

# FOCUS

## Teaching the Teacher

by M Garry

**M**D Abul Kasem, BSc has been a school teacher for 25 years. first in Dinajpur and then, for the last 16 years, in Thakurgaon. He reckons that he has taught 20,000 students in that time. "Most of them still remember me," he boasts, but modestly. "That's why," he says, "when people are in trouble, they come to me."

For, during all the years he has been teaching, Mr Kasem has also been social worker and confidante for many of the people in his community, willingly but unpaid. "Divorce, crime, violence," he tells me. "I've dealt with them all." He says that he has not yet met a problem he could not solve, somehow. "I even get donations from rich people to give to poor people to provide dowry for their daughters."

So why had he bothered to attend a one-day training course, provided by RDRS in Thakurgaon, to give the village elites a background in legal education? "I've always had the sympathy," he explains, in his halting but good English, "but this course gave me the information — about the law, about family rights, about women's rights. It taught me about things I knew nothing about before. It hasn't changed how I help people, it has just made everything clearer. I only wish it could have been longer."



# Eco-Philosophy or Bust-III Learning to Think Like the River

by Abdul Hannan

*"It will not suffice to plant trees, embank rivers and educate the younger generations in Bangladesh on environmental issues, if the result is that these very programmes and people develop into mere cogs integrated into a world economic system that continues to be hierarchical, undemocratic and ecologically destructive."*

It is obvious that both ecological ethics and spiritually inspired holism require a change of world-view. A harmony with nature, the avoidance of different kinds of pollution, the discussion of the possibility of all life having its own intrinsic value, self-realization rather than economic growth and consumerism, appropriate technology, recycling and thrift and the organization of human communities on a regional basis, with great attention paid to minorities, are all found at one point or another within the corpus of ecological ethics. Some, however, have seen these as reformist rather than radical steps and hence an insufficient response to today's problems. They argue that many of these measures accept the dominant paradigm of humanist instrumentality over nature and only have the effect of tidying up at the edges and avoiding the worst visible excesses of environmental degradation. A more radical position is occupied by deep ecologists who draw their conceptual sources from ecological science, pantheism, process metaphysics and historical linguistics.

Akin to some western and many eastern philosophies, deep ecology constructs a world-view with no ontological divide in the understanding of existence. There can be, for example, no dichotomy of reality (or value) between the human and the non-human. Similarly, people are seen as interlinking pieces of a total eco-landscape where the realization of the self must not lead to self-centredness but rather to a connectivity with all things which goes beyond more altruism. This world-view translates into two fundamental norms. The first is the accordance of primacy to self-realization. In this, we must reach beyond the dehumanizing definitions of people as consumers, workers and commodity producers and achieve identification with the non-human world; we must learn to 'think like the river' and hence let all things be themselves. The second norm is that of biocentric equality — the world is no longer our oyster, we share it with the oysters.

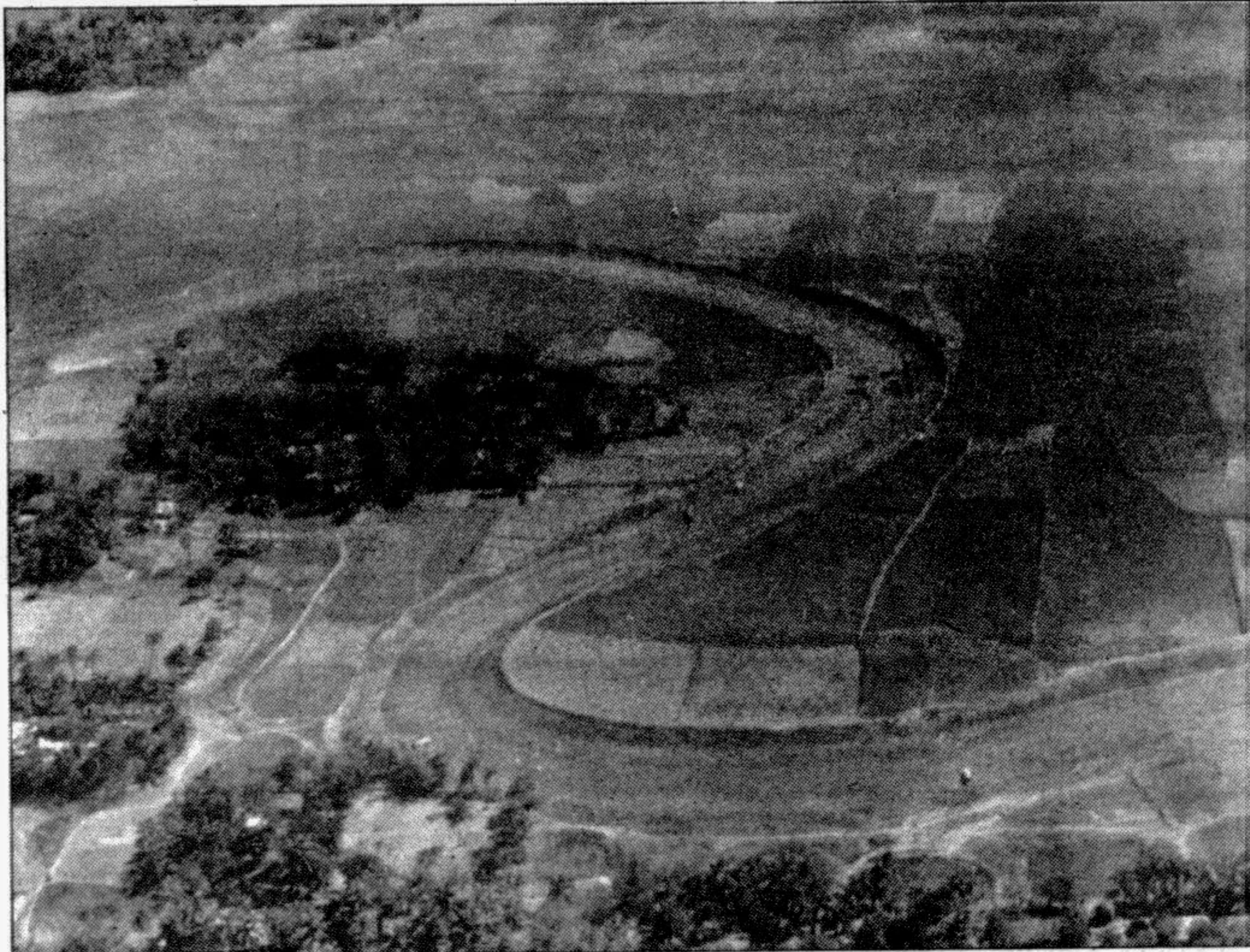


Photo by Nazim Sh. Ahmed

According to the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, behind these two norms there are six ultimate premises for this ecological view of the world. The first

less one that recognizes that many different (though mutually appreciable) interpretations of nature are both possible and acceptable. Criticism of such a view one could anticipate to be strong. There are the obvious

and in the growing visibility of environmental and social impact assessments as mechanisms built into development programme and project cycles. While these attempts constitute a welcome degree of conceptual revisionism in a

lectual and moral courage from people animated by a concern for the environment but who for the time being are trapped into supplication by the material attractions of conventional professional structures. The opacity of the language used here, though not unfamiliar to intellectual discourse, is also clearly a hindrance to the wider acceptability of ecological principles, when we have been so conditioned to respect technical language and the illusion of human perfectibility offered by statistics and the measurement culture. Against this, ecological exhortations are dismissed by development 'experts' as vague and dysfunctionally romantic.

There are those who say that basically the human concepts of utility and justice as elaborated in the West are all that is needed for a valid and viable environmental ethic. But a problem here is the fragmentation of societies into systems such as law, education, economy and religion and the more fundamental dislocation of people into separated 'private' and 'public' domains of social agency. The need for an ethic, a language of ecological (meaning both social and environmental) synthesis needs to deal with this fragmentation of experience, to use Baudelaire's words. The problem is that since no one of these function systems equals the whole of society, the level of resonance in any one function system caused by sensitivity to ecological concerns does not necessarily produce a sustained ethic for all. Thus new metaphysical insights going beyond the range afforded by the current brands of humanism are required to knit together our fragmented societies.

Paralleling the findings of quantum mechanics, we may arrive at this following understanding which holds as the basic axiom of eco-philosophy: "If the self is valuable, then all else is equal." This argument can be extended to suggest that the Universe in its entirety possesses a measure of selfhood, what Fritjof Capra calls "mentation," is being a self-realizing system. The ecology need not have a purpose, or telos, but is dynamic and unfolding at all levels. This idea of self-realization can be further extended to inorganic things if we include them in the system in which they are ecologically embedded.

All of these thoughts should generate some obvious corollaries for a *modus vivendi* for us all. Thinking like the river, eco-philosophy, entails grassroots democracy, personal responsibility over lifestyles, communitarian economies using measures of exchange that register not just instrumental utility but ecological value, post-patriarchal relationships, respect for cultural and biological diversity and a vision of the future that rises above the narrow economism of today. There is a critical tussle here between human agency and the determinism of circumstance which always makes the ecological choice a difficult one, because it often seems so contrary to the flow of the times. This applies both at the individual and social level. There is also a humanistic bias to these recommendations. But for those looking for a way to translate ecological ethics into the stuff of every-day life, they nonetheless constitute a necessary starting point along the road to a coexistence that will be of a radically more environmental order.

## ENVIRONMENT

# Hunting for Policy Balance

Pressure Mounts on the United States to Liberalise Trade in Endangered Species of Wildlife

by Rose Umoren

**G**EOGRAPHY comes alive in Africa. From the majestic lions to the elegant cheetah, nature's wonderful species abound, drawing millions of tourists and hunters from around the world every year.

But the continent, which houses about a third of the world's yet unexplored biodiversity in savannahs, rain and montane forests, is also the world's poorest region.

Most of its 500 million people, too poor to notice Nature's beauty, often find it necessary to destroy their ecosystems to meet bare everyday needs.

With the growing realisation that these ecosystems contain life-saving plants and animal species — both known and unknown — the international community has since the 1970s produced conventions regulating their exploitation.

One country went further. In 1973, the United States enacted the Endangered Species Act (ESA) under which the import of endangered species and their products must be licensed by the Interior Secretary. The United States has traditionally been the largest market for exotic wildlife products.

In the 1970s, when such prized species were nearing extinction, the US action was widely welcomed. But since then, some of these animals have greatly multiplied and now compete with human beings for space and scarce resources.

Our concern about the (ESA) is aggravated by the failure of the Department of Interior to consult with our governments about determinations concerning our wildlife," said the three, which have been battling for years to have the ESA amended.

They also pointed out that the ESA operates outside the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) signed by 126 countries including the United States.

For instance, while CITES allows quota trade in leopards, the Nile crocodile, cheetahs and elephants, Washington has consistently refused to allow the import of any of these, not even as hunting trophies.

For countries of Southern and East Africa, including Kenya, Zimbabwe, Rwanda and Namibia, the US stance has meant a loss of between a quarter and a third of external income.

On the grassroots level, the loss is even more poignant. In northern Namibia, northern Rwanda and some parts of Kenya and Zimbabwe, for example, villagers have no means of livelihood other than wildlife and its products.

Unable to earn income

from wildlife, villagers in these arid and semi-arid regions have gone into food production on lands which some experts say cannot support cultivation.

The recurring question has remained: How can a balance be struck between ecology and tourism? Or what experts have dubbed ecotourism?

There appears to be a narrowing of positions between the US government and others.

Testifying at the June hearings here, the director of the US Office of Ecology and Terrestrial Conservation, Robert Pringle, said the Africans' growing environmental awareness and access to appropriate technology "are beginning to yield tangible results."

Sounding more like proponents of ESA's amendment than an administration official, Pringle said, "It is dangerous to generalise about Africa... (and) we have learned that the solution to environmental problems is almost always about balancing legitimate interests."

Pringle acknowledged that "there would be no such thing as environmental progress without an economic foundation."

This apparent narrowing

of positions is itself a result of investments by all parties. Many African countries, such as Zimbabwe, Botswana, Kenya and Namibia, acknowledged Pringle, have implemented good conservation programmes.

In Zimbabwe, for example, Rihoy estimates that "more than 75 per cent of privately owned ranches have integrated wildlife management into their overall land use strategy..."

For its part, the US government has invested about US\$ 82 million a year as aid to African governments implementing conservation programmes.

But lobbyists who want to amend the ESA insist that what African countries need is not aid but freedom to manage wildlife and trade in its products under CITES rules.

Safari Club International president and former congressman Ron Marlenee said Washington should instead address developing countries complaints that they are being made into a natural history museum while their ability to feed their people is impaired in the process.

Marlee, whose group represents wildlife hunters in about 150 countries, said: "What Africa needs is not handouts." — IPS

considers that the value of non-human life is independent of the usefulness of the non-human world as resources for man's consumption. Secondly, the diversity of life form has a value in itself and humans may only reduce this value to satisfy vital needs.

The third of the premises sees that a flourishing of the non-human life-world requires a diminution of resource consumption and the size of the human population. Linked to this is the fourth premise which expresses the need to reverse the increasing manipulation of the non-human world by the adoption of different economic, technological and ideological structures. Naess' fifth premise aims at a greater experience of the interconnectedness of all things and the enhancement of the quality of life rather than an attachment to material standards of living. Finally, those who agree with the agree with the above premises have an obligation to join in the attempt to bring about the necessary changes to the social order.

Based on these premises, all things are in a position to achieve their own self-realizations and thus the space occupied by any 'thing' (ourselves and our technologies especially) must be limited to allow all other species to flourish. An ecological society would insist on the value of the experiential as well as the rational, believing as it does that Cartesian dualism is at the heart of most unsustainable relationships within the biosphere. While the beliefs set out here from the conditions of a personal value system, it is nevertheless

questions of the "how do we get there from here" type, but also a fear that any challenge to the absolute 'liberty' of the discrete, Rational Individual (the false god of today's narcissistic culture) will lead to some form of totalitarian nightmare; a kind of ecological fascism, if you like. The counter-argument from within the rationale of the ecological perspective would posit that the glorification of the rights of the Rational Individual has in practice itself lead to a totalitarian capitalist world culture which is eradicating any sense of notional equality and with it the idea that man is anything more than a resource-devouring economic automaton.

The ecological crisis that we are daily compounding has been caused by the almost overwhelming representation of anthropocentrism in western thought and world-view. Since these cultural and intellectual features of the western lifestyle dominate the world in practice, they must be addressed if we are to change our social praxis. It will not suffice to plant trees, embank rivers and educate the younger generations in Bangladesh on environmental issues, if the result is that these very programmes and people develop into mere cogs integrated into a world economic system that continues to be hierarchical, undemocratic and ecologically destructive.

Piecemeal attempts emanating from the dominant paradigm to deal with the challenges of ecologism are becoming manifest in the increasing numbers of courses in Environmental Economics sprouting up in the universities of the West

direction more in tune to ecological considerations, actual, ecological holism is epistemologically beyond the reach of the fragmented, reductionist analytics of these methodologies. In the words of Rabindranath Tagore, you can never come to the reality of Creation by contemplating it from the point of view of destruction. The elusiveness and permanence of ecological principles is captured evocatively in the words of Juan Mascaró, who tries to extend our understanding of nature in a spirit of transcendental and immanent ecologism, moving towards a sense of holistic responsibility within which monetized instrumental rationality is only one of several aspects. He writes: "A flower can be an object of trade, something to buy and sell for money. This is its lowest value. It can also be an object of intellectual interest, but then it becomes an abstraction and from a purely intellectual point of view a nettle may sometimes be more interesting than a flower. But to the soul the flower is an object of joy and to the poet it can be a thing of beauty and truth: a window from which we may look in wonder at the Beauty and Truth of the Universe, and the Truth and Beauty in our own souls."

While environmental consciousness is growing daily, what remains to be realized is that room does exist for altogether different ways of looking at these environmental problems, but radically novel concepts will need a new form of expression free of the ideational prejudices built into contemporary development vocabularies. It also requires no mean intel-



## Youngsters Say They Can Easily Get Any Narcotic

**A** survey of 12 to 17-year-old youngsters still in school has found that most can buy almost any narcotic almost anywhere in the United States.

What America's children are telling us, is that they are drenched in drugs," Joseph Califano, president of the Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse and sponsor of the survey, told a news conference July 17. He was secretary of health, education and welfare during the Carter presidency in the late 1970s.

Califano said the survey is the most comprehensive yet on youngsters and their use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco even though survey organizers interviewed by phone only 400 between the ages of 12 and 17 and 2,000 adults. Other surveys with a larger base, however, also report a

**Jerry Stilkind writes from Washington**

growing number of youngsters trying narcotics, tobacco and alcohol the past few years.

Califano said that the biggest problem named by the largest number of adolescents (32 per cent) was drugs. The next most important problem was crime and violence in school, mentioned as number one by 13 per cent of the youngsters.

Almost 90 per cent of the youngsters polled reported that they could easily get cigarettes and 73 per cent said they could easily get alcohol. Almost 60 per cent said they could easily buy marijuana but when the total was broken down by age, more than 80 per cent of 15 and 17-year-olds said they could readily obtain marijuana and 54 per

cent cocaine or heroin.

More than 60 per cent of the youngsters said that by the age of 15 they had friends who smoked marijuana and the 40 per cent of their friends had drinking problems.

Califano charged that popular music, television and the movies "encourage illegal drug use." He said the survey showed that three-quarters of the youngsters believed that the entertainment industry encouraged using drugs.

He called on the entertainment industry to stop "glamorizing" the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco.

The serious use of these substances is found in poor and well-off areas, among all racial and ethnic groups, in

urban and suburban neighborhoods and in youngsters living with two parents or in one-parent homes, Califano said.

His organization's analysis of the survey showed that youngsters who are unlikely to use drugs, alcohol or tobacco share four characteristics — they are active in religious groups, doing well academically, see a bright future and believe marijuana to be dangerous.

Califano said that the survey of adults indicated widespread support for increased police efforts to stop the import of drugs. About half supported increased funding for drug and alcohol prevention and treatment programs.

Jerry Stilkind is a USA staff writer.