

Planting Trees, Synergetically

"YES, that poster is my ideal," Engbert Gründemann smiles when I ask him about the forest hills surrounding a lake in Switzerland. He is secretary of Synergy Foundation, a British company investing in the forestry sector. Along with Synergy Conservation this firm combines reforestation with sustainable agriculture. For this purpose Synergy draws up long-term contracts with owners of unproductive hill lands, landless families and local government authorities. The intended results? Precious timber and fruit trees interwoven with cash crops, yielding profits to the owners of the land and employment to the poor, and at the same time providing environmental protection.

In Gründemann's view this model is a good way of running a social reforestation programme. To some extent, it was born out of his disillusion with existing development agencies. He started his life as a development expert in 1976, working in Kushtia for the United Towns Organisation of Bangladesh. He considered it necessary to really get to know a country to have an impact on it. For this reason he continued his career with the Church of Bangladesh after completing his first project. His three employers in Bangladesh, the Swedish International Development Agency, provided a new perspective on development co-operation. "During the day staff discussed corruption: the stealing of a cement bag. In the evenings cocktail parties were held in lavish homes. That was quite a contrast." He ran with his head against the wall and returned to Holland after serving his term.

New Ideas
In 1989 he landed up in Sri Lanka in a youth development project, and three years later he was transferred to the UNDP office in Dhaka. By this time he started thinking about new ways of managing land resources. "The Dutch idea of taking land away from the landlords and distributing it among the landless has never worked. Together with colleagues and friends I started a discussion group to think about alternatives. Landless farmers should establish professional firms run

along professional lines." In 1994 the first trees were planted, in Meherpur. Buying the land proved very expensive, however. Then the idea of acquiring the land for free by allowing the landowner a share of the profit was born. Synergy placed advertisements in the newspapers, to which many landlords responded enthusiastically. Gründemann says, "There are many families who own large hill estates. They have no idea what to do with them. I know of one landlord who had never ever seen his estate!"

Synergy puts those lands into use. It recruits most of the future planters from those people who are leading a marginal life in the hills. They are formed into a firm of environmental stewards, providing the labour and care required to make the land productive. With this firm and the landlord Synergy enters into an Environmental Stewardship Contract for a period of six years. The local government is witness to this contract. Synergy subsequently pays the stewards to make the site suitable for tree plantation by clearing shrubs and provides

by Nico den Tuinder the seedlings. In between the rows of trees (amongst which mahogany, gamar, ipel ipel, jackfruit and many other species) the tillers can plant high-value cash crops such as vanilla, orchids, passion fruits, black pepper and lemon grass. As it will take some time before these yield an income, Synergy provides the tillers with a fixed monthly fee for each surviving tree for a total number of three years, in addition to a loan to finance these intercropping activities.

At first the trees are densely planted, up to 1,000 trees per acre. In the third to fifth year the trees will need more space, and trees will be removed. This thinning-out process will continue until the optimum plantation density has been reached. After some 20 to 25 years the average number of trees per acre will be about 600. According to Synergy's calculations, the average value of a tree will be not less than Tk 6,000. The profit from selling the fully grown trees will be divided amongst the local government (5%), Synergy Conser-

vation Ltd. (20%), the planters (35%) and the landowner (40%). The rights and obligations of the stewards are fully recorded in the contract: a firm will have to spend 35 per cent of its profit on local development. Gründemann shows me one contract. The tillers have proudly put their thumb print.

NGOs
Synergy is not alone in planting trees for development and sustainable land use. Social forestry got a real start in Bangladesh in 1982. In this year the Community Forest Project, financed by the Asian Development Bank, begun. Six years later, afforestation assisted by the World Food Programme took off.

NGOs have become the main executive agents: they provide loans for income-generating activities such as raising seedling and growing mulberry trees. In their study *Social Forestry in Bangladesh: State of Art Study of 1995* Md. Fazlul Huq and Prof. A. Alim pointed out some problems in these programmes: "The NGO forestry activities also suffer from many constraints and inadequacies. ...

They are mostly dependent on donor funding and with the exception of a very few, most of them have not been able to find out ways and means of sustaining their programmes from financial point of view." Gründemann has a similar opinion: "You need flexibility when you start up something new. A funding proposal however is like a contract. You cannot adjust it. Furthermore, long-term contracts are needed. If you draw up a contract for a mere ten years, as NGOs do with block plantation, the poor are sure to be thrown off before the project becomes really profitable."

Funding
Where does Synergy get the funds from? Synergy Conservation Ltd. is linked up with the foundation Friends of Synergy Foundation in The Netherlands. This was established to make individuals, companies and organisations interested in contributing to the forestry programme through the adoption of trees. For the sum of f15 (Tk 350) they can adopt one tree, that is, make it financially possible that it will be planted. "Companies in The Netherlands



Gründemann and a team of stewards

Seedlings being carried to plantation site

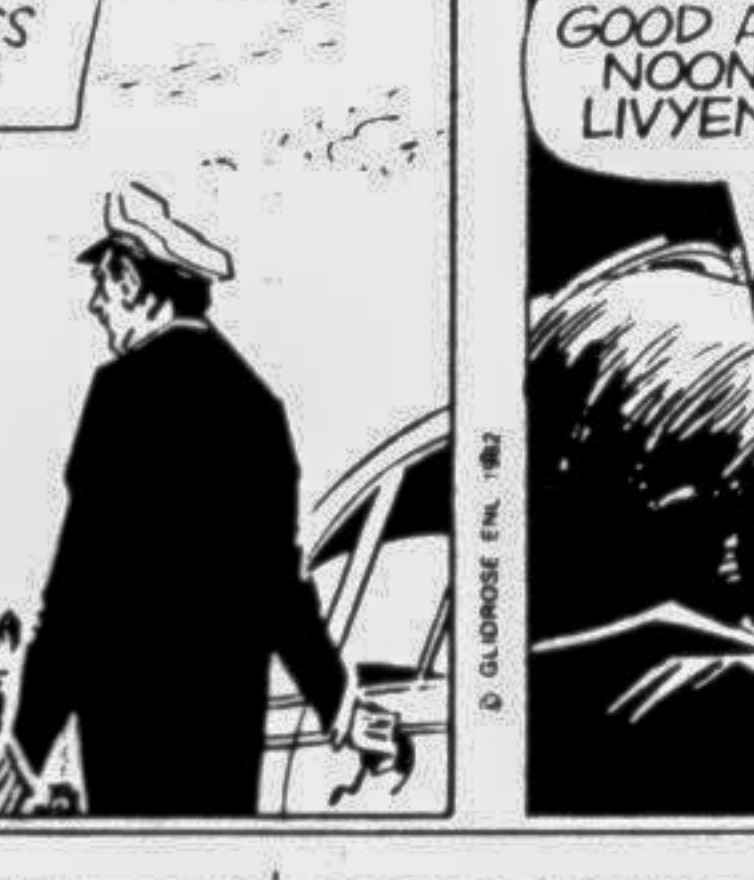
Garfield®



by Jim Davis



James Bond



Call to launch movement against drug abuse

State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Dr M Amanullah yesterday said private institutions could play an important role along with the government efforts to contain the menace of drug addiction, reports BSS.

He was speaking as chief guest at a discussion and prize distribution function held in observance of International Day against Drug Abuse and its Illicit Trafficking.

Ahsania Mission organised the function at the WVA auditorium in the city.

The state minister said the danger of drug addiction has been eroding the human values worldwide. Bangladesh is not free from it, he added.

Amanullah stressed the need for mass awareness about the danger of drugs and called upon the NGOs to launch an integrated movement against drug abuse.

Chaired by former IG of Police Dr Enamul Huq, the function was addressed, among others, by Director General NGO Affairs Bureau Mohammad Fazlul Huq, Dr Shamim Chowdhury, Ronald Drahozal and Prof Rausan Ara.

Meanwhile, the day was observed in a befitting manner in Rajshahi yesterday.

A colourful rally was brought out from Rajshahi Government College High School in the morning to mark the day.

A discussion meeting, organised by the Department of Narcotics Control, was held at local

Moni Bazar Zilla Parishad Auditorium.

Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) Commissioner AKM Shamsuddin and social worker Dr Sultan Ahmed, among others, spoke on the occasion.

Islamic Foundation also organised a discussion on the day at local Lakhnath High School, where speakers called upon all to launch a united movement against illicit drug trafficking and drug abuse in society.

The day was also observed in Khulna with a rally and seminars.

To mark the day, Department of Narcotic Control, Khulna brought out a rally from the local Circuit House at 7:30 am which ended at Zia Hall.

State Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Abdul Khaleque led the rally. Khulna City Mayor Sheikh Toyebur Rahman also joined it.

Later, the State Minister addressed a seminar organised by the department at Zia Hall, highlighting the significance of the day.

On the occasion, Islamic Foundation organised a seminar on the Point of View of Islam Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Drug Trafficking. Principal of Khulna Shaheed Suhrawardy College Prof Mazharul Hannan attended the seminar as chief guest.

Lion Club also held a programme in the city. Police Commissioner Kazi Nazrul Islam was present as chief guest.



A procession was brought out marking the International Day against Drug Abuse and its Illicit Trafficking in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Russian professor calls on DU VC

Dr A P Gratiuk Danilchuk, Prof of Bengali Language and Literature, University of International Relations, Moscow, called on Dhaka University Vice-Chancellor Prof A K Azad Chowdhury at his office on Wednesday, reports UNB.

During his stay in Bangladesh for about three months, Dr Danilchuk will work to further improve the existing cultural relations between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation, said a DU press release.

Weather

Moderate rain likely
Moderately heavy to heavy fall is likely at places over the country in the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Met Office also forecast moderate rain or thundershower accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind at most places over Chittagong, Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions.

Under the influence of monsoon, well-marked low over north-west Bay and adjoining area, temporary south south-easterly squall at the speed of 55-70 kph or more is likely at one or two places over Chittagong, Barisal and Khulna divisions and the regions of Faridpur and Dhaka during the period.

The sun sets today at 6:50 pm and rises tomorrow (Saturday) at 5:14 am.

Advisor of C'wealth Sectt satisfied at election process

Visiting Advisor of the Commonwealth Secretariat Henry Van Sekyi called on Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru at his office yesterday, reports UNB.

During the meeting, Sekyi expressed satisfaction at the ongoing democratic and election process in Bangladesh with particular reference to the provision for neutral caretaker government to conduct the future general elections.

He said one of the fundamental values for which the Commonwealth entrusted is to endeavour to establish the culture of parliamentary democracy in its member countries.

Regarding the Commonwealth help in legal sector of the country, the visiting advisor expressed his organisation's interest in extending assistance in the legal field with particular offer to assist the legal expertise.

Calls on CEC
Ambassador of Ghana to Bangladesh Henry Van Sekyi yesterday called on Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Mohammad Abu Hena at the latter's office at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, reports BSS.

During discussion, the chief election commissioner gave a brief resume of the election system in Bangladesh. He explained the constitutional innovation of the non-party caretaker government and the constitutional role of the election commission in arranging national elections under the new system.

Problems of Youth Health

by Dr M Zakir Hussain

ADOLESCENT health is becoming an important concern. Adolescence is a period of life when bodily and psychological changes take place quickly and profoundly — an experience that often perplexing and unsettling to the young. Ironically, when help is needed most that help and assurance usually is not available to most youths. A fertile ground is created for misinformation and myths, particularly about bodily functions and sexual urges to take firm roots. More specifically and cause of our concern is the high risk of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies that young people face.

A situation review in many countries clearly revealed that correct information on health and counseling and other direct healthcare for the youth is inadequate, inappropriate and therefore under-used by those these were meant.

Members of the health professions are often communicating to the youth from a distance — either too authoritatively without patient and convincing evidence or from a position of incrimination or intimidation. None of these approaches succeed in a real communication, let alone induce responsible voluntary behaviour and practice by the youth. In a repressive and inhibitory society and culture, this evokes misplaced fear and harmful concealment both a consequence of ignorance that is not removed through friendly and persuasive education and counsel.

Is it not time to put the health professionals and the youth face to face? Could it be

true that the youth now have very little trust and confidence in the health professions such that they may be consulted only as last resort out of frustration and despair? It is strongly urged that it is high time for us in Bangladesh to engage the young and adolescents in a serious and sustained exchange of information and education to bring about a far more open dialogue and appropriate enhancement of adolescent health knowledge and health of the young people.

In this regard the initiative should come from the health professions, particularly the Bangladesh Medical Association. To give a few examples:

The BMA may start a series of editorial and other writings on adolescent health for the popular media.

The BMA and other members of the profession may give more attention to youth health and sexual and reproductive health, particularly addressed to the concerns of the youth in technical and professional journals that will benefit the students and general practitioners learn more on how to effectively give professional care and counsel.

The BMA may consider producing a series of learning modules on adolescent health for home study or distance learning. These materials could be available at normal public libraries and widely accessible to those who need to know.

The schools may conduct courses with the help of teacher trainers to build up core competence in school faculty for counselling and peer education

on matters of health of the young.

The Ministry of Education has a strong role to play in these efforts. So has the departments concerned with sports, youth affairs and women's affairs. Jointly with the Health Ministry, they may provide youth counselling services and student seminars on healthy growing and living for the young people using colleges, health centres, sports clubs, libraries, and other community facilities. For the urban metropolitan centres, one may think of opening free of charge hot lines (telephone counselling) services. These are merely examples. It is certain that give the right signal and support, the Association and other youth groups will come forward with many suitable and effective, innovative and acceptable ways and means of doing the job.

This is a plea for a less repressive and more open information and education in general and free flow of valid information and counselling and care for the youth, particularly on the subject of sexuality and health behaviour. We need not continue to subject our youth to fear, anxiety, and helplessness due to ignorance or misinformation. In this effort of far-reaching national importance, one would need the close alliance of many actors namely the medical profession, the youth and women's groups, the education and health departments working together.

The writer is former Director, Programme Management, WHO South East Asia Regional Office.

GOITRE

Iodine Level in Salt Not Maintained

by Julian Charles

SALT mill workers responsible for iodization often don't add the correct amount of the chemical, causing fluctuation in salt iodine levels.

National co-ordinator of the International Council for Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders (ICCIDD), Prof. Quazi Salamattullah, said though UNICEF had given free iodization facilities to all of Bangladesh's 264 salt mills, inadequate worker training meant salt iodine levels were not being maintained.

"The mill owners say they have problems with the people, with the machinery. But the machinery is okay — the salt mill owners are not enlightened and they do not keep a person who knows something," Salamattullah observed. They are all labourers, so they could not weigh the iodine properly and mix it with the water," he said.

The latest study of salt iodization in the country, "Evaluation of Universal Salt Iodization in Bangladesh", found iodine in salt at the factory level varied greatly. While it should be between 45 and 50 ppm [parts per million], it ranged from four ppm to 1000 ppm.

The UNICEF-funded study was conducted by ICCIDD, the Institute of Public Health and Welfare, and Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation. Its results were published in ICCIDD's April 1997 newsletter.

Salamattullah said while salt with high iodine levels was only a minor health risk, low intake was responsible for the endemic problems of goitre and cretinism in the country.

The new report said almost 69 per cent of Bangladeshis were iodine deficient, while 47 per cent had goitre and 0.5 per cent were cretins.

The study measured the iodine content of edible salt from 138 of the 150 factories operating at the time, as well as at the retail and household levels. It said: "More publicity is needed to create awareness among the mass population about the benefit of iodized salt."

Salamattullah said a 1993 university survey based on the iodine content of respondents' urine — showed some areas had a 100 per cent incidence of iodine deficiency and that all Bangladeshis were at risk. The survey, published in ICCIDD's April 1996 newsletter, showed the country's hilly areas were worst affected.

The new report showed there was iodine in 99 per cent of the salt collected. But it said less than 5 per cent of this contained the correct level. The iodine in more than 45.3 per cent of the salt tested was inadequate, while almost 50 per cent of the salt had an excess of the chemical.

Vice President of the Salt Mill Owners Association, Shamsul Islam Shahjahan, agreed that workers' inability to measure iodine correctly made the iodization process inaccurate. "Even if they are trained, the machine is not automatic, it's manual. Sometimes the labourer is dozing, sometimes he is sleeping, sometimes he is talking with others," Shahjahan said. "Actually they are laymen — they

don't know 45 ppm or 50 ppm. This is the main problem, sometimes they can measure accurately and sometimes they can't. If we can get intelligent labourers we can improve it."

But he said mill owners were not to blame as most of them were trying hard to ensure all salt was iodised. "In some mills there are discrepancies but most mills are very good. The owners themselves are trying to gear up these things, to mix the iodine proportionately," Shahjahan said. "UNICEF requested us to fortify our salt for the betterment of our nation — so we agreed to do this. We are trying our best to do it."

BSCIC general manager Md Rafiqul Islam said his department properly trained all mill workers responsible for iodization, including newly hired workers.

But he said BSCIC — which monitors factories' salt iodine levels — could not be at all mills around the clock and couldn't say whether salt was properly iodized during its absence.

Salamattullah said salt iodization laws were not being enforced. The Iodine Deficiency Diseases Prevention Act 1994 states anyone producing or selling non-iodized salt for consumption can be jailed for three years, fined Tk 5,000 or both.

"They usually just mix a bit, so we are hammering them to do it properly," Salamattullah said. "The government is just telling them 'you do it, you do it', because people are thinking if we stick to the law maybe they will not do it. If they don't maintain levels, then in future the law will be enforced."

JS told Unemployed youth being trained on poultry, dairy farming



Commemorative stamps on paintings released

State Minister for Youth and Sports Obaidul Quader yesterday informed the Jati Sangsad that the unemployed youths, both males and females, are being trained on poultry and dairy farming, and pisciculture under Mohammadpur and Dhanmondi thana areas in the city under the District Youth Development Directorate, reports BSS.

Replying to a question from AL legislator Moqbul Hossain, he said there are one block batik and one garments manufacturing training centres under Mohammadpur thana for the unemployed youths.

He said the unemployed young men and women also receive training on computer, radio, TV, electrical and house wiring, refrigeration and air-conditioning.

He said loans would be distributed among the trained youths from July this year.

Moreover, computer training centres would be set up under the two thanas in the next fiscal, he said.

Workshop on HR begins

RAJSHAH, June 26: A three-day workshop on "Fact Finding and Human Rights" began at Association for Community Development (ACD) office here today, reports UNB.

Some 25 persons, comprising grassroots level workers of ACD, local journalists and UP chairmen and members, are taking part in the workshop.

132 arrested on various charges

Police arrested 132 people, including 18 wanted criminals, from different parts of the city on various charges during the last 24 hours till 6 pm yesterday, reports UNB.

Of the arrested, 61 were held on charges of killing, dacoity, snatching and extortion, said a DMP press release.