

It's Flooding Everywhere . . .

PHOTO FEATURE



Dhaka: Manda

Photo — Sk Enamul Huq



Dhaka: Mugdapara

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Sherpur: Maligee in Nalitabari Thana

Photo — Ratan Chowdhury



Sylhet: Singair in Golapganj Thana

Photo — Iqbal Siddique

Heat Wave Prompts UNEP to Issue "Wake-up" Call

by Chander Mehra

UNEP urged policy-makers worldwide to take immediate action to limit the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the wake of what is called "scientific reports that 1998 is shaping up to be the hottest year on record".

"There is still uncertainty about how the climate will change at the regional or national level, and it is still not possible to prove that individual heat waves or extreme events are caused by global warming," said Toepfer. "But, we have more than enough credible evidence to know that global climate change poses tremendous risks. We must take out insurance now against future catastrophic climate change by urgently adopting energy efficiency and other 'win-win' measures."

"Win-win" policies are those that make environmental and economic sense irrespective of climate change. According to the IPCC's 1995 report, policy-makers can cut carbon dioxide emissions while saving money by creating an economic and regulatory framework that encourages both energy consumers and energy producers to adopt the most energy-efficient technologies available.

Solar-cells, which currently produce less than one percent of global power supplies, and other renewable energy technology sources will be an essential part of the solution, accord-

ing to the UNEP. Regulatory standards, tradable emissions permits, information and public awareness programmes, voluntary programmes for business, better urban transport planning, and phase-out of counter-productive subsidies can also pay a role, it says.

The UNEP chief holds the developed countries "responsible for the bulk of past and present emissions" and calls on them to "take the lead in limiting emissions". He adds, "At the same time, cleaner energy technologies should also be promoted in developing countries through the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)."

Under the CDM, developed countries will be able to receive credit for investments in emissions-limiting projects in the developing countries.

But Toepfer says nothing about the rich North failing to take advantage of this incentive. He does, however, say that "this kind of incentive for marking large-scale transfers to developing countries for energy-efficient and renewable-energy technologies can clearly go a long way towards achieving

both developmental and environmental objectives."

Informed sources told IANS that Toepfer does not really take a tough stand against the rich industrialised countries. He is too soft on them. But one of his predecessors, Dr. Mostafa Tolba of Egypt, did not have the habit of mincing words and, therefore, became quite a controversial figure in so far as the United States and other rich nations were concerned. And that's why the renowned microbiologist from Cairo had to resign.

Meanwhile, the IPCC will adopt its Third Assessment Report in the year 2000. The report is expected to be comprehensive while emphasising new findings since the completion of the 1995 Second Assessment. It is likely once again to cover the causes and impact of climate change as well as the various response options. The sources say that the report will also expand its scope to cover not just the global scale but the regional scale as well.

The sources say that representatives of the developing nations are trying "very hard to see that the emphasis of the report does not shift from the global to the regional level... if it does, the main polluters, who are the industrial countries, will be given a licence, as it were, not to heed UNEP's wake-up call. In today's global order, the rich North is eventually allowed to have the last laugh at the expense of the poor South".

— India Abroad News Service

Cultural Sleuths Hit Back as Criminals Turn to Art

East European countries are trying to work together to curtail the plunder of their museums, churches, private collections and archaeological sites by organised crime. **Gemini News Service reports on the battle against art thieves. Thomas Land writes from Budapest.**

HUNGARY has established a police task-force in a bid to protect art, antiques and other cultural treasures.

The number of art thefts in Hungary rose from 702 in 1990 (valued at about 71 million forints) to 1,025 last year (425 million forints).

"Criminals exploiting the illegal trade in cultural treasures tend to deploy the latest technologies, while the police usually plod after them using obsolete techniques," says Miklos Moritz, an Interior Ministry spokesman.

"But this is about to change. With the help of Interpol (the International police organisation) we are to introduce state-of-the-art data-processing techniques that will make possible exchanges between police forces."

The task-force has been set up by the police and the Ministries of the Interior and Culture. The agreement bringing it into existence was signed at the Dezso Laczko Museum, the site of a 1992 robbery in which several valuable medieval golden plaques and two Roman sculptures were stolen. Most of the pieces were recovered in Austria and Switzerland.

The new five-member unit will coordinate arrangements for safeguarding vulnerable collections and encourage owners and administrators to as-

semble a database of their possessions.

It will also cooperate with other countries in the recovery of stolen objects and promote a regional strategy to stamp out smuggling.

The team was recently introduced to top crime-busters from around the world at a regional conference organised by Interpol. The aim of the get-together was to work out ways of improving collaboration to end the plundering of museums, churches, private collections and archaeological sites throughout East and Central Europe.

The meeting was held in Budapest. "The geography of Hungary makes this place the centre of East-West developments — and that fact has not escaped the notice of organised crime," Interpol secretary-general Raymond E Kendall told me.

The number of art robberies in the region has nearly doubled since the beginning of the decade. At the same time, a vig-

orous, legitimate art auction market has sprung up. Art auctions in Hungary yielded 1.6 billion forints last year, up from 1 billion forints the previous year.

Police say the trade in stolen cultural treasures is a relatively new but increasingly important activity of the Russian mafia. Shortly before the conference, Hungarian police arrested two Russians with eight priceless medieval icons in their car, apparently stolen from a church in Ukraine. Documents found on the suspects contained the names of several well-known Hungarian art dealers and established a connection with a number of previous robberies.

The database assembled by the task-force will be linked up to Interpol's central register of stolen objects, in Lyons, France, by the end of the year.

The task-force will also concern itself with the return of objects stolen in neighbouring countries and smuggled through Hungary on their way to the

West. Raymond Kendall says that a 1983 case involving the theft of "Old Master" paintings from the Museum of Fine Arts yielded important lessons for the police.

"The case taught us that there is a great deal of preventive work that can be done. In that case, the work of the thieves was made easy by some scaffolding erected outside the window, providing easy access to the room where the paintings were exhibited."

"All over the former Eastern Bloc (countries previously controlled by the Soviet Union) there has been inadequate protection put in place by museums for works of art under their care, and inadequate inventories and descriptions of their treasures maintained by them. Yet good databases are essential for the identification of works if they are stolen."

The Museum of Fine Art paintings were recovered quickly, as were objects stolen in another major theft in Hungary, the 1993 robbery at the Jewish Museum in Budapest.

"We are lucky to recover them, some in Italy and some in Greece," says Kendall. But the overall recovery rate in art thefts is less than 10 per cent.

— Gemint News
The writer is an author and journalist who writes on international affairs.

TOM & JERRY

By Hanna-Barbera

