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Remarks
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(Transcribed from handwritten notes)

Talking Points

IHT Conference in Bangkok:

Many of the well-known business firms operating in the Asia Region are incorporating environmental concerns into their corporate philosophies and business strategies.

It was good to hear political leaders emphasise that the key concern from the 1990s onward would be sustainability in which the environment would play a dominant role.

Until fairly recently, the attention of policy makers has focused almost exclusively on issues on economic sustainability - how to increase employment, output and exports in the long run, while maintaining stable prices and manageable balance of payments in the short run. The emergence of environmental issues is changing that orientation to include ecological sustainability as well.

The World Bank:

Over the past six years, environment as a development issue has assumed increasing importance in the Bank's work. Of the \$22.7 billion that the Bank lent in FY 91, \$1 billion was for free-standing environment projects, double the previous year's amount. More than 50% of all loans contained environmental components. The Bank has established requirements and guidelines for environmental assessment, promoted national environment action plans and adopted policies for involuntary resettlement, dams, wildlands, and forest conservation and management. It has also set up, in cooperation with the UN Environment Programme and the UNDP, The Global Environment Facility, a pilot scheme for helping developing countries toward solving global environmental problems.

There are three interconnected dimensions to the Bank's work on the environment - the relationship between environmental degradation and poverty; the link between poverty and population; and the importance of a sound macrocosmic framework in minimising natural resource depletion.

When the Bank began its strengthened program on the environment, it already had gained considerable experience in South Asia, where population pressures in rural areas had for many years taken its toll in soil erosion, siltation of rivers and streams, deforestation, and other processes.

As Asia's population continues to grow, the proportion of the population living in cities will also increase. By 2025, over 4 million each, compared to 20 currently. South Asia is expected to have the highest ratio of population of such mega cities by 2025. Many of these cities will have 10 million people or more. Few governments have policies or programmes to cope with the projected rates and associated needs of urbanisation. Significant issues regarding environmental pollution and land use allocation are inevitable.

Forest areas are declining - highest decline in East Asia and severe in South Asia. Throughout Asia, the rate of deforestation has increased from 2 million hectares per annum in the 1970s to at least 5 million hectares per annum in the 1980s. This has resulted from demand for increased agricultural land, commercial logging and fuel wood collection.

Secondary costs of forest depletion: Soil erosion caused by deforestation is estimated to cost Java alone about \$400 million annually. Soil productivity loss and costs of clearing silt.

Air pollution in Asian countries: Threat to human health. Children in Bangkok show increasing levels of toxic chemicals in the blood stream resulting from inhalation of car emissions.

Dimensions and distribution of poverty: South and East Asia. East, industrialising economies. Poverty reduction in Asia is tightly bound to population density and to rapid growth. More than half of 5 billion live in Asia, nearly 35% of whom are below 15 years of age or 35 years. Asia will have another 1.7 billion. Measures of density of settlement . Asia has 354; LA, 55; SA, 58;; 116 for ME and NA. Bangladesh has more than 1000 people per sq km of agricultural land.

Pressures on resources. Physical and natural. Social services. Poverty. Status of women. Gender disparities in South. Building into various components - social services, credit training and employment.

Macro-economic stability - "structural reforms" to extend the enabling environment for private sector development. As in the case of economic growth, every consensus that moves to a more "market friendly" approach makes good economic sense.

Illustrated by non-market approach, Eastern Europe. Distortions in price system encouraged growth and social system. Unintended effect of encouragement: water and electricity prices were kept artificially low; promoted consumer use leading to wasteful consumption and extra pollution. State-run policy on heavy industries (illegible 3 words).

Poland. High metal (illegible 1 word) environment. Leads to disasters. Reduction in life expectancy.

Moving(?) to market (illegible word) for key natural resources. Effective land use. Reduce wasteful consumption, improve efficiency, restructure government bureaucracy. NGOs and media to reconcile a potential conflict between human effort and environmental considerations.
