

The Environmental Attitudes of Floodplain Residents

Experience from Dhaka East

by Dr Md Rashed Chowdhury

This article, extracted from a research carried out by the writer in 1997, examines the importance of environmental factors in the choice, motivation and decision-making of the floodplain residents arising from the proposed flood defense schemes in the eastern part of Dhaka.

In my last two articles entitled 'Floodplain Occupation in Dhaka: Natural Hazards Perspectives' and 'Factors Affecting Floodplain Encroachment: Experience from Dhaka East' published on the issues of 'The Daily Star' on October 09 and 27, respectively, I tried to describe the reasons of floodplain occupation from macro as well as micro perspectives. This article examines how social and environmental factors influence individuals' decision-making for floodplain occupation. While a structural flood defense scheme might be recognized as possibly leading to disruption of environment, this would be somewhat broadly defined concern to most residents to the way the flood scheme would impact on the view from a house, increase safety against future flooding, or change the appearance of the area.

This study used qualitative methods of analysis and was based on long structured questionnaire administered by interviews. The survey population was defined as householders living within the 50 years floodplain. The sampling error that affected the selection of study sample was 5 per cent (sampling error at a 95 per cent confidence level for a stratified random sample was 5%). The majority of the study sample were

new-comer (74.9%) of which about 70 per cent have been resident for less than 10 years. Among the new-comer settlers, 73.8 per cent bought land from the farmers.

Respondents were in the lower middle (25-34) to middle age group (35-54), and their education level ranges from primary to secondary. The number of small businessmen was significantly high (37.3%), followed by salaried men (33.55%). Only 29.2 per cent were farmers in the study sample. The mean length of residence is 16 years old and 25 per cent of the respondents have been resident long enough to have witnessed major floods. Among the respondents, 49.2 per cent have their houses made of concrete (Pucca), 50 per cent reported about 5 to 8 persons in their households, 73.4 per cent of the sample live within 5 km of embankment. The median distance of nearest road is 1.25 km. The average income of 2000 study sample varies from 2000 to 5000 Taka. About 82.4 per cent of the respondents have experienced extremely serious flooding in their houses, 25 per cent experienced flooding in their locality. Most of the respondents agreed 1988 flood as the worst flood that they have experienced during their lives.

Environmental perception: Environmental perception can

be set within the wider context of social perception which, at its simplest, is concerned with the effects of social and cultural factors on the individual's cognitive structuring of the physical and social environment. Thus perception is dependent on more than just sensory data but is related to past experience, psychological set, context, role and personality of the individual, and operation and cultural forces.

How people perceive the environment was hypothesized to affect their attitude to proposed structural flood defense scheme in their area. An important indicator of such attitudes is likely to be the relative importance of environmental values within respondents' total value system. This survey, however, concentrated on the environmental component and tested attitude statements related to nature conservation, environment, and society. There was considerable agreement with the majority of the statements suggesting widespread environmental awareness and concern. Statements like 'I like to be in the open of the countryside' attracted about 66 per cent of the respondents. Certain statements showed a divergent response when respondents had to choose between industrial growth and environmental preservation. Therefore, respondents displayed strong agreement (84%) with the statement 'Without economic growth, our country will not be able to afford to do the things we want'.

Attitude to environmental change: Respondents were

asked to rate a number of items as disadvantages and advantages of their local area as a place to live. Shopping facilities, nearby countryside, open space, and access to work were rated as considerable advantages while the flood risk and access to transportation facilities were major disadvantages. Other advantages of the area included neat and clean, attractive neighborhood, and near river facilities. Thus the many advantages of the local area outweighed the perceived risk of flooding. The majority of the sample highly rated the area in which they live. In response to the question whether countryside living pattern has changed in the last 10 years, a significant portion of the respondents said that there had been a little change (64.8%) followed by 28 per cent who considered a significant change during the last ten years. Only 7 per cent found the area as same as before.

Attitude to scheme (flood embankment): Generally respondents had extremely positive attitude towards flood schemes although a large number showed very moderate response to scheme attitude. Only a very few showed a negative attitude to flood scheme. The statement 'flood protection scheme will only bring more development in this area' attracted general agreement (83%) while statement 'there is no need of flood scheme here because flood risk is low' attracted general disagreement (55%). Respondents were uncertain about the technical statement 'a flood embankment would be preferable to raised flood embankment in this

area', with large number (75%) opting for moderate response. The statement 'flood protection scheme should be carried out regardless of cost' and 'anything designed to reduce flooding' attracted more than 60 per cent of the study sample. Conversely, statements that 'there is no need of flood scheme and spending money on flood scheme is a wastage' have been disagreed by about 50 per cent of the study sample.

Conclusion: How people perceive the environment was hypothesized to affect their attitude to proposed structural flood defense scheme. There were considerable agreement with majority of the statements suggesting widespread environmental awareness and concern. However, certain statements showed a divergent response when respondents had to choose between industrial growth and environmental preservation. Scheme attitude statements attracted similar attention from the study sample. Findings have supported the importance of environmental factors in flood hazard mitigation in principle but not at the expense of scheme. Rather, their attitudes were highly influenced by the introduction of proposed structural flood embankments which might increase perceived safety against future floodings.

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Reflections

A Metaphysical Approach to Amartya Economics

by A Zabr

How the Planning Commission is going to approach Amartya Economics? The modalities have to be sorted out sooner than later, for revising the concept papers, as also to mentally prepare the donor agencies for new inputs, to generate new types of outputs for speedier and wider development of the human resources.

THE recognition of the economic matrix propounded by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen after two decades of layering and distorting is making non-economist generalists such as this writer to think about some of the implications of trying to create a brave new world in the coming century. The level of observations below may not be of professional standard, but some comments here might be destructive enough for some metaphysical minds.

Man, *ahrafah makhluqaat*, is a combination of physical entity and spiritual vibrations, and the *yin* and *yang* principle cannot be separated and dissected separately for the material development of human society in a balanced manner of communities of complex lives which can think and take independent local decisions. Motivation is not a manipulative number. Mind and matter, the head and the heart, male and female, the instinct for survival, rationality, feeling and emotion are disturbing catalytic agents lurking in the background, to tamper the findings of science at the laboratory level where research and development are conducted by 'trained' human minds are conducted.

What is the goal of life on this Earth, and what is there thereafter? Relevant queries cannot be brushed aside in an integrated approach to mice

and men. Due to habitual over-sights in evolutionary thinking processes of societies, perhaps Amartya Sen was the gainer through an universal recognition, which is better late than never.

If the very approach to the philosophy of life be now seen to be imperfect in definitions, parameters, processing, and end product (goal), then the short-term mundane affluence would seem distorted after the gestation period, and application after several phases. This is exactly what is happening now. The well established theories and formulae are playing truant, and can no longer be disciplined to work smoothly. Why? The playing field has changed. In cricket term, the type of bowling has to be changed.

There is more to religious teaching than the consequences of sin and the fear of divine punishment; after thousands of years of evolving civilizations, time, acting as filters, always generated the nagging feeling that treating live and reactive human beings as cold, pure units of data by the scientists and the experts would not bring about a better world, although some cosmetic effects could be encouraging.

What happened to the vast Soviet type of socialism or communism, and why disintegrating cracks are appearing in the western type of capitalism,

where the rich are filthy rich, and the poor in the third world are still as marginal as ever? In N Korea, even the presence of a good rural infrastructure and agricultural mechanization could not minimize the traditional adverse effects of a famine. How the UN WTO concept would be affected? What will happen to competition and monopolies? Can the regional concepts trickle down the economic goodies? There are many technical reappraisals awaiting exciting seminars as the next century approaches.

How the Planning Commission is going to approach Amartya Economics? The modalities have to be sorted out sooner than later, for revising the concept papers, as also to mentally prepare the donor agencies for new inputs, to generate new types of outputs for speedier and wider development of the human resources. Till now certain HR bases suffered from lower priorities, or were not working as estimated, vide one such report in DS (Dec 18) the 'Health [sector] Misses the Boat', according to a WB Review.

A thought comes to mind: the economists of Islamic socialism may carry out some mental exercises and come out with comments on Sen's findings of age-old anomalies which sustained virtual reality now threatening to rise as ugly facts.

Report Debunks Hype over "50 Years of Human Rights"

AMIDST all the euphoria surrounding this month's official celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a new report paints a grim picture of the status of people who fight for human rights in their own countries.

The first annual report of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders covers 40 countries and details the cases of over 200 human rights defenders between July 1997 and October of this year. If the reader, casual or carefully attentive, comes away with one single impression from its 300 pages, it is the magnitude and sophistication of the means of repression brought to bear on human rights defenders, including harassment, threats, arbitrary detention, torture and murder.

The message of the report comes across loud and clear in contrast to the self-congratulatory speeches of the anniversary celebrations: not only is the Universal Declaration far from being completely put into practice, but those who are working to bring it about are threatened more than ever. The Observatory intends to do its utmost to let the world know this, and to give human rights defenders the strength that comes from knowing that they are not alone and more importantly, noticed, supported and defended.

In the overall assessment, several countries have achieved the distinction of being in a class by themselves: Afghanistan, Burma, North Korea and Iraq. Otherwise, citations go to:

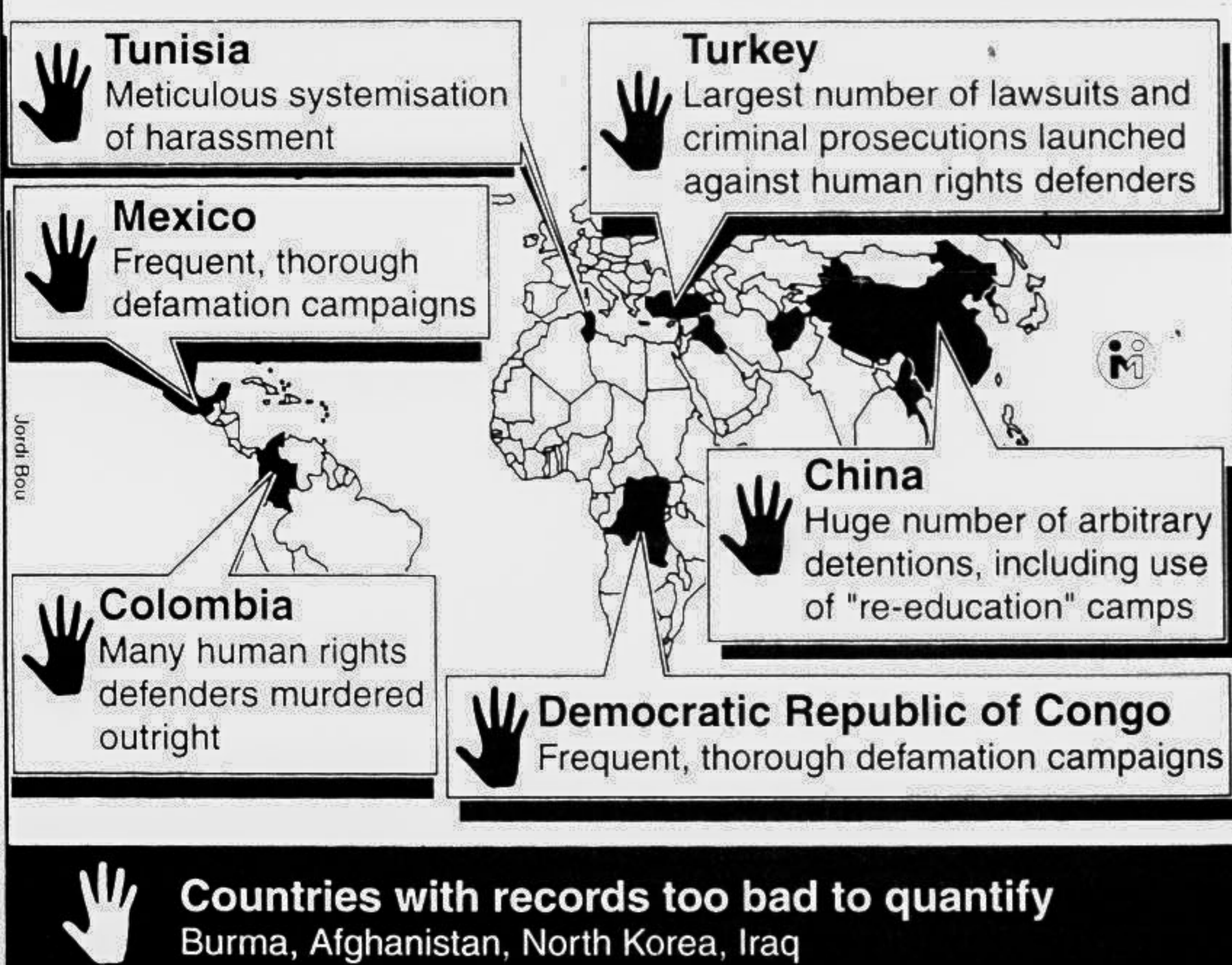
- Turkey, for the largest number of lawsuits and criminal prosecutions launched against human rights defenders;
- The democratic Republic of the Congo and Mexico for the frequency and thoroughness of their defamation campaigns;
- Tunisia for the meticulous systematisation of harassment;
- China for the number of arbitrary detentions (including in "re-education" camps); and
- Colombia for the most human rights defenders murdered outright.

Among the testimonies giving a personal picture of those fighting for the rights of others is that of Bishop Juan José Girardi Condera. He was murdered in April, two days after publishing a report on the three decades of civil war in Guatemala. His report attributed 90 per cent of the human rights violations to the Guatemalan armed forces.

A recently created international human rights network has issued its first report, citing such countries as Afghanistan, Burma, North Korea and Iraq as in a class by themselves. Gemini News Service reports that the people who fight for human rights are themselves victims of repression. Robert James Parsons writes from Geneva

Rights defenders wronged

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders has published its first report on 50th anniversary of Universal Declaration of Human Rights



The Observatory was created in July of last year, marking a major milestone for those who believe in the principles of the Universal Declaration. It drew together two already well established and well known NGO networks, the World Organization Against Torture in Geneva

(best known by its French acronym OMCT) and the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (known by its French acronym, FIDH).

Given the extent of the Observatory network, reports can be cross checked for accuracy

and detail. Given the global reach of the world's economy, the means at the disposal of multinational corporations to buy and sell whole governments and the constant implication of multinationals in human rights abuses — Shell's arrangements

with the Nigerian government in crushing the Ogoni people's resistance to its exploitation of oil on their land come to mind — the subject of attacks on human rights defenders needed to be tackled on an equally global basis.

Examples of this sort of global strategy are not new. For some twenty years, the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) has been monitoring compliance with the World Health Organisation's marketing code for infant formula. 'Network' is the word for it, for there is no central headquarters, only a web of some 150 closely connected non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in 90 countries pursuing the same goal, sharing information to avoid duplication of effort and providing each other with the moral support that comes from knowing one is not alone in the struggle against big business and its government backers.

The goal is simple and long overdue: human right defenders, the people who make known the abuses committed on their home turf, work at immense personal risk and need all the protection they can get. Without them, there would be no need of a Universal Declaration, not because there would be no universal enjoyment of human rights but because no one would know that anything was wrong.

In the report, Roberto Garretón retraces 25 years of his life in the service of human rights, first as a lawyer in Pinochet's Chile, then as United Nations Special Rapporteur for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the former Zaire). He emphasizes the political dimension of defending human rights in view of the political character of so many of the violations.

"It's not just a matter of setting a prisoner free, providing treatment for a torture victim or finding someone who has been the victim of a 'disappearance,'" says Garretón, "but of ending the arbitrary detention, stopping the torture and making the 'disappearances' impossible."

The writer is a US-born reporter covering UN and other international affairs from Geneva. He writes regularly for Le Courrier and has also written for the Sunday Times of London.

Nobel Laureate Son Returns to Several Soils

SEVERAL places in India and Bangladesh may be hankering to be called the true 'home' of Amartya Sen, but the man whose contribution to welfare economics has been recognised with a Nobel prize appears to be doing justice to all. Be it Dhaka, Santiniketan or Calcutta, the economist has made sure he visited all the places he spent the early part of his life in after returning to his native land straight from Stockholm where he received the prize from King Gustaf on December 10.

Sen has been shadowed by journalists and politicians right through his 'homecoming' in the two countries. On December 20, he finally met his 87-year-old mother Amita Sen at Santiniketan, a quaint town established by 1913 Nobel literature laureate Rabindranath Tagore in eastern India's West Bengal state.

A throng of people awaited the celebrity 'son of the soil' at the railway station near Santiniketan, welcoming him with flowers and red carpet when he alighted from the special train attached to the Santiniketan Express from Calcutta. In fact, there was a near stampede on the platform as people broke

the police cordon and rushed to greet their newest hero.

The three-kilometre stretch from the station to his ancestral home 'Pratichi' was lined by admirers, but the press and even some relatives were kept at bay by police when he went in to meet his mother. Press photographers who had been waiting for hours for shots of an emotional meeting between the mother and son were denied that chance.

The only photo-op came a few minutes after the family reunion when Sen, his mother, his daughter Antara and son-in-law Pratichi stepped out for a short while, leaving photographers grumbling.

In the special rail salon while on his way to Santiniketan, the 65-year-old Sen was busy penning a work of fiction, reported *The Economic Times* newspaper. During the brief stops en route, Sen took a break to wave to the crowds gathered on the platforms to catch a glimpse of the renowned economist who is currently Master of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Sen, who has spent most of his life studying poverty and famine, made it clear right after landing that he had no clear favourites and no one place he

called home. "I don't believe in a unique place to call my home," he told reporters. "Which place I prefer is like asking which do I prefer: breakfast, lunch or dinner."

Calcutta has special significance because I spent several years here," he said. "Then there are childhood memories of Dhaka. Boston was my home for a while and today it is Cambridge."

He dismissed rumours that he was being asked to head India's Planning Commission, saying he had never held public office and had no intention to start now. Sen also discouraged comparisons of him with Tagore. When it was announced in October that he had been selected for this year's award, the Indian media drew several parallels — both Tagore and Sen won the Nobel, the latter spent many years in the town founded by the former and was even christened Amartya by the poet laureate.

After arriving in Calcutta, Sen travelled to Bangladesh for a three-day visit on December 16. In Dhaka, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina conferred him with an honorary citizenship of her country, saying "You are ours."

— India Abroad News Service

Monsanto Trials Illegal, Says Indian Environmentalist

NOTED environmentalist Vandana Shiva on Sunday (20 Dec) accused the Centre of granting permission to Monsanto for conducting Bt cotton trials after the seeds had been sown at the experimental sites. "Sowing takes place in June-July while the permission was granted in mid-August," she said.

Speaking to reporters in Bangalore, she termed the trials illegal as the permission was granted after consultation with the review committee on genetic manipulation (RCGM) of the department of biotechnology when as per rules, the genetic engineering approval

committee (GEAC) in the ministry of environment was the authority concerned.

She called for an immediate ban on the field tests and a moratorium of at least five years on all genetically engineered crops in the country. She said it was not terminator technology but the ecological impact of Bt cotton which was harmful. "Bt threatens beneficial species and encourages emergence of resistance in the bollworm thereby creating super pests," she added.

She said Bt contained a crystalline substance which decreased the resistance of red blood cells to rupture, thus posing a threat to human

health. Ms Shiva said countries like Britain, France, Denmark and Greece had announced a moratorium on genetically engineered crops and organisms (GMO).

There would be a worldwide campaign against Monsanto which had forced many authorities to accept GMOs, she observed. Coordinated by the agriculture wing of the International Forum on Globalisation, the campaign would have the participation of consumer and environmental groups from the US, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and UK.

Courtesy: Times of India News Service

Prisoner of Conscience Receives Solidarity Award

TEK Nath Rizal, the most renowned South Asian defender of human rights, an Amnesty International 'Prisoner of Conscience' was the first recipient of the Prakash Kaphey International Solidarity Award at a ceremony in Kathmandu, Nepal on December 18, 1998. A purse of \$2,000 accompanied the award, which was received by Teknath's wife, Kaushilya.

The biennial award is sponsored by the Group for International Solidarity (GRINSO) — Nepal and the Prakash Kaphey Memorial Foundation. It honours the memory of Prakash Kaphey, an outstanding human rights worker, who died at the age of 40 in a plane crash near Kathmandu July 31, 1992.

Tek Nath Rizal was a Royal Advisory Councilor in Bhutan. He petitioned the King, along with others, to make an immediate intervention when Bhutanese of Nepali descent were being forced out of the country. In June 1988 Rizal was arrested for a few days, freed on royal pardon, but was expelled

from the Advisory Council. Fearing for his life, he fled to Nepal in July, where he began the People's Forum for Human Rights in Bhutan in exile. On November 16, 1989 he and two associates were kidnapped from his home in Jhapa District with the tacit approval of the panchayat government. He was taken to Bhutan, kept in solitary confinement and forced to wear shackles for 20 months. He was found guilty of treason in 1993 and sentenced to life imprisonment. The King has decreed that he will be freed when the refugee problem is settled.

Man Mohan Adhikari, a former Prime Minister of Nepal and present leader of the opposition, was chief guest at the award ceremony, held at the International Conference Center in Kathmandu. Other visiting guests and speakers were retired Bangladesh Supreme Court Justice K.M. Subhan, who presided over the ceremony as Chairman, retired Justice of the High Court A.S. Bains of India, Swami Agnivesh and

A.S. Verma from India, Holy Cross Father R.W. Timm from Bangladesh and M.A. Sabur from Thailand. Dr. Clarence Dias and retired Chief Justice of the Indian Supreme Court P.N. Bhagwati were unable to attend but sent messages.

Many tributes were paid to Prakash Kaphey. Justice Bhagwati wrote of him: "Prakash Kaphey was a person of rare courage, indomitable will and a passionate commitment to freedom." Father Timm stated: "I learned to love Prakash deeply and to appreciate the steadfast and dedicated nature of his complete commitment to human rights."

Man Mohan Adhikari in his talk stated: "We must carry on the struggle begun by the human rights champions like Prakash Kaphey and Tek Nath Rizal as human rights violation is still a world-wide evil even 50 years after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948." Adhikari felt that the return of the refugees to Bhutan can only be brought about through the involvement of the 'key player' —

India — the regional power.

Before the ceremony the visiting guests spent two days at the refugee camps, including the Caritas Nepal camp at Damak near Jhapa in eastern Nepal, where Jesuit Fathers Anil Raj and Varkey Perakkatt work for Caritas as Field Director and Assistant, respectively. The guests held a long discussion with the Chief District Officer at the Regional Coordinating Unit. They also attended a reception by about 50 lawyers and human rights workers of the area at the District Electricity Board Auditorium. The general consensus of these discussions and later discussions in Kathmandu with the Bhutanese leaders was that the only likely solution of the nine-year old refugee problem was if the Indian government takes an active role in trying to persuade the Bhutanese authorities to open a dialogue on return of the refugees. The visitors proposed to form a high-level delegation of outstanding personalities of South Asia to visit the King of Bhutan. — Hotline Bangladesh

