

### Bracing the Brunt

PHOTO FEATURE ON FLOOD



Volunteers rush cooked food, wading through flood waters, to the affected.

— Star photo by Enamul Haq



Desperate destitutes return with relief goods, virtually swimming through flood waters, to shelter.

— Star photo by Enamul Haq



Cooked food being distributed among the flood affected destitutes.

— Star photo by AKM Mohsin



Flood shelter is also no more safe like its inmates who wait for relief yet to reach them.

— Star photo by Anisur Rahman

## Civil Society and Reproductive Health Care

by Dr M Zakir Husain

Reproductive health involves complex organisational and functional personnel and behavioural changes; the State cannot fulfil all these requirements and make it most effective. There is a gap between the delivery end and the acceptance end.

REPRODUCTIVE health care is essential for a credible and sustained population programme. Population growth is a major development concern in Bangladesh. Past performance of population programme in Bangladesh is reflected in the significant lowering of fertility rate of women and slowing down of population growth rate.

Still, the demographic momentum of the young age population of Bangladesh strongly suggests early implementation of a comprehensive reproductive health programme. The purpose of this article is to point to the need of civil society's active participation in reproductive health and population programme which includes safe motherhood, pregnancy by choice, information on reproductive and sexual hygiene, safe abortion, and contraception.

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) include various organisations and associations of people and groups such as the youth, the women, the professions, volunteers, activists, and non-governmental organisations. Bangladesh has the distinction of numerous major and minor civil society organisations and groups.

Reproductive health involves complex organisational and functional personnel and behavioural changes; the State cannot fulfil all these requirements and make it most effective. There is a gap between the delivery end and the acceptance end. But it is absolutely imperative to further enhance the acceptance and outreach of reproductive health. The CSOs can, and should, play a positive role in several areas.

These are: Making public policies more gender sensitive, especially protecting the rights of the females; and securing male responsibility in reproductive health and contraception equally as of the female.

Disseminating information and education on reproductive health widely and effectively so that these are understood, and accepted, and reflected in citizens' rights. They are essential and potentially effective instruments to secure accountability of the State. They articulate public concerns and rights in matters of State policies and remain vigilant about people's rights. The CSOs are usually more effective when they exercise their functions and duties through a process of constructive engagement and negotiation with the State apparatus rather than an adversarial or confrontational approach.

CSOs are situated intermediate between the citizens and the State; often acting as a buffer between State power and

change of reproductive behaviour.

Taking good reproductive health care to the specially difficult, remote, and minority groups; specific age groups and ethnic segments that the general services normally cannot or will not reach.

Keeping State programmes informed of particular concerns and needs of the consumer public; and secure the right to valid information and other user rights.

Improving quality control and assurance, and keeping watch over the services by the State and the State funded NGOs.

Giving general support to good State programmes and enhancing the coverage and outreach of reproductive health care. Improving community participation and fostering partnership between the public and private sector.

But in order to do all these, the CSOs need to become more effective and stronger. How can this happen?

First, CSOs should mobilise own resources and become self-reliant and largely or totally solvent; must reduce dependence on State funding, or foreign funds.

Second, CSOs should acquire a sound knowledge and information base, and technical capacity as and where necessary.

Third, CSOs should focus programme of action strategically upon subjects and areas of comparative advantage rather than dilute resources on many fronts without visible impact on any.

Fourth, CSOs should freely network and share resources and expertise among themselves.

What are the problems? There are several. First, CSOs in Bangladesh are working in an environment with poor infrastructure; low literacy level and widespread poverty. Thus, CSOs cannot easily mobilise resources or acquire wide popular representation. Most CSOs are urban based, consist of elite groups, academics, and look for State funds and external support. This further reduces their strength and autonomy.

Under these conditions, the State tends to take upon itself more than it can deliver; assumes power beyond what is legitimate resulting in some instances violation of human rights and lack of due sensitivity to human concerns especially those of the poor and disadvantaged. Unfortunately, poverty and ignorance combine to keep large segments of the eligible population outside participation in civil society organisations.

## Race to Save the Beach of Turtles

Mexico has broken its word by letting hotel developers into one of its own environmentally protected areas. But, as Gemini News Service reports, campaigners are striking back by hitting the government in one of the industries it wants to develop: tourism. **Zadie Neufville** writes from Mexico.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS are trying to save a nesting beach used by sea turtles that has been sold to developers by the Mexican government, despite federal regulations intended to protect the area.

The isolated beach of Xcacel, on the east coast of Quintana Roo, was divided and sold to two companies earlier this year.

The beach is said to be the largest reservoir of genetic diversity in green and loggerhead sea turtles in the Atlantic.

Spanish and Mexican campaigners need \$11 million to buy 45 hectares sold to Melina, a hotel group which has offered to sell to the environmentalists. Another 48 hectares was sold to Mauro Gonzales, head of Gozumel Ga-sol, who bought the land for about \$2.25 million.

Early attempts to stop the sale failed when a petition by an ecology group submitted in 1994 for scientific exploration and preservation of Xcacel was turned down this year just before the land was sold.

Now, because of federal regulations protecting turtles, the local governor, Perez Erasles, declared a portion of Xcacel a state turtle reserve. Mary Louise Whitlow, an activist for the United States who has also

worked with Greenpeace Mexico, says this was a move to cover the sales.

The area extends 100 metres, or 110 yards, from the waterline, an amount Whitlow says biologists have described as Band-Aid.

For years biologists and environmentalists turned have been watching the beaches at night to protect turtle eggs from poachers. They say the governor's gesture is a piece of worthless public relations.

Other areas near Xcacel were sold despite the federal protection ordinance that gives environmentalists first refusal if the land is sold. They were never given that chance.

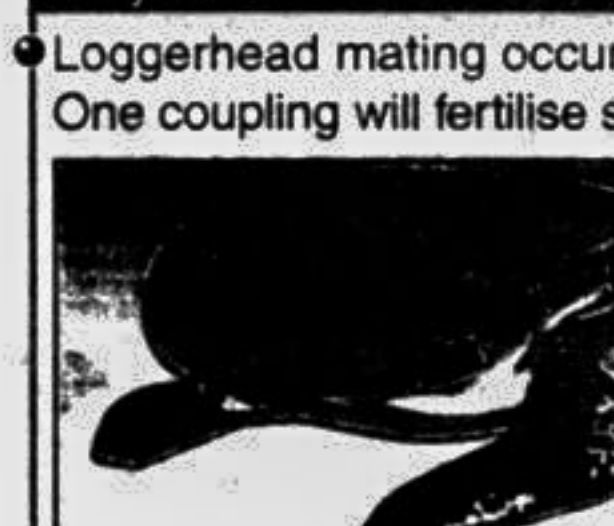
Whitlow said people are still unsure of how much of the land has been sold and to whom. The Quintana Roo government has been tight-lipped about the sale because areas under development are part of Mexico's newest tourist attraction, Mayan Riviera.

While the Quintana Roo government shuts its ears, activists have taken the call to save the turtles worldwide. They want to hit at the root cause: tourism.

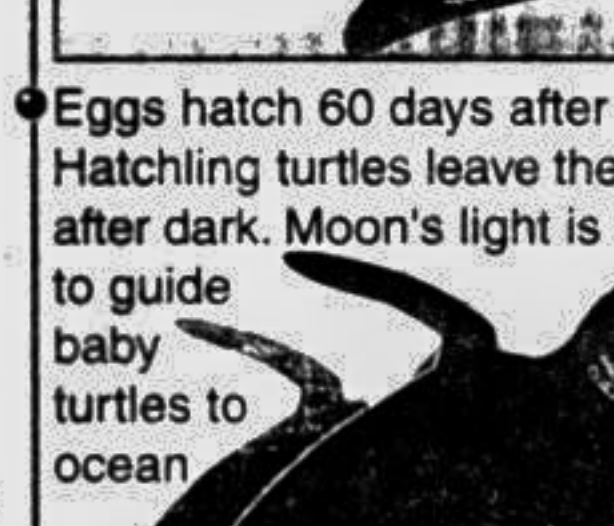
"A travel agent petition is going around and a petition for the general public is being pre-

### 15 years to danger

- Only seven species of marine turtles exist today
- Loggerhead turtle is threatened species. If present trends continue, species could be endangered within 15 years
- Loggerhead mating occurs in late March. One coupling will fertilise season's egg supply



- Female turtle uses hind flippers to dig flask-shaped eggchambers on beach
- Chambers are about 18 inches deep and hold about 100 eggs



- Eggs hatch 60 days after being laid. Hatching turtles leave the chamber after dark. Moon's light is thought to guide baby turtles to ocean
- Adult turtles lay eggs in same place where they were born. How they find way back is still a mystery



pared now." Whitlow said. Protests are also being planned in the US cities of Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, and Los Angeles; Mexico City, Mexico; Spain and Colombia. The beach's possible destruction is one of the most urgent conservation crises in the world for sea turtles, says marine biologist Brain Bowen of the University of Florida, who has studied the Xcacel turtles.

"If the nesting ground is eliminated, 20 per cent of the genetic diversity in Atlantic loggerhead turtles and 22 per cent of the genetic diversity in Atlantic green turtles will be lost forever," he said.

### Garfield®

by Jim Davis

