HERE is a variable impact

patterns generated by the socio-

economic system they live in.

In general term, the three types

of division among people, gen-

erated by socio-economic sys-tems, are of gender, class and

ethnicity. These may act as de-

terminants of vulnerability to

Problems Faced by

Women During Flood

men and women, the physical

burden of coping falls heavily

on women. To meet the imme-

diate survival needs of their

households women have to

perform different functions

most of which overlap with

men's work in flood times.

However, fulfilment of women's

traditional roles in the custom-

ary division of labour becomes

more difficult at this time.

Women's gender assigned tasks,

especially cooking, taking care

of house, fetching water, gath-

ering fuel wood, rearing

children, looking after the sick

and elders and undertaking

homestead production etc.,

flood affected areas.

cannot be easily performed in

had to adjust their cooking and

consumption patterns in many

ways, which were different

from flood-free cooking proce-

dures. For example, in the relief

camp one of the first priorities

for a newly arrived family is to

make a new chula out of

mud.....Women alone in the

camp, or female headed house-

holds with one or two children,

often borrowed another house-

hold's chula, but cooked sepa-

rately when they did so, waiting

until the owner of the chula had

finished cooking, and using

their own supply of cooking

fuel. Commensal divisions be-

tween households tended to

harden, even as social support

and mutual cooperation be-

tween them increased (Shaw

households, although both men

and women suffer from floods.

women are commonly seen to

sacrifice their own meals for

tracts (e.g., "beels") of the coun-

try, young girls scrounge for

women of all ages have to take

considerable risks to procure

drinking water from great dis-

masters of multi-tasking.

A managing to look serene

while performing their various

roles as wife, mother, career

professional and household

mering within, says new re-

search by an international ad-

that they are keeping bottled

inside, says a research team of

Ogilvy and Mather, which did

'Simmering Within: Asian

Mothers and Their Rising Ex-

pectations', Asian women go

through each day with sadness

and dissatisfaction, conscious

in the first quarter of this year

as an attempt to understand

Asian mothers as a marketing

target group, but the study also

contains useful insights into

the thoughts and ambitions of

consisting mostly of mothers

with dependent children, in 22

cities in mainland China, Hong

Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan,

South Korea, Malaysia, the

Philippines, Singapore, Sri

Ogilvy and Mather has come up

with what it thinks is Asian

women's portrait of a happy

mother: someone who is suc-

TOM & JERRY

TAKE TWO

AND BARK.

As a result of the research.

Lanka, Taiwan and Thailand.

It covers 198 focus groups,

women across the region.

The research was conducted

that life could be better.

Indeed, the team says in

But these women are sim-

It is not resentment, though,

manager-worker.

vertising agency.

the study.

In the deeply water logged

their husbands and children.

Besides, in the poorer

1989: 13).

Women in all households

Although floods affect both

to gender.

on people, of flood hazard, according to vulnerability

Impact of Flood on Women

by Tahera Jabeen

The struggle for survival of our brave women during the recent floods is a proof that with organised efforts and proper guidance they can work wonders. Special efforts should, therefore, be made to inculcate hazard awareness in them. Capable women should be associated with disaster readiness programme, right from the planning stage down to its implementation.

flooding as in other hazards. The primary concern of the pre-Leaving aside cleanliness. sent article is to examine the instances of flood disasters for identifying the variable impacts they have had according

merely finding space for toilets is a huge problem that women face in their day to day life during the floods. They are not being able to respond to the call of nature because of lack of privacy. As a consequence, they have to wait till nighttime.

boat or raft to fetch drinking

water finding no men around to

Another great ordeal faced by women, especially those in low-lying areas, is giving birth during a severe flood while trying to observe purdah. Many babies are born in bamboo shafts, on boat or on rafts made of banana plants, fitted inside half-submerged houses. Having such private affairs exposed to public view must aggravate women's sense of shame.

Since all or most of the women of female-headed households have to manage for better or worse on their own during floods, they have to solely depend on their own social and economic resources. Moreover, if they are already poor they risk becoming destitute in such a crisis. For example, if they belong to the landless and marginal farmers' households, their loss of resources is likely to have an adverse effect on the already low nutritional and health status of the adults and children of these households. Despite their own sickness and other activities. they also tried their best to cure sick family members themselves in order to avoid the cost of modern treatment. Furthermore, poorer women take risks to collect medical herb from distant places during the floods.

Kitchen utensils, jewelry, livestock, poultry, trees and other household items, which usually belong to women, are their only assets that are often considered 'non productive.' However, these assets are particularly vulnerable to flood. Reports from the rural areas reveal that the women coming mostly from poor femaleheaded households were forced to sell their non-productive assets at distress prices to meet the immediate needs of the households during and after the floods where men's assets are

edible reeds and root, while kept for the future. Women's behaviour and actions are more governed by social rules and norms than that tances. But the saris often pose of men. Society expects women a death trap for women when to be passive and gentle. As a rethey travel long distances by sult, women lose out in the race

ering chores and emotionally

organised, in control and re-

sourceful. And while she may

have others to share her house-

hold burdens, she is not blamed

as neglecting her motherly du-

ties. She maintains a close rela-

tionship with her children

while her devotion to others is

searchers, Asian mothers are

all too willing to sacrifice their

own identity in anticipation of

rewards that come in the form

of family togetherness, their

children's academic and career

successes and their husbands'

feel that they have little oppor-

tunity for their personal ful-

filment, they also think their

accomplishments and their

contributions to family and so-

ciety are unappreciated and not

capital of New Delhi is quoted

as saying, "I don't want to be re-

born as a man. I want to be re-

born as the husband of my hus-

searchers say the women's sit-

uation and attitudes are reflec-

tions of the double standard

widely practised in Asian soci-

"Across the region, Asian

The Ogilvy and Mather re-

One woman in the Indian

But not only do the women

achievements in work.

acknowledged enough.

band!"

According to the re-

This 'ideal mother' is also

stretching her roles.

appreciated.

for receiving relief goods where men are aggressive, making sure that they absolutely get their due share. If in anyway they are able to stand in the queue they are like to come last. The only way children can get relief is through their mothers. When mothers are among the last people standing in a relief queue, they not only miss out

on their share of relief goods.

they also deprive their children of these goods. "Once, flood water swept away most of our clothes, and my mother and I were left with only one saree between us. So, when relief officials came to distribute food, my mother went out but I had to stay indoor for fear of the men," says Mariam, 27, of Kalubari village in Tangail. If she had gone outside in anything less than a saree, she says, she would have re-

ceived abuse, not help.

When women are completely helpless without any source of income and shelter, they usually move out to non-affected areas. However, this migration does not make their lives any easier. In their new homes, being migrants, they lose the physical and social security they had in their native villages. Many of the younger women refugees have to remain unmarried due to their parents' inability to provide the kind of dowry customarily needed for their marriage. This, in turn, has other kinds of adverse social consequences. For example, younger women are often lured away into prostitution in towns within the country, or even abroad by professional gangs and pimps with promises of jobs elsewhere. Young girls living on embankment or in shelter camps are also in con-

Coping with Flood 'Leaving with Floods' reports that despite the massive relief effort launched after the 1988 flood by government and NGOs and supported by international agencies, relief aid reached only 20 per cent of affected people. This raises the question, how did the other 80 per cent survive? These figures, while not an argument against the provision of relief aid in emergencies. do underscore the importance of supporting and strengthening women's own survival strategies, developed on the basis of long experience.

Women have devised various

schooling to salaries to sexual

misbehaviour," they noted.

"Society expects women to be

quiet and submissive (although

less so in places like Hong Kong

that to satisfy the demand of

their roles, they must make

numerous sacrifices," the re-

dition make it easier for the

women to accept their myriad

of responsibilities without

much complaint, this does not

mean they do not have hidden

desires and their own ambi-

participants were shown pic-

tures from which they were

made to choose one that they

thought communicated happi-

ness. Majority picked images

related to more freedom, space

and independence, report the

mother Watcharee Muthasat-

hearn is kept busy cooking.

dressing up and feeding her

children and sending them to

school during the morning, be-

fore she rushes off to her nine-

has to go to the market, cook

dinner and wash the dishes.

During weekends, there is laun-

dry to do for her husband and

children, more cooking and

dishwashing, as well as the

obligatory visits to relatives.

After work, the 38-year-old

to-five job at a bank.

For instance, Thai working

At one point in the research,

"Mothers themselves know

Yet while the dictates of tra-

and the Philippines).

searchers added.

tions.

researchers.

'Ideal' Mothers Keep Ambitions Bottled Up

Prangtip Daorueng writes from Bangkok

SIAN mothers are other things aside from moth- men in many respects, from "I love my two kids more

stant danger of rape or assault.

strategies to cope with the frequent inundation.

Different case studies in some pocket areas exhibit that women prepare themselves for floods long before it starts. They dry firewood in transportable earthen cookers and during floods, cook only once a day. The rest of the time, they eat dry food prepared beforehand, such as puffed rice or roasted wheat. Other foods that women might stock up for the flood include balls made of flattened rice or puffed rice, molasses and shredded coconut. In addition, instead of raising chickens, which would drown in floodwater, they raise ducks that provide an excellent source of floating food. For water purification, as well as using alum to cleanse polluted water. women mix it with roasted betelnut and charcoal to make toothpaste that helps control gum infection. During floods, when diseases and infections increase, this mixture is widely used. Women also use dried neem leaves to treat boils and skin diseases, mix honey with tulsi leaves to control coughs and fevers, and apply dried grass to cuts and insect bites.

To prevent rape cases in some shelter camps, women are seen to form groups to protect each other. They have even set up vigilance group to keep guard and prevent violence against young girls.

These coping strategies are vital for the survival of the poor households and are only adopted by women. And it is women who have also the main responsibility for flood protection work. After the floods, reconstruction of their houses, by both the affected men and women, involves more laborious activities than during flood free time. Women need to play a major part in the post-flood reconstruction, spending most of their time working in muddy and slippery condition.

A Few Suggestions Related to Relief Operation

In a disaster, people generally find women more approachable than men, yet most relief workers are men. So, it is necessary to have more women involved in relief work. But women relief workers face higher security risks and obstructiveness from local male leaders and government offi-

than anything else," said

Watcharee. "But sometimes

just wish I (could go) some-

where, leaving everything be-

the researchers: "I want the

courage to be able to say I want

pines — who the researchers

note as having a very positive

view of themselves, their oppor-

tunities and their situation at

home - convey similar frustra-

tions and fears as the women in

some changes are taking place.

are unwilling to sacrifice fam-

say a greater sense of self-es-

This group of women, they

say, believes they can survive

breadwinners in the family.

mother told the researchers

that she never thought of "lean-

be able to make a living for my-

women.

Still, there are signs that

While most Asian mothers

the other Asian countries.

something for myself.

One Japanese mother told

Even mothers in the Philip-

hind and be only with myself."

cials when trying to carry out their work. More women volunteers should be available to form a strong group, able to overcome these problems collectively. Moreover, female doctors and nurses should be included in the volunteer medical teams. Emergency medicine and equipment should be available to cope with women's special needs. For example, many women lose their breast feeding infants during floods. Pumps to extract breast milk must be available in order to avoid serious infection and debilitating pain. Equipment and medication is needed also to handle the inevitable miscarriages. None of these equipment can be dis-

pensed, or care given, by men. Since women of Bangladesh are a disadvantaged group in terms of literacy, income etc. and are saddled with home management, they are gener-ally unaware of what is happening outside her immediate environment. But the struggle for survival of our brave women during the recent floods is a proof that with organised efforts and proper guidance they can work wonders. Special efforts should, therefore, be made to inculcate hazard awareness in them. Capable women should be associated with disaster readiness programme, right from the planning stage down to its implementation. This will ensure that the critical needs of women and children who can't run for safer places like men when the disaster strikes, would be incorporated in the programme.

(References: Flood Response Study (FAP 14) Final Report Excerpts from 'Women & Water" Rivers of Life, PANOS/BCAS, 1st edition, 1994; Women Coping with Floods by Shaheen Anam, The Daily Star, September, 1998; Structural Measures or Survival Strategies? by Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen, The Daily Star, 28 September, 1998)

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Information Technology Cracks Social Interface

by A M M Aabad

The scientists have found out that spending hours and days on the Internet and e-mail could impair a person's sociability rating, and introduce social distortions. He becomes insulated from the society, and facing the human beings face to face in the normal manner in daily life brings up subtle problems.

THE research laboratories of the West, enveloped by L the euphoria of the march of science, are always late with analysing the impact of applications of latest technologies. The information technology (IT) has been hailed as a boon to mankind restricted by communicative devices out of the

earshot. Distance disappeared when the Internet appeared, overtaking the telephone with recorded messages to unrestricted browsers. Today it is the hottest toy going to turn professional, played by tens of millions from all the corners of the globe, breaking down all the social barriers (except the physical proximity). Social intercourse became invisible, visible only on the computer screen. The global village is squeaking Imagine that the books in

the libraries could talk. How long this platonic conversation could be sustained? Now the scientists have found out that spending hours and days on the Internet and e-mail could impair a person's sociability rating, and introduce social distortions. He becomes insulated from the society, and facing the human beings face to face in the normal manner in daily life bring up subtle problems. Virtual reality takes its toll, and new technology extracts its price. Nothing in life is free, except the good things: the sun, the air, the water, and human

The conception of society remains struck between the pages of the text books, and the social rating of a person thus imprisoned by the electronic media becomes disoriented. The solution is the old grandmother's cure: come out and meet the people, mix and mingle with them, all in real time and three dimensions. Face to face contact is the norm.

That means use the telephone more for information and less for human communication (the telephone is superior to the e-mail in the presence of the audio voice and its nuances to make the personal-ity glitter. Of course the voice and video mails are also coming up, but these are in 2-dimensions. Even 3D is not enough. The 4th dimension, namely, time, must be real. The orthodox mind chuckles at the thought of the created trying to improve upon the Creator.

Any temporary improvement must be compensated for in the philosophical perspective. Take the case of the mother and her baby communicating from a distance. Where hugging disappears, and what is its effect on both? Touching is an important mode of emotional discharge or outlet. The same goes for eating, and enjoying good food in good company.

The Bengalees would feel miserable without the adda: and the latter cannot be replaced by the mighty and superfast Internet. The laughter can be heard, but what about the smile, and the light that lies in the eyes? Real-time interface and interaction are essential components of life. What is life if there is no time to stand and stare, instead of being imprisoned by a 14-inch screen?

The Internet is a big convenience, but what about the small pleasures of life? Note the most important nuisance, the intervention of the machine between two human beings (computer, keyboard, learning, training, and the boring technical details).

Some writers write the first draft by hand, just to get the feel of the moving fingers writing (interactive mode with constant feedback), and lose their rhythm when using a typewriter or a computer. Perhaps that is why we eat with our fingers and do not use the fork and the spoon. The philosophy is to keep the system simple (like using the loongi, genji, and the gamcha, and drinking ure, simple water). The advertisements of the famous Volkswagon (VW) car carried the slogan "We make it simple."

Quiz: What is you first choice in life — Supplementary or Complementary? Economics is more formal with the three categories of want: essential, necessary, and luxury. The human body is basically impervious to style, fashion, and the modern conveniences (two thirds of the world's population face this reality every day). The mind can be trained and polarized. Acquire or discard?

This is not a sermon against modernity and enjoying the benefits of science and technology. What is wrong with the golden mean? Moderation solves more problems than it creates. The more the desires, the more the wants. We are faced with the ageless philosophy: Plain living and high thinking.

PS: Take a break once in a while. I am not that ascetic!

Pachyderm Predicament HERE was a time in India by Jitendra Verma when humans and the

"Between 1966 to 1976, nearly a third of the nation's elephant habitat was replaced by eucalyptus and other fast-growing species. Similarly, conversion of natural sal forests into teak forests in some parts of eastern India has affected the elephant habitats."

these animals," agrees Vivek Menon, a wildlife conservationists and senior technical consultant at the Asian Elephant Research and Conservation Centre, Bangalore, "And since elephants need a much larger home range than any other land animal, they are usually the first to suffer the consequences of habitat fragmentation or destruction," he

A recent study conducted by the Dehradun-based Wildlife Institute of India, reveals that a hard of 25 elephants needs an area of at least 450 sq km dur-

In Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura, traditional slash-andburn shifting agriculture has led to a severe degradation of elephant habitat. Between 1950 and 1980 about 25 per cent of Tripura's reserve forests were lost. Nagaland lost 35 per cent of its forest while in Megha-

were degraded. This problem is also serious in states like Orissa, Assam, south Bihar and northern parts of Bengal. While villagers on forest fringes live in constant

laya, 43 per cent of the forests

controlled and a balance in maintained between the pachyderm population and their habitat. The captured elephants - whose population would be controlled — could then be domesticated and used as beasts of A K Chaddha, divisional for-

the wild elephant population is

est officer, Bhubaneshwar, suggests: "A new forest reserve force should be developed to monitor the activity." Both short and long term measures are needed to reduce the conflict. Managed elephant reserves, shared by people, should be established.

One of the many difficulties of resolving this issue, according to Rishi, is that the animals, being migratory in nature, often cross over to different states with no regard for the interstate boundaries. However, when it comes to tackling the conflicts, there is minimal interaction or collaboration be-

fear of pachyderm raids, the an-Big Trouble

Problematic elephant population in each state

STATE DISTRICT NO OF **ELEPHANTS** Sibsagar 16 Assam Darang 20 Kamrup 25 Guwahat. Lower Sukanshri 20 Arunachal Pradesh Doimukh 20 Siang Labhanbali West Siang Pasighat, Ruksin Debung-Roing-Shantipur Lohit Namsai 30 Baghty valley Nagaland Jalpaiguri + Darjeeling West Bengal 75 (west of Torsa) East Midnapur (migrants from Bihar) 50 Nokrek, Dadengiri Meghalaya 25 Madhya Pradesh North Sarguja, Jashpur Chandka Kotgarh, Mahagiri, Kalaht Orissa

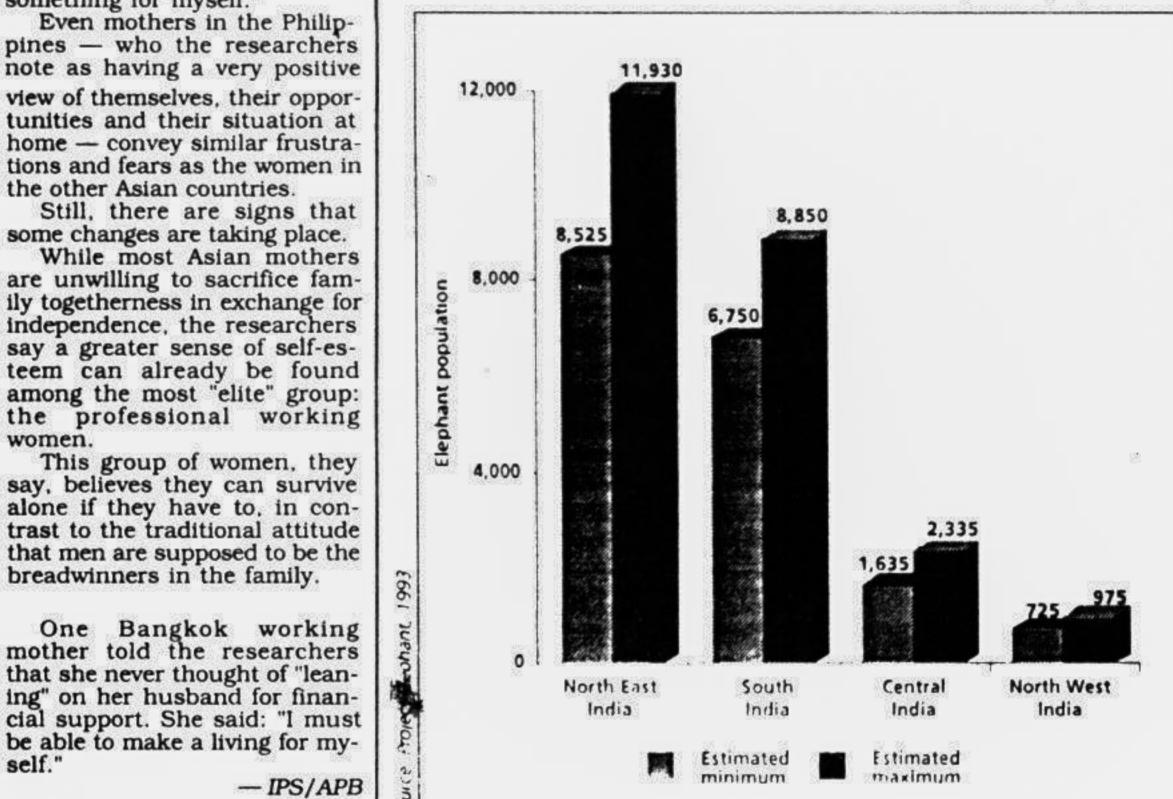
L elephant lived in peace. Then came faulty forest policies and a nationwide destruction of elephant habitats which have forced the animals out of the forests and into nearby villages, where pachyderm raids are becoming increasingly

frequent. As the harvesting season approaches, the people of Nopam, a tiny village near Tezpur in northern Assam, steel themselves for the worst. For the last 10 years, they have witnessed herds of hungry wild elephants raid their crops; crops that they had grown through a year's hard work and care.

So, between September and January, when the fields are harvested, the villagers, together with a few poorlyequipped forest guards, play a risky hide-and-seek game with the marauding animals in their attempts to chase them away.

Staying Alive

Nationwide distribution of the current elephant population



They do everything - light fires, burst firecrackers, even scream, to ward off the herds, but to no avail

Nopam, suffering extensive damage to crops, life and property each year, is not alone. The scene repeats itself all over the country, wherever human habitation and agricultural lands exist on the fringes of elephantpopulated forests. Last year, for instance, 36

people in Assam and 51 in West Bengal died in elephant raids. According to figures released by the Project Elephant report, 1993, of the ministry of environment and forests (MEF) about 250 people and over 50 elephants are killed every year in this conflict.

In the last century, states such as Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, once boasting of pachyderm populations, have witnessed their disappearance.

Elephant count had been shrinking for quite some time but became very noticeable in the mid '70s with conversion of forests into agricultural lands and the practice of monoculture. The pachyderms were left with no choice but to come out of the dwindling forests looking for food, which the nearby agricultural fields supplied in

"Fragmentation of habitat and loss of forest has resulted in tremendous pressure on

abundance.

ing the year as compared to 1,185 sq km in the harvest season. It is around this time that the beasts come in search of food, forcing them to turn into ravaging demons.

According to Vinod Rishi, former director of Project Elephant and currently the chief conservator of forest, north Bengal, conversion of natural forest to commercial timber or pulpwood monoculture plantations of trees such as teak and silver oak has reduced elephant habitat by at least 10 per cent in south India.

"Between 1966 to 1976, nearly a third of the nation's elephant habitat was replaced by eucalyptus and other fastgrowing species. Similarly, conversion of natural sal forests into teak forests in some parts of eastern India has affected the elephant habitats," he says.

Teak trees, he says, form a canopy and prevent growth of plants on the forest floor which are food for the elephants. The resultant shortage of food, according to him, has been responsible for pushing the beasts out into the agricultural fields where they come in contact with humans.

In Arunachal Pradesh, forest officials point out, the habitat available to elephants is shrinking every year due to construction of roads and establishment of human settlements in the foot hills and the imals, too, have suffered. They are harassed, chased and suffer

Source Project Elephant, 1993

near-fatal injuries. Conservationists differ with forest officials over the means to resolve the man-elephant conflicts. The conservationists have frequently accused the officials of not involving the local villages in their conservation programmes, saying that without the local people a conservation movement cannot succeed.

Forest officials, on the other hand, claim that so far, none of the solutions offered by the conservationists have been successful in the field. Solutions suggested by experts have failed, as have habitat restoration and creation of migration paths for the animals are difficult to implement in the field. Most officials think that the conflicts can be resolved only through intensive forest management.

"This is the only way to ensure that the elephants will survive in the wild and won't interfere with man," says Bist Rishi, a forest official who supports the theory of increased participation from the villagers as suggested by the conservationists.

Dinesh Choudhary, an expert on elephants and a licensed hunter based in Assam, thinks that the ban on capturing elephants in the state should be lifted. Instead a certain number of wild elephants could be captured from the forests so that

tween these states. "There is a less-than-desired interstate dialogue and collaboration as far as resolving the problems of elephant management and conservation are concerned," he

In 1992, the MEF launched Project Elephant - an ambitious plan to conserve the country's elephant population and encourage their growth. But this plan failed.

Rishi, former director of the project, accepts these failures but says that the projects is only five years old and one cannot expect it to show spec-tacular results in such a short period. "It is the changing pattern of the human behaviour and land use practices which were not taken care earlier as they were not prevalent at that time," he adds.

How do the villagers perceive the entire issue? they are doubtful of both the forest officials and conservationists. They do not want "outsiders" telling them what to do. "These people (forest offi-

cials and conservationists) are obstructing our way of life and we do not want to take instructions from them about how to live with the elephants," says Santosh Orang from village Baguri near Kaziranga national park, Assam. "For centuries we have been living in their company," says another.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

cessful in her career, busy with societies continue to favour James Bond THE RELIEF BY WAN FLEMING DRAWING BY HORAK ARRIVED OVER AS SEA SLAVE'S LAST CONTACT, MOTHER SHIP STEAMS AT FLANK SPEED TOWARD THE SCENE OF THE MYSTERIOUS DISASTER -





