

"It is probably best to bury the world FAP once and for all after the 4th FAP conference," wrote Dr Saleemul Huq in one of his recent write-ups. Let us use the word 'National Water Plan' which should hopefully gain a less controversial and more cooperative image in the coming years, he added. This attitude from a critic of FAP is not only appreciable but also visionary.

#### FAP Criticism

Since the start, many have criticised FAP for being too donor-driven, too consultant-dependent, too study biased, too structural intervention oriented, too away from PAPs. In short, FAP, though prepared specifically for this country, at the end it seemed it was not owned by the country. So, a debate started with an intention to kill FAP with even a simple excuse that FAP was approved during Ershad-regime. A 'criticise-FAP' culture developed among certain élite quarter of the society. More so, these people started to get prominence for simply being a FAP critic. Donors appeased them but FAP continued on. The debates and discussions increased enormously; networks to oppose FAP came to daylight overseas; national 'water-experts' prolonged their stay in the Hague, Berlin or London. Many of these experts wrote books containing only criticism but without any constructive suggestions. A group of seminar speakers was created. This group, when addressing folks from Rasulpur or Chalanbeel, cannot prevent themselves from speaking in the language of flood zoning, zero option etc.

#### Critics' Contribution to Reshape FAP

I am not a critic of these critics. I salute their contributions. I salute their worry for the suffering millions. I salute their valuable time spent overseas to take the messages of 'Malati Dey' or 'Rokeya Buli' or 'Ali Hossain'. I am totally impressed by

their speeches of 'best chosen words'. After all, simple messages of 'Ali Hossain' had to be made presentable with charisma of inner strength.

Many of these critics, however, belong to one or the other NGO. At one stage the apex body of large number of NGOs, ADAB (Association for Development Agencies in Bangladesh) aligned itself as an anti-FAP platform (not sure, whether all ADAB members had any participation in this decision-making process). Overseas also, a parallel anti-FAP campaign gathered its momentum. These two platforms discussed often different FAPs but were able to draw attention specially of the international media. Opposed to that well orchestrated media campaign, FAP proponents were too slow to respond or present information on challenges, successes, limitations etc. A basket full of misinformation accumulated and simply created controversy and heated debate. This misinformation prompted Dr Huq to write "The Many Faces of FAP" (The Daily Star, October 10, 1995) to make clear the precise aspect, phase or definition of FAP at different stage of evolution.

Whatever one may say, one cannot overlook the contributions critics have made to 'reshape' FAP. One can feel changes in style and attitude of FAPs of 1990 and 1995. This was possible, also because, FAP, since inception, was supposed to evolve itself through a gradual process of development. The room was already there to accommodate changes. On the other hand, critics also have come to realize, after all, not everything was bad in FAP.

This process has allowed a forum for critics to contribute and enrich FAP more

directly. the 4th FAP Conference, held recently in Dhaka, was the humble beginning of 'the step in the journey of thousand miles'. So, the march is now on from the 'Flood Action Plan' towards the 'National Water Plan'. In simple words, the change is from managing 'Bannya' to managing 'Barsha' or 'Bannya-Barsha' — a more challenging task, a tougher job.

#### Alternatives: Ideas Plenty but Experience None

The critics who have con-

tributed to these policy changes will now be faced with a real task. So long they were at the periphery, mere criticisms were sufficient. Now, they need to present an alternative, that's where my concern is. If one goes through the pages of reports produced by critics — one sees paucity in constructive suggestions, formulation of alternatives, real field level solutions. The image, already cropping up, that these brand of brilliant critics have simply criticized without any serious considerations of alternatives. Alternatives could

be many — as many as its proponents but for implementation, one needs to come down to earth, an earth with limitations, with complexities of the 'system'. I have attended the 'People's Conference of FAP' organized by the CEN and ADAB with a wishful thinking that the organisers must have prepared themselves to present the nation with an alternative thinking, with an alternative option, why not be it a 'zero option', or 'let us live with flood' option. These are probably two options scantly mentioned, without details.

in that conference. The question remained whether these options were discussed with flood marooned population and sought their opinion. An opportunity has been lost during flood '95. They country cannot afford a debate only for long. The stakeholders are many.

It appeared to me that the thinkings & ideas are yet 'compartmentalized'. BELA deals with legal issues, CEN with environmental issues, ADAB, in general, with people's participation issues. At project level, all these issues are to be dealt with in one package. That's where all the complexities lie, that's where compromises and accommodations crop up and exposes the work to criticism. FAP-20 can be cited as the best example of that exposure.

As we turn our attention to water management rather than flood management, the requirement of testing an alternative (as suggested by critics) becomes all the more important.

#### Proposal for an Alternative Pilot Project

My proposal is that all parties, including FAP critics, take the responsibility of setting up a 'pilot project' in a people accepted 'pilot area' to show the 'ideals' of managing water resources. The objective of the pilot project, with suggested organisational responsibility, could be —

- to select a pilot area and establish a methodology how to select suitable area for water management with assessment of technical feasibility and consent of people (ADAB/WARPO)
- to demonstrate a methodology of genuine peoples participation — how to involve 'many

— evaluation (Ministry of

Water Resources /IMED, Ministry of Planning, final assessment and recommendation (World Bank/Ministry of Planning/Ministry of Finance)

#### Lessons Learned' to be Discussed in 2000

In this atmosphere of co-operation, cross table discussion, the time is just ripe for implementation of the proposed pilot project with all parties' cooperation, as also rightly suggested by Dr Saleemul Huq during 4th FAP conference, so that in the year 2000 when the next phase of Flood and Water Management Strategy will be discussed, there are results of 'lessons learned'.

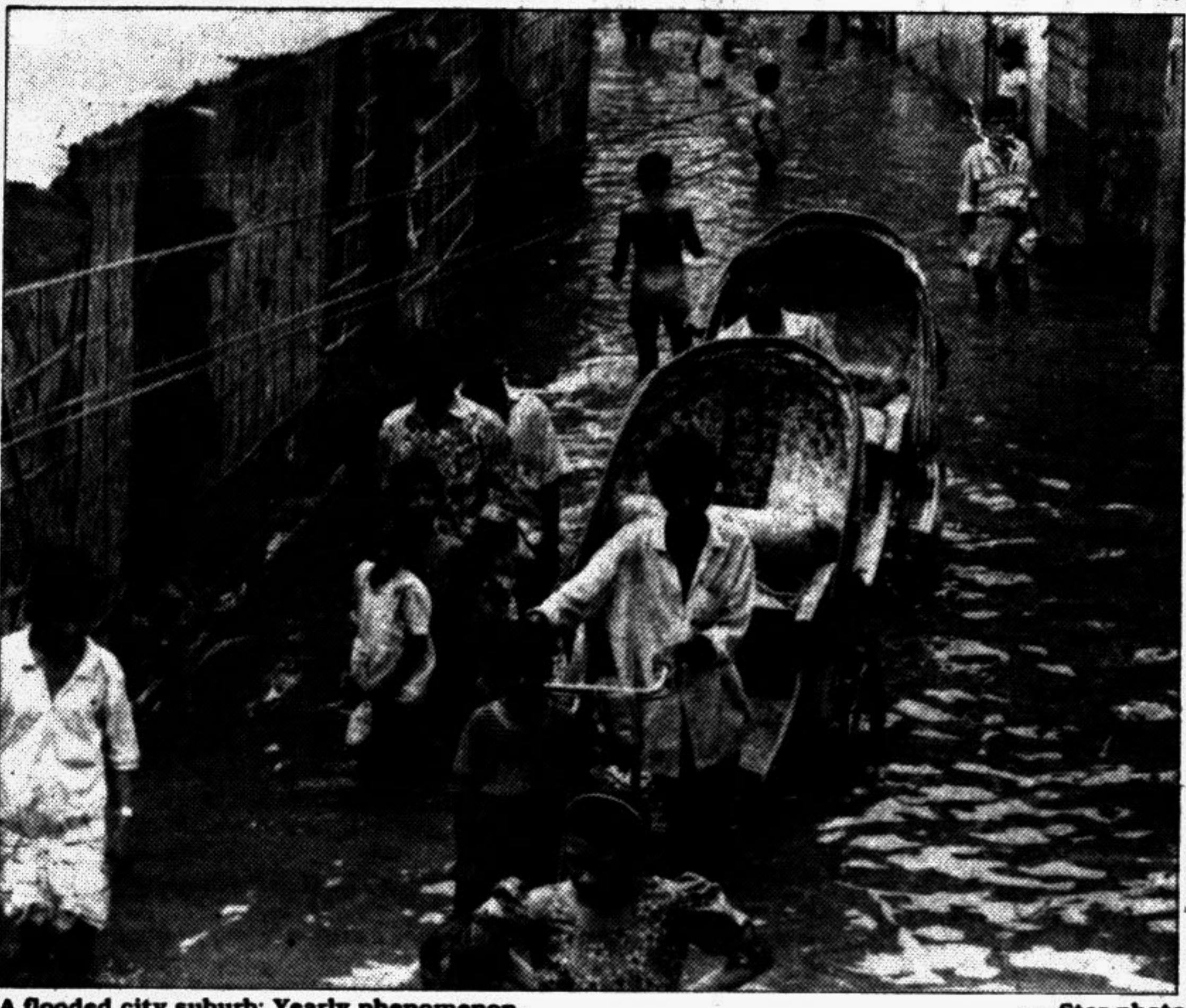
This could be a challenge for the 1996-2000 period. The era of criticisms and suspicion should be buried. Let us feel the 'complexities' of implementation of best ideas. It is encouraging that certain critics are willing to be partners in learning while doing' phase of 1996-2000.

The Apex Body ADAB should respond to the call of the time. I am hopeful, if ADAB/CEN/BELA respond to take up the challenge with positive spirit, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Planning or World Bank will find donors to finance this project.

#### Opportunity for Critics to Sit on the Driver's Seat

Let us focus our attention to the proposed 'ideal and implementable' water management project where ADAB becomes the real formulator with WARPO and others taking supporting role. The nation will appreciate ADAB to welcome this proposal and take the challenge of doing it. Let us together show all the ideal slogans are really implemented in the real setting of Bangladesh.

The views and suggestions expressed are author's own and not of the organisation he belongs to.



A flooded city suburb: Yearly phenomenon.

— Star photo

## Beasts and Beauties of Environment in '95 Bangladesh

by Ekram Kabir

contained components for social forestry, agro-based forestry and utilisation of marginal agricultural land for these purposes. According to the CCHRB Report '94, it also provided for creation of a separate Social Forestry Directorate and suggested amendments to existing legislation on forests.

The Environment Protection Bill 1994, which was put to public debate unconventional by BELA to enrich the Bill with expert input, was adopted by the Parliament on February 5, 1995 without any consideration of the suggestions presented, and received the Presidential assent 10 days later (Feb 15) as Environmental Protection Act 1995. The only attempt came from the State Minister for Planning Dr A Moyeen Khan who brought an amendment motion to the proposed Bill. Mr Khan said that if his motion was denied, the enactment would create nothing but a paper tiger.

Unfortunately, the proposed amendment of the Cabinet colleague on the section that debars the courts to take cognizance of any act or omission under the assented Act was rejected without any proper debate.

Denying the amendment motion of a minister on a Bill placed by another minister of the same political party was apparently an odd one in the backdrop of Bangladesh's prevailing political drift.

Meanwhile, the government last year notified 1,176 industrial units for polluting the environment and asked them to install environment-friendly waste treatment systems. About 196 of them have positively responded and some have defended their polluter status. According to a BELA newsletter, the DoE was supposed to take legal actions against those who didn't respond. Among the 1,176 polluting industries, 472 were in Dhaka, 392 in Chittagong, 265 in Khulna and 47 in Rajshahi divisions.

The DoE observations said, tanneries, textiles, dyeing, pulp-paper, fertiliser, chemical, jute and sugar industries are the worst polluters.

The much-awaited final report to shape up a National Environment Action Plan (NEMAP) is expected to be released sometime this month (Jan. '96). To develop the NEMAP, there was a government-initiated practice of public consultations stretching over a period of three months (Feb 23-May 11, '94). A total 23 ADAB-organised grassroots workshops were held in all the important agro-ecological zones to ac-

cumulate true views of local people from all walks of life.

This process of participatory consultations was seen as a model methodology for involving people's participation in policy-planning, but 1995 failed to pour out any result in this regard.

Some 'The Daily Star Save Dhaka' campaigns aside, there was an optimistic sign that "to create awareness among the Dhaka city people about cleanliness, the DoE and DCC jointly organised the Dhaka Cleanliness Drive on August 9" with some high-sounding rhetorics. But that was all about Dhaka city.

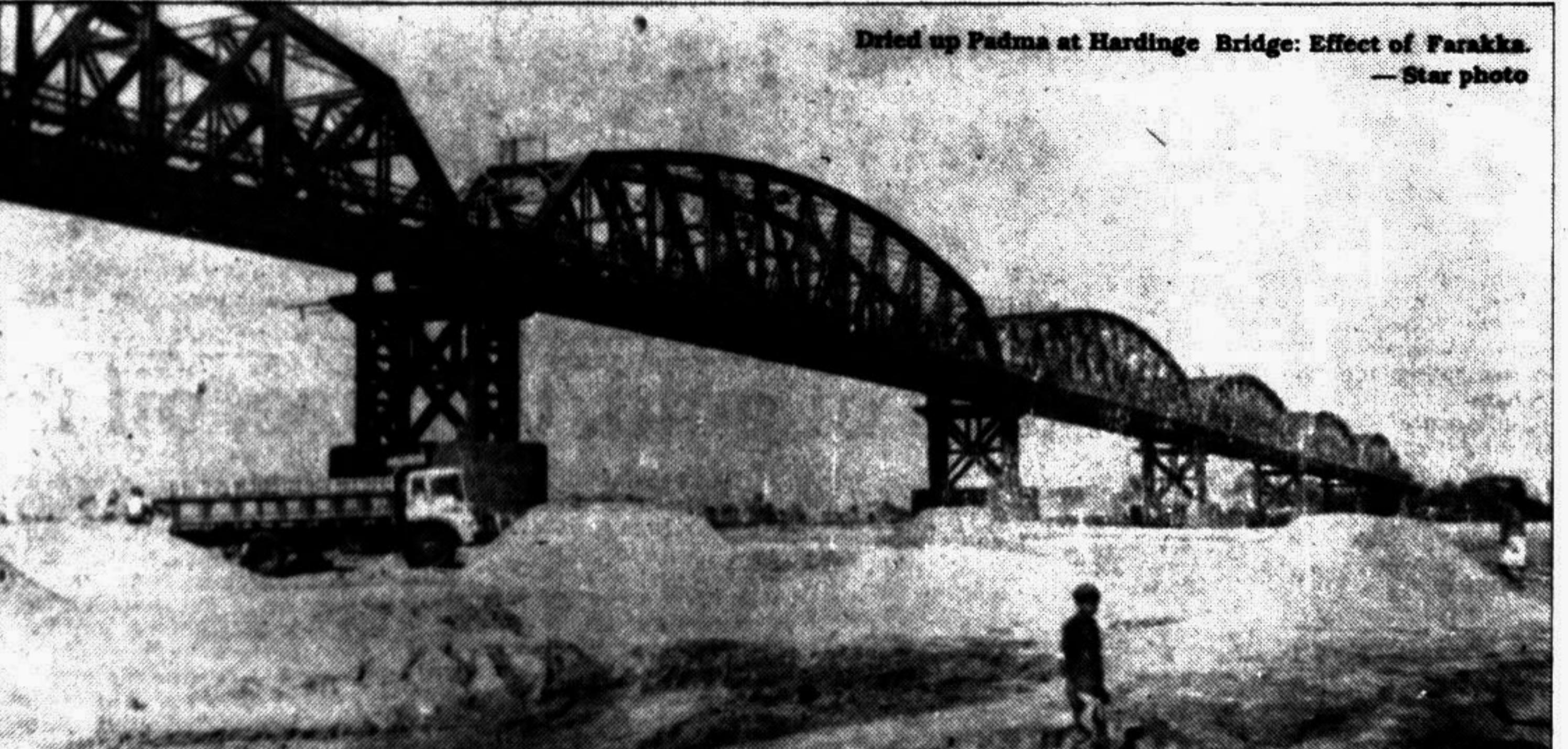
High salinity in southern Bangladesh, specially in the river Bhairab, forced the Khulna Newsprint Mills (KNM) to stop operation on May 14 last year. The country's lone newsprint mill requires 500 to 600 tonnes of sweet water everyday to each of its three boilers — in the pulping process — as well as

But unfortunately, according to analysts, the UNGA remained under no obligation to take any specific measure or action. Another effect of Farakka — silting of Bangladesh's major rivers — unleashed a flurry of serious problems in the riverine country's river traffic system.

The inability to protecting the world's ecology at the UN level, according to available reports, came up glaringly at the Berlin climate conference (March 28-April 7, '95), participated by 170 countries, including Bangladesh — a futile exercise to implement the Rio declaration. Fearing hindrance in industrial development, the rich

"flood" that people perceive and the "flood" conceived in the FAP were not necessarily the same. In the former case, according to analysts, it's a part of life and livelihood, while in the latter concept, it's the project — the blessed evil that breeds money for some vested groups.

This was because the FAP underwent a number of changes — like, French FAP, World Bank FAP, FAP-20 and FPCO's FAP — and thereby it wasn't always clear which phase or aspect of FAP was being discussed. However, termed as 'half-dead' by its critics, but the supporters expressed that the strategy



Dried up Padma at Hardinge Bridge: Effect of Farakka. — Star photo

T RADITION says you've got to learn and grow up; tradition says you've got to live by what are available on earth; tradition says you should care for your children and parents; tradition says you may have to fight wars in order to survive; and tradition "also" says you should, when you complete your life, leave this world making it a far better place for the progeny than that you lived in. But human activities in Bangladesh — and globally at large — don't seem to follow the traditional gospels when it comes to protecting the environment.

On the other hand, "Bangladesh sets an example that poor people don't damage the world's environment". That was what the UNDP country representative Emile Watanabe said on June 5, the World Environment Day 1995, expressing her concern from a global perspective. And while at the local level environmentalists believe that problems which are currently afflicting the country's ecology are very much solvable, the politicians hardly realise that they are the ones who can make the right move.

Parliamentarians — at an opinion programme on 'Commitment of Environmental Conservation in Party Manifesto and Election Manifesto of Political Parties' organised by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) in March '95 — pointed out that the lawmakers of Bangladesh did not give emphasis on the role of environment in the country's

The Forestry Master Plan

contained components for social forestry, agro-based forestry and utilisation of marginal agricultural land for these purposes. According to the CCHRB Report '94, it also provided for creation of a separate Social Forestry Directorate and suggested amendments to existing legislation on forests.

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Sincerity of the state machinery was better understood by deteriorating condition of the Dhanmondi Lake and rising vehicular pollution in the city. Pollution of the Dhanmondi Lake took a severe turn during the monsoon rain last year — toxic sludge flooding into the lake.

The pollution turned the water thick and black, spreading stench in the area. The toxicity reduced the dissolved oxygen required for fish, and they floated up the surface in the northern side, of course.

Increasing air pollution got focused on the breach of people's fundamental right to a healthy and safe environment. Media reports suggest that by emitting 95 tons of poisonous gas — 50 per cent of that being carbon monoxide — more than half of the vehicles on the city roads were — and still are — discharging black or hazardous smoke causing serious health problems and compelling people to wear safety-masks. There are strong allegations that although there's a law against black-smoke emission, the law-enforcing agencies are failing to enforce it.

A local newspaper report pointed out the lack of coor-

5,000 tonnes per hour for condensation — in the cooling process. The boilers can only function with water at up to 50 to 60 parts per million (PPM) in salinity (sodium chloride) levels, otherwise there's a chance of machinery breakdown.

BCIC, the authority of the KNM, said in a press release that abnormal salinity of water in the rivers of Khulna region created malfunction in turbine condenser causing it to leak. This increased saline intrusion that made the authorities worried is alleged to be the result of water-withdrawal of the Ganges at the Farakka Barrage. Later in the year on October 23, raising the water-sharing issue between Bangladesh and India, and the disastrous impact of Farakka on Bangladesh, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia once again — like she does at every UNGA — said, while speaking at the UN's 50th anniversary gathering, over 40 million people of Bangladesh were facing poverty and destruction owing to deprivation of the country's due-share of the Ganges water by India through unilateral withdrawal at Farakka.

From its beginning and throughout its five-year history, the FAP has generated a great deal of debate and criticism both at the local and international levels. One of the interesting feature of this is that critics and proponents when talking about the FAP often didn't mean the same thing. In other words, the

paper has stressed well through institutional capacity-building. The long-term sustainability, they said, was also focused on in terms of operation and maintenance institutions. This seemed to be a major shift from the traditional "project approach" to a new "process approach". No-structural solutions were addressed under the purview of institutional issue in which area the NGOs and the FAP critics didn't contradict.

After all this, it was heartening to see some developments in the UNICEF-approached — with its assisting agencies, NGO Forum etc — area of safe drinking water and sanitation programmes. Among one of its mid-decade targets, the UNICEF was able to make safe drinking water available to 97 per cent of the people in both rural and urban areas. The sanitation coverage of the UN Children's Fund was 34 per cent in the rural and 75 per cent in the urban areas. It's hard to break the age-old practices of not being hygienic in the countryside, but the agency seems to be determined to make it possible by the turn of the century.



James Bond



TOM and JERRY