Life in Dhaka Keep it Covered!

by A Husnain

The traffic jams are just the effect of a cause: too many users of some limited space, and lack of control to regulate the flow. The drains and the roads are designed for similar purposes: to keep the flow flowing. There is no static system in life, municipal or otherwise.

HAKA is living up to its name. Dhaka in Bangla means covered. A lot of activities in Dhaka are kept covered. Cable TV fans are familiar with the hit song 'parda may rahne do, parda no outha-o; parda uthne say raaz khul jaa-e gi', which means do not lift the curtain, otherwise many secrets would be out. In Bengali the short expression is 'dhaka thaak' ('keep covered). Let us indulge in some benevolent spying, in public

interest. In your home street, did you ever bother to notice whether the road has any drain by the side, or on both sides of the road? The question is like asking you whether you are aware you are breathing. It is simply presumed that such facilities exist, because it is part of the standard design after the planning stage.

In the Mohammdpur residential area, it will be noticed that most of the roads, except some major ones, do not have drains on one or both sides. Where the rain-water is supposed to go? Surely the plans for the residential areas were approved keeping provision for

Therefore it is not surprising that, metaphorically and otherwise, we collect a lot of garbage in our social and community life, visible and invisible, and grumble all the more

MONG the most tragic

consequences of the drug

war in South America is

the destruction of the Andean

jungle. A recent move to use a

granular herbicide, called

tebuthiuron or "Spike", to put

an end to coca cultivation has

ignited a degree of opposition

from environmental groups. US

activists point out that

tebuthiuron is normally used to

clear vegetation from the sides

granular herbicide reads, "Do

not apply Spike 20P near desir-

able trees or other woody

species. Exposure of even a

small part of a plant root sys-

tem may cause severe plant in-

nev states: "Tebuthiuron is not

labelled for use on any crops in

Colombia, and it is our desire

that this product not be used for

illicit crop eradication. It can

be very risky in situations

where the territory has slopes,

rainfall is significant, desir-

able plants or trees are nearby,

and application is made under

less-than-ideal circumstances.

igibility Decision (RED) report,

the US Environmental Protec-

tion Agency confirmed that

Spike was persistent, mobile

resistant to biological and

chemical degradation and

likely to be transported to

ground and surface waters

through run-off. According to

US newspapers, Spike is "so

strong that just a few granules

sprinkled over a tuft of grass on

a driveway in San Francisco

killed an oak tree several yards

is less forthcoming although

the US National Academy of

Sciences in its 1993 report, Pes-

ticides in the Diets of Infants

and Children, noted: "Little

work has been done to investi-

gate the effects of pesticide ex-

posure on neurotoxic, immuno-

toxic, or endocrine responses in

in Germany have found that the

family of pesticides, including

tebuthiuron, act as "endocrine

disrupters" disturbing hor-

monal messenger systems in

humans. Moreover, the half-

life or tebuthiuron is 12 to 15

months. In coca-growing areas

where subsistence farmers in-

Several studies carried out

infants and children.

Evidence of harm to humans

away.'

In its 1994 Reregistration El-

Dow spokesman Ted McKin-

The label on Dow Chemical's

of highways and industrial

facilities.

jury or death."

because no outlets have been designed into the social and municipal systems of our society (say, the provision of a drain by the road-side, and garbage bins which over-fill too quickly, and clearance which is

always too late). The same logic applies for democratic outlets - a favourite issue with the politicians, in and out of season. Communication assumes a 2-way facility. What is the name of one-way communication? The sun communicates one way.

The issue is not drains, but the availability of drainage systems in the society for providing different types of outlets, whether in degree or kind. That includes the labour unions and the CBAs, as we are vastly experienced on the nuisance value of this right, which, most of the time, tries to go left or out of control.

The traffic jams are just the effect of a cause; too many users of some limited space, and lack of control to regulate the flow The drains and the roads are designed for similar purposes: to keep the flow flowing. There is no static system in life, municipal or otherwise.

Let us look at some opposite effects. A large number of new multi-storied shopping complexes have come up in different localities of the metropolis. The shops inside cannot claim to be doing roaring business, due to

low purchasing power of the vast majority of the shoppers; hence the footpath hawkers have more customers per hour. The shops inside the buildings have more shop assistants than customers most of the time.

This trend can be explained through the supply and demand equations. The strong point is siphoning the surplus cash in the pocket, and the weakpoint is cheap and crude imitation of marketing and sales tech-

As for money (poisa), there is a timeless rule: easy come, easy go. Hard-earned money is thoughtfully spent. Bargaining is a national pastime in the East — hence if the prices are 'fixed', then it is fishy (daal may kala hai).

The posh air-conditioned shops stock so many items of foreign consumer goods, in a country where the average earning per head is around 250 dollars per annum. It has more to do with human nature than economics or patriotism.

During the mid-1960s, once while I was shopping in Tokyo, a Japanese shopper asked me how was my Japanese SLR camera which I was carrying (it was top class and not expensive, the Yen being around 350 to the dollar, if I recall correctly). It took Japan one more decade to capture the world markets with quality goods. During that period of recovery from the effects

of the World War which ended in 1945, the Japanese usually preferred the top brand names of foreign goods, such as Zeiss cameras and Parker pens.

The same trend could be observed in Malaysia during the 1980s, even when her growth rate was above eight per cent year after year (the financial crash was not that unpre-dictable to the regular visitors). It is a passing syndrome of de-velopment: the grass appears greener on the other side. Trying to keep up with the Joneses might bring about a national crash, the Asian Tigers warn us.

Dhaka means covered. Our drains should be kept covered. befitting the name of the world's tenth largest city; oth-erwise we seek alibis and start blaming the polythene shop-ping bags, instead of castigating the municipal garbage and drain cleaners (thousands are employed but very few bother about the sense of duty). What about the households who throw the garbage around? Don't believe in dhaka, to say the least!

The unauthorised tool collections are dhaka (covered). The back doors are also covered. As for the front door, it is open and transparent, but there is nothing much to reveal or display formally. We Bengalees like informality. That's saying a lot. Dhaka is dense, but smart

Mr Handyside Makes a New Greenhouse

OUR toilet may soon have a closer relationship with your home's rain gutter by using collected rainwater to flush, in an effort to become more environmentally friendly.

Your walls may also soon be insulated with wool, flax or recycled newsprint which take less energy to manufacture.

In other words, the world "greenhouse" my become a term not just left to gardeners who enjoy growing plants indoors.

A tour through a new building centre in London called Constructions Resources shows how parts of your home could look, using environmentally friendly construction materi-

For instance, the roof of one of these environmentally friendly homes would resemble the solar panels of a satellite. The panels would be used to generate hot water by storing the energy cylinders used to heat the water.

Unfortunately, the panels would not be used to generate electricity, since the technology is not economically viable for a company to produce them just yet. But Construction Resources hopes that eventually will

Outside walls would be built of a Swiss block system made of lower grade, often discarded, wood that is made of crossglued boards to provide strength.

The hollow blocks resemble Lego and connect accordingly. In the cavities of the blocks. electrical wires, insulation and plumbing are placed. The benefit is that less lumber is wasted and more trees are left in the forest.

On the inside of the "greenhouse", Danish lighting fixtures would come on automatically to save electricity. Inside walls would have alternative coverings that use less energy to manufacture, such as sticks that resemble weaved bamboo shoots or unfired clay bricks made out of wood chips, straw, or flax that look like little bales of hay, which are just as strong and fire-resistant as clay-fired bricks.

Although similar building centres exist in Germany, and Denmark, this is the first of its kind for Britain, explains Richard Handyside, managing director and founder.

He adds that the company is also unique for Europe in the sense that it is the first to combine the "know-how" with the

"Green" and "environmentally friendly" have become buzz-words in the last decade, as marketers use them to cashin on a more conscientious public. As Gemini News Service report, a new company wants to bring this environmental awareness to the British construction industry. Dan Palmer writes from London

The friendly way to live Solar energy for water heating Insulation made of Swiss eco block wall Double or triple glazed **Automatic Danish lights** (M)

Anatomy of an environmentally friendly home showing how 'green' construction materials work together

products it sells in the form of training seminars.

Handyside, a former book publisher and later software company owner, says he has no formal training in either building design or environmental engineering, but has had an affection for both subjects since he was a student at Cambridge where he graduated in economics and sociology.

But it was not until five years ago that the 55-year-old began to turn this interest into a business to help the environment. He had first tried some environmental tinkering of his own, using wind to generate electricity at a cottage he once

owned in Wales. Now he has six architects and engineers who are product specialists at Construction Resources. They can tell consumers everything about natural points to insulations. This new business, explains

Handyside, is not trying to 'cash in" on the last decade of growth in environmentally friendly and green products to make a quick profit by slapping an environmentally friendly label on it. The company looks at all its

material from start to finish to see how much energy it takes to produce to how quickly it will take to bio-degrade. "We're in it for the long-term basis," says Handyside.

The seminars are also part of Construction Resources plan to go the long haul.

For instance, contractors or members of the public can signup for a one-day seminar for £20 that explain the benefits of a home water collection system, which funnels rain water from roof gutters into a holding tank.
The collected water can be used for toilet flushing to minimise

water consumption from other sources by up to 50 per cent.
Other one day seminars include demonstrations of how to use the natural-based paints. while others show the techniques to install insulation

properly. Eventually, Handyside says he wants to see Construction Resources become involved in the training of architects and tradespeople either by producing manuals for existing courses or by creating new ones that are accredited.

Andy Wilson, a researcher for the British-based Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians, which represents carpenters, painters and work-ers who would be using these types of products, says Construction Resources is an interesting initiative and that the union would have no problem

supporting it.

But Wilson explains that price would be a major factor in influencing tradespeople to use these environmentallyfriendly products on a job site. "Cost is everything," he says, "the lowest price is what wins the tender."

For instance, a square metre of conventional insulation made of fibre glass costs about £1.80 whereas Construction Resources flax insulation costs about £6.95 for a square metre.

Construction Resources natural paints, which are linseed oil based and have colour pigment added to them just before use, cost about £22.00 for five litres whereas conventional paints are about £15.00 for the same. Handyside says that it will take a long time for the industry to react, but public pressure for environmentally friendly products will eventually change it.

"It's a long slow gradual process," says Handyside, "but gradual is the key word."

The writer is a Canadian journalist working with Gemini News Service in London on a fellowship arrangement with the School of Journalism and Communications at the University of Regina.

Bane of the Andes by Philip O Coffin

crops with drug crops, contaminated soil risks further misery and destabilisation.

Mauricia Castro, head of the Colombian office of the World Wildlife Fund, calls it "a very large contradiction to say it is sale to use" tebuthiuron in rain forest when it is not used in a similar fashion anywhere else. But Charles Helling of the US department of agriculture's narcotics group disagrees: "The benefits (of spraying coca) are so strong" as to outweigh environmental risks.

So far, the aerial fumigation of coca fields in Colombia with glyphosate, responsible for the high rates of eradication since 1995, has been touted as a success by the US. However, the Washington Office on Latin America reports: ".... despite the fact that Colombia is the only Andean country engaged in aerial eradication, the US reported a 32 per cent increase in coca production in 1996."

Moreover peasant groups and human rights monitoring agencies have reported damaged food crops and medical problems, including eye damage, skin irritation and birth defects, purportedly caused by contact with glyphosate. An estimated 241,000 people participated in marches protesting aerial fumigation in 1996.

A report commissioned by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) concluded in 1980: "..... as a crop, coca's effects on the environment seem average or even benign, especially in comparison with other crops that are grown in the region.

The researchers determined that coca drains fewer nutrients from the soil of the Bolivian Yungas than any other regional crop, and that the bush's hardy root structure helps hold in place the otherwise loose, claylike topsoil of Peruvian and Bolivian mountain regions.

However, when the bush is torn from the ground in eradication campaigns, the soil seems to become resistant to other vegetation, leaving the land bare and vulnerable to heavy seasonal rains.

Over 700,000 hectares (ha) of the Andean jungle has been deforested for the cocaine trade over the past 15 years, yet less than a third of that land is currently used to cultivate coca.

Under normal circumstances, a coca bush will produce harvests for as long as 35 years. Yet, after just a few years, two-thirds of this land was deserted by farmers and denuded by eradication forces.

Hundreds of unique plant and animal species are at risk as authorities drive growers and traffickers deeper into the jungle, forcing them from roads and traditionally accessible lands.

The poor farming practices of coca growers can likewise be traced to drug war tactics. Coca is grown with no other plants to maximise output and allow for easy harvesting of the leaves, leaving the fragile soil exposed to constant sunshine. Multiple annual harvests on the steep terrain also causes tremendous soil erosion, particularly in the mountain slopes.

This is in stark contrast to the experience in the Yungas of Bolivia, a location where coca is grown legally for a small local market and for the famous flavour extract in Coca-Cola. Farmers in the Yungas often

plant large leafy plants around coca bushes to protect the soil from the sun, plant the bush in deeper pits to allow for the formation of a sturdier root structure and construct store terraces to allow for harvesting on what amounts to level ground.

Tourists visiting the site of the ancient capital of the Inca empire, Peru's Macchu Picchu, learn that these growing practices were the norm hundreds of years ago. They are rare today precisely because most cultivation must remain as concealed as possible. Cultivators work at breakneck speed and are always ready to depart when authorities arrive.

The US state department would have environmentalists believe that drug control is worth the costs. However, there is little evidence to source the fact that strategies have been able to decrease drug abuse. Cultivation has increased steadily since 1974 at a rate of 20 per cent per year according to the United States General Accounting Office.

The street price of cocaine remains stable or drops each year in the US. In fact, when eradication efforts peak, coca cultivators sometime respond by increasing cultivation. The UN reports that 50 per cent (25,000 ha) of coca in Colombia was eradicated in 1995 and Colombia reports eradicating 40-47,000 ha in 1996, yet cultivation increased by at lease 10,000 ha each year. According to a study by

RAND Corporation, a US-based non-profit policy research institute, intensive, long-term, extremely costly eradication efforts could create a short-term decrease in coca availability causing at most a 2 per cent rise in the price of cocaine in the US but that would rebound within two or three years. Because of the enormous gap between coca prices and black market cocaine prices, huge changes in the price of coca affect cocaine prices only by pennies. In addition to eradication

programmes that have succeeded only in denuding an estimated 200,000 hectares since 1984, substitution programmes have failed to wean coca growers onto alternative crops. Few substitutes for coca have proven viable in the Andean environ ment, and those that are viable are seldom profitable.

By some estimates, coca yields twice the returns of pineapples and five times those of macadamia nuts in Bolivia. In Colombia, the only crop with returns comparable to those of coca is opium poppy. As a bishop in Guaviare Colombia, Belarmino Corea, said The people fear that if they stop growing coca, they will die of hunger.

There is little hope that current drug war strategies will ever significantly reduce coca cultivation. With at least 80,000 square miles of viable land remaining and extensive economic hardship throughout the Andes, it is unlikely that farmers will stop cultivating coca.

The US has renewed eradication efforts in the Andes and the UN Drug Control Programme has initiated the SCOPE (Strategy for the Elimination of Coca and Opium Poppy) promising global eradication of illicit drug crop production by 2008. But are we prepared to level the South American rainforest? The time has come to stop chasing farmers spraying fields and burning bushes. The voices of environmentalists must be heard.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

First Indians Came from Africa 85,000 Years Ago? by Jayanta Sarkar

About 100,000 years ago, modern humans began moving out of Africa — where, many anthropologists feel, they first appeared — perhaps following a major demographic expansion, and looked for new habitats. According to evidence, one stream of those modern humans came to India about 85,000 years ago, while another went to south China.

TTT HERE did the first /human inhabitants in ▼ India come from? Africa, suggest DNA studies taken up in the last couple of years in the country.

About 100,000 years ago. modern humans began moving out of Africa - where, many anthropologists feel, they first appeared - perhaps following a major demographic expansion, and looked for new habitats. According to evidence, one stream of those modern humans came to India about 85,000 years ago, while another went to south China.

naturally took a very long time," says Professor Partha Majumder of Calcutta's Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) who is leading a team that has been looking into this veritable black hole of Indian prehistory. The project, sponsored by

"The movements of people

the Indian government's Department of Biotechnology, has as its members Susanta Roychoudhury of the Indian Insti-

tute of Chemical Biology and Nitai Bhattacharva of the Saha Institute of Nuclear Physics. besides Professor Majumder and Bidyut Roy of ISI.

What forced the people from

Africa to move out many millennia ago was increasing pressure on available resources. Presence of modern humans in India in the prehistoric age has been established by recent archaeological tests of stone tools dating back to nearly 40,000 years by researchers. These items have been found in and near Shivalik Hills in the foothills of the Himalayas, among other places. The presence of the humans has also been supported by DNA tests of human-specific polymorphisms among contemporary ethnic groups in eastern and northeastern India --- West Bengal. Orissa, Tripura - and in north-central India, like in Uttar Pradesh.

Based on these tests, the Calcutta team has found evidence that there was a major demographic expansion of modern humans within India perhaps about 60,000 years ago. Just as the demographic expansion in Africa forced modern humans to move out from there, it is believed that the demographic expansion within India also resulted in movement of humans out of India.

The Calcutta team looked for this evidence in extra-nuclear mitochondrial DNA tests and found that humans moved to southeast Asia from India. Professor Majumder adds that earlier studies had shown that humans had moved into southeast Asia from China. In other words, the recent

findings of the Calcutta team imply that southeast Asia was peopled by two streams of humans; one that moved out of India, and another that moved out of southern China.

The latest theory adds a new dimension to those chapters of Indian history that mention

Indian kings and emperors sending their cultural emissaries as well military teams to many other countries in southeast Asia. "So now we know that there was also some kind of genetic affinity between our forefathers and these peoples," says B. Banerjee, a history professor. Recent findings of the Calcutta team seem to support the view that it was Indian tribal communities like the Mundas, Lodhas and Santhals that were the original Indian inhabitants.

It is believed that they occupied a much larger area on this land mass but were steadily pushed back as new groups entered India - such as the Indo-Aryans - and finally confined to the areas where they are now found. "So, genetically speaking, there is fundamental unity among all Indians. And it is only factors like religion and culture that have created the differences," Majumder says.

- India Abroad News Service

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by Jim Davis





American Air Strikes Seen to India's Advantage HE American air strikes

on alleged terrorist bases in Afghanistan are seen as a vindication of India's position on the existence of a "terror network" in the region and gives a new twist to the region's conflict whose ramifications are felt here.

Even as the hardline Islamic rulers of Kabul extend their control over Afghanistan, the new US. involvement in Afghanistan, triggered by the recent bombings of American embassies in Africa, is seen to have made things difficult for the Taliban which has spread its fundamentalist network into India through Kashmir.

The American attacks are also seen to have exposed a rift between the radical Islamic militia and their alleged backers in Islamabad.

All this should please Afghanistan's northern neighbours, and countries like India, Iran and Russia, who have reason to feel threatened by the Taliban successes and have accused Pakistan of meddling in Afghanistan's internal affairs, they said.

Ousted Afghan President Buranhuddin Rabbani has virtually endorsed the American action. Masood Khalili, Afghanistan Ambassador in India, told reporters on August 21 that American air strikes were "not sufficient" and the US should do the same to "terroristproducing machinery" in Pakistan.

"Terrorist training camps have been established and operated in southern Afghanistan with the active involvement of the Pakistani military intelligence service ISI. Unfortunately, the international com-

Mahesh Uniyal writes from New Delhi

munity kept silent in the face of increased terrorist activities stemming from such camps," Khalili alleged.

C Raja Mohan, Strategic Affairs Editor of The Hindu newspaper said, "The American action is a vindication of what India has been saying all this time: that Pakistan and Afghanistan have been the hub of an international terror network for which India has paid a huge price." "The Americans must make a full disclosure of all the information they have.' he said, adding that the American action will "affect" the Tal-

iban. Former Foreign Secretary S K Singh too said that the United States can no longer ignore charges by India and Afghanistan's northern neighbours that there is a nexus between the Taliban successes and Pakistan. "The US will have to look at the Taliban and Pakistani support (for them) more comprehensively," he told India Abroad News Service.

P. Stobdan of the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), said the American strike shows for the "first time, a crack between the Taliban and Pakistani authorities. This is a "positive indication" for India as the American action shows that the Taliban are now acting "independently," he added.

New Delhi, has, however, been cautious in its reaction to the Taliban successes. In a delayed statement, issued nearly a week after the fall of Mazar-e-Sharif, the stronghold of the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. India demanded an end

to "active support, collaboration and actual involvement of

foreign forces" in Afghanistan, but without naming Pakistan. The Taliban gains are said to have created a security threat to India because they are seen as a shot in the arm to the Kashmiri insurgency which India alleges is backed by the same Pakistani intelligence agencies who are said to be aiding the Taliban. Khalili pointed out that the advancing Taliban are nearing the Kashmir border. The northeast Afghan province of Badakhshan borders the portion of Kashmir under Pakistani control. However, the Taliban have failed to capture

this, he said. Khalili told IANS that the Rabbani government-in-exile has asked the United Nations. the European Union, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and India to put pressure on Islamabad to stop supporting the Taliban. He said the conflict in Afghanistan was "not a civil war, but a liberation war." He accused Pakistan's "military intelligence" of "encouraging, helping and nourishing" the Taliban and disputed the contention that the Taliban were a purely Islam-inspired force. "You do not learn how to drive a tank in the madarasas (school of Islamic instruction)," he quipped.

Total Taliban control o Afghanistan which straddles Pakistan is also seen as helping Islamabad achieve its long sought goal of acquiring "strategic depth" against India. Analysts have advised New Delhi to play a more proactive role to safeguard its interests. Singh said India would "have to act" with like-minded countries to contain the Taliban's growing clout in Central Asia. Although India has a "geographic disability" in not being contiguous to Afghanistan, but "diplomatically, we should be seen as uniting the Russians, the Iranians, the Uzbeks, the Tajiks, the Kazakhs and the (anti-Taliban) opposition in Afghanistan," he said.

Raja Mohan warned that the Taliban control Aighanistan, which has long been a reliable friend of India, "undermines the political balance on the northwestern frontiers of India."

"India's diplomatic task must now be to ensure that Afghanistan remains an autonomous actor in world politics," he said, advising New Delhi to "step up its diplomatic

activism over Afghanistan." The Afghan conflict is also said to be closely linked to rival bids to control access to Central Asia's huge oil and natural gas reserves. For long, Iran was seen as offering the only viable route for transporting Central Asian energy resources to world markets.

The US, backed by Pakistan, is, however, said to be engaged in trying to beat arch-foe Iran in the Central Asian energy sweepstakes by developing the shorter route through Afghanistan to South Asia and the Indian Ocean. "With the Taliban now having gained control over northern Afghanistan, Pakistan will hope to revive the pipeline projects," said Raja Mohan.