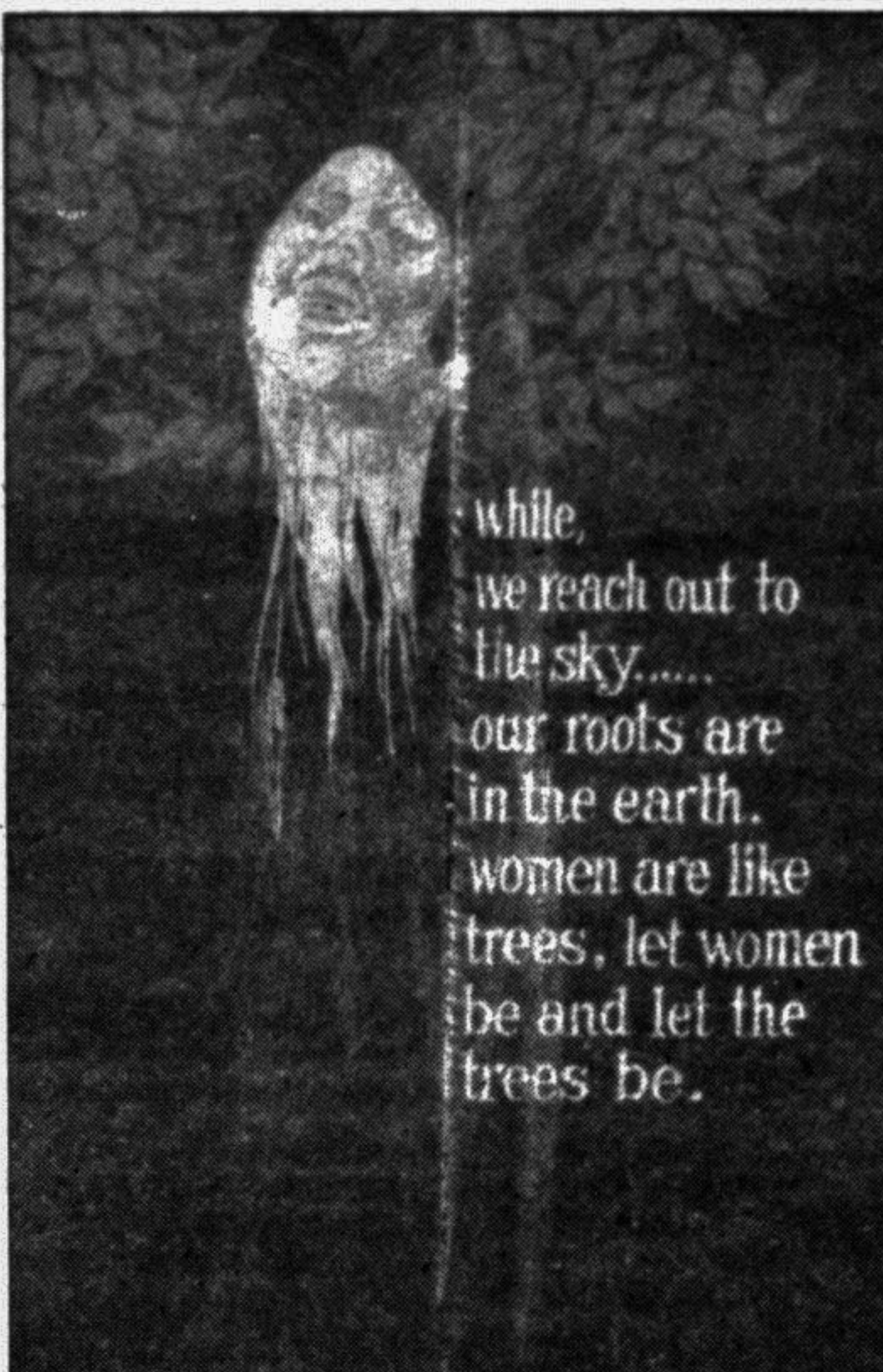




## Environment, Human Rights and Women

by Saira Rahman

Many grass-roots environmental groups in developing countries, where poverty is fought alongside pollution, have been formed by women. The Chipko movement in India is specially notable. It saw a significant struggle 15 years ago of villagers, a majority of them women, who organised themselves to fight against logging by clinging to the trees.



While we reach out to the sky..... our roots are in the earth. women are like trees. let women be and let the trees be.

Courtesy: Quarterly Adhuna

concerned with the environment and people, irrespective of sex, how do women relate to environmental issues and how do they specifically fit in?

Women in developing nations control most activities in the informal home economy, which therefore brings them

closer to the environment than men. About 50 per cent of the world's food, for example, is grown by women; 80 per cent of it in African nations. Women also attend to such household activities as waste disposal, family sanitation, animal grazing, the gathering of fuel, wa-

ter, fodder and animal wastes for fertilizer and washing clothes. In all these household chores, women have to make choices linked to conservation: for example, how and when to begin cultivation of land subject to erosion, what kind of fuel to use while cooking, whether to use today's manure as fertilizer or dry it to use as fuel, where to dry the next garbage pit etc.

In developing countries the work done by women for the domestic economy, exposes them to the effects of environmental degradation. As trees in Africa disappear due to drought, erosion and deforestation, and as services dry up, women have to travel further and further afield to gather fuel or water and to do their laundry. Due to the building of the Narmada Dam in India, there has been a shortage of twigs and wood for fuel and fodder for the animals.

Basic human rights of health, well-being and safe working conditions are part of women's rights, which have been recognised as being human rights as well. Thus if these rights are to be safe guarded by improving the state of our environment, we see a fine link between women of human rights and the environment, and can safely say that environmental degradation could, in principle, result in a violation of women's rights to health, well-being and safe working conditions. Women in different countries have become aware of their link to the environment around them, specially women in developing countries who live close to the land, so to speak, in comparison to their sisters from developed nations.

Many grass-roots environmental groups in developing countries, where poverty is fought alongside pollution, have been formed by women. The Chipko movement in India is specially notable. It saw a significant struggle 15 years ago of villagers, a majority of them women, who organised themselves to fight against logging by clinging to the trees.

The writers is a member of Ain O Salish Kendra.

## How We can Make a Difference at Beijing

In the last decade a majority of member states of the United Nations have endorsed two documents to ensure women's rights and development in order to bring about Equality, Development and Peace. These are the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the Forward Looking Strategies.

The World Conference Women to be held in Beijing in September 1995 is expected to adopt a Platform of Action until the year 2000 which will be based on an evaluation of the FLS which were endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 40/108 in 1985.

The process of bringing about equality in gender relations will need to continue at international, regional and national levels. As part of their commitment towards gender equality each member state is expected to submit a country report on the extent to which it has been able to implement the FLS. Each region is also expected to formulate a platform of action.

The Forward Looking Strategies call for:

- Sexual Equality**
  - the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women
  - equal rights under the law
  - equal rights to marriage and divorce
  - the establishment, in every country, of a high-level governmental body to monitor and implement progress towards equality.
- Women's Autonomy and Power**
  - the right of all women — irrespective of marital status — to buy, sell, own and administer property and other resources independently
  - the protection of women's rights to land, credit, training, investment and income as an integral part of all agrarian reform and agricultural development
  - the equal involvement of women, at every stage and level of development
  - the promotion of women to positions of power at every level within all political and

legislative bodies in order to achieve parity with men measures to promote equal distribution of productive resources and reduce mass poverty among women, particularly in times of economic recession.

### Recognition of women's unpaid work

- recognition of the extent and value of women's unpaid work, inside and outside the home
- inclusion of women's paid and unpaid work in national accounts and economic statistics
- the sharing of domestic responsibilities
- the development of services, to reduce women's child-care and domestic workload, including introduction of incentives to encourage employers to provide child-care facilities for working parents
- the establishment of flexible working hours to encourage the sharing of

child-care and domestic work between parents.

### Health Services and Family Planning

- equal access to health services
- adequate health facilities for mothers and children
- every woman's right to decide on the number, and spacing of her children, and access to family planning for every woman
- discouragement of child-bearing at too early an age.

### Advances in Women's Paid Work

- equal employment opportunities
- equal pay for work of equal value
- recognition of the extent and value of women's work in the informal sector
- measures to encourage women to work in male-dominated occupations and vice versa, in order to desegregate the work place
- preferential treatment in

hiring of women so long as they are a disproportionate share of the unemployed

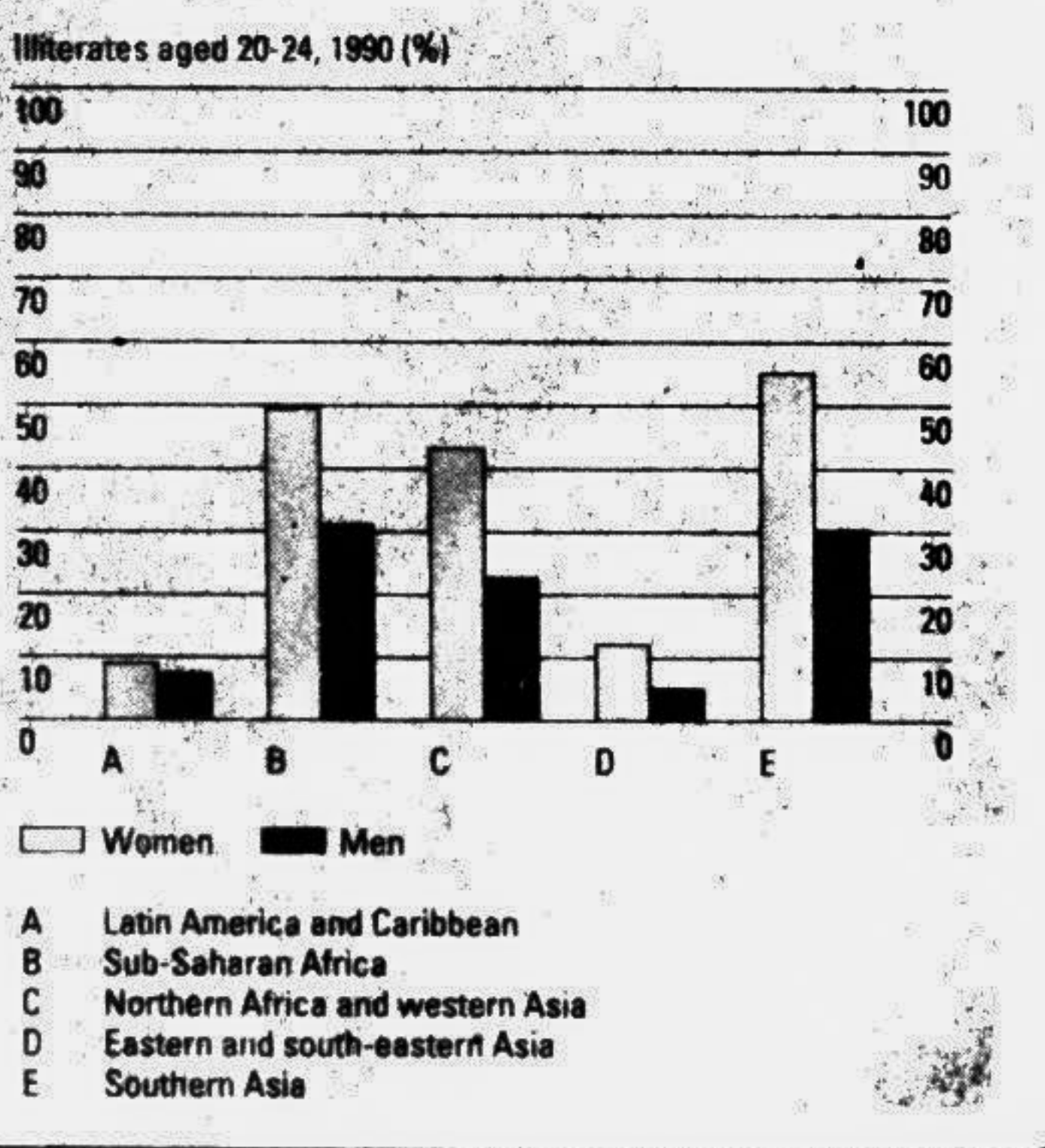
### Better Educational Opportunities

- equal access to education and training
- efforts to have more girls study subjects usually selected by boys, and vice versa, in order to desegregate curricula
- efforts to ensure that girls don't drop out of school
- the provision of adult education for women.

The Government of Bangladesh has prepared a country report which it will be submitted to the Asia and Pacific Regional Meeting to be held in Jakarta this June. As in other countries the government should share their plans with as large a cross section of women as possible to ensure representation and consensus. But as citizens and as women we need to make our concerns known to our own government, so that it is made aware of the voice of the women's movement. We need to analyse the social, legal, political and economic factors which act as constraints on women's development; we need to formulate strategies and policies which will bring about progressive equality, and we need to identify mechanisms to be used by government, non-government agencies as well as the community through which we can implement these strategies. In doing so we need to isolate the forces which work against the interest of women. We can do this by engaging in an exchange amongst ourselves, by writing in the media so that our ideas are taken note of. We need to interact at every stage of formulation of policies and plans, of strategising to make sure that the country report is not merely a paper document to be preserved in UN archives, and that we are directly involved in planning for our future.

An NGO Preparatory Committee for Beijing '95 is currently working through consultations with women from all over the country to draw upon their experiences to formulate a plan of action, — Ain O Salish Kendra

Literacy rates are still much higher for young women than men — the widest gaps between women and men are in Africa and southern and western Asia



## A Victim of the Flesh Trade

by Bernard Gomes

She had no regular income, which meant she often starved or remained half-fed. Chances of her getting a job as a house maid were nil because of lack of contacts or credibility. "Still I was happy with the freedom. Nobody loved me on the street, but nobody beat me or scolded me either," said Anwara who, however, learnt soon after there were other kinds of exploitation on the street.

Meanwhile a woman befriended her and gave her all the best she could give to the street girl — food, clothes, shelter and cosmetics. She even took her to movies which Anwara enjoyed very much. She dreamed she was a movie star clad in beautiful dresses and loved by all. But then the woman gradually began to pressurize her to encourage the company of men who made sexual advances to her. "I objected to this at the beginning

and complained to the woman I was staying with but she forced me to go with them and have sex with them for which they paid me," said Anwara. But as a matter of fact the pimp would take away all the money Anwara would earn and give her only food and clothes instead. "I clearly understood I was being prostituted for her own benefit. So I decided to run away from her," said Anwara who realized by this time there was hardly any way she could survive without selling her body.

Anwara Begum now 13, operates independently as an itinerant prostitute joining many other street girl prostitutes in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka, home of six million people. An estimate shows the number of registered prostitutes in Dhaka is about 15-20,000, of whom many are child prostitutes — either brothel based or floating.



The Picture says it all

With her short hair and plump cheeks, Anwara is adept at alluring her clients by her inviting smiles and infatuating look. She earns Tk 60-100 (US \$1.50-2.50) a day working mostly from evening to late night. She spends a considerable amount of money in buying cosmetics which she puts heavily on her face, normal for a girl of her profession.

Anwara does not have a permanent shelter. She sleeps on the footpath, or in other public places such as railway station and bus terminals. She pays a regular toll to police or gate keepers of parks to avoid harassment.

Anwara, however, faces sexual harassment from Muslims (muslims) on the street. A few months ago Anwara was gang raped by Muslims who not only inflicted terrible physical injury but also ruined her friendship with a young boy who wanted to marry her. "Jasim came to my life as a deliverer wanting to give me a new life. But he misunderstood me and left me after this incident," said Anwara sadly to a World Vision researcher who had helped Anwara to get some medical treatment following the incident.

World Vision, an NGO has recently conducted a study on Dhaka's street girl children who, according to a UNICEF estimate, number 100,000. Among the street children, many earn their living as child prostitutes like Anwara. The study analysed the situation of street girl children for whom World Vision, an international NGO, is presently considering launching a special rehabilitation programme. "We are planning a rehabilitation center where street girls including street prostitutes would come and spend time together learning literacy and job skills," says Sylvester Costa, the coordinator of the study and manager of the Child Survival Project.

Anwara is happy that she is linked with World Vision where she recently gathered with other street child prostitutes for a focus group discussion necessary for the study. "World Vision people are nice and caring and I trust them," says Anwara. "If I get a shelter and an employment at a garments factory I would definitely leave this profession of indignity and insecurity," she adds.

The writer is a Communications Manager of World Vision, Bangladesh.

## A Woman Journalist Masters the Subtleties of Diplomacy

Javed A Malik writes from Islamabad

In the shortest time on record, the army, the real power in Pakistan, has shown how keen it is to portray a different image of Pakistan to the US administration.

Lodhi is well-known to the Western media through her in-depth analyses of political and strategic issues in South Asia. She will allow Pakistan to put forward a united front in Washington for the first time in many years. In the past, Pakistan's army has been seen to have its own agenda with the US, often opposed to the civilian governments.

As with her previous assignments, Lodhi will not find the task easy. Although the US has not put Pakistan on the list of countries sponsoring terrorism, as once threatened, it still faces "international isolationism" in the words of Bhutto.

On the vexed nuclear issue, the US now wants to treat India and Pakistan on equal levels. For Islamabad it will obviously not be easy to get an "equal" status with a neighbour seven times its size.

The US recognises the nuclear race between India and Pakistan is linked to their dis-

pute over the Himalayan state of Kashmir. That dispute started in 1947 when the sub-continent was divided into India and Pakistan by Britain, the colonial power. Islamabad maintains that Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority province, should be part of Pakistan. India rejects that claim, saying Kashmir is its integral part.

Any concessions on Kashmir, Lodhi knows, will antagonise the opposition critics back home and could jeopardise her job. Sentiments are so high over Kashmir that no government could keep power after soft peddling on the issue.

The government, facing an economic crunch, realises it must ease tensions with India because at the present level Pakistan's defence bill — nearing six per cent of GDP — is unsustainable.

The US cut off economic and military help in 1990, alleging Pakistan was developing nuclear weapons. It was then Pakistan's largest donor, a place since taken over by Japan. While Pakistan has survived this cutwell, its US-dependent air force has been badly affected.

Lodhi's first priority will be to get a significant portion of this aid restored — a tricky situation because the US insists on "rolling back" nuclear programme in exchange for aid restoration. Pakistan says it would reconsider its programme if India does the same.

Pakistan's second woman ambassador in its 46-year history is taking up a job that can make her a part of history if while in office progress is made to resolve the Kashmir dispute. For the first time in her life, Lodhi will be helping formulate and implement foreign policy as well as interpreting it.



MALEEHA LODHI Editor-turned-diplomat

JAVED A MALIK is a reporter on The Daily News in Islamabad.

ANWARA squatted in 1990 in Dhaka's Ramna park, devastated. She was too weak to walk or even stand. The night before the 10-year-old girl was raped by two men who lured her by offering some food she had not eaten for a day. Anwara still remembers that frightful night. "As I was preparing to sleep on the pavement on that night, two men arrived and told me that they would give me some food if I went with them to a nearby house," said the street girl who had eventually agreed to the proposal and was cheated.

Born in the southern district of Faridpur, Anwara has suffered poverty, hunger and exploitation since birth. She was three years old when her day laborer father divorced her mother who left her with the father and remarried. A few months later the father, took a new wife who had been most unkind to little Anwara. "She would often beat me and give me very little food to eat," remarked Anwara. She also recalls a frightening experience one day when her step mother, wanting to kill her, held her under water in a pond near their home. A neighbour saved her life and arranged for her to travel to Dhaka, 150 kilometers south from her village, to live with her own mother, Rongbahar (36), living in a Dhaka slum. She was then seven years old.

Poor Anwara was not very warmly received by her own mother either. "She considered me a burden to her family where she had three more children by the new husband," said Anwara. Rongbahar, a spice-grinder at a local restaurant, arranged a job as housemaid for Anwara at a rich man's house at the other end of the city. In this house Anwara used to work long hours washing and cleaning, causing her back to ache so that she could not sleep properly.

Despite the hardship, Anwara continued to work there for two years after which she lost the job because of her master's moving to another district. Anwara returned to her mother who snatched away all the money she had saved and drove her away from home. "She told me I was old enough to earn my own living and slung the door closed," remembers Anwara.

For the first few days Anwara was happy on the street surviving on begging or whatever odd jobs she could find such as street sweeping or cleaning an office compound.

It will need much skill to change from being an outspoken journalist to master the subtleties of diplomacy. This is precisely what Pakistan's most famous woman journalist Maleeha Lodhi will be doing in Washington.

By nominating her to the crucial post of ambassador to the United States, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto is signalling that her government intends to bring a much-needed dose of pragmatism to Pakistan's foreign relations.

As Lodhi was being briefed by the foreign office, Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali said: "Pakistan will follow the foreign policy of the past, but will make adjustments wherever required."

These "adjustments" will be most important in relations with the Clinton administration. Though relations between the US and the world's second most populous Muslim country have improved a little in recent months, they are still far from those in the Cold War days when Pakistan was one of Washington's closest allies.

Bhutto, in office for the second time since the October elections, seems determined to restore relations to their previous closeness without giving up Pakistan's nuclear programme. By nominating Lodhi to the world's most important capital at this critical time, she has put trust in a long-standing confidante.

Lodhi was Pakistan's first woman editor of a national daily and later of the country's largest circulation English language newspaper, The News. She is a blend of modernism and Islamic values.

A PhD in politics from the London School of Economics, she is a progressive woman. She is well-versed in the Western ideas and values, having lived in the West for almost a decade. She is on first name terms with Bhutto and a believer in Islamic values.

Lodhi's nomination sends the signal that Pakistan is not the religious hardline state many in the US administration believe but a modern nation believing in the pragmatic interpretation of Islam.

By clearing her appointment