

International Year of Ecotourism

U.N. officials speaking at a special event January 28 marking the launch of the International Year of Ecotourism highlighted the development potential of ecotourism as well as the disturbing environmental trends of increasing tourism.

being coordinated by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), will provide an opportunity to review the ecotourism industry's effect on biodiversity, its potential contribution to sustainable development, and its social, economic and environmental impacts.

in or close to them," said UNEP Executive Director Klaus Toepper. High level delegates and experts from around the world are expected to attend the World Ecotourism Summit to be held in May in Quebec City, Canada.

Eco-tourism : Opportunity for environment conservation and regional cooperation

MOHIUDDIN BABAR

GLOBAL tourism galore is likely to witness a shift from the traditional inquisitiveness of the tourists in watching the Taj Mahal in India, Pyramids in Egypt, Great Wall in China, Leaning Tower in Italy, Eiffel Tower in France, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and several other monuments of great historic significance.

Eco-tourism could be boon for the region to alleviate poverty to a greater scale while at the same time, allow it to uncover its real resources-- the geographic splendours of rivers, lakes, hills, mountains, forests, animal reserves and sea beaches. More importantly, development of eco-tourism shall strike a balance between conservation of environment and economic and social development



The Sundarbans: Abode of the Royal Bengal Tiger

whole, it employs, directly or indirectly, about 11 per cent of the world's total workforce. Furthermore, besides being a key stimulator of national economies in many countries, tourism has been the major foreign exchange earner for many.

Unfortunately has been at low ebb and could not be any significant contributory factor for our national development so far. Bangladesh is blessed with a topographical structure which has several characteristics to be tapped for substantial economic benefits.

of market economy, a wise step could be to allow foreign investment in developing such infrastructure. Malaysia has implemented a mammoth development in its tourism industry, particularly in developing her ample eco-tourism spots which were in decaying or uncared stages only a few years back.

While most of the countries in the region have many similarities in geographic structures, there are many contrasts too. These could be exploited through a web of cooperation for regional tourism and its development.

With their foreign exchange earnings normally pegged to foreign aid and small scale exportables, countries in the region could do better under an umbrella of cooperation for tourism development.

Despite having enough potentials, south Asian region has failed to make any limelight in global tourism. Most of the countries are reeling in with acute poverty precipitated with unabated unemployment, low rate of literacy, poor infrastructure development and so forth.

Tribute to an environmentalist

AMITA BAVISKAR

THE death of Anil Agarwal at the age of 54 on January 2, 2002 is a loss to the environmental movement in India. He was an activist whose passion, vision and prodigious energy brought environmental concerns from the margins of the public sphere into the mainstream.

change. While the first two reports attempted to cover all aspects of environmental change in India, the three subsequent reports acknowledged the impossibility of such an exercise in spite of the huge expansion of environmental journalism which included the CSE's own magazine Down to Earth.

ment and development. It was probably then that he was persuaded that winning over key politicians would be an effective strategy towards influencing environmental decision-making.



Activist-environmentalist Anil Agarwal, 1947-2002

Chipko, and his support for that other great environmental cause - the Narmada anti-dam struggle - was inexplicably muted, he did consistently make the case for local control over natural resources.

AGARWAL'S skill in mounting sustained and hard-hitting environmental campaigns is best exemplified in his work against vehicular pollution. The CSE's 1996 study report titled Slow Murder showed Agarwal at his best, brilliantly dissecting the problem, assigning responsibility and not hesitating to name names.

Forest: The hidden medicine chest must be saved

MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

INDISCRIMINATE logging and killing of wild life in our little known forests especially the mangrove forest of the Sunderbans, Rangamati, Sylhet etc. signal a catastrophic extinction of these vast untapped wealth and resources.

Mother Nature has been creating weird and wonderful chemicals for more than three billion years; and we are only beginning to sift through these hidden treasures. New technologies enable us to find, analyze and manipulate molecules as never before. While today's laboratory scientists can synthesize new molecules from scratch at a pace unimaginable just a few decades back, promising compounds produced by nature's most creative creatures increasingly provide the optimum starting points.

million hectares or 18 percent of the country's surface land, shockingly the actual forestry now stands about 7 percent of the land area. But unquestionably, forestry contributes to both economic and ecological stability of the country.



Diminishing forest resource: The trend must be reversed

cancer agents, pain killers and blood thinners. For example, "fox gloves" (Shial Kata) mostly found in our region has been found to be so useful to millions of people with heart ailments.

Human beings are the only ones who possess the power to snuff life out of all other species in the world. But that power can very often turn malevolent and that is where we have to be cautious. Unfortunately for us Bangladeshis, we've been more than malevolent -- we've been natural born killers of wild life and plunderers of forest resources.

store of known and potential medicines is under threat. Every species everywhere has the potential to teach us something new. How tragic then it is that just as innovative technologies give us the ability to take advantage of natural compounds as never before, we continue to threaten the world's species and the habitats on which they depend.

MD. Asadullah Khan is Controller of Examinations, BUEIT