

FOCUS

Post-monsoon Flood in South-west Bangladesh: Causes and Remedies

THE occurrence of flood in South Asia is not a new phenomenon, but over the 45 years (1954-2000) the problem has aggravated and become one of the main concerns of most people. Bangladesh floods of 1987, 1988 and 1998 attracted international attention and various theories have been adopted for the causes of those floods. However, recent flood in the southwest region of Bangladesh is leading experts to further speculate about the causes of floods in Bangladesh. Meherpur, Chuadanga, Kusthia, Jhainadaha, Jessore, Satkhira, Magura, Rajshahi and Chapainabaganj these nine districts were free from floods, even at the time of severe flooding in Bangladesh. Especially, people of Satkhira, Jessore, Kusthia, Jhainadaha, Meherpur and Chuadanga are not at all familiar with flood devastations but everyday new areas are being inundated bringing untold miseries for the people of the region.

Although there has been extensive research on 1987, 1988 and 1998 floods, the exact causes of severe frequent flooding are yet to be known. The recent, untimely and unexpected floods in the southwest region is further holding the experts and policy makers from making any concluding remark. They are just watching the situation and constituting different committees.

Historical analysis suggests that the severe floods over the last decade or more in Bangladesh occurred for different reasons. For example, in 1987 it was caused mainly by heavy rainfall from July to September over northwest regions. Insufficient drainage and embankments without proper bridges and culverts were identified as causes for flooding. Minor watercourses failed to accommodate the huge water flow because of siltation of riverbeds. However, the capital city Dhaka was not flooded in 1987 and this flood was not focused so widely as 1988 and 1998 floods. Started in May-June with early flash floods in the southeastern hill basins, the 1988 flood was predominantly caused by the overflowing of rivers and that also aggravated by intensive rainfall over the north-east of Bangladesh and Meghalaya (India) to the north. The major rivers of the country crossed the danger level and flooding caused damage to more than 60 per cent of the country including most part of Dhaka City. The 1998 flood was caused by the heavy rainfall in the upper catchment areas of the Ganges and the Brahmaputra while heavy rainfall within Bangladesh aggravated the situation. Started in mid-July, the flood of 1998 stayed for a longer period and

spread all over Bangladesh except the southwest region. Many theories are given about the exact causes and duration of this flood: earthquake in areas of Himalayas and Andean Island (which was identified as causes of tidal bore 'Sunami'), high tide in the bay, sub-surface water circulation and opening of Farakka Barrage etc.

However, the past floods in Bangladesh inundated those areas, which are known as flood-prone. People in the flood-prone areas are familiar with the phenomenon and have their own mechanisms to cope with it. Expatriate research, warning systems of government and non-government organizations only strengthened the survival techniques of the people. Because the southwest region is not in the flood-prone zone, there is no research, theory, flood forecasting system, mechanisms to measure the level of flood water and act as such for survival. Above all, people of the region do not have preparatory measures to cope with severe floods. Experts opined that overflowing waters from the neighbouring rivers Rupnarayan, Damodar, Mourakhi in India caused the untimely floods in the southwest region of Bangladesh. That they also cut the dams on the rivers Ganges, Bhagirathi, Isamoti, Mahananda, Jalangi and Kodra and the untamed water also ran over Bangladesh. When the rivers failed to accommodate the huge rainfall water, the Indians did not have other option than free the rivers from barriers.

Should we blame nature for catastrophe? Past research proves that floods in Bangladesh

The flood-related sufferings increase more when the floodwater starts to recede. To restart a normal life, build new houses are very costly for the distressed poor. Because the flood-affected farmers of the south-west region failed to harvest Amon crop and the stored seeds of their Rabi crops were inundated, government and non-government bodies could provide them with cash money, seeds of Rabi crops and vegetables etc. to minimize the losses. The VGF and VGD cards could continue to help the poor until harvesting of crops in the next year.

by Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen

The Sufferings

Although there is flood forecasting system for the Padma-Jamuna and Brahmaputra basin, no such system was available for the Meghna basin and Hill-tracts region. For the recent flood management in the southwest region, forecasting is dependent mainly on assumptions. Until 11 October, the flood situation of Kusthia, Jessore, Meherpur, Jhainadaha and Chuadanga was gradually improving but that of Satkhira was deteriorating. Everyday flood engulfed new areas of five of the seven upazilas of Satkhira district. Many people are marooned; living in the flood refuges, on roads, platforms, rooftops and trees. Flood affected people are struggling for survival with such odds as lack of food, medicine, pure drinking water, fighting water borne diseases, with insufficient relief materials. They are also victims of conflicts of the politicians and corruption over relief distribution. Women are facing problems of cooking, shortage of fuel, toilet facilities, pregnancy and privacy, they feel insecure, living with children in fear of snakes, mosquitoes and other insects, not to mention the

problem of drinking water.

The main cash crop Amon of the region is under water and the farmers did not have means to protect the seeds of Rabi crop for the next season. The lack of preparation of farmers to face the severe flood indicates the inexperience of the people to live with flood. However, many families are surviving with the meagre savings of *mushitichal* (fistful of rice) of which women usually keep from everyday ration to use in the lean seasons. Women are also making moveable stove with earth pot or tin can, trying their best to keep firewood dry to use as fuel and keep their livestock alive. While the distressed men are wondering around looking for work and food, women are remaining at shelter to protect children, the elderly and remaining family effects. Women's effort to provide healthcare for the seek family members is also vital in absence of medical facility. The flood-affected people are suffering from diarrhea, viral fever, jaundice, skin diseases, conjunctivitis and swelling of the body and lack of health care facilities in many places is aggravating the situation. Women's contribution to provide family members with food and health care is vital to

cope with flood.

The Measures

Before floods, government and other bodies should give urgent attention to structural solution such as making embankments and raising dykes besides focusing on peoples' needs and survival activities. Relief had come to be a concomitant of floods but relief does not reach to those who most need it. Government, politicians, different NGOs and many other bodies are distributing relief to the flood-affected as they do usually. However, it is evident that the amount of relief is very insufficient and the relief materials often become useless to the flood-affected. For example, distributing wheat should be avoided. Because grinding of whole wheat in flood conditions is difficult for women. The following points could be considered while distributing relief:

- Distribution of *sujit* (semolina), milk, packed serial (rice and pulses) in roasted and powdered form for the children should be undertaken.
- Lactating and pregnant women must be located and provided food on priority basis.
- Distribution of local food

instead of foreign canned food should be undertaken in consideration of habituation.

- Supply of drinking water, kerosene, firewood/fuel, torch light, especially in the flood refuges should be constant.
- Measures to keep insects and reptiles at bay should be undertaken.
- Water purifier tablets, oral saline, first aid box, medicine to fight water borne diseases.
- The flood-stricken people lack cash to buy essentials and even to make a roof to live under. Thus cash money could be provided.

However, media coverage shows that relief is not reaching to the poor people and it is a temporary arrangement for some of the victims. It is evident that relief is distributed from a centre and it becomes difficult for some, especially women to reach it. Widow, divorced or single women, who do not have any man, do not want to leave their refuges to protect their children, animals and other belongings. Even if they queue for relief, they face problems of transport and often have to wait long to get a small amount of relief. Distributors could think about door-to-door delivery. Above all, the coordination of relief distributors is very important to avoid giving relief several times to certain people and excluding some others forever.

Relief distributors should consider environmental factors while distributing relief goods. The distribution of relief goods in polythene bags can result in pollution, waterlogging, and

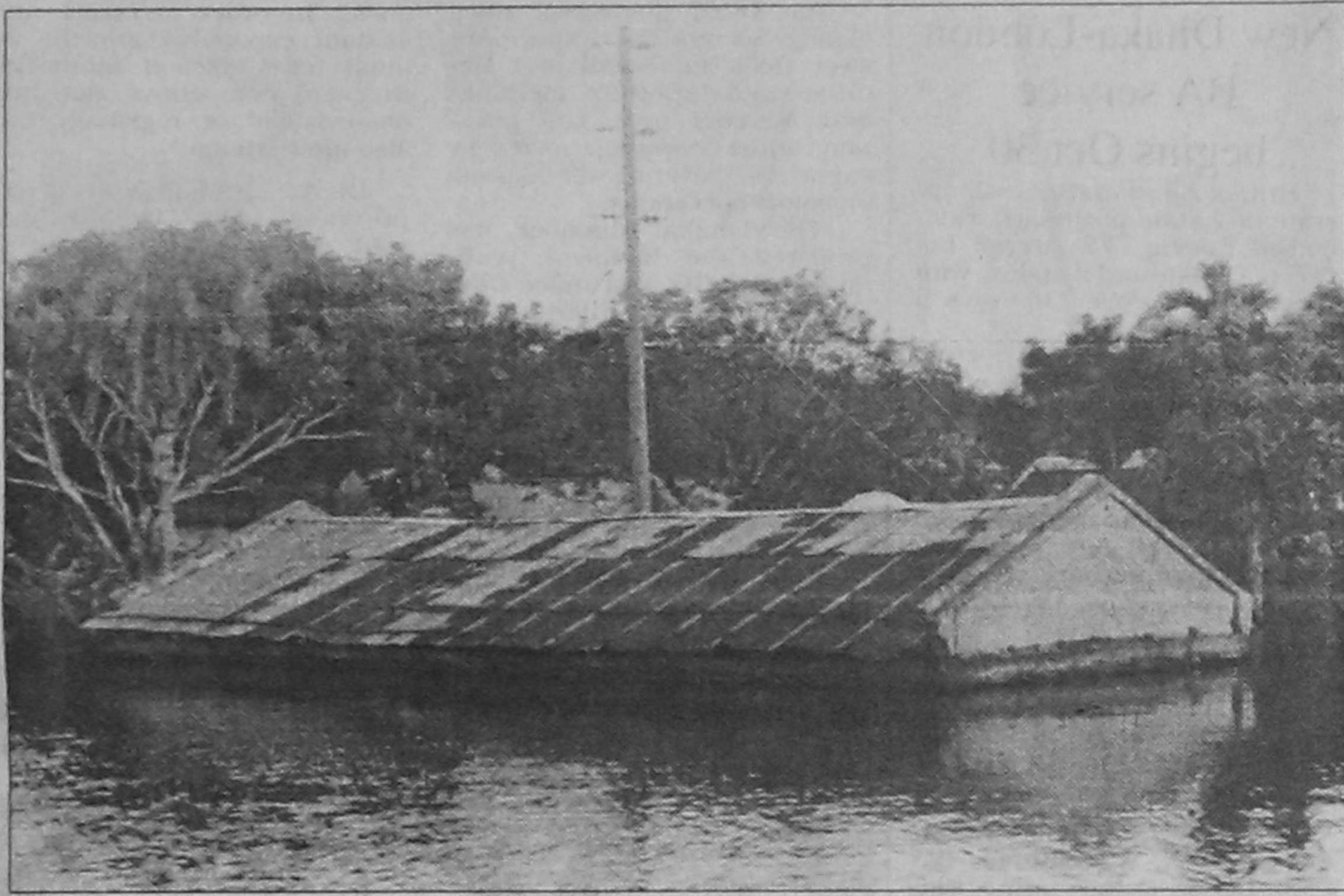
decline of soil fertility when these bags are discarded. As far as possible relief goods should be distributed in bags that people would not throw away and may even preserve, for example, jute bags with waterproof polythene lining that may protect the content.

We should bear in mind that relief is a temporary solution for some of the flood victims, and would not help to solve problems of floods in Bangladesh. There is a need to adopt long-term strategy to manage devastating floods. The structural measures did not solve flood problems rather increased flood losses and caused environmental damage. There is also a need for timely and well-focused policy to solve flood-related problems. A step to manage the agriculture, forest, water regimes, structural construction and ensure regional cooperation is needed to manage floods. Because the geographical settings and water-courses of Bangladesh are related to other neighbouring countries, so a regional solution to flood problems should be given emphasis. Programmes may be targeted at specific groups, such as the poor, or they may have a broader socio-economic scope. Because poor people in the flood-affected regions are surviving with floods, their activities need to receive attention in government planning.

The flood-related sufferings increase more when the floodwater starts to recede. To restart a normal life, build new houses are very costly for the distressed poor. Because the flood-affected farmers of the south-west region failed to harvest Amon crop and the stored seeds of their Rabi crops were inundated, government and non-government bodies could provide them with cash money, seeds of Rabi crops and vegetables etc. to minimize the losses. The VGF and VGD cards could continue to help the poor until harvesting of crops in the next year.

But responses to the sufferings of flood victims is yet very few and far between. Why? Should we believe that people are not responding to the recent flood because Dhaka is saved? Where is the altruism to assist the affected? We should not forget that the recent flood is not only devastating the economy of southwest region but also would cause long-term suffering for the whole Bangladesh economy. We should all stand by the side of the flood-affected people, for the sake of the country itself.

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Flood water level rises up to roof of houses in Satkhira

-- Star photo



Flood victims take shelter at make-shift camps in Jhenidah

-- Star photo

Platinum-gold

FOR once, it makes a pleasant change to write about something different from the usual, something positive, successful, controversy-free, and of unblemished integrity. How many know that there are women in today's Pakistan who dare to play cricket and that there is a Pakistan Women's Cricket Control Association (PWCCA) with a team of cricketers women who go abroad and play for Pakistan? Shaiza and Sharmeen Khan of Karachi started playing cricket with their elder brother and his friends when they were about the same height as a cricket bat. Shaiza took to batting and Sharmeen to bowling. Their parents habitually spent an annual summer holiday in England, so when the girls were in their early teens they joined the Winchmore Hill Cricket Club and started playing in earnest. Their cricketer skills grew whilst they were at boarding school in Shropshire, where as cricketers they graduated from club level to league and county levels.

Shaiza rose from a rating of 32 to the trophy holders of the 300-odd women's university and college teams in England. The resolve to form a women's cricketing body in Pakistan which would be accepted by the International Women's Cricket Council (IWCC) came to the two sisters when they were summoned to Headingley to provide bowling practice to the England squad who were preparing for the 1993 Women's World Cup (the fifth of the series). The resolve was strengthened when they sat at Lord's watching England play New Zealand in the finals, and they vowed to themselves that they would bring honour and accolades to their motherland and be members of a team from Pakistan when the next World Cup series came around. They returned to Pakistan in 1995 and set about forming an association that would qualify for the IWCC and travelling around Pakistan looking for good cricketers girls. They found them and by 1996 women's teams were raised from Punjab and Sindh. The first national tournament was held at the Karachi Gymkhana and Sindh won convincingly in the three matches played. By the end of the year, confir-

The only discouraging and blocking factor has been the cricketing bureaucracy of Pakistan which has done its very best to ensure that the team was not formed, and when against all odds it was formed, that it was not allowed to play in Pakistan or elsewhere. Fortunately, the bureaucracy is not always invincible.

Ardeshir Cowasjee writes from Karachi

mation of the PWCCA's membership was received from the IWCC. The next step was the international debut of the Pakistani team, and both Australia and New Zealand agreed to a tour. Three international one day matches played outside Pakistan were all that was needed to qualify for the sixth Women's World Cup to be held in India at the end of 1997. They played 18 matches in New Zealand, including two one day matches, winning thirteen. In Australia they played one day and five side matches against the champions and though beaten in all matches gained valuable experience. To gain further experience for the World Cup, that summer six players signed on for the English cricket season, and in October they rendezvoused at Lahore to set up a camp for the World Cup. After the usual trials and tribulations blockages, and the general nationally adopted negative non-

cooperative attitude towards anything innovative, the Army stepped in and provided the team with a cricket ground at Tufail Road. Women's Cricket Australia and the Australian Sports Commission sponsored a coach, Jodie Davis, a former player. Word was spread that a team was being raised and 3,000 girls turned up at the camp, an amazing number proving that in the male-oriented society of the Republic of Pakistan women still had high hopes. A team was selected in mid-November and set off for Delhi for the opening ceremony on December 5, 1997. They played five matches against Denmark, England, Australia, South Africa and Ireland. Excusably and expectedly, all were lost, the team being the babies of women cricket at a mere three weeks of age. All the women's cricket teams of the Western world have been playing for over fifty years, India has had

a team for 35 years, and Sri Lanka for 13 years. In April 1998 the team toured Sri Lanka, where it played its debut test and three one-day matches, again losing all. In August the team arrived in England to play their first match there, a forty-over one-dayer against High Wycombe (Kiran's old team which she had captained since 1998), which they won easily. They scored 297 for 5 off 40 overs, with Shaiza, the Captain, at 76 not out, Sharmeen, the Vice-Captain scoring 48, Nazia Nazeer, 36, and Kiran 38. High Wycombe were all out for 101. Sharmeen, Nazir and 12-year old Sajida Shah (the youngest international player ever) each taking three wickets. They moved on to Charterhouse School at Guildford where they played against the MCC and scored a famous victory. It was a rain-hit match. The MCC batting first scored 143 for 2 off 40 overs and Pakistan made 144 for 3 off 29.1 overs. The winning streak is on. A team from Europe has been invited to play here in Pakistan next year. All this is due to the determination of the two sisters, both working women, both educated and knowledgeable, both earning their keep and paying for their cricketer expenses. It is also due to the generosity and understanding of their father, Mohammad Said Khan, and a few family friends and supporters, who provided the initial financing and much of the subsequent financing for the team. The present MD of PIA, Sher Afghan, has been most helpful in giving discounted tickets. As for moral support, they have been propped up and encouraged by the team's patron, Anita Ghulam Ali, our forward-looking educationist and provincial minister, by Omar Kureishi, Arif Abbasi, Hanif Mohammad, She editor Zohra Karim and Women's Cricket International editor Afa Salam. The sporting press of Pakistan in general has also been most supportive. The only discouraging and blocking factor has been the cricketering bureaucracy of Pakistan which has done its very best to ensure that the team was not formed, and when against all

TOM & JERRY
By Hanna-Barbera

1. I'D BE DELIGHTED TO TAKE YOU MOUSE CATCHING.

2. BUT I MUST WARN YOU... HERE ON JUPITER'S SECOND MOON...

3. MOUSE CATCHING IS...

4. BIG GAME HUNTING.

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James Bond
BY IAN FLEMING
DRAWING BY HORAK

1. OFTEN THOUGHT I'D LIKE ONE FOR A PET! THESE ARE HOWLETS, AREN'T THEY? ... EASY TO TRAIN?

2. ER, TO SOME EXTENT...

THE CAPUCHIN IS, OF COURSE, BEST... THE KIND USED BY OLD TIME ORGAN GRINDERS... IF YOU WOULD CARE TO SEE THIS ONE...

1. THE CAPUCHIN IS, OF COURSE, BEST... THE KIND USED BY OLD TIME ORGAN GRINDERS... IF YOU WOULD CARE TO SEE THIS ONE...

2. SOME OTHER TIME, THANKS!

MIGUEL - QUICKLY! THAT MAN CLAIMED TO BE A JOURNALIST - BUT WE HAD BETTER FIND OUT FOR SURE!

1. MIGUEL - QUICKLY! THAT MAN CLAIMED TO BE A JOURNALIST - BUT WE HAD BETTER FIND OUT FOR SURE!

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