

CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Bangladesh should Make its Position Clear

by Dr Mustafizur Rahman

No nation should have a notion of its perpetual right of undue larger share of every thing. The industrialised countries can reduce emission in many ways, starting with even non-essential emissions.

As a follow up of the 1992 UN framework convention on climate change, at the so-called Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, signed by some 150 countries, where it was agreed that the industrialised nations would bring carbon dioxide emission to below 1990 levels by the year 2000, the Third United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP3) is scheduled to be held in December, 1997 in Kyoto, Japan. Meanwhile there have been held many mini-summits among the groups of developed and developing countries to come to certain consensus before the convention. The positions of the developed countries that actually emit most of carbon dioxide, and that of the developing countries which are at different levels of industrialisation or are just trying to initiate industrial development are different. The positions of the developed countries are also not the same. At the second UN Framework convention held in Geneva in July 1996, the members wanted the reduction targets to be legally binding after the year 2000. There were also arguments for country-by-country targets. Germany insisted on setting a common goal. No agreement could be reached.

As this convention is going to be held in Japan, the Japanese Government takes it as a prestige issue to work out some kind of agreement in this convention. It is airing different views like a cut of 5 per cent by the year 2008 and 2012, which is being criticised by the West. It is also trying to bring in complicated formula to maintain its position avoiding higher cut. There have been put forward the idea of Qualified Emission Limitation and Reduction Objectives (QELROs) with 5 per cent as a base reduction rate for deciding a reduction target for each country. The proposal intends to cover carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide in the list of greenhouse gases. The proposal differentiated the target for an individual country by emission per GDP, emission per capita and population growth. There

are also set a few other conditionalities.

The European Union has proposed that global emission targets for 2010 be set at 15 per cent below 1990 levels, while Japan informally proposed 5 per cent emission cut by 2010 from 1990 levels.

A UN draft document prepared for a special General Assembly session in June urged industrialised nations to boost aid to developing countries to help reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Though this might sound right, it may encourage the industrialised nations to tie their aid to the carbon dioxide emission, which may jeopardise the marginal development of the disadvantaged countries are trying to achieve. The USA has set up a five-year climate fund of US\$1 billion for nine targeted countries, namely Russia, Ukraine, India, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, Poland, the Philippine and South Africa.

The USA was not initially agreeable to any reduction in view of its impact on its industries and the economy. Japan made it a condition that the binding protocol to be adopted shall be effective only if the US ratifies it. The USA declared that it will agree if others do. This 'others' might imply the developing countries as well. The US Senate unanimously adopted a non-binding resolution on July 25, 1997 urging the President Bill Clinton administration not to sign any agreement that would exclude the developing countries from legally binding targets for reduction of the greenhouse gases. There are such ideas as compensating the OPEC countries by the developed countries because of their reduced sale resulting from the cut in emission. It is also proposed that when industrialised countries help developing nations reduce carbon dioxide emission through technological assistance or other measures, the developed countries should be allowed extra emissions equivalent to the reduction.

Things are getting more complicated by a recent Japanese Environment Agency commissioned research report that some of the gases used in

semiconductor process, insulation gas, freon gas substitutes such as HFC, etc have strong greenhouse effects. Sulfur hexafluoride (SF6) has a greenhouse effect of 24,000 times that of carbon dioxide while PFC has 7,000 to 10,000 times and HFC has 10,000 times. Coral reefs emit more carbon dioxide than they absorb. There is a growing tendency to include a limit on those gases as well.

Japan which is carrying out high-level bilateral and multi-lateral contacts to hammer out certain agreement could not convince the ASEAN members. China which is also a big emission country, but is not bound by the convention, showed some understanding.

What should then be the position of a technologically and economically backward country like Bangladesh with a population of more than 100 million? Our emission is purely insignificant in global context. The USA annual carbon dioxide emission volume in 1990 was some 1.3 billion tons — 22 per cent of the world total, and more than 33 per cent of the industrialised nations' total. The total global was emission in 1991 was 21.613 billion tons, where US accounted for 23 per cent, ex-USSR for 17 per cent, China 11 per cent, Japan 15 per cent, Germany 5 per cent, UK 3 per cent, Canada 2 per cent and others 35 per cent. Though realised so late, reduction of CO2 emission is a sensible and immediate mission for the humanity. For a good living the people have chosen so far, some emission has become inevitable for the time being. What Bangladesh emits in year, if not decades does not match one day's emission of USA or Japan. If Bangladesh is to remain at 1990 level, it would remain in mediaeval age. As the purpose of reducing the level is for the safety of the Earth and the humanity, the per capita sharing is the most logical approach. It is understandable that such an idea would not be accepted by the big emitters, but that concept must be borne in mind for fairness. There have been floating ideas of emission tax or energy tax or trading sharing of quota and so on. If

any nation's per capita emission is less than the envisaged per capita of the world population, it should be allowed to sell its quota to other emitters who also shall gradually reduce their emission to approach the global per capita emission. The nations with too low a level of standard of living shall not be obstructed by any protocol until a reasonably good standard of living is ensured for each of its citizenry. No nation should have a notion of its perpetual right of undue larger share of every thing. The industrialised countries can reduce emission in many ways, starting with even non-essential emissions. Slight sacrifice in domestic heating and cooling by a few degrees along automobile model change cycle, strengthened recycling, minimization of military exercises, air drill or war game, improved mass-transit, intensive afforestation and so on can also be of some help before highly efficient technology is developed to minimise carbon dioxide emission.

I would urge the Bangladesh authority concerned to seriously do all the necessary homework and make its position clear, if necessary, in consultation with countries with similar position. No pressure of allurements or threat of aid or persuasion alone should make us sign a protocol that is not for our long-term national interest.

There is no scope of "reduction" for Bangladesh. I believe the world body shall be rational enough not to impose any unjust condition on us, but we shall have to do our best to clarify our position and defend it. It is expected that our wise delegation to COP3 shall do their part well not to frustrate the people by agreeing to something that will virtually block our future development without contributing almost nothing to the reduction of greenhouse effect gas emission from global context.

The writer is Director General, International Industry and Technology Promotion Agency, Tokyo and Chairman, Institute of Development Strategy, Dhaka

Preparing National Agenda 21

by Quamrul Islam Chowdhury

Can we now chart our future of a 21st century Bangladesh? Can we prepare Bangladesh Agenda 21 with essential elements of a shared vision of a better quality of life for all through the development of a just, economically vibrant, caring, creative, moral, spiritual yet cohesive society...

CAUGHT up in rampant poverty, increasing population, natural resource degradation, low land-ratio, recurring natural hazards and national institutional capacity, sluggish economic growth, low rate of investment, high unemployment and underemployment, low literacy and predominance of malnutrition, environmental shocks or surprises such as arsenic pollution, Bangladesh with its 120 million people is now facing major challenges in charting the nation's own destiny. Certainly, the magnitude and seriousness of the problems the nation face are daunting. But as a nation, surely, we can chart our future.

In post-Rio era, China, the Philippines, Singapore and others have already shown it. We must swiftly respond to and heed the call of the Earth Summit held in Rio five years back when the world leaders offered the global village a blueprint for a global agenda for change popularly known as the Agenda 21. In that largest-ever meeting of world leaders, they have made critical decisions about how we can run our economies and secure our future. In that monumental gathering, 179 nations agreed to establish national mechanisms to formulate and implement their own agenda of action for sustainable development. But Bangladesh could not make its own national agenda. True, it has made significant progress by preparing globally acclaimed National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP), Bangladesh Health and Environment Action Plan (BHEAP), Forestry Mater Plan and National Conservation Strategy. Again those plans and strategy are yet to enter into implementation phase.

Can we now run for formulation and implementing a comprehensive Bangladesh Agenda 21? Can we ensure that it will echo the voice of the people in the depth of its substance, in the comprehensiveness of its vision, in the set of principles it advocates and in the broad range of parameters it delineates to guide this nation towards a sustainable path into the future? If we REALLY want, it then we must involve all sectors of the society in the formulation of the document by involving an extensive consultative process as we have followed during the formulation phase of NEMAP.

What is Agenda 21? The 1992 Earth Summit has adopted a global plan of action, popularly known as Agenda 21, to address the most critical issues we face as a global community. Agenda 21 is the vision of the world leaders to face the challenges of 21st century. Agenda 21, the 700-page programme of action for change agreed by 179 states in Rio, will serve as the guideline for environment and development policies for the next century. Agenda 21, explains that population, consumption and technology are the primary driving forces of environmental change. It lays out what needs to be done to reduce wasteful and inefficient consumption patterns in some parts of the world, while encouraging increased but sustainable development in others. It offers policies and programmes to achieve a sustainable balance between consumption, and population and the Earth's life-supporting capacity. It describes some of the techniques that require to be developed to provide for human needs while carefully managing natural resources. It is in a sense a blueprint on how to make the future development of our world economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. A major theme of Agenda 21 is combating poverty by giving the poor more access to resources they need to live sustainably.

What is Sustainable Development? The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as "meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs". But our concept of development must be grounded on both an image and a shared vision of our society. The essence of sustainable development in our case should be in the harmonious integration of

a sound and vibrant economy, good governance and ecological balance to ensure that development is a life-enhancing process function. The development should be defined in terms of human development now and through future generations. The key actors of sustainable development in our case are of course the government, private sector and civil society.

Global Perspective: By adopting Agenda 21, industrialised countries recognised that they have a greater role in clearing up the environment than the poor nations who cause relatively less pollution. Though the richer nations promised to more funding to help developing countries develop in ways that have lower environmental impacts, in reality the richer nations are not coming up in expected way. During the special session of the UN General Assembly popularly known as Rio plus 5 held in New York in June last to take stock and to see implementation status of the conventions including Agenda 21 signed at Rio five years back, some of the developed countries, especially US, rebuffed calls for a convention to protect forests, and water-downed a text on global warming.

Where are we now? There is no denying that it is a daunting task to achieve sustainable development for a country like Bangladesh which is the eighth most populous country in the globe with a very low per capita income. The country's population growth, if unabated, will be 175 million by 2025 further worsening the density, deteriorating the environment, putting more increasing pressure on its limited natural resources and making difficult the national planning itself for such a huge population.

Given the population growth, economic trends are not quite encouraging. Despite economic growth, low levels of savings and investments, widening budgetary and trade deficits and land degradation remain as major concerns. Urbanisation trends are also areas of concern while difficulties in the implementation of agrarian and urban land re-

forms and rural development programmes have contributed to unplanned and uncontrolled urbanisation. Cities have deteriorated as human habitats, beset with intractable and often interrelated problems like pollution, slums, water shortages, loadshedding, etc.

Human development, science and technology and institutional trends are improving though at a very slow pace. We must accelerate the pace to face the challenges of sustainable development.

Where do we want to go? Can we now chart our future of a 21st century Bangladesh? Can we prepare Bangladesh Agenda 21 with essential elements of a shared vision of a better quality of life for all through the development of a just, economically vibrant, caring, creative, moral, spiritual yet cohesive society characterised by appropriate productivity, participatory and democratic processes and tolerance and living in harmony within the limits of the carrying capacity of the nature? We have to concretise the vision through this National Agenda 21 describing a path of images for our society and ecosystem.

How do we get there? We then have to work out an operational framework and action agenda to achieve a sustainable development that draws out the full human potential and at the same time it should be ecologically friendly, economically sound, politically empowering, socially just, spiritually liberating, gender sensitive, based on holistic science, technologically appropriate, based on our values and ethos and rested upon strong institutional foundations.

Our national agenda should not duplicate but build on existing and ongoing initiatives related to sustainable development.

Implementation, monitoring and assessment of the national agenda would be a challenging task. How best we can run for that for a better future of our nation.

The writer is General Secretary of Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh

INTER-BOARD MIGRATION

The Process Must be Simplified

by Syed Abu Royhan

AFTER introduction of uniform syllabuses in all the five boards of the country, the need for a board-transfer certificate i.e. a board transfer processing is immensely questioned by the students' guardians.

Eva, a candidate for the coming 1998 Secondary School Certificate Examination had to be transferred and got herself admitted into a school belonging to a different board. The present system required for a board-transfer process including no objection certificate, getting a new registration number issued by the authority of the board under which she got herself admitted in a school owing to her father's transfer recently. Many well-wishers, especially, the teachers of her school urged greatly on her appearing at the SSC examination from the previous school to avoid all such botherations. Had she been a boy, the matter could be thought of. But our society hardly leaves any scope to allow an adolescent girl to be away from her guardians, even for examination purpose. Cases like this are not very few across the country.

The disadvantages of the prevailing system of board-transfer may be summed up as follows:

1) It imposes some kind of mental exertion or pressure upon the candidate affecting his or her seriousness in preparation for the examination.

2) It obsesses his or her guardians like a permanent mental discomfort that remains affecting their day to day activities till they are relieved of the problem.

3) It also causes undue and unwarranted administrative pressure upon the authority of the school where the student concerned gets herself or himself admitted.

4) It also entails loss of money and time to the guardian of the student for making correspondences or personal appearance at offices concerned for quite a number of times.

Now, in the light of the above problems, let us try to find out the reasons why the prevailing board-transfer system should be simplified and rationalized:

1) Uniform syllabuses have been introduced in all the five boards. As a result, the students as well as the candidates would not suffer at all, in spite of board-transfer due to that uniformity in syllabuses.

2) The contents of the questions in the examinations are also the same in all the five boards.

3) The dates of examinations are also the same in all the five boards.

4) The publications of results of both SSC and HSC examinations occur on the same date and time throughout the country.

Why then so much of both-creation (due to board-transfer)? It is not understood why a student having a registration number from Jessore Board should not be allowed to sit for either SSC or HSC examination in Chittagong Board with the same registration number (with simple incorporation, if needed formally)? Where lies the need for procuring a different registration number to be issued by the authority of the Board under which she or he would sit for the same examination at the cost of agony, toils, time, money and other psychological embarrassments?

In fact, the uniform syllabuses, contents of question papers etc. have made all the five boards come under the same (fruitful and effective) arena of process or thinking. Under the present system, one cannot opine that a student of Dhaka Board is, on an average, better than that of Chittagong Board. It is, of course, a positive sign, because all the examinees of the country are measured with the same yard-stick.

Furthermore, a student passing SSC examination from either of the boards, can easily get himself/herself admitted to the higher class under any of the boards if not otherwise screened out.

One question may arise, if

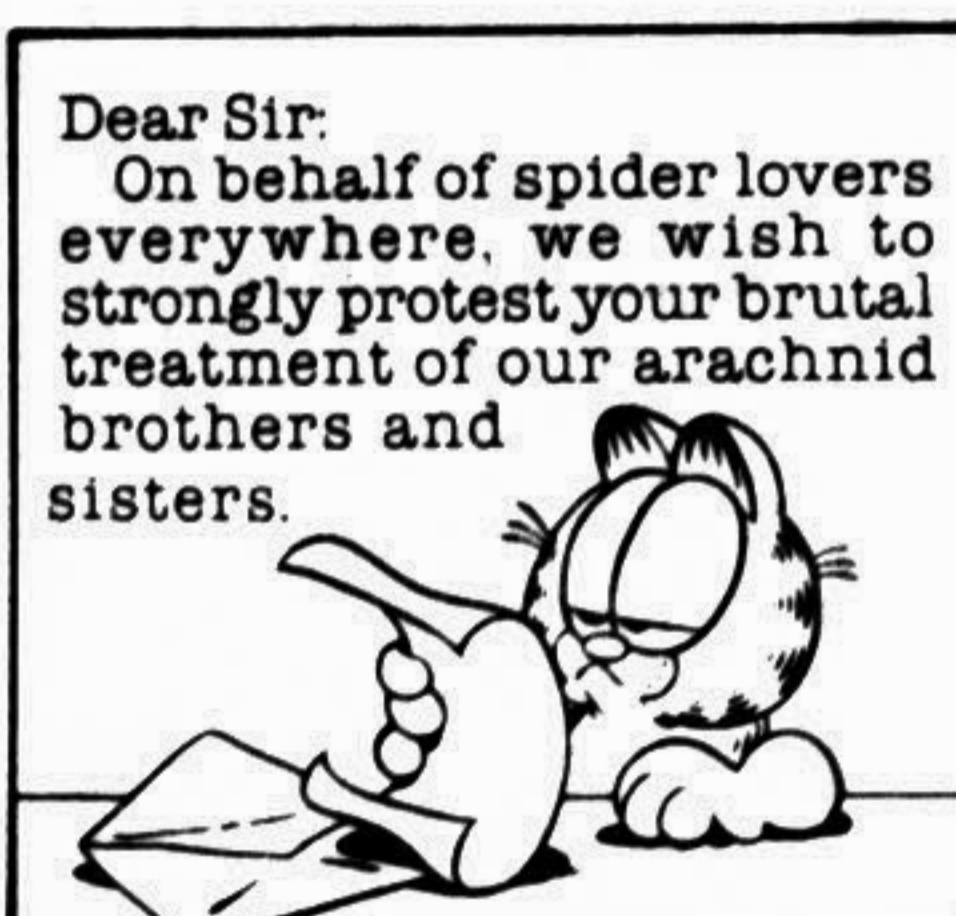
the system of registration is changed or simplified, cannot be free from forgery. The answer to such a question is simple. A registration number either genuine or false is issued from the same venue. The kind of corrupt persons are there too, as elsewhere, to do the job. If cautious steps and punitive measures are taken against such elements, the evil can be eradicated.

More alarming is the fact that if a candidate cannot procure a fresh registration number from the Board, where he or she is supposed to get herself admitted, immediately before the process of filling up the forms by being transferred for any reason, he or she might not be allowed to sit for the examination or if he or she sits for the results might remain withheld — causing a damage to his or her career.

The present age is the age of simplification and speed. If the registration number issued by one board, is honoured and valued by the other board, two positive outcome might occur: (1) During the assessment of the probable number of examinees, the duplication of a single candidate in two boards could be avoided; (2) The candidate and his or her guardian might not suffer from any extra mental agony and pressure.

The writer is an Additional Deputy Commissioner.

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Metropolitan

Berger Young Painters' Art show opens

By Staff Correspondent

The country's industrialists should sponsor various painting competitions and offer stipends to encourage budding painters, said young artists, who took part in the 'Second Berger Young Painters' Award '97', while talking to The Daily Star yesterday at the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University.

Berger Paints Bangladesh, an agent of UK-based Berger company, organised the painting competition.

Berger managing director Masih-ul-Karim yesterday inaugurated a three-day showing of 40 selected paintings of the contest at the Zainul Gallery of the Arts Institute.

He told The Daily Star that Berger has been organising the contest for two years to encourage young artists of the country. 'We have plans to expand this kind of competition,' Karim said.



Visitors at Berger Young Painters Art Exhibition '97 that began at the Zainul Gallery of the Fine Arts Institute, DU, yesterday. —Star photo

Weather

Thundershower likely

Light rain or thundershowers may occur at one or two places over Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal and Sylhet divisions during the next 24 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Besides this, Met Office said, weather is likely to remain mainly dry elsewhere over the country with cloudy sky.

No appreciable change in night temperature is expected.

Weathermen forecast that weather is likely to deteriorate in the subsequent two days and improve in another five days.

The sun sets today at 5:12 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:15 am.

Japanese team discusses ways to expand trade link

A 7-member high-powered Japanese business delegation led by president of WHY Management Consultant Company limited Shinomiya Shigeyuki called on State Minister for Land Alhaj Rashed Mosharraf here yesterday, reports UNB.

The delegation discussed the ways and means to expand appropriate business and other activities to bring and end to poverty and hunger and strengthen the economic base in Bangladesh.

While talking to the delegation, the State Minister said the present government has been working with utmost sincerity to eradicate poverty and hunger from this soil.

With a view to achieving this goal it has taken up many poverty alleviation projects, including Adarsha Gram Project and Char Development Project.

The Hunger project, which is working in Bangladesh in bringing an end to poverty and hunger, has arranged the meeting.

DUTA call to maintain discipline on the campus

By DU Correspondent

The Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) urged all concerned to maintain discipline on the university campus.

The DUTA also called upon the concerned authorities to take appropriate action against the trouble — managers on the campus — no matter whether they belonged to the ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) or the BNP-led Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD).

President of the DUTA Prof Mostafa Chowdhury, talking to The Daily Star, said that the culture of hall capture should not be tolerated.

We have also met the Prime Minister and the Home Minister and urged for total elimination of the terrorists from the campus irrespective of their party affiliation, Prof Chowdhury said.

When asked about the recent incidents of hall capture by rival factions of the BCL, the DUTA president said that DUTA had requested the Vice Chancellor to take necessary action against the terrorists from a neutral point of view.



Dr Abdullah Al Muti Sharfuddin presented certificates to participants of an IT training programme for women scientists held in the city recently.

HERE and THERE

BPATC

A fifteen-day orientation course for the thana nirbahi officers (TNOs), organised by Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre (BPATC), began in the city yesterday. The course is designed specially for the field level administrative officers. Twelve senior assistant secretaries are taking part in the course, says a press release.

Establishment Secretary Mohammad Mahe Alam inaugurated the course.

IUB

A group of seven students from Mankato State University of USA, led by Associate Professor Dr Bikasha Nandy, has arrived in Dhaka on a five-day visit to Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

In Bangladesh, their study is being facilitated by the Population Environment Department of IUB's School of Environmental Science and Management.

IT workshop for women scientists concludes

A week-long IT training programme for women scientists, researchers and technologists was held at CIRDP training centre in the city recently, says a press release.

The programme using computers was organised by the Association for Advancement of Information Technology (AAIT), with financial assistance from the Commonwealth Science Council (CSC) and in cooperation with the Ministry of Science and Technology.

Judy Johnson, Deputy Director, Science and Technology Division and Deputy Secretary, CSC, Commonwealth Secretariat UK, came to Dhaka to observe the training workshop.

The certificate-awarding ceremony of the workshop, held at a city restaurant, was presided over by Lutfor Rahman, Executive Director, AAIT. Dr Abdullah Al Muti Sharfuddin was the chief guest while Judy Johnson was special guest. Science and Technology Secretary Fazlul Rahman was also present.