

# Say yes for children

## A global movement for a better, brighter tomorrow

STAR REPORT

IN September 1990, at the World Summit for Children, world leaders made a commitment to work towards a better future for every child on this planet. Their urgent, universal call inspired international organisations, national governments and civil society groups across the globe to launch a concerted effort to realise the goals set at the summit. The reawakening has reaped success. Almost all the countries in the world have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Right now, there is much more support for children than ever before.

Yet, more than 1.2 billion people half of whom are children live on less than one dollar a day. Some 110 million children of primary school age half of them girls are not enrolled in school. Thirteen million children have lost one or both parents to AIDS. Best efforts of the countries have obviously not been good enough. More work and more energy, therefore, need to be invested for the children's welfare. Thus comes the Global Movement for Children.

The Global Movement for Children is a force for change, calling for people throughout the world to take action and protect the rights of children. The core of the movement will be adults and children, working together. It will not be enough for adults to change the world for children they must change the world with children. Young people have important things to contribute, and they must be given every opportunity to speak. The movement realises that the decisions it makes will affect the lives of children. Children, therefore, must participate at every step of the decision-making processes.

The movement is already under way. Mandela and Machel are heading the leadership initiative, reaching out to leaders from all parts of the world and all sectors of society to jumpstart the movement.

Since March 2001, the movement has asked the world to "Say Yes for Children". Through this campaign, children and adults from around the world will be able to speak out on ten imperative actions, which must be undertaken in order to improve the lives of children. The results of the campaign will be presented in September 2001 at the Special Session on Children, held by the United Nations General Assembly in New York. The movement will then take the message of the Special Session to the world, and hold leaders

accountable for the agreements they have made. The Global Movement for Children calls on everyone, everywhere, to do as much as possible, in their own time and their own way, for children.

**The Rallying Call for Children:** In every child who comes into the world, the hopes and dreams of the human race are born anew.

The world has the knowledge, the resources and the legal imperatives

"We cannot waste our precious children. Not another one, not another day."

--Nelson Mandela and Garca Machel

**Put children first:** In 1989, the international community adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention states that all children, everywhere, have the rights to survival and opportunity, to

each year of complications during pregnancy 99 per cent of them in the developing world. The death of the mother jeopardises the life of the child.

It is equally important to enable

of AIDS are more likely to be deprived of an education and, without the knowledge that even a basic education provides, they are at greater risk of contracting HIV themselves. And should they die of

**Listen to children:** As children grow, so does their capacity to make decisions. They deserve to have their voices heard on the issues that affect them. This is a basic right that all people share: the right to express

the most vulnerable members of society suffer the worst. They are forced to live in fear, to give up their education. Some lose their lives. Some lose beloved family members. All lose their innocence.

Many children are even forced to fight in these wars. Today, over 300,000 children (under the age of 18) some as young as seven are involved in hostilities in over 30 countries. Girls and boys alike are

**The Bangladesh scenario**

Bangladesh is among the first few countries to have ratified the CRC and was an active participant in the World Summit for Children in September 1990. Its commitment to the goals set at the summit has had its reflection in its End Decade Report (EDR), which has already been submitted to the United Nations General Assembly.

A significant reduction in infant and under-5 mortality rate has been achieved during 1999-2000. Infant mortality rate has come down from 94 in 1990 to 57 in 1998 against a target of 50 per 1000 live births. Under-5 mortality rate has also declined to 92 in 1998 from 151 in 1990 with a goal of 70 per 1000 live births.

The Expanded Programme of Immunisation (EPI) coverage has reached nearly 80 per cent against the WSC goal of 90. The percentage of children aged 12-23 months immunised against poliomyelitis increased from 62 per cent in 1990 to 75 per cent in 1997. The number of facilities providing essential obstetric care was 30 in 1994 and 68 in 1998.

Besides, other indicators such as drinking water and environmental sanitation, nutrition, status of girls and women, gross enrolment, etc have all shown positive during the last decade.

It is needless to say that much remains to be done. Encouragingly, the government is determined to do everything possible to ensure a better, brighter future for the children in the country. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will renew her government's commitment today when she says yes for children at the campaign launch in the country at the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the morning. Political and social leaders, eminent citizens and noted personalities will also be invited to the pledge campaign and sign and form endorsement to demonstrate their support to the ten imperatives the Say Yes for Children campaign propagates.

GreenPhone will set up a pledge-receiving centre at the UNICEF to receive pledges. The numbers 017-356729, 017-354722, 017-357497, 017-357513 and 017-356744 will be active from May 6 up to May 10.

The write-up is a compilation of facts and figures provided by the UNICEF.

The regular features "Have a Nice Day" and "Excerpts from HRC Report" are held over for next issue.



Photo Shehzad Noorani/UNICEF

to give every child the best possible start in life, in a family environment that offers the love, the care and the nurturing that children need to grow, to learn and to develop to the fullest.

The entire community of nations acknowledged as much when they embraced the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and vowed, a decade ago, to fulfil the goals of the World Summit for Children.

Yet in this new millennium, it is clear that more must be done if the world is to protect the rights and meet the needs of all children.

**Leave no child out:** There is never a good reason for denying a child freedom and opportunity. Yet throughout the world, children face discrimination because of the colour of their skin, because of their gender, or because of the traditions their parents passed onto them. Because of discrimination, these children are left out and unable to live up to their potential.

protection from abuse and exploitation, and to have a say in decisions that affect them. It is a legally binding document and its fundamental principles are non-negotiable. The governments of the world have made these commitments to children, and they are obliged to meet them.

**Care for every child:** Despite impressive improvements in child health, nearly 11 million children under the age of five still die each year. The majority of these deaths could be prevented. Children are dying of measles and tetanus, both of which can be prevented with a simple immunisation. They are dying of pneumonia and malaria, without access to the medication that could save their lives. They are dying of diarrhoea, because the liquid solutions, which can prevent dehydration, are not available.

Children need to be cared for before they are born. That is where the question of caring for the mothers come. Nearly 600,000 women die

children to protect and improve their own health. Participation is key; children must be involved. Children must know how to help prevent illness and poor health, and follow the principles of good hygiene.

**Fight HIV/AIDS:** HIV/AIDS continues to spread throughout the developing world, emerging as a global crisis of immense proportions. As the international community struggles to address this crisis, we must remember that the impact of HIV/AIDS goes far beyond those infected with the virus. Every family that loses a loved one to the disease suffers. And children suffer most of all.

Thus far, the epidemic has left behind a staggering 13 million orphans. Traditional family structures have been decimated. Many children go to live with their grandparents, but there is sometimes not enough money to go around.

The cycle perpetuates itself, and worsens: children whose parents die

AIDS, who would take care of their children?

**Stop harming and exploiting children:** Every child has the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment. Children rely on adults for protection and guidance. So when adults harm and exploit children, it is the most egregious betrayal of trust imaginable. Whether in the home, school, streets, or workplace, a child should never be subject to harm.

An estimated 250 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are working in developing countries. Roughly 60 million children are exploited in the worst forms of child labour. Some 120 million work full-time, many of them for nine or more hours a day. Almost 80 per cent of them earn no money at all for their labour. Still another one million children every year are pulled into the multi-billion dollar commercial sex trade. They are coerced, "bonded" by debt, sold or simply kidnapped.

views and to have those views taken seriously and respected.

All too often, though, children are denied this right. All too often, no one listens to children.

**Educate every child:** Children are born into the world eager to learn. All too often, though, they do not have access to education. Today, more than 110 million school-age children worldwide, mostly girls, are not going to school and millions more are receiving poor quality education. There are a number of reasons for this. Either there is no money, or the school is too far away, or the children are working to support their families.

Education is not only a child's right. It is also a child's responsibility, one of the most profound responsibilities a child can undertake. It is a responsibility that children want to undertake. We must ensure that they can.

**Protect children from war:** No child ever started a war. Yet every time a war breaks out, children as

abducted from schools, refugee camps or their homes and trained to kill. Girls are subjected to sexual abuse and rape, often systematically.

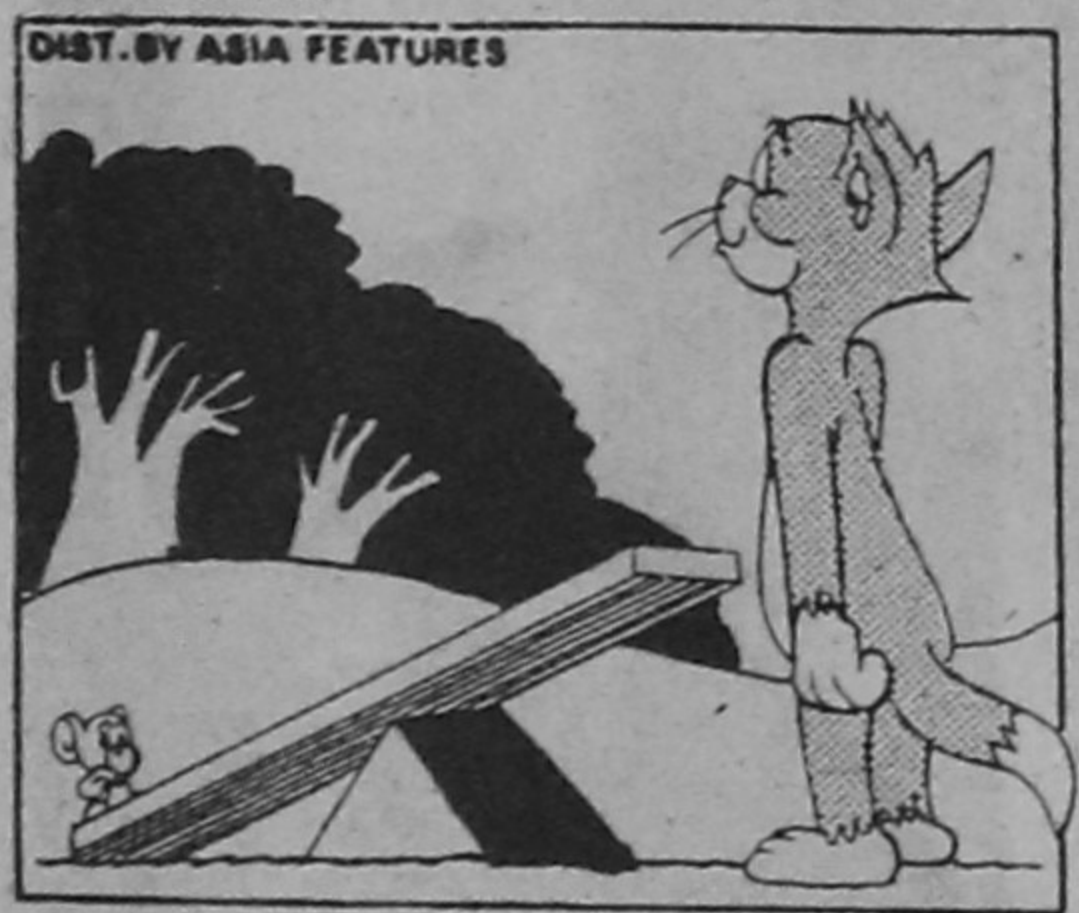
**Protect the earth for children:** Every generation has the right to a safe and healthy environment and the opportunities it provides. Environmental threats like global warming and the water crisis take their greatest toll on children. They will continue to take their toll, for the mistakes of today will continue to haunt the world tomorrow.

**Invest in children:** For millions of children throughout the world, poverty means more than simply not having enough money. It means not being able to control their lives, being vulnerable to the will of others, and demeaning themselves to make ends meet. It means not being able to take part in community life, and feeling inferior to others. Above all, it means not having the opportunity to make a better life for themselves in the future.



Photo Naser Siddique/UNICEF

TOM & JERRY



### TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR

As we have received a greater number of letters than usual, we have an expanded 'To The Editor' section on this (Focus) page today. Our regular feature 'Pictorial' remains on the Editorial Page (page 6).

#### Border tension

I would like to say something to the 'True Indian' who wrote a letter "Border tension" (23 April) insulting Bangladeshis as a whole.

Why should we change the name of our country to East Afghanistan or East Taliban? Unlike India, in Bangladesh people live rather peacefully irrespective of religion, caste and creed. We don't boss over anyone.

What's the fault of BDR and Bangladeshi villagers? Wouldn't BSF protest if BDR intruded into Indian territory?

Finally, I would like to tell the 'True Indian' to give up their big brotherly attitude. Bangladesh is an independent nation and we want to live peacefully with our neighbours and not become anyone's province.

Shihab  
Kishita, Dhakha

I am an Indian Citizen. I am shocked at the contrast of reports published by Indian and Bangladeshi media about the border crisis. This clearly shows that our media is biased. Nevertheless, I would like to request Md Alamgir (Melbourne) and Anwar Babar (Texas), responding to the letter by 'A True Indian', to tone down the rhetoric primarily because none of us were witness to the alleged intrusions and torture. We should look ahead towards strengthening our ties, and not let mere

6.5km of disputed border to hinder foreign policy.

Mohit Kapur  
Purdue University, Indiana, USA

According to the Indian media it was BDR who crossed the international boundary and set up a temporary camp in the Indian territory. They also said that these Bangladeshi para-military troops were responsible for the casualties and they showed some proof against this. Following the news there was another report in BBC which was an exact copy of the Indian report. Both sides can easily show a lot of proof, whether true or false to defend themselves, but what is the point? The actual facts have been buried with the dead soldiers.

I would like to know, is it possible for a retreating army, as the Indian side said it was, chased by enemy, to carry 18 dead bodies and two injured men? Our country should have taken the statement of the injured Indian BSF personnel to use as proof.

Eighty-four per cent people on that side agree that Bangladesh should apologise, even though we did nothing wrong. It is clear that they attacked and our soldiers had to defend themselves. This neighbour of ours who covers the other side of 85 per cent of our land on the border has a high quantity of their goods exported to our country. The tables would surely turn if we just

say 'no to Indian goods'. I do understand that it will deteriorate the diplomatic relationship and we would have to overcome some hardships but it is not impossible. We can always have an economic war as our military is not as strong as theirs.

I feel that our government is not reacting to this issue that much and this keeps me thinking is their any political motive behind this? Why is BBC taking the Indian side? I know the matter will be long forgotten before these questions are answered.

Waseem Alim  
Dhaka

We're shocked and dismayed by the hatred displayed by the Bangladeshis towards India. In the beginning, the Bangladeshi newspapers couldn't suppress their glee when BDR suddenly overran the Padua outpost, leading to the skirmish. The Bangladeshis conveniently forgot that from last December, a Joint Commission has been appointed to solve the vexed border problem. It was the height of the Bangladeshis' stupidity to believe that they could retain our land by force. They forgot that in 1999, we drove out the Pakistani intruders from the inhospitable terrain of Kargil, what is the big deal in driving out Bangladeshi soldiers from a flat land?

I'm not going into the details whether the land belongs to Bangladesh or not. Yes it can be, there are

many enclaves which belong to Bangladesh and vice versa. We've inherited the legacy of an unscientific partition. A mechanism has already been set to resolve the dispute. Bangladesh could have asked for its speedy implementation instead of this misadventure. We, the Indians especially the Bengalis on the other side of the border have no animosity towards Bangladeshis, we sympathise with them and fondly remember their liberation struggle. We welcomed their help during the recent Gujarat calamity. However the image of our dead jawans dangling over bamboo poles like trophies while Bangladeshi citizens are rejoicing have shattered us beyond

belief. We will never recover from this shock. Even if BSF entered Bangladesh territory, they were bound by Geneva Convention to look after the prisoners and show respect towards the dead bodies. The border skirmish was indeed unfortunate but more unfortunate was Bangladesh people's rejoicing with the mutilated dead bodies of our soldiers and its subsequent illustrated publicity in Bangladeshi newspapers.

In the Parliament, our government has come under harsh criticism for its "soft approach". If we, citizens, harden our attitude, our government will be forced to take a tough stance which will not be

pleasant for Bangladesh. Much has been said about Indian "dadagiri" and Indian "imperialism". But you haven't seen enough of dadagiri. Borrowing from my favourite writer Humayun Ahmed I can say, it has been a fashion in Bangladesh to blame India for anything and everything. Indian goods are smuggled in Bangladesh, so blame it on India. People don't realise how much revenue the Indian government is losing for this smuggling. Bangladeshis people run to watch our films, the fault is ours. Bangladeshis people illegally enter our country and if we push them back, the fault is ours. The list goes on.

Conflict does not solve any problem. We have no intention to start a conflict with a minnow like Bangladesh. And we want to dispel a popular fear that India is up to gobble Bangladesh. We have innumerable problems and don't want to add another. We only want to see a secular Bangladesh living in harmony with India.

Anirban  
An Indian Bengali

I refer to an article published by the BBC's Online News service regarding the clash which led to the death of two BDR and 16 BSF soldiers due to border clash.

I vehemently protest the lack of objectiveness of the article. During their coverage, they continually

quoted Indian officials as a source of reference but failed to report the point of view from the Bangladesh side. The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) were made out to be hostile, aggressive barbarians while the Indian Border Security Force (BSF), the hapless protectors of the innocent who were savagely and mercilessly killed. I can understand the Times of India and 'The Hindu', as well as our own dailies, presenting one-sided points of view but the BBC, as an independent body, should have taken much more care before publishing a totally ill-researched article. After the events of a couple of days ago when the BDR successfully took back a Border Outpost (and since withdrew) that since 1971 rightfully belonged to Bangladesh, the Indians engaged on a fruitless exercise to save their face. The Indians claim to have recaptured the village they lost a couple of days ago whereas in actual fact, the BDR were ordered to withdraw by the Bangladesh Government. This act was done in order to ease tension across the border.

I hope that the BBC World Service will take note of this complaint and refrain from airing such articles in future.

Abdul M. Ismail  
Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

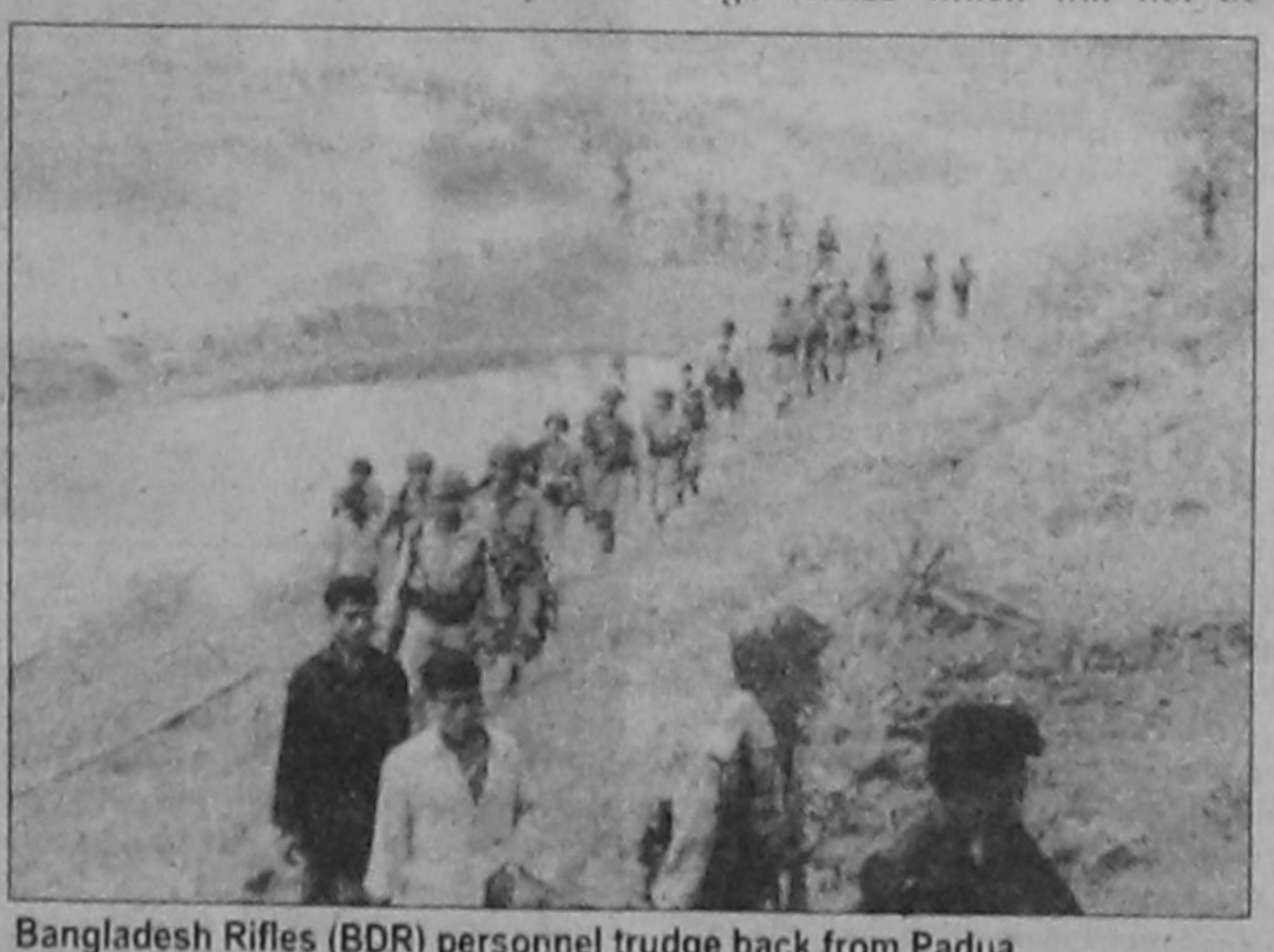
Shame on the Awami League government for its way of handling the current skirmishes on the border.

Instead of condemning the occupation of our land and lodging strong protest against intrusion, killing and authorised movements along the border, the government has been talking of cordial discussion, making the BDR inactive. I have been distressed learning that in spite of known facts of BSF's intrusion and amassing of greater number of forces along the border and recapture of 'Barabari enclave' by BSF, our Foreign Secretary has urged the media 'not to whip up unnecessary tension on the border'.

I want to know what was his comment about the capture of our own land 'Padua' after 30 years of foreign occupation and subsequent quietness without rhyme or reason? Isn't it the subservient policy and surrender of our sovereignty in a most disgraceful manner? The Foreign Secretary should be ashamed of himself in particular and the Awami League government in general should step down without any delay for the failure and telling the nation that "tension does not exist on the border" though according to news reports more than 18 troops died on both sides in the fight and great tension among the people in the border persists.

The nation has the right to know under what circumstances our jawans had to roll back and under whose occupation is our sovereign habitation Padua?

Affrahman  
Dhaka



Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel trudge back from Padua.