

## FOCUS

## Clinton's Journey to Moscow

by Henry Kissinger

For a discussion with Putin to be meaningful, Clinton needs to focus on two subjects. One is to ensure that Russia's voice is respectfully heard in the emerging international system. At the same time, President Clinton must stress — against all his inclinations — that geopolitics has not been abolished.

America cannot remain indifferent to Russia's support of Iran's nuclear programme, its systematic attack on American policies in the Gulf, especially in Iraq, and its eagerness to foster groupings whose proclaimed aim is to weaken so-called American hegemony. America should respect legitimate Russian security interests.

PRESIDENT Bill Clinton's imminent visit to Moscow (June 4) takes place in anomalous circumstances. The new Russian president, Vladimir Putin, is developing policies intended to shape Russia's future. President Clinton, near the end of his eight-year term, must be careful not to foreclose his successor's options.

The difference in perspective is compounded by a gulf between the two leaders' perceptions of the nature of international politics. Putin has articulated a set of principles to enable Russia to resume the role of a great power and "to uphold its national interests in the international arena." The Clinton administration seems to believe that reform of Russia's domestic institutions is the major solvent to bring about stable Russo-American relationships. Hence its policy emphasizes constant exhortation regarding internal developments in Moscow. And its political agenda stresses a view of arms control that, if implemented, is certain to trigger a political explosion in this country.

This is the real gap that challenges the two leaders when they meet in Moscow. Great powers have interests that they seek to vindicate by their own efforts or to adjust by diplomacy. But the administration policy toward Russia has focused on Russia's domestic redemption. The Moscow visit can make progress if it begins the process of treating Russia as a serious power. It will fail if it becomes the occasion for discussions on Russia's domestic structure or for arms-control schemes doomed to failure in America.

All Western leaders have anxiously pursued a dialogue with the new Russian president. In advance of it, they have showered him with accolades testifying to his intelligence and commitment to reform, and, somewhat condescendingly, as a "quick learner." In the process, they have abandoned the moral precepts they proclaimed less than a year earlier. Then, they justified their Kosovo policy as a new moral dispensation that would no longer ignore domestic repression as an internal matter.

But when, six months later, Chechnya produced an almost precise replica of Kosovo with

even higher civilian casualties, they changed their tune. The "freedom fighters" of Kosovo were transformed into "rebels" in Chechnya. President Clinton specifically approved Russia's right "to oppose violent Chechen rebels," drawing the line only at "the treatment of refugees," seemingly endorsing the actions that produced the refugees in the first place.

The West has a stake in a peaceful and democratic Russia that would contribute to a more stable international order. And Russia is clearly in the process of a historic transition. But history, culture and geography have left a legacy that cannot be removed by "dialogue" for its own sake. Throughout Boris Yeltsin's period in office, Western leaders acted as if they were a party to Russian internal politics. Ignoring a corrupt economy and autocratic governmental practices, President Clinton, on the occasion of Yeltsin's resignation, spoke of Russia as having emerged as a "pluralist political system and civil society competing in the world markets and plugged into the Internet."

Russian domestic reform is not a favour Putin does for America; it is imposed on him by reality, as he has pointed out in his own thoughtful manifesto, "Russia at the Turn of the Millennium," published on Dec. 28, 1999, just before he became acting president. There are some ways we can and should help, but, in the end, Russian domestic economic reform is a Russian internal problem that depends largely on Russian de-

cisions. The deepest foreign policy challenge posed by Russia is how a potentially powerful country with a turbulent history can evolve a stable relationship with the rest of the world. For four centuries, imperialism has been Russia's basic foreign policy as it has expanded from the region around Moscow to the shores of the Pacific and the centre of Europe, relentlessly subjugating weaker neighbours and seeking to overtake those not under its direct control.

From the Holy Alliance to the Brezhnev doctrine, Russia has often identified its security with imposing its domestic structure on its neighbours and beyond. Russia has only peripherally shared in the Enlightenment and has never experienced a genuine democracy. Now reduced to the boundaries of Peter the Great in Europe, Russia must adjust to the loss of its empire even as it builds historically unfamiliar domestic institutions. The West does itself no favour by pretending that Russia has already culminated a process in fact only in its very inception, or to celebrate Putin for qualities he has not been in office long enough to demonstrate.

Paradoxically, Putin may prove an effective interlocutor because he does not seem willing to play the game of appealing to our preconceptions. He emphatically does not share the Western assessment of Russia's internal evolution. In his seminal manifesto, Putin declared

that "it will not happen, if it ever happens at all, that Russia will become the second edition of, say, the United States or Great Britain.... For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly which should be got rid of. Quite the contrary, they see it as a guarantor of order and the initiator and the main driving force of any change." Putin proposed to base domestic reform in Russia not on Western individualism but on what he described as the traditional values of Russia — in his words, patriotism, belief in Russia's greatness, statism and social

solidarity.

Russian policy under Yeltsin and, so far, under Putin clearly has as one of its objectives to make independence so painful for those states by the direct presence of Russian troops, the encouragement of civil wars or economic pressure — as to cause return to the Russian womb to appear as the lesser of two evils.

Thus the leader Clinton is about to meet seeks cooperation on economics, but, in politics, he will attempt to generate countervailing pressures to what he considers America's quest for domination. Russia is bound to have a special concern for security around its vast periphery, and the West should be careful about extending its military system too close to Russia's shrunken borders. But, equally, the West has a right to ensure that Russia will seek security by measures short of domination. If Russia becomes comfortable in its present frontiers — and with 11 time zones there is no obvious reason for claustrophobia — its relations with the outside world will rapidly normalize.

Thus for a discussion with

Putin to be meaningful, Clinton needs to focus on two subjects. One is to ensure that Russia's voice is respectfully heard in the emerging international system. At the same time, President Clinton must stress — against all his inclinations — that geopolitics has not been abolished. America cannot remain indifferent to Russia's support of Iran's nuclear programme, its systematic attack on American policies in the Gulf, especially in Iraq, and its

eagerness to foster groupings whose proclaimed aim is to weaken so-called American hegemony. America should respect legitimate Russian security interests. But this presupposes a Russian definition of "legitimate" compatible with the independence of Russia's neighbours and such serious American concerns as proliferation of nuclear and missile technology.

President Clinton has implied another major objective on his visit to Moscow: a breakthrough on arms control, specifically regarding the ABM treaty, missile defence and reductions of offensive weapons. A word of caution is in order. The administration is highly uncomfortable with missile defence. If unavoidable for domestic reasons, it clearly prefers to squeeze it into a framework where it is confined to threats from so-called rogue states such as North Korea. Yet an ABM system aimed at North Korea will also be useful against a threat from China, and a strategic defence against China that omits Russia implies a definition of national security priorities that will profoundly affect all other international relationships. A lame-duck president should not attempt definitive breakthroughs on so controversial a subject.

As for offensive limitations, the administration is proceeding with the same avoidance of public and congressional consultations that wrecked the Comprehensive Test Ban treaty. There has been no public discussion or serious briefing with respect to the implications of a ceiling of 1,500 warheads that the administration is reportedly seeking. How is this to be distributed among existing categories of weapons? Does it require different types of weapons? What is the relationship to missile defence? What would be the impact on global deterrence and foreign policy commitments?

While Putin is concentrating on the modernization of Russia, which has its own momentum, our challenge is to deal with its international consequences. And, in what is left of the Clinton administration, the best that can be achieved in this respect is to start, rather than to conclude, a dialogue.

Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

## Clueless in Drought

by Ajit Chak

INDIANS have lived with drought since time immemorial. Communities have built water-harvesting structures and learnt to treasure the value of every raindrop. All this has been keeping in mind that it does not rain throughout the year and it may not rain next year. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the Indian media has no sense of history. The media's reaction to the drought is the same as their reaction to a fire or a gas leak tragedy. They are treating it like a catastrophe, not as a process that needs to be managed.

To begin with when other sections of society were talking about the drought as far back as October, the mainstream media woke up to it a few weeks ago, that too because water riots broke out in Gujarat resulting in casualties. Something the media understands. Next came a flood of drought-related stories in the press. But the understanding of the crisis was in the disaster mode and the issues that were raised were about disaster relief, almost as if they were talking about a cyclone or an earthquake. One nearly expected television reporters to ask questions like what is rain, followed by what is drought and then talk about causality figures.

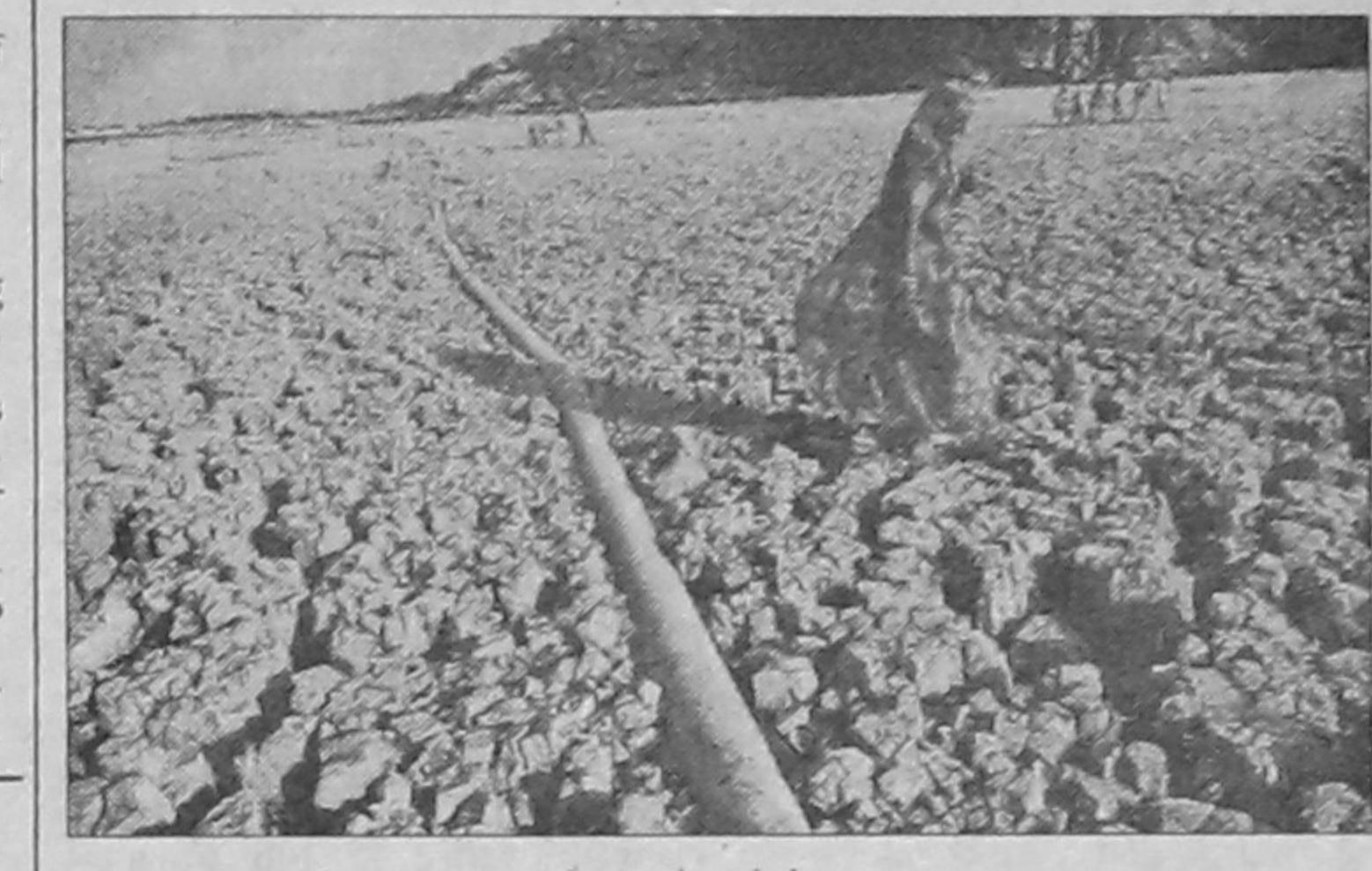
But a drought is not a catastrophe. It can be managed. As part of this process communities try and anticipate the crisis. They do so by taking measures to conserve and harvest water. Water use is regulated.

Where the ecology is fragile, farmers desist from planting water-intensive crops like sugarcane and rice. More than 60 villages have proven that drought is a myth — that this system works in the Alwar district of Rajasthan and the Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh. Even in this drought there is water for drinking and irrigation in the wells out there.

While it is good that the media has finally woken up to the drought, they should try and cover it more as a process than as an event. There should be a post-drought coverage as well so that issues of water and the role of communities in managing it are kept under public scrutiny. We don't need drought relief but relief against drought.

Then also there should be an analysis of what goes on in the name of drought-relief measures. There is a story that dates back to the time of the Nawabs of Avadh. The kingdom was experiencing a severe drought. As part of the drought relief work it was decided that a palace be built in Lucknow. The people were provided with work and food. Even the nobles and high officials were provided with work. While the workers were paid for raising the walls during the day, the nobles were paid for pulling down the walls at night, as it would be beneath their status to be seen mingling with the common folk. Everybody loved the drought.

Down to Earth Features



A water pipeline passes through a lake

## Flash Flood Management in Haor Areas

by M A Matin

FLASH Forecasting and Warning centre has started issuing flood bulletins from 1st of May 2000. I could locate a flash flood warning message issued by the centre as follows:

Flash Flood Warning Message: 2nd May 2000

The prevailing flash flood situation in northeastern part (greater Sylhet) of the country may deteriorate further as there is possibility of further rainfall around that region.

The sequence of events were as follows:

Date	River level situation	Rainfall
1/5/2000	Surma at Kanairhat is flowing 74 cm above DL. Kushiyara at Amalsih was flowing only 15 cm below DL. River levels at Sheola and Habiganj were not available.	Rainfall recorded at Sylhet, Moulvi bazar and Monu railway bridge ranged from 62 to 91 mm. Rainfall at Sheola, Kanairhat and Sunamganj were not available.
2/5/2000	Water level at Sheola, Kanairhat and Sunamganj were not available. But it could be guessed, Kanairhat continued to be above DL and Kushiyara at Amalsih, Monu at Monu railway br. and Khowai at Habiganj crossed DL.	Rainfall at Sylhet, Moulvi bazar, Habiganj and Monu railway br. ranged from 30 to 111 mm. Rainfall at Sheola, Kanairhat and Sunamganj were not available.
3/5/2000	Water level at Sheola, Kanairhat and Sunamganj were not still available. But it could be guessed, Kanairhat continued to be above DL and Kushiyara, Monu and Khowai continued to flow above DL.	Rainfall at Sylhet, Moulvi bazar, Habiganj and Monu railway br. ranged from 12 to 28 mm. Rainfall at Sheola, Kanairhat and Sunamganj were not available.

On 5th May Surma, Monu and Khowai fell below DL while the Kushiyara fell below danger level the next day.

I don't remember to have seen any news about this flood which caused the Surma, Kushiyara, Monu and Khowai to remain above DL simultaneously for 2 to 4 days. This is a very critical period for the haor areas of Sylhet that grows only one crop during the year. The harvesting is generally complete by end of May. How did this flood affect the boro crop?

The only news I found in a section of the press on 15/5/2000 where a UNB reported news item dated Netrokona May 11 says:

"Boro paddies on vast tracks of land in haor areas of 5 upazilas were inundated as flood wa-

ter from rain-swollen rivers poured into croplands in last few days. Standing crops, mainly boro paddies, on 50,000 hectares of land in Kaliazuri, Madan, Mohanganj, Atpara, Kalimakanda upazilas went under flood water, disheartening some 15 lakh farmers. The flood triggered by incessant rain and onrush of hill water, takes more and more areas into its grip everyday displacing hundreds of people."

Boro crops of many haor areas are generally protected by submersible embankment. These low height embankments provide protection to the haor areas up to end of May when

available on 2nd and 3rd May, we do not know if the river level touched or crossed the maximum level. It is also noticed that the median level at Sunamganj by end of May is 6.56 m-PWD but water level on 4th May rose to 7.38 i.e. 82 cm (2'-8") above median level.

How often such levels are expected at Sunamganj? An analysis of water level at Sunamganj for the 1st fortnight of May (during 1949-95) shows that this level has a return period of about eight years and was exceeded only four times during the period of 47 years as shown below:

Year	HWL (1-15 May)
1991	8.35
1977	7.62
1992	7.43
1956	7.40
2000	7.36

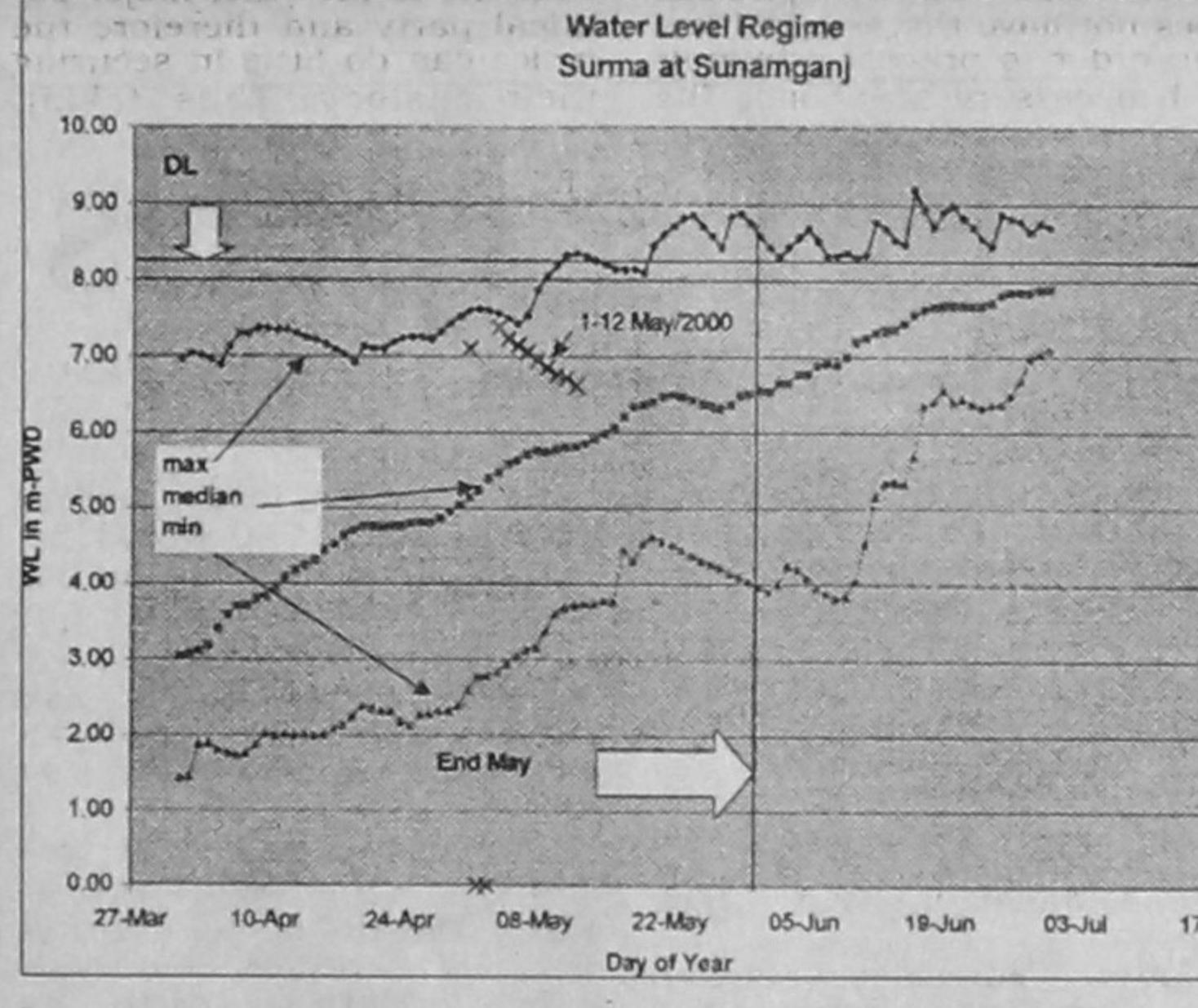
I met one of my friends on May 13 working in Jamalganj upazila with CNRS. He said boro crops suffered damages in Pagner haor and Hallir haor. Some of the breaches occurred in the temporary closures of interconnecting canals of haor and the peripheral rivers. Only a field survey can determine the extent of damages to the boro crop.

This area is far downstream from Sunamganj on the Surma. In Jamalganj thana the Hallir haor lies on the right bank while Pagner haor lies on the left bank. Some distance downstream of Jamalganj the flow of two other rivers (Bhogai, Kangsa and Bhanu-Baulai) join the Surma. It will be of some interest to compare flood level at Sunamganj with those in the haor areas at Mohanganj and at Sukdebpur as follows:

Comparison of annual Flood levels

Could we think of an improved management of this flash flood? We have to remember

that the river level gauge shown above. The upper and lower curve are the recorded maximum and minimum April-June water level while the middle curve is the median curve for the period of record (1949-95). This year between 1-12 May the water level (shown by symbol XXX) reached almost the maximum level of the season. In fact since water level at Sunamganj was not



their regular monitoring stations. So this situation needs attention and improvement to address the first point.

Regarding the 2nd point, who are the stakeholders? Boro crop growers of course. Then among others, we may consider upazila administration LGED, and BWDB officials at field level. Did these stakeholders receive the warning message? I think, at this time no clear-cut arrangement exists to reach the warning message to the stakeholders at that level.

Next point is what farmers and other stakeholders are supposed to do on receipt of the warning message? We have to remember, not very many things can be done within the short lead time of flash flood forecasts. Even then, little bits of improvement in different stages in an organised community can bring substantial benefit. The important point is that the community must respond to the warning message promptly and decisively.

What can be done to improve the performance of FF&WC? They must get the required data on a real time basis. Without placing all the burden on the FF&WC we may think of beneficiary participation in this regard. For example, let upazila administration take the responsibility of operating a water level station at Jamalganj on the Surma (a good location for monitoring flash floods in Pagner haor and Hallir haor).

Let us consider the case of flash flood of May 2000 in Sylhet region. Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre issued flash flood warning on May 2. Now the points to be considered are:

- could the warning be issued earlier than 2nd May?
- did the warning on flash flood reach the stakeholders on time?
- what the farmers are supposed to do on receipt of the warning message?

Flood forecasting and warning centre had to act on a limited amount of data. They did not even get all the data from

Surma, Bhogai-Kangsa and Dhanu-Baulai.

Stations Period

Sunamganj 1949-95

Max

Mohanganj 1964-95

avg

Sukdebpur 1982-94

min

7.24 6.99 6.47

max-min

2.22 1.73 1.61

max-avg

0.88 1.05 0.85

Stations Period

Sunamganj 1949-95

Max

Mohanganj 1964-95

avg

Sukdebpur 1982-94

min

7.24 6.99 6.47

max-min

2.22 1.73 1.61

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0.88 1.05 0.85

Stations Period