

UNESCO Clubs on the Move

by Mahbubuddin Chowdhury

BAHGLADESH signed the constitution of UNESCO and became its member and set up its National Commission for the UNESCO under the Ministry of Education soon after the independence. Since then the commission began to follow the spirit of UNESCO closely by participating in all sorts of its activities aiming to create awareness about the UNESCO among the Bangladeshi citizens and trying to enhance the aims, objectives and its notion to the people vividly.

As a result, it led to the creation of UNESCO Clubs in Bangladesh which stands 50 (fifty) in number at present. Being officially recognised and having all out support from the Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO (BNCU), National Association of UNESCO Clubs in Bangladesh (NAUCB) was formed back in 1985. NAUCB has been working voluntarily and with whole-hearted dedication and utmost sincerity to uphold the charter of UNESCO and implement it to the grass-root levels in Bangladesh through the active participation by its affiliated UNESCO district clubs.

With this introduction I will now specify a few objectives of the National Association of UNESCO Clubs in Bangladesh. NAUCB wants to foster active civil society and to conscientise people about the existing social structure and social dynamics. It is also trying to raise mass awareness through publications,

workshops, seminars, study circles, docu-film shows, networking activities and literacy programmes for both child and adult. NAUCB believes that without a sustainable socio-economic development a nation can not progress, that is why one of its main objective is to bring sustainable socio-economic development through income generation efforts. Keeping in mind this idea NAUCB has taken up some programmes to create awareness among the people about the need for group formation; necessity of development of management capacity; best use of human resources and about the role and importance of present day science and technology. It also wants to provide training to its beneficiaries to improve their management, marketing, financial and operational efficiencies and productivity. Information and news are essential for today's citizen — to broaden the area of national and international understanding. NAUCB has an objective to develop information communication through cultural exchange programmes in home and abroad.

Now I would like to mention some of the activities of NAUCB. NAUCB used to observe all the National, International and UN days regularly. Recently it has activated its programmes in the field of world peace, education, science and technology, culture and information communication in order to conscientise citizen of the coun-

try. Prize distribution among the children for recognition of their talents in various fields of culture and science; organizing cultural shows, painting exhibitions; distributing medals in memory of the renowned scholars and artists for their life-long contribution are some of the scheduled activities of the association. Seminar — Symposium on mass literacy, social services, human rights, drug abuse, bad effect of dowry system on the society were held regularly. Moreover, training camps, conferences, training workshops, social services, educational tours, campaigns on family planning, poster exhibition, poster and essay competition are some of the compulsory functions of the UNESCO district Clubs. Besides, UNESCO Clubs have some projects on mass education and rehabilitation and income generation efforts for the destitute and working children. Tree-plantation programme for environmental protection is another important and effective work of the UNESCO Clubs. Establishment of libraries, discussions on UNESCO principles, national and international affairs are the core activities of UNESCO Clubs.

Recently women and girl-child sectors, i.e., handicrafts, sewing, weaving, poultry and pisciculture and training camps on skill development such as sewing,

knitting, garments works training, computer training development science training, etc. both for male and female in urban and rural areas were organised.

NAUCB is also engaged in distributing stipend to poor and meritorious students, arranging camps on eye and dental care, distributing medicines through free private clinics and relief materials to the affected people during floods and natural disaster.

At present 25 schools are functioning by the initiative

of the district UNESCO Clubs all over the country. NAUCB is also conducting 34 adult education centres by the financial support of the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Japan (NFUAJ). Future thrusts of NAUCB are to establish library and documentation centres in all district branches of UNESCO clubs; construct a trainings complex at national level; publish a monthly news bulletin on the activities of district branches of UNESCO Clubs; arrange training vocational guidance, small credit programme management,

scientific and technology aspects and on cultural issues; preserve and renovate historically important monuments and places; construct 64 number of school complex for destitute street children; establish a UNESCO Youth Complex at Dhaka, launch mobile library programme; arrange open-air video film shows on AIDS, environmental degradation, bad effect of drug addition etc; facilitate medical treatment to the destitute men and women and rehabilitate land and shelterless aged people.

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A mass education centre in Brahmanbaria, organised by National Association of UNESCO Clubs.

Sensor Technology

The Chemical Bug

by Dr Ute Hansler

THE presence of substances dissolved in liquids can also be identified with acoustic sensors. Oscillating like a violin string, these sensors change their resonating frequency as soon as they come into contact with certain substances; the higher the concentration the deeper the "tone" or frequency of the sensor.

A team of Heidelberg researchers have now succeeded in achieving a marked improvement in the sensitivity of acoustic sensors with the application of a new material, enabling them to identify a few nanograms (a billionth of a gram) of a protein in one minute drop of liquid within minutes.

Professor Michael Grunze from the Physical-Chemical Institute at the University of Heidelberg has been engaged in the development of acoustic sensors since 1990. These comprise crystal wafers made of lithium niobate, a piezoelectric material which when subjected to an alternating current, modifies or "distorts" itself to adapt to the rhythm of the changed current.

This distortion in turn produces sound waves which are reflected several times onto the surface as they travel through the lithium niobate wafer. With the thin metal electrodes on the underside of the crystal serving as receiver and transmitter of the sound waves, a minuscule amount of the liquid to be examined (around one thousandth of a millimetre) is applied to the upper side.

To enable the sensor to indicate the presence of a specific protein dissolved in the liquid, a thin film, which binds exclusively to the targeted protein, is located on the lithium niobate wafer. This coating or film consists of protein antibodies. As soon as protein molecules accumulate on the film, the mass of the niobate wafer increases as the frequency of the sound waves traveling through the niobate crystal decreases.

These changes are registered by the receiver which converts the acoustic signal back into an electrical signal. The degree of the frequency distortion then indicates how much protein was present in the drop of examined liquid. German Research Service

Helping the Disabled to Help Development

by Imrul Kayes Muniruzzaman

THERE is no one in the society who does not feel for the disabled. But the most afflictive question which impudently perplexed the modern civilized world is, how far has been done to transform those handicapped as productive human resources and consequently how many of them have been rehabilitated as useful members of the society? According to World Health Organization, about 10 to 13 per cent of the total population suffer from some sort of physical or mental handicap. Almost cent per cent of these population belong to the low income group with hardly any means for them to survive. The problem is more acute because of the fact that it does not show any sign of diminishing either in qualitative or in quantitative terms. The feeling of inadequacy, dependency and insecurity compels these handicapped and disabled people to go for begging as the only means of livelihood.

Human disability may be defined in a simple term as a defect in a part of organ of a human body that prevents a victim from discharging his/her normal physical or mental functions. Disabilities found in human societies are mainly of two types. One is natural or congenital and the other is accidental or ex-post. Both these disabilities are again classified as to physical and mental disability. Whatever is the type of disability, the victims are the most susceptible, neglected, downtrodden group and are away from the mainstream of development activities of the society.

The problem is more acute in developing countries particularly in the third world countries including Bangladesh. These countries do not have any comprehensive social security system for the disabled which contributed a lot in aggravating the magnitude of the prob-

lem in those societies. It was reported that more than 3600 million population of East and South Asia covering nearly 2.46 per cent of the total population are disabled. They represent more than 87.5 million Asians, mostly children. It was also reported that 80 per cent of disabilities in the world are in developing countries and 50 per cent of these disabilities can be prevented.

The predominant development policies emphasizing the growth of human productivity have been found to provide much higher return to the able members of the society and hence created wider gap between the able and the disabled in terms of socio-economic development. It is also very unfortunate on the part of civilized society that story of the disabled and that of their suffering families are very seldom focused in newspaper and other mass media. This kind of moral negligence is definitely an impediment towards bringing social equilibrium to a nation where the disabled population remains and will remain as an integral part of the society.

One of the main reasons of human disability is malnourishment that causes hundreds of thousands of children every year to gradually become disabled even before passing their childhood. Due to increasing poverty, the unfortunate babies born of undernourished mothers in many developing countries like Bangladesh, suffer from physical disabilities and mental disorder from the very beginning of their lives. Many rural people specially the children are afflicted with partial or full blindness at one stage or the other due to poor administration of key vitamins in their diet.

According to the forecasts of World Health Organisation 1700 children will die of ill-

ness and malnutrition in every hour if nothing is done now to improve the situation. Over the next 24 hours, that number will be 43,800 and over the next year, more a 15 million. Many more millions will live with mental and physical handicaps. Most of these will be in the third world countries, where, on an average, one out of every four children will die before reaching the age of five. This formidable invocation, consequently resulting into many more disabilities every moment, is the world's latent emergency which should collectively be addressed by all concerned.

Among all the development initiatives being carried out by a large number of governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) to bring welfare to the society, a very few organizations are involved in taking care of the disabled population. To get an insight on the magnitude of involvement of the development organizations in uplifting the handicapped, particularly those who are living in the rural areas, an assessment of development activities in five districts of northern Bangladesh has been carried out which indicates that 97 per cent of the total concentration of efforts in different fields of socio-economic development were meant for the able members of the society. Another reality represents that, out of 52 registered NGOs operating in those districts during the recent time, only 3 NGOs were found to have specific programmes for the disabled but in a very limited way. This simple example is radiantly transparent enough to draw attention of the development initiators and social analysts to gauge the gravity of the problem and its future consequences on the society and posterity.

The problem is multiplied

not only due to lack of adequate intervention by the development agencies in this arena but also due to indecisive attitude of the government and implementing agencies of formulating plans and programmes aimed at removing social disparity. It is a matter of grave negligence too that in most of the poverty alleviation and rural development programmes in Bangladesh, the disabled population are discriminately kept out of the purview of socio-economic development, as if, the development programmes have nothing to do for them. Inclusion of the disabled in those rural development and poverty alleviation programmes as direct beneficiary is sometimes restricted by the design of the programmes. It is also very humiliating that disability of a person irrespective of his/her socio-economic vulnerability, is considered as disqualification of the victim for becoming a recipient of the development assistance targeted for the poor.

It is even more painful that in many countries like Bangladesh the profile of the disabled people are not reliably known. These people are continuously aggrieved by the apathy shown not only by the government institutions but also by the social and development organizations working to mitigate inherent suffering of the society. This social trauma, as a result, is silently strangulating the lives of the disabled and has brought immense suffering for them. On the other hand, development touches under the government responsibility, even up to the recent past was inadequate. This has resulted in a situation where non-government development organizations and social welfare community as a whole, will have to come for-

ward to help these people in an effort to combat their increasing vulnerability.

The decision of the United Nations to declare international year of the disabled and observance of many more international days a year had certainly evoked human sympathy but majestically a very little has been done to ease the socio-economic constraint of the disabled. Indeed a comprehensive development programme is needed to promote social mobilization and creation of more effective socio-economic conditions for the disabled in order to curb this inhuman retardation. The overall need strikingly demands on the society a holy

mandate of strategic involvement of the government and development community to alleviate the plight of the disabled persons.

To reach the ultimate goal of human welfare, more strategic dimensions need to be added to the existing path of ongoing development. Few of the potential strategies could be: (a) Establishment of community awareness on participatory development to help identify and resolve specific community problems related to disability and thereby to increase the community involvement in rehabilitating the disabled persons; (b) Preparation of community based detailed profile on the disabled/handicapped population and compiling those into regional

and national databases with provisions of monitoring and updating; (c) Compulsory reservation of adequate plans and programmes alone with financial resources for the disabled in all the poverty alleviation and rural development programmes being undertaken with whatever assistance available; (d) Mobilization of technical and financial resources for encouraging more action research and pilot projects on rehabilitation prospects for the disabled; (e) Alluring local-level institutions and NGOs to come out and undertake community based rehabilitation projects with national and international assistance to help the disabled people in accordance with their physical ability and

mental aptitude. On top of everything, the disabled persons should not be overlooked or looked down upon as a burden to their family, rather they should be assisted to become more productive members of the society by ensuring their access to creative environment and means for education, employment and socio-economic rehabilitation. Given these opportunities and facilities for the targeted handicapped, it is expected that they can be more productive and be integrated more humanly in the overall process of sustainable human development.

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Cry of Help for Child Victims of Conflict

Two million children have been killed in conflicts around the world in the past decade, says UNICEF, which has published a special report on the issue in December. One current example of this tragedy is Sierra Leone, where civil war is exacting a terrible price from the nation's young.

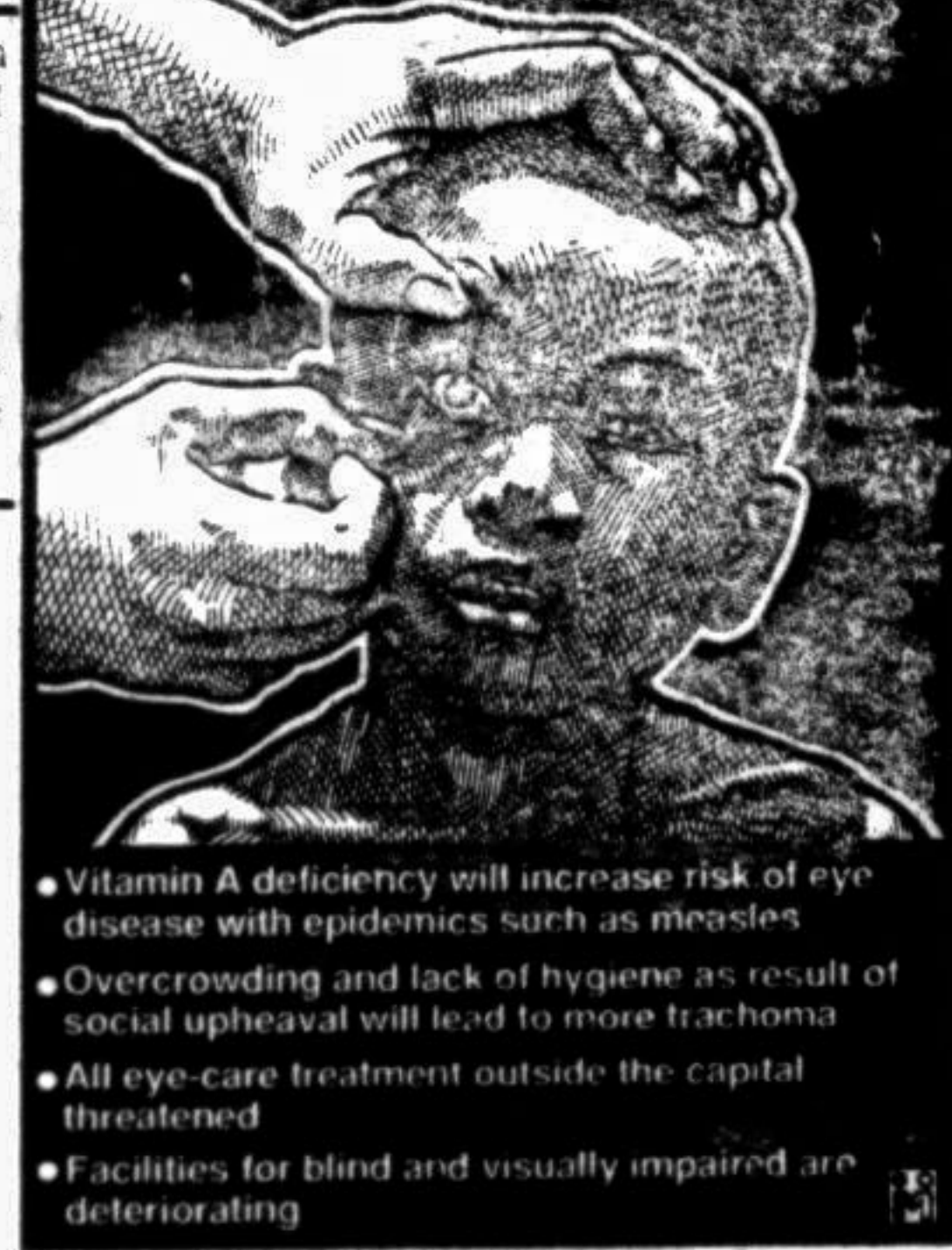
Rod Mac-Johnson writes from Freetown

CHILDREN are becoming the main victims of Sierra Leone's civil war, according to relief workers, who say the world has failed to grasp the extent of the tragedy. Many thousands of youngsters have already died as cannon fodder in the fighting or from starvation or disease. Up to 5,000 more — orphaned, lost or abandoned — have been consigned to a miserable existence scavenging on the streets where many suffer physical or sexual abuse or drift into drugs and crime, say aid workers desperate to channel more international assistance to the country.

Vicky Amara, a social worker in Freetown, says: "We don't know exactly how many (street children) there are, as they are scattered in big towns, where people have scurried to safety because of the war." With more than a third of the country's 4.5 million population thought to have been displaced by the four-year conflict, refugee camps are bulging. But one major setback to relief efforts is that continued fighting has led to the suspension of even

The fight for sight

Civil war has disrupted life in Sierra Leone. Here is how the conflict has affected just one programme — Sight Savers International's anti-blindness campaign: Blindness, including irreversible glaucoma, will increase. Rural deliveries of drug that combats onchocerciasis (river blindness) suspended; the disease will become a major threat — hundreds at risk, drastic economic effects.



Vitamin A deficiency will increase risk of eye disease with epidemics such as measles. Overcrowding and lack of hygiene as result of social upheaval will lead to more trachoma. All eye-care treatment outside the capital threatened. Facilities for blind and visually impaired are deteriorating.

the immunization campaigns have been disrupted by the war. Despite the dangers, agencies such as UNICEF and Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF — Doctors Without Borders) are planning a mass immunization campaign over the next few weeks to counter the threat of measles.

Their work is hampered by lack of funding. As of August, UNICEF Sierra Leone had received less than a third of the \$3 million required for this year's work. Emergency food distribution has been hit by frequent rebel attacks on military-secured outposts. The Dutch branch of MSF helped ease suffering in rebel-occupied Kambia by airlifting in 20 tons of food, seemingly unopposed by the rebel leader Foday Sankoh vowed to "shoot down any food plane".

Meanwhile, the schooling system has largely broken down, and an estimated 2,500 children — some as young as eight — have been abducted or coerced into combat roles. About 80 per cent of the Revolutionary United Front rebel forces are said to be aged between 14 and 20. The problem of displaced people has been partly absorbed by the extended family system, with some homes now sheltering more than 20 people.

The result is that the general public and international community are not fully aware of the deep physical and psycho-social impact of the war on children and women," says sociology lecturer Dr Andrew Adams. His view is echoed by Peter Hansen, United Nations Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. During a recent visit, he expressed regret that Sierra Leone had not been given sufficient assistance.

Military ruler Valentine Strasser says he will hand over power to a civilian government after parliamentary and presidential elections, due to be held next February.

— GEMINI NEWS
ROD MAC-JOHNSON
writes for the Sierra Leone News Agency.

