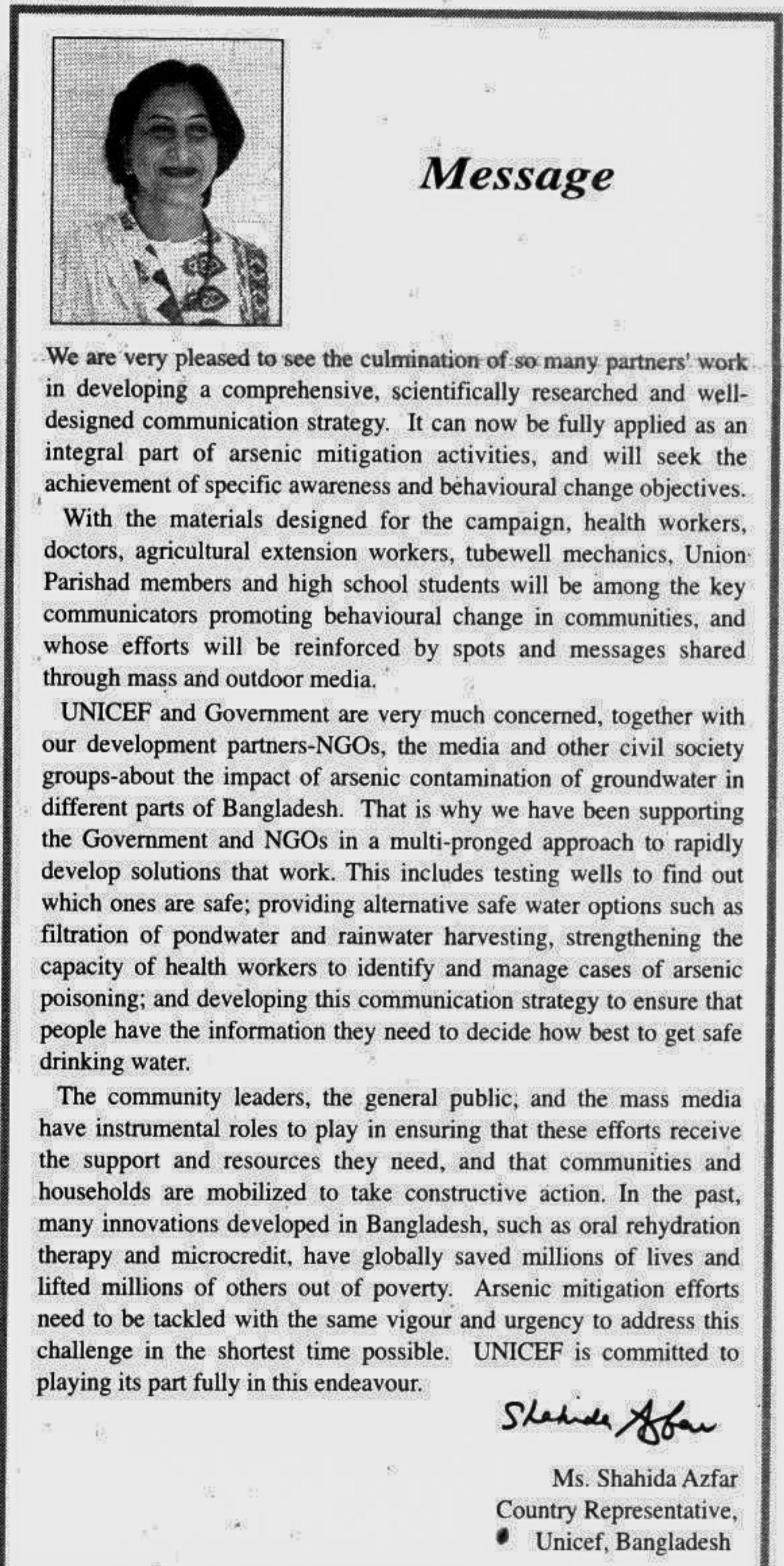
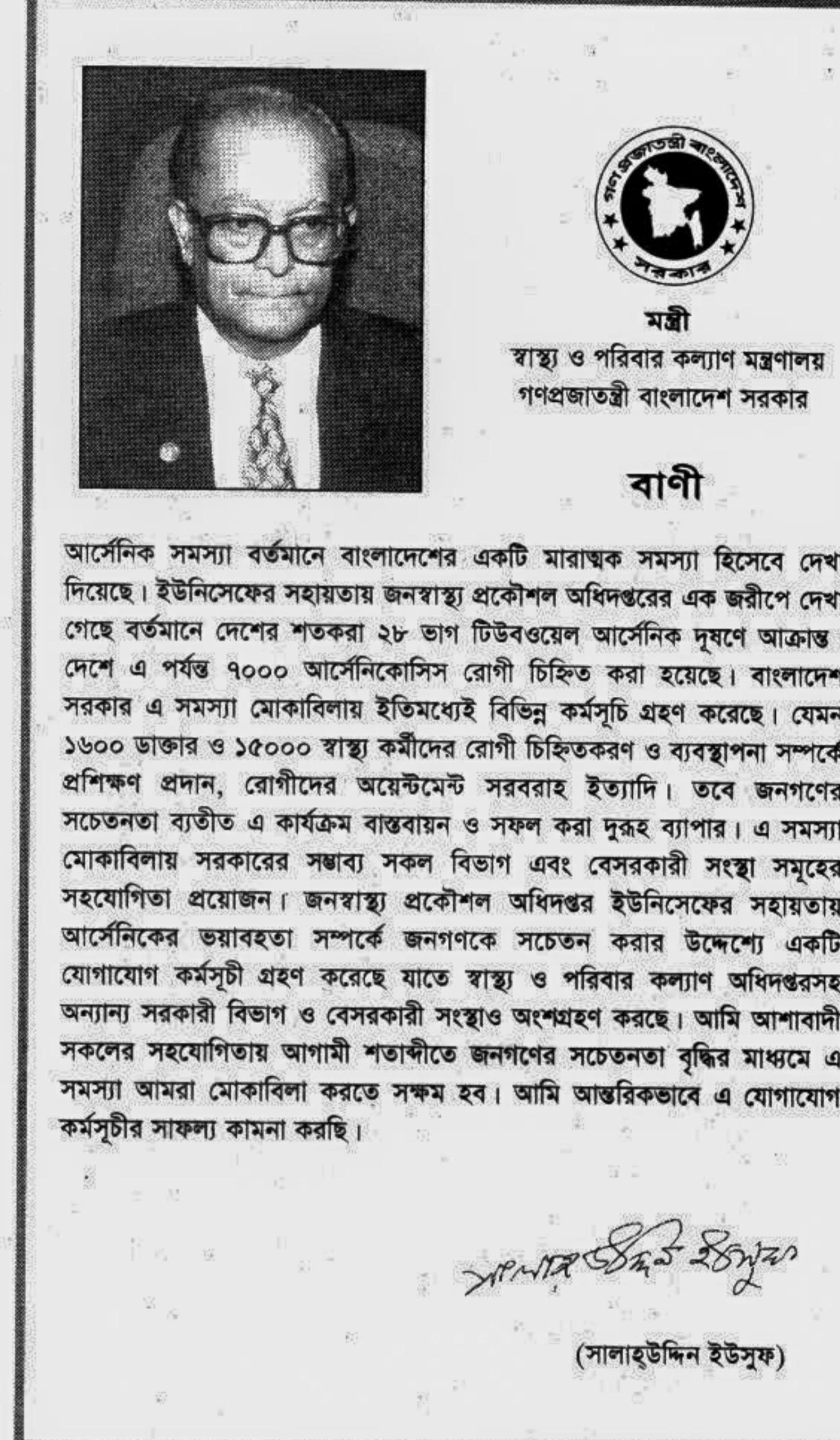
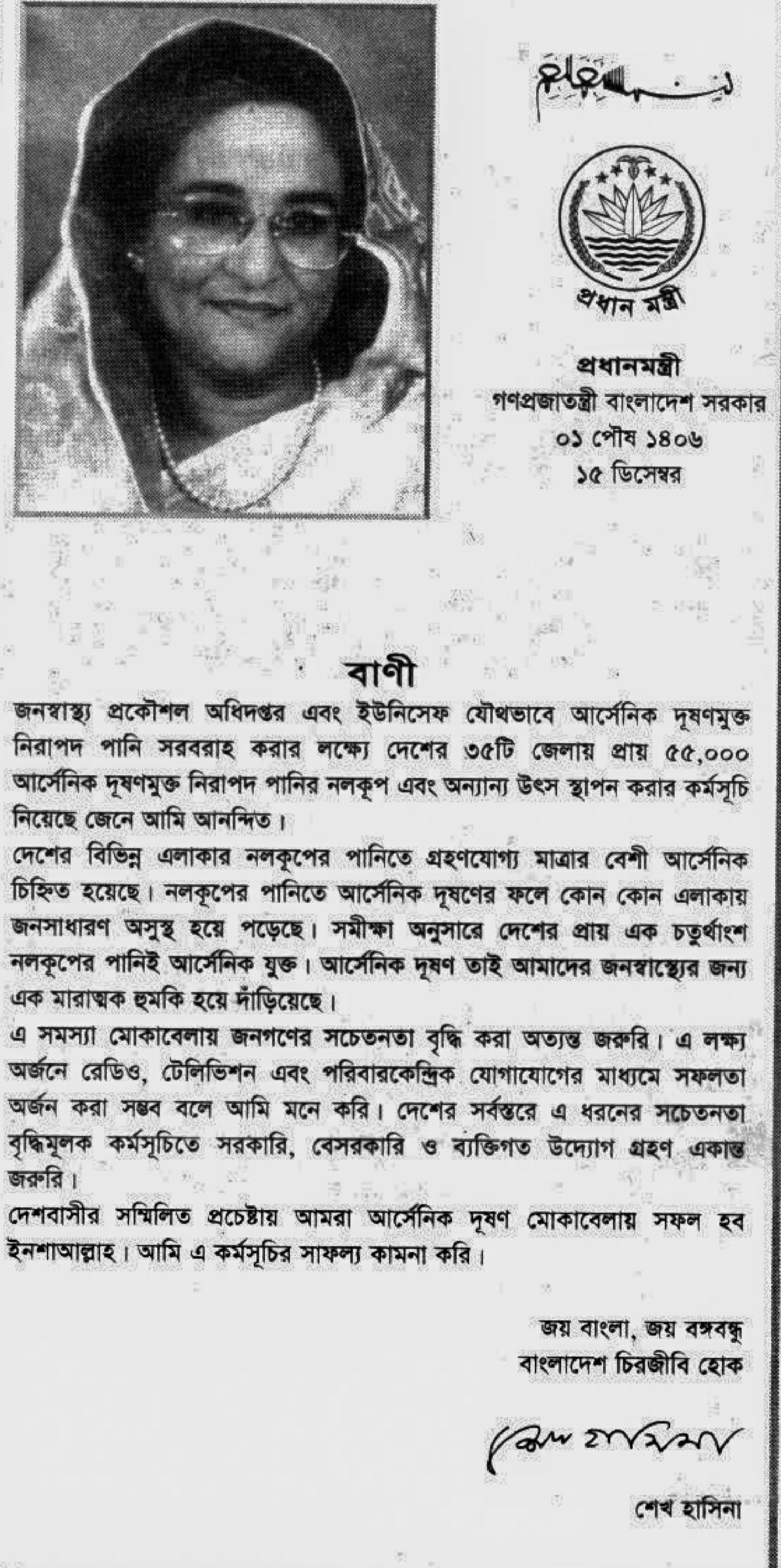


LAUNCHING OF NATIONAL COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN ON ARSENIC MITIGATION

Department of Public Health Engineering and UNICEF



DHAKA, Monday, 20 December 1999



Arsenic Contamination in Bangladesh

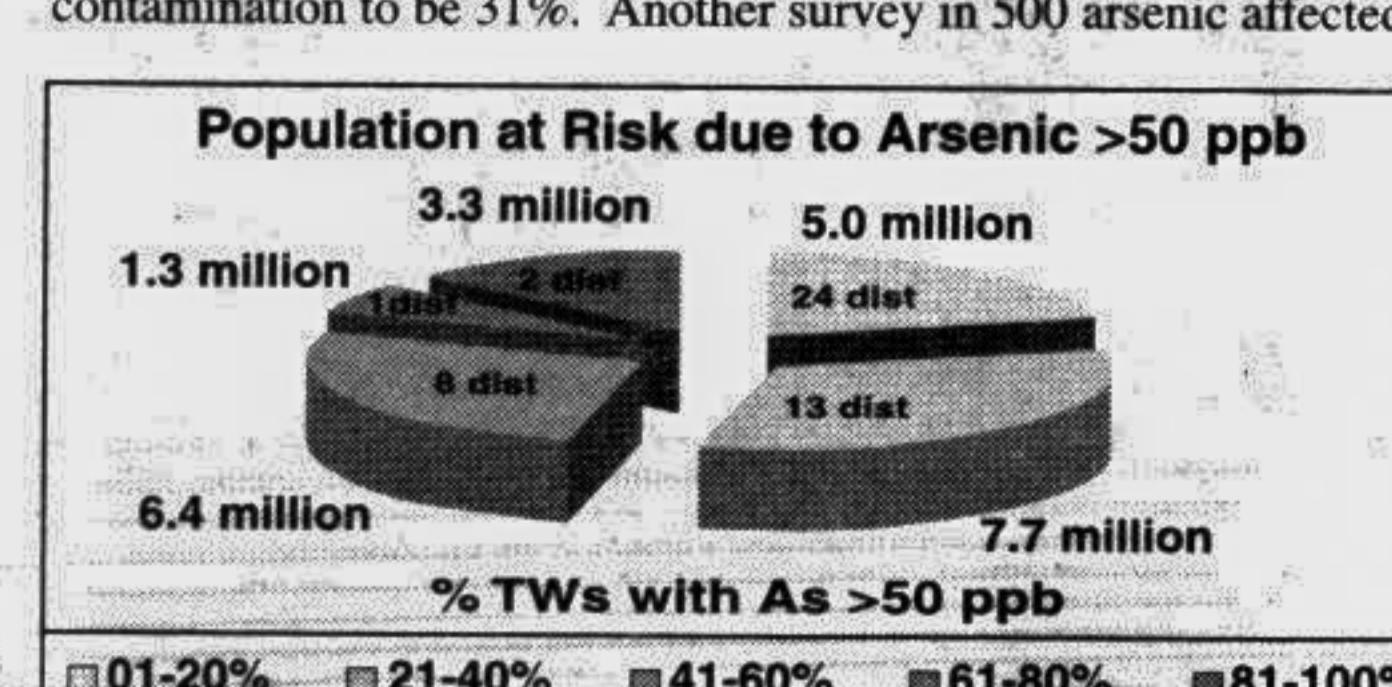
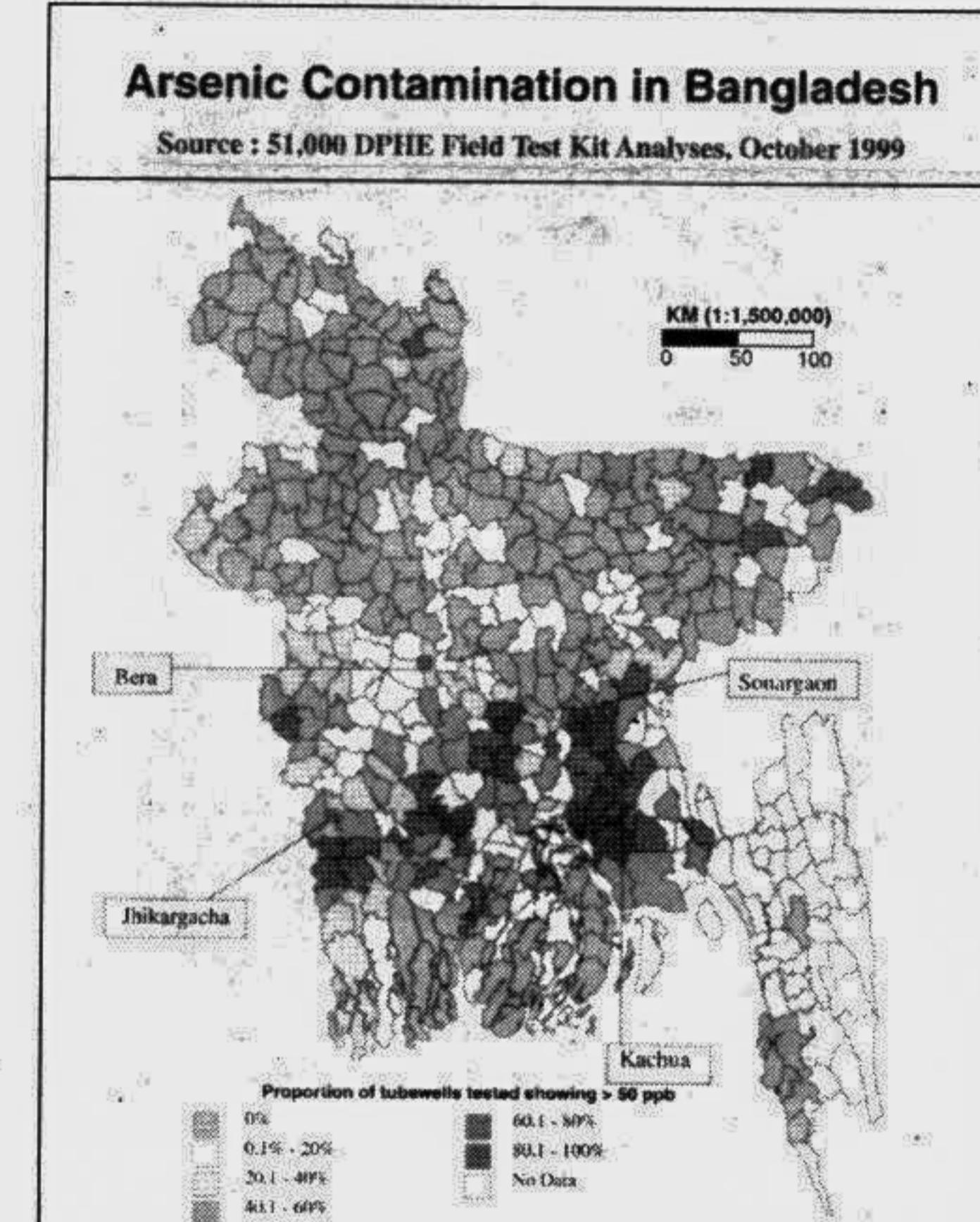
Al-haj Md. Quadiruzzaman
Chief Engineer
Department of Public Health Engineering

The discovery of arsenic in the ground water of Bangladesh is posing a major threat to people's livelihood in the country. More than 90% of the ground water is used for irrigation. Although a relatively small portion of it is used for drinking, 95% of the population rely on this as the source for drinking, thanks to the deltaic conditions that favour the installation of the shallow tubewell and the No 6 hand pump. The Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) is proud to have promoted the technology with the assistance of UNICEF and other donors. Individual household initiatives, assisted by NGOs and the private sector, played an equally important part, as is evident from the fact that three-fourths of the total tubewells today are privately owned. What was hailed until recently as the country's major success story, in having achieved near universal access to drinking water and contributed to the reduction in cholera epidemics as well as diarrhoeal mortality and morbidity, now requires serious reorientation.

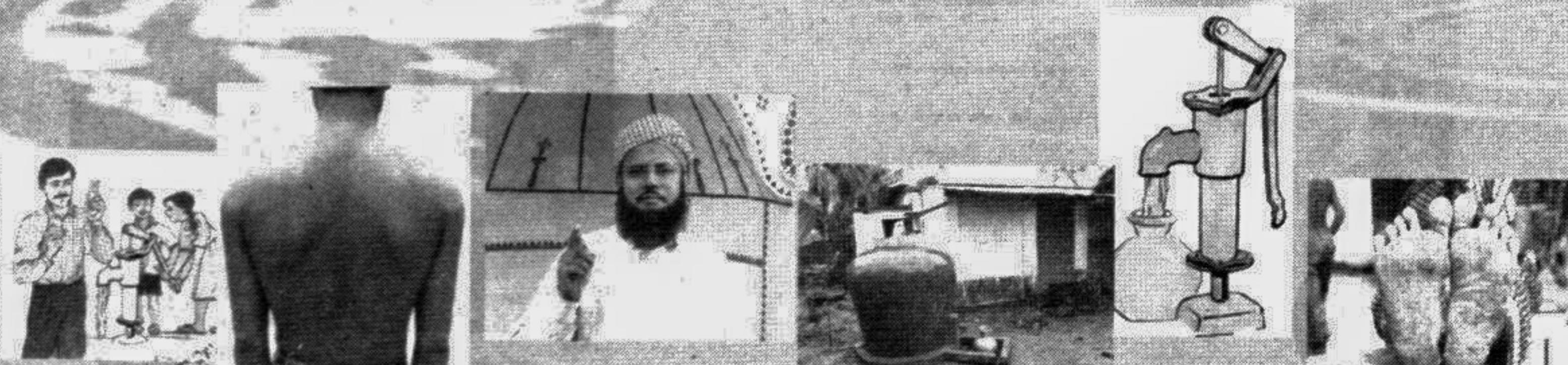
Arsenic is an extremely complex problem. Much is yet to be known regarding its cause as well as the magnitude and extent. Although it started slow, particularly during the few years following the first identification of arsenic contaminated tubewells in 1993, serious efforts are now being undertaken in the last three years. A two pronged approach is now envisioned: **immediate action for relief** on an emergency footing, based on what we know today, while taking necessary measures that help **formulate strategies for long term action**.

Population at Risk

Based on information from the DPHE-UNICEF national testing programme, 29% of 51,000 random tubewells across the country contain arsenic above the maximum permissible level of 55 µg/l.



villages by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Dhaka Community Hospital supported by UNDP indicates that the percentage of contamination is about two times higher. These villages were, however, purposively chosen and are expected to contain higher proportion of contaminated tubewells (the detailed information is not, however, made public yet to facilitate proper comparison). Subject to availability of further information, it



Community-Based Arsenic Mitigation: A Work in Progress

Dr. Deepak Bajracharya
Chief, Water & Environmental Sanitation
UNICEF Bangladesh

The Community-Based Arsenic Mitigation initiative is the beginning of accelerated action to address one of the most serious concerns in Bangladesh. Supported by UNICEF, it is a partnership for action between the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) and three prominent non-government organizations of the country: BRAC, Dhaka Community Hospital and Grameen Bank. The action is concentrated in 788 villages of four thanas: Bera in Pabna District (Dhaka Community Hospital), Jhikargacha in Jessore District (BRAC), Kachua in Chandpur District (Grameen Bank), and Sonargaon in Narayanganj District (BRAC). It integrates four principal elements:

- Test all tubewells, public and private, to determine the extent of arsenic contamination in the area
- Identify arsenicosis patients, provide medical counseling and nutritional advice, and monitor the efficacy of treatments;
- Use a comprehensive communication strategy to raise awareness



এমন খাবার পানি ঢাই যে পানিতে আসেন্টিক ও রোগজীবণ নাই