

# Reaching the Goals for Children by the Year 2000

**T**HE 1993 State of the World's Children Report (SOWCR) makes the point that meeting the needs of all the world's children for adequate nutrition, clean water, basic health care and primary education would cost about \$25 billion a year, and that if these needs were met, the lives of more than 4 million children would be saved. This, in turn, would help lower birth rates and population growth, paradoxical as that may sound.

It is not UNICEF's position or prediction that these goals will automatically be achieved. A lot of hard work lies ahead of us to make that happen.

We in UNICEF do not regard ourselves as woolly-headed idealistic optimists. But UNICEF's message of hope is certainly in sharp contrast with the pessimistic views and the cynical scenarios of those who hold that the Third World is getting more and more stuck in a poverty trap, and that no amount of foreign aid is going to help them out of that. I have come across many such pessimists in the few weeks that I have been in Bangladesh.

What we are saying is that for about \$25 billion a year we could apply the recent breakthrough technologies in health care and nutrition, teaching and learning, and water and sanitation on a scale commensurate with the magnitude and severity of the problems children face. In fact, for that amount we could reach the goals for the year 2000 set at the World Summit for Children in 1990. These goals include control of the major childhood diseases; reducing malnutrition and maternal mortality by 50 per cent; a one-third reduction in infant and under-five death rates; safe water and sanitation for all; universally available family planning services; and a basic education for every child.

That's what is called the \$25 billion bargain! Where would that money come from? UNICEF suggests that two-thirds of the \$25 billion be met by the developing countries themselves, with the other one-third coming in aid. Even with present resources, such sums could be made available if 20 per cent of all international aid, and 20 per cent of government spending in developing countries, were to be allocated to basics like food, water, sanitation, basic health care, primary education, and family planning. That is about twice the amounts governments are currently spending to meet the basic needs of their peoples, and twice as much as the donor countries and agencies now spend by way of international aid to meet basic human needs. Entirely doable, in other words.

Let us start with the health and nutrition situation. As always, there is good news and bad news. To take the good news first, the national immunization programme, EPI, has been, and continues to be, a big success. EPI has shown one of the fastest rates of increase in coverage recorded anywhere in the world, and with a coverage of over 70 per cent it now saves the lives of 72,000 young Bangladeshi children each year. It also prevents 4.2 million episodes of illness, and averts 6,400 cases of polio paralysis. What we can learn from this, given the political will and commitment,

the system has the capacity to reach every part of the country every month. The fact that the coverage has been sustained, indicates the soundness of the EPI strategy.

It could be said that the EPI has become Bangladesh's flagship programme in the health sector. And the 15 million EPI contacts which the health services system has with pregnant and lactating mothers and their infants can now be used to provide other priority health interventions. This strategy, called EPI-PLUS, will tackle such problems as diarrhoea, pneumonia, vitamin A and iron deficiency, and some of the medical causes of maternal mortality. To universalize these interventions, along with the immunization contacts, is the aim of UNICEF's assistance to government and NGOs when our new three-

by Rolf C Carriere

been the government's excellent Essential Drugs Policy which UNICEF, along with WHO and the World Bank, continues to support. With this visionary policy, Bangladesh is way ahead of other developing and even high-income countries, and the benefits this Drug Policy has yielded are tangible, both in terms of public health and of economics: increased availability of essential drugs at entirely affordable prices, mostly domestically produced.

Another two programmes, on their way to becoming successes, deserve mention here, namely the universal salt iodation programme, and the oral rehydration programme. Already, 30 per cent of the salt for human consumption is now fortified with iodine, and this

tools, we have the technology, we have the infrastructure, and we have the awareness. The challenge now is to understand the community and household behavior better, and to convert awareness and skill into application and practice.

That is largely the good news in health and nutrition. But there is, unfortunately, also bad news. For example, Bangladesh has the largest number of moderate and severely malnourished children within its borders. No less than 55 per cent of young children is so affected, with more than one-third of them having been born as low-birth weight babies. The Prime Minister's Daal Bhat programme, if focused on prevention of malnutrition, as well as on dealing with the child under two and on adolescent girls in their last growth spurt,

now available and affordable. Increasingly, we now need to turn our attention also to the deteriorating situation in urban slum areas, and through education also ensure that the water and sanitation facilities are hygienically utilized. These remain important challenges.

Finally, a word about education. Noteworthy is the government's very high priority to increase access to schools and reduce the gender gap in schools. Necessary laws have been passed, and the focus should now shift to retaining children in school, and this, in turn, is related to quality of teaching and learning, relevance of the curriculum, and sensitivity to the seasonal rural workload.

Bangladesh has several successful examples and models, of both formal and non-formal education, which have attracted attention from all over the world. The case study of successful government schools, "Our School", written by a journalist, and the Kushtia Education project show that a lot can be achieved through local initiatives. The BRAC schools demonstrate how the poorest drop-outs and left-outs, mostly girls, can be enticed to come and stay in school if local control and community involvement, including NGO management, are taken seriously.

The government's intentions to decentralize and devolve authority to the union level of administration could immediately be applied to the education system to great advantage. Universalizing primary education before the turn of the century — in the next 2500 days — remains a major challenge, but it can be done, and at an affordable price.

We can rightly stress the many positive possibilities we see for Bangladesh's children, and the reason for our hope — based on what has already been achieved in such a short time, and what we have learnt in that process. If there is any one key ingredient in the success recipe, then it is social mobilization, professionalized social communication, and more active people's participation.

A South Asia Consultation of Communicators recently held in Kathmandu noted that issues related to the situation of children, and particularly that of the girl child, are receiving increasing attention in the media, but that the effort is neither sustained, nor made with a sense of urgency. A professional intervention was therefore considered imperative, so that the media, together with concerned citizen groups, could stimulate a constructive process of socio-political action, upwards from the community level. This could be done for instance, by alerting the public of the changing situation of children and women, by reminding governments of the commitments they have made, by informing people of existing legal provisions and public services available to them. If there is one factor that can initiate people's access to their own basic needs, and thereby support a democratic process of participatory development, it is communication.

(Rolf C. Carriere is UNICEF Representative in Bangladesh)

# Improved Country Boats Contribute Better

by Masud Arif and Hans Rolloos

**D**ESPITE different technical difficulties and financial constraints the country's boat sector, on which over 10 million people depend directly or indirectly, is looking forward to its promotion as well as the expansion of its contribution to the transport sector.

According to available statistics, the boat-related activities generate almost 60 per cent of all employment in the transport sector as a whole and over 90 per cent inland water transport.

Country boats only use 50 per cent less fuel and charge 40 per cent less per ton mile. Md Abdur Rashid, Secretary General of the Country Boat Owners Association told the sector is yet in need of co-operation from both the government and the people for its promotion.

"Police harassment of the boat crew is a regular feature

does not have that flexibility. It cannot guarantee a door-to-door service. It is dependent on other transport modes which are means of carrying goods to his boat and to the customer. This on and off loading often involves so many delays and extra costs that many factory owners and traders are unwilling to take the risk.

Some years ago the governments of Bangladesh, the Netherlands and Norway decided to set up a joint country boat project. The first objective of the project was to improve the existing sails and sailing techniques and to upgrade the most common boat designs. The general idea was that a better use of sail and stability of the boat would increase the speed and mobility of boat.

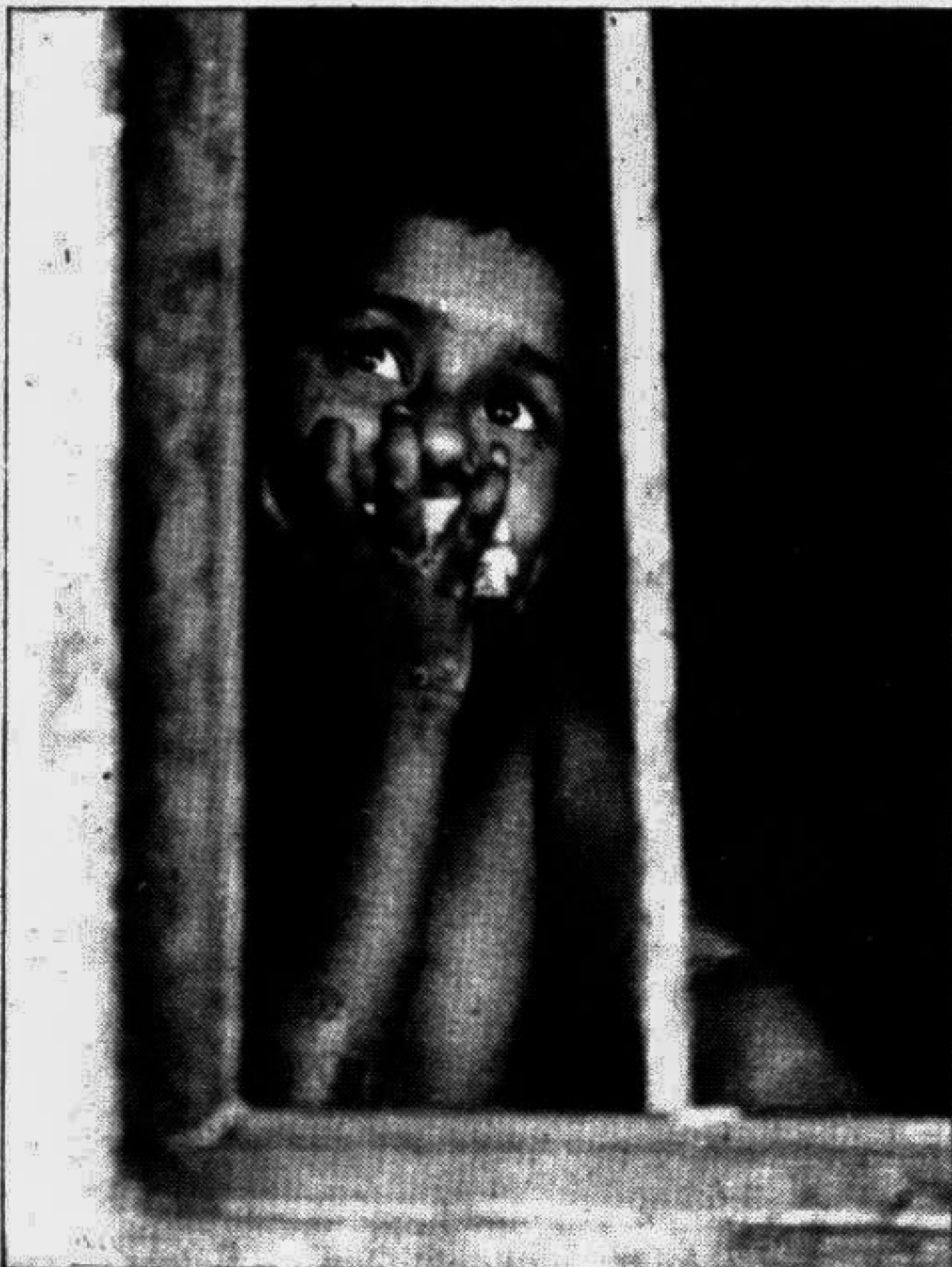
It all started with the introduction of small irrigation pumps in the northern part of

almost all boats are owned by village people.

No huge investment have to be made to promote this sector. The advantage is that the existing infrastructure requires little maintenance and repair. A last argument is that the available engines are low-priced. The relatively low costs of the engine have encouraged many boat-owners to buy one.

Hafiz, a boat-woner living near the Aricha ferry ghat bought an engine two years ago. "The engine changed so many things," he comments "before I could only operate only within a small range of my village. Now I can go up to Dhaka and Nagarbari. I also need less crew now and am not dependent any more on wind and current. And then I feel more secure. River pirates have less chance to rob me of my goods. Last but not the least, my family is more satisfied as I earn more money than

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Unfortunate children of the universe should be given a better chance. —Photo: Shehzad Noorani

year plan of Operations starts on January 1, 1993. Once brought up to scale, they will result at least in another 52,000 lives of young children saved each year, and many times that number of disease episodes averted.

A second success story is that of family planning, and the contraceptive use rate has now reached 40 per cent up from 15 per cent in 1975. Even so, almost 50 per cent of pregnancies are unplanned, and often unwanted, and that represents an enormous challenge. Meanwhile, there is reason to believe that the EPI and family planning programmes have been mutually supportive, and that they will in future strengthen each other even further. That's the opposite of what some people have been saying who believe that these two programmes are competing for the same resources.

helps to prevent mental and physical subnormality, and in fact will increase the nation's intelligence quotient! And all that for the price of a cup of tea per person per year! I hope to be able to tell you next year that all edible salt will have been iodated, as per the present plan. Soon thereafter we will be able to declare Iodine Deficiency Disorders eliminated from Bangladesh.

The other programme, oral rehydration and better diarrhoea management, is now, we believe, also on the verge of becoming a success. Already more than 90 per cent of households are aware of the therapy against diarrhoea, although, unfortunately, less than a quarter actually apply the skills of oral rehydration. The result is that still one-third of all deaths in children under five years of age is due to diarrhoea — no less than 262,000 a year. We have the

will be able to bring down malnutrition rates significantly, even with currently available resources. This will also involve education for behavior change regarding distribution of food within the family, and monthly weighing of babies. This is a major challenge.

Another major challenge is the reduction of maternal deaths. This country has one of the highest rates of maternal deaths in the world: 28,000 mothers die each year in the very process that brings forth new life. These women die of a medical condition brought on not by a physical illness, but by a societal ill. They die, because they are uneducated. They die, because they are malnourished, and many hours away from adequate health care. They die because they are women! One of every 25 Bangladeshi women dies as a result of her pregnancies, and many more suffer long-term maternity-related handicaps and illness. Moreover, recent ICDDR,B studies suggest that after the death of a mother, her infant has a 100-times greater risk of death in the next one year than infants whose mothers are alive.

We in UNICEF think it is high time — indeed, long overdue — that women get a fairer chance in life, and that motherhood should be made as safe as fatherhood. Today, 99 per cent of maternal deaths are preventable, and there are no mysteries in putting together a package of maternity services that will sharply bring down maternal deaths in a short period of time. It has been successfully done even in poor countries. All it takes is putting the issue high enough on the political agenda, and commit the resources needed.

Now turn water and sanitation. Here the news is mostly good. Bangladesh is among the very few developing countries to have achieved the target set for the International Water Decade for rural water supply, and over 80 per cent of rural households are now within 150 metres of a source of safe water. Although the coverage ratio at 25 per cent is still low, the government, NGOs and the private sector are effectively using the new technologies

## China's Green Gold

**A**RJUNA was in China's Zhejiang province recently and there delighted in the wonders and beauty of bamboo.

In countless factories, artisans devote themselves in weaving and carving artistic pieces and handicraft from the seemingly simple bamboo. Craftsmen pressed gold patterns on bamboo-woven articles, turning out gilded bamboo vases and handicraft.

One of their products, I was told, is a bamboo-woven eagle which hung in the Oval Office of former American President Jimmy Carter. Another beauty is a huge bamboo-woven screen painted with six horses that had Princess Diana of Britain intrigued by its workmanship when it was exhibited in London in 1985.

In endless poems and paintings, the Chinese have extolled the evergreen unbending bamboo as a symbol of a lofty character, unyielding and incorruptible.

Ancients wrote Chinese characters on bamboo strips, praising bamboo's deeply rooted importance in culture. One may grow up in a bamboo cradle, sleep on a bamboo bed and use a thousand and one bamboo articles. One certainly eats with chopsticks made of bamboo.

The modern Chinese may no longer write on bamboo strips, but they certainly use a lot of bamboo paper — about a quarter of the country's bamboo harvest is used for making quality paper. Annual production of bamboo pulp reaches close to 3 million tons.

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But what amazes most is that bamboo plantations are actually advancing northward from southern China where, two decades ago, almost all bamboo groves were found. Bamboos grow well in tropical and subtropical areas but scientists have found a number of species sturdy enough to grow in cold environments.

Today, bamboos have spread north to the Yellow River

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where some 40,000 hectares of new groves emerged since the 1970s. Some species have even found their way to Dalian, northeast China.

With the addition of new groves in southern China, bamboo now covers 7 million hectares of China which has about a quarter of the world's total. Growers harvest 8 million tons of bamboo a year, or one-third of the world's annual output.

This includes as much as 1.8 million tons of bamboo shoots, that delicious, succu-

lent and nutritious food. If you're wondering where those canned bamboo shoots come from China produces 1 million tons of bamboo shoots annually: pickled, dried and canned.

Indeed, the country exports each year about US\$60 million worth of bamboo shoots, mostly canned. Including handicraft, China's bamboo-processing industry annually creates 5.5 billion yuan (US\$1 billion) in output value and earns US\$150 million in export earnings.

In Zhejiang province alone (where ex-President Carter's bamboo eagle came from), more than 100 factories specialise in bamboo handicraft and employ 30,000 workers. Most of the factories are in Longyou country where bamboo earns US\$6 million a year, or 10 per cent of Longyou's total industrial output. Each year, bamboo products (including bamboo shoots) account for a third of Longyou's total export earnings.

Scientific farming has also raised the yield of bamboo. In well-kept bamboo forests, per hectare annual yield now reaches 30 tons. Such forests now account for 8 per cent of the total, from less than 1 per cent in the early 1950s.

According to Forestry Minister Gao Dezhao, China plans to double its annual bamboo output to 16 million tons by the year 2000, also doubling output value to US\$2 billion. By then, China hopes bamboo will become a source of even greater wealth for the nation. —Depthnews Asia

# Rotary Programme Among Rural Poor

by Rtn B K Debnath

**The prime reason for establishing the college at Astagram by Rotary Club of Dhaka is that there was no college in any of the thanas of Astagram, Itna, Nikali, Mitamoin, Lakhai, Tarail of the whole downstream area before.**

November 29, 1991.

The prime reason for establishing the college at Astagram by Rotary Club of Dhaka is that there was no college in any of the thanas of Astagram, Itna, Nikali, Mitamoin, Lakhai, Tarail of the whole down-

stream area before. Due to the underdeveloped and time-consuming communication system, the people of the area are very backward in education.

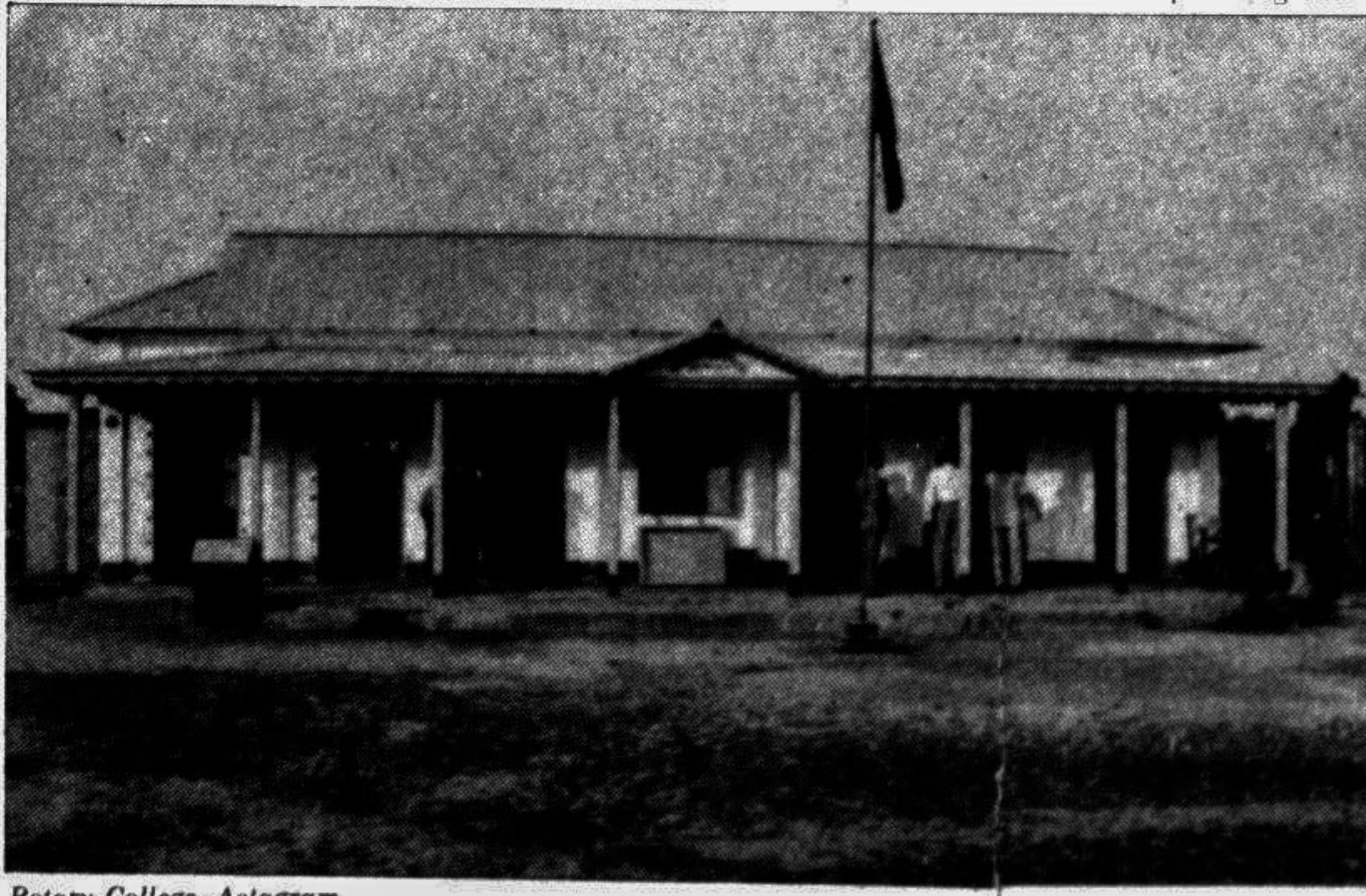
It is too much expensive and almost impracticable for the poor people of the area to

send their wards to colleges in capital Dhaka, district headquarters Kishoreganj or commercial centre Bhairab. As such, it is a proper and practical decision by the Rotary Club of Dhaka to establish a college with a view to spreading edu-

cation in the area.

With the assurance of financial help from Rotary Clubs of Australia and practical cooperation of the inhabitants of Astagram the works began in September last (purchase of land, construction of building, appointment of teachers and admission of students). After completion of all these processes at a faster pace, now classes have started. Observing the spontaneous participation of lakhs of inhabitants in the inauguration ceremony, the Rotarians and Annes coming from Dhaka were simply moved. Not only the members of Dhaka Rotary Club but all Rotarians of District 3280 can certainly feel proud of such a project. The architects of such a successful project are proud sons of Astagram and former president of Rotary Club of Dhaka, Engr Rtn Emdadul Huq and his competent spouse Rotary Ann Manira Emdad. Now the inhabitants of this whole area cherish the dream that their wards can study in their Rotary College and become useful citizens of the country.

We the members of Rotary Club of Dhaka cherish the hope that like Rotary Village Corps, there will come up more colleges in the villages of the country. Rotary programme is not confined to cities and towns. It is spread through villages by Rotarians like Rtn Emdad.



Rotary College, Astagram