

World Economic Forum: Most Exclusive Gabfest

Harun ur Rashid writes from Canberra, Australia

The World Economic Forum has been credited with providing a backdrop over the years for much fence-mending and bridge building. The Forum claims a role in bringing together South Africa's business leaders and the African National Congress.

opment on Freedom (Oxford University Press) argued that development was not merely an economic process but a political

one. Development and economic growth should be seen as the "process of expanding the real freedoms that people en-

joy." Development should be targeted to remove poverty and poor economic opportunities. He also argued eloquently that

all humanity was connected and that human suffering anywhere was relevant. The bottomline is that economic growth is to be judged from the point of view of social consequences.

Globalisation has not benefited many of the Third World countries. It is alleged that globalisation has ignored "human face." The claim of all-inclusive globalisation remains a myth in the developing countries. The world has to create an environment of responsible globality.

The main themes of this year's meeting are the impact of internet and biotechnology. This is a very different set of concerns to the agenda a year ago. Business leaders representing 60 to 80 per cent of world production are attending the Forum. America's leading players in the technology and internet revolution are present as well.

As a result Davos has become a focus for anti-free traders and environmentalists as the World Trade Organisation. To avoid the protests from the non-government organisations (NGO), the Forum invited some 15 heads of NGOs. The business leaders will be interested to listen, among other things, to Pierre Sane of Amnesty International and Thilo Bode of

Greenpeace. The head of World Trade Organisation (WTO) Mike Moore and the Chairman of De Beers group of South Africa Nicholas Oppenheimer are to debate the role of NGOs in the global agenda.

Corporate attitudes have changed after the debacle in WTO's talks in Seattle. The perceptive business leaders realised that they needed to engage civil society rather than scorn it. The World Economic Forum, according to the founder Swiss business professor Klaus Schwab, provides the opportunity to the business leaders to be aware of the fact that business cannot operate in this century without moral considerations.

The World Economic Forum has been credited with providing a backdrop over the years for much fence-mending and bridge building. The Forum claims a role in bringing together South Africa's business leaders and the African National Congress. This year it is supposed to provide a meeting place for dialogue between Arab and Israeli leaders, a process that would involve President Clinton as both Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Chairman Yasser Arafat were supposed to be present in Davos. But Barak at last cancelled the trip.

The global summit at Davos appears to be more than an economic forum. It is as much about economics as about politics.

The author, a barrister, is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva



Swiss riot police stands in line in Davos as anti-globalisation protesters try to march on the World Economic Forum in Davos Saturday. Demonstrators smashed windows and injured at least one policeman during clashes. — AFP photo

THE 30th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in the Swiss Alpine ski resort, Davos, near the Austrian border, commenced on 27 January for six days. This meeting is the first multinational event since the meeting of the World Trade Organisation in Seattle last December. President Clinton and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were among the 33 heads of state who have been invited to participate in the meeting.

Since the meeting attracts high profile world leaders, the 1000 business leaders including Bill Gates are to attend the meeting after the payment of US\$22,000. The participation is restricted and is by invitation only. The Forum is unique in the sense that the discussions are held in an atmosphere of informality and candidness, followed by questions and answers, often uncomfortable to the speakers. The Forum does not make recommendations or releases any communiques.

This year the meeting is taking place in the backdrop of the growth of world economy and the business potential of the internet companies. However, inequality has increased between the rich and the poor countries. At the beginning of the 21st century, the world is divided into three kinds of nations: those who spend lots of money to reduce body weight, those who eat to live and those where people don't know where the next meal is coming from?

As Nobel laureate Amartya Sen in his recent book Devel-

The Judicial Crisis in Pakistan

by Benazir Bhutto

The judicial crisis is illustrative of the challenges Pakistan faces as it begins the twenty-first century. It is time for the generals ruling Pakistan to take stock of the last three months and correct negative developments. This can be done if the generals show they have a will to create political consensus for reform. Without that will, the outlook for the country will remain bleak.

generals. Chief Justice Saeeduzzaman Siddiqui challenged the constitutional authority of the new regime, throwing up questions once again of its legitimacy. He declared that he would only "work under the Constitution".

Interestingly, the Chief Justice revealed the bargain that the military ruler had struck with him when he seized power last October. According to Siddiqui, General Musharraf had agreed with him to retain those parts of the Constitution that dealt with the judiciary. The deal and the generals fell out when the generals issued an executive order forcing the judges to take an oath of allegiance to the new order. Publicly, the sacking of the judges has been viewed as an echo of the steps taken by Pakistan's previous military ruler, General Ziaul Haq, to pack the judiciary with judges loyal to him. This poses a challenge to the sitting judges of the Supreme Court under their new Chief Justice, Irshad Hassan Khan. Most of these judges enjoy a good reputation. In having taken the new oath of office swearing allegiance to the new order, the justices would be barred from hearing the application for the restoration of the

Nawaz regime. However, the judicial mess highlights the inability of the new regime to win friends and its proclivity to make foes. Increasingly, the generals are seen as taking arbitrary decisions to manipulate the judicial and political process.

The political parties, the bar associations and the human rights activists had welcomed the removal of the fascist Nawaz regime. Yet, these very social classes which welcomed the end of the Nawaz regime, have been systematically alienated.

The inability to formulate an independent mechanism for accountability, the failure to undo the wrongs of victimization by the Nawaz regime, the lack of communication with the combined opposition and now the brutal sacking of known independent judges have eroded the political support which the regime enjoyed when it took power last October. It has also opened the federal question. For, ominously, the bulk of the sacked judges of the Supreme Court came from the alienated southern province of Sindh. General Musharraf,

when taking over, had criticized the ethnic policies of his ousted predecessor. Yet, the ethnic slant of the sacking can only add to the sense of grievance felt by the people in Sindh.

The judicial crisis reflects the growing divisiveness of civil society in Pakistan and the increasing importance of the judiciary in determining political matters. In democracies, elections determine issues of governance. In Pakistan, the judiciary has been determining the right of different players to govern. The effect has been the politicization of the judiciary and the collapse of freedom and law.

Since democracy was restored in 1985, the death of three different governments, enjoying a parliamentary majority, was pronounced through the blessings of the judiciary. In the last four years, the Pakistan People's Party blamed one Chief Justice for conspiring against it whilst President Leghari blamed another Chief Justice for saving the Pakistan Muslim League government. Given the proclivity of justices to act on known political inclinations, the generals simply could not take the risk of Chief

Justice Saeeduzzaman Siddiqui, a Nawaz appointee, hearing the case for the restoration of the Nawaz government.

In other countries, judges with known political sentiments do not hear cases in which they have an interest. Consequently, the judiciary remains untainted. In Pakistan, this is not the case. Politicized judges have insisted on hearing cases in which they are interested even when the parties protest, as the Bhutto-Zardari trials showed. The inability to separate themselves from political issues has undermined the independence of the judiciary and made courts controversial.

Even darker days may lie ahead for Pakistan's embattled judiciary. Despite published reports of judicial propriety, the courts have failed to take action against errant justices as provided under the law. There is a growing body of public opinion which believes the allegations of corruption and misconduct against justices should be investigated. Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, ousted in a 1997 power play, has been in the forefront of demanding the accountability of the members

of the judiciary. Yet, even as Pakistanis call for accountability, they shirk from asking for an accountability mechanism that is independent and a law which is fair. Resultantly, moral cries for accountability degenerate into pathetic plays of retribution.

The judicial crisis, coming as it does on the heels of India's campaign to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, does not bode well for the stability of Pakistan. The divisive nature of civil society, the crumbling institutions, the economic malaise and the marginalization of the major political parties is creating a vacuum that can degenerate into chaos. The disintegration of civil society in Pakistan poses a threat to regional peace and stability. Chaos in Pakistan, the world's only nuclear capable Islamic state, bordering fanatic Afghanistan, bodes ill for the international community.

The judicial crisis is illustrative of the challenges Pakistan faces as it begins the twenty-first century. It is time for the generals ruling Pakistan to take stock of the last three months and correct negative developments. This can be done if the generals show they have a will to create political consensus for reform. Without that will, the outlook for the country will remain bleak.

The author is the former prime minister of Pakistan. This piece first appeared in The Dawn of January 30, 2000.

'Idiot' Journalists Blasted for Mutiny Reports

Political atmosphere is heating up in Kenya, as the next election approaches. Now the temperature has been raised further by complaints about pay and conditions by a group of anonymous junior officers. President Moi tried to damp down the issue by attacking the journalists who reported the grievances.

Robert Otani writes from Nairobi

Despite government attempts to brush the matter aside, the grumbling continued. Finally, after meetings with senior military officers, the President took the opportunity of the Jamuhuri Day festivities to vent his wrath on the mass media, especially the People on Sunday.

Dismissing talk of mutiny as treasonable, Moi said angrily: "The journalists writing about this matter are idiots of the highest order."

However, his bid to gloss over the situation was embarrassingly undermined when senior officers emphasised the seriousness of the problem.

A further dimension was added at a four-day, closed-door meeting at the Kenya Defence College in Karen, on the western outskirts of Nairobi, to review the armed forces' operations in general and to map out the way forward into the next millennium.

The meeting was attended by 300 senior officers, including the chief of combined staff, General Daudi Tonje, who was in the chair, his deputy, Lieutenant Daniel Opande, and the three service commanders: the Army's Lieutenant-General Aden Abdullahi, the Air Force's Major-General Nick Leshan, and Major-General Abdul Raifouf of the Navy. They were joined by their brigade and regimental commanders and staff officers. Sunkuli, who is in charge of

internal security, delivered a personal message from the President, which essentially said he did not want to hear any more talk of mutiny or disaffection, and wanted the situation settled.

Soon after the meeting, however, the aggrieved junior officers gave another interview to the People on Sunday, in which they complained about General Tonje, citing him — and his style of management — as the source of their grievances.

One officer, who requested anonymity, argued that General Tonje, like his counterparts in the United States and Britain, had attended prestigious military training colleges such as Sandhurst and West Point, but claimed "his casual approach to serious matters leaves a lot to be desired."

It was also alleged that he was more interested in politics than in military affairs, a charge likely to resonate as Moi heads towards the end of his final term of office and elections in 2002. They questioned the basis of many recent promotions, and claimed the armed forces were top heavy: "Why should the Navy have five Admirals when they run small units? It need only one... Today we need a very small army as the Cold War is over. We do not have any serious threat."

In another interview with the People Daily, a number of

officers called for General Tonje's departure. Keeping him at the helm was "like tugging at a rubber band from both ends; it will snap any time."

"The myriad problems at the

military can be solved amicably, but the presence of General Tonje at the helm makes it very difficult for anybody to sort out anything," they said, adding,

"When one hears of a mutiny in the military, one has to take it seriously. It's not something

you can dismiss with the wave of your hand."

In his 21 years in power, Moi has proved his political cunning. He is also wrestling with economic difficulties, and the last thing he needs is dissent in the armed forces.

— Gemini News

The author is a Kenyan freelance journalist based in Nairobi.

Waiting for Tomorrow

by Alif Zabr

IF there were no tomorrow, when today becomes the last day of existence? It is unthinkable situation for six billion people at the end of the day. Perhaps that is one of the divine manifestations, which, in mercy, denied man the knowledge of the future, to provide a little peace of mind.

What is life if tomorrow is not worth waiting for? It is a basic question of daily life both in the developed and undeveloped countries. It is the small pleasure of life at the end of the day's grind, when the breadwinners return home, and the family relax, to plan or resolve afresh for the morrow.

But tomorrow is not in our hands, and none can control it individually, subjectively or objectively, however powerful or secure. Man is a social animal, and one's happiness and sorrows have interactions through others around us, known or unknown. Our lives are controlled by many factors

in the society we live in, and the environment we mould, with the ultimate aim of the greatest good of the greatest number. The welfare we seek for ourselves cannot be obtained without consideration for others. Adjustments take place at many levels — vertical and horizontal — of the society.

At the global level the UN system comes in. But today UN is a shadow of its former existence, with manipulations at the highest level. The existence of one God is justified, but not that of one super-power, of collective might, but not of collective wisdom. A sole human power may be vulnerable; unlike the two hands that are necessary to clap.

Adjustment is part of the definition, and one of the parameters, of life. There are several types of adjustment, internal and external, and in many areas. The complexity of life is hidden inside the mores, habits and rituals. That makes life a

bit easier, and more tolerable. We look forward to the next day for some incremental improvement. The dimensions of Hope in the Third World is different. The will to live is there, but what tomorrow will bring? That is the biggest global issue of the times — waiting for tomorrow.

Why life is not like an atom (nuclear) bomb which explodes within a fraction of billionth of a second, packing uncontrollable energy? Time intervals have been assigned to life for daily or periodical assessment through delicate feedback mechanisms embedded within the life-support system; making man's existence on Earth extended. This is an indirect blessing, which has to be appreciated, armed with the right philosophy of life.

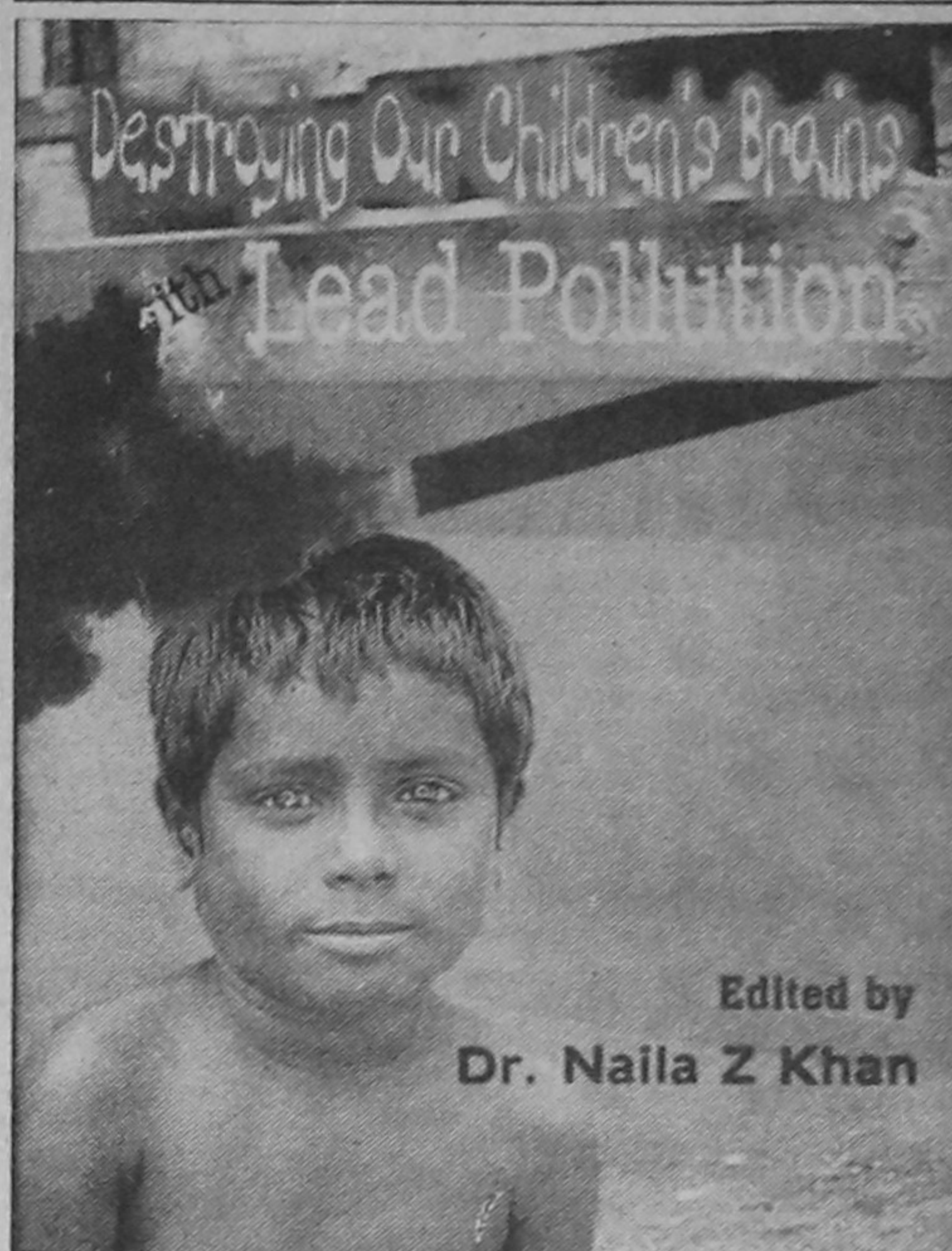
There is no National Tomorrow Day, because the Day never comes. Yesterdays leave trails and serve as Check Lists, for incremental development. The

Pay Heed, Will You?

BOOK REVIEW

Destroying Our Children's Brains with Lead Pollution

Edited by Dr. Naila Z Khan, Professor, Child Neurology and Development, Dhaka Shishu Hospital. Published by Narigrantha Prabartana, January, 2000. Price: Taka 20. Available at Narigrantha Prabartana and Shishu Bikash Kendro, Dhaka Shishu Hospital.



Edited by Dr. Naila Z Khan

AIR pollution by leaded petrol has been recently found to be affecting the functional and brain development and intelligence of children in Bangladesh. This book is an important chronological documentation of a campaign started by the Shishu Bikash Kendro (Child Development Centre) of the Dhaka Shishu Hospital, along with environmentalists and the media, demanding a ban on leaded petrol and immediate implementation of policies for clean air in Bangladesh. More importantly, scientific research findings have been put forward in easy format and language to convey the urgency of the matter to the general public.

The first section gives information to the general reader on sources of lead in the environment, its toxic effects and effects on health and development of both children and adults. It explains why specific populations, especially children (their brain development), are more vulnerable to its long-term effects than adults.

In the second section, evidence that Bangladesh is one of the highest known lead levels in the environment and in human blood are explained. Two major studies conducted in the eighties and early nineties have been quoted.

In the third section, a previously published article of Dr. Khan has been reprinted in which she has explained the extent of the problems found in children, and some important measures to prevent them. A letter to the Lancet titled "Psychomotor delay and lead poisoning in Bangladeshi children" has also been reprinted.

In the fourth section, excerpts from relevant editorials, editorial commentaries and frontline articles including the announcement of the

Bangladesh Government to ban leaded petrol, have been chronologically reprinted as documentation of a positive public action towards a cleaner environment in Bangladesh.

In the fifth section, a comprehensive policy towards cleaner air is strongly voiced, especially the need to change car exhausts to include catalytic converters. Dr. Alaudin's article clearly explains a research finding where over 40 types of carcinogenic emissions were found in the exhaust fumes of the two-stroke autorickshaws.

In the sixth section, a small population based survey of blood lead levels conducted by the Shishu Bikash Kendro recently has been highlighted i.e. its main findings have been reproduced. It shows that no population is exempted from lead poisoning. However, the worst sufferers have been shown to be the urban slum population, especially children.

In the seventh and final section individual children suffering from lead poisoning have been described, including both symptomatic and asymptomatic children, and how lead affects their brain development and intelligence.

The book is written in simple language and is full of information for the general readers. In every page the most important points are printed in larger font and easily catches the reader's eye. The synthesis of important scientific information with socially relevant issues is commendable and will serve to further the campaign for a cleaner environment for scientists, environmentalists and social activists alike. The focus on children's development makes it an important reading for every parent, childcare provider and child health professional. And, of course, the policymakers.

—EK

