

## FOCUS

## WORLD FOOD SUMMIT

## Opportunity to Learn from Others' Experiences

THE UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) is holding a World Food Summit in Rome, Italy from 13 to 17 November 1996. Heads of State from close to 200 countries are expected to gather at FAO Headquarters to agree on a blueprint for a co-ordinated campaign, in partnership with civil society and international organisations, to eradicate hunger.

The personal participation of national leaders is instrumental in mobilising all government ministries and agencies concerned with food security — from agriculture, fisheries, forestry and environment to foreign affairs, trade, economy and development co-operation. This wide involvement, along with the active participation of the NGOs, the private sector and other groups, is essential for developing a sound and realistic draft plan of action for the Summit, and subsequently for ensuring achievement of the Summits goals.

The high visibility of the Summit and its preparatory process also serves to draw public attention to food security questions and to stimulate debate in all sectors of society and in the media.

As a world forum, the Summit will take a global perspective in dealing with all aspects of food security. At the same time it will address the specific challenges

faced by different regions of the world.

The agreements reached at the Summit will place food — the first and fundamental requirement for life — at the top of the global agenda alongside peace and stability.

Bangladesh with an area of 147,570 square kilometres and a population of 120 million is one of the most densely populated in the world over 750 persons per kilometre. With per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of US\$ 224 Bangladesh is one of the world's poorest countries. It is also categorised as a low income food deficit one. Over 50 million of its population are considered below poverty line. At present, annual import requirements are in the range of 1.5 to 2.0 million tonnes of foodgrains representing an average of about 11 per cent of national consumption. Even with such heavy imports, it has not been possible to arrest the declining trend in food availability. The per capita intake is now roughly 1900 calories against the normal requirement of 2300. About one third of the population is severely malnourished. Since food grains provide roughly 85 per cent of the calories in Bangladeshi diet, the food deficits have resulted in large segments of the population suffering from protein-energy malnutrition and vitamin deficiency.

There are many countries

which were in the similar situation as Bangladesh's but they have managed to overcome their problems. Bangladesh can emulate the experiences of these countries and tackle its food problem. Examples of such countries are India, Tunisia, Costa Rica, Indonesia and Burkina Faso. India has had economic growth 5.2 per cent per annum since the early 1980s, three points above the average annual population growth for the same period. This vast and populous country has maintained a determined effort to develop domestic food production, reduce aid dependency and improve household food security over the past 35 years. The level of hunger and poverty is still high, but extensive use of targeted anti-poverty measures such as public works and infant nutrition programmes has reduced vulnerability to famines and preserved a minimum status of food security, defined as a situation where everyone has access at all times to food need for an active and healthy life.

Tunisia has undergone rapid food security improvements since the beginning of the 1960s,

thanks to a sound underlying economic and social process significantly influenced by public action. Increases in dietary energy supply — a widely available indicator of food consumption — from about 200 calories per person per day to nearly 3500 today, were achieved essentially through food imports. Extensive social safety nets at the household level have made sure that even the poorest get enough to eat.

Costa Rica has steadily improved its food security over the past 30 years, partly thanks to the strong government measures to reduce poverty. This central American country, after having financial and budgetary problems, had to apply measures to reduce the imbalances and adopt a more efficient production structure. Although less food is produced domestically now, export crop production has expanded, which allows more food to be available to consumers through imports.

Burkina Faso has pursued a mix of public policy measures, including macroeconomics policies such as the restructuring of public finance, soil conservation and water harvesting, new land settlement, household level income generation and transfer measures. Since the early 1990s this landlocked West African nation can boast of a steadily improving record in the feeding of its people, though problems still arise due to its vulnerability to drought.

In addition, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Ecuador and Zimbabwe have made impressive

progress in feeding their populations adequately. Their success can be duplicated in other countries including Bangladesh provided the emphasis is on efficiency, effectiveness and partnership involving governments, civil society, particularly non-governmental organisations and the private sector. Rural development programmes should strive to improve employment opportunities, particularly for the poor, within a diversified rural economy.

Bangladesh is far behind the status of the above mentioned countries in terms of food availability. However, it does not appear to be in a desperate situation. The economy has grown by more than 4 per cent annually since 1992. The rate of population growth has decreased to 2.17 per cent at present against 2.5 per cent in the mid-1970s. Total food production has declined from 6.4 children per woman to 3.9. It has already achieved substantial gains in foodgrain production during the last two decades. Rice, the dominant crop, increased from 11.2 million tons in 1970 to an average of 18.2 million tons in the early 1990s. Wheat production increased from about 100,000 tons to 1.1 million tons over the same period.

However, the impact of these gross production gains has been seriously eroded by high rates of population growth. In 1970, gross rice production provided the equivalent of 463 grams per capita per day which is equivalent to 2000 calories per day. Despite relatively high production growth rates, by fiscal year 1989

the equivalent of about 400 grams per capita per day was produced. After a dramatic rise to 454 grams in fiscal year 1990, per capita level again showed signs of decline from 1993 as rice production levelled off. Wheat production has helped to supplement gross foodgrain production on, contributing about 25 grams per capita per day in recent years.

There is some scope for expansion of wheat production but with a current high population growth rate of over 2 per cent, if the per capita production decline is to be reversed, the further substantial increase in foodgrain production required will have to come from rice. The growth in rice yields in the 1980s was due to the introduction of high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice and the adoption of irrigation and fertiliser technologies which enabled intensive use of the dry-season (Boro) months. There is still a significant amount of land suitable for the replacement of local varieties with HYV for boro crop. However, since 1990 the right market signals did not seem to have been in place to encourage that process and maintain the rising rice production trend of the 1980s.

Apart from these longer term food production issues, for the foreseeable future Bangladesh continues to be particularly vulnerable to sudden floods, cyclones and even droughts, all of which can cause extensive damage to food crops and a temporary deterioration in food security situation.

Commercial imports of

grains fell dramatically in 1991 and 1992, in part because of bumper rice harvests and over-flowing of government stocks. There has been some increase in commercial imports since, but this was well below the amount needed to cover the gap between local production and that required to ensure a consumption level of 2200 calories per capita per day. Even at their highest levels in 1985 and 1988 (when imports were three to four times higher than at present), commercial imports accounted for no more than 10 per cent of domestic production, and added only marginally (about seven per cent) to per capita food requirements.

Despite nearly a million tonne higher projected food production for 1996/97 over that of the last season, the country had to import a bulk amount of food for the third consecutive year. This years food import requirement is projected to be 1.97 million tonnes which is only 490 thousand tonnes less than last year. Food aid to the country which is showing trend the past years, has been targeted at 648 thousand tonnes this year. In its continuous slide, the food aid to the country went down from 1.5 million tonnes in 1990/91 to 743 thousand tonnes in 1995/96.

The burden to feed its growing population with imported food is very heavy for a poor country like Bangladesh. The country therefore needs to make an all out effort to increase the level of production of its food crop to the maximum extent possible. There is a major effort to do so as the current rate of yield for its major crops is much below the achievable rate. For example, the yield of Boro rice remains at 3.4 tonnes per hectare against the yield rate of 7.8 tonnes achieved in research stations. For this the country not only needs to in-

crease its investment in agriculture but also mobilise all kind of support to increase level of production in the sector.

To invest more in agriculture Bangladesh needs to campaign for more aid for investment in agriculture. Mere availability of aid may not be a sufficient condition to increase agricultural production in the country. There is a need for sound government policies to utilise the available aid for investment in agriculture. Although increase in production of agricultural crops in Bangladesh is the first condition to meet its food deficit situation, it may not be sufficient to make food available to all those who need it. To achieve such a goal there are needs for —

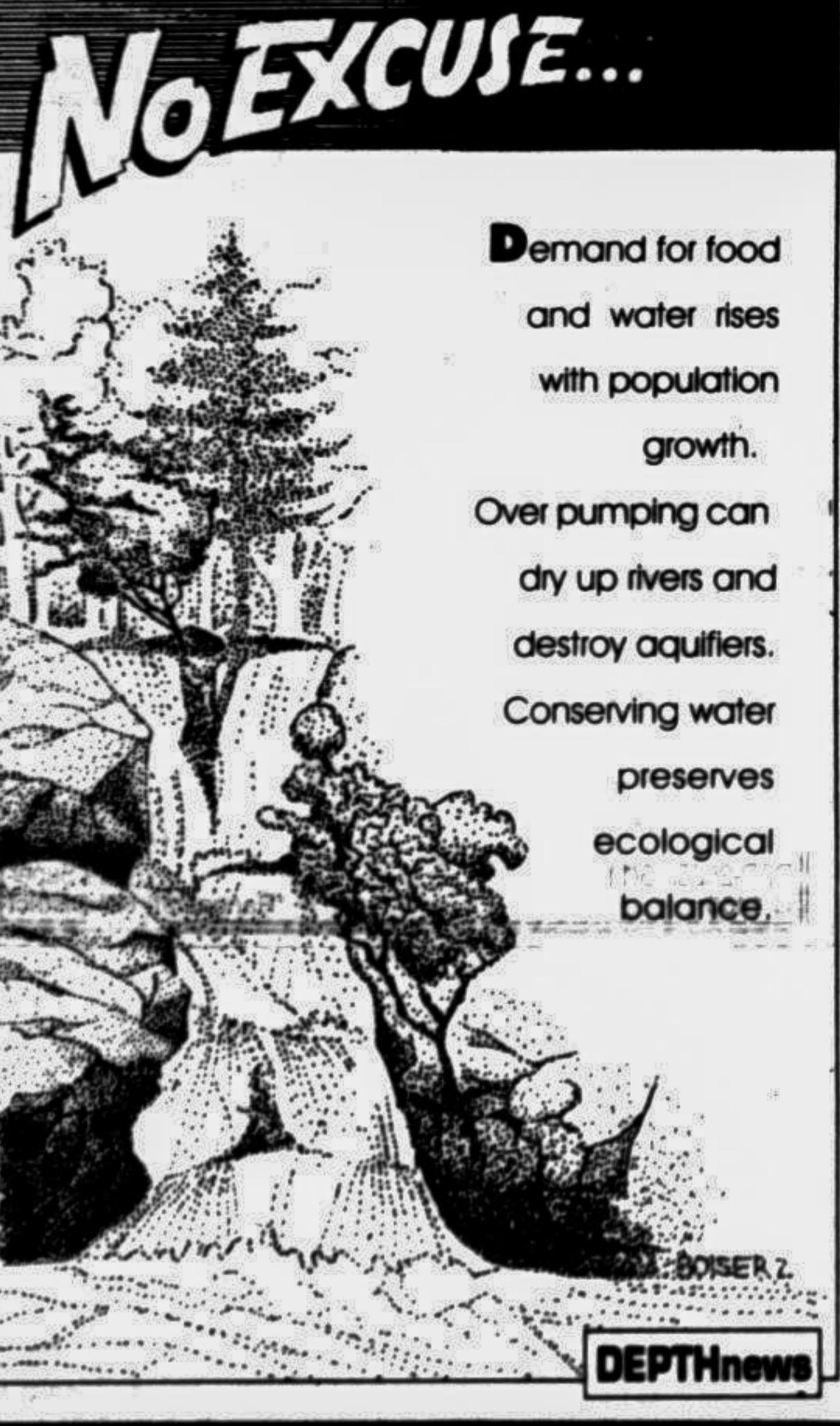
• dialogue between governments and civil society in determining national targets, policy formulation and design of practical action to achieve food for all;

• public awareness campaigns on the implications of hunger on development and lessons for successful assurance of food for all;

• mobilising civil society to take action in pursuit of food for all, in particular the human resources and communication opportunities provided by educational institutions, religious groups etc;

• people to people fund raising activities for support of projects aiming at reducing food insecurity at the household level.

As the main purpose of the World Food Summit is to develop awareness about the above mentioned actions, participation of Bangladesh in the Summit is therefore adequately justified. The real benefit so its participation will however be justified on the day when Bangladesh is able to pronounce that it has been able to provide food in adequate amount to all of its population.



## Female Circumcisers Defend 'Sacred Practice'

**F**EMALE circumcision is sacred and life without it would be meaningless, according to the Bundo Society, which represents the Soweto who carry out the operation in Sierra Leone.

About 100 Soweto held a three-day workshop in Freetown to establish guidelines for the practice, involving the removal of some or all of the female genitalia and known to critics as female genital mutilation.

"We have taken the lead to discuss a very sacred institution affecting the lives of our youth and adult population," said Haja Isha Sasso, president of the National Council of Muslim Women.

"It is a form of school where the initiates are taught useful acts of behaviour, social values and meaningful life patterns," she commented.

One of the key workshop recommendations was an end to media discussion of the issue, with fines of between \$200,000 and \$500,000 for anyone breaking the silence.

Another is that female circumcision should not be performed on a child under 10.

Said a spokesman of Sierra Leone's Medical and Dental Association: "Mutilators are hid-

The death of a 14-year-old Egyptian girl after a circumcision operation has increased calls for a government ban on the practice. But in Sierra Leone, Soweto who do the job have held a three-day workshop and are calling for legislation to protect the ritual.

Desmond King writes from Freetown

## Under the knife



## Number of women who suffer female genital mutilation

Nigeria	33m
Ethiopia	24m
Egypt	24m
Sudan	10m
Kenya	7m
Somalia	4.5m

## Mutilation is not required by any religion

## It is designed to preserve virginity, ensure marriageability and contain sexuality

2m girls a year have all or some of their genitalia cut away

ing behind the cloak of culture to bring death or permanent disability to our young ones.

"We shall fight these proposals to ensure they do not see the light of day."

The Association also warned against allowing hospitals to perform female circumcision in the hope of improving the safety of the operation, on the grounds that then we would have little hope of eradicating the practice."

Statistics on deaths and injuries arising from the operation are impossible to obtain, says Stella Sosay of the Births and Deaths Office, "because families are sworn to secrecy and will not disclose details."

Police representative Yabu Kamara says the police, too, are frustrated because nobody will give them any leads.

"People see it as a secret society," says a Christian priest, the Reverend Timothy Mends, who has received dozens of threatening letters as a result of his public stand against the practice, "and those who are

members are afraid to tell you what goes on behind the bush."

MPs who were asked whether they would support the Society's proposals were all against, even those from rural areas where the practice is most rooted.

Many rural men would not want to marry uncircumcised women, who are then likely to be ostracised.

They would probably agree with the Bundo Society members at the workshop who said that the aim of the ritual "is to cut down on the sexual desires of girls who go into marriage immediately after initiation."

"It is an easy way to reduce their sexual promiscuity that would normally lead to friction in the home between husbands and wives."

Soweto also support the practice because it gives them status and considerable payments, not only in money but through gifts such as rice palm oil and clothes.

Yoshio Koiko of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Sierra Leone describes female genital mutilation as an issue of great concern to the organisation.

— GEMINI NEWS

## The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Tuesday 12th October  
(All programmes are in local time. There may be changes in the programmes.)

BTV

3:00 Opening Announcement Al-Quran Programme Summary  
3:10 Recitation From the Geeta  
3:15 Documentary Film: Cinema Europe 4:00 News in Bangla 4:15 Esho Para Shishi 4:45 Cartoon Series: The Animals of Parthivwood 5:00 News in Bangla 5:20 Sangeeta: Modern Songs 6:00 News in Bangla 6:05 National Television Debate Competition 7:00 The News 7:05 Open University 7:25 Comedy Series: Sainfeld 8:00 News in Bangla 8:40 Drama Serial 10:00 News in English 10:30 Apan Priya 10:55 Mini Series 11:30 News in Bangla 11:35 Wednesday's programme 11:40 Close down

BBC

6:00am BBC World News 6:30 Newsnight 7:00 BBC Newsroom inc. World Business Report/Asia Today/24 Hours 10:00 BBC World Headlines 10:05 World Focus: Panorama 11:00 BBC Newsday 2:00 BBC World News 2:15 World Focus: Panorama 3:00 BBC World News 3:30 Time Out: Tomorrow's World 4:00 BBC Newsdesk 6:00pm BBC World News 6:15 World Focus: The Money Programme 7:00 BBC World News 7:15 World Business Report 7:30 BBC NewsHour Asia & Pacific 8:30 Time Out: The Travel Show 9:00 BBC World News 9:15 World Focus: Panorama 10:00 BBC World News 10:30 Time Out: Jeremy Clarkson's Motorworld 11:00 BBC World News 11:30 Time Out: Film '96 12:00 The World Today 2:00 BBC World Headlines 2:05 World Focus: Panorama 2:45 The Panel 2:30 BBC World News 3:30 Time Out: The Clothes Show 4:00 BBC World Report inc. World Business Report/24 Hours

## STAR PLUS

6:00am Home and Away 6:30 The Sullivans 7:00 Aerobics Oz Style 7:30 Star News 8:00 Sky News 8:30 Star News 9:00 Sky News 9:30 Aerobics Oz Style 10:00 Yan Can Cook 10:30 For Your Entertainment 11:00 Kate & Allie 11:30 The Oprah Winfrey Show 12:30 The X Files 1:30 Santa Barbara 2:00 The Bold & The Beautiful 3:00 Khandaan 3:30 Imthian 4:00 Home and Away 4:30 Lost in Space 5:30 Adventures Of Black Stallion 2:30 Inside Motorsports News — 4:30 World Windsurfing 4:40 Inside PGA Tour 4:30 Sports India 5:00 The Asian

VJ Ruby on Channel V.

1:30 Thai Kickboxing Highlights 2:30 Inside Motorsports News — 4:30 World Windsurfing 4:40 Inside PGA Tour 4:30 Sports India 5:00 The Asian

Forthcoming attractions on BTV

CTech Vision Limited's, the Bangladesh Representative of Warner Bros (a Time Warner Entertainment Company of USA) forthcoming blockbuster releases on BTV are:

Jules Verne's "Mysterious Island" — This timeless well known classic from Jules Verne centres around a group of escapees of the American civil war in a hot air balloon and land on an island and their adventures begin. Each episode is so gripping being full of adventure that a viewer cannot miss it for a moment. There are 44 episodes and all have been dubbed in Bangla which the viewers will thoroughly enjoy with their family.

Requiem for Granada — This 10 episode Bangla dubbed mini-series is set in the 7th century Spanish background when the glory of Muslim Ottomans was at its peak. The story starts from Boabdil the grandson of the Emir of Granada leaves his kingdom and enters into a flashback to the period of his grandfather. The richness of the set, the identification of the story line, the superb quality of

35mm camera work and the direction will surely make this series a block buster hit.

Queen — Another classic from Alex Haley (Roots fame) — Queen completes the story where Roots finished. This touching 8 episode mini-series of the life of Queen's daughter of an Alabama plantation owner and a slave — Caucasian in appearance she must walk the boundaries of prejudice and fear as she searches for a home between her two cultures of her heritage. The sequences are emotional charged and bound to bring tears in our eyes. A sure short hit.

Robocop — This ever popular action adventure Bangla dubbed series in 23 episodes is already well known in the world over. The central character Robocop part human and part machine is the centre piece of law enforcement. Each episode is thrilling as the one earlier and is sure to be enjoyed by BTV viewers.

CTech Vision is finalising arrangements for launching these programs from January 1997.

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Do you wanna come swimming, Jerry?

Sorry, but mice aren't very good swimmers, Jerry.