

MEGACITIES

Relocation of Industries and Services Must be in Agenda

by A Husnain

Suburban schemes have to be given priority, with ring rail transport system. Dhaka lies in a low-lying region surrounded by water on three sides.



In developing countries, the indigenous small industries are located within the city limits, due to lack of infrastructure facilities outside. During the initial development period, as the small industrial units expand (with export demands), the industrial units or factories are reluctant to shift to new expanded areas selected to handle the growth during the next couple of decades.

living are upset, setting up distortions, which are very difficult to normalise if remedial measures are delayed. The implementation of these measures are restricted due to financial and infrastructure constraints.

The third problem of the megacities is the invasion of residential areas by business, trade, and NGO offices, and the setting up of hundreds of private schools and academic institutions. Even the private universities are going high-rise on rented accommodation; desperately waiting for allocation of plots for permanent campuses.

The growth cone is northwards towards Gazipur and Madhupur reserve forest areas. All these factors are well known to the public planners, but action is slow, and decision-making slower. There are two overriding clauses: the resistance to relocation; and more waiting period cannot be allowed.

India to Have the First Biodiversity Law in the World?

by Durga Ray

INDIA may soon be the first country in the world to have a law for the protection of biodiversity, if one goes by the statement of the country's environment minister.

"We are planning to bring in legislation for the protection of India's biodiversity," Union Environment and Forest Minister S.P. Prabhoo has been quoted as saying. "It will be the first of its kind in the world."

With the grave threat India's biodiversity is facing, the legislation won't come a day too soon. The country is said to be on the verge of a "biodiversity holocaust" with about 750 species of plants and animals on the verge of extinction.

An estimate by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) says that nearly 79 of India's 372 mammal species, 44 of 1,228 bird species, 15 of 428 reptile species and three of 204 amphibian species are considered endangered.

bird species in India range from the better known ones like the one-horned rhinoceros, Royal Bengal tiger, musk deer, red panda, snow leopard and Great Indian bustard to those like the white-winged wood duck, black-neck crane, lesser florican, Bengal florican, pygmy hog, slender loris, lion-tailed macaque, golden langur and the brown antler deer.

Even domestic flora and fauna are threatened. Breeding of only high-yielding varieties of cattle has led to the gradual phasing out of a number of indigenous cattle strains, feels Vandana Shiva of Navdanya, an NGO fighting for the conservation of biodiversity.

"You spray your fields with pesticides, you kill all the birds. You use herbicides, the kind used in the Vietnam war, and you wipe out plants," Shiva said, adding that even weeds were important part of a field ecosystem.

Added to that is the "abysmal lack of education displayed by our planners, politicians and businessmen," asserts Bittu Sahgal, a Mumbai-based environmentalist and editor of the wildlife magazines, 'Sanctuary' and 'Cub'.

These people are living in the past, when science had not yet provided the rationale for conservation," Sahgal said.

Not that India hasn't had laws on wildlife and environmental conservation. "There is no point in having a law if it is not being enforced," Talwar says. Referring to the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, Talwar says, "It is fairly elaborate and if enforced properly it can make a lot of difference."

He says that the responsibility of looking after wildlife rests with the government. "Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play only a very minor role," he says, adding that only the government could spend the kind of money required.

Whether it enacts -- and implements -- another law, or enforces the one that already exists, it is clear that the government has to act fast. The alarm bells just haven't stopped ringing.

For Nature (WWF), told IANS. "There is no point in having a law if it is not being enforced... the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, is fairly elaborate and if enforced properly it can make a lot of difference."

He says that the responsibility of looking after wildlife rests with the government. "Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play only a very minor role," he says, adding that only the government could spend the kind of money required.

Whether it enacts -- and implements -- another law, or enforces the one that already exists, it is clear that the government has to act fast. The alarm bells just haven't stopped ringing.

— IANS

Now it's Brazilian Forest Fire What the Blazes!

by Carlos Tautz

CHARRED black smouldering ground has replaced the lush dense rain forests of Roraima, Brazil's northernmost province where flames lit a year ago have devastated nearly 25 per cent of the province. Locked in a grim battle for survival against the roaring fires are 1,500 firefighters from Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela, possibly the first and last line of defence of the native Yanomami Indians.

The fires are estimated to have devoured some 12,000 head of cattle — almost 4000 are dying daily — and destroyed practically all crops, except the irrigated rice.

The population of Roraima is suffering from the effects of the holocaust. As in the case of Indonesia last year children have become a major casualty with 200 reporting everyday to the hospital with respiratory ailments. In the Yanomami area, media reports state that entire communities have had to migrate in search of water as their streams and rivers have dried up, others survive on water from hastily dug wells.

Malaria has increased significantly, and patients cannot be removed to hospital because of the smoke-induced bad flying conditions. Rise in cases of malnutrition, respiratory diseases and malaria is now expected.

The fires have exposed the lack of preparation for forest firefighting and the absence of a special task force or requirement anywhere in the Brazilian Amazon. Even the army and the air force which have many bases, planes, helicopters and battalions in Roraima, do not have any firefighting equipment or trained personnel.

"People want to treat this like a natural disaster, like an earthquake or tidal wave, where nothing can be done. But it's not just El Nino, there are economic and social factors that also have an impact," says Philip Fernandes, a scientist at the National Institute for Amazon Research in the jungle city of Manaus.

Only when the fires hit the international media in a big way did the government take action. Friends of the Earth (FOE) accused the Brazilian government of failing to respond to offers of assistance from the Disaster Relief Branch of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The UNEP offer was to send a

small team of specialists to Roraima to elaborate an emergency plan, which would include the use of the technologies used in Indonesia.

It took the Brazilian government four long months to accept the UNEP offer. The acceptance provoked a strong reaction from military leaders. General Luis Gonzaga Lessa, military commander of the Amazon, went on record to say that international aid was unwelcome, because it meant foreign interference.

General Luiz Edmundo Carvalho, commander of the First Jungle Brigade, said that left to itself the Amazon Military Command could offer all the help needed. This spurred President Fernando Henrique Cardoso to call a special meeting of the Foreign Affairs and National Defence Council to call a special meeting of the Foreign Affairs and National Defence Council to discuss the situation in Roraima on March 26, 1998.

It was finally decided to accept a \$5 million World Bank loan for fighting the fire and set up a task force under General Carvalho to coordinate all activities in Roraima. Significantly, according to a newspaper report, it was also decided to begin a campaign to change international opinion that Brazil is unconcerned about the fate of the Amazon jungles.

Governmental corruption, illegal logging, and the burning of thousands of hectares for quick profit, all too apparent in Brazil, is a global phenomenon.

According to the Washington based World Watch Institute (WWI) the fires raging in Indonesia and Brazil are symptoms of this global trend of accelerating forest loss.

Half the forests that once covered the Earth are gone, and deforestation has been accelerating the last 30 years," says Janet Abramovitz, a senior WWI researcher.

Between 1980 and 1995 at least 200 million hectares of forests vanished — an area larger than Mexico. Government policies and subsidies encourage the large-scale forest

exploitation and infrastructure developments in forested areas says Abramovitz.

"Subsidies for below-cost logging, road building, and infrastructure are so large that governments are essentially paying businessmen to take the timber and convert the land to other uses," she adds.

Indonesia's timber subsidies cost the government \$2.5 billion in lost revenues in 1990, according to the Abramovitz report. In the United States, timber sales from national forests lost over one billion dollars from 1992 to 1994, because of subsidies.

In Russia, according to the WWI, 12 million hectares are illegally logged each year, compared to only two million hectares of legal logging. Timber corporations also have very close links with the seat of power in most nations. A factory for example took precedence over reforestation in Indonesia when President Suharto diverted money from the nation's reforestation fund to build a paper factory for his personal friend and "timber king" Bob Hasan.

Hasan is also a member of the Suharto cabinet. Auditors of the IMF were amazed to find that money to fight the devastating forest fires had been skillfully steered towards Suharto's son's failing car company. In Cambodia, the prime ministers and the military illegally control the forests and the timber trade. According to the WWI, profits bypass the treasury and fund different factions in the civil war.

Abramovitz claims that since 1970, the international trade in forest products has tripled to \$142 billion and a large part of the illegal trade goes unreported. Prior to the collapse of the Asian tiger economies, demand in Asia had been growing faster than anywhere else with growth rates in the consumption of wood panels more than three times the world average.

Having depleted their domestic forests, many Asian timber companies are now

moving elsewhere. The area of Amazon forest under lease to Asian companies quadrupled in 1996 to more than 12 million hectares, according to Abramovitz. A more shocking example is that a Malaysian company controls over 60 per cent of the timber trade in Papua New Guinea.

But it seems there is still hope despite the increased destruction of forests. Governments, businesses and consumers have been developing new relationships with forests, finding innovative ways to meet demand for forest products while still preserving the long-term values of intact forests, suggests Abramovitz.

While paper recycling and reducing paper consumption are essential steps, sustainable forestry management is the key, according to the WWI. Even though the definition of such forest management is still in the process of evolution, the Mexico-based Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) has developed a set of guiding principles for sustainable management.

Primary forests and other sites of major environmental, social or cultural significance are not to be logged under these guidelines. Conserving the biological diversity of the forest and also respecting the ownership of forest by indigenous communities is another major plank of the argument.

Consumers have also changed their attitude and are beginning to demand products from sustainably managed forests. The FSC has already certified more than 6.3 billion hectares in 20 countries as sustainably managed.

Some governments have also woken up to the disastrous side-effects of their subsidies and are beginning to change policies to better protect their forests by eliminating the hand-outs, putting an end to road building in forests, and strengthening the law enforcement machinery.

"By scaling up the efforts already underway we can begin to turn away from today's destructive relationship," says Abramovitz, "and move towards managing our forests so that all of their benefits and services, from timber and jobs to flood control and climate regulation, are available for generations to come."

CSE/Down To Earth Features

All that Glitters ...

by Rehana Parveen Ruma

Abandoned by their husbands poor women are arriving in the capital in search of job. But little they know the glittering city can become a slave house for them.

WHEN Aleya Begum stepped out of a bus at the crowded Gabtali terminal she had only Tk 50 tied in a knot of her worn sari. She was greeted by a cacophony of traffic and a wave of people. And she wept remembering her small village and one of her two sons she had left behind.

Aleya, her first son nestled on her lap, had never been to Dhaka before. She never thought of leaving her village and relatives. Yet a journey to Dhaka was her last attempt to survive and feed the two young children.

The 32-year-old woman was deserted by her husband because her poor family could not pay any dowry two years ago. Aleya had found none at her village home in Rajshahi district to depend. Rather her neighbors advised her to go to Dhaka or any other city to earn a livelihood.

Thus they have pushed me to the capital," Aleya said sitting on a pavement throbbing with pedestrians.

There was a time when only the poor men used to migrate to urban areas, particularly the capital city, but over the years the situation have undergone many changes with the increase in female population and rise of poverty level.

Hit by natural calamities like river erosion, recurring floods and drought, hundreds of poor people, some of them with their family members, migrate to the city to look for jobs every day.

With jobs in short supply many of these people, especially women and children are forced to beg to survive. Some are cheated into red light areas.

Having landed in the capital, they pass their first several days on footpaths, at bus terminals, railway stations and laundhats looking for people they know. And one day they make place for them in slums and find out job either as household workers or day labourers.

Aleya also had faced the same problem. After sleeping several nights on the city streets, she managed a job as housemaid and later she joined a garment factory with help of a girl.

After getting the job at garment factory, she married a man younger to her. But the new husband left her when she was five-month pregnant.

"At this stage I thought of going back to my village. But I could not fearing that the villagers will now raise question whether I'm carrying a legitimate child," she sighed.

More rural poor migrate to Dhaka city than the other cities and towns. Because Dhaka is well connected with the rest of the country and it still can provide jobs and business. Poor people are pouring into the city everyday in trucks, buses, launches and trains, raising the number of floating people in an alarming rate.

According to a coordinated report of the United Nations on the prospect of Bangladesh's human resources, the unabated poverty is breaking the country's age old family bonds and encouraging women to join the outdoor work.

The report showed that 25 per cent people migrate to the capital for lack of job in rural areas, 33 per cent in search of a better living, 9 per cent with

their relatives, 2 per cent to help their families, 12 per cent due to transfer and 19 per cent for other reasons.

Shahnaz Haq Hossain, a teacher of Dhaka University Geography Department, has recently conducted a study on migrated people, particularly on those who came to the capital.

According to her findings, rural women more or less remain unemployed throughout the year, except during the harvest, and most of them engage themselves in sewing kantha that is used as blanket or bed sheet.

When they migrate to urban areas in the hope of changing their economic condition, they face another problem: their old age values. They have to live in slums and sleep with their husbands and children at the same room. But they can suit to the situation quickly.

The UN report also mentioned that the sun-dwellers usually fall victims to rape, terrorism, stealing and social nuisance like eve teasing.

"We have got many changes in our social system. There was time when the male family members used to go out for earning money. Now the female members have become aware about their economic emancipation. So, they are also coming out in large number, both from educated and uneducated section of the society, to join the outdoor activities," Ms. Haq said.

There is also instance, she said, that many women after getting job in towns helped the male members of their family to settle in urban areas and this is more common among the

garment workers.

This may one good aspect of the migration. In a sense the women are taking the responsibility.

According to Rita Afsar, a researcher at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, the migrated women work hard to acclimatise with the new situation. If they get jobs other senior male colleagues sometimes exploit them. In some cases women are also taking the advantage."

In their struggle for survival there are women who get involved with gangs of criminals. In course of a study on migrated women Rita came across drug women who are used by drug traffickers. For example, the illegal drugs and kept hidden with the women who cooperate with the traffickers.

A large part of the migrated women get jobs in the garment factories. Many of them become victims of sexual abuse.

Over the years the migrated women have learned from sufferings. They have started organising themselves though not in a way the trade unions do. The migrated women set up a network among them. This network becomes principal source of information about women willing to work as housemaids.

When Aleya came to the city she hardly knew any one else. She is now an experienced resident who knows many this and many people.

She is now in a position to help the new migrants from her area. This is one of the reasons why women, who can afford to live in their villages, feel encouraged to travel to the cities. — News Network

Lanka to Host SAARC Trade Fair in September

by Sugeeswara Senadhira

SRI Lanka will host the second South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Trade Fair in September 1998, two months after the summit meeting of the SAARC scheduled in Colombo for July 29-31.

The week-long fair will be held from September 8 to 15 at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall in the capital city.

India will put up the largest number of stalls among foreign participants. In all 150 stalls will be allotted to six SAARC members while Sri Lanka will have 100 trade stalls. Titled 'Opportunities for Regional Growth', the fair has been organised by the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Sri Lanka (FCCISL) in association with the Ministry

of Internal and External Trade. FCCISL President Patrick Amarasinghe said that both public and private sector organisations would participate in the fair, which will cost the federation Rs. 20 million.

Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga will inaugurate the fair to which all South Asian commerce ministers have been invited. Commerce Minister Kingsley Wickremaratne said, "It will be a show window for South Asian products," Wickremaratne said.

"We expect over 1,500 overseas buyers to visit the fair," he said. The first SAARC Trade fair was held in India in 1996. While Pakistan was to host the second event, Islamabad, following a request made by Wickremaratne, agreed to allow Sri Lanka to host it to coincide

with the country's golden jubilee of independence.

"The SAARC has made a fair progress and with dedication and commitment we can mould SAARC into a dynamic economic bloc. This trade fair will definitely help us to achieve that objective," Wickremaratne said.

"The main emphasis of SAARC is to strengthen economic cooperation in the region," Amarasinghe said. "Hence, the SAARC trade fair will be able to help that objective by projecting the image of SAARC member countries through the full range of their respective economic and trade activities."

Another area where the promotions would help is tourism, Amarasinghe said. "It will be an ideal show window as many visitors are expected

from outside the region -- from America, Europe, the Middle East, the Asia-Pacific, South-east Asia and Africa."

Trade analysts pointed out that such fairs and other promotional activities would help increase intra-regional trade. "South Asia's share of international trade is only three per cent and active promotions are necessary to increase the trade ratio," Douglas Premasiri, former director of commerce, said.

He pointed out that the slow growth of trade within South Asia was mainly due to restraint by the member states, paucity of products and lack of high quality. "Regional cooperation and South-South trade will be the best remedies for economic ills of the developing nations," he said.

— India Abroad News Service

Garfield®

by Jim Davis

