EQUATIONS Documentation Clipping Service was started with the purpose of reaching to the interested, information on tourism development activities in our country on a regular and timely basis. The selection of the newspaper reports is in itself reflective of our analysis of these developments. But in response to requests from our friends, we will preface each of the volumes with a brief comment on our perceptions.

In response to these requests, future issues will include a summarised analysis of tourism developments and trends. Our analysis is supported by the material that we send to you. Your responses/comments on the clipping service are most welcome.

The first section of this issue focuses on the policy trends in Tourism Development. Reflecting the change in Government priorities, the presence of Mr. Devi Lal at the helm of affairs leads to innovative marketing strategies. His overwhelming concern to redeem the rural people from the inferiority complex that they seem to suffer from, by subsidising their stay in Government-owned ITDC luxury hotels fizzes out when it comes to acquiring 11,200 hectares of Gujar land in Gurgaon. While public attention is taken up by the headline stealing comments of our Tourism Minister, the Industry and the ministry are single-mindedly carrying on with their plans for major investments as well as strategising for the Visit India Year. That concerted and coordinated efforts are taking place is reflected in the utterances made by the Railway Board Chairman, the hotel lobby as well as the FICCI.

The undue haste in which tourism development plans are made and executed has not escaped notice from various quarters. Saner voices from within the Government are looked upon by the industry as unwelcome as they are in conflict with their short term economic gains outlook. The obduracy of our policy-planners to ecological and social concerns of its fellow citizens is brought out in the article on Nilgiris. Critical examination of the new tourism strategies of the Government by the media is indicative of the increasing public awareness of our top-sided development policies.

We feel that the letter by Ms Vasanthi Sarathy drives home our plea for re-prioritization of our efforts - a plea to confront the fundamental problems afflicting our country and to quit believing that cosmetic changes will bring any sustainable improvements in the quality of the life of our people. Or will our plea fall on deaf ears with our 'rulers' concentrating their efforts in discovering the elusive 'tourist paradise'?

K T Suresh
for EQUATIONS
UDAIPUR, Dec 26. (UNI): “Dhoti-clad and rural-spired” people will get preference over urbanites in the Tourism Development Corporation hotels and restaurants where they will enjoy 50 per cent concessions.

This unique facility has been offered by the deputy Prime Minister, Mr Devi Lal, to the rural people to enable them to savour the luxury tourism products of India at ITDC establishments.

Inaugurating a week-long crafts mela named “Kangan shilgram mela,” organised by the west zone cultural centre in collaboration with the tourism departments of the Government of India and Rajasthan and the Handicraft and Handloom Commission, Mr Devi Lal said this facility would be available to the rural people twice a week — Thursday and Friday.

He explained that this step was designed to “encourage the rural people to shed their inferiority complex.”

Mr Devi Lal said that 50 per cent concession would not be limited only to food served in the hotels run by ITDC but also in room rent and other facilities provided by these establishments.

The deputy Prime Minister said he had introduced such a scheme in Haryana when he was the chief minister of the state and found that the response was very encouraging. He hoped that other state governments would follow the scheme of providing facilities to the rural people in their respective tourism establishments to promote tourism among villagers.

In the crafts mela, selected craftsmen from all over the country exhibited and sold attractive products. Food craftsmen from Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa have made available delicacies from their region.

Mr Devi Lal said that such a craft mela organised in Haryana earlier was very popular, particularly among foreign tourists.
Devi Lal’s return triggers Disneyland fears

With Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal now in charge of the Tourism portfolio, the Gujaratis of Haryana are waiting for his son, Mr. Om Prakash Chautala, to begin pushing his once-shelved Disneyland project through.

It was in January this year that these farmers were first faced with the threat of losing their lands when the State Government issued an order prohibiting them from constructing new buildings on their holdings. However, stiff resistance from the farmers forced Mr. Chautala to put his ambitious plans on the back-burner for a while.

The Congress, then in the Opposition, had only been too willing to lend strength to the farmers’ plans to storm the streets of New Delhi to protest against Mr. Chautala’s move to acquire their lands. But the farmers, who were determined not to politicise the issue, declined the offer of manpower and resources and managed to stage an impressive demonstration in the capital after having arrived in their own tractors.

The Congress is now the ruling party’s prop. Yet, former Surface Transport Minister and senior Gujrat leader Rajesh Pilot is threatening to hold a massive rally at the Boat Club lawns on December 3 to protest against revival of the project. Mr. Pilot claims that he has the party leadership’s permission to mobilise Gujarati farmers from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, besides Haryana, for the show of strength. He can also count on the support of two of Mr. Devi Lal’s traditional rivals from Haryana: Mr. V. Bhajan Lal and Mr. Bansi Lal.

When a copy of Section 4 of the Land Acquisition Act was put up at the tehsil office in Gurgaon in January, warning farmers that they would soon be forfeiting the right to build anything on their property, village elders had got into a huddle, trying to figure out what was coming. Charges against the ruling family of the State followed thick and fast — from political vendetta (the Gujaratis are said to have voted against Devi Lal and his son in the Lok Sabha elections), to land-grabbing and illegal money-making.

The farmers are still at a loss to understand why the Government wanted 11,200 hectares of land for the Disneyland project, however wonderful it promised to be. (The Disneyland in California is spread over only 80 hectares.) But what they do know is that leading developers and builders are all in the game and waiting to make a killing when the inevitable influx of urbanites begins. Three of Delhi’s real estate barons had, in fact, already begun advertising mega residential complexes and exclusive farmlands in Gurgaon.

The Union Food and Civil Supplies Minister, Rao Birendra Singh, who has a home in Sohna, a village in Gurgaon, is not against the Disneyland project. According to him, it would bring in a lot of revenue, something the State badly needs for its development. It would also provide employment opportunities for the local people. He is not unduly worried about the negative effects that a luxury project like Disneyland could have on life in the villages. He feels that rapacious real estate agencies are anyway reducing Gurgaon to a slum by parceling out land to Delhiites.

The farmers are not convinced. They have denied that many of them are selling land to developers for fabulous sums. No self-respecting farmer will sell his land if he can help it, they maintain. And they know that once the Disneyland comes into being, the tourism industry will strike roots in Gurgaon — with all its attendant evils.

When the project was first mooted, the State Government was reportedly negotiating a deal with the US Walt Disney company through a consortium of non-resident Indians. The American firm is known to be a tough bargainer and will not do business unless there is the promise of a big bonanza. But the traffic will not be inconsiderable, and the Haryana politicians could still find themselves in clover.

— Mary Mathen in New Delhi
Devi okays Kerala’s big tourism projects

Express News Service
Thiruvananthapuram, Dec. 16:
Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal on Saturday approved Rs. 4 crore worth of tourism projects submitted by the Kerala Government.

Mr. Devi Lal made the announcement after laying the foundation stone for the Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology at a function at Kovalam.

The projects sanctioned by Mr. Devi Lal are the Convention Centre attached to the Kanakkunnun Palace (Rs. 135 lakh), Peermedu Tourism Complex (Rs. 60 lakh), four boat trains on the Kollam-Alappuzha waterway (Rs. 96 lakh) and the flood-lighting of memorials at Thiruvananthapuram (Rs. 26 lakh).

The Munnar golf course and pensions condominium projects at Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Munnar, entailing a total cost of Rs. 2 crore and Rs. 1.5 crore respectively will get immediate assistance from the Centre by way of link-up with international experts.

The State Government had submitted to the approval of the Deputy Prime Minister projects worth Rs. 6.79 crore. The projects still awaiting Central sanction are the Rs. 37-lakh waterside rest houses at Kanyakumari and Muhamma, Rs. 102-lakh heritage museum and auditorium development scheme and the Rs. 50-lakh scheme for the development of KTDC units.

Mr. Devi Lal, complained that even after 40 years of independence, it was regrettable that “we cannot converse in one common language understood by all people”. Though known to be a Hindi hardliner, Mr. Devi Lal said he could understand part of what the speakers said in English at the stone-laying function, “but not your local language”.

Referring to Chief Minister Nayanan’s plea that Kerala should be given all assistance because it had recognised tourism as an industry, Mr. Devi Lal said the priority was for according industry status to agriculture.

Mr. Devi Lal said all assistance must be given for promotion of tourism because tourism brings in foreign exchange. Tourism combined with agriculture would be a boost for both agriculture and tourism industries.
By Mohan Selve

SUNDAY 29 NOVEMBER

ON THE eve of the visit India Tourism Year 1991, the Union government has decided to change its strategy to boost tourism.

At a meeting called in New Delhi last Friday by the secretary in the tourism ministry, Mr Manish Behl, to review the preparations made to implement the tourism-boosting programmes chalked out for the next year, it was decided to concentrate on wooing tourists from the Far East, instead of focusing on the western hemisphere as has been the practice hitherto.

The meeting was attended by representatives from the travel and hotel industry.

An important factor that was taken note of in deciding to shift tracks was the escalation in air fares, particularly in the wake of the Gulf crisis.

Consequently, the feeling was that short-haul flights to India would be an attractive proposition to tourists in the neighboring South-East Asian countries.

It is pertinent to note that Indonesia is also heralding its tourism year along with India. Though some quarters fear that Indonesia would pose a strong competition to India in luring tourists, trade circles in general do not treat this development with concern. They contend that India can benefit from the spillover of western tourists to Indonesia. As such, the Indonesian tourism year is viewed as complementing India's efforts to supplement its foreign exchange earnings by promoting tourism.

In this context, the decision to emphasize on short-haul flights makes sense.

However, it remains to be seen whether the travel bug can as strongly evident in the Asian tourists as it is the Americans and west Europeans. Moreover, would these tourists be as lavish in their spending as an average western tourist? Ask tourism circles.

In fact, at the meeting in New Delhi, the possibility of postponing the Visit India Tourism Year by another year in view of the unstable political situation in the country was also considered and debated. Fortunately, the proposal was shot down.

As Anil Bhadani, managing director of the Hotel Corporation of India, the government-owned undertaking which runs the Country chain of hotels in the country, pointed out, "The promotion done for the Visit India Tourism Year is not going to be entirely wasted. Even though there may be no tangible results this year, because of factors beyond the control of the tourism industry, the benefits would start accruing the year after next."

Januar, managing director, Thomas Cook: "I would plead with the government not to stop at 1991. Why not declare the entire decade as Visit India Tourism Decade?"

Notwithstanding this enthusiasm, the tourism industry agrees in private that the agitation in Kashmir, the anti-Mandali riots and the Ayodhya imbroglio have taken their toll. There were a record 30 per cent cancellations in October, beginning the peak season which lasts till March.

Travel agents are keeping their fingers crossed that the new government at the Centre remains stable till March and elections are held only thereafter. However, the die-hard optimists among them see no reason to panic. According to Mr Madhavi, there are already signs visible that the worst is over. Says he: "Oil prices are settling down and no one seems to want a war in the Gulf."

The reincarnation of A-320s is also expected to ease the strains on the domestic airline and improve its efficiency. The permission to the private sector to start air taxis, Mr Madhavi said, would also contribute to improving the overall tourism environment.

Thus, the picture that one encounters is that the tourism industry — hotels and travel agents — has geared up and is ready to set and go to welcome the 1.5 million tourists that the government had earlier projected would touch India in 1991. By next year, the hotel industry is expected to add 20,000 rooms to the 40,000 in existence in May 1990. A tourist can book the best room in a five-star hotel can give for just 85 pounds (Rs 2,600) thanks to the devaluation of the rupee.

The tourism ministry on its part has drawn up a calendar chock-a-block with events. For example, January is the month for the kite festival in Ahmadabad, the Pangal festival in Tamil Nadu, Elephant March in Kerala, the Nagaur festiv in Rajasthan, not to forget the Republic Day parade in New Delhi and the desert festival at Jaisalmer.

Rajasthan.

Other events being promoted are the crafts mela at Surajkund in Haryana, Yoga week at Rishikesh in Uttar Pradesh, the Goa carnival, the Elephant festival of classical music and the Konark festival of dance — all in February.

March consists of Basant Utsav at Shantiniketan, the Khajuraho festival in Madhya Pradesh and the Ellora festival of dance and music.

The international flower show is the high point in April, while the summer festival at Mount Abu in Rajasthan and Shimla in Himachal Pradesh are the highlights of May. July has the mango festival of Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh and the 40th year of the Idols of Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra at Puri in Orissa.

The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation is promoting the Kushti Mela at Nashik during July-August.

The Ganesh festival of Maharastra and West Bengal's Durga Puja will keep the tourists occupied in September.

This is followed by the festival of nine nights at Vadodara in Gujarat in October, which will also celebrate Diwali and the Godavari festival at Godavari fort in Andhra Pradesh.

The Pushkar Mela in Ajmer, Rajasthan, and the India International Trade Fair in New Delhi in November is followed by the international seafood festival in Goa in December.

Through this itinerary, the tourism department hopes to give the visiting foreigner the taste of a slice of life in India. But the most important question is whether there will be any takers for this extravaganza...
Tourism: Over to Mr. Kitson

By Hugh and Colleen Gantzer

THE Chairman of the Railway Board, Mr. Kitson's speech the other day at the seminar on "Management of change in the Railway business" was like a breath of fresh air. Avoiding the familiar bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo, he did some plain-speaking that touched the core of the malaise afflicting the Indian Railways. He stressed the need for "structural changes" in the Railways and they are to "react quickly and efficiently" to changes in the market. He referred to the "increasing costs and subsidies" as a disturbing trend.

Despite such candour, however, it would be unrealistic to expect an end in the near future to the over-disorganisation of the Railways. This has come to be entrenched in the power politics. One need not despair on this count. The Indian Railways can, before the end of 1991, offer a service which could rival that of any major railway system in the world.

For this purpose, the Government should set up an Indian Railway Tourism Corporation (IRTC) to be run on strictly commercial lines. The Railways could contribute 30 percent of the capital of the Corporation. Financial institutions could chip in another 30 percent, and the private sector could be offered the remaining 40 percent.

Initially, the IRTC should be involved in doing nothing more than building and servicing, luxury rail coaches for affluent tourists. In other words, tourists used to the comfort and services offered to them in Europe should be able to get them in India. This, in a way, is what the American George Mortimer Pullman did when he formed the Pullman Palace Car Company in 1867. His Company built and operated sleeping cars under contract to the railroads.

Gourmet food

In fact, the Railways have already made a start in such a venture. The Director-General of Tourism informed us some time ago, that the Railways are building a new, air-conditioned, Palace-on-Wheels for Rajasthan Tourism. Obviously, these ITDC coaches will, at first, be attached to special long-distance trains. Equally obvious, food on these trains will also have to be special. If a precedence for this is needed, Air India has already blazed a trail in serving gourmet food on its flights. Along with the coaches, therefore, the IRTC must also have their own station kitchens and service centres at nodal points along the route.

These rail 'kitchens and service centres can then be expanded into Railhotels. Such all-budget hotels can come up above existing Railway stations and offer dormitory, mid-level and luxury accommodation. They will not compete with the existing waiting room and retiring room facilities because guests do not have to be Railway passengers to use Rail Hotel facilities. Nor will they trespass on the market of private sector hotels because, according to the Ministry, there is a major hotel-room shortage in this country. Private hotels, with their professedly superior service, should be able to skim the cream from the market. Nevertheless, we believe that if Rail Hotels are run with only average efficiency, they will record the phenomenally high occupancy rates that Railway retiring rooms do today. Finally, if the Rail coaches, catering and hotels are successful, the IRTC should seriously consider expanding into the coach tour business.

Bright future

We have sound reason for believing that luxury tours by rail have a bright future in our country. For one thing, our air space is going to get more and more crowded resulting in greater and greater delays in flights. This has already happened in Europe and we, in India, are unlikely to have the funds to invest in a galloping expansion of our air services. Secondly, the big market of the future is the 40-50 age group: well settled in life, with more disposable income, fit and eager to travel to new destinations. But they will demand to travel in comfort. Thirdly, luxury rail travel has the added advantage of virtually insulating the traveller from the normal hassles of travel. A single ticket takes you from city centre to city centre, and shows you everything in between. You do not overfly any destinations when you travel by train. This is a major attraction of a rail tour and well suited to the needs of the growing segment of affluent international tourists.

Much, of course, will depend upon Mr. Kitson's ability to counteract the expected opposition to such a scheme from pseudo-socialists.
Ficci calls for liberalisation of trade in services sector

DH News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov 2 — The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci) on Thursday called for a liberalisation of trade in services in order that India might, over time, gain access to the world services market.

It said India had great potential to increase its share in the services market, particularly in the areas of travel and tourism, consultancy, computer software and manpower exports. As part of a strategy to step into the world market, Ficci has suggested that India become a signatory to some of the sectoral agreements within the broad framework of services designed under the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations.

In a background paper prepared by Ficci for its forthcoming seminar on 'Export of services — India's perspective,' it pointed out that estimates of global trade in services vary between $600 billion to $1.340 billion with an annual growth of 15 to 17 per cent. India's share in the total world market is very negligible, it said, although the services sector accounted for almost 46 per cent of the total GNP in India. Equally significant has been the fact that 40 per cent of India's exports (merchandise and invisibles) was accounted for by trade in the services sector. As a result of the positive balance on this account, the services sector financed almost 43 per cent of India's total deficit on trade account in 1987-88, the paper said.

According to Ficci, greater stress needs to be placed on travel and tourism since it is the single largest net contributor to the services trade in India. Also, since the ratio retention of foreign exchange in the travel and tourism sector at 92 per cent is quite high, efforts should be made to increase the receipts from the tourism sector to Rs. 5,000 crore per annum by the end of the Eighth Plan period, against Rs. 2,200 crore in 1989-90.

Promotion of tourism in India, Ficci said, required liberalisation of procedures and restrictions of the operation of foreign-based tourist enterprises, such as operators, hotels and travel agents. Development of transport, hotel accommodation, rail and road linkages and tourist centres required prime importance if these were to help in attracting over 2.5 million tourists by the end of 1995, it said.

In the transportation sector, according to Ficci, the net inflow on account of freight payments was one of the most serious problems faced by India. While development of the Indian shipping industry had become an objective of state policy, the shortage of capital was a major constraint. It also said Indian shipping suffered due to lack of expertise in ship repairing, dry docking and cargo handling.

Stating that it was possible to increase software export to the level of Rs. 2,000 crore by 1994-95, the Ficci paper pointed out that services included advertising, manpower exports, medical, accounting and financial services and insurance.

Tourism's toll

As 1991 — declared Visit India Year — draws near, it is time the Government seriously examined both sides of the tourism coin. An unbiased evaluation of the impact of large-scale tourism on a developing country like ours is long overdue. Will the foreign exchange brought in by the 1.3 million tourists expected next year outweigh the negative effects on our geographical and social environment? This is an issue that needs to be resolved before we go further ahead with aggressive tourism promotion. Tourism has long ceased to be a harmless, mind-expanding pastime. It has come to be associated with cultural erosion, environmental degradation and, in some South-east Asian countries, blatant prostitution. The Government has so far paid scant attention to these aspects while touting the (expected) gains of foreign exchange, employment and international goodwill. The interlinked hotel and tourism sectors have already caused much harm to our mountains, forests, lakes, beaches and islands. Ironically, the attempts at providing tourists with greater accessibility and comfort have robbed our scenic spots of the very beauty that lured visitors in the first place.

Instead of demanding strict adherence to environmental guidelines, the Government has been bending backwards to suit the interests of luxury hoteliers. One example is the announcement last June by the National Front Goernment's Minister for Environment and Forests, Mr. Nirmalani Rotrav, that the "no construction zone" limit on beaches would be reduced from 500 to 200 metres on the high-tide line. Add to this the Government's intention of promoting beach tourism and the expected rush of hotels abutting the sea could well alter the topography of the coastline. One of the Government's priorities is to identify and popularise new areas as tourist attractions. It is imperative that the social and economic impact of such a move be assessed before transforming remote parts of the country into havens for affluent travellers. Here is where we should learn from the experience of other developing countries which have gone in for high-intensity tourism development and ended up with soaring local inflation and distortion of culture. We already have our Government's efforts to attract foreign tourists by putting up contrived fairs and festivals which do not represent our culture. The recent elephant marathon in Kerala and the Sikkim flower festival, for example, are purely creations of the Department of Tourism. The Government should not be blinded by visions of dollars and cents and gamble away the country's natural and cultural heritage.
Goa's hotel ind. uneasy over Maneka's induction

From PRAKASH KAMAT
PANJIM, November 27.

The reinduction of Mrs Maneka Gandhi in the Union environment ministry with independent charge of the ministry is not perceived as a good sign for the beach-side hotel projects in the state.

Though both the supporters of the beach side tourism, the chief minister of Goa, Dr Luis Proto Barbosa and tourism minister Mr Churchill Alemao have refrained from making any comments, their concern and anxiety could well be imagined from the promptness with which Mr Alemao had publicly welcomed the demotion of Mrs Maneka Gandhi when Mr Nirmaly Routray was inducted in recent past.

With Mrs Gandhi's stand on beach-side constructions well known, serious doubts are being raised in the tourism lobby whether she will once again come down heavily on such projects.

Mr Alemao's disapproval of Mrs Gandhi emanates from his bitter experience during his 14-day stint as the stop-gap chief minister of the Progressive Democratic Front government in March last when he was summarily dismissed by Mrs Gandhi when he tried to persuade her from taking a harsh view of the beach-side hotel projects in the interest of Goa's tourism. Mrs Gandhi went ahead and not only pulled up the state government but directed it to resort to demolition of at least seven such projects sending panic waves among hoteliers. The state government along with hoteliers sought court intervention.

The state government has reluctantly been following the guidelines on ban of beach-side constructions beyond 200 metres from high tide line (HTL). Mr Alemao and Dr Barbosa have been ardent supporters of relaxation of this limit to 100 metres depending upon the merit of a case. They have found a supporter in former Union tourism minister Mr Arun Nehru and Mr Routray in the environment ministry.

No sooner had Mrs Gandhi been divested of her charge of project clearance, than Dr Barbosa made clear at a tourism conference in Bombay that beach-side construction ban should be relaxed to 100 metres so that foreign tourists who come to the Goa beaches can watch the waves from their hotel suites.

This invited loud protests not only from the environmentalists or organisations like Jayrat Geetcharanachi Faze (Vigilant Goan Army) but also open opposition from deputy chief minister Mr Ramakant Khope who in his capacity as minister for environment promptly announced that the government was duty-bound to follow the 200 metres guideline. Urban development minister J.B. Gonsalves was also quite outspoken in accusing the chief minister of trying to appease the tourist lobby at the cost of "our beaches."

When contacted here recently, Dr Barbosa confirmed that the 200 metres ban was being followed and argued that the 100 metres relaxation idea was his personal opinion. Such is the enthusiasm of the state government on beach-side projects that it dissolved two committees known as Eco-Conservative Committee and Inter-ministerial Committee on Project Clearance ostensibly to avoid deals in clearing projects. The power to do so was sought to be concentrated with a new committee known as Goa State Committee for Environment.

Initially, the committee formed in September this year had a large number of bureaucrats. The number of ministers on it increased to seven during this month. The committee chaired by the chief minister itself had only one meeting and has not cleared any projects yet. At least 19 small and big projects are pending for clearance before it.
Disaster on the hills

The recent warning from the co-ordinator of the Save Nilgiris Campaign (SNC) about the ecological degradation in the Nilgiris is not to be taken lightly. The deluge which took a heavy toll of life and property in the Nilgiris last month is not to be mistaken for a mere quirk of nature. The hand of man can be seen clearly behind this and other disasters which officials routinely describe as natural calamities.

The Tamil Nadu Government is blind to the perilous ecological imbalance in the hills. It has buried the study conducted by the Geological Survey of India after floods wrought mayhem in the range in 1978. The SNC has been persistently seeking implementation of the recommendations made by the GSI and the Udhamandalam unit of the Dehra Dun-based Central Soil and Water Conservation Research and Training Institute. Though 12 years have passed, it may still be possible for the Government to tackle the main reasons stated by the GSI for frequent landslips and heavy soil erosion in the Nilgiris, namely, deforestation and conversion of land for agriculture, tea plantations and residential purposes. The Hill Areas Conservation Authority set up by the Tamil Nadu Government should be prodded out of its slumber and made to exercise its wide-ranging powers.

Unfortunately, no government in India has a creditable record in the area of environmental conservation. Plenty of crocodile tears are shed, surveys ordered and bodies instituted, but we have yet to witness concrete actions that reflect genuine concern. Instead, the Environment Ministry is being steadily divested of its powers. It had, once again, alarming development being the decision to insist on environmental clearance for only major projects (exceeding a coverage of 10,000 hectares). The Ministry itself has sufficed its name by taking several retrograde steps to benefit industrialists.

Such irresponsibility is to be condemned, especially in the face of accelerating erosion due to uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. We lose 5.300 million tonnes of topsoil every year; sedimentation has altered the course of rivers and reduced the capacities of dams; our hills and mountains are denuded and landslide-prone. India cannot afford to tread the self-destructive path taken by most Third World countries in giving precedence to short-term economic gain over ecological advantage. There is a pressing need to define the indices of development. Let us not forget future generations will have to pay a heavy price for our short-sightedness.

Points To Ponder

Sir,—1991, hardly two months away, is supposed to be the "Visit India" year and here, what do we have to attract them?—killings in Punjab, Kashmir and Assam claiming around 100 lives per day, strikes, bandhs, closing down of our schools and colleges, murders (even nuns are not spared), burning buses and trains and still worse, young men and women.

All this notwithstanding, the buffoonery of our leaders makes us hang our heads in shame. Surely, this is not where we wanted to get after 45 years of Independence. What has happened to us? Have we even thought for a second what the whole world thinks of us, the nation identified with Mahatma Gandhi? When a German breaks away its wall, a Gorbatchev wins the Nobel for fostering world peace, here we are, garnering backwardness and worse, entering the dark ages of barbarism, spilling blood in the name of God. How revolting the very thought is! It was Alan Brownjohn, the poet, who said, "India is an amazing country and it could be the country for the world's future." I can almost hear him regret his words.

VASANTHI SARATHY

Bangaore