

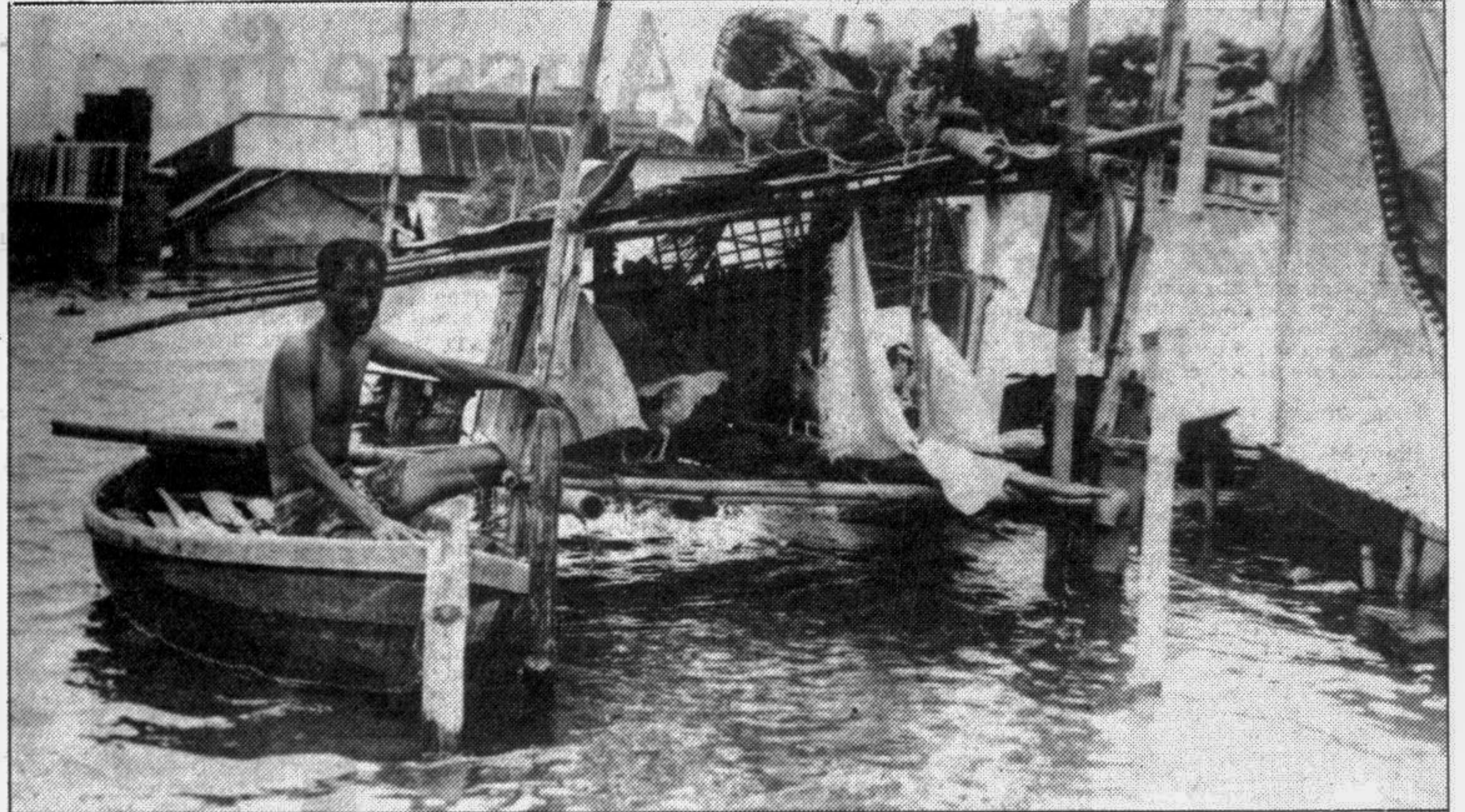
Dwelling in the Déluge

PHOTO FEATURE ON FLOOD



Now, innovating a nest in the roof (Kamrangirchar).

— Star photo by A K M Mohsin



Erecting platform for poultry — frantic bid to save belongings (Manderkhal).

— Star photo by Amran Hossain



Over a month under a tent on the roof (Nandipara).

— Star photo by Amran Hossain



Mounting concern — how much more to raise the platform (one of the many affected areas).

— Star photo by Amran Hossain



Getting accustomed to boat-life! (one of the many city areas).

— Star photo by Amran Hossain



Marooned on board! (Raniganj, Rangpur)

— Star photo

Of Disasters and Destitutes

by Pial Das Rajat

FLOODS, cyclones and tornadoes are our constant companion. We have hardly crossed a single decade without being struck by a huge calamity. Once again a disaster, a deluge has come to the fore. It is a natural phenomenon can't be stopped altogether. Flooding or deluge leads to not only substantial destruction of physical infrastructure and crop land, but also to the massive uprooting of people. Many of whom become destitute virtually overnight.

Among those affected by floods and related problems, women and children are usually the most helpless and disadvantaged. The statistics of the previous disasters show that the largest number of deaths due to drowning etc. tended to occur in the case of children, followed by women, especially aged women.

There is an unwritten convention in our society that some types of jobs are fixed for the male and some for the female. We all know the traditional roles in the customary division of labour become much more difficult to perform under flood conditions, e.g. cooking, cleaning, fetching drinking water from a long distance and undertaking other household chores. During flood people confront acute shortages of potable water and edible foodstuff. And all this is mainly faced by women. During flood almost the whole of affected area turns into 'under-served and unserved' area. So it is not difficult for us to imagine the complications faced by women to bring water during flood. Lack of firewood and other kinds of fuel generates an energy crisis with serious consequences. Since there is no scope

of cultivation, a farmer can spend his time by playing cards but his wife has to cook food, as always, whatever the position of water, fuel, hearth etc. is.

Destitute men and women usually lose their job (if any). I may describe few such events, which have taken place due to the devastating flood of this year. The garments workers most of whom are females usually reside in the sub-urban areas. Most of these areas are now under water. They have been confined to their slums of shelters. And it is almost impossible for them to afford the fare of alternative transport (e.g. boat, rickshaw). Here it should be noted that majority of the workers generally walk to their working place. The vice-president of BGMEA has already told that of their production has decreased by about 25 per cent due to the reason mentioned above.

Some of them (garments authority) have been forced to shut down their factories. We know it clearly that the workers are very poorly paid and the authority does not show any kind of sympathy if they are absent even because of illness. So how can we expect that they (authority) will pay the salary for the non working days, due to flood?

In the submerged and deserted village settlements and sub-urban areas the very security of people's lives and property tend to wane. Looting and robbery by criminals are being reported from these areas. Destitute women are compelled to migrate elsewhere but there too they face the most acute of physical, financial and social insecurity. Even under normal circumstances, it is difficult to

helpless beggars.

We have seen several pictures of receiving relief goods from the PM, Leader of the Opposition and so on in the media. And most of the pictures show that the receiver is either an old man or woman. After the departure of these powerful givers, the faces of receivers are also changed. And then the 'mighty mastaan' take the responsibility of distributing relief goods. Then these old destitutes are not given any preference even they are deprived of their small shares. Policies of the flood relief administration and implementing agencies should be changed. We should ensure that destitute women receive foremost priority in the distribution and receiving process. It will not only ensure the right of women but also help ensure that children will receive their

due share since their access to it depended primarily on that of their mothers. Measures need to be devised to enable women perform their traditional roles under conditions of flooding, water logging and consequential disruptions.

The schooling of children is affected because of floods. There are several reasons for that. But the most important one is the turning of schools into shelter homes. We are facing the scarcity of shelter for the flood affected people. This year the children of sub-urban Dhaka are going to miss at least two/three months of their schooling. The scenario of other areas are more pathetic, their school buildings have been submerged and they don't know when they may resume their academic year again. It is absolutely essential to take steps to ensure that schooling of

children does not suffer due to flooding. As such we need flood shelter exclusively for the purpose.

Since flooding is virtually endemic in certain parts of our country, regular measures to ensure safety could be arranged in advance. The availability of community-based shelters in the vicinity, and rehabilitation programmes during the most acute periods of distress are an imperative. Such measures would be of particular benefit to destitute children and women. The kind of preparatory activities should include advance community-based stocking of such essential consumer goods as would allow women to cook food, purify water, nurse and care their children without being desperately looking for the same and in the process forced or lured by deceptive elements.

The writer is a computer analyst at 'Naripaksha'.

by Jim Davis

