

## EARTH SUMMIT+5

### Five Years after Rio: Where do We Stand?

#### The Big Picture

**Positive:** Growth in world population is slowing, food production is rising, the majority of people are living longer and healthier lives, and environmental quality in some regions is improving.

**Negative:** The growing scarcity of fresh water, loss of productive agricultural land and downward spiral of poverty for many threaten to undermine these gains and cause collapse of local economies.

**Poverty:** Gaps between rich and poor continue to grow, both within and between countries, attributed by some to the effects of globalization. The poorest countries have become even more marginalized. Over 1.1 billion people — 20 per cent of the world's population — live in absolute poverty, on the equivalent of less than one dollar a day.

**Action Taken:** At the 1995 Social Summit in Copenhagen, world leaders pledged to eradicate poverty by a target date to be set by each country and to increase spending on basic social services.

**Consumption/Production:** Twenty per cent of the world's people continue to consume eighty per cent of its resources. Some large developing countries are moving rapidly toward higher-consumption lifestyles.

**Action Taken:** In industrialized countries, governments and industry are making steady progress on recycling, using more efficient technologies and reducing waste; there is growing consumer awareness.

**Population:** Fertility rates are declining more rapidly than expected in most regions. Latest projections show many developing countries will stabilize population within the next generation or two. Some countries still face high population growth rates that strain natural resources.

**Action Taken:** The 1994 Cairo Conference adopted a strong action plan with concrete targets, including that family planning be available to all by 2015. Many governments have strengthened national policies, although international funding committed in Cairo has not materialized.

**Forests:** In spite of a recent downward trend, forest loss continues at an unacceptable rate. A total of 13.7 million hectares of forest — roughly the size of Nepal — are cut or burned each year.

**Action Taken:** Based on the Forest Principles adopted in Rio, an Intergovernmental Panel on Forests agreed to over 100 action proposals for sustainable forest management when it concluded two years of talks in March 1997.

**Fresh Water:** One third of the

world's population lives in countries facing moderate to severe water stress; by 2025 that figure may reach two thirds unless action is taken. One fifth of humanity lacks access to safe water and half lack adequate sanitation.

**Action Taken:** Progress in implementing the Rio recommendations has been limited.

**Oceans:** Marine pollution — about 80 per cent of which is caused by land-based activities — threatens the health and livelihoods of the two thirds of humanity living in coastal areas. Some 60 per cent of global fish stocks are overfished or fully fished, requiring urgent action to avoid depletion.

**Action Taken:** An international agreement to combat land-based sources of marine pollution was adopted in 1995, and negotiations have begun for a treaty to control persistent organic pollutants such as PCBs, polychlorinated biphenyls and dioxin. The UN legal agreement on fish stocks was adopted in 1994 but has not yet entered into force. Initiatives on coastal zone management and coral reef protection have spurred greater awareness and some action.

**Climate:** Global emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases continue to rise. A 1995 report by a UN panel of scientists stated that the balance of evidence suggests a "discernible human influence on the global climate".

**Action Taken:** The UN Convention on Climate Change, signed in Rio, has been ratified by 196 countries, but few developed countries will meet the aim of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000. The parties to the Convention have begun negotiations to strengthen the commitments, and are scheduled to adopt legally binding targets for developed countries in Kyoto, Japan, this December.

**Energy:** Fossil fuel use in industrialized countries is slowly stabilizing, but many polluting emissions are on the increase. Rapid growth in fossil fuel use in many developing countries is leading to severe pollution. Global energy consumption is projected to more than double by 2050. Over 2 billion people, mostly in rural areas in developing countries, do not have access to commercial energy services.

**Action Taken:** No major international initiatives were taken at Rio. Some progress has been made in renewable energy technologies, energy conservation and efficiency, but few countries are pursuing alternative energy sources.

**Land:** World food production continues to rise, but over 800 million people still suffer from hunger and malnutrition. Use

of pesticides and poor farming methods have taken a heavy toll: 300 million hectares of farmland worldwide are now severely degraded and farming abandoned. Another 1.2 billion hectares show moderate fertility loss. Desertification (degradation of drylands) affects one quarter of the Earth's land area—3.6 billion hectares.

**Action Taken:** The Convention to Combat Desertification which was negotiated after the Earth Summit and entered into force in December 1996 — has spurred new approaches and aid partnerships. The 1995 World Food Summit called for at least halving the number of hungry people by 2015.

**Toxics:** Toxic chemicals and radioactive wastes continue to pose significant threats to human health and ecosystems. An estimated 3 million tons of toxic and hazardous waste crosses national borders each year.

**Action Taken:** The Basel Convention was strengthened in 1995 to ban the export of hazardous wastes from developed to developing countries, but this ban has not yet become legally binding. Timetables have been set for negotiations on legal agreements obligating those countries shipping toxic wastes to obtain "prior informed consent" and regulating persistent organic pollutants. Two new international bodies on chemical safety have been established, and a growing number of domestic regulations have been complemented by voluntary industry initiatives.

**Biodiversity:** The current rate of species extinction and habitat loss is unprecedented. At a moderate estimate, 50,000 plant and animal species are likely to be lost each year over the next decades.

**Action Taken:** The Convention on Biological Diversity, ratified by 161 countries since Rio, obligates governments to protect plant and animal species through habitat preservation and other means, but national action is insufficient to counter devastation from unregulated development and pollution. Treaty parties will focus on national implementation for the first time at their 1998 meeting.

**Financing:** Despite developed country pledges at the Earth Summit to increase aid for sustainable development, official development assistance declined from an average 0.34 per cent of donor country gross national product (GNP) in 1992 to 0.27 per cent in 1995. The UN target affirmed at Rio is 0.7 per cent of GNP.

**Action Taken:** The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has channeled \$2 billion into projects since 1994. The World

Bank and Paris Club have made limited progress on debt relief. Foreign investment by the private sector has risen sharply in some developing countries, but does not always promote sustainable development.

**Technology Transfer:** Developing countries urgently need greater access to environment-friendly technologies in order to develop sustainably. Most green technologies are held by the private sector and access is market-driven.

**Action Taken:** Some progress has been made through the UN on improving information about new technologies and encouraging financing partnerships in developing countries, but many countries continue to be marginalized from private sector investment and the technologies it can bring.

**International Institutions:** Better coordination and collaboration is needed among the ever-growing number of policy-setting bodies in the area of sustainable development. The on-going financial crisis affecting many UN agencies and programmes has left many hard-pressed to carry out both their original mandates and those stemming from Rio.

**Action Taken:** The Earth Summit catalysed many new institutional arrangements. The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), set up after Rio, has become a central forum to review and urge implementation of Agenda 21 and other agreements. The UN Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development now coordinates how agencies and programmes divide up responsibility on areas of expertise.

**Participation:** The Earth Summit identified seven "major groups" whose active involvement was needed to achieve sustainable development: women; children and youth; indigenous people; non-governmental organizations; local officials such as mayors; workers and trade unions; business and industry; scientists; and farmers.

**Action Taken:** Some 150 countries have established national councils on sustainable development or similar bodies, many of which bring together government officials, business executives, environmental activists and other major group leaders to recommend national policies. Over 1,800 cities and towns have drawn up a local Agenda 21 based on the Rio document. All the major groups have been actively networking and promoting public awareness of and policies for sustainable development. Through a series of dialogue sessions at the CSD, they have provided input to the Earth Summit+5 talks. UNIC

### Dhakaites Suffocate for Lack of Open Space

by M Sultana

**N**AZNEEN Hasan is worried about the poor physical and mental growth of her six-year-old son. The house the family lives in does not have a courtyard. Nor is any open space close to the house for the child to play in the afternoon.

Nazneen is hesitant to take the child to a park for deteriorating atmosphere. "I feel so helpless when I see my son playing in our narrow balcony. I myself feel suffocated when I look at him. Poor boy," said the college teacher.

Ferdousi's problem is not exactly like that of Nazneen but of a similar nature. Doctors have advised her to have regular walk in an open space to keep diabetes under check. But Ferdousi is scared of going to parks. "Walking alone in a Dhaka park is not safe. Where can I get someone to give me company everyday. Better walking from one room to another at home," the 50-year-old housewife said.

Dhaka, with its eight million population which grows everyday, is expanding fast. But the expansion remains un-

planned. The necessity of open spaces for a fresh breathing during leisure does hardly come to the mind of the city planners.

Open space for public is dwindling sharply in capital Dhaka also with the aggression of the so-called real estate developers. Developers are now even eyeing the marshlands and lakes in and around the Dhaka city.

Dhaka's spiralling land prices, said to be one of the world's highest and comparable with big European and American cities, leave planners to think twice in considering open spaces for play ground and park.

The negligence of the city fathers saw even two big parks reducing over the years. The area of Ramna Park and Suhrawardy Uddyan had been reduced by 26 acres since establishment due to the acquisition by Hotel Sheraton, Tennis Federation, Dhaka Club, Police Control Room and others. Recently, Kakrail Mosque is also demanding some area of Ramna Park.

Whatever left with Suhrawardy Uddyan and Ramna Park still attract people. But their deteriorating atmosphere has been a big concern to the citizens.

Motiar Rahman, a retired government official, is a regular visitor to the Ramna Park. He suited himself to the environment of the park. But few could. Those leafy gardens have almost gone to the grip of muggers and vendors at daytime and of prostitutes and pimps after dark.

The beautiful Chandrima Garden at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar has specially become a notorious place.

The necessity of a serene park was greatly felt by Niaz and Lipi when they decided to get married. They wanted to exchange possible post-marriage developments. Restaurants are costly and often crowded. "So we tried to sit in Ramna Park but it proved impossible. At least five vendors disturb you in every minute. Also there are hundreds of curious eyes of floating people swallowing

you," recalled Lipi. And there are other nuisances like fear of blackmailing attempt by 'law enforcers' and caretakers.

Not only are the young lovers and couples hungry for secured parks. Children, retired people and joggers also feel greatly their need. But security concern are keeping them at bay.

"I feel it's necessary for a walk in the morning or afternoon not only for physical fitness but also for mental peace. But I don't want to face any untoward situation," said Nazneen.

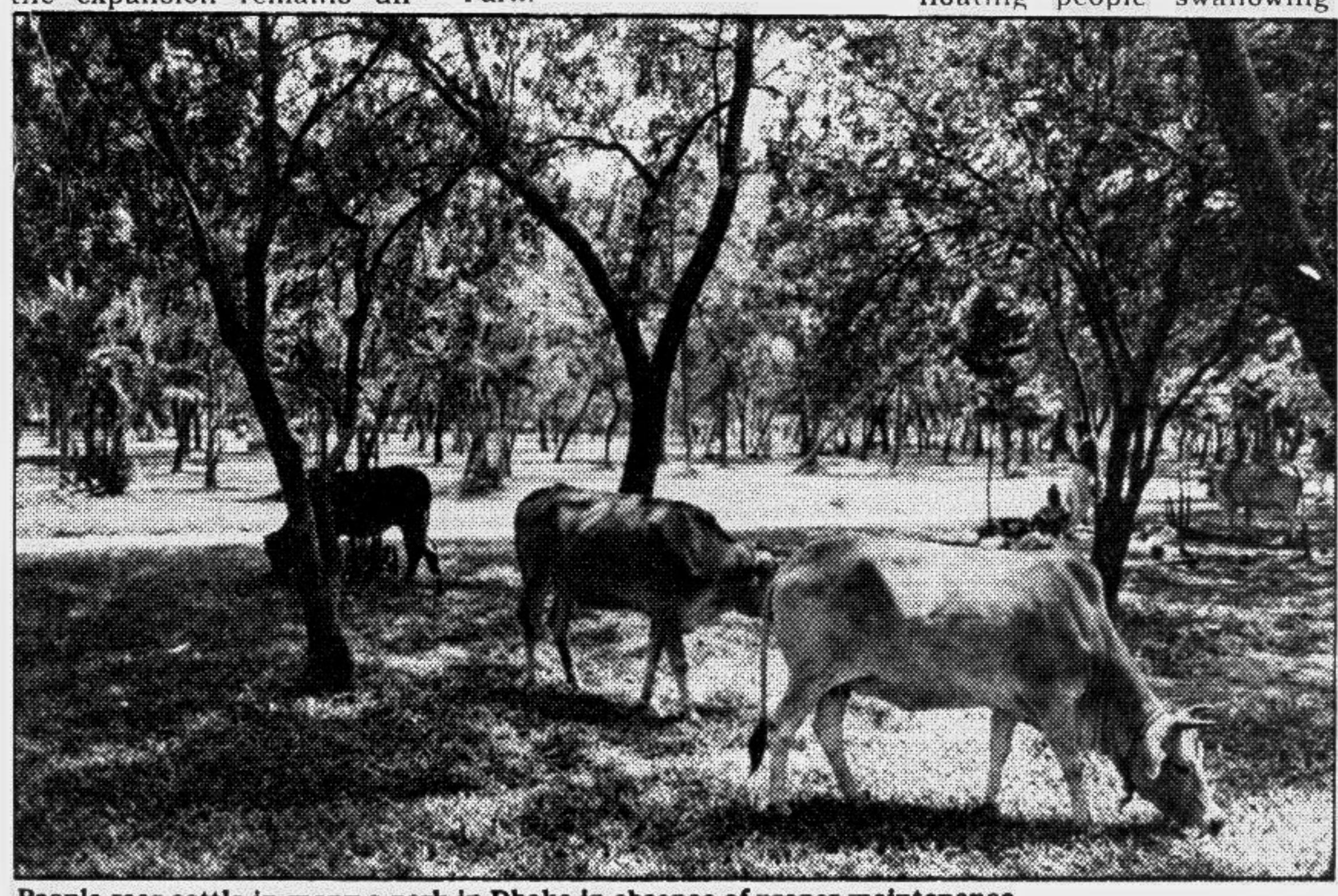
Spaces of many a small-size park, meant for children of the locality, have been so wrongly selected that parents do not find it safe to send children there. As a result, many such parks are being used for cattle rearing and automobile workshop.

In Dhaka city, parks are maintained by Dhaka City Corporation and by the Arboriculture Division of the Public Works Department (PWD). Both the agencies have been failing to keep the parks safe. A retired Chief Arboriculturist of PWD, Abu Muzaffar Hossain, while confessing that parks are hardly worthy for visiting, said, however, the green world could not be different from the country's overall law and order situation.

The park authorities argue they cannot maintain the parks better due to budgetary constraints. The lion's share of PWD budget, that is about Taka 1.2 crore out of the total Taka 1.5 crore, goes for salary purpose; the rest for maintenance of all the parks and lawns of all government buildings and residences of government officials.

On the other hand, the DCC spends a total of one crore taka only for the maintenance and development of 50 parks under it, except three children's parks now under lease. But beautification works are hardly consulted with experts.

According to Muzaffar Hossain, modern park can provide different types of recreations and attraction like aquarium, museum, special flowers corners, green house, sanctuary and others. The management rarely cares about beauty.



People rear cattle in many a park in Dhaka in absence of proper maintenance. — Photo: Sayed Zakir Hossain/News Network

### Community Mobilisation for Cyclone Relief Operation

by Peter Eppler

**I**T was a rare sight to see Jaheda Begum, covered with a black burka (veil), sitting proudly beside the Jeep driver and taking off to her community with relief materials after the recent cyclone of May 19, 1997. How did it happen that in this rather conservative area of Teknaf, which is located in the south-eastern-most corner of Bangladesh, a woman took the lead to help her distressed community? Jaheda Begum is the chairperson of the village development committee of Hazarpara, which has been founded in 1995, after Society for Health Extension and Development (SHED), a local NGO, has mobilised women and men in the area to organise themselves in village development committees (VDCs) to improve their health and living conditions. These organisations, are the backbone of the Participatory Process for Human and Health Development project.

On May 19, 1997 the cyclone hit Teknaf at 10 am and from there moved along the coast of the Bay of Bengal reaching Chittagong in the evening with wind speeds of more than 200 km per hour. Television and radio did broadcast news which suggested immense destruction in the affected areas. As soon as these reports got reconfirmed, Development Association for Self-reliance, Communication and Health (DASCOH) released fund for an emergency relief operation in Teknaf when DASCOH has given a mandate to SHED to implement the Participatory Process for Human and Health Development Project in seven villages situated in the high risk area.

So far it can be concluded that the community mobilisation and formation of VDCs or self-help organisations proved to be extremely useful for the relief operation as well. The VDCs were entrusted with far reaching responsibilities, which included identification of criteria

for relief distribution, planning of relief operation at village level and participation in packing and distribution of relief materials.

After an orientation meeting in the afternoon of May 21, the members of the staff of DASCOH and SHED visited the intervention area of the Participatory Human and Health Development Project to assess the situation and to inform the VDC chairpersons to meet at SHED office the following morning to find out a suitable scenario for the relief operation. After a brief summary of the situation the representatives were asked to identify the most important criteria for relief distribution. They came up with following suggestions:

- a) The beneficiaries have to belong to the poorest of the poor.
- b) Those should be considered whose house has been totally or partly destroyed.
- c) Those should be considered whose crop has been partly destroyed.
- d) Single women-headed households should be given preference.

After everybody agreed on the above mentioned criteria, the representatives of VDCs were asked to prepare a list of people who fall within this category. The VDC representatives accompanied by the field staff of SHED went to their villages to make house to house visits to choose the beneficiaries and orient them on the relief distribution.

The lists were presented in the morning of May 23. In a meeting the distribution plan was fixed with the representatives. They took the responsibility for organising the venue for distribution, calling the beneficiaries, and volunteering in distributing the materials. All representatives committed themselves to guarantee a

smooth and disciplined distribution.

The distribution took place in nine different places with full participation of the VDCs and community members. They were coming to SHED to accompany the Jeeps to their village. The community members were setting up the venue in fixed buildings or in the open field, unloading and packing the materials into small quantities or distribution units. They were engaged in the registration of the beneficiaries and distribution of materials. Altogether over 200 volunteers from the local communities took part in the operation without getting any incentives. The staff of DASCOH and SHED rather played the role of observers than active participants.

In total 1328 households with 8446 individuals from 7 villages could benefit from the distribution of relief materials, which took place from May 23-25. The materials consisted of 10 kg chira (flat rice), 3 kg muri (puffed rice), 3kg molasses, 6 yards polythene sheet, and 12 yards nylon rope per household.

The smooth and very effective handling of the distribution has brought up results that go beyond the foremost objective of the operation which is providing relief to the distressed communities. In assessing the approach of mobilising VDCs and volunteers of the communities in the planning, organisation and distribution of relief materials we can learn following lessons:

- a) The participation of VDCs in planning and organizing created good transparency and publicity among the population.
- b) The criteria for distribution were set by VDC chairpersons and contributed to the smooth distribution process without conflicts.

c) By consulting and including VDC chairpersons and community members the approach strengthened local decision making and gave a boost to volunteerism in the area.

d) As women are well represented in local groups and committees women could play an important role which contributed to their empowerment and prestige in the community.

e) Community participation made the relief operation very effective regarding time and costs. In a short time relief materials reached many beneficiaries with minimum manpower involvement from the donor agency or their partner organisation.

Reviewing DASCOH's first relief operation it proved to be quite successful. The whole team was highly motivated and during the first day they worked even until midnight and consequently made the long 12-hour journey from Dhaka to Teknaf. The cooperation with the staff of SHED went very well and contributed to a smooth implementation of the relief programme. SHED's mobilisation of local communities and the promotion of VDCs in the intervention area of the Participatory Human and Health Development project has proved to be very effective and helped considerably to carry out the relief operation.

The VDCs and community members were entrusted with far-reaching responsibilities, which included identification of criteria for relief distribution, planning of relief operation at village level and participation in packing and distribution of relief materials. The community members were no more degraded to mere recipients of relief, as it happens in the traditional approach, but became active partners in the relief operation.

The writer is Country Representative, DASCOH, Dhaka

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### Written test for appointment of pry teachers June 27

The written test for appointment of assistant teachers to primary schools of Dhaka district will be held on June 27 at 10 am, reports UNB.

The test will be held in the following two centres as per the roll numbers of the candidates. Male candidates of Dhamrai (01-773), Savar thana (1027-1747) and Nabaganj female candidates (2724-3261) at Eden University College.

### UP chairmen to be sent abroad for training

LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry has introduced a special programme to send union parishad chairmen abroad for management training on agriculture and rural based economic and cooperative activities, an LGRD Ministry press release said, reports BSS.

### Jahanara Imam's death anniversary Thursday

The third death anniversary of Jahanara Imam, a crusader against the anti-liberation forces, will be observed on Thursday, reports UNB.

### Tk 10 lakh allocated for 2 bridges on Nabaganga, JS told

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain yesterday said the government will consider the construction of Jhenidah town bypass road that will link the town with Jessore and Magura roads, reports BSS.

### Tripura University VC calls on DU VC

Prof Y D Pandey, Vice-Chancellor of Tripura University, India, made a courtesy call on Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof A K Azad Chowdhury at his office yesterday, reports UNB.

### Power supply system in Sangsad Bhaban reviewed

A meeting chaired by Speaker Humayun Rasheed Chowdhury yesterday reviewed the power supply system in the Sangsad Bhaban, reports UNB.

### FBCCI concerned at attack on Monno Ceramic Industries

President of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) Yussuf Abdullah Harun yesterday expressed deep concern over the attack on the factory of Monno Ceramic Industries Ltd, reports UNB.

### Sajeda meets several world leaders in NY

Environment and Forest Minister Sajeda Chowdhury met with several world leaders during the 19th special session of United Nations General Assembly that began on Monday in New York, reports UNB.

### TEA CEREMONY organized at UNIVERSITY

A traditional Japanese tea ceremony was organised yesterday at North South University, with the assistance of the Embassy of Japan. Shaista Ahmad, founder member of the ceremony, conducted by Naomi Teruya, who is the only tea ceremony master in Bangladesh. Mayu Hagiwara, Cultural Attache, Embassy of Japan, was present as special guest. The tea ceremony, known as *chanoyu* in Japanese, is an aesthetic pastime unique to Japan that features the serving and drinking of *macha*, a powdered green tea. — NSU photo

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