Dhaka, Thursda y. March 24, 1994

The Piscicul ture Scenario

Talks have just resummed at the United Nations to work out a global accord to conserve endangered marine fish stocks. Most of the major global ocean fisheries have either been depleted or face over-use. The problem is to agree on ways to ensure a sustainable level of yield in future. At home, disturbing indications have surfaced showing that the on-goin g projects for augmenting fish resources in the country are running into snags. In December we had published a report saying that the plans for raising more sweet water fish from the floodplains had suffered a serious setback. Then, there was another report to the effect that a multi-million dollar fish stocking project may also have backfired. These developments, to say the least, are quite disconcerting.

The 50-million dollar project to stock the country's major floodplains: with fish is being financed by the World Bank under the Third Fisheries Credit. As it happened, net catch from the floodplains under the programme was less than even the quantity of fingerlings released! Funded by the Asian Development Bank, the other fish stocking project is said to be on the way to turning into a major ecological disaster. In this project, a poison — Roltanen — was reportedly used to eliminate predatory breeds from the area under the programme. Now it is feared that the indigenous fish species in the project area might eventually be destroyed altogether, heralding stock depletion!

Of course, it's not that the pisciculture scenario is all bleak. Some progress has indeed been made. To go by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics data, the total production of inland and marine fresh fish in the country has increased by thirteen per cent over the five-year period ending in fiscal year 1991-92. However, factor the population growth in the chart, and, you would find that the higher yield still would not leave much of more fish for consumption per capita.

Of more relevance perhaps is the fact that the country is overwhelmingly dependent on fresh water fish for, its consumption meeds. Sweet water fish accounts for seventy-five per cent of our consumption. Unfortunately, it is here that efforts to expand supplies seem to have failed to achieve a break-through. The annual out put in the sixties was nearly eight and a half lakth tons. And; in 1993, the yield just about crossed nine lakh tons. Looking over a period of three decades, we thus see the production of fresh water fish remaining nearly stagnant. It is estimated that the country would need fifteen lakh tons of fish a year by the end of this century to meet the minimum protein intake per capita. To judge by the pace of development of pisciculture, such a target for production would indeed look like beyond our reach. The reasons for the degradation of fish re-

sources of the country are not far to seek. Encroachment of cropland into fishing-grounds, even of human habitation into the wetlands, are perhaps the main causes for the reversal. Then there is the withdrawal of water in the upper reaches of the principal rivers. Haphazard construction of embankments aggravates the situation further. And overfishing, coupled with catching the species with utter disregard to the breeding cycle, goes on all the time. The government brings up new laws for the protection and conservation of the species but one does not see much of a result.

There is yet another crucial aspect to the conservation of open waters and floodplain areas. It is the question of preservation of livelihood of literally millions of people — nearly all of them poor who draw their subsistence from fishing. The economy cannot afford to let them lose their vo-

The authorities must look into the current debacle in the programme for raising more fish from open waters and floodplains. There are strong indications to suggest that lack of coordination among the concerned agencies and absence of adequate monitoring lie at the root of the impasse. The authorities have to ensure that such mishaps do not occur in the future.

Intimations of Greatness

Nelson Mandela barring unforeseeable accidents, is going to be South Africa's first black president. This cannot add any extra aura to what he has already achieved in life ennobled specially by a 27-year jail stint. But then he can always raise that unique office of first citizen in an apartheid-free South Africa to heights of glory beyond ordinary imagination.

That he has the capacity for that and also the necessary disposition is hinted by a recent peep into the habits of his private life. He rises regularly at 4:30 in the morning. And makes his bed all by himself before retiring. 'I can cook a decent meal ... I can polish a floor' - such is but the language of a modest one who often enough do those chores but is only too decent to brag about that. If one knows his Mandela, he is sure to take these to his presidential mansion. What is however very unknown is whether he would at all like to live in an ostentatious place like the ones heads of state are wont to make their residence.

This small peep into Mandela the private individual makes him only too familiar to us in this subcontinent. A life of simplicity has always been extolled in our society and examples abound of even sovereigns from Ashoka to Aurangzeb via a closer to home Nasiruddin leading a life of selfinflicted hardship. However much may one dislike the way he conducted the affairs of his state, contributing to the decline of the great Mughal Empire, one can hardly help being touched on seeing the grave of Aurangzeb in the southern city named after him. The emperor paid for this earthen grave in advance from the savings of a lifetime made mainly through sale of the Quran copied by his royal hands.

Mandela's spartan ways cannot but remind us of Mahatma Gandhi. His was a singular influence on subcontinental politicians who even when claiming to the highest offices of the land kept to their ways of using the least of materials. And a very big section of our noted Marxist leaders, Muzaffar Ahmed of Sandwip and Satyen Sen of Dhaka to name only two from a range of two hundred that could easily come to mind - led Gandhiesque lives without being influenced by him in any way.

Mandela rises early from bed. Rabindranath used to rise half an-hour before he does - at 4 o'clock. Is it part of a punishing routine? May be not. This could very well be gateway to joys of life we in our idler's ways hadn't ever had a taste of.

ding the people and The land. It is the source of life itself. This fact seemed to have been very well realized in the western arid parts of the subcontinent, so that the world's largest irrigation systern, straddling across frontiers of two hostile nations,

remained largely undisturbed inspite of three full-fledged wars as well as sporadic border clashes from time to time since the partition of 1947. The south-west Bangladesh

river is not a knife divi-

is suffering and suffering very badly because hardly any water left in the river Ganges at this time of the year. Water, the source of life is not there and the dry channel is now the narrow valley of death. At the same time, we all have read in our school geography text book that world's highest rainfall occur in Cherapuntt. Assam just north of Bangladesh from Mymensingli district. But not for once do we realize that all this rain water ultimately runs through Bangladesh before ending up as pure waste of enormous quantities of fresh water into the saline vastness of the Bay of Bengal. Thus simultaneously we face the problems of abundance and shortfall, within a delta which from east to west is not stretched beyond 200 miles only.

The sharing of Ganges water between Bangladesh and India might be approached on the "river is the source of life itself' principle. During dry months, the total volume of surface water available all throughout Bangladesh is not meagre - it is more than sufficient to meet our entire needs and even then there would be surplus left. The problem is its uneven distribution all throughout the territory. If water transfer by means of water

HE children of Sarajevo

deadline for the withdrawal of

the Serbian big guns around

their city, and were skimming

down the steep streets on

toboggans, building snowmen

dicing with death whenever

they skipped out to play, they

gambled ahead of time that the

guns around them would be.

silent and snatched back their

lives as they remembered

them. Most were still locked

out of school because of the

ice-cold classrooms when the

ultimatum passed, but already

they had given up kicking

their heels up home because of

the Chetniks (Serbs) in the

were reassuring.

All around them the sounds

Overhead - night and day -

aircraft of the North Atlantic

Treaty Organisation (NATO,

the West's main military al-

liance) boomed as they

swooped over Serbian posi-

tions in the hills checking that

the big guns had gone.

Armoured UN personnel carri-

ers screamed backwards and

forwards along the city roads

at full throttle. The radio

broadcast news of yet more

initiatives and words like fed-

"I am always waiting for a

grenade to fall," said one

woman still unable to shake off

the fears of yesterday as many

children around her seemed to

be doing. Windows of her flat

had been shot out by snipers

and were patched over with

plastic sheeting like thousands

of others throughout the city.

Her twice-monthly journey to

collect rations for survival was

suddenly no longer a dash

across road intersections be-

fore the snipers could take aim

said Merdina Tekac, recalling

the nightmare of the past two

lost years. "The children were

with their skis enjoying the

snow. But if the children were

quick to accept a normal life

again, their father, Migdat, off

for the day from his duties in

Now at last they were out

"I lost 30 kilos from fear."

and gun her down.

often sick from fear."

eration and confederation.

After nearly two years of

and tossing snowballs.

went into action days

ahead of the West's

Water is Life — Not Death! control structures and canals be prevented. Again as a result is feasible, then it should not of population growth, largescale deforestation has taken be difficult to develop intensive irrigated agriculture, prac place in the upper catchment tically all over the country and areas in Nepal. The rainfall is also generate surplus water to less and cusecs of dry season sell to India where the average water flowing into Ganges have declined. The net effect of all availability of water, per unit of surface area, is much less. It is these developments is that water available during low flow wellknown that Bangladesh and North-East India are both months at the Farakka Barrage in the humid tropics and as point is now much less than one moves further to the west before so much so that the the agro-ecological conditions planned diversion at Farakka tend to get increasingly arid. in terms of cusecs of water may not be feasible any longer. Inter-country water transfer is not a new idea in view of The dry river bed beneath the Hardinge Bridge is therefore water scarcity becoming a spreading global problem, an inevitable fact of life.

cal use", maintains that a country's rights to a given water source depend on how much it has used the water in the past. If the country has traditionally taken most of the water, it has a right to continue. Egypt's claim to Nile river water is based on this historic rights. The use of Ganges water for irrigation began in the 1960s with the completion of the GK irrigation scheme in Bangladesh Such use in case of India followed our GK scheme with the commissioning of Farakka Barrage. None of these how

WINDOW ON ASIA Shahed Latif.

The problem therefore now is to augment supplies of water and work out the stable system of sharing the enhanced river flows. It is first a problem of water resources development and then the law and legal arguments on water ought to be taken into account. It is generally agreed that all nations bordering a water source have some rights to the water under international law. But there is no single accepted formula for determining those rights.

Several arguments enter the debate on how such water rights should be allocated. The territory of origin doctrine states that India (and also Nepal for that matterly may control the allocation of Ganges water since the source is within their territories.

ever fulfil the doctrine of historic use. The irrigation from Nile waters in Egypt is perhaps as old as civilization itself - atleast 30 centuries have passed. Such claims over Ganges water cannot be established, either by Bangladesh or

India, after only thirty years.

Under "no significant harm doctrine", a nation may control the water from a given source only to the extent that it causes no major harm to others downstream. Under this argument, construction of Farakka Barrage would be legal only as long as Bangladesh did not suffer from the reduced flow. Bangladesh did suffer from the reduced, now practically zero, flow of the Ganges. India however argues that the flow at Farakka point is now

severely reduced both due to upstream withdrawal as well as reduced flow from the mountain catchment areas. Hence even without Farakka barrage. at which point the river gets divided, the amount of water reaching Bangladesh would have severely declined during the dry months. There is therefore no doubt that under the no significant harm doctrine, Farakka Barrage cannot be justified; but at the same time, the greatly reduced availability of water itself is an agonizing reality which ought to be taken into account.

Equitable Apportionment

The solution lies under the doctrine of 'equitable apportionment" which requires that each country's rights to water from a shared source be assessed according to current and future needs and access to alternative sources. Augmentation of Ganges waters is the only answer to the crisis and fortunately both the countries have accepted the solution. The outstanding problem has been created by conflicting prescriptions for development of alternative sources of water.

Bangladesh supports the plan to build dams and develop largescale water reservoirs in the uppermost catchment areas of the Ganges, lying within the territories of the Kingdom of Nepal. Thus water can be stored during monsoon season and released during dry periods to maintain an even flow of the river all throughout the year - fulfilling the needs of India and Bangladesh. In addition, generation of hydroelectricity would be an additional

of Meghna-Brahmaputra system to the Ganges from where India can also draw its re-The upstream solution of Bangladesh directly confronts the downstream tail-end Indian design. Located at practically two extreme ends of the river Ganges, sharing of whose water is in dispute. there seems to be no compromise solution in sight. At

the same time, the suffering of

net gain to Indiasin particular.

India is opposed to such a

scheme and favours transfer of water from the eastern rivers

the people knows no bounds. River is the source of life itself - it must not be construed as the knife to generate hostility among countries and peoples. Let the leaders of both Bangladesh and India be convinced of this basic fact and then proceed to work out the ideal solution for the benefit of all. As a step in that direction. wish to suggest that let a team of eminent experts, independent in all respect and none belonging to SAARC countries, be appointed to examine various proposals and solutions and come up with the least cost alternative that maximizes benefits for all the peoples concerned, regardless of nationality. It would be in the nature of the grand his-

The much sought after commitment would be possible if and, only if the leaders of the two countries, in a bold bid to resolve, are prepared to accept the fundamental truth that river is the source of life itself and it ought not to be used as the knife to divide the lands and the peoples.

toric arbitration and both

Bangladesh and India commit-

ted to abide by the decisions of

the eminent experts.

in increasing volumes cannot After the NATO Strike — II

Proposals to tow around ice-

bergs from Antarctica or fill

giant plastic bladders with lake

waters will not be enough to

quench the world's thirst, said

Bob Engleman, co-author of

the Population Action Interna

tional Report. Other ideas for

augmentation of water include

building desalination plants or

international water pipelines

"The bottom line of this is

simply that the rate of

population growth in countries

experiencing water scarcity is

vastly outpacing population

growth of the world as a

Fact of Life

passed since the Farakka

Barrage was constructed

During this period, the popu-

lation of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar

and West Bengal has increased

enormously and irrigation has

spread all over north India.

The increase in demand for

Ganges water and, conse

quently, upstream withdrawal

Over four decades have

whole"

'If One Loses Hope, there is No Life Left'

Petar Hadji-Ristic writes from Sarajevo

NATO's new assertive policy in Bosnia — first an ultimatum over the withdrawal of big guns around Sarajevo and then the shooting down of Serbian warplanes — has already changed the lives of citizens in Sarajevo. Nearly two years after the city's peace demonstrators were gunned down by Serbian snipers, people can again walk the streets without fear of death. But in this on-the-spot report, a Gemini News Service correspondent finds that the long siege has left deep wounds and many have lost hope in a future for their city and Bosnia.

Bosnia Croatia Vellka Kladusa • Tuzi Serbia Visoko A Srebrenica Croatia 249990 Moster Adriatic Sea Montenegro UN controlled Serb Muslim

the army, seemed sceptical about their future in Sarajevo, a city still ringed by Serbs who over the past two years had effectively prevented him and 60,000 men drafted into the

Bosnian army from pursuing

the battle beyond its borders. "They (the Serbs) control everything - the water, the electricity. They are all around the city," he said.

For months, a tiny fair light connected to a car battery was the only illumination in their flat, there was no running water for days at a time, the gas pressure was low. They lived, like everyone else, on humanitarian aid flown in by the UN and Red Cross and had to queue for hours to receive it.

His father lived only a few hundred yards away in the Serbian-controlled suburb of Grbavica. He could shout to him across a checkpoint, but not embrace him. His wife's, sisters and mother had fled to Germany.

"One can't live in a divided city, because it cannot fundtion," said Enisa Muzurovic.

Around the city the signs of the long, cruel siege were everywhere. Holes blasted by the 300,000 mortars which rained down on the city, burnt-out buildings. facades pockmarked by sniper fire and shrapnel and shattered windows. In the streets, sniper victims hobbled along on crutches; a legless teenage boy dressed up in army uniform was wheeled past by a companion. Abandoned dogs scrummage for food in the waste by the roads.

There were tell-tale signs of a desire for escape. Billboards pasted up around the town advertised crash foreign language courses. A telephone number in a shop window offered second-hand foreign language dictionaries and coursebooks.

"As soon as they open the road, I am off," said Rasmira, a 24-year-old student selling chocolate from a gift parcel. She stood only yards from the open market where a grenade killed 68 shoppers on February 5, the incident which led to the NATO ultimatum.

"There is no life here. The Serbs will fight again, there will be no peace. Anyone with a brain in their head will go." predicted Ilija Bosnak, an excommunist now working for the Bosnian army:

But for many of the older generation with homes and property still intact, departure seemed out of the question.

"If one loses hope there is no life left," said Veda Dervanovic in her cold cafe. still in business although most people could not afford to step inside. Her family's tourist business had collapsed and they were now using shop space to give free haircuts to impoverished people.

But a future beyond the mooted two-year UN administration of the city by Muslims, Croats and Serbs seemed especially uncertain for those of mixed ethnic backgrounds. There were reports of many

Serbs and Croats who had already found a way to leave during the siege.

"I don't want to live here any more," said one man as he . fragile ceasefire has given time patrolled a main road. "More will leave than will return. I have no church, no nationality and no leader - and I don't need one.'

UN renef planes still bring in most of the city's food, most shops are still locked up; only essential services are working. factories are closed, some destroyed or plundered.

But for the relief flights bringing in basic rations of flour, beans and rice, 430,000 people would have starved to death. Yet people complain of gnawing hunger and loss of weight. "It is very difficult to live on the low quality food, said Miracem Kokic, an official in charge of food distribution. "A lot of people are suffering in hospital. We desperately need

sugar, meat, fish, corned beef and high-quality food." In the main city market

- but everything is priced in German Deutschmarks and must vie for the title of most expensive food in the world. A kilogram of beef sells at 70DM, a kilo of rotting apples

some additional food is on sale

17DM, a litre of cooking oil 90DM. For the majority of the city's people who earn the equivalent of 2 DM or less a month, buying anything there is impossible.

The siege has set the economy on its head. A secondhand car sells for a tenth of its pre-war price because a litre of petrol costs 30DM and it is unsafe to drive anywhere. Anything using electricity — a fridge or TV - sells for a frac-

tion of its cost Even the 10,000 graves of the victims of the mortars and snipers crammed into the sports grounds beside the

Olympic stadium have barely one flower. Except for those working in

essential services, men are assigned to guard-duties and women are without work. For most, the day ends early. At night there is little to do other than eat and go to bed. There is no electricity for television, often no heating to keep warm. A 10pm curfew is strictly enforced.

The siege has left many with the foreboding that the suffering will continue. But the to reflect on why the country fell into such disarray.

Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic struggled to answer this in a radio and television interview hours after the NATO deadline: "Nationalists came to power in a moral wasteland and they implemented their policies without obstacles... nothing opposed the evil here.... the communist ideology bears the blame for the evil which happened."

His views might have been shared by many, but could hardly reassure the parents of the children playing in the

PETAR HADJI-RISTIC is a British journalist and film maker based in Berlin. He spe cialises in Balkan affairs.

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.

An active life

Sir, Every one wants a long life. But there is no virtue or substance in a long life without meaningful work. No one should desire a long life with an inactive empty record. What is the use of a long life if it does not help a man to do good work or something worthwhile? In fact, life should be full of

action. As the proverb goes, 'A rolling stone gathers no moss. one who is not inclined to do a work is called 'shirker,' his mind refuses to work, his body wants rest and ease. It is true that for all times, he who seeks to do work, will find more than enough to do.

Life is rightly and appropriately measured by the amount of work one does. The fact of longevity is of little significance, if it is only an accumulation of ill-spent years. So it can be said that a successful life is not the number of years we

live, but the achievement we acquire to our credit. Our capacity of success depends on the incentive received for the

Man must not make mere longevity his sole aim of life. He must always be ready to do as much work as he can within the limited period of time that he has at his disposal. The performance of good work that is beneficial to humanity should be his principal con-N. Rahman

Alamdanga, Kushtia.

Politics of production Sir, The 110 million people

of Bangladesh are grateful to the developed democracies of the world for their cooperation. The motivated politics here devoid of patriotism and national development has made the people as well as the country poor - and a section of bureaucrats too have con tributed to such sad state. The actual development of the people and the country as well has not yet been evaluated properly: still a remarkable percentage of total population is below poverty line.

Development oriented politics and economics are not in work here - distortion in many ways are rampant and all these have eroded much of the spirit of liberation. The present state of governance and different party affairs are not rewarding though the mass movement which ousted the autocracy in 1991 also aimed at social justice and economic emancipation, educational uplift and social orders etc.

Negative politics like strikes, and acts of terrorism have become a routine part of life here. Inter and intra grouping among political parties adds injury to the erosion of values in all spheres of life: moreover, some ill-motivated bureaucrats are another evil force.

Political parties have no sustainable economic and development programmes, rather that are marred by vested interests. Corruption was institutionalised during the nine years of black autocracy and, as it appears, corruption

and bribery have become unwritten norms. Administration and judiciary if separated and police made really honest and devoted people may have some sigh of relief. Accountability and transparency in all spheres need to be ensured.

The mass scale nationalisation immediately after liberation of the country in 1971 made the large industries sick and negative politics has added to their aggravation. The denationalisation programme afterwards has also been disturbed by vested interests within and outside the government. The so called labour leaders and CBA have little contribution toward industrial development, rather their activities hinder the process of development of skilled labour force as well as industries.

The virtual absence of legal framework in socio-econopolitico fields has contributed to unrest and disorder there. People have been made to suffer in a state of lawlessness and insecurity. Assumably, to derive political gains, the educational institutions have been made into volcanoes, making students and their future uncertain and dark. Arms have

replaced books there! And the

political leaders are shedding crocodile tears. Even the so called intellectuals with their 'misfit' programmes are rather pushing the country towards maybe a sort of civil war and this has created division among the people contributing to further anarchy. The system of ombudsman is an immediate necessity to check the evils. including that of bureaucracy in the organisations/offices.

The higher cost of industrial production encourages black-marketing/smuggling and thus creates economic stagnancy in the country. Bureaucratic bottlenecks and indecisions have been standing as barriers towards smooth implementation of industrial policy, as is believed. Proper and honest management of the country would surely guarantee its development.

The mass media need to be reformed to meet the challenges of making the country developed and people motivated in that line. Dependable correct data are a must for any development planning.

Many a political party speaks of democracy often without following the norms within themselves. Perhaps persons have become more important than programmes in

their minds.

Political reforms and educative cadre programmes need to be undertaken urgently and mutual respect, cooperation and tolerance practised by all concerned. Strikes, lockouts to be stopped once for all in the greater interest of the country for making the country self reliant and economically developed. Politics has to be made development oriented.

Moksud A Khan 67 Hale Drive, Mill Hill London NW 7 3EL

Student politics Sir. The term student poli-

tics' has come to such a pass insecured in that most parents have become cynical about it and they feel sending their wards to colleges and universities. Why should such a situation exist? If nothing better can be done, student politics should be immediately banned.

We deeply expect that the present government will be very drastic and firm to implement ban such of for the greater interest of the nation.

Motius Samad Chowdhury Phultola Tea Estate. Sylhet