

IODISED SALT

Are Consumers Getting the Right Staff?

by Julian Charles

INACCURATE salt production statistics may be encouraging the sale of smuggled non-iodised salt and indirectly fuelling Bangladesh's iodine deficiency problem.

Although the Iodine Deficiency Disease Act 1994 said anyone producing or selling non-iodised salt for consumption could be jailed, fined Tk 5000 or both, non-iodised edible salt is still sold in the marketplace.

Iodine deficiency is the cause of endemic goitre and cretinism in the country and, according to a 1993 university study, threatens all Bangladeshis.

The latest study of salt iodisation in the country, "Evaluation of Universal Salt Iodisation in Bangladesh", said most shop owners knew the benefits of iodised salt, but 84 per cent of them didn't know the law. It said rural retailers were less informed than their city counterparts.

The UNICEF-funded study was conducted by the International Council for Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD), Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation, and the Institute of Public Health and Nutrition. Its results were published in ICCIDD's April 1997 newsletter.

ICCIDD national co-ordinator Prof. Quazi Salamullah said retail price still played a role in many poorer people's decision to buy non-iodised salt. "Businessmen sell iodised salt for two or three taka more per kg — it should not be so costly," he said. "Our plan is that all the salt should be iodised, so there is no non-iodised salt this problem will not arise."

He said much of the non-iodised salt sold in shops and

markets was produced locally for use in tanneries. He also said many people in border areas bought cheaper non-iodised salt smuggled from India.

But Salt Mill Owners Association vice-president Shamsul Islam Shahjahan denied industrial grade salt was sold for consumption. He said all non-iodised edible salt in the market was smuggled and almost all locally-produced salt was iodised.

Salamullah said the cost of iodisation was not a factor in combating IDD because UNICEF has been supplying free machinery and potassium iodate to all of Bangladesh's salt mills since the government began its universal iodisation project in 1993.

Shahjahan agreed iodisation was not a problem, but said a crude salt shortfall hampered refined salt production and encouraged smuggling.

He said mill owners reported a four to five lakh tonne shortage of refined salt each year because of the supply problem, but BSCIC told the government that there was a surplus.

"BSCIC declared this year we must produce nine lakh tonnes and we — the millers, crushers, iodine mixers — said our actual production is four to five lakh tonnes," he said.

"But they tell the government our production is more than our demand so we are not required to import. They are indirectly encouraging black marketing."

A BSCIC source who wished to remain anonymous said: "From an economic point of view there may be smuggling of salt, but the same universal

iodisation programme that we have was also carried out in India."

Salamullah said the salt smuggling problem was restricted to border areas.

Shahjahan said BSCIC's method of measuring salt production was flawed. He said BSCIC measured the mud content of crude salt samples, which they found to be 20 per cent, then used the results to calculate the country's annual refined salt production.

But Shahjahan said the Corporation's figures didn't accurately reflect the factories' output. He said their claim that Bangladesh produces more than nine lakh tonnes of edible salt a year was an overstatement.

"They say this is actual salt, but we say 'no this is mud'. You cannot identify what per cent of this crude salt is clay or mud," he said. "It may be 50 per cent, it may be 40 per cent, it may be more than that."

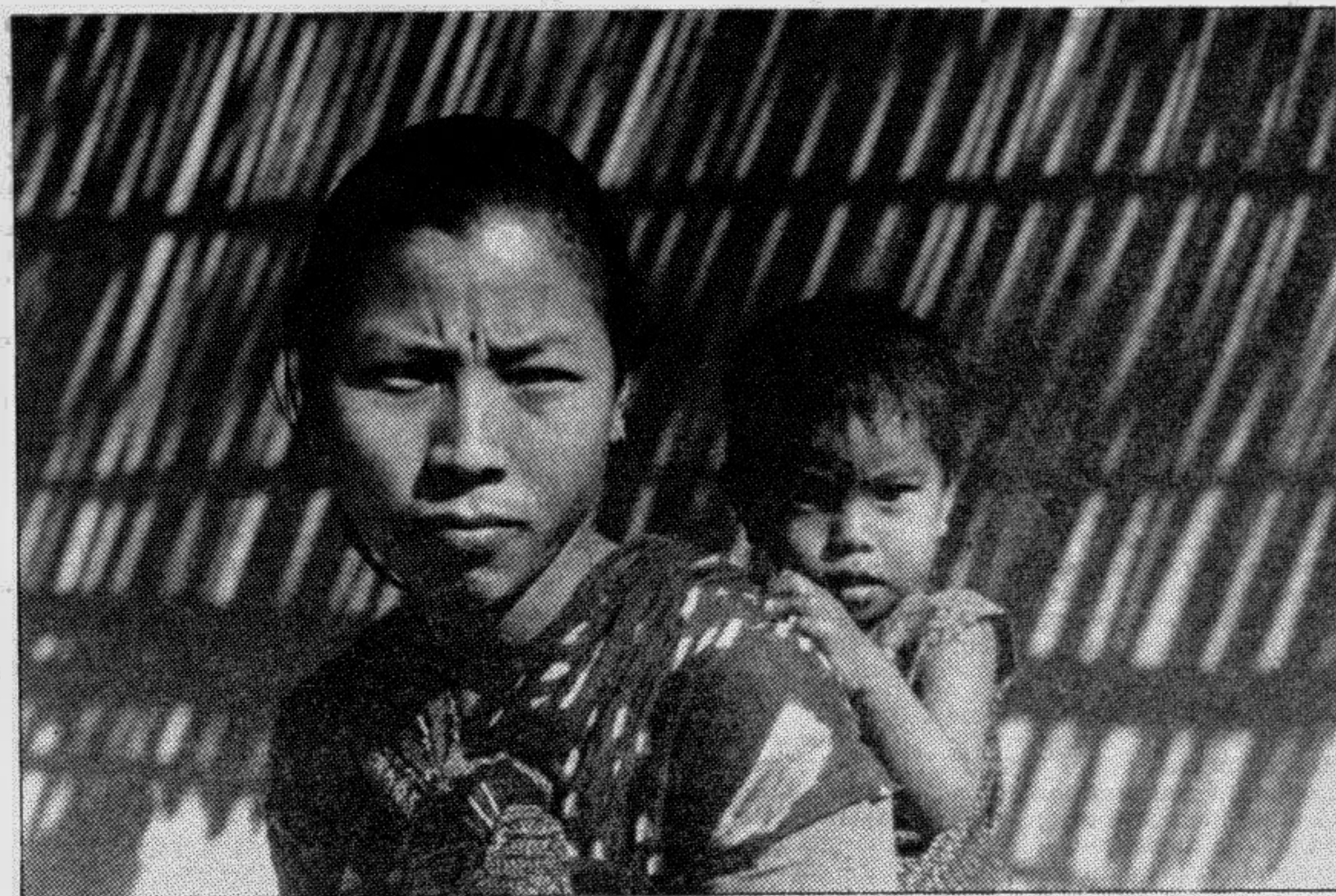
But a BSCIC source who wished to remain anonymous said: "Our national refined salt production for this year will be nine lakh tonnes. The salt mill owners have a vested interest in importing crude salt, refining it and making a profit by trading it."

Salamullah agreed will owners often pushed for the right to legally import crude salt since this would boost their industry. He said at present only the government itself was permitted to import salt.

But he also said: "At the beginning of the year BSCIC said production will be sufficient. But sometimes at the end of the year — especially if a cyclone strikes — there is a shortfall and the government has to import."

Garos are Waning Across the Hills

by Ruhul Motin



time. They could not fight in courts in absence of proper registration. Garos in Birishiri said they used to own land by inheritance and hardly thought about registration.

Now they find loyalty to tradition has been a big mistake.

Day labourer Ayub Khan in Kulaura said mahajani credits were leaving the Garos landless. Ayub, whose father migrated from Dhaka to this Garo-populated area in 1965 with refugee card, said Bangladesh outnumbered the Garos in village after village.

Sitanath Chambugonj of Dhopakola said settlers frequently intimidate tribals to force them to leave.

"Many Garos traditionally rear pigs. But miscreants often pick up quarrel with us over the issue. Now we have no peace," said Chambugonj.

Garos have traditionally been the farming community. With farmland being gradually lost, they started retreating to hills and also beyond the frontier.

Many are just leaving farming to take up alternative means of living.

Garos, desperate for survival, are taking refuge in Christian missionaries, leaving century-old tradition and religion.

A 1996 census by a voluntary organisation say Garo population is now about 120,000. More than 90 per cent adopted Christianity and they prefer to recognise themselves as Christian than Garos.

News Network Feature

THE story began on a rainy day, a poor tribal Hajong in Madhupur bought a spade, an umbrella and two-and-a-half kilogram of pulse from a Bangalee merchant on credit.

Five years later, the merchant declared the poor man a loan defaulter and attached his entire farmland, a little bigger than one acre.

"I was an eyewitness to how the poor Hajong lost his land," said Satyananda Sangma, a member of the Garo tribe at Birishiri village in the Durgapur thana of the district.

Sangma, a 55-year-old school teacher, recalled the Hajong could not pay back the due in time. Interest and compound interest continued to rise. Five years later, the amount reached a level that the poor man had no other way but to surrender his land.

The story of the Madhupur Hajong is only the tip of an iceberg. Sangma said majority of the Garos had bitter experiences of losing land to mainland settlers.

"In the 1950s, almost all the Garo families had their own land. Now, only a few own land of their own," he said.

Garos community is spread across the districts of Netrokona, Sherpur, Tangail, Mymensingh and Sunamganj. According to anthropologists, the tribe had its root in India's Assam state. They gradually migrated to the Garo hills and farther down the plains in North-eastern Bangladesh.

There are two sects in the tribe — Garos living in the hills are called Hill Garo and the other section is known as Plainland Garo.

The mostly-farmer Plainland Garos had almost a peaceful living until the 1960s. They had fertile lands, forests for wood and animals for hunting.

Elderly tribals recalled their bad days began from the mid-sixties when the then Pakistani rulers dumped truck-loads of non-tribals in the area for set-

tlement. Many of those mainlanders began lending money to the tribals. And started then the process of land grabbing of the illiterate tribals.

Traveling through the Garo inhabited villages in Durgapur, the News Network correspondent came across dozens of tribals who complained that their land had been grabbed.

Shitanath Chambugong, a Garo farmer in Dhopakola village in Kulaura, said he had inherited seven Ara (one Ara equals to one-and-a-half acre) land from his wife's family.

Only two-and-a-half Ara are left. Mahajans took the rest. "Now I cannot run my family. I have to work in other's field," the 60-year-old farmer said.

A Baptist Mission official in Birishiri Village in Birishiri said he had got proofs that lands of Garos were being taken over unduly. There had been lot of difficulties over land in the area, he said.

Fake registration is a common trick of the land grabbers.

One Garo of Kulaura union in Durgapur complained his land been put in auction by the

authorities despite he paid taxes regularly. "I found out my payments were not registered by Tahsil office," he said. Local tahsil office, however, dismissed such allegation.

Garos lost lands also due to political reasons. Many of them fled home to India during the 1964 riot. Some fled during the Liberation War in 1971.

Many returned only to find that their land and homesteads were occupied by the people from the plains. Chunks of Garo-owned lands were declared enemy property over

'City Farms' Promise to Humanize 21st Century Skyscrapers

by Edna D Pabie

AS crammed megacities multiply, urban agriculture is emerging with a promise of ecological sustainability for urbanites of the future — and with it the hope of turning sterile, dehumanizing cityscapes green.

Already, urban agriculture provides income for an estimated 100 million people. It is also a source of food for five billion, many according to a study entitled, *Urban Agriculture: Food, Jobs and Sustainable Cities*.

The United Nations Development Programme, in cooperation with Urban Agriculture Network (TUAN), prepared the study.

Urban farms are sprouting everywhere — from the slums of Nairobi to the residential neighbourhoods of Santiago, Chile to carefully designated sections of Shanghai.

The forms vary: rooftop and roadside hydroponic vegetables, livestock grazing in parks and feedlots, chickens in backyard sheds, ducks in ponds, fish in lagoon, river cages and sewage ponds.

Even seaweed is grown in lagoons, mushrooms in basements and caves.

Bamboo is also grown for

construction, eucalyptus for fuel, orchards, medicinal/ culinary herbs, and milk, meat and eggs.

In and around 18 of China's largest cities, farmers meet 85 per cent of the urban demand for vegetables, and more than half the demand for meat and poultry. In over-populated Java (Indonesia) urban home gardens supply an estimated 18 per cent of the calories and 14 per cent of the protein consumed in the island's cities.

By the year 2000, more than two billion people throughout the world will live cheek-by-jowl in cities, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) predicts. But half of those huddled in Third World cities are poor: they spend 50 per cent to 90 per cent of their incomes on food. And in one of those modern ironies, food costs at least 60 per cent more for city-dwellers than those in rural areas, due to transport/marketing costs.

But where urban farms flourish, costs of transport, storage and wholesale handling are sharply reduced. And produce like vegetables, fruit and livestock — all high in micronutrients — are fresher when marketed.

Urban agriculture not only provides survival food to the poorest and improved nutrition to a broad range of low-income families. It also generates jobs for waste-recyclers, street food vendors and market-stall operators. Significantly, in Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia, it also provides entry points into entrepreneurship for women.

There are environmental pluses, too. Urban agriculture tends to be more organic than rural, the study asserts. "The sheer variety and small scale of most urban agriculture, where multi-cropping and animal husbandry both enrich the soil, reduce the need for environmentally-harmful chemicals and equipment."

And there is increasing recognition of the potential of urban agriculture offers to desmog and green the cities of the 21st century.

"Taking care of the soil helps restore biodiversity to the city. When the soil is fed, you get trees and bushes that clean the air," the study adds.

Managed forestry in cities like Shanghai and Bangalore, provides wood and other tree products. These prevent erosion and landslides that often afflict

squatter colonies of Third World cities.

Urban waste water and solid waste are used in urban agriculture. This gives hard-pressed cities a sustainable alternative to dumping or incinerating urban waste, causing pollution.

Biological treatment of sewage using duckweed and water hyacinth to provide nutrient-rich food for buffaloes and fish is practised in Bangladesh, China and India. In China, the Shanghai Bureau of Environmental Sanitation collects and treats 90 per cent of the city's human waste daily, then sells it to farmers in the metropolitan area.

However, those who practise urban farming are hobbled by constraints: lack of proper training on safe, through waste-processing; lack of secure land tenure; access to credit and training on sustainable agricultural practices.

"In the developing world, costs of greening and cleaning programmes can be borne by urban food production. Urban agriculture provides an economic activity that brings in income. For low-income countries, urban agriculture is the way to go," the study concludes.

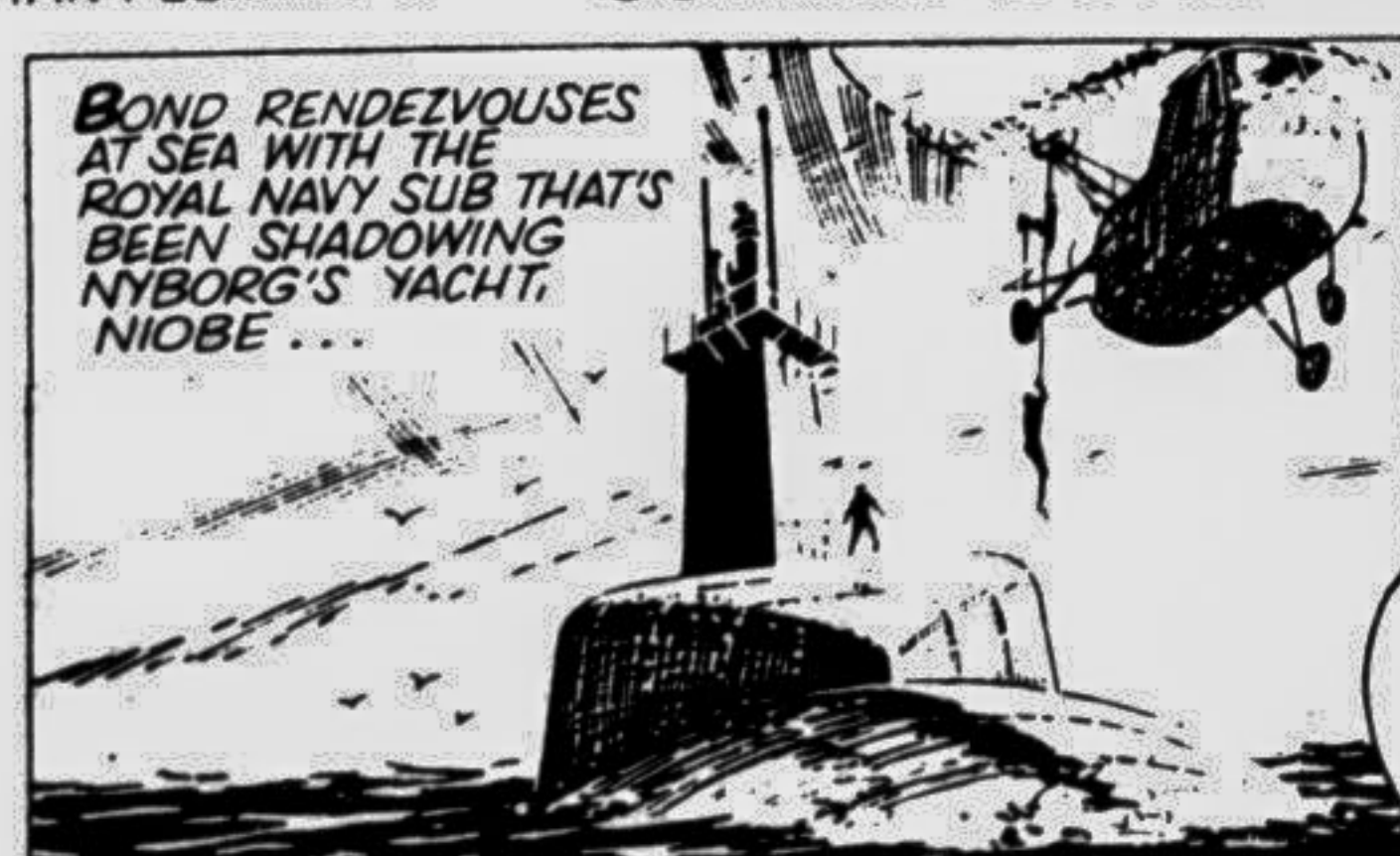
— DEPTInews

Tom and Jerry



IAN FLEMING'S

James Bond



DRAWN BY JOHN McLUSKY



Metropolitan

Fertility rate down to 3.27 children per woman, NIPORT survey says

Bangladesh experienced an exceptionally rapid decline in fertility rate during the 80s and early 90s following increased use of contraception mainly by women, reports UNB.

The 1996-97 Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) preliminary results indicate that fertility rate has come down to 3.27 children per woman, a slight decline from the 1991-93 figure of 3.4. In 1971-75 it was 6.3.

It said the overall use of short-term methods like oral pills, condoms, and injectables has increased, while use of longer term methods such as sterilisation has declined. Among the contraception users, more than 90 per cent are women, it added.

BDHS, a nationally representative survey among 9,127 married women aged 10-49 and 3,346 married men aged 15-59 was conducted in the country between November '96 and March '97.

The result of the survey, carried out by National Institute for Population Research and Training (NIPORT) with financial assistance from USAID, was disclosed at a press conference at the Health Ministry yesterday.

It was addressed by Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf, State Minister for Health Dr M Amanullah, Health Secretary Mohammad Ali, DG of NIPORT Rafiquzzaman and USAID Country Representative Richard Brown.

The survey revealed that 49 per cent of married women currently use a method of contraception, which was only 4 per cent in '71 and 8 per cent in '75.

Most of this increase had been in the use of modern contraceptive methods. While use of traditional methods has been slowly declining since the early

'90s.

The oral pill is the most popular method of contraception among women. At present 21 per cent of married women are using oral pill.

An increasing proportion of young women are using contraception. In fact, 33 per cent married women aged 15-19 are now using a family planning method, especially the pill, as opposed to 25 per cent in 1993-94.

Between 1993-94 and 1996-97, contraceptive use increased more rapidly in urban areas, from 54 to 62 per cent, in comparison with the rural areas where the percentage increased from 43 to 48.

The survey said child survival has improved greatly over the last 15 years. Under-five mortality rate was 173 per 1,000 births in 1982-86 came down to 116 in the 1992-96 period.

Possible factors that contributed to a lower child mortality included decline in the prevalence of diarrhoea and respiratory diseases and increase in vitamin A supplementation.

The infant mortality (under one year rate) for the five years before the survey was 82 as opposed to 87 in the 1993-94 BDHS. Similarly, child mortality (aged 1-4) rate declined from 50 to 37 in the five years preceding the surveys.

Overall, only 26 per cent of births were to women who consulted a doctor or a trained nurse/midwife at least once during pregnancy, a proportion that remained unchanged since 1993-94.

Medical assistance during delivery has slightly declined since 1993-94 from 10 per cent down to 8 per cent. A majority of women still rely on dais for assistance.

Fifty four per cent of children aged 12-23 months received all vaccinations recommended by the EPI, a decline from 1993-94 result (59 per cent).

The declining trend is due entirely to the lower proportion of children having received the third dose of polio. Among those who received the first dose of polio (87 per cent), almost 3 children in 10 did not get the third dose (62 per cent).

Data show diarrhoea has declined from 13 to 9 per cent, while ORS use has remained unchanged. The proportion of children under three who had a cough or difficulty in breathing dropped sharply from 24 to 15 per cent between the two surveys.

Over half (55 per cent) of children under five are considered to be short for their age or "stunted," a condition that reflects the cumulative effect of chronic malnutrition.

Data also show that 18 per cent of children are underweight for their height, or "wasted," a condition reflecting acute or recent nutritional deficit.

The BDHS result also said awareness about AIDS increased dramatically with education. Thirty three per cent of men and 19 per cent of women had heard of AIDS.

The detailed report of the survey is expected to be published by September next.

Data collection for the survey was made by Bangladesh research firm Mitra and Associates. Macro International Inc of Calverton, Maryland provided technical assistance to the project as part of its international demographic and health surveys programme.



— Star photo

BIWTC launches new steamer service on Friday

The BIWTC will launch a steamer service in Daulatkhanchar Alexander-Burighat route on Friday to facilitate safe journey for the people of the coastal and char areas, reports UNB.

The steamer will run in two routes — Daulatkhanchar-Burighat route on Saturday, Monday and Wednesday and Daulatkhanchar-Alexander route on Friday, Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday.

The steamer of the Daulatkhanchar-Alexander route will leave Daulatkhanchar at 8:30 am and reach Char Alexander at 11 am, and it will return back to Daulatkhanchar at 3:30 pm.

On the other hand, the steamer of the Daulatkhanchar-Burighat route will leave Daulatkhanchar at 8:30 am and reach Burighat at 1 pm, and it will come back to Daulatkhanchar at 6:30 pm.

BCI welcomes launching of D-8

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh Chamber of Industries president Sharif M Afzal Hossain has welcomed launching of a new forum Development-8 to foster global economic co-operation among its members.

In a statement he said that this would encourage joint ventures flow of capital, technology transfer and promotion of investment among D-8 countries.

He said D-8 could play a vital role in the development of the economies of the member countries.

Congratulating the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for signing the Istanbul declaration, BCI president hoped that Bangladesh will take advantage of the facilities which was offered by the member countries.

Zillur urges municipal authorities to be self-reliant

Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Zillur Rahman yesterday urged the municipal authorities to be self-reliant, and dynamic through increasing their earnings by realising taxes, reports BSS.

"Municipal authorities have a vital role to play in modern civic life," he said and added that despite enormous potentiality, the *pourasabhas* were unable to provide expected civic facilities.

Zillur Rahman was speaking as the chief guest at a two-day seminar on 'Municipal Finance Management Sector Study' jointly organised by the Local Government Division (LGD) and the World Bank at the auditorium of Local Government and Engineering Department (LGED).

Chaired by local government division secretary Hasnat Abdul Hye, the function was addressed, among others, by Dhaka City mayor Mohammad Hanif, State Minister for LGED and Cooperatives Syed Abul Hossain, acting Resident Mission Chief of World Bank Waise Saadat, LGED chief engineer Gurnul Islam Siddique and Public Health Engineering (PHE) chief engineer Aminuddin Ahmed.

He said improper financial management and inefficiency of tax administration were the major causes of insolvency of the municipalities of the country. Zillur Rahman said that reorganisation of the tax administration as well as motivating people to pay taxes could reduce the dependence of municipalities on government fund.

HERE and THERE

BAAS

By Staff Correspondent
Shuichi Sakakibara, First Secretary of the Japanese Embassy, yesterday said that the development of human resources is essential for Bangladesh to take off onto a higher level of economic growth.

He was speaking as chief guest at a certificate-awarding ceremony of Bangladesh AOTS Alumni Society (BAAS) Computer School in the city.

Sakakibara said, "Japan has traditionally attached importance to primary education in Bangladesh since it is vitally important for poverty alleviation giving benefits to a large section of people."

He also stressed professional skills, and training to boost the national economy. He emphasised the need for computer education in various fields, particularly in business transactions and communications technology.

Dr AKM Moazzem Hossain, GM of AOTS Dhaka and ARS M Anwarul Haq, President of BAAS, also spoke on the occasion.

Philosophy Dept of Dhaka University

Speakers at a discussion have paid tributes to Sayed Abdul Hai, a noted professor of Philosophy of the University of Dhaka, on the occasion of his third death anniversary, reports BSS.

Held on Monday at the Kala Bhaban, the meeting was organised by the Philosophy Department of the University of Dhaka. The discussion was presided over by Dr Kazi Nurul Islam, chairman, Department of Philosophy.

Prof Aminul Islam, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Dhaka University, Prof Mansur Musa of the Institute of Modern Languages, Prof ANM Wahidur

Rahman of Chittagong University, Prof Anisuzzaman, Dr Galib Hasan Khan, Prof Ayesha Sultana, Prof Latifa Akhand, Prof Syed Ahmed Khan of Dhaka University, Prof AFM Obaidur Rahman of Jahangirnagar University, Prof Miah Mobashwer Ali of the BUET, Prof a Bari of People's University and Begzadi Mahmud Nasim, Vice-Chancellor, Women's Federation University discussed various aspects of the life and works of the late educationist Sayed Abdul Hai.

Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha

A ten-day workshop on "Theatre Direction and Alternative Application" began in the city, reports UNB.

Eminent drama-artist Ferdowsy Majumder inaugurated the workshop. Organised by Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha (BNPS) at its central office on Monday, BNPS executive director Rokeya Kabir presided over the function.

Ferdowsy Majumder, Pijus Banerjee, Jamil Ahmed, Sara Zaker, Khaled Khan, Sara Banu, Golam Sarwar, Kamaluddin Sarkar and Sazzad Hossain will help BNPS coordinator Sohrab Uddin in conducting the workshop.

Workshop on primary edn

A workshop on "Role of Local People in Boosting Enrolment in School and Preventing Drop-outs" was held at the office of Primary Education Directorate yesterday, reports UNB.

Education Minister ASHK Sadek was the chief guest at the inaugural programme of the workshop, arranged on the occasion of National Primary Education Week.