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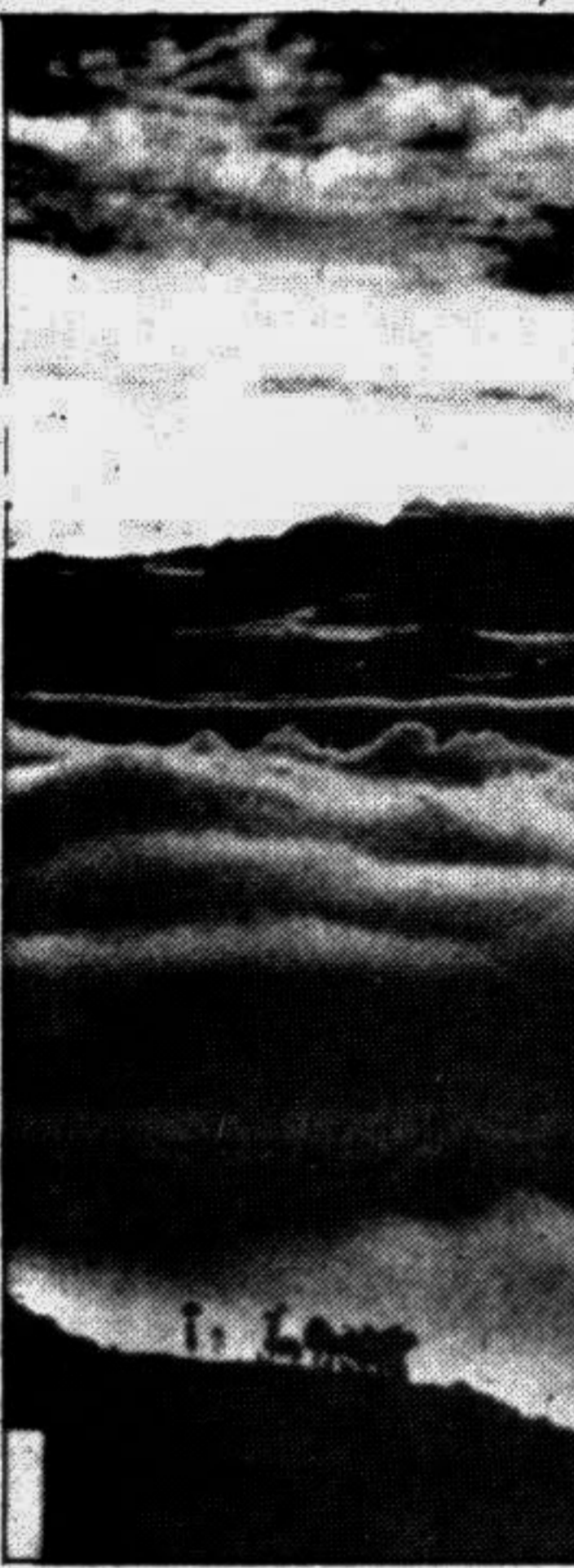
ECO-PHILOSOPHY OR BUST

Why Current Environmental Trajectories are Not Enough

by Abdul Hannan

THE way in which our society is going about destroying nature is not so much a matter of intention, not even of a lack of consideration of important issues concerning how we need to care for nature if we are ourselves to survive. It is certainly correct that we need to be less anthropocentric in outlook and action and that we need to be aware of what we are doing to nature, how we should establish new ways of understanding the biosphere and how we should change the ways we relate to it for our own good. This, of course, we continue to fail to do as we remain profoundly ignorant of biotic systems just as we continue to maintain faith in the flagging science and technology-led rationalistic culture.

ments in the South. But these remain steadfastly positivistic environmentalist initiatives addressing the immediate environmental impacts in a fragmented manner but lacking any framework — ideological or practical — through which the totality of the problem might be addressed. As such, they fail to meet the criteria of a value-oriented eco-philosophy we so desperately need but lack.



day life and some other ways of doing things that are benign to nature. This largely results from the fact that we are ignorant of the processes of fragmentation of knowledge and skill which is one of the salient characteristics of the corporate global village we live in. Beyond this — and somewhat more problematic — is the continued influence of the proscription upon ideas explicitly aimed at fomenting radical social change. It is more acceptable in intellectual circles to exhort people to take an ethical stance towards nature than it is to call for wholesale change in social and political structures.

quence of the radical and deleterious havoc we are wreaking upon our life support systems. If we are in practice to have adequate regard for nature then we will need to change quite fundamentally our social and economic praxis. Thus we should be concerned in the first instance to effect change in the social and political machinery that structures our every day lives, bearing in mind that the ultimate reconfiguration of the way in which these work will have to square with the sustainable self-reproduction of nature. It is necessary to accept culture and society as the central terms of our approach to forestalling ecological destruction, the every day concerns and actions of 'ordinary citizens' and 'community leaders' will only make informed tracks via an adequate conscious restructuring of this as a whole to produce a social and political machinery that is inherently benign in its intercourse with nature.

We need to start from the assumption that it is necessary to make choices about how we live our lives in relation to the use of nature, human civilizations could therefore be gauged as resource use systems, sustainable or unsustainable. We need to become aware that individual choices are also social ones and so become concerned to ask the question: "Will the choices currently being made by our society satisfy our material and spiritual needs and avoid ecological, destruction?" Ten years ago the answer to this was clearly "No". Today we can see a significant adoption of environmentalist measures ostensibly designed to address the issue of ecological destruction.

But it takes little by way of hard analysis within the framework of an environmentalist perspective to realize that these measures amount in their results to no significant impact at all upon the general destructive trajectory. 'Sustainable growth' as the currently acceptable concept within which changes are politically tolerated, still calls for economic growth which adds to the burden on already overstretched ecosystems. It is quite clear to ecologists that substantially more thought and understanding, and upon that effective action, is required before we have reached a point where we can answer the foregoing question in the affirmative.

Elderly People of Bangladesh Actively Contributing to Society

by Sabrina Shahab

WITH the advance of science and technology a man's life span has increased. Instead of this increased life span being a source of hope for the individual making him more productive, this has brought sorrow making him a burden on the society. But why? Especially in our country old age is associated with decreased mental, physical ability, unemployment, loneliness, inability to take care of oneself.

ten to give them advice, supervise their children. She acted more or less as a centre of stability for the whole family. Now she herself had become a family burden, someone who needed to be looked after. This was created not because of financial hardship, health problems, or fear of abandonment. The reason was simply inability to cope with the sudden change from a happily married prosperous wife to a lonely widow who had to depend on others.



Members of the Bangladesh Association for the Aged holding a press conference discussing the problems of the elderly and the objectives of the Association

over 65. But we know that many people become old (that is they show the systems of old age) long before 65 especially women and poor people in a country like Bangladesh. On the other hand in advanced countries like Europe, America increasing number of elderly remain mentally and physically active long after this age.

It is even worse for the elderly who come from the lower middle classes. These people don't own a home, their savings are negligible. After retirement they are forced to live with their children as they do not have any alternative. On the other hand, the children who themselves belong to the lower middle class are hard pressed to look after their parents. Though their health care needs are not met very adequately the real damage is done to their minds. They feel depressed and guilty about being a burden on their children, thus further deteriorating their health. This naturally increases their dependence, making them feel more guilty creating a vicious cycle.

with their children, a opportunity elderly of western countries don't get. But they ignore the fact that the joint family structure is fast breaking down due to socio-economic changes. The majority of neither the elderly rich nor the poor elderly enjoy the benefits of joint family system. It is only the middle class who can be genuinely associated with the joint family system. Elderly in the western countries benefit from financial and health care system specially designed for them by the government. Therefore they enjoy a special sense of independence which can only be imagined by the elderly of Bangladesh. With the increase of elderly population in the western countries, they have begun to be aware of their political and economic might. This might has also been recognised by the Government and the business sector. That's why we see the interests of elderly becoming more prominent in the political agenda and market places being filled with products, services especially designed for the elderly. In Bangladesh the elderly are the silent minority. Neither the government nor the private sector pay them any special attention or recognize their rights.

FOLLOWING on the heels of the race-based invective of The Bell Curve, a new group of conservatives are now entering the mainstream media forum. This time, the targets are the ultimate scapegoats — immigrants, a group which neither possesses media presence, nor dares to fight back for fear of losing their prized immigrant status (any arrest record can serve as grounds for denial of future entry to the US). Leading the nativist charge is Peter Brimelow, a British-born naturalized citizen and editor of Forbes magazine. Expanding on the demagoguery of his 1992 National Review article, Brimelow has penned Alien Nation: Common Sense About America's Immigration Disaster (Random House). The central thesis of Brimelow's magnum opus, immigration policy is shifting the "natural" racial order in the US, transforming the white population into a minority by the year 2060 — a change which will destroy the core character and values of the nation.

US Omnibus Terrorism Act — II Enter the Nativists

by Naeem Mohaimen

off at Park Avenue and rob him. If readers are not convinced that a non-white majority by its mere existence is a bad thing, Brimelow trots out the beloved family in support of his arguments: "My son, Alexander is a white male with blue eyes and blond hair... the sheer size of the so-called 'protected classes' that are now politically favoured, such as Hispanics, will be a matter of vital importance as long as he lives." Alien Nation then reminds us that the newly arriving darkies don't share the values of the majority. Shame on the media for not pointing out that the Long Island Railroad mass murderer Colin Ferguson was an immigrant! And does the nation really want to open the gates to the Koran-toting crazies of the World Trade Centre "bomb vintage"? Peter Brimelow disingenuously links immigration with law and order: "[I]f Ferguson and the others had not immigrated, those fourteen Americans would not have been killed."

Rosenthal, Sir. Some 3% of Haitian refugees at Guantanamo tested HIV-positive. Peter Brimelow's solution is simple: stop the immigration menace and thus guarantee the management of affairs by the "Real Americans." [I]nter-marriage cannot guarantee social harmony. That can be done only by an American majority that is confident and strong. How to staunch the tide of immigrants waging "war on the nation-state"? Brimelow proposes firstly to repeal the 1965 Immigration Act. Then, "[i]t may be time to consider reviving a version of the bracero program, the agricultural guest-workers program that operated from the 1940s to the 1960s, allowing foreign workers to move in and out of the country in a controlled way, without permanently altering its demography and politics." Guard dogs on the borders, aggressive deportation, closure of bilingual schools and bachelor immigration (paralleling the Chinese Exclusion Act) by "skilled" labourers are the other components of this "Return to Greatness" programme.

In the debate following publication of the book, liberal critics have done an excellent job of combating Brimelow's theories. Interestingly, even neocons have skewered Brimelow's thesis that a white immigrant somehow has a greater affinity for "American culture and values" and that, turn of the century immigrants were "closely related" by a "common ethnic heritage." Many have quickly pointed out that the "Boston Brahmins" hardly considered Irish immigrants to be part of their "race." Newsday (April 27) points out another flaw in Alien Nation's paranoid exhortation to "save" majority culture: "Non-white" is a synthetic, historical construction already fraying at the edges. It is really likely that the great-grandchildren of Ecuadorian, Korean and Indian immigrants will come together with African-Americans during the next century to form a new majority culture based solely on their common lack of European-ness?

American taxpayers"; John Tanton of the Federation of American Immigration Reform (Brimelow's assessment: "Truly a citizen who has taken up arms for his country"); fellow Briton and exporter of the sceptred isles' poisonous brand of xenophobia, National Review editor John O'Sullivan; and economist George Borjas whose research is cited in Alien Nation: 1996 and the coming wave of Proposition 187 politics. With media anti-immigrant hackles raised, the Omnibus Act wending its way towards passage and the onslaught of pseudo-research about the negative impact of immigration — the battle lines are being drawn just in time for the 1996 elections. The Godfather of Proposition 187, Pete Wilson, is already in the presidential fray. His probable defeat in the primaries only ensures that the anti-immigrant plank will be adopted by other presidential candidates eager to pick up the scapegoat vote. The immigrant will emerge as a successor to Ellison's "Invisible Man" — replacing Willie Horton as the universal bogeyman. But, as Brimelow and others are already discovering, this is not a fight that will be easily won. Attacks on immigrants have galvanized into action not only immigrant groups, but a host of other progressive coalitions, civil liberties groups and ethnic communities which are now solidly embedded in mainstream American. At stake in the upcoming battle is not only the status of immigrants today, but an idea that still serves as a saving grace and something approaching a core value for US — the conception that all peoples of the world have the right to be part of this nation, and that this diversity strengthens and enriches American society. Europe's doors are now firmly shut against immigrants, and ugly anti-foreigner attacks are spreading like wildfire across that continent; the Asian tigers are practising their own home-grown brand of xenophobia, particularly directed against darker skinned "guest workers" from neighbouring Asian nations. The last remaining bulwark of the immigrant ethos, the United States, is now undergoing a struggle pitting multiculturalists against xenophobes. 1996 may prove to be the watershed year for this struggle which extends beyond traditional left-right divides, with both allies and enemies in unlikely places. The Village Voice's Lawrence Chua echoes the fervent hopes of the activists now organizing to push back the nativist onslaught: "We take our acts across oceans in order to survive. Our survival depends on the destruction of the privilege that Brimelow is so desperate to defend. His fear is justified. We will bury him." (Concluded)



Age is no bar to creativity Courtesy: Nourah Ahmed, Naib Uddin Ahmed

being respected and loved. They also have a say in the family matters. Reality is far from this rosy picture. Most elderly people have two major fears. One is the increasing alienation from the society they live in, in other words the fear of being left out. Their second fear is financial and becoming mentally and physically handicapped thus reducing their independence, ability to take care of themselves, and forcing them to depend on their unwilling children. According to psychologist Nazimudullah problems of old age spring from widowhood, retirement, financial problems, physical, mental impairment. Let's cite the case of one woman who comes from the upper middle class. She lived quite happily with her husband and son in a joint family structure (she was the recognized head of the family along with her husband). She suffered from minor health problems but nothing that serious. After the death of her husband the situation changed drastically for the worse. Her health deteriorated so much that she took to the bed, unable to do the most simple things by herself. This created a minor family crisis. Before every one especially daughters, daughter-in-laws looked upon her to lis-

their socio economic condition. Therefore today's rickshaw, cart pullers or day labourers may be seen tomorrow as beggars in the streets. Their destiny seems to be dying in the streets. Dhaka city dwellers are so used to seeing old men and women lying on the streets in a semi dead condition that their hearts are hardly touched. From a psychological point of view elderly people living in the village are better off than their counterparts in the cities. Though they do not have the same access to health care facilities as do city dwellers at least they do not suffer from isolation as they live in a closely knit community. But the situation is changing fast. Due to increase in economic hardships more and more villagers are coming to the cities. The trend is also similar for the land owners and other rich people of the villages. More and more young people of these families are settling in the cities in order to increase their economic and social status. Therefore in the future the elderly of the villages could be worse off than their counterparts in the cities. Some people argue that the elderly people of Bangladesh are better off than that of western countries. They say that here elderly people get a chance to stay,

fortunate brothers and sisters. They can extend their services by urging the Government and NGOs to create a health care services specialised for the elderly. Creating an organization like Sena Kallyan Sangstha with the help of Government and other funding agencies will give the elderly the opportunity to be productive and financially independent. This organisation will also be able to provide funds for those elderly who are financially handicapped and unable to work. Other ways to help the elderly include: Urging Government, NGOs and other private financial institutions to help the elderly create provided funds. Carrying out promotional activities which will make Government, business and the elderly themselves aware of their political and economic power. Strengthening the research, training capacities of the organization. If other organizations become as interested as Bangladesh Association for the Aged in the welfare of the elderly, surely the situation of the elderly will change for the better. They will take their rightful place as productive and creative members of the society and not as a burdens any more.