



HARASSMENT II

Days of the Raj Revisited

This Woman's Point of View

by Nadia S. Hossain

I don't believe one person has the right to make other peoples lives miserable. Especially when the sole reason is purely based on the color of their skin. Survival for the larger part of the population of Bangladesh, especially us women, is difficult enough without having to be punished by non-Bangladeshis for the color of their skin. People don't need this kind of suffering, as well. The number of cases of racial harassment in Bangladesh these days is on the rise and by people who come from abroad, who are for all intents and purposes visitors in our country. It's unfair, it's unnecessary, it's unacceptable and it's a form of bullying.

An incident that has caused a lot of disturbance amongst family and friends recently is one that first comes to mind. It was at an international school with a minority of children from Bangladesh. The facilities are better than any other school. Unfortunately, I cannot say much for the member of school staff that a friend and I had the unfortunate unlucky and unpleasant experience of meeting.

The school was hosting an annual dance for their teenage students. My friend and I were asked to assist with the music for the dance. We were treated rudely and humiliated in front of a large number of thirteen and fourteen year olds. The person in question began by speaking incredibly rudely to a member of the schools own maintenance staff and then to the young brown eyed black haired student not to mention my friend who just happened to be Bangladeshi as well.

All four of us were spoken to as if we were uneducated, uncouth pieces of scum, without any provocation whatsoever. Ironically, we were treated like we were trespassers in a land foreign to us. As young adults I presumed that we were entitled to a few words in defence. I was wrong, this teacher wouldn't have it, he just wouldn't listen. His behavior was despicable, appalling, unspeakable and down right racist! Nothing more or nothing less. Before we were harassed any more we made our departure. It was then that I came upon a piece of information that confirmed my accusations of racism.

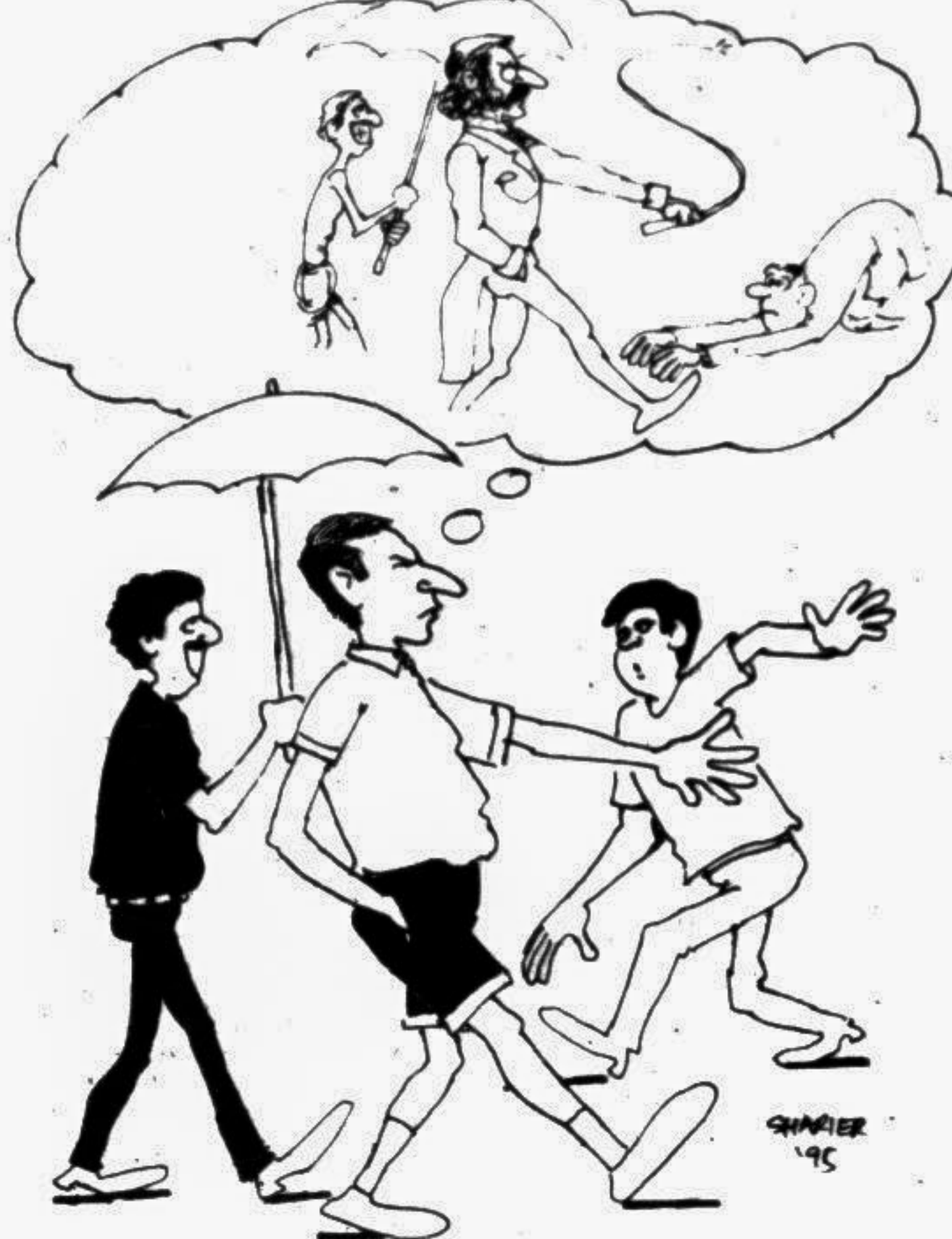
Whilst on a school field outside Dhaka, this same teacher had man handled some of the local people of the villages. Correct me if I'm wrong, but does this man have any right to do this? As a visitor in our country this man should not be allowed to treat us as if he were superior and

we were inferior. He should be honored to be in Bangladesh in the first place.

The night after the dance I received a phone call from an aunt of mine whose son is a student at the school. Her son had been forced to leave the

tions/clubs? The sort of harassment normal everyday Dhakaites have to put up with in order to enter the premises of some of these offices, and from the security guards at the gate!!

The foreign national wait-



school premises during dinner before the dance. Why? Because the poor kid had booked his ticket but due to unavoidable circumstances was unable to give his teacher the money for it. The ethnic origin of the boy, well, guess. That's right. Third time may have been lucky for this man, but I can assure you there shall be no fourth. This teacher is supposed to be an example for these young children. They are at a vulnerable age, what they see and hear around them makes a big impact on their own character. From what I have seen this man is a danger to them, and the way they grow up to view other people, not only of different races but those older than themselves.

Another horrifying incident was one that took place outside an expatriate recreational club not too long ago. The irony of this one is that it was a deshi person being racist towards another deshi person! What, now our own people? Why is it that some of our own people think they are nominal bideshis because they work for these foreign organiza-

ing in front of me was treated with such respect, it was beginning to make. When it came to me however, I was signalled to leave the premises for my requirements couldn't be met. And why. The only thing I did was to speak to the security guard in bangla. My mistake, afterall, why should a deshi person speak to another deshi person in Bangladesh in bangla? Having demanded to speak to the manager who was exceptionally polite, I got what I wanted and left. On my way out, I explained to the guard that the fact that I am not foreign does not take away my rights to be treated properly. And with that I took his apology and left.

It is hard to believe that this sort of racism still exists in this day and age with people who are apparently highly educated and teachers of educational institutions. We don't have to tolerate it, and we won't. The days of the Raj in cases some people have forgotten are long gone. (The sun set a long time ago on the British Empire).

Introduction

In many countries in the world, endeavour to prevent crime from Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) was also started through private initiative. Some farsighted, social workers felt their moral responsibility to work in this regard for diminishing the increasing trend of crime. In 1965, they formed the "Association for Correction and Social Reclamation" (ACSR), a voluntary organization for prevention of crime and rehabilitation of socially handicapped women. Since then, till 1971, when the liberation war started, about 100 female jail returnees were rehabilitated by the association. During the period of the liberation war because of the uncertainty and social disorder, the association's work remained suspended. The association was again reactivated in 1978 and managed to purchase a plot of land of one bigha (30 decimals) at Mirpur for a project on the rehabilitation of socially handicapped persons.

From the beginning, the association consisted of renowned government officials and other senior citizens i.e. university teachers, lawyers, journalists, philanthropists, etc. With the intelligence and dynamic leadership of the patrons, the association has set up four branches in four divisions in Bangladesh. It has also been patronizing a youth development project "Dhansiri" which has been working for the prevention of juvenile delinquency in Dhaka.

Since its commencement, it has received financial and other support mainly from the government to run its activities. In 1992, it got Tk. 16,75,000 from the Canada Fund for building a training-cum-rehabilitation center for the female jail returnees and women in moral danger at the plot purchased by the association at Mirpur. Recently it has also received a grant from the government of Japan through its Bangladesh mission, in order maintaining the activities of the center.

Nirmal Aray Prokta (The Happy Home Project)
The aptly named Happy Home Project is a training and rehabilitation center for female jail returnees and offenders, and the latest stage of the as-

Rehabilitating Women Prisoners at the "Happy Home"

by M A Momen and Azizur Rahman Molla

and offenders, particularly of young age
• b) Juvenile delinquents, both boys and girls
• c) Women in moral danger

In-mate screening:

The in-mates will be selected from all over the country and as per the selection criteria. The branches of the association are also empowered to select and send in-mates to the center. A detailed guideline will be developed for screening the in-mates so that the more needy clients can get the services offered by the center.

Norms to be followed:

• All in-mates will be recruited as per guideline of the association and the law of the land.

• Stay at the center is fully voluntary i.e. any in-mates can leave the center on her wish (in this case some formalities will be formulated by the project authority).

• A consultative team will be formed including the member of the ACSR and representative from human rights organization and women affairs organization to suggest to improve its overall performance.

• The center will try to train and rehabilitate all of its in-mates as per their educational background, aptitude, skill and their case history.

• Practical based education and training which will be of use of their day to day life will get priority.

• The institution holds the right to release, transfer its in-mates for their better future, employment and establishment.

Resource and its utilization:

The association's members will participate in the motivational class for the in-mates. In addition, expert counselor/instructor also will be hired from outside.

Association's own fund will be utilized in providing clothes, food, educational/training materials for the in-mates.

The center will dispense following services for the in-mates during their stay in the center:

- 1) free accommodation
- 2) provide food regularly free of cost/or at subsidized rate for those who are able to earn
- 3) provide cloths free of cost, if needed
- 4) provide health care service free of cost
- 5) impart motivational and vocational training
- 6) literate the illiterate in-mates

Target Group:

- a) Female jail returnees



Sri Lanka fills in the Gap

by Harold Pieris

THE sudden exit of Filipino housemaids from Singapore following the execution of their compatriot Flor Contemplacion has resulted in an SOS from Singaporean recruiting agents for 10,000 housemaids from Sri Lanka.

This demand is expected to rise to 30,000 altogether. The vacuum in Singapore's "domestics" market has caught Sri Lanka somewhat flat-footed, although Labour Minister Mahinda Rajapakse had set a target of 300,000 overseas placements in 1995.

Overseas employment is currently Sri Lanka's biggest foreign exchange earner, bringing in over 30.5 billion rupees (over US \$600 million) from over 500,000 Sri Lankans working overseas. An estimated 150,000 Sri Lankans leave each year for foreign employment.

Sri Lankan professionals like doctors, accountants, engineers and nurses have found employment the world over creating a brain drain in the country.

The most difficult category of migrant workers to handle has been the housemaids, a number of whom had experienced cruelty at the hands of their employers in the Middle East. At one time there was a cry to ban the deployment of domestic workers to the Middle East.

Nevertheless, the difficulty of finding jobs at home has continued to drive women abroad. It was also argued that only a handful had suffered cruelty or have had problems, and that one reason for this was the lack of training of the worker herself.

"Our housemaids fall into trouble as they are not trained. Most Sri Lankan women who go abroad as housemaids don't know how to operate a washing machine or other electrical gadgets which are common in affluent homes," said Minister Rajapakse.

Thus in January, the Minister decided to open vocational training centres in each district to give free training to some 200,000 housemaids. The move — a crash programme — is also meant to capture the market which is for trained house-help. "We have to train them as fast as we can or else countries like the Philippines will grab the opportunity," he said.

Sri Lankan domestics get only half of the salaries received by those from the Philippines because of their lack of training, added Mr Rajapakse.

Two delegations sent to Sri Lanka by the Singapore Recruitment Agents Association in February reflected the urgency of the need for domestic help. According to them, affluent Singapore employers were losing business because Filipinas were not coming anymore, and quite a number of employers had been used to having Sri Lankan maids whom they had found to be hardworking and honest.

Workshop Aims to Prepare Women Politicians

by Saika Sultana

The highest political authority in Bangladesh is at present vested with a woman leader. A woman also heads the opposition in Parliament. The leaders of the major opposition parties and the combined opposition movement is a woman. But this does not represent the actual situation that prevails in the over all political arena. Like all other aspects of our national life, our political system is controlled and dominated by male leadership. Women's participation is virtually very insignificant. A few, who have come forward into the political arena, are not representing women class, rather their family. But the situation has started to change in the recent past. A number of women activists are coming forward and have begun to contribute to the political system of our country.

Centre for Analysis and Choice (CAC), a non-govt organization under its Women in Politics (WIP) programme is working to encourage women leaders to more significant roles in politics.

Under the WIP programme CAC has organized a series of training workshops on "Campaign Management and Skill Development". The second part of the workshop was held at the CAC where 15 women leaders and politicians participated in the two-day long workshop.

Ms Yasmeen Murshed, Director, CAC explained the scope, objectives and goals of

the workshop in her inaugural speech. She emphasized on the necessity and significance of these kind of workshops for women who intend to build-up their careers in parliamentary politics.

The second session was conducted by Mrs Geetara Safa Chowdhury, Managing Director ADCOMM. She discussed the election publicity, campaigning and different techniques at length for creating an image of the candidate. She pointed out some factors or issues which need to be taken into consideration while preparing an election campaign. Among them are: obtaining a clear conception about the voters, and maintaining consistency in election campaigning speeches. She cautioned that consideration be given to religion and social norms. She also identified the obstacles and difficulties which the women could face while trying to succeed in politics.

Political leadership in our country lacks a clear vision of their present and future role and responsibilities. Women politicians are in a more distressful predicament. Workshops of this nature may really create an opportunity for them to build-up the theoretical base and learn techniques of successful campaign management. The WIP programme of the Centre for Analysis and Choice will continue organizing these kinds of workshops for the next one year or so.

Outstanding Woman

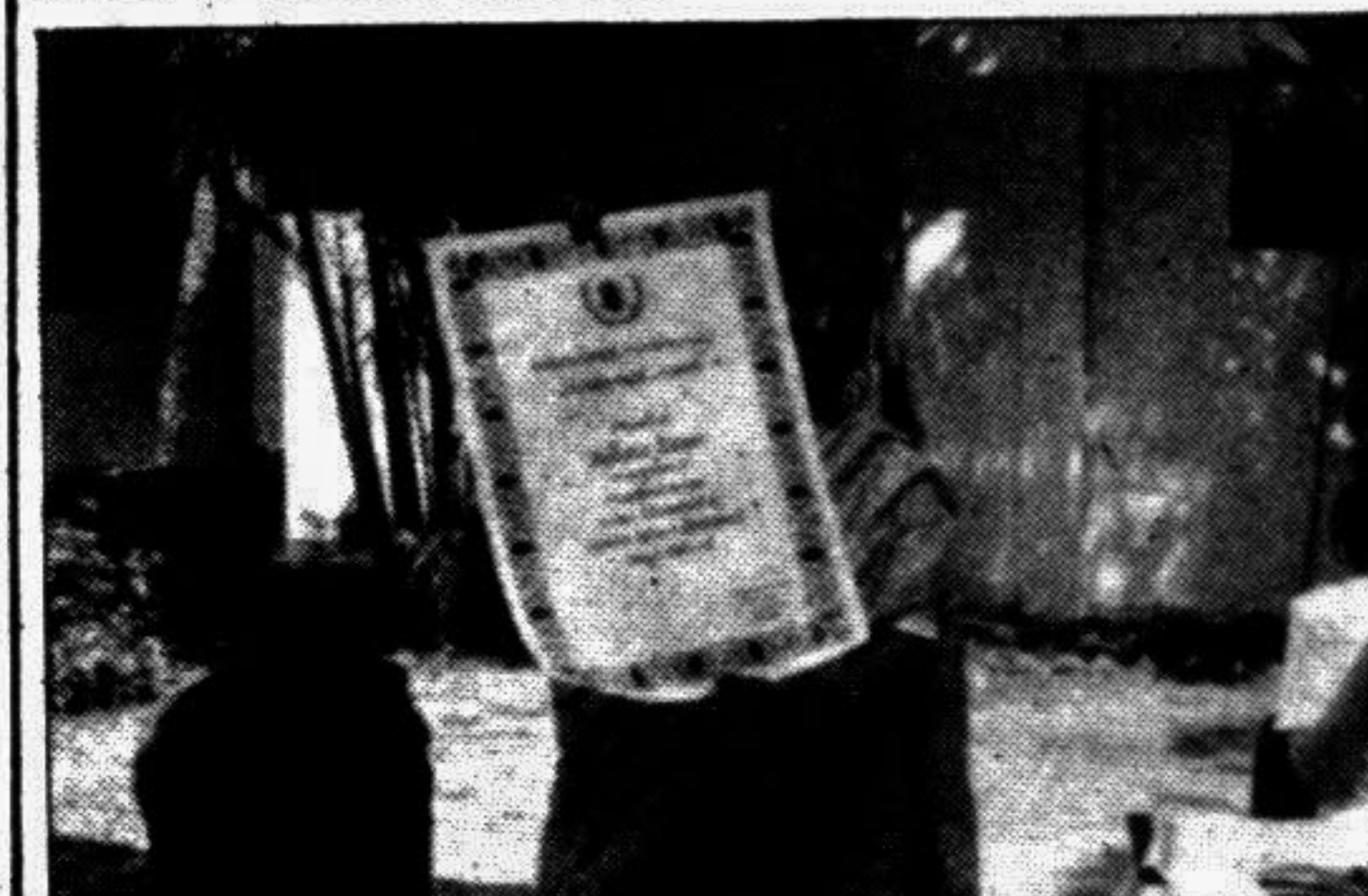
The World Food Programme Award

ON 8 March, International Women's Day, Rehana Banoo, a WFP Programme Officer in Bangladesh, was awarded one of the first Achievement Awards of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). Rehana Banoo, a qualified youth leader, joined the World Food Programme in 1978 as the first female Field Officer in Bangladesh. She has been a primary contributor to the advancement of destitute women in the country, by means the concept of short term relief with long term development.

As a female member of WFP Dhaka, Rehana Banoo was forced to confront traditional

with DRR and BRAC. This tripartite collaboration shows how tapping the expertise of different actors in development is often the most effective way of making significant change. The success of this programme has also been due to Rehana Banoo's determination to change its overall focus from relief to development and the programme is one of the most sophisticated and effective development programmes in Bangladesh.

In 1991, Rehana Banoo, assisted by two colleagues organized the participation of VGD women in the first public celebration of International Women's Day in Dhaka, now a



Proudly showing her award

preconceptions of the role of women in society in order to overcome professional obstacles. In the late 1970s, she was the first female officer to travel to remote rural areas of Bangladesh in order to monitor Food for Work schemes. She demonstrated considerable courage and determination, frequently facing the scepticism of both government officials and many of her WFP colleagues.

Since 1974, WFP has been supporting the Government of Bangladesh in addressing the needs of the poorest people in rural areas through two development programmes, namely Rural Development (previously known as Food for Work) and Vulnerable Groups Development (VGD). Since the mid 1980s, Rehana Banoo has devoted all her professional and personal efforts to the VGD programme.

The VGD programme aims to increase the self-reliance of poor women in rural Bangladesh by giving them a monthly income transfer of 31 kg of wheat for two years. In addition, women are enrolled in training courses and have access to savings and credit facilities. The programme is focused on poultry rearing and other non-traditional income earning activities. During the two-year programme, from 1994-96, more than 70 per cent of the 400,000 women covered by VGD will have access to a variety of support services that will enable them to sustain their households above the hard-core poverty line.

Rehana Banoo has contributed effectively to the mobilization of national support for the programme and worked particularly closely

major event throughout the country. Rehana Banoo has also played an important role as a strong advocate of greater gender equity in WFP. This initiative helped to increase the number of women staff members considerably. She also attended a course on gender and development, funded by DANIDA at the University of London, which strengthened her background in the conceptual aspects of gender analysis. She has consistently looked for ways in which to incorporate gender interests in her work and within the organization.

A Girl Guide since her childhood and at present Commissioner at the national level, she has represented Bangladesh in two Girl Guide World Conference and one Asia-Pacific Regional Conference. She is also a member of 'Naripakkho' — a professional women's network working for women's advancement.

At the ceremony, Rehana Banoo expressed her gratitude both to her counterparts in the government's Directorate of Relief and Rehabilitation (DRR) and NGOs, especially BRAC, and to her colleagues in WFP, who have contributed to her efforts to improve the standing of poor women in Bangladesh.

Rehana Banoo strongly believes that men and women can work together as equal partners for the development of their country. She has played a vital role in strengthening the position of women in this context. She will have the pleasure of joining the WFP Executive Director Ms Catherine Bertini to the WFP delegation to Beijing, China for the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995.