

# Dhaka Day by Day

## A Project with Hopes and Aspirations

by Fayza Haq

A splendid display of what NGOs do in Dhaka was witnessed recently at a house show at Mohammadpur. This handicraft show was organised by Taranga, a section of a Bangladesh-German NGO begun by Father Klaus Beurle. Taranga has three other counterparts, viz Dipshikha, Shampriti, and B-G Shampriti.

There were admirable samples of items such as garments, household goods and objects of daily interest made from jute, cotton, silk and straw on display at the show. The craftsmanship was neat, precise and relatively cheaper than commodities sold in shops run by other NGOs.

The difference between Taranga and other parallel NGOs in Bangladesh is that it exists on the earnings of its own trained workers and does not rely on any foreign aid," says Shamsun Nahar, its executive director.

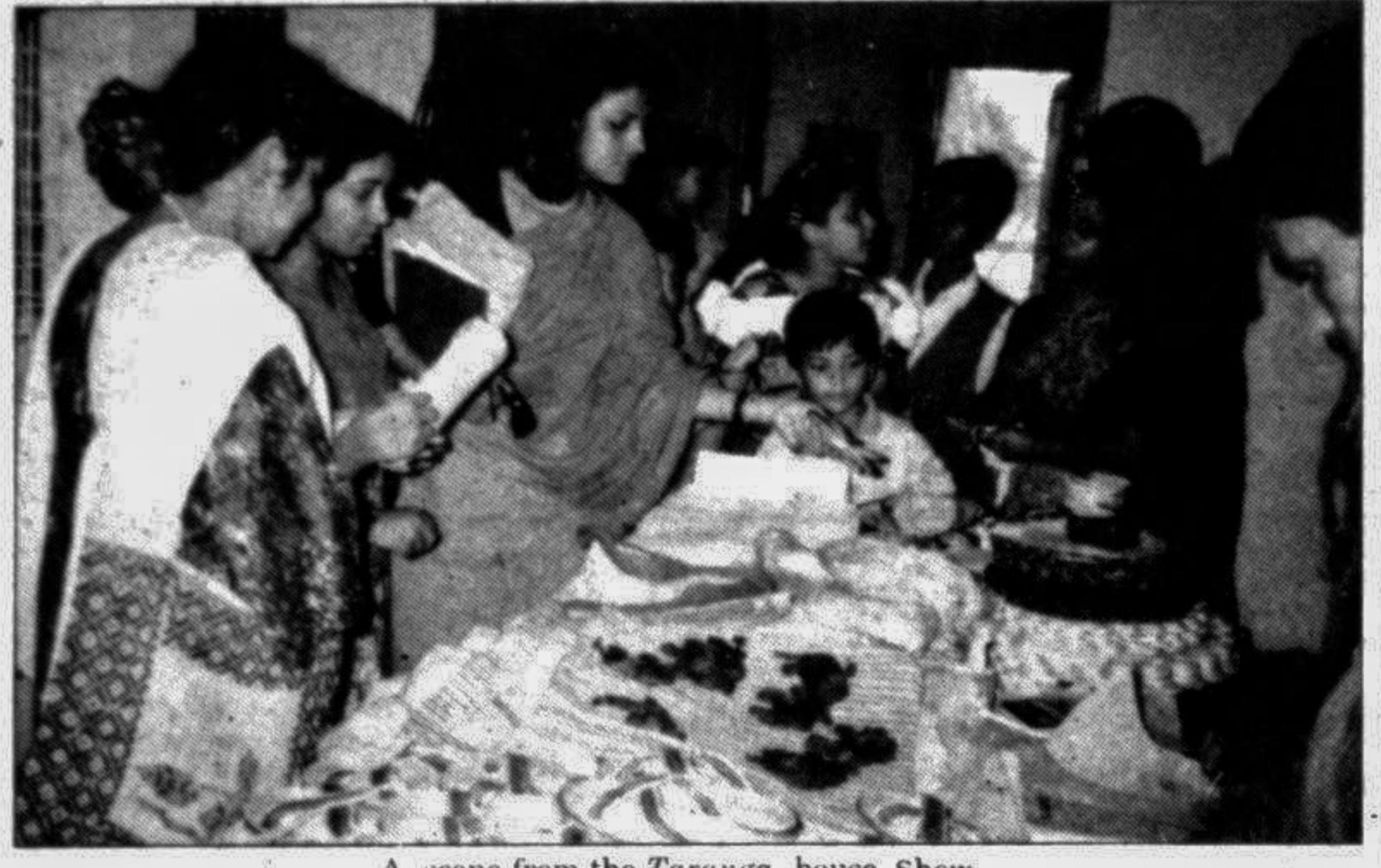
"We have established centres in eight districts, i.e. in Dinajpur, Gazipur, Dhaka (Mirpur), Cox's Bazar, Gopalganj, Barisal, Kushtia and Madaripur," she says. Asked to

week, for two to three hours. He checks mothers and their children, prescribing the necessary medicines. The poor people who come to the centre are thus treated for only Tk 2 for all their needs.

In the preventative side, the project deals with further mother and child care, as well as sanitation (such as the use of toilets); the necessity of drinking pure water; deworming; prevention of scabies etc. It provides individuals with water-sealed toilets and dug-out covered ones.

On the construction side, the project repairs roads and culverts in villages at Dinajpur and Barisal. It provides 75 per cent of the cost while the rest is given by the local people. The work is done mostly by men who form club-type groups. The project also encourages and supervises planting of trees — about 1,500 trees have been planted in Dinajpur alone.

In the training services, mobile workshops run by the project provide hand-sewing, carpentry, and mechanical as well as electronic



A scene from the Taranga house Show

elaborate on how the work is actually done, she said. "It is done by women, both at home and the centres that we have established. There are approximately 985 women working in the various villages of Bangladesh. Another 600 are also attached to Taranga, but they have not completed their training yet."

Apart from the trade aspect, this NGO also caters to local development programmes, such as education of children till the pre-school stage. They provide books and necessary equipments for school rooms. There are six such school rooms at Dinajpur and Barisal. It provides stipends for older children at the primary and high schools in the same districts. When the children with scholarships reach their teens, they join Taranga in creating handicrafts and learn to do official work connected with it. The brighter ones get permanent posts with the project.

This project also caters for awareness of environment, health and education of adults in the form of group activities. There are 1,500 women involved in this adult awareness programme. They learn about the adverse effect of deforestation and improved methods of cooking with the help of a metal net placed over mud ovens found in local villages.

Meanwhile, in the health section of the project, there are two parts, one being curative and the other preventive. In the curative section, primary health care and complicated medical cases are dealt with.

A health officer, a local qualified doctor, comes to the project's centres once a

year. The courses vary from three to six months. This project which has been operating for a year, produces items, ranging from jute products to nakshikantha, batik prints, embroidered cotton and handloom work. In the jute section, there were items like chhikka; bags for toiletry; table-mats; hammocks; carpets; shopping-bags; doormats; shoe-holders etc. Among the nakshikantha items made by the project were embroidered panels for kameezes; table-mats; pencil-covers; and spectacle holders. In the batik section, the same type of ornamental, sophisticated and selective work was done on silk and cotton for kameezes, shirts, and household equipment. In the handloom section, one found similar fine and delectable work. Straw greeting cards remain a specialty of this project. These were all on display — at the exhibition.

Taranga operates in collaboration with foreign experts in Germany. The reason why this project had to bifurcate from Dipshikha, set up at Dinajpur, was due to ideological differences, as this project's officials explained. Dipshikha could not handle all the required products, which NETZ German experts wanted, say the same officials.

This project has its show-room at Banani and has its main office at Mirpur. It is interesting and informative to compare and contrast the quality and prices of the commodities of Taranga and other similar NGOs, with their central offices in Dhaka.

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