

Need for Maintaining an Ecological Balance in Cyclone-prone Areas

Book Review

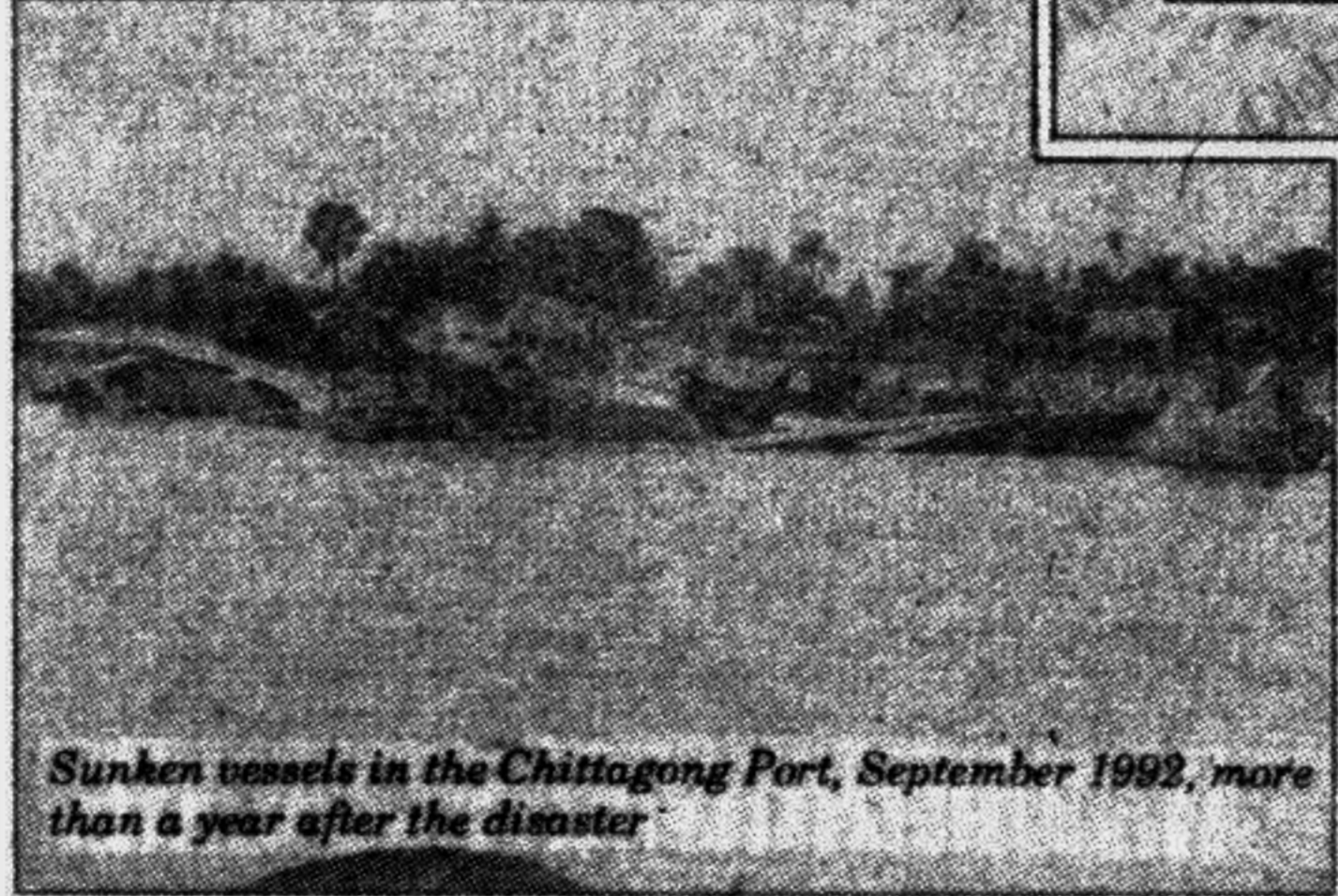
**Cyclone '91 Revisited
(A Follow-up Study)**

Editor: Raana Haider

Publisher: Bangladesh Centre for
Advanced Studies

144 Pages: Tk.400 US\$20
(incl. postage)

Reviewed by
NANCY WONG



Sunken vessels in the Chittagong Port, September 1992, more than a year after the disaster.

THE disaster-weary people of Bangladesh breathed a huge sigh of relief last November when the super cyclone that was heading for a direct hit on the coast weakened into a tropical depression and changed its course, thus sparing this battered country from further catastrophe. So grateful was the government for this bountiful act of reprieve from cruel nature that the Prime Minister organized a massive *milad* to thank Almighty God for His mercy. And no wonder, for as "Cyclone '91 Revisited" shows, the country has barely recovered from the massive destruction inflicted on its already overtaxed infrastructure by the ferocious cyclone of just over a year ago.

Least people forget and the authorities concerned with disaster management grow complacent about the immense miseries suffered by the victims, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies has published its findings on the aftermath of the '91 cyclone. The editor, Raana Haider, has accomplished the formidable task of collating all the raw materials of research workers who have spent considerable time in the affected areas along the coast. The result is a well-designed, medium sized volume replete with facts and tables illustrating detailed data about all kinds of economic activity and dramatic photographs which are helpfully captioned. Those who wish to know more about the subject of natural calamities which afflict Bangladesh and its consequences will find the annotated bibliography particularly useful.

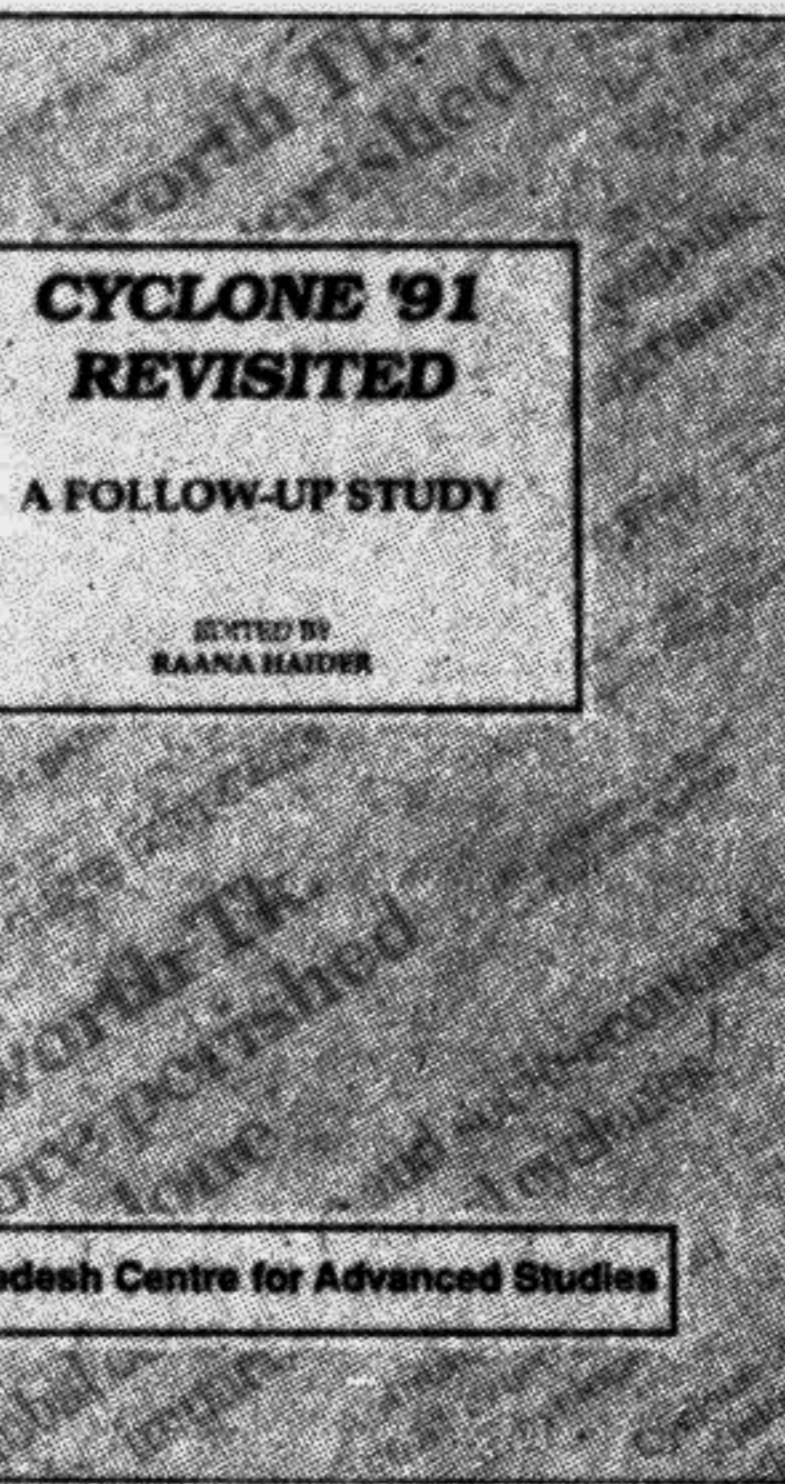
One year after the tragic event, the question foremost in development planners' minds must be: How has Bangladesh coped with the disaster? Subsidiary and related ones would be: Have the numerous victims managed to piece back their lives together and to what extent has the infrastructure been repaired and industries set back into motion? "Cyclone '91 Revisited" tackles these and other pertinent questions systematically,

examining each affected area such as Chittagong, Sandwip, Kutubdia and Patenga closely and interviewing survivors who in more ways than one, are victims who have virtually lost everything that makes life meaningful.

The overall picture is not exactly a heartening one: the rich have become richer (benefitting from the foreclosures on the properties of those who were forced to borrow from them at exorbitant rates in order to carry on for one more year), the middle class (neither fish nor fowl, unable to avail themselves of

any kind of aid) were squeezed more than ever, while the poor grew poorer or just fled to urban towns to eke out a deprived existence.

Yet in the midst of this bleak outlook points of lights do shine through: such as brave Shefali Begum who battled against all odds to start a small poultry rearing venture to save her family from starvation. There are probably a number of "success" stories of this kind scattered across the coastline. Nor did the fears and expectations of failed rice crops materialise as would have been the case if the salin-



ity left behind by the tidal surge had not been washed away by ensuing heavy rains. As a matter of fact, the rice crops turned out to be a bumper one!

1992 will probably be remembered as a year of overall slow economic growth for Bangladesh—massive funds required to rebuild the devastated infrastructure of the Export Processing Zone in Chittagong may well be a major cause of the sluggishness, a part from other factors. "Cyclone '91 Revisited" gives a somewhat detailed sketch of the enormous losses suffered in terms of ships sunk, factories ruined and mentions specific companies which are still struggling to keep afloat—one year after the event.

As far as the human aspect is concerned, readers are left in no doubt as to the magnitude of suffering in terms of starvation, malnutrition, lack of basic hygienic facilities, epidemics of diarrhoea, scabies, just to mention a few, undergone by the inhabitants along the rural coast. Those who made their living from the sea rank foremost among the dis-

possessed—having lost their boats and fishing nets, they lost everything and the majority were forced to mortgage their homes to avail themselves of credit from local loan-sharks. The situation with reference to basic housing remains far from satisfactory, particularly in the offshore islands of Sandwip and Kutubdia. While the government, NGOs and organisations like BRAC helped a great deal initially by supplying building materials such as CI sheets and bamboo, these makeshift structures have all but crumbled one year later.

One highly pertinent point emphasized by the study is the importance of maintaining an ecological balance in cyclone prone areas. Embankments, cyclone shelters do serve the people around the area—provided they have been well maintained, but even so, sometimes the gale force winds and tidal surge are so powerful they manage to smash them apart. What can resist such slamming is the presence of mangrove swamps forming a protective line of defence against the winds onslaught. This is evident in Ghatvanga where the people were saved in spite of the low embankments surrounding the village. On the other hand, the villages in Kutubdia and Moheshkhali were submerged in water for 16 hours despite higher embankments. It would appear to be a wise and sensible solution to keep the mangrove swamps along the coast intact in order to provide the best natural cover; but alas too much have been cleared to make way for shrimp and salt cultivation. The million taka question is how to balance the need to earn foreign exchange with the struggle for sheer survival when cyclones strike.

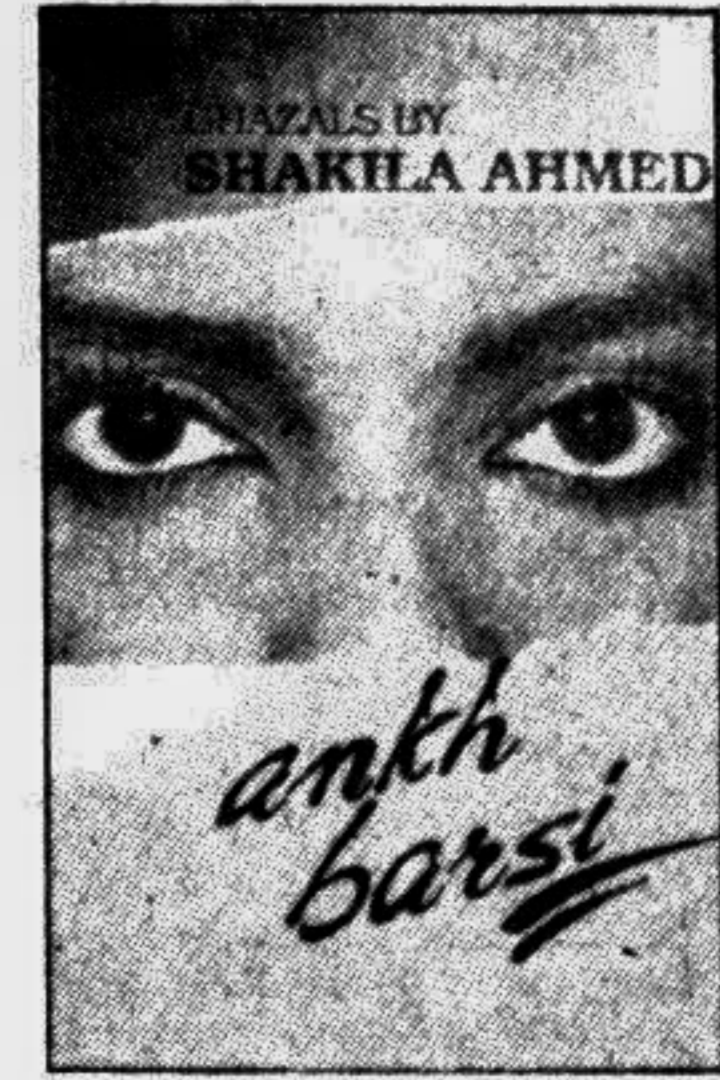
Relevant and urgent topics such as environmental health, basic needs, family planning, livelihood are all handled in this bird's eye view of the '91 cyclones aftermath. All involved in any way with disaster preparedness and management will find something to learn from this publication.

Gift of Ghazals from an Expatriate

AFTER her maiden album—a mixture of Bengali songs—his market three years ago Shakila Ahmed was swamped with exuberant fan requests: Go for the second. Offers also came from several recording companies.

But she was in no hurry. An ardent believer in perfection Shakila though she needed more practice and maturity for her kind of songs and for the special category of listeners she would like to attract. As luck would have it, Shakila, then a cabin crew at British Airways, met Indian maestro Ustad Dilshad Khan who gave her lessons on classic music for two years.

Currently settled in London Shakila at last heeded her fans leaving behind a wonderful gift:



Ankhi Barsi, a 60-minute 9-ghazal cassette. In this album Shakila has

ghazals some traditional Urdu ghazals composed by famous poets like Bahadur Shah Zafar, Fatah Ahmad Faiz, Ahsan Danish, Zafar Gorkhpuri, Nayyar Asmi and Anwar Lucknowi. She also has done justice to the tunes created by musicians like Gulam Qadir, Surinder Soni, Bashir Ahmed Khan, Benoy Pathak and Jamal Hassan, who come from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The release of the cassette, almost coincided with Shakila's marriage in October with Nasir Khoraana, a man from Isphahani family who was born in Dhaka and now settled in London as a banker.

"These two events, I hope, will be important in shaping my career as a singer," said Shakila who began her career as a journalist.

Swami Vivekananda: Universality of Religion

Continued from Page 10

Swami Vivekananda has further pointed out that all the great religions are existing, spreading and multiplying. There is a great meaning in it. It is the will of all-wise and all-merciful Creator. Had it been otherwise, then only one religion would exist and the rest would die. But it has not happened so. We find many sects that exist among the Christians with different practices; similarly many sects exist among the Buddhists, also among the Mohammedans and hundreds among the Hindus with different religious rituals. Swami Vivekananda says—whirls and eddies happen in running, moving water; it does not occur in a stagnant water when religions are dead, all these cease. Variation is the sign of life. Buildings, languages, rituals, books etc used in various religions are not counted here. But in every religion there lies an internal soul which also varies from the soul of another religion. Apparently it may be contradictory, but really it is not that; it is supplementary. Each religion accepts at least one point of the great universal truth and continues to practice it with ever increasing stre-

ngth.

We find an idea also in the teaching of Swami Vivekananda: "All the religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind." Swamiji made out a plan in this regard. He says, "...do not destroy; break not, pull not our anything wrong, but build. Help if you can; do not injure if you cannot render help; God is the centre of all religions; each of us is moving towards Him along one of these radii. It is certain that we must reach that centre. And at the centre where all the radii meet all our differences cease. If we say that God is the father or mother, the creator of the universe, its protector and guide, yet it is quite inadequate for one to express Him. God is the life of one's life, soul of one's soul. God is the Self. Nothing remains that is other than God.

Religion preaches that the freedom is the way out of the world. The duty of Vedanta is to harmonize all the religions, to manifest the common ground among all the religions of the world. Vedanta claims that man is divine and everything around us is the outcome of the Consciousness of the

Divine. There is no difference between man and man essentially and every man is trying to unfold the Divinity which is within him. This principle is found in every religion of the world. Swami Vivekananda has given emphasis on the above ideas.

Swami Vivekananda declared in the Parliament of Religions held in 1893 in Chicago: "If one religion is true, then all others must be true." He also said that mere toleration was blasphemy. He accepted all religions as true. He will worship God with everyone else and in whatever form they worship. He will go to the mosque of the Mohammedans, he will enter the Christian church and kneel before the crucifix; he will enter the Buddhist temple where he will take refuge in Buddha and in his law. He will go to the forest and sit down in meditation as Hindus do. He will keep his heart open also for all that may come into the future. He will salute all the prophets of the past, all the great souls of the present and all that are to come. We find, an universal thought about religion is well expressed here.

The fighting is going on in various fields of human race in the world to win over the other on the plea of sustenance, development and doing good to the mankind. Religion has become a great factor playing a foul game which retards the growth of mankind, rather doing harm to each other. In the modern times the religions intolerance is prevalent. To save the human society from the clutch of this intolerance we need to go back to the practice of essential part of religion leading to God. This aspect of religion makes us know the real nature of God—omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent.

Swami Vivekananda saw his God in man and accordingly he discovered his God in the downtrodden, in the poor, in the sick. He said, "The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body, and all other attempts to know God are of no avail." Every religion, however, teaches us the sense of brotherhood, of fellow-feeling etc. The sense of such human touch will not be earned before knowing that we are all moving towards the centre—God, with apparent religious differences. In all reality, every religion has its universal approach besides other practices.

Swami Vivekananda in his Chicago address in 1893 uttered boldly "...upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: 'Help and not fight', 'Assimilation and not destruction', 'Harmony and peace and not Dissension'. 'Perhaps, here lies the truth of all religions which can be attained only by religious tolerance and human fellow-feeling. The writer is Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, Dhaka

How the Stage was Set by Yahya for the Crackdown...

Continued from Page 9
After seeing off the President I felt relieved that the period of doubt and anxiety was nearly over. I genuinely believed that the President was sincere in his statements and sentiment, that he did not enjoy the exercise of absolute power which called for much exertion and toil. For practical reasons as well, it was common ground between the President the PSO and myself that the Armed Forces should be disengaged from ruling the country so that they could concentrate on their primary responsibility of preparation for defence against aggression.

On his return to West Pakistan, the President visited Larkana for a shoot, and there appeared a picture in which he was accompanied by some senior officers. Innocent as this was on its face value, in Dhaka it became a matter of suspicion and speculation. People talked of a plot to delay the summoning of the Assembly with a view to pressurise the Awami League in diluting their Six Points. Armed with the sure knowledge of the President's intention of calling the Assembly soon after Eid, I denied these rumours as best as I could.

Later in January 1971, Mr Z. A. Bhutto visited East Pakistan and with his colleagues of the PPP, held discussions with Sheikh Mujib and his Awami League colleagues. Mr Bhutto also visited the cyclone-affected areas and was gracious enough to call on me. He asked me to try and expedite the construction of houses for the victims of the cyclone, a programme which was not going fast enough because of shortages and bottlenecks in the supply of bamboo. About his talks with Sheikh Mujib he said he was neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

After the departure of Mr Bhutto, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called on me. The MLA Zone B and Major-General Civil Affairs were also present. Sheikh Mujib said that his talks with Mr Bhutto were inconclusive, and that there will be another visit of the PPP Chairman later for more detailed discussion. Sheikh Mujib asked us to press the President to summon the Constitutional Assembly as soon as possible.

In the first week of February 1971, the President sent a message inviting Sheikh Mujib and his colleagues to Rawalpindi as his personal guests. I spoke to Sheikh Mujib and also sent him a written invitation on behalf of the President. Sheikh Mujib regretted his inability to visit West Pakistan at that time, because he said he had arranged a conference of the Awami

League MNAs and MPAs. Both the MLA and I urged him (in vain) to accept the invitation for the earliest possible date convenient to him. I informed the President that the MLA and I had not been able to persuade Sheikh Mujib to accept the invitation. I also pointed out that the Awami League MNAs and MPAs were shortly going to confer, and were bound to make the demand of firming up a date for the National Assembly. Would it not be graceful to announce a date before shrill voices were raised asking for the inevitable. I was greatly relieved when on the 14th February, 1971 the National Assembly was summoned to meet on the 3rd March, 1971.

A few days later I received a telegram from the President which alarmed me a great deal and for once I was shaken in my confidence about the Government's intentions. The telegram said something as follows:

Convey to Sheikh Mujib that I am very dissatisfied with his refusal to accept my invitation to visit Pindi. If he does not arrange to visit Rawalpindi as

Sheikh Mujib told me that he was not afraid of intimidations and he would not betray the people of Bengal. But he felt no less love for the poor people of West Pakistan.

soon as possible he will be entirely responsible for the serious consequences which will follow.

I was asked to read this telegram to Sheikh Mujib and to hand it over to him in the presence of MLA Zone B. I telephoned PSO to express my anxiety over the pre-emptory wording of the telegram. I said that if Sheikh Mujib recovered from hitting the ceiling after listening to the message, he would want to know the reason why he was being called to Pindi. But PSO was uncommunicative and asked me to comply with the telegraphic instructions. Accordingly I called Sheikh Mujib for a meeting together with the MLA and the Major-General Civil Affairs. As the preliminary pleasantries were being exchanged and we were moving on to the preamble, I was called to another room to attend to an urgent call from the President's House in Pindi. I was asked if the telegram had been read out to Sheikh Mujib, and when I said in a few minutes from now I was instructed to withhold the message that evening. This was indeed very perplexing, so I hurriedly telephoned PSO in Pindi to obtain his authentication to the latest orders from the President's House. He sounded equally baffled, but after obtaining con-

firmed from the President, called back to say that the Message should indeed be withheld.

I was invited to attend a meeting of Governors and MLAs around 22 February, 1971. On arrival in Rawalpindi, I was alarmed to notice a high tide of militarism flowing turbulently. The dismissal of the Cabinet and the stoppage of direct air services between West and East Pakistan added to the sense of crisis. There was open talk of "military solution according to plan". I was caught quite unawares in this atmosphere for I knew of no military solution or military plan.

In the evening of the 22 February, 1971, the President presided over the meeting of the Governors and MLAs attended as usual by the military and civilian officers of the Intelligence Agencies. It is relevant to record that among the tribe of Governors and MLAs, I was the only non-Army Governor and the only retired officer in the midst of active service men. Opening the conference the President gave a review of the situation and pointed out the difficulties of

therefore it was imperative for all controversies to be settled before the Assembly met. I pointed out to him that the postponement of the Assembly was bound to create an immediate and adverse reaction leading to large-scale agitation and lawlessness. In fact, it was obvious for anyone with eyes to see that Sheikh Mujib was the last Bengali of consequence with whom West Pakistan could talk and reach a compromise. The younger element of Bengal who were too young at the birth of Pakistan had been nourished with vilification and hate, and had little love for the rest of the country.

The President thought that my views were needlessly alarming as he was intending to take two major steps along with the announcement of postponing the Assembly. He had decided to combine the post of the Governor and MLA—the situation before I was appointed Governor—he was going to impose press censorship and a stricter Martial Law. He was going to announce the postponement of the 1st March 1971, and Sheikh Mujib was to be informed of this only 24 hours in advance of the announcement. I was to return to East Pakistan and induce Sheikh Mujib as best as I could to "see sense". I noticed that the President never once looked into my eyes I could no longer consider his intentions devoid of guile or devoid of guilt.

"When I arrived in East Pakistan on the 25 February, 1971, the tension there was unbearable. I got in touch with Sheikh Mujib and by mutual agreement we met at a secret rendezvous to avoid the Press. I told him that the President was under the most severe pressure to postpone the Assembly. It was imperative for him to make a dash to Rawalpindi to break the deadlock. It was also of the greatest importance that as a concession to West Pakistan sentiment he should say something, however guardedly on the flexibility of his stand on at least Foreign Aid and Foreign Trade. The fate of Pakistan I reminded him now hung in the balance, and only he could save the country from disaster. Sheikh Mujib was visibly shaken but soon regained his poise. He told me he was not afraid of intimidations, and he would not betray the people of Bengal. He felt no less love for the poor people of West Pakistan. He wanted to organise his party there but the present Government sent their Intelligence Officers to the Pir of Pagaro and threatened him to withdraw support to the Awami League.

"The next two or three days were a nightmare. I was still unsure of the President's in-

terventions; he had been fickle on more than one occasion, and was playing the cards held close to his chest. I seemed to have no ally left at the summit to speak in kind of our anguish. So I sent an urgent telegram reviewing the situation and explaining that if he were to postpone the Assembly, there will be very serious lawlessness which could not be controlled by the civil administration.

"On the 28th February, 1971, 24 hours before the announcement I called Sheikh Mujib who was accompanied by Mr Tajuddin Ahmad. Sheikh Mujib asked 'Is the postponement sine die?' I said, 'I am afraid so.' I tried to reassure him that it was bound to be for a very short period but he would not be mollified. He said words to the effect that the authorities were not only trying to destroy him but to destroy Pakistan. History would judge where the blame lay. He could not be held responsible for the consequences.

"On the 1st March, 1971 the fateful announcement of postponing the Assembly was made. As the President himself did not address the nation some people thought that General Yahya had been ousted and a different junta had assumed power. Throughout the 28th night and 1st morning I tried to get the President on the phone, but either he could not or would not speak to me. I sent my last telegram ending 'I beg you even at this last hour to give a new date for the summoning of the Assembly and not to postpone it sine

Tapaswi O Tarongini: A Moving Performance

by Waheedul Haque

KANTHISHEELON did it again. Their rendition of Buddhadev Bose's poetry-drama "Tapaswi O Tarongini" was almost the performing art event of the year although coming at the lag end of the year now past. This was gloriously in keeping with their earlier offering of "Rother Rosh" and the solo presentation of Tagore's immortal tale "Street Patro" by Shameema Nazreen. With memories fresh of the "Tapaswi O Tarongini", one would tend to put this way above the others, if only as a token of bias betraying the power of the performance of it.

Kanthosheelon gave two performances of the same separated by half-an-hour's break. The one-and-a-quarter-hour show, so hurriedly repeated, spoke of supreme professionalism—turned in by a wholly amateur team. Through sheer power of elocution, with hardly any stage decor or help from the lights, the protagonists sat in rising rungs, and made us believe that they were indeed acting out a full play as

they do in stage dramas. One was never allowed to feel that movement was wanting. It is not for nothing that the group is recognised as the finest among the reciting troupes.

Dominating the whole show, what with delicacy and what with passion, was Tarongini the doyen of the courtesans sent out to break the meditating *enfant terrible*



Masuma and Dipu as Tarongini and Rishwasringa in Buddhadev Bose's "Tapaswi O Tarongini" at the Goethe Institut, Dhaka.

Rishwasringa. Masuma cast a fatal spell not only on the young sage but on the audience as a whole. What power—and at the end—what resignation. It would be hard to recall such a truly bewitching performance—and on one's maiden outing.

And she was evenly matched by the calm and suave Rishwasringa done by Dipu. Exploiting his bass, Dipu drew from within such an expression of serenity as can come only with age and experience. And this Dipu's maiden outing as well.

Lolapangi, Tarongini's mother, was as cantankerous a hard bargainer selling her daughter's charms as was possible for Buddhadev to pen and Papri to portray.

The brimming audience at the Goethe Institut wished for an early revival of the show. Shamsur Rahman, Syed Shamsul Haq and Sanjida Khatun were among the admiring crowd and went backstage to congratulate the team on their moving performance.