



The Daily Star

50 years of Saving Sight

Special Supplement

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MESSAGE

As President of Sight Savers International, it gives me pleasure to send greetings to the people of Bangladesh.

Since the foundation of Bangladesh, Sight Savers has been working in partnership with local organisations to prevent blindness and train incurably blind people to lead active and productive lives. During that time, hundreds of thousands of people have had their vision restored by a cataract operation or received sight saving treatment.

The new projects at Gopalganj and Sylhet mark a great step forward in our partnership with government to combat the tragedy of blindness and I wish them every success.

PRINCESS ALEXANDRA
PRESIDENT,
SIGHT SAVERS INTERNATIONAL

MESSAGE

In 19 thanas of the districts of Sylhet, Sunamganj and Habiganj, we will

perform as many as 18,000 cataract surgeries over a two year period. This will make a significant impact in the North East of the country to reduce the number of cataract backlog. (The country as a whole needs more than 150,000 cataract surgeries a year to clear the annual incidence of cataracts and the present level of cataract surgeries is estimated to be about 50,000).

Late Sir John Wilson, who founded the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind, and who was himself blind, knew Bangladesh very well and had visited on many occasions. I know, had he been alive today, he would have been delighted to hear of this initiative resulting in so many lives being changed for the better.

May I add my own personal warm congratulations to a society which has done so much good for the world and for Bangladesh, and is still so active and young at heart.

D C WALKER, CMG, CVO
BRITISH HIGH
COMMISSIONER IN
BANGLADESH

MESSAGE

to combat blindness to restore sight for the next millennium.

In Bangladesh Sight Savers has funded over 800,000 cataract surgeries since 1973. This surgeries were done as an outcome of over 10 millions eye examinations conducted in rural eye camps and eye hospitals established in partnership with local service providers. Also we helped our project partners to take the benefit of IOL implantation surgery to the poor communities through subsidized services. In order to permit this, Sight Savers funded capacity building initiatives in terms of providing training and equipment.

Sight Savers International is proud of its project partners who have spectacularly demonstrated their great sincerity, dedication and hard work towards restoring sights and changing lives of the poor communities of the country.

On this day I wish to recognize and appreciate the tremendous contribution made by our valued partners, Government officials, National Institute of Ophthalmology, volunteers and local leaders in the reduction of blindness.

Wishing you all the best and a very happy new millennium.

M JALALUDDIN KHAN
Country Representative,
Bangladesh

Global drive to eliminate avoidable blindness

The Sight Savers International is celebrating its 50 years of 'saving sight and changing lives' all over the world this year with a renewed pledge to prevent blindness among more people than before.

Besides gearing up its own projects in Bangladesh and elsewhere in Asia, Latin America and Africa, the Sight Savers has joined the VISION 2020 global campaign sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) as its key partner to eliminate avoidable blindness.

Today, of an estimated 180 million people worldwide, who are visually disabled, between 40 to 50 million persons are blind and, by definition, can not walk about unaided. They are usually in need of vocational and social support.

The loss of sight causes enormous human suffering for the affected individuals and their families. It also represents a public health, social and economic problem for countries, especially the developing ones, where 9 out of 10 of the world's blind live. In fact, around 60 per cent of them reside in sub-Saharan Africa, China and other parts of East Asia.

Approximately, 50 per cent of the world's blind suffer from cataract. The majority of the remaining persons are blind from conditions that include, among others, glaucoma, trachoma, onchocerciasis (commonly known as river blindness) and different conditions of childhood blindness.

Despite a half century of efforts, commencing with organized trachoma control activities, the global burden of blindness is growing largely because of the population growth and ageing.

If additional resources are

not urgently mobilized and efforts are not made to curb this trend by 2020 the global burden of blindness can double.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates, about 80 per cent of the global blindness is avoidable. It results either from the conditions that could have been prevented or controlled if the available knowledge and interventions had been timely applied (e.g. trachoma and river blindness) or it can be successfully treated with the sight restored (e.g. cataract).



Significant progress in the prevention of avoidable blindness has already been made through individual efforts of the international community, including those by the WHO and its member states, other UN agencies, NGOs and the private sector.

Given the scope of the problem, the time has come for a major focused and concerted international effort to combat avoidable blindness. The WHO, in partnership with a task force

and the feasibility and affordability of interventions to prevent and treat them. These are cataract, trachoma, onchocerciasis, childhood blindness and refractive errors and low vision.

Other disorders, such as glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy, do not at present meet all these criteria. However, the global initiative progresses, priorities are likely to include these challenges.

CATARACT, which refers to clouding of the crystalline lens

of international NGOs, including the Sight Savers International, has already launched a common agenda, namely VISION 2020—the right to sight—in this respect for global action. The Sight Savers International is one of the founding members of the VISION 2020.

From among the many causes of avoidable blindness, five conditions have been identified as immediate priorities within the framework of Vision 2020.

The choice of these conditions is based on the burden of the blindness they represent

of the eye, stands out as the first priority amongst the major causes of the blindness. Today, an estimated 20 million of people are blind from this condition alone. Cataracts are not generally amenable to prevention but currently available surgery can restore near normal vision in a large proportion of the cataract blind.

The number of cataract operations per million population per year (cataract surgical rate or CSR) is a useful measure of the delivery of the eye care in different settings. There is currently a wide variation in the CSR from country to country and even within countries, ranging from an estimated 5000 in the USA to approximately 200 in the whole of Africa.

In poorer countries, financial and cultural barriers often exist to accessing surgical services even where available. In addition, productivity in terms of surgical services is low. It is envisaged that under the Vision 2020 there will be a marked increase in the number of cataract surgeries performed, particularly in the developing world.

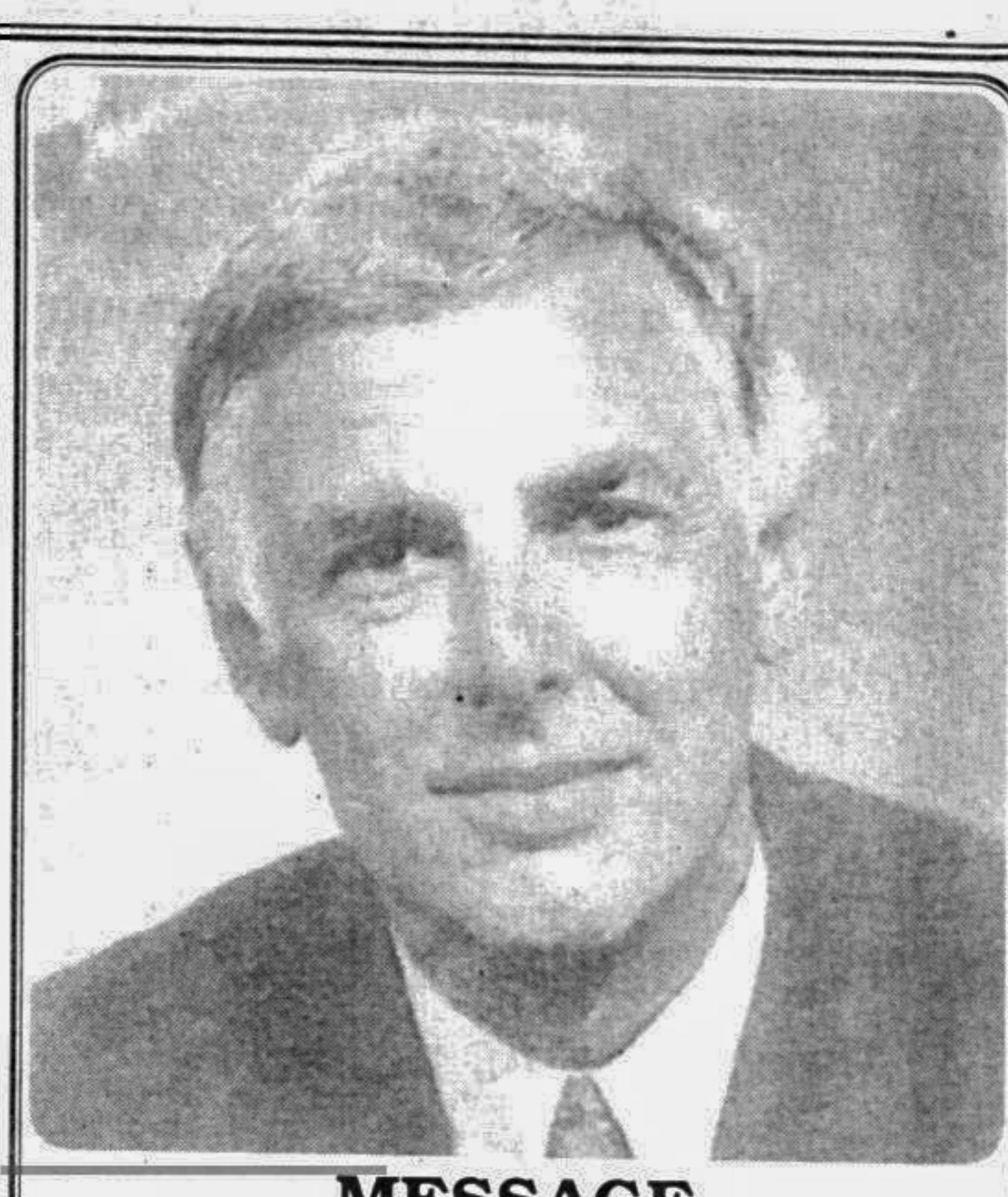
In global terms, it is necessary to increase the currently estimated seven million cataract operations to 12 million in the year 2000 and 20 million in 2010. By the year 2020, the final target should be 32 million cataract surgery annually.

In addition, the global initiative will place emphasis on achieving:

- High success rate in terms of restored vision and quality of life outcomes.

- Affordable and accessible services, especially for under-served populations.

- Measure to overcome barriers and increase the use of services.



MESSAGE

As Executive Director of the Sight Savers International it gives me enormous pleasure to send my congratulations and best wishes on the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Sight Savers International.

We are proud to have been active in the fight against blindness in Bangladesh since the foundation of the country in 1971.

The celebration is particularly satisfying for the Sight Savers International, coinciding as it does with the launch of Vision 2020, and our joint contribution to Bangladesh to this global initiative to eliminate the main causes of blindness in order to give all people of the world, particularly the millions of needlessly blind, the right to sight.

I wish every success to Sight Savers programme in Bangladesh and look forward in the years ahead to strengthening our partnership with government and non-government organisations so that we can, together, tackle and overcome both the humanitarian and socio-economic challenges of blindness in Bangladesh.

Richard B. Porter
RICHARD B. PORTER
Executive Director

Cataract Campaign

To make its 50th anniversary the Sight Savers International - Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind - a British Charity, has launched a CATARACT CAMPAIGN to reduce the growing risk of blindness, which is increasing about 1.2 million per year due to both enlarging and ageing of world population.

An estimated 25 million blind people live in Asia, 7 million in Africa and two million in Latin America. Of this, 50 per cent is treatable while 20-30 per cent is preventable. The Sight Savers International (SSI) believes that approximately about three quarters of blindness can be eliminated if services are made available to at risk sectors of world population.

Despite a half century of efforts, commencing with organized trachoma control activities, the global burden of blindness is growing largely because of the population growth and ageing.

Given the scope of the problem, the time has come for a major focused and concerted international effort to combat avoidable blindness. The WHO, in partnership with a task force

doing follow-up and post operative evaluation on probable cases.

The Sight Savers International restored eye sight to over eight lakh Bangladeshi people and offered treatment to over one crore eye patients since 1973. At present the Sight Savers is engaged in sight restoration, rehabilitation, education and IOL Training Programmes for the blind with its following partners: (1) BNSB—Sirajganj (2) Bogra Christian Hospital (3) BNSB—Comilla (4) Quasem Foundation (5) Magura Shishu Hospital (6) Cox's Bazar Baitush Sharaf Hospital (7) M A Ispahani Institute of Ophthalmology and Islamia Eye Hospital (8) Voluntary Association for Rural Development (9) BNCB—For Gopalganj National Eye Care Pilot Project & Bangladesh National Blindness Survey Project (10) Assistance for Blind Children (11) Rangpur Unnayan Samajik Sangstha

and child eye patients who are generally deprived of medical care due social stigma and lack of facilities for physical movement.

The MOT service will help overcome the problems of reaching the eye care service to the so far unattended poor patients and widen the scope of reducing the backlog cataract patients living in villages spread over the country.

Besides the activities of the MOTs in rural areas are generating awareness among the people of all strata of the society about the need for accessing eye care services.

To ensure quality treatment and building up confidence in the mode of service among eye patients all surgeries by the MOT teams are being done under microscope. Thus the IOL implant services have been taken to the doorstep of rural people ensuring better visual rehabilitation.

With a view to initiating the cataract campaign in Bangladesh, SSI has included 19 thanas (local administrative areas) of Sylhet, Sunamganj and Habiganj districts under the first ever national eye care project.



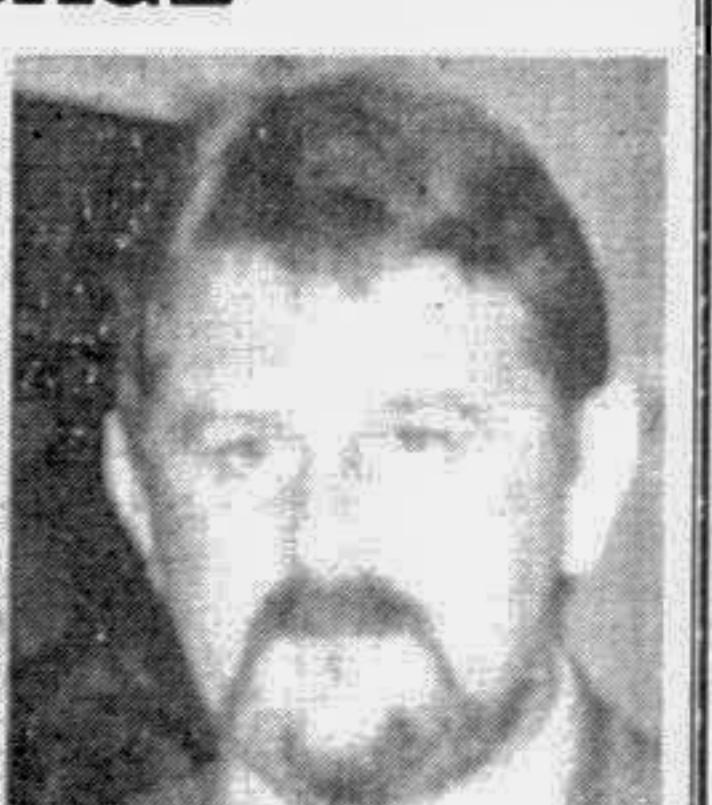
MESSAGE

As we Sight Savers International celebrate 50 years of global blindness prevention, I have great pleasure in sending my best wishes to all our partners in Bangladesh on the occasion. It was due to their sincere and continued cooperation the Sight Savers could achieve a great headway in carrying eye care services, including high quality care, to the doorsteps of the vast rural masses of the country.

Sight Savers have so far restored sight to over four million cataract sufferers but with the number of blind population rising fast due to greater longevity the dream of reducing blindness still remains a far cry. Sight Savers is, therefore, also working on developing a permanent and sustainable eye care service available all the year round.

Let the spirit of our 50 years of 'Saving Sight and Changing Lives' inspire us to work more hard with dedication to the cause of the welfare of those unfortunate millions who could be brought back to the life of dignity through tender care.

CATHERINE CROSS,
DIRECTOR,
OVERSEAS PROGRAMME



MESSAGE

Sight Savers International has been working with partners in Bangladesh since 1973 to combat blindness, focussing on restoring sight to the curable blind and providing rehabilitation services to the incurably blind.

We believe that these have been productive partnerships and hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshis have benefited from these joint programmes with both government and non-government partners. All those involved in the struggle for sight must be sincerely congratulated on the part they have played in this noble endeavour.

The celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Sight Savers International this year marks Bangladesh's systematic response to Vision 2020, a new WHO global initiative, aiming at eliminating preventable blindness from cataract and four other key diseases within the next 20 years.

The challenge is enormous

techniques and supporting Indian manufacture of replacement lenses.

Development of partners' operating effectiveness and fundraising capacity, with a view to phasing out SSI support.

50th Anniversary

In 1999 we are marking 50 years of saving sight and changing lives with a Cataract campaign which aims to restore sight to over 400,000 people by the end of the year 2000. This campaign is the UK's first major contribution to Vision 2020.

Fundraising in the UK

At Sight Savers we are heavily dependent on support from the general public, with almost 80% of our income coming from individual donations and legacies. We also receive funding for a number of projects from the Department for International Development and the European Community.

Sight Savers International at a glance

Sight Savers International (SSI) is the UK's leading charity dedicated to preventing and curing blindness in developing countries. It was founded as the British Empire Society for the Blind in 1950. Our first director, Sir John Wilson, who is himself blind, played a key role in developing a number of pioneering programmes.

In 1958 our title changed to the Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind and in 1987, following a very successful Blue Peter appeal of the same name, we adopted the title Sight Savers, as it more closely represents what we do.

We currently operate in over 20 developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. From the outset Sight Savers has worked in partnership with governments and voluntary organisations to maximise the impact of our programmes.

Milestones

Surveys in East Africa showed 80% of blindness was preventable or curable.

Studies in West Africa revealed the scale of the river

blindness (onchocerciasis) problem and investigated ways of controlling it.

Eye clinics were set up in Nigeria and surgical services started in East Africa.

Rural training schemes for blind people enable them to play their part in village life.

The Sixties

Work expanded into Asia, with eye camps in Pakistan and India providing mass cataract surgery. Mobile Eye Units started work in Africa, travelling thousands of miles to bring eye care to rural communities.

Successful pilot scheme in Nigeria showed that blind children could be educated in standard schools, with support from specialist travelling teachers.

The Seventies

Base eye hospitals established in India to provide year-round care.

Fund set up to supply blind pupils with braille and mathematics equipment.

Played a key role in establishing the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness to coordinate the global fight against blindness.

The Eighties

Training of local staff seen as key to long-term eye care.

Established training course in Malawi which now serves much of central and south Africa.

African Braille Computer Development began producing textbooks for blind pupils.

Development of Community-Based Rehabilitation, providing individual training for blind people in their own homes.

Blue Peter's Sight Saver campaign on BBC children's TV broke all previous records, raising over £2 million for our work in Africa.

The Nineties

Development of Comprehensive Eye Care Service (CES), linking eye care, education and rehabilitation services in a defined district.

SSI-supported Mectizan distribution programmes protected four million people against River Blindness.

Bringing benefits of modern cataract surgery to poor communities through helping to set up training courses in new

countries.

The Tenth Anniversary

At Sight Savers we are heavily dependent on support from the general public, with almost 80% of our income coming from individual donations and legacies. We also receive funding for a number of projects from the Department for International Development and the European Community.