

From "Stormy Today" to a "Better Tomorrow"

by Dr M. Enamul Huq

If the people cannot travel to the seat of the government to share power, then the government can and should move towards people by decentralising. True democracy cannot work by twenty men sitting at the centre.

HUMAN rights as an expression may have a modern ring to it, but as a science it is as ancient as Plato and Aristotle when "Humanity" literally started gaining ground. And scholars like them taught the then rulers that people weren't subjects who are exclusively made to bow but also were "human beings" who needed to be looked after—both physically and emotionally. Moreover possibility is there, according to many, as science deals with humanity that no more genuine inter-disciplinary subject exists than the study of human rights, especially now in the West. These days, a large number of human rights organisations has been established all over the world to watch and protect rights violation.

This indeed is a welcome development. The national human rights groups are also doing very commendable tasks, drawing attention to violations by different agencies of the government in Bangladesh's backdrop, these organisations can be more effective when functioning under democratic setup with a relatively free press (which is yet to be fully realised here in this country). The very fact that there has been already a beginning of the awareness among the masses itself is significant and positive step for human rights i.e. to protect one against person, society, state, environment, nature and above all the man-made bad laws.

Human beings tend to think and act in terms of gains and losses, likes and dislikes and of his own multifarious desires. If we are trapped by considerations of self-interest we are apt to view things as we want them to be, not as they really are.

The charter of United Nations imposes a clear, compelling legal obligations on all member-nations/states to promote economic and social development and human rights through collective and individual efforts. The promotion of social development must be harmonised with and reinforced by the promotion and protection of human rights of the people.

The Human Development Report 1993 rightly focuses on

participation as key to human development. If the people cannot travel to the seat of the government to share power, then the government can and should move towards people by decentralising. True democracy cannot work by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to begin from the people of every village. Likewise to make the development sustainable, "there is only one group which really knows what is happening at the field and that is the people who live at grassroots." It is to them and their representatives that execution and supervision must be entrusted if such execution and supervision is to have any real effect and desirable significance.

Human Development Index (HDI) combines life expectancy, educational attainment, basic purchasing power etc., into one. The need for human development is not limited to developing countries only because in the developed ones also there is increased joblessness as economy cannot keep pace. Hence there must be synergy between measures so that social and environmental need be taken into account within the framework of various international and regional programmes in support of national projects which should be participatory one.

Given the present scenario of Bangladesh, will the rural people, poorer class and women be able to make their voice heard? Will they be able to come up with holistic concept of development for the country? Till now, NGOs had been playing a comparatively free run through the stranglehold of age old bureaucracy and intricate rules and regulations of various government programmes. Power-sharing is a must and the measure of our success for sustainable development can be better appreciated if the following sector/segments are harnessed to extract best out of them and to do all that is possible for them, like:

a) Gender Equation — necessary legal framework; b) Unem-

ployed youth/adult; c) Handicapped e.g. deaf, dumb, blind, lame etc.; d) Brain-drain — wastage of manpower; e) Illegal trafficking of manpower; f) Rehabilitation of released prisoners and convicts; g) Social reclamation of drug addicts; h) Utilising the technical know-how of the financially insolvent; i) Children/Tokai — vocational training like UCEP; j) Senior citizens expertise; k) Migratory labour of rural areas; l) Returnees from abroad; m) Reformative measures for vagabonds, musclemen and jobless; n) Special areas like Hill Tracts, haors, coastal belts; o) NGOs vis-a-vis relevant UN agencies; p) Madrasha-based vocational education; q) Private security services to collaborate with government agencies; r) Streamlining financial irregularities; s) Increasing efficacy of enforcement to ensure law and order; t) Toning up administrators, especially development oriented subjects; u) Due coordination among similar job-oriented agencies; v) Ensure follow up action for perspective planning attainments.

Equal protection of law needs equal reasonable oppor-

tunities to access to the course of law — otherwise justice remains a myth. "Justice is always advantageous to the rich" is equally applicable to Bangladesh. One of the pre-requisite of development is the achievement of equality and equity not only among men but also between men and women. Our goal is a universal life a shared aspiration for all. Wishful thinking alone is useless. Of course man's spiritual growth should not lag behind his material advance. Major imbalance in progress often causes conflict among people and thereby increases unhappiness.

Time has come to reconsider our development strategy to confess that development has to come from within not from outside and there must be realisation that community participation is a must to checkmate the evil force within society to reconcile the constitutional ideals of public justice with novel social condition to enlist the support of benefactors at its maxim to attain economic freedom.

In our country often we talk about gender equation, children's rights, abuse of women etc., and urge for due facilities

to redeem the exiting lacunae. These must not be hesitation to speak the truth that in Bangladesh there is no dearth of good but ineffective laws which relate to women and children e.g., a) Dowry Prohibition Act; b) Cruelty to Women (Deterrent punishment Act 1983); c) Child Marriage Restraint Act (Amendment Ordinance 1984); d) The Muslim Family Ordinance Act (Amended in 1985); e) The Penal Code (Second Amendment Ordinance); and f) Family Court ordinance 1985

"Good laws remain in the books only and are rarely implemented. Fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution and internationally adopted human rights are also rarely translated into reality. Due to lack of law-enforcement, lack of skills, absence of impartiality and corruption, the society has fallen into the grip of a few terrorist and corrupt people, and ordinary people, particularly the poor are becoming hostages in their hands. All fundamental rights provided under the Constitution should be guaranteed. Any law, rules or

regulations which is inconsistent with Constitution and curtails fundamental rights should be abolished. Land reforms, laws for violence against women, anti-dowry laws, environment protection laws, family laws etc., should be amended and made comprehensive, and at the same time, the exiting laws, whatever they may be, should be fully implemented. (UNDP's Human Development Report 1969, Bangladesh).

What is needed is action derived from concerned optimism and collective wisdom if we are to bequeath a happy peaceful world to our next generation. Dynamic leadership, dedicated entrepreneurs, continued and concerted efforts for sustainable development oriented services for rational and pragmatic attainments are the variables to be utilised for common goal and aspirations and that requires endless cycle of learning from the past, understanding present and planning for the future to pass from "Stormy Today" to a "Better Tomorrow."

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When Delay Spells Death

by Ayesha Kabir

AS her date for delivery approached, Bilkis was almost blasé about giving birth to her child. Having had four children already, the 26-year-old woman of Jamalganj in Sunamganj district, felt she knew it all. Having her fifth child was just another job to get over with.

If the thrills of motherhood had dwindled, so had the fears. But things were to change, and just a week before the date due for Bilkis to give birth to her child, she realised all was not well. She was violently ill and had begun bleeding sporadically.

Her mother-in-law dismissed this as minor complications that women invariably had to face. "You'll be fine once the baby's born," she airily assured Bilkis, brushing aside the expectant mother's apprehensions.

But things turned from bad to worse. Pains began to shoot through her body and she began to lose strength rapidly. Weak and sapped of energy, when Bilkis could no longer bear the excruciating pains that racked her body, her husband Afsar Miah decided that she needed medical attention. "I'll take you to the Thana Health Complex," he comforted his wife. "They'll know what to do."

But easier said than done. It took Afsar Miah a better part of four hours to manage a mode of transport — the only means of transport available which turned out to be a push cart in which Bilkis just managed to fit. By then, Bilkis was delirious with fever and pain and could hardly make out the blurred faces of her four children who were watching their mother leave, tears streaming down their grimy cheeks. They had never been left by their mother before.

Bilkis hardly knew when the arduous journey along the 12 kilometres of rough track to the health complex came to an end. She was carried to a bed in the doctor's room and a nurse came up to examine her. "Why did you bring her so late?" she admonished Afsar Miah, who stood helplessly looking at his almost inert wife. "You have lost the baby," the nurse informed him. "And you're most likely to lose your wife as well."

Scared and confused, Afsar Miah begged her to get the doctor and do something to save Bilkis' life. "You'll just have to wait. The doctor isn't here."

When the doctor did finally turn up, Bilkis was past recovery. "It's too late," the doctor declared on a final note, and informed Afsar Miah that his wife had died.

Thus when Afsar Miah finally returned home, it was with the lifeless body of the unfortunate Bilkis. Bilkis who had been so full of confidence, strength.

Her story is a common one. The main tragedy of her story is that it need not have ended thus. It was just a lack of awareness on the part of all concerned that led to her death. It is this lack of awareness that brings in the crucial factor of delay — delay in getting proper medical attention at the proper time. Time is the decisive factor between life and death in such cases and in Bangladesh, all the more so in rural Bangladesh, it is delay that spells death for too many women. And Bilkis' is a classic case of delay.

In the first place, she did not avail routine maternity care. When complications arose, this

was nothing surprising. But her family delayed in seeking medical attention. Poor infrastructure and transport facilities caused further delay and even when she finally arrived at the complex, she did not get the immediate emergency obstetric care she was entitled to.

The delay takes place in several stages and for a variety of reasons. This can be visualised by a Three Delay model which illustrates what lies between a woman and Emergency Obstetric Care (EOC). The first stage of delay deals with the basic drawbacks of the economy, education and gender status. Pregnancy is generally associated with a bevy of illnesses and so any complications which may arise are more often than not dismissed as unavoidable. And the women's status being as such, the question arises whether it is worth the expense to take her to the hospital, to buy medicines and such. The woman herself hesitates to leave her household and her children. It is the mother-in-law and the husband who are more important in deciding whether she needs medical attention or not. Thus the first phase of delay is in actually deciding whether or not to seek medical care.

Secondly, with a poor infrastructure and transport system, the distance to the health centres are long and difficult. The costs of whatever available transport there might be are high for indigent rural folk. Thus, even if one finally decides to seek care, reaching the place of medical care itself is a process of delay.

In the third phase, once the patient arrives at the health complex or hospital, the quality of care is often inadequate. There is an overall lack of staff, medicines, equipment and general attention. The journey to the facility can prove to be futile and the quality of service, or rather its lack, proves to be a disincentive.

Lack of proper maternal care does not only lead to death. Death, in a manner of speaking, is just the tip of the iceberg. A woman, having survived poor medical attention despite complications, is likely to suffer from the effect of this neglect all her life. She can develop a number of illnesses, some unpleasant enough to distance her from the community for the rest of her life.

But the situation is not without hope. These crucial delays can be overcome. In the first place, if the Emergency Obstetric Care (EOC) services are upgraded, then women can be assured of receiving care at the health facility. If the EOC services are decentralised, the delay in reaching the facility can be avoided. And if the community is educated, this can mobilise the people concerned to seek medical attention.

It is obvious that the attention must be caught of those who can make these changes. The rural communities themselves perhaps, in their present circumstances, cannot bring about these changes and the required upgradation. It is the policy makers, the leaders, the politicians, the MPs, the journalists, the opinion makers, who can bring about these essential improvements in the system.

Action must be taken. We can delay no longer, not at the cost of the lives of thousands of women, year after year.

Unicef Feature

Cost of Modern Defence: Quest for an Alternative

by Rukhsana Ahmed

THE present day world is characterised by continuous violence, conflict and disagreement between nations. The traditions of the international community make it clear that armed forces are the most tangible evidence of a nation's independence and sovereignty. Consequently, the cost of modern defence has become a crucial dimension of international affairs.

Governments of the major nations of the world today perhaps no longer promote the security of individuals; their commitment to weapons of mass destruction for national defence creates a world situation that threatens the security

of everyone. One must, however, distinguish between the offensive weapons of the developed and developing countries. The developing countries are far behind the western world's characteristics of defence capability. But they can reach the developed countries by 1) following them blindly or 2) going directly to the western world.

The first option is time-consuming and is difficult to practice. In military context, the developing countries are replicating the second option, that is directly acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

And, as a developing coun-

try, Bangladesh is not an exception in this regard. Her current defence strategy is based on macro ethics which imply survival of the state, nation and government. The ruling class in Bangladesh readily accepted the defence strategy of modernity in the form of replicating the west to acquire weapons of mass destruction. But the usual consequences must not be without some telling effects. The military expenditure occupies a great amount of the total budget of Bangladesh. For instance, the government spent Tk 38,95 billion as military expenditure in 1992 which represented 4 per cent of the total GDP of that year. However, according to some serious military researchers, this kind of military spending is economically wasteful for a developing country like Bangladesh where nearly 80% people of the total population live below the poverty line.

In the last decade, the effort to design an alternative defence strategy of a non-offensive character has received considerable attention of the peace research community. A large amount of literature has been produced, and detailed proposals for alternative security policies have been drawn up for specific countries.

In the context of a developing country like Bangladesh, the following measures may be adopted to transform its current defence strategy: 1) The essential principle of every defence policy must be securing of peace for itself as well as for every other nation of the world; 2) substitution of offensive weapons by defensive weapons; 3) use of the techniques of non-violent action, for instance, protest and appeal to public opinion, non-cooperation with the aggressors etc.; 4) dealignment of the nuclear strategy; 5) abandonment of the principle of "winning war"; 6) reduction of the role of military alliances and pacts; 7) reduction of militarist culture; 8) strengthening of regional inter-bloc cooperation; 9) increasing internal in-

ternational security.

In addition to above measures in global context suggested for a developing country, the following creative measures may also be adopted: 1) public awareness of the cost of modern defence has to be generated; 2) national interest concerning the welfare and security of individuals must not be superseded by regime interest; 3) decrease in military expenditure and its appropriate distribution in other sectors; 4) there should be expert and specialist defence strategists; 5) replication of the military wisdom of the west come to and end; 6) the concept of creative cost of west in the form of research findings and development should be adopted; 7) the air force can safely be dismantled and regular army can be replaced by (3-year service) voluntary armed forces; 8) the transformation at the micro level must be equally innovative and radical; 9) finally, an integrated approach should be devised pulling together the government, policy planners, decision-makers, scholars, chief of the armed forces, public figures etc.

The proposals may seem quite utopian. But they are actually not, and still there is hope for having a far more effective defence strategy which would be cost-effective and self-reliant as well. We can construct a new security system based on non-offensive defence with adequate political will and efforts. Planners, decision makers, scholars, chief of the armed forces, public figures should work in collaboration with each other. The possibilities for alternative structures of state and military are immense in the context of developing countries like Bangladesh.

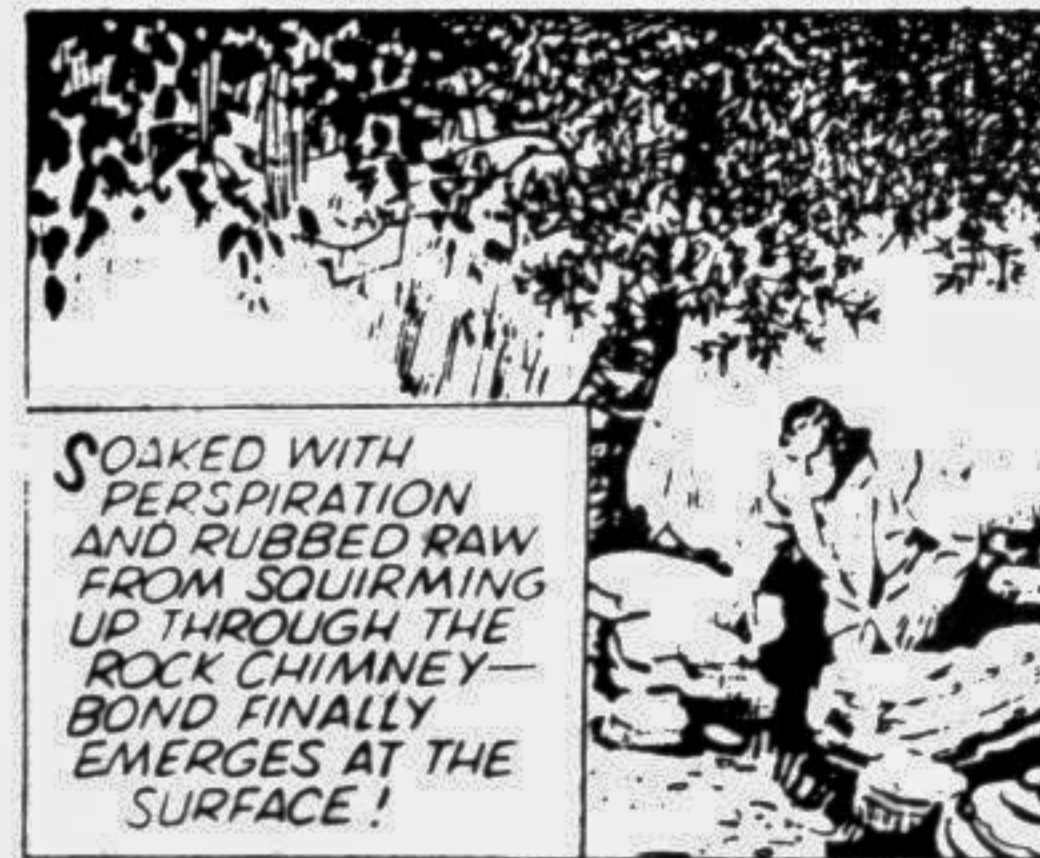
This is resistance and defence, but of a non-violent sort. This requires not only conversion to a peace-oriented economy but also the development of alternative means of national defence.

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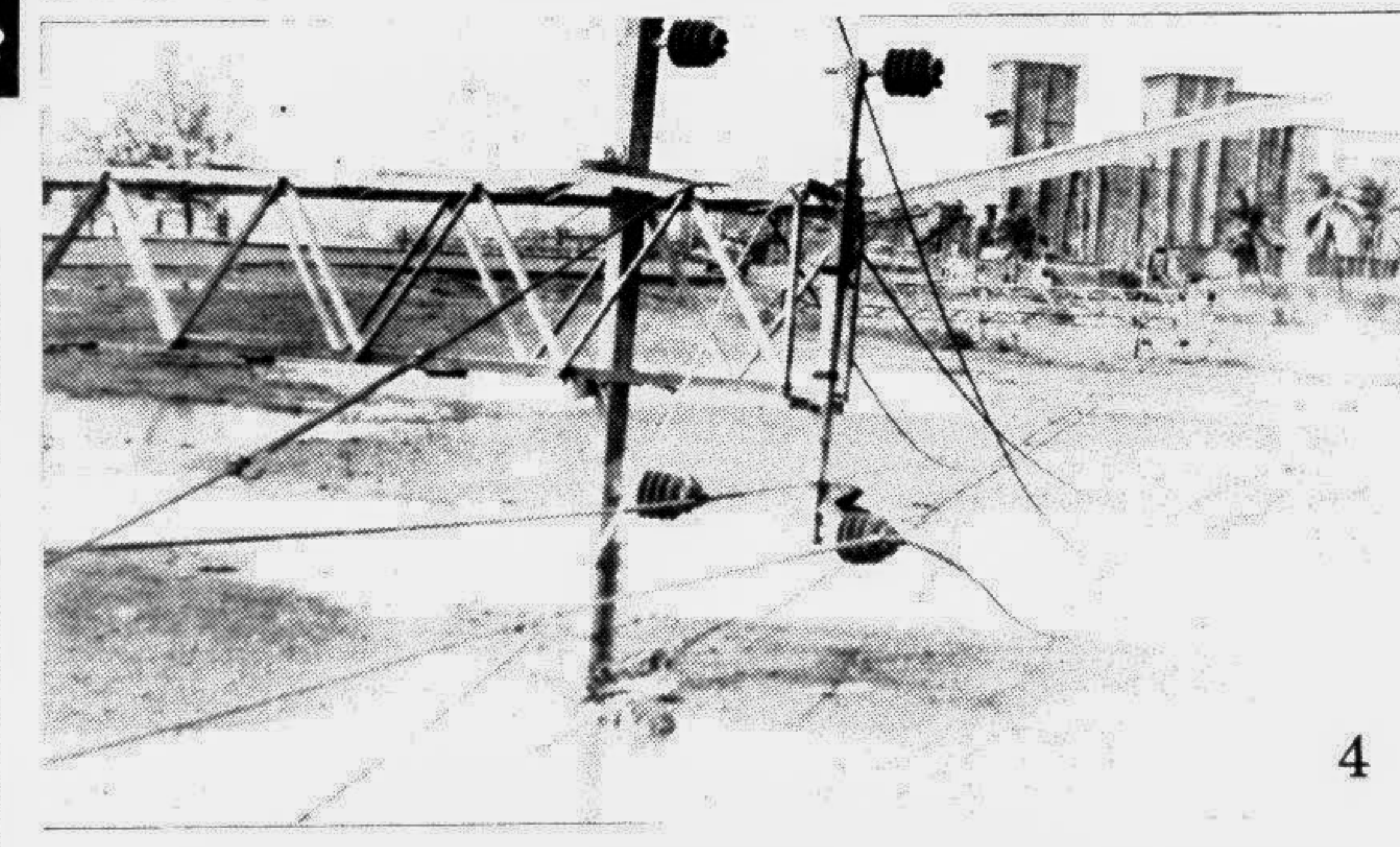
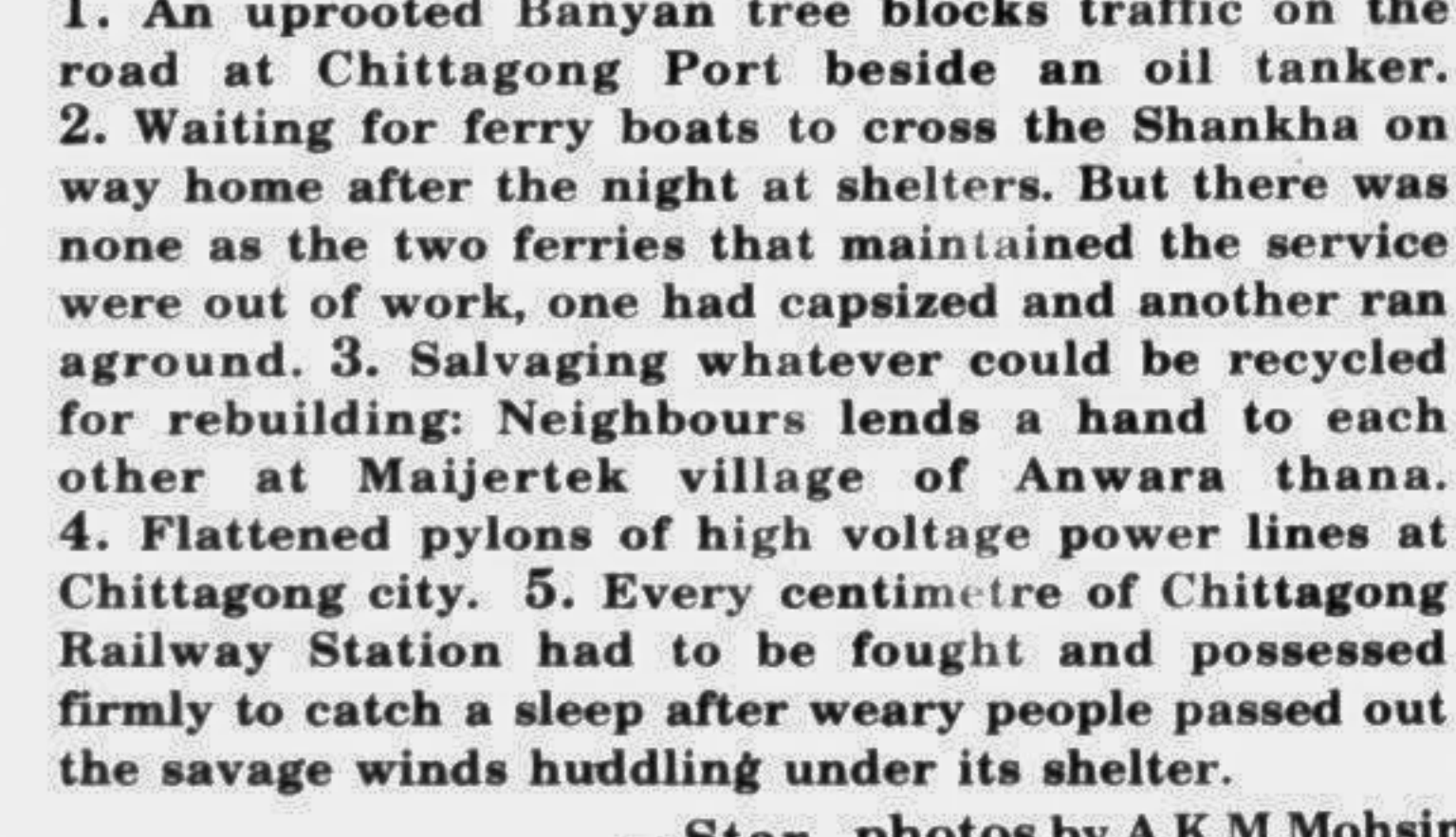
Tom and Jerry



James Bond



After Monday's cyclone



1. An uprooted Banyan tree blocks traffic on the road at Chittagong Port beside an oil tanker. 2. Waiting for ferry boats to cross the Shankha on way home after the night at shelters. But there was none as the two ferries that maintained the service were out of work, one had capsized and another ran aground. 3. Salvaging whatever could be recycled for rebuilding: Neighbours lend a hand to each other at Maijertek village of Anwara thana. 4. Flattened pylons of high voltage power lines at Chittagong city. 5. Every centimetre of Chittagong Railway Station had to be fought and possessed firmly to catch a sleep after weary people passed out the savage winds huddling under its shelter.