

# Reining in the Rape of Nature

by Mohammad Amjad Hossain

As a result of widespread degradation of environment and its adverse effects on our planet, this branch of science has assumed importance in recent years. Rio Conference, as it has come to be known the Earth Summit, in June last year on environment and development has evoked worldwide response for the protection of environment.

Against this backdrop, Bangladesh civil service (Administration) Academy has organised a seminar recently on Environmental Degradation in Global Perspective. The Minister for Environment and Forests inaugurated it. The inaugural session was presided over by the Director General of the Academy Dr Fazlul Hassan Yusuf. While tracing the genesis of the environmental movement Dr Yusuf in his speech said increasing awareness and technological advances now marked the beginning of a second phase in the movement as it seeks global solutions rather than merely identifying habitats at risk. He said that in trying to meet the challenge of the needs of a continually expanding population without destroying the environment and resource base, we must seek to forge a society which could ensure, fresh air, clean water, pure food and yet meet the demands of development.

It is interesting to note that the seminar began with following commentary: Our planet is not safe; the air we breathe is polluted; water we drink is contaminated and food we consume is adulterated. Over population, desertification, deforestation and endangered species pose environmental problems.

The population is indeed increasing. According to World Bank Report of 1992, it is increasing at 1.7 per cent a year and ninety per cent of this growth will take place in the developing countries by the year 2030. As per statistics released by Human Development Report 1993 of UNDP, 40 per cent of the population in developing

countries has no access to sanitation and 1.3 billion people are at the level of absolute poverty. Although the percentage of rural families with access to safe-water has reportedly increased from less than 10 per cent to almost 60 per cent during the past two decades but still, more than 850 million people live in areas that are undergoing various stages of desertification. According to another statistics of UNDP report of 1993, people in industrialised countries consume ten times more commercial energy than people in developing countries and they ac-

count for 71 per cent of the World's Carbon Monoxide and 68 per cent of the World's industrial waste.

On one hand, environment is polluted by the industrial waste and carbon monoxide of the North, poverty of the South, on the other, poses a threat to environment which will begin to travel without a passport in many unpleasant forms as stated by Human Development Report of 1993. Therefore, there is a need to make concerted efforts against poverty. In the interest of the security of rich nations these countries should invest in the development of the developing nations.

Dr M Aminul Islam, Professor of Geography, Dhaka University in his key-note paper talked about global environmental change, population growth, land degradation, desertification, effect of urbanization and loss of wetlands and opined that the current problems of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and pollution are mainly the product of the industrialised world and the extent of pollution is

still on the increase in these countries, but it is likely to spread even to some other industrialising countries like China, India and Brazil. Professor Aminul Islam held the view that it should be possible to achieve stable population if we could achieve continuing economic growth, raise living standards and thereby break the chains of poverty, hunger and environmental degradation and only growth could eliminate this ominous cycle of poverty and manage resources at a sustainable level.

While commenting on the key-note paper, Professor Dr Ainun Nishat of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said that developing countries could not be held responsible for the environmental hazards created by the industrialised West. He told at the gathering that all environmental threats, as propagated by the West, do not pose threat to the developing countries. He also reminded the audience about distortion of the facts to divert attention of the people from the crime committed by the West. Dr Ainun Nishat was of the view that if Bangladesh goes for industrialisation for 200 years, her contribution to global environmental degradation would be less than 3 per cent. Therefore, the West should provide fund for environmental protection.

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to his personal experience at the Rio Conference, he told the audience that all the NGO's representing developing countries had made utmost effort to resist United States President George Bush so that he could not get his plan approved. At this point he emphatically said that genepool in one square mile of the Sundarban area has greater bio-diversity than that of whole North America. So, when the United States refused to sign the bio-diversity clause at Rio Conference, Dr Atiq and NGO's from other developing countries exerted pressures on the developed countries and had made a moral cause in this regard.

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# From Blooming Desert to Treeless Waste

Barbara Nimri Aziz writes from Gaza

As Palestinian and Israeli officials discuss plans to develop the occupied territories, one area totally ignored is the environment. The Palestine Human Rights Information Centre says the Israeli authorities have axed more than 161,000 trees in the West Bank and Gaza in the last six years.

Destruction of these trees, mostly fruit-bearing, is a feature of callous Israeli policy in the area, continuing even after the Israeli-Palestinian accord was signed in September in Washington.

The felled trees represent a lot of lost wood and rotting foliage. Add to that the enormous devastation of 54,258 olive and citrus trees in 1989. That alone represented nearly \$21 million loss to the owners.

Last June, more than 8,000 fruit-bearing trees were burned or uprooted. The practice goes on entirely unopposed and often unnoticed by the media.

How long can conservationists continue to ignore the facts? The silence is especially worrying since the devastation is not an unforeseen by-product

of some urgent development plan or due to population pressures creating shortages of farmland or fuel, as in places like Nepal or in Indonesia.

Nor is it a matter of negligence or bad management, as in Brazil. Environmental destruction on Palestinian lands results from carefully designed political and military strategies, executed since 1967 when Israel occupied the Gaza and West Bank.

The policy of clearing healthy, productive orchards is also underway, quite unreported, in the once densely covered hills of

document the practice. Israeli military efforts to subjugate Palestinians is admittedly a kind of war and therefore this ecological wrecking might be seen as part of the inevitable destructive processes of war. Footage of the 1991 Gulf conflict vividly shows just how devastating war is to the environment.

People who may not have been concerned about the liberation of Kuwait became outraged by the environmental damage. Wars in the Horn of Africa and Sudan are partly responsible for the massive deforestation there. The Israeli case is not quite the same. The war against the Palestinian landscape is direct and intentional, attested in case after case of uprooting.

In 1989, in Tul Karim village, near Nablus, two bulldozers under military guard uprooted an entire orchard — 170 orange trees — a family's livelihood. The traumatised grandmother of the family asked the army officer overseeing the assault: "Why? He told her: 'Your children come and hide in these trees when we are chasing them. These boys should not hide here, so we have to clear the area. It's your fault old woman. These are your children, these dogs.'"

Later, in the Qarah area of Gaza, 2,875 trees were uprooted explicitly as part of Israel's confiscation of land to build a settlement road.

In almost every case of tree destruction investigated there was a punitive motive in the military action. Either it was directed against the community, or against the relative of an orchard owner. Militarily conducted deforestation is supplemented by Israeli government-sanctioned civil assaults. In 1989 armed Jewish settlers in one area alone ripped out and burned 5,422 trees. This policy is as serious as Israel's restrictions of water use in the area and its siphoning off of regional waters.

In the pace of uprooting goes on much longer, the entire Palestinian lands will be laid waste and desertification will be hastened. If, as it appears, this is a calculated policy, it can be seen as an insidious form of forced transfer of people.

— Gemini News

BARBARA NIMRI AZIZ is an American freelance writer and journalist.



Gloom in Gaza: Trees and plants bulldozed by the Israeli military.

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LOOKING like grounded astronauts lost in the African bush, we made our way through tall savannah grassland dressed in bulky white bee suits. The heavy cotton seemed to trap every degree of the early afternoon heat.

The world looked slightly out of focus through the wire mesh covering my sweaty face. A steady buzz grew louder as we neared 10 hives hanging in a small cluster of trees in the buffer zone of western Malawi's Kasungu National Park.

Ahead of me, bee expert Clifford Mwale set fire to a piece of dried dung and placed it in an accordion-like bee-smoker made of tin and leather. Slowly he puffed smoke at one of the hives to sedate the bees.

Two villagers removed the hive roof and Mwale inspected the top bars, heavy with honeycombs. As technical adviser to a WWF-sponsored bee-keeping project, Mwale regularly



Song of the beehive

demonstrates colony management to apiary clubs.

"I come from this area. I used to see people hunting animals and cutting down wood inside and outside the park," remembers Mwale, 33, who joined the Malawi Parks Department in 1983. "I realized that people would accept conservation only if they were shown how to satisfy their basic needs."

For years, Malawi's parks department, one of the most progressive in sub-Saharan Africa, has been setting aside tracts of land for environmental protection. Today, an impressive 21 per cent of the country is made up of national parks, forest, and game reserves.

But space is scarce — Malawi is one of Africa's most densely populated countries and almost one quarter of its 118,000 square kilometres is taken up by its famous lake. The country's 8.2 million people live on a thin strip of land,

## Sweet Success

by Sandra Mbanefo  
WWF is abuzz with the results of Malawi's enterprising bee-keeping project

about the size of French Guiana.

Up to the early 1980s, the government was still moving Malawians off ancestral territory to make way for conservation areas. Environmental protection and law enforcement were strict. But as relations between park authorities and villagers deteriorated, poaching within parks increased.

"We realized that Malawians

In 1986, the parks department helped start a bee-keeping club in Thazima, with funding from the German embassy. Fifteen villagers were allowed to hang their hives inside the park. Their traditional skills reaped a good harvest, increasing their meagre income from subsistence farming. The following year two more clubs were started in Chilinda and Kaperekezi. Funding from WWF

equipment, all made by local Malawian artisans.

Last year, clubs in the Nyika area produced almost four tonnes of honey, which the project bought and then sold to a national supermarket chain. This year, the harvest is already close to six tonnes, and has made over 36,000 kwacha (US\$10,285).

"The project only buys honey that is up to EC standards. In 1989, a kilo of honey cost around 9 kwacha (US\$2.50). This year, the price fell to 6 kwacha (US\$1.70), which is still double the world market price," explains Dr Karl Kaiser, the project's chief technical adviser.

"So far, only rich Malawians and expatriates can afford to buy our honey in shops. We want to make honey more affordable for the average salary-earning Malawian," he adds.

"The project specializes in two types of bee-keeping — one that relies on forest vegetation and another that focuses on



Making honey: This protea is a favourite nectar source for bees (top). Alex Banda shows off the results (bottom).

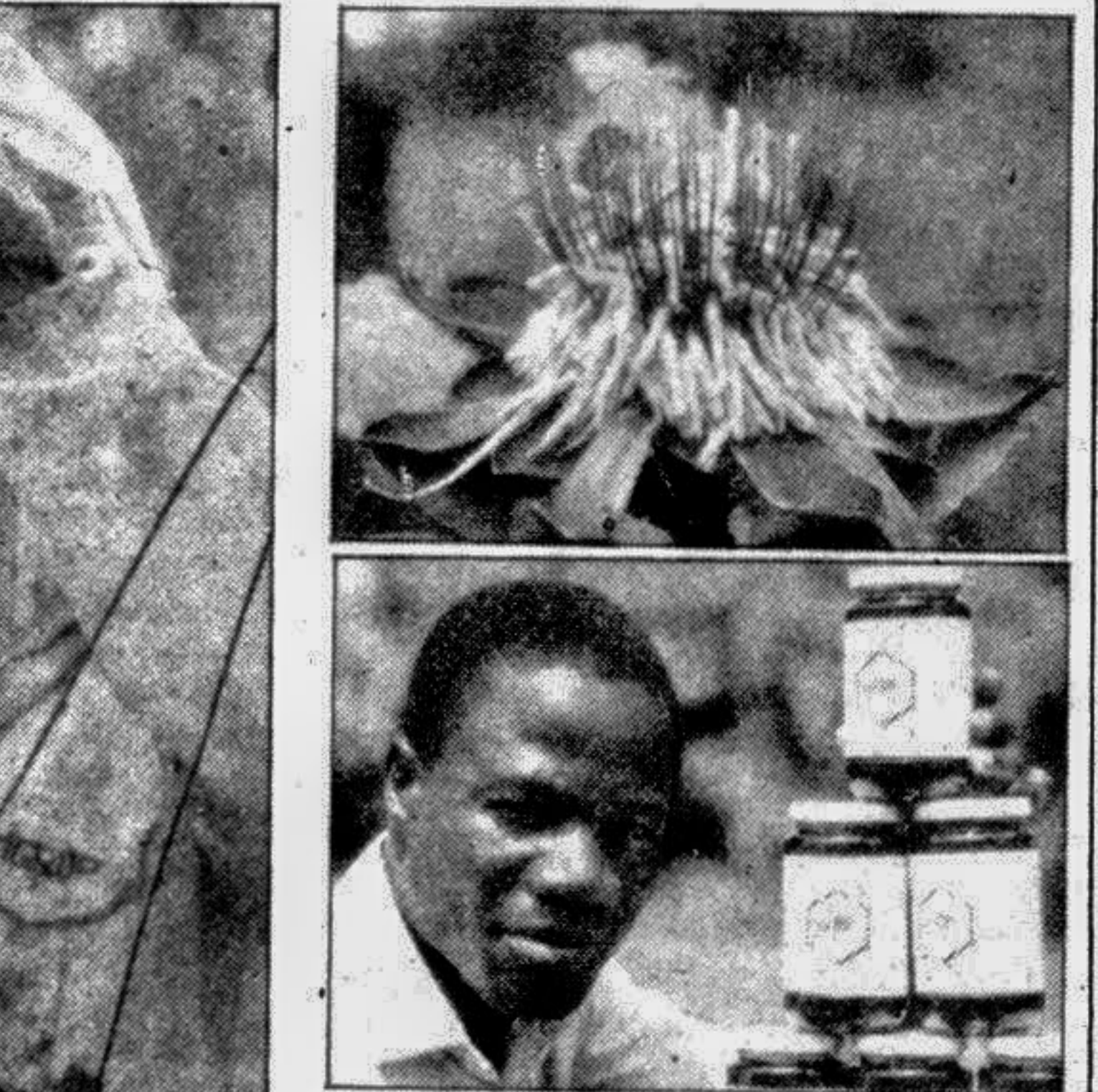
fruit species such as mangoes and oranges.

"The honey the clubs produce is of excellent quality and chemical-free," adds project manager Alex Banda. "People are going for natural food these days, so our honey will be popular in health food shops."

Besides building a domestic market, the project hopes to export honey. But local expertise needs to be refined first. So club members attend workshops on financial management and accounting, apiary, and colony management, and harvesting techniques.

Production of honey-related goods such as wax and propolis, a natural antibiotic, still needs to be developed, as well as a marketing system that can replace the project as middle-man. The embryonic Malawi Bee Keepers Association is an important step in making the project independent of external donor support.

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# Secure Tenancy Better than Ban on Logging

by A Special Correspondent from Rome

FOR an industry earning as much as US\$ 17 billion a year, forestry poses ticklish questions to those who want to halt the alarming destruction of tropical forests.

Forestry does earn than much in tropical developing countries. And in Indonesia, it employs as many as 800,000 workers, from loggers deep in the jungles to employees in processing plants downstream.

In this context, a total log ban may not always be the answer. Secure tenancy may well be.

The bottom line is: forests are as valuable as they are perceived to be. The important benefits of forest industries can only be sustained and expanded if the resource on which the industries are dependent is protected, effectively managed and even expanded," according to a United Nations review of the contribution of forest products to development in tropical countries.

"It is therefore essential that efforts are made to increase the value of the forest resource, says the review made by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's Committee on Forest Development in the Tropics. Without this the basis on which forest industries are established, that is the forests, will be threatened."

The argument is that, forest resources will be reduced if they are seen as having no immediate or obvious value.

"Evidence in the Philippines, for example has shown this to be the case, the FAO review says. "In that country, in areas where harvesting was totally banned by cancelling all concession agreements, the forests were almost completely destroyed within about five years."

This emphasises the negative effects of controls, which generally do nothing to maintain or enhance the value of the resources."

Reducing the activities of forest industries results in greater pressure on forests. Fewer jobs and lower incomes pressure local communities to use forests for fuelwood and other products.

In contrast, the granting of longer-term, more secure tenure on forest use is likely to encourage improved management and give industry the financial incentive to take a longer-term value of forests. Improved tenure and enhanced value also encourage more sensitive use of forests by local communities.

Joint ventures between local enterprises and overseas companies, if properly designed, can provide capital, technology and marketing expertise to tropical developing countries. Small-scale plants can also be less disruptive, especially where the products are destined for local markets — which is mostly the case in developing countries.

The fact is, forests are valuable — in 1989, developing countries used US\$ 59 billion of industrial wood products like sawnwood, panels, pulp and paper. Tropical countries (two-thirds of which were Asian) accounted for US\$ 36 billion of this.

North African and Middle Eastern countries, South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore depend on imports for most of their wood products. In general, developing countries are largely self-sufficient in wood products.

In 1989, developing countries imported forest products worth US\$ 15 billion. About half of that came from tropical

developing countries (in some countries, forest products contribute 10-15 per cent of foreign exchange earnings).

Exports earn developing countries about US\$ 17 billion a year—US\$ 13 billion from logs, sawnwood, panels, pulp and paper and about US\$ 4 billion from furniture and processed wood products. By value, the Far East dominates exports, accounting for about 71 per cent of developing country exports. Between 40 and 50 per cent of logs, sawnwood and plywood exports are to other developing countries which process this further and exported to developed countries.

Value-added forest products are increasing, with the export of logs increasingly being banned or restricted in some countries. Sawlog and veneer log exports from developing countries declined from 40 million cubic metres in 1980 to the current 28 million cubic metres. Over the same period, sawnwood exports increased by 20 per cent and panels by

150 per cent.

Forests also generate employment — in Indonesia some 400,000 people directly involved in the industry, including logging and fuelwood harvesting. In a country which is the largest tropical producer of wood and wood products and one of the largest exporters, forestry also employs another 400,000 in forest processing industries.

In the Philippines, direct employment by forest industries is about 212,000. In 1987, some 275,000 workers in India and 60,400 in Malaysia were employed in forest. In the pulp and paper plants of China, employment ranges from 2,000 to 5,000 employees per mill. Indian mills show typical employment levels of 1,200 to 1,500; Indonesian mills have about 700 employees. For similar sized mills, employment levels are generally higher in developing countries than in developed ones.

According to the FAO review, 1.5 jobs are created elsewhere in the economy for every job created in the sawmilling and plywood industries (2.1 jobs are created by pulp and paper). On this basis, the 400,000 workers directly employed in Indonesian forest industries may create another 600,000 to 800,000 jobs in other businesses.

As an example of the extent of forest industries, Indonesia has around 3,600 sawmills, some 108 wood-based panel plants and 38 pulp and paper mills. In general, small-scale millage sawmills processing logs from forests employ two to 12 people while larger mills have 170 to 350 employees.

In a way, forestry helps stem the rural-urban for employment and income. Forest harvesting is rural-based, many in remote areas. Processing like sawmills and pulp and paper plants tend to be located in or near the forest.

Because of the obvious value of forest industries, the FAO review says, a balance must be reached between the interests of industry and the environment. Forest industry development, for example, is better achieved with the participation of the private sector which takes a long-term view of its investment.

Financing is also important, especially for small-scale, rural-based industries.

Legislation must be modified so as not to discourage effective industry development.

— Depthnews Asia

**Wood Harvesting:**  
Employment estimates for selected countries

Country	Year	Forest workers employed in harvesting	Number
India	1985	Forest workers employed in harvesting	275 000
Indonesia	1985	Harvesting in tropical high forest	57 000
Malaysia	1985	Forest workers employed in harvesting	60 400

**Export of Tropical Wood Products**  
Selected Countries 1989

Country	Total exports - all products		Total forest product exports		Forest products as Proportion of total exports
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
	(\$ mil)	(\$ mil)	(\$ mil)	(Percentage)	
Philippines	7747	228.5	3		
Malaysia	25 080	3 037.3	12		
Indonesia	19 218 (1988)	3 676.7	19		
Papua New Guinea	1 281	109.8	9		
Solomon Islands	75	17.2	23		
Cote d'Ivoire		245.1	8		
Gabon		128.8	10		
Cameroun	924 (1988)	112.6	14		
Chana	1 014 (1988)	131.6	13		
Congo	751 (1988)	117.5	16		
Zaire	1 254	17	2		
Brazil	34 392	1 751.0	5		
Paraguay	607 (1988)	25.0	4		

Source: (1) UN Monthly Bulletin of Statistics, November 1990.  
(2) FAO Yearbook of Forest Products 1989 (Rome 1991).

Understates total wood exports since does not include secondary processed wood products such as furniture, builder's woodwork, componentry, etc.