

We are all potential environmental refugees

source?" "The rich countries," she added, "may look upon development as the cause of environmental destruction, but to us it is one of the primary means of improving the environment of living, of providing food, water, sanitation and shelter, of making the deserts green and mountains habitable."

At the Stockholm Conference, however, there was a general recognition that environmental concerns should not be a barrier to development but should be a part of the process. Only an environmentally-sound development is likely to be enduring and will also avoid unforeseen and unwelcome side effects. "Eco-development" — a word coined to describe this process of ecologically-sound development and a process of positive management of the environment for human benefit — emerged as a central theme during the deliberations at the Stockholm Conference. Though the developing nations cannot afford to ignore their development urge, they are no longer apathetic towards environmental quality. This may be seen in a series of anti-pollution and conservation measures adopted by a number of developing nations. In this respect, initiatives taken by some of the governments, as well as the activities of the growing number of environmental groups, have made significant contributions. The recent shelving of the Silent Valley hydroelectric project in India is a case in point. Strong public protests forced the Government not only to cancel the project — which would have dammed the Kuntipuzha River in Kerala State and flooded part of the Silent Valley, India's only surviving virgin tropical forest — but also to declare the fragile Silent Valley a National Park. That action only reaffirmed the growing conviction among the developing nations that environmental concerns are not a setback but a guide to development.

Conserving or not polluting?

Although the attitude of the people towards environment has undergone a sea change in the post-Stockholm period, nevertheless, many still remain more concerned about pollution *per se* than about natural resource degradation or the need for environmental conservation. Ironically, the "trigger events" still continue to guide public awareness of the environmental hazards. As a result, only when a severe earthquake or cyclone causes massive damage in a country or when drought affects a whole region, driving millions of people to flee and causing tremendous human suffering, or a Bhopal-like industrial disaster causes thousands of deaths, do the policy makers and the public become alert to such environmental hazards and their consequences.

Even the World Bank has now felt the need to increase steadily its attention to the environmental opportunities and risks introduced by the developmental process. The environmental concerns of the World Bank encompass human ecology and occupational health and safety. Accordingly, a significant and growing number of Bank-financed projects are entirely "environmental," such as reforestation, soil conservation, wildlife and watershed management, sewage treatment and pollution control.

Several studies have also been carried out during the past decade by expert groups and institutions on the relationship between environment and development. They have unfolded the complex relationships among people,

resources, environment and development. The twin problems of environmental crisis and developmental crisis are haunting the people of the Third World today. On the one hand, there does not seem to be any light at the end of the long tunnel of the problems of inequality, poverty and unemployment. Side-by-side, the destruction of environment at a menacing rate has only worsened the plight of these disadvantaged nations. The chain reaction stemming from this environmental disequilibrium has, in its wake, only brought untold miseries for the poorest. The grinding and pervasive poverty in the developing nations has come to be known as "pollution of poverty," whereas the widespread neglect of the environment and the erosion of social values in the developed nations has been called "pollution of affluence." With more than two-thirds of humanity groaning under sub-human conditions, poverty has been regarded as the "biggest polluter."

Internationalizing pollution

Environmental pollution is also no respecter of national boundaries. Transboundary pollution has now become a serious cause of concern. Polluted air from industrialized Europe can easily take in its sweep countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia. This has been bitterly experienced recently in the case of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident in the Soviet Union, wherein radiation clouds reached well over 1000 kilometers away in Sweden. The spine-chilling account of the disaster given by the Soviet delegation at the meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna in early September, corroborated these dangers. Had the winds pushed these radiation clouds in the reverse direction, many nearby nations, including India, would have got the brunt of the radiation damage. The atmospheric nuclear testing being carried out by some of the nuclear haves is equally laden with grave risks. Such tests not only bring in their wake serious consequences for the atmosphere and marine environment, but they also violate the freedom of the seas. The arguments put forward by both Australia and New Zealand in the *Nuclear Tests Cases* (1974) before the International Court of Justice against French nuclear testing on the Mururoa Atoll island in the Pacific, reflected the concern for these dangers to mankind.

The fruits of development of the developing nations have also often turned sour with the hazards brought in by the import of some of the technologies and designs of industrial plants from the developed world. This was tragically demonstrated in the escape of the lethal gas from an MIC (methyl isocyanate) storage tank at the Union Carbide Bhopal plant (December 2, 1984), which resulted in the world's biggest industrial disaster, instantly killing more than 2,000 people and causing serious long-term environmental damage. The Indian Government has now filed a damage suit against Union Carbide Corporation of USA in Bhopal district court, following the dismissal of a similar damage suit in the southern district court of New York four months earlier, claiming compensation of an "appropriate amount" for the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy and asking for punitive damages to deter Union Carbide and other multinationals from showing disregard for the safety of the people. Even efforts by some industrialized states, such as Japan in the Pacific and Britain in the Atlantic, to

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