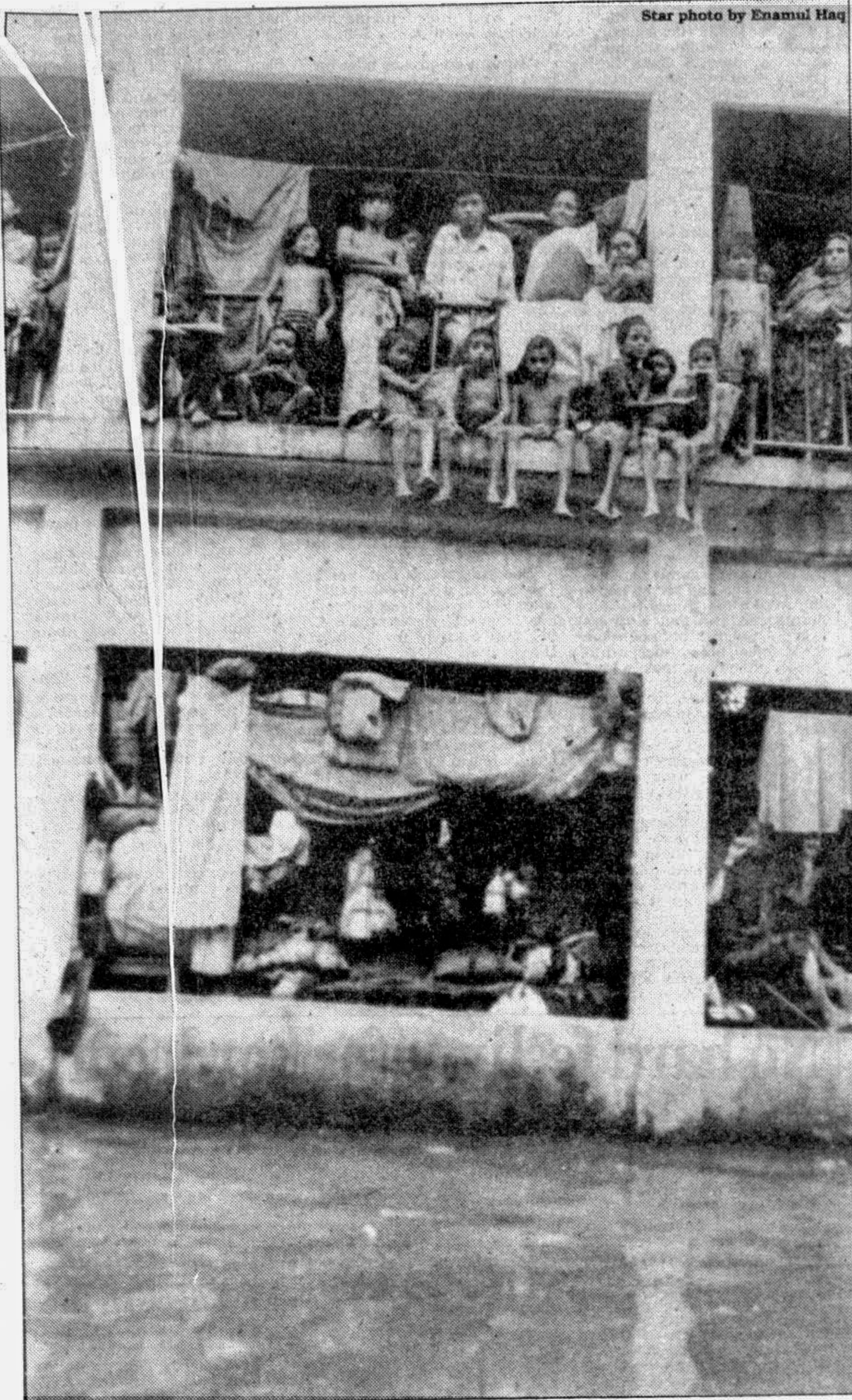


A Swelling Deluge

PHOTO FEATURE ON FLOOD

As the water level rises the affected look for higher places to take refuge: They move vertically... from lower floor to upper floor of a flood shelter (below), from floor to roof of their dwellings (right), but from roof to where? (below, right)



Post-flood Measures: Some Suggestions

by Abu Imran

FLOOD Causes havoc in its wake. And there is little reason to be complacent when it recedes, for then too follows miseries which need careful and concerted efforts to mitigate in the challenging situation.

Among others, the first thing the flood-battered people have to face is the out-break of epidemics, particularly the diarrhoeal diseases. The prime victims are the children since they lack resistance compared to the adults. So it is necessary that special care for them is taken and arrangements made. Adults, of course, are not spared too.

Precautionary measures can be taken if the basic knowledge about spread of such disease is disseminated among the people, particularly in the affected areas. The most common cause is that it spreads through contaminated water and food. That being so, one has to be careful in using both water and food. In such areas normally water becomes impure. But there are measures to purify water. The simplest one is to boil water for around ten minutes, and then use for both drinking and cooking. The other way water can be purified is by using water purifying tablets and alum. These are normally supplied by the social/health workers and volunteers working in the affected areas. People should also be encouraged to keep reasonable stock of these essentials in their possession so that they don't have to depend on others in times of emergency.

The other thing that contaminates food and drink is negligence in maintaining personal hygiene. One needs to wash hands before eating in general and after answering to the call of nature in particular. In the latter case soap/detergent must be used. In absence of which fuel-ash (chhayec) can

liberally be used. It is not only that the adults should do so, but the children must also be trained and educated to develop this habit. This will go a long way in checking if not eliminating the diarrhoeal diseases.

Despite precautionary measures or other wise, when persons get affected by diarrhoea, immediate treatment should be started. In such disease, the too frequent loose motions cause loss of fluid from the body. So the easiest treatment for this is to administer oral saline very liberally. Alongside the patients should be encouraged to take normal food so that they don't become too weak. The infants as usual can be breast-fed. In absence of medicated ORS (oral saline), the same can be made at homes too. A fistful of sugar or gur with around quarter tea spoonful of salt put in about half litre of clean boiled and cooled water may make an ideal ORS. Green coconut water is also a good substitute. In case, however, if a patient doesn't show improvement, he/she should be sent to hospital, health complex or to a nearby makeshift health camp, where doctors/health workers can be of help. In no way any patient be left unattended lest his/her condition turns from bad to worse.

After addressing the health problems, the people would need to address their rehabilitation problem. They have to repair or reconstruct their dilapidated dwelling houses which the poor people alone can hardly do. Here local and external assistance is almost a *sine qua non* and it's really encouraging to know that at the behest of the government or, in some cases, of their own, the donor community always come in a big way to help people. This time too from the recent meet-

ing convened by the government where representatives of donors attended, their response seemed to be positive. The items mostly needed are house building materials like CI sheets, bamboo, bamboo mats, wood, iron wire, bolts, nuts, nails, rods, cement and also money. Items have to be prioritized so that only the essentials are supplied to reduce the cost and benefit the larger section of people. External assistance should be supplemented by voluntary labour from the beneficiaries where such labour is available. This will also boost the morale of the people and give them a sense of pride in addressing their problems.

Alongside the above, the occupational rehabilitation should also follow. Arrangement for supply of seeds, fertilizer, and liberal credit like interest-free loan should be arranged direct from the government bodies since the involvement of intermediaries would make the process vulnerable to less efficient use, harassment and the like. Interest-free loan is suggested because, experience shows that in many cases interest bearing loans are required

to be written off later, since the poor people fail to repay their loan which together with interest become simply too big to meet and the interest hangs on their neck like a draconian sword right from the day they receive the credit. And hence is the suggestion for interest-free loan. It is heartening that the present government has similar feelings.

As it takes time for a crop to come up and mitigate the immediate sufferings of the poor, in the interim period, the people particularly the land-less ones, should be engaged in FFW (food for work), FFE (food for education) and in some other vocational training programmes against bare survival allowances so that they have at least some thing to eat during the lean period.

In this way and with other better measures, and with courage, wisdom, fortitude, self-feeling and active participation of all — the government, the donors, the NGOs and the people themselves — the post-flood rehabilitation programme may be made a success and the ravaged people benefited and encouraged to restart a healthy life forgetting the pains of flood.

Missing Out on Secondary Education

NEW DELHI: While the gender gap in primary school enrolment and education is beginning to close in most parts of the world, the same cannot be said for secondary school education, says the 1998 Progress of Nations Report brought out by the United Nations Children's Educational Fund (UNICEF). The worst-disparity is found in South Asia, where

52 per cent of boys but only 33 per cent of girls enrol — a gap of 19 per cent.

In contrast, girls generally lead boys in Latin America and the Caribbean, with 56 per cent of girls and 52 per cent of boys enrolled in secondary school.

In five countries — India, Nepal, Togo, Turkey and Yemen — the gap exceeds 20 per cent. — WFS/News Network

By Hanna-Barbera

"I Don't Want My Daughter to Follow Me"

In Bangladesh sex workers are no more shy of voicing their demands. They want the society to treat them as equal as others. Some NGOs have come forward in their support in a positive response. Rehana Parveen Ruma reports.

SHE has left the profession: commercial sex. Like any mother the young woman does not want her teen-age girl to pursue her former profession. Instead she wants her daughter to become a teacher. One day her dream may come true because the daughter is already going to school.

"I don't want my daughter to follow me. I've never liked this work," said the 30-year-old woman sitting at her grocery store not far from Doulatdia Ghat. The woman — News Network has decided against using her name — was in fact looking for an way-out for the benefit of her daughter. "I had always wanted to get out of that hell. I want my daughter to be educated and have a normal marriage and a good career. She should be able to live with honour and dignity," said the sex worker speaking about her dreams.

She was excited when one day a local NGO offered her help materialise her dreams. She and six of her former co-workers had took their daughters to the Safe Home run by the NGO with a hope of giving them education and a normal life. Alongside Doulatdia Ghat, one will find rows of tinsheds houses where singing, dancing and revelries go on throughout the night and this is known as a prime redlight area across river Padma. The rent of a 7x5 feet house is Tk 900, which the women call as a dark tunnel. The women are happy they are no more sex workers.

This particular woman has married a man who does not mind her past and is eager to

help her lead a normal life.

Marriage is the only way to regain the social respect. That is why I married this innocent man," said the woman pointing to her husband. She and her husband run a grocery store. She told to this correspondent, "It's true that once I had no financial hardship, but I do admit that the money which I used to earn could never give me the mental peace which I am now getting."

Not only this woman. There are a good number of sex workers who are willing to leave the profession and want to be rehabilitated in the society. They voiced such a demand in the first ever sex workers' conference held near the redlight area on July 22.

The sex workers themselves organised the conference in collaboration with the Save the Children, Australia (SCA) and Karmajibee Kalyan Sangstha (KKS) to ventilate their grievances accumulated over the years.

SCA Country Director Sultan Mahnuud said: "In our country, the sex workers are socially hated and culturally isolated and they have no rights to observe religious rituals. But it's the section which is economically more solvent and self-dependent compared to many others."

According to a survey, the number of sex workers in this brothel ranges from 1200 to 1500 and their turnover is between Tk four and five lakhs everyday. Nearly 4000 people depend on their earnings. It's true that the prostitutes earn handsomely, but hardly they

enjoy the money. Different sections like house owners, landlords, musclemen and police have their stakes on these earnings.

According to the local people, the history of this brothel goes back to British period. At that time this river-port was the business hub of this region. The British rulers used to bring women here from various regions of India for domestic works. Some local women also joined them. These women ultimately had been outcast by the society. Shoals emerged in the mighty Padma forcing the prostitutes to relocate the brothel in Doulatdia Ghat. Sultan Mahnuud disclosed that there are nearly 1.5 lakh prostitutes in 19 registered brothel across the country besides the floating sex workers.

"Everyday a large number of women either voluntarily or forcibly join this profession." What are the factors that for growing number of sex workers in the country? SCA Project Coordinator Munira Sultana said: "There are girls who take up the profession following their mothers, some are sold into the profession by their so-called lovers and husbands and some slip into it as victims of fraudulence. Among the reasons, the biggest one is poverty," she said.

How long they want to hold on to this profession? In most cases it depends on their physical condition, beauty and age.

Those who can make a large amount of savings they turn into house owners. But the prostitutes who retire because of ageing without savings they

have to lead an inhuman life. Then they have to work as pimps to collect new sex workers and either as cook or babysitter. In fact they have to count the days of life.

"The number of child sex workers is increasing in an appalling proportion alongside the adult ones. To my surprise, I had seen during my research that even seven years old were looking for clients in their houses," said Munira.

Addressing the conference, chairperson of the brothel said, "Others will never be able to imagine what an inhuman life we are leading despite being human beings."

At the conference, the sex workers had put forward three demands: measures to put an end to repression by police and musclemen, rights to conduct funeral rites and rights to wear shoes in public.

The Save the Children had started its journey with a vision to make these women self-reliant and ensure their children to grow up as other children of the society.

"In this context, we have emphasised the importance of poverty alleviation and to achieve the goal we ask the sex workers to make savings," said the country director.

So far, 38 sex workers of the Doulatdia Ghat have started small business by taking loans from the Save the Children. Their business include, tailoring, embroidery, grocery, tea stall and leasing out generators.

It has also a five-year long credit system and the woman who was interviewed is one of the beneficiaries. News Network

