Arab leader who is a "threat to world peace."

It is useful for the US to sustain a hate figure like Saddam Hussein. He fits the bill — an Arab and a ruthless leader with an appalling human rights record. The image conforms with the popular Western perception of Arabs, highlighted and sustained by a US-dominated international media, cashing in on centuries of prejudice against the Islamic world.

Others live as refugees in often hostile countries. During the Gulf crisis Palestinians in Kuwait lost assets estimated at \$8 billion. The average income of Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories is estimated to have halved as a result of the Gulf War.

Images of Arabs as terrorists are projected by the Western media without addressing the underlying causes of resentment among the world's 230 million Arabs.

This strengthens the Islamic radicals. Paradoxically, satellite TV is fuelling the anti-Western feeling. The relay of instant information, through the likes of CNN and World Service Televisions, gives the Arabs a Western version of the events.

Global diplomacy should not be reduced to impulses and whims of powerful leaders acting outside the rule of international law. George Bush bombed Baghdad just days before he relinquished office, to "settle old scores".

Clinton needed to improve his image, sort out the economic mess and divert attention from inaction in Bosnia, so missiles are launched on Iraqis. These are the signs of a totalitarian political culture in a country which prides itself on being the world's freest democracy.

One disturbing dimension of this type of international relations is that it proves that might is right, made even more serious with the tyranny of technology. Today from hundreds of miles away in the Gulf or from the Red Sea, with a touch of a button, US warships can destroy lives of innocent Iraqis. This, truly, is international terrorism.

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Military money



Military share of GDP is planned to go down from its late 1980s peak of 6 per cent to around 3 per cent by late 1990s. Source: SIPRI

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.

The Eternal Quraan

Sir, While walking along the bookshops of Dhaka New Market recently, the look 'The Clarion Call of the Eternal Quraan' by one Md Khalilur Rahman caught my attention. Just the introductory notes convinced me this is a presentation with a difference.

All along we have been content to know a) 'Imaan' means 'belief in Allah'; but no, it means 'motive force for heroic

performance in allegiance to sovereign Allah, to attain world unity, world peace and plenty for all. b) 'Amal Saalih' means 'good work'; but no, it means 'heroic performance in allegiance to sovereign Allah, to attain Islam, to attain world allegiance. c) 'Zakaat' means 'poor tax' or 'charity'. But no, it is the 'prescribed welfare tax payable to the state treasury to finance and promote welfare services in order to bring about and maintain the social equilibrium. Zakaat is to be administered to eradicate poverty, misery, igno-

rance and unskilled labour and not to multiply the number of beggars. Alas our mode of paying Zakaat in fact multiplies their number. Just think of the rush for Zakaat items during the month of Ramadan while the country depends on aid. d) 'Siyam' means 'fasting'. But no, it really means practice of self-abnegation, self-purification and self-purification through allegiance and rigid fasting during daylight hours and thereby receive inspiration for more and more welfare services to promote unity, peace and plenty.'

The Eternal Quraan is conventionally treated as a religious scripture; but in fact it is the eternal constitutional law-book of the world order, framed by Allah Himself. And so on.

Dr Farzana Ishaq Cox's Bazar

Roads need repair

Sir, A year ago, the Telephone department dig some parts of Joyng Road, Khaja Dewan 1st Lane and Urdu Road, for fixing new cables. But later, when the work was over, they just filled the holes with sand and bricks, the roads are still as they were left — simply battered.

These roads are very narrow, and some local people have opened a mini vegetable market beside the battered parts. It is very hard for a rickshaw to ply through, and its impossible for two rickshaws to cross each other. Even the pedestrians cannot walk through.

Who is going to mend these roads? Is there no-body? Then to whom and for what we pay the taxes?

A dweller of the area.