

For an Ideal and Implementable Water Management Project

by Dr M Rafiqul Islam

"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 FAPs. 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 elitist quarter of the society. More so, these people started to get prominence for simply being a FAP critic. Donors appeared 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 option — why not be it a 'zero option' or 'let us live with flood' option. These are probably two options scantily 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. The 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 on 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 a 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

faces' of people with their total agreement for a common cause (ADAB) to firm up the methodology to formulate an EIA through creating awareness regarding opportunities of legal support and compensation and demonstrate its application in the field (CEN and BELA)

- to develop methodologies of consultation and involvement of people toward — a people accepted, environment friendly water management plan keeping the interest of farmer, fishermen, landless, women and boatmen (ADAB/CEN)

- a methodology to involve negatively impacted population with a provision of compensation (ADAB)

- establish procedure for legal requirement for project implementation and people's institutions required for O&M of the project (BELA)

- mechanisms of information dissemination to many level of actors, from user to planner (Prosikhah?)

- technical, geo-hydrological assessment and planning of the project area formulated through the above process (WARPO)

- integration of above formulations in a simple plan for implementation (WARPO/ADAB)

- implementation of structural and nonstructural interventions of the project (BWDB/LGED/ADAB)

- operation and maintenance (Local institutions/NGOs/BWDB/LGED)

- monitoring of key indicators (BUET/BAU)

- 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'.

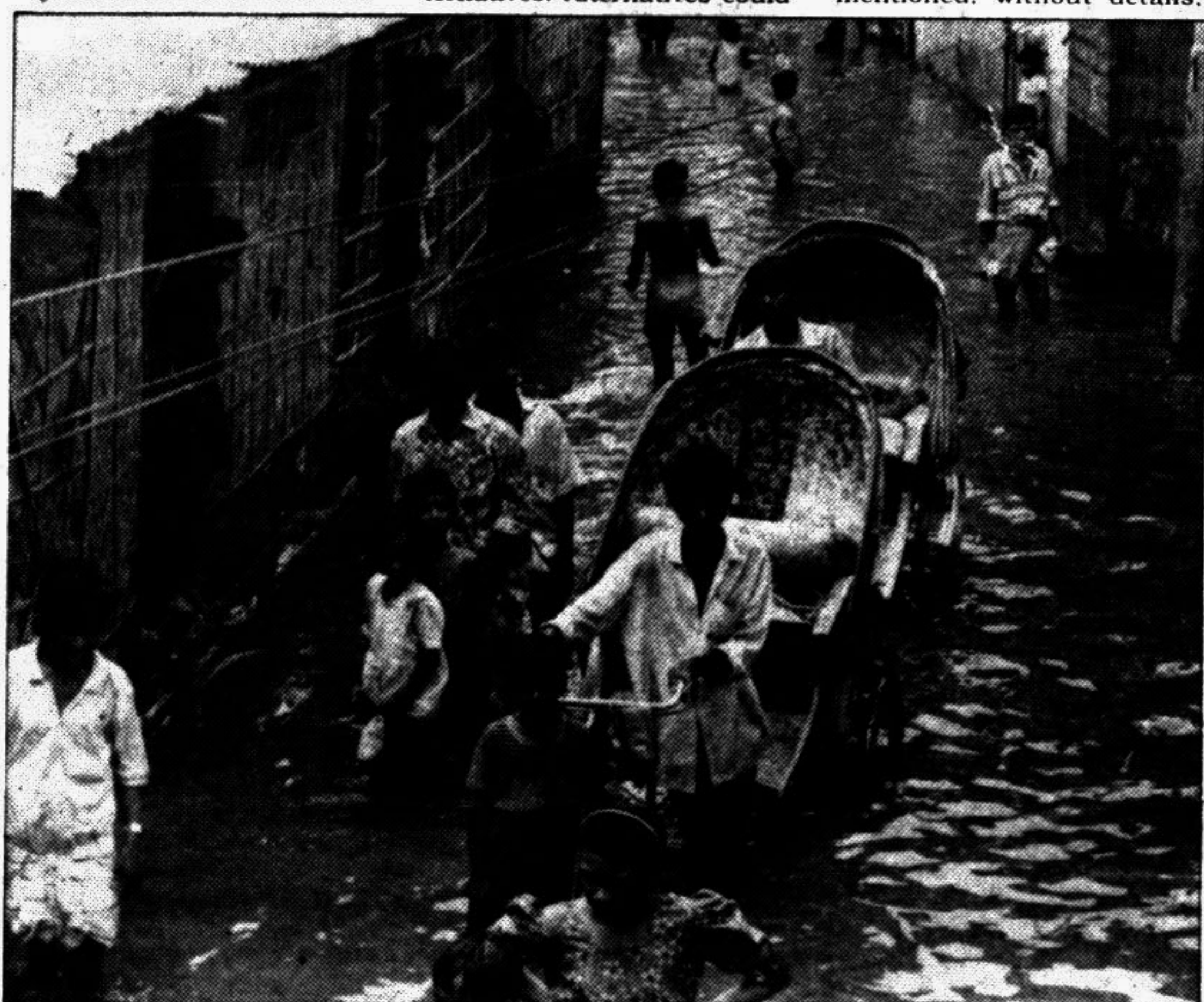
This could be a challenge for the 1996-2000 period. The era of criticisms and suspicion should be buried. Let us feel the complexities of implementation of best ideas. It is encouraging that certain critics are willing to be partners in 'learning while doing' phase of 1996-2000.

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 a 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 implementable 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

TRADITION 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 Emie Watanabi 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

parliamentary process and there was a lack of commitment for environment protection at the state level.

Despite some motivational and legal activities by some NGOs — like CEN (Coalition of Environmental NGOs) and BELA — and UN agencies, the politically-obsessed government gave almost a blind eye to the environmental issues those are of grave concern for Bangladesh.

It became clear, by the Polythene Interlude, of the previous year that '95 wasn't going to gain anything from the country's policy-house. The decision for banning the production of polythene was taken in '93 which would have been in force by January 18, 1994. But two days before that the ban was abruptly lifted. It was surprising to note that the bombshell for lifting the ban came from the Prime Minister reportedly overriding the Ministry of Environment and Forests which initially proposed the ban.

On the afforestation front of the country, a 20-year Forestry Master Plan, prepared in 1994, is still lying with the implementing body of the government. The Plan which was expected to be implemented in '95, however, purported to expand the forests to cover at least 20 per cent of the country's land area — which is presently a staggering eight per cent. Although termed as 'ambitious' by many, the Plan was hailed for successful implementation both by private and public sectors.

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.

The Environment Protection Bill 1994, which was put to public debate unconventionally 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 was to bring 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. 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 drill.

On the other hand, introducing the Bill, Mr Akbar Hossain, the Minister for Environment and Forest, informed the House on the ne-

cessity to create a legal infrastructure to protect and develop the environment and to control pollution. The Bill contains powers for the Department of Environment (DoE) to prosecute for undefined offenses which may be extended up to five years of imprisonment or a maximum fine of Taka 100,000 or both.

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 rhetoric. But that was all about Dhaka city.

dination between such agencies as Bangladesh Road Transport Authority and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Traffic Department was the main reason behind the failure to implement the law. Both the agencies tried to avoid the issue by putting the responsibility on each other's shoulder.

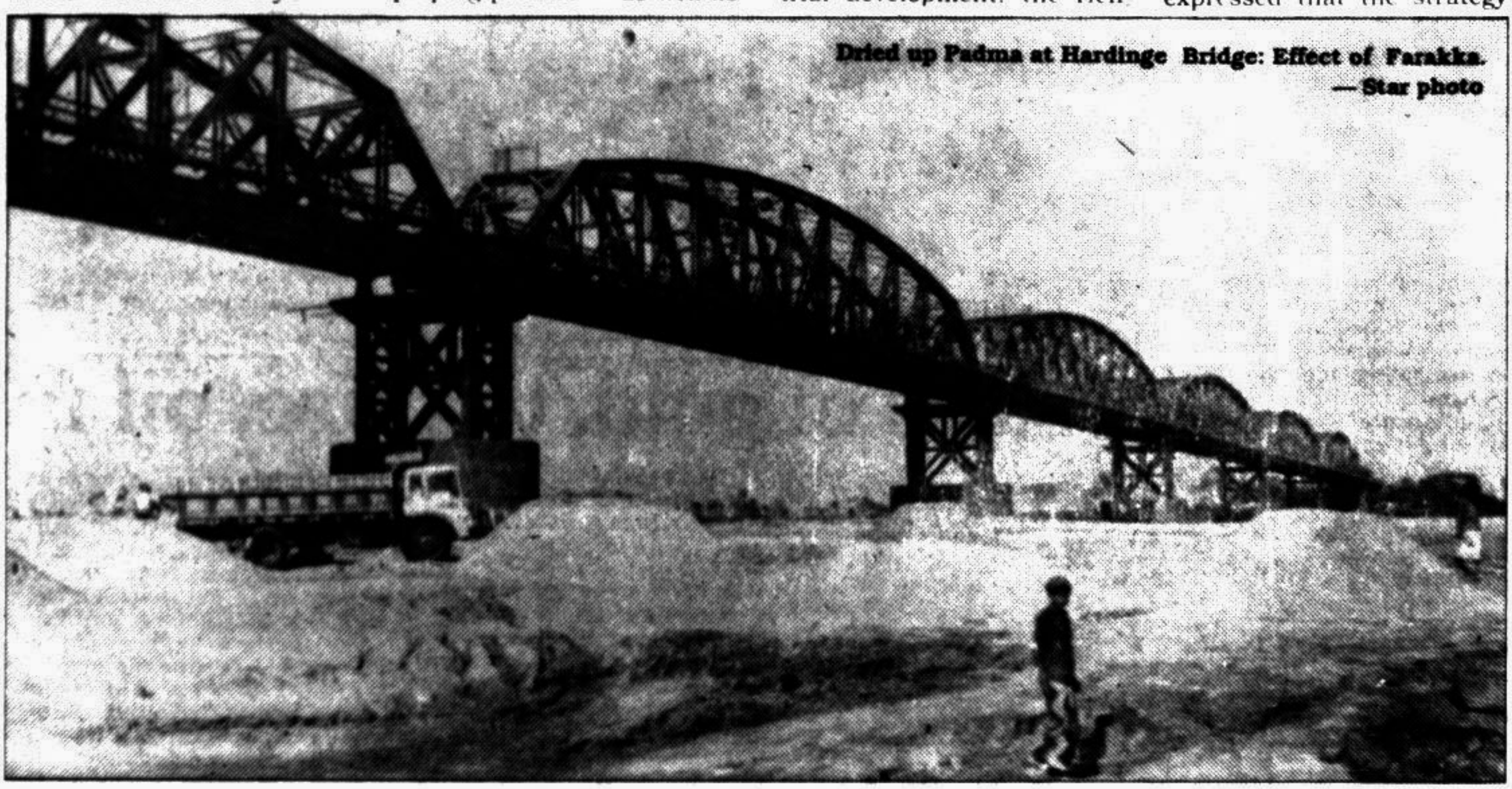
High salinity in southern Bangladesh, specially in the river Bhairab, forced the Khulna Newsprint Mills (KNM) to stop operation on May 14 last year. The country's lone newsprint mill requires 500 to 600 tonnes of sweet water everyday to each of its three boilers — in the pulping process — as well as

But unfortunately, according to analysts, the UNGA remained under no obligation to take any specific measure or action. Another effect of Farakka — siltation 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



TOM and JERRY

