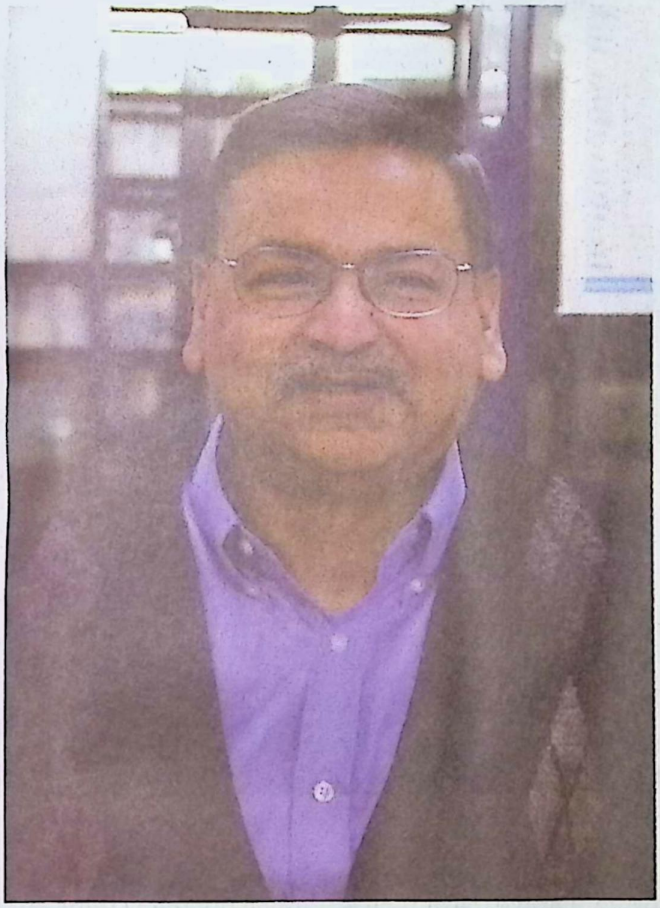


Dr. Saleemul Huq.



two seminars held in 1987, which were later turned into the organisation's first two publications. Both Rahman and Huq state that the main challenge they faced was to use knowledge as a tool and that was part of the philosophy that lead to the creation of BCAS. The first 18 months were very difficult, after almost 15 years abroad, working with the best and brightest in the world on the very cutting edge of science he gave it all up to follow his dream and initially it was not paying off.

They started in a small office in Dhanmondi with just a few people as Rahman says, "it would be fair to say we did not get a salary and could barely afford to pay for the few people who worked with us initially and that continued for quite some time actually. I then started to have a few reservations, I had turned down lucrative teaching and research jobs from the best universities in the world and in return was not getting paid to sit in a tiny office." They rode their luck and it was the floods of '88 that really gave them anything substantial to work with. Those floods pulled Bangladesh into the perspective of the world and that was just about the time the first IPCC report was being prepared. It was also the time of the controversial flood action plan, as both battled against what they thought was an ill conceived plan. They had begun to make waves; their work lead in many ways to the creation of the Environment Ministry and for the first time they took Bangladesh and its issues to global level talks.

In 1990 climate change was just being discovered and discussed and after the publication of the IPCC First Assessment Report there was to be a framework treaty on climate change. The Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (INC/FCCC) met at the end of 1990 and there Atiq Rahman was elected to address the UN negotiations on climate issues. In his speech he raised the issues of the problems of climate change, the impact of sea level rise on poor societies, the issue of equity and fairness and the migration of people induced by climate change. As he says, "it became an issue of survival." While those topics are commonplace now they were new and untested then and as Rahman said "the poorest of the poor lived and live in the most environmentally vulnerable areas." It was at those meetings that he argued for a convention on poverty, a topic that would only be discussed and theorised upon years later.

Rahman says, "the North had solved their development problems and the first few conventions were based on them trying to then solve their environmental problems. That was not the case in the South, they had both development problems as well as environmental ones." By 1992 there was a convention on poverty and within a few months their institute was getting regular projects, it had finally taken off. That was the era when sustainable development became a buzzword while for him implementing that sustainable development was his main area of concern. The centre was