



ISSUE 15 JANUARY-MARCH 2001

LAW TO PROTECT RIGHTS OF REFUGEES SOUGHT

Participants at a consultation urged for the adoption of a national law on refugees. Organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) on 26 October 2000 at CIRDAP auditorium, the programme was participated by a host of experts, lawyers, activists and government officials. Mr. Suranjit Sen Gupta, Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister was present at the meeting as the chief guest.

In his key note presentation Dr. Shamsul Bari, a former senior official of the UNHCR, refuted the common arguments against a national refugee law or acceding to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. He portrayed Bangladesh both as a refugee receiving and refugee producing country given the serious refugee exodus to India during the war of independence of 1971 and influx of Rohingya refugees in 1980s and early 1990s. Without being a party to the Convention, Bangladesh has already hosted a large number of refugees, Dr. Bari pointed out. He assigned a number of reasons as to why Bangladesh needs a refugee law. That included dealing and minimising conflict and tension, device a mechanism for conflict management on a regular and legal basis rather than on an *ad hoc* basis. He refuted ideas that, acceding to the Convention or adopting a national legislation would attract new refugee inflows. He enshrined that by legislating or acceding we will only reconfirm our old tradition of respecting the international human rights and humanitarian laws. The speaker suggested that accession to the Convention could also be considered as safeguarding State's national interest as it would help us to make a clear distinction between victims of persecution and economic migrants. He pointed out that adoption of such a law or accession to the 1951 UN convention, Bangladesh can prove its human rights promotional activities. While choosing a trade off between acceding to 1951 Convention and adopting a national law on refugees, he preferred the latter one, as accession to international convention has the risk of non-implementation for some sort of reservation.

Barrister A K H Morshed, Legal Counsel of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saw the 1951 Convention more as an European construction unsuitable for developing countries such as those of South Asia. He emphasised the need for discussion on issues such as definition of a refugee, principles of *non-refoulement*, and role of the UNHCR. Although he acknowledged that it is easy to solve the problem within a legal structure, he expressed his reservation about its adoption in a situation where neighbouring countries did not sign it and opted for a process to persuade neighbours to adopt the same.

Dr. Shahdeen Malik stated about the inherent contradiction of law as a right limiting and right confirming instrument. Contesting the fear of mass influx of refugees in case we have a national refugee legislation, Dr. Malik suggested that refugee law could also be a 'right limiting law' in the sense that it extends a refugee only basic protection. However he was sceptical about implementation of the law even after its adoption.

M M Sunnah, Legal officer of UNHCR, Dhaka office pointed out that due to the failure to accede to the 1951 Convention and for the lack of a national legislation regarding refugees in Bangladesh, the problem of new Rohingya influx can not be resolved so easily. On the issue of Eurocentrism, he said that it created ambiguity regarding signing the law, he said that the definition of refugee has been

extended by 1984 Cartagena Convention and the OAU Convention and thus covering the reality in developing countries of the world. He alleged that 22,000 Rohingya refugees are still staying here in Bangladesh as we lack any legal document to call upon international organisation like UNHCR. We can merely request them to serve with minimum standard of voluntariness on an *ad hoc* basis.

Deputy Attorney General, Barrister Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik made his comment that the draft law is incapable or inadequate to deal with the refugee problem of the country, as with its finality clause, proper justice cannot be ensured. He suggested the creation of a comprehensive appellate system and incorporation of the law within the local legislation.

Dr. Borhanuddin Khan of the Department of Law, University of Dhaka, found no obstacle in the way of acceding to the 1951 Refugee Convention as the rights and privileges of all women and children, whether refugee or not, are already well protected by the two international instruments of Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC), signed by Bangladesh. Thus acceding to 1951 convention or adopting a national legislation regarding it does not imply extending new rights and privileges to refugees. Moreover the essence of the principle of *non-refoulement*, he believes, is already there in the civil rights of the country, envisaged from the International Covenant on the Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

Yasmin Ahmed of *Odhikar*, stated enacting a law is not enough, the most important part rests with its proper implementation for the benefit of the people. Haider Ali, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, upheld the environmental and social problems created by the Rohingya refugees. To him, the adoption of a national document would help augment refugee flow and therefore he found no need to adopt such a law at the moment. The Asian African Legal Consultation Council was deemed more efficient and appropriate to him for taking a decision about a regional instrument. Obaidul Haque of the Department of International Relations also stressed on adopting region specific measures regarding refugees.

In his concluding observation Dr. Bari said that a wide consensus among the non-government people on the adoption of law is already evident. He urged the government to register the civil society response on the issue. He said that environmental and social problems has little to do with the signing or non-signing of the refugee law. Refuting the argument on the principles of *non-refoulement* he said that over the past few years 95% of the Rohingya refugees were repatriated with UNHCR's sponsorship. As a country of potential refugee influx, he said, we should not discard adopting a law. Rather necessary changes in the draft must be brought in recognising the severity of the problem.

The Chief Guest of the programme, Mr. Suranjeet Sengupta, Member of Parliament, viewed the problem from a humanitarian perspective. Sharing his experience as refugee, he argued that a law, if adopted, would help shape the expectation of an asylum seeker. According to him, having a national necessity, endeavour must be geared to sign the Convention.

The consultation was moderated by Dr. C R Abrar, Coordinator of RMMRU. Earlier he introduced the Bangla translation of Model National Law. A new book title *Towards National Refugee Laws in South Asia* published by RMMRU was also launched on the occasion.

Reporter: *Syeda Rozana Rashid*

Principles on RECEPTION AND REINTEGRATION OF RESETTLED REFUGEES APPROVED

A conference on the *Reception and Integration of Resettled Refugees* held on 25-26 April 2001 at Norrköping, Sweden, endorsed a set of Principles to guide the ways in which integration process and

programmes are implemented. The final version of the Principles was subsequently approved by the Expanded Executive Committee that met on 28 April 2001. The text follows:

Principles

*“You can’t feel grounded until you belong.
You can’t belong until you’re accepted.”*

Preamble

Refugees strengthen societies through their cultural diversity and the contributions, which they bring. We affirm that resettlement of refugees works. Most refugees integrate successfully into their host communities and most of the support and services provided by governments, refugee communities, non-governmental organisations and the public makes a difference.

Resettlement is an important tool of refugee protection and a durable solution for many refugees. It is not a substitute for asylum, but rather a complementary way of providing protection to people in need. Resettlement offers refugees the possibility to begin new lives and to become fully participating members of society. Given global needs and the success of resettlement as a durable solution, we believe that the use of resettlement should be expanded in the future.

The challenge for states and for UNHCR is to ensure that resettlement selection is carried out in a fair, transparent, and equitable manner based on refugee needs for protection and for durable solutions. A particular challenge for states is to be inclusive in their resettlement criteria and not automatically to exclude groups or countries from consideration. While we acknowledge that resettlement may not be appropriate in every situation, it should be seen as an integral component of a comprehensive international response.

Experience with resettlement varies from country to country. Some countries have long resettlement histories while others are new to the process. But all resettlement countries are committed to facilitating refugee integration, to nurturing a hospitable environment for refugees, and are willing to learn from one another. While integration occurs within a framework of national policy and in a particular cultural context, it is fundamentally a personal process through which refugees develop a sense of belonging, make friendships, and enjoy mutual respect in their new society.

The following general principles will serve as a guide to our efforts to promote refugee integration.

Integration

1. Integration is a mutual, dynamic, multi-faceted and on-going process. “From a refugee perspective, integration requires a preparedness to adapt to the lifestyle of the host society without having to lose one’s own cultural identity. From the point of view of the host society, it requires a willingness for communities to be welcoming and responsive to refugees and for public institutions to meet the needs of a diverse population.”¹
2. Integration is “multi-dimensional in that it relates both to the conditions for and actual participation in all aspects of the economic, social, cultural, civil and political life of the country of resettlement as well as to refugees’ own perceptions of, acceptance by and membership in the host society.”²
3. Opportunities for resettled refugees to become citizens and to enjoy full and equal participation in society represent an over-arching commitment by governments to refugee integration.
4. Family reunification is crucial to refugee integration. Similarly, relatives and ethnic community networks can play key roles in successful refugee integration.

5. A multi-dimensional, comprehensive and cohesive approach that involves families, communities and other systems can help refugees to restore hope and to re-build their lives.

Refugees at the Centre

6. Refugees bring resources and skills to the countries in which they resettle. Host societies are strengthened and enriched by the contributions of refugees.
7. Refugee participation and leadership are essential in the development, implementation and evaluation of both refugees' own individual settlement and integration programmes.
8. Underlying the practical, tangible needs which refugees have are more fundamental needs for dignity, security, social connectedness, and identity. Both these more fundamental needs and immediate material needs must be addressed.
9. Enabling refugees to use their own resources and skills to help each other is a priority.
10. Responding to the range of needs specific to the refugee experience will improve resettlement programmes and enhance integration.

Strengthening Receiving Communities

11. Building community capacity for equitable partnership in refugee reception and integration involves all sectors of the community.
12. Refugees integrate themselves. The responsibility of the public, private and community sectors is to work alongside refugees as facilitators to create an environment in which people can be empowered.
13. The public should receive accurate and timely information about refugee situations. Receiving communities require additional specific information in preparing for the arrival of refugees in their communities. In both cases, the media have an important role to play.

Strengthening Partnerships

14. Multi-faceted partnerships need to be continually developed and strengthened among governments, refugees, communities, non-governmental organisations, and volunteers.
15. Strengthening relationships between those working to identify refugees in need of resettlement and the communities where they will be resettled is important to the resettlement process.

Notes

¹ Adapted from the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, "Policy on Integration," 1999.

² ECRE, "Policy on Integration," 1999.

VESTED PROPERTY ACT REPEALED

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The Vested Property Act (VPA) has been the legacy of discriminatory and communal law enacted during the Pakistan days. The VPA, originating from the Enemy Mission Act (Act 9 of 1921) became widely known immediately after the World War I. During that period the British government declared the property of German mission in India as enemy property and recruited custodian for the management of the property. Then after World War II the 1st Act was added with the Defence of India Act (Act 35 of 1939). But we became familiar with the act after the Indo-Pak War of 1965.

Bangladesh inherited the law (*Daily Ittefaq*, 22 June 2001). This law has been used against the religious minority of the country for a long time, and repealing of the law has been a long sought demand.

Impact of the VPA on Minority Community

The VPA isolated fundamental rights and the Hindu Law of Inheritance. It has been claimed because of open corruption and malpractice of power by a section of bureaucrats and officials of other concerned authorities the Hindu community had faced serious harassment. The VPA has been directly and indirectly responsible for oppression on the minority community including torture, harassment, and in cases forced eviction. This resulted in increased rate of violence, murder, rape, extortion, and filing of cases, which aggravated the law and order situation. It was also seen that the officials of concerned department declared some property as vested with ill motives. It is difficult for the real owner to get back that property once it is declared vested. Also the officials of vested property department often illegally leased the vested property according to their personal liking. To avoid harassment the real owners are compelled to sell rest of the property and move.

Dr. Abul Barkat, a Professor of Dhaka University, based on his research, claimed that about 1 million families, 5% of the owners of the property, which the government declared as vested property, stayed in India. The rest lived in Bangladesh. He also showed that under the Act the government acquired 21 lac acres of land and worth a minimum cost of Tk 15,000 crore. Another government source suggests that the government enlisted 6.52 lac acres of land and among this 5.95 lac acres were agricultural and 57 thousand acres non-agricultural land (*Sangbad*, October 2000). It has been alleged that the influential political leaders usurped two-thirds of vested property. As for example, in Chittagong among 14,228 acres of vested property 8,960 acres have been usurped by the musclemen of political leaders of the mainstream parties (*Sangbad*, 7 January 2001). It has also been reported that in 1995, 72 percent of the total illegally occupied vested property was controlled by BNP leaders and 11 percent by the Awami League leaders. On the other hand, in 1997, 32 percent was controlled by the BNP and 44 percent by the Awami League leaders (*Sangbad*, 22 September 2000).

The life of Shanti Bala Dashi of Faridpur became totally shattered in 1982 when the government declared her property as vested property. She was the owner of 40 decimals of land. She filed a case against the government for establishing her rightful claim. After a long trial the judge gave his judgement in favour of Shanti Bala and urged the government to return the property. But some officials of concerned offices did not follow the order of the court and the land was not listed till January 2001 (*Sangbad*, 3 January 2001).

Movement by the Minority Community

Though the public representatives of different political parties gave their consent to repeal the VPA, there was inordinately delay in repealing the Act. Under the circumstances Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad, the minority community coalition, and other civil society organisations mobilised people for repealing the VPA.

On 16 September 2000, Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad organised a rally where speakers demanded that the government should scrap the VPA immediately. They also claimed that the Act divided the nation, and that Muslims are also victims of the Act. The leaders of the coalition stated that the demand for repealing the VPA has turned into a national demand. He urged the government to take necessary steps to repeal the act in the upcoming session of parliament (*Sangbad*, 17 September 2000). Later the organisation observed countrywide hunger strike demanding abrogation of the VPA. As part of its core programme, the leaders and workers of the minority front took part in the daylong hunger strike at the Central Shahid Minar on 25 March 2001 (*Independent*, 26 March 2001).

Beneficiary groups were alleged to be trying to subvert the repealing process of VPA. These groups were identified as (1) those who are engaged in communal and fundamental politics; (2) a section of

government officials including those of land survey department; (3) a section of lawyers; and (4) locally powerful including politicians (*Sangbad*, 25 September 2000).

Perceptions of Opposition Political Parties

Though all members of Parliamentary Standing Committee comprising of different political parties gave their consent to repeal the VPA, Begum Khaleda Zia, Chairperson, BNP, stated that the exodus of Hindus would stop. She urged the Hindu community to boldly establish their rights in their own country instead of leading a humiliating life in a foreign land. Moreover, she promised to repeal the VPA should people give her a chance to form the next government (*Independent*, 2 October 2000). The Workers Party's politburo alleged that the government had adopted delaying tactics in repealing the law. They claimed that the members of the ruling party are the main beneficiaries of the Act and hence are not interested in repealing it (*Independent*, 5 September 2000). Addressing a discussion meeting held on 13 December, leftist leader Pankaj Bhattachariya commented that the VPA is a tool of state violence against the Hindu community (*Sangbad*, 14 December 2000).

Government Policy on Vested Property

Recently the government has decided to return the vested property to the original owners by repealing the Act. But the issue created a dispute among the political leaders, civil society and the people who have expressed different opinion on the possible impact.

On 3 September a regular meeting of the cabinet with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took a major decision in principle to return the vested property to their original owners. After long 35 years of the state acquisition, a cabinet committee was formed to formulate an effective draft law for restoration of ownership of the vested property. The committee comprises of five members headed by Abdul Matin Khasru, Law Minister, Rashed Musharraf, State Minister for Land, Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Planning Minister, Satish Chandra Roy, Primary Education Minister and Advocate Rahmat Ali, Member of Parliament. On 22 October 2000 the cabinet committee finalised the draft Vested Property Return Act 2000 in its fourth meeting. Before finalising, the bill was drafted by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Land, after meticulous consideration of all aspects of handing over of the vested property.

The Parliamentary adviser to the Prime Minister, Suranjit Sen Gupta, assured the political leaders and civil society that the VPA is unable to sustain in terms of policy, democracy, constitution or secularism. He also said that it is not a problem of a particular group or community and now it is a national issue. He hoped that the bill would be passed in the next session of the Parliament (*Sangbad*, 3 December 2000).

On 8 January 2001 the Cabinet approved the draft of the *Vested Property Return Bill 2001* as recommended and amended by the Cabinet Committee. Under the bill the enlisted plots or building which are now under the possession of the government will only be returned to the original owners or their heirs or beneficiaries provided they are permanent citizens of Bangladesh (*Independent*, 9 January 2001). The *Vested Property Return Bill 2001* was placed in the 22nd Session of *Jatiya Sangsad* (JS) on 29 March 2001. Later Abdul Matin Khasru stated that the issue was brought under his attention that this law should have been annulled long ago. He also said that the issue was discussed with the different sections of society before finalising the bill (*Sangbad*, 31 March 2001). Finally the Vested Property Return Bill was passed on 8 April 2001 by the JS (*Independent*, 9 April 2001).

Perceptions of Lawyers

Senior lawyers of the country expressed varied opinions on the possible impact of the proposed Vested Property Return Bill insofar as far as its application and implementation are concerned. While one expressed that it would create a lot of problems in society, others said it would pave the way for return of the vested property to their original owners.

Barrister Mainul Hossain, President of Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association said that the decision to restore the vested property to their original owners after so many years would lead to serious consequences. He added that many of such properties had been either sold or leased out, and the ownership would open the flood gate to law suits as these were sold by the Hindu owners before leaving the country after the Indo-Pak War of 1965 (*Independent*, 5 September 2000). Leading lawyer Dr. Kamal Hossain welcomed government's decision. Advocate Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder hailed the government's initiative and stated that the Hindu community wanted to see the complete repeal of the law. He hoped to receive cooperation and support of all MPs when a bill on the law would be placed in the parliament. At the same meeting, advocate Sheikh Razzak Ali, Member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Vested Property, praised the government for taking the decision to form a cabinet committee on return of vested property, but warned against any decision in haste that is likely to spark disputes and complications (*Independent*, 4 September 2000).

Response on the Vested Property Return Bill 2001

Different sections of the civil society appreciated the passing of the *Vested Property Return Bill*. Later a decision to form a committee to revise and remove the inconsistencies of the Bill was proposed at a meeting. Speakers warned that there should not be any anomaly in the Bill, since such a law took 45 years to be annulled. They also mentioned that there was still vagueness in using some terms (*Sangbad*, 14 April 2001). Some viewed the government act as 'a half-hearted political tokenism' only to secure the votes of the Hindu minority in the next polls, which is likely to be closely contested. The UN Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, after visiting Bangladesh in May 2000, raised a number of criticisms against the Bill. Firstly, the temporal limitation of declaring a property vested by 16 February 1969, would annul most of the reclamation cases, as most Hindu property was declared as vested property after that date. Secondly, the proprietorship status can not be challenged if the property was transferred to the government, a government institution or to a private individual, has been sold or handed over permanently by the government at the directives of the court. Thirdly, the period of 180 days for submitting the ownership documents following the promulgation of the law was considered too short. Fourthly, Hindu women would be automatically excluded from inheritance in cases of death of the owner of the property, as according to the Bill, rights of inheritance shall apply in accordance with Hindu religious personal laws which do not accord any rights of inheritance to women (*Daily Star*, 22 April 2001).

Salient Features of the Vested Property Return Bill 2001

The salient features of the draft bill prepared by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs in conformity with the guidelines suggested by the parliamentary sub committee and the land ministry are as follows:

- The citizens of Bangladesh or their successors, who are staying in the country but their property had been enlisted as vested property by mistake would get back their land and property.
- The property of those who left for India abandoning their landed property in this country will be converted into government *khas* property. Property already acquired by the government will not be returned.
- After passing of the Vested Property Return Bill 2000 the VPA would be repealed. A tribunal headed by a judge with the status of a district and session judge will be constituted in every district to hear the applications of those who will claim that their property has been listed as vested property by mistake. The tribunal will complete the hearing in 90 days after gazette notification of the list of the property and name of those who claimed them. Within 90 days of publication of the list, the application could ask for return of their land of up to 60 *bigha* (1,980 decimal) in accordance with the maximum of 60 *bigha* ceiling under the Land Reform Ordinance 1984. The tribunal will give its verdict within 120 days asking the District Commissioners of the respective districts to transfer possession of the land to its original owner within 45 days. The claim of the property, once rejected by the tribunal will automatically be converted into *khas* land.
- There is also a provision for constitution of an appeal tribunal in Dhaka or other places as deemed fit by the government, where an applicant could place his/her appeal against the verdict of the tribunal. The appeal tribunal will be headed by a retired judge of the high court or a judge of sixty

years of age and will deliver the verdict on the appeal within 180 days (*Independent*, 5 September 2000).

Conclusion

A long-standing demand of the minority Hindu community has been fulfilled. The job now for the government is to ensure that genuine owners of the property are identified before their assets are returned. Three decades is a long time, and there always remains the scope for complications to arise in such sensitive area as property ownership. But let not caution create new impediments in the way of translating into action government's decision. A democratic dispensation presupposes the right of every citizen to be part of this land. Let this right be established.

UPDATE

THE 2000 FLOOD IN BANGLADESH

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Floods, although regular events for a flood-plain land like Bangladesh, cause severe damages to life and property of the people every year. Internal displacement induced by floods has been a natural occurrence. But the year 2000 observed a number of occurrences of flood among which the flash flood in the south-western part was the most devastating since people of that area are unfamiliar to such occurrence for more than 70 years.

The Regular Flood in 2000

The regular yearly flood began as early as in late April. 29 districts were affected by the month of August 2000, among which the districts situated on both sides of the rivers Padma, Jamuna, Meghna, Teesta, Dharala, Mohananda and Brahmaputra were seriously affected. The districts affected by other rivers are Chittagong, Sherpur, Khulna, Cox's Bazaar, Sylhet, Sunamganj, and Habiganj. The overall flood situation in North-Bengal further aggravated following rise in water levels of Padma and Mohananda.

Flood compelled the Rajshahi University authorities to postpone examinations for three days in the last week of September as floodwater engulfed the campus (*Independent*, 21 September). Due to monsoon wind, heavy rainfall and aberrant tidal surge of early September, a disastrous situation arose in the coastal area, as the coastal *beri bandh* (embankment) was breached. Over 10,000 dwelling houses and 12 miles of embankment were damaged in Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar. The affected areas are the offshore islands of Sandwip and Moheskhal, the coastal areas of Sitakundu and Anowara. The Sandwip Town Protection Embankment was seriously damaged that affected over 1,00,000 people (*Independent*, 3 September). In Nilphamari due to flood, and land erosion some 10,000 trees were uprooted and washed away (*Observer*, 29 September). Ferry services between Aricha-Daulatdia and Aricha-Nagarbari routes turned risky.

Communication and transport of goods in 36 districts of the south, west and northern areas of the country were seriously disrupted. Road communication of Sherpur with other districts remained suspended from early August. More than 1500 houses in Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj collapsed. Due to collapse of WAPDA *beri bandh* at Luxmipur, a large area was flooded leading to thousands of people being uprooted (*Sangbad*, 5 August).

Background of the Flash Flood in the Southwestern Region

The flash flood in the south-western region of Bangladesh in the month of September-October 2000 was unprecedented since in more than 70-year history people in that area have been unaware of such calamity. The total affected population was 31,92,786 or 650,000 families in the nine most affected districts: Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Satkhira, Kushtia, Magura, Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Jessore. The total number of displaced persons was 905,509, and more than 150 persons died due

to the flood (*Paribeshpatra*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June – September 2000). Moreover, a number of 43,623 persons including children and aged persons were affected by diarrhoea during flood, among which 11 died (*Independent*, 5 November).

Reason of the Flood

From September 18 to 24, the total amount of rainfall in West Bengal was 1,700 mm (daily 243 mm on an average), while the normal rainfall during this period should be 49 mm daily. Altogether 258,000 cusecs of water from Damodar flooded 9 districts of West Bengal resulting in the destruction of the embankment at Bahrapur. As a consequence, 400,000 cubic feet of water entered Bangladesh per second from 22 to 23 September (*Paribeshpatra*, Vol. 4, No. 2, June – September 2000). According to a study conducted by the Joint River Commission (JRC), the reasons for the flash flood identified were: (i) incessant rainfall in the Ganges river basin, (ii) over-rainfall in West Bengal, Damodar valley of Bihar and in the flood affected areas in Bangladesh at the same time, (iii) releasing of water from different water structures of India, (iv) flowing of water from the upper riparian areas into Bangladesh, and (v) the unnatural high tide at the Bay of Bengal at that time (*Sangbad*, 22 November 2000).

According to river experts, after the construction of the Farakka Barrage, the river Ganges have shifted its course resulting to regular flooding in part of Maldah and Murshidabad districts of West Bengal of India. It was predicted that within the next decade the rivers Pagla and Bhagirathi will merge into the Ganges and it would become three times greater in volume. This will cause degradation of a large portion of the Ganges basin or permanently inundate under floodwater. The flash flood of 2000 may be a forecast of the future. Kalyan Rudra, the eminent Indian water expert predicted early in 2000 of a flash flood in the southeastern part of West Bengal and southwestern part of Bangladesh (*Sangbad*, 22 November).

Economic Impact

According to Agriculture Minister, Matia Chowdhury, the loss of agricultural products was estimated at Tk 474.36 crore caused due to the flood (*Daily Star*, 16 November). Crops were damaged in more than 27,000 hectares of land worth Tk 78 crore (*Sangbad*, 24 December). The estimated damage of jute plants was Tk 50 crore and that of 51 fishery projects in Jessore was Tk 23 crore, of which the probable income would be over 100 crore. According to one newspaper, there has been a loss of more than Tk 5,000 crore (*Bhorer Kagoj*, 17 October). Another estimate by Novartis Crop Protection, an NGO, the crop loss was Tk 9.7 billion, including Tk 3.1 billion in investment and Tk 6.6 billion from potential yield loss. Another estimate suggests that fish resource worth Tk 42.89 crore, and shrimp structures worth Tk 19 crore had been lost (*Independent*, 27 October and 19 November). A total of 1,315 km road and embankment, 1,374 km pavement and 834 bridges were partially or fully damaged (*Independent*, 29 November). Export and import through Benapole land port were stopped in late September (*Bangladesh Observer*, 29 September). At the same time, the direct goods train service between Bangladesh and India on Benapole – Petrapole route scheduled to start from 28 September was postponed. Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) announced suspension of Dhaka-Calcutta bus service due to flood from the 28 September.

Social Impact

Acute crisis of construction materials like bamboo, straw and jute-stalk emerged in the flood-hit areas. The unavailability of these items triggered off a price hike, which made the poor suffer the most. Fodder crisis was also acute during and after the flood. The sudden flood brought a change in the pattern of the houses in the flood-affected areas. Before the flood, most of the mud, trunk and bamboo made houses did not have high basement. After the flood, people began to build high houses. Many of them are using corrugated iron sheet as the major house-building material. The cold winter following the flood caused further sufferings to the flood-hit people. Thousands of families had to spend their days and nights under open sky during the winter. It was reported that the support provided for housing was also quite inadequate. According to a report, around 700,000 people of Satkhira are still passing their days and nights under open sky. Most of these families are compelled to mortgage in

land for small amount of money, sell their poultry and cattle, as they could not recover from the loss (*Prothom Alo*, 1 April 2001).

Due to damaged houses families suffered as a result of cold, especially children and elderly people. Most of the people lost their valuables since they did not get enough time to move those out of the houses. Children lost their books and other educational materials. Many primary and non-formal schools were destroyed and some of them remained closed in the flood-affected areas. Other notable loss is the death of many fruit trees and valuable wood trees. Many families' hopes were dashed by this loss. Mostly the landless and marginal farmers as well as the women headed families felt the adverse impact of the deluge.

Population flow towards the urban areas was visibly inevitable. Hundreds of flood-affected people migrated to Chittagong city, as well as nearby towns. They looked for work and took mainly the professions of begging, rickshaw pulling, and day labour. They took shelter in railway station, pavements, open spaces, and slum areas. This flow of population led to the lowering of already depressed wage (*Sangbad*, 29 October). Serious unemployment problem was faced as the crops were damaged. The government did not take any special measure to create job opportunities. This led to starvation of thousands of poor people; even the luckiest had to sell their labour at only Tk 30 a day.

Post-flood Rehabilitation: Support Provided by Different Sectors

Government Support

For the post-flood rehabilitation, the government took a number of programmes. It allotted Tk 8.76 crore for distributing seeds, and Tk 15 lac for the betel-leaf cultivators (*Daily Star*, 16 November). 519 metric tons of Boro seed were disbursed among 61,000 small and marginal farmers (*Sangbad*, 24 December). Government programme for agricultural rehabilitation provided with Tk 18.24 crore in 16 districts for 1,83,697 hectares of land. There was free seed distribution among 44,000 farmers. The Ministry of Agriculture distributed 5 lac fruit-plant saplings to 25,000 families worth Tk 50 lac. An amount of Tk 47.10 crore was allotted to the NGOs for housing programme. A total of 4,74,510 Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) cards were issued in the affected districts.

Initiatives were also undertaken by government banks. The Janata Bank disbursed loan through temporary field based branches. An amount of Tk 25 crore was disbursed as agricultural loan by the Krishi Bank.

The Degree Examination was rescheduled to be held 2 months later in the flood affected areas. The deadline for submitting the income-tax return was extended by 3 months.

International Support

A huge amount of support also came from external sources. The Department for International Development (DfID) provided 15,000 blankets, fertiliser to 12,000 families, paddy seed to 6,000 and 15 days work at the rate of Tk 60 per person. The World Food Program (WFP) gave Tk 170 crore as emergency relief, and US\$ 200 million of resources for 2001-2005. The Government of Great Britain altogether provided Tk 12 crore worth of support. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) offered a loan of Tk 370 crore (US\$ 67.8 million) for post-flood rehabilitation. Later ADB approved a loan of US\$ 34 million for repair and rehabilitation of the flood-affected roads and bridges. 800 tons of dates were donated by Saudi Arabia. World Bank approved a loan of US\$ 21 million for damaged roads for Rajshahi and Khulna zones. Support was also offered by Oxfam Bangladesh.

Support from the Civil Society

Spontaneous initiatives were visible from different segments of the civil society for the flood-affected people of the Southwest. Cultural programmes and art exhibitions were organised by prominent artists. People came up with relief of whatever amount they could.

NGO Support

Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) provided with support to the SSC examinees – it disbursed loan to 2,353 students with a total Tk 16.48 lac as Board fees. Further an amount of Tk 3.05 lac was disbursed by BRAC as flood relief. Later it came up with a rehabilitation plan with Tk 9.31 crore. Warm clothes among 10,000 families were distributed by Rangpur – Dinajpur Rural Service.

Public Protests

According to newspaper reports, allegations were made against the local public representatives for misappropriation of flood relief, and people demanded immediate actions against them through mass rallies. In reply to such allegations, the government took action against the district administration and removed the DC and Civil Surgeon of Satkhira on 5 November (*Independent*, 6 November). The agricultural officers of Satkhira were also accused of corruption, distribution of unproductive seeds, and irregular purchase of low-quality seeds (*Sangbad*, 24 December). Abdul Khalek, the State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation stated that the accused persons were mostly from the opposition parties. The Union Parishad (UP) Chairpersons demanded that the members of armed forces should not be present during relief distribution (*Sangbad*, 19 November 2000). In this connection, a report prepared by the Office of Chief Audit and Accounts Department and sent to the President on 4 October 2000, revealed that 42 District Commissioners were alleged to be unable to produce proper documents of an amount Tk 14.45 crore which had been allotted for the post-flood rehabilitation programme in 1995 (*Sangbad*, 7 October).

On 25 October, at a meeting of UP Chairpersons of Satkhira, the State Minister of Social Welfare, Dr. Mozammel Huq gave an order to break hands and legs of the reporters who had been reporting against the misappropriation of flood relief. He further assured the public representatives of taking care of the cases if filed against them (*Saptahik 2000*, 3 November, Vol. 3, No. 26). The journalists informed the Prime Minister about this and protested. But immediately after the incidence, a reporter of *Daily Satkhira Chitra* was assaulted on 26 October by Asadul Huq, the UP Chairman of Kulia (*Sangbad*, 27 October). Moreover, a procession led by the local public representatives on 31 October at Satkhira, demanded breaking off hands and legs of the journalists who had reported against the misappropriation (*Sangbad*, 13 November). Later in a statement the State Minister of Social Welfare denied the allegations of threats and physical abuse on newspaper reporters and urged for impartial news report (*Sangbad*, 1 November). On 24 October, the State Minister of Relief and Rehabilitation admitted the allegations to be true. But 12 UP Chairmen submitted resignation letters to the DC of Satkhira with a demand for the withdrawal of the minister from relief activities (*Saptahik 2000*, 3 November, Vol. 3, No. 26).

Politicisation of the Flood

The incident of the flash flood in the south-west turned into a political issue between two mainstream political parties. On 5 October the opposition party leader, Begum Khaleda Zia was prevented from going to Kolaroa, Satkhira, by the security forces as the relief programme by the PM was going on there (*Sangbad*, 6 October 2000). This event was criticised by the opposition party. But the PM alleged that the opposition leadership was trying to play politics on people's miseries (*Independent*, 27 October).

National and International Response at the Policy-making Level

The government task force on flood suggested removal of 170 cross dams out of 212 constructed for fishing purpose. The task force made this recommendation as the dams obstructed the normal flow of water. The report also suggested immediate repair of sluice gates of those embankments, and a 30-day plan to drain out the flood water. At a meeting representatives of donor agencies suggested increase in the quantity of food grain under the VGF programme. They also identified the failure of the local administration to respond quickly and the weakness of a flood early warning system (*Independent*, 10 November). The government undertook a project worth US\$ 16.5 million to control flood in the south-western region, of which US\$ 13.2 million will be provided by ADB and the rest by the government. The project was reported to be implemented in two phases (*Independent*, 9 December).

In order to prevent flood, the government decided to go for an early implementation of the Dhaka Integrated Flood Control Embankment (*Independent*, 17 January 2001). The need for developing a system to handle the man-made along with natural disasters was stressed by delegates attending the Pacific Rim Directors of Air Operations Conference held at Dhaka. The participants also suggested inclusion of civilians in disaster management, and regular exercise between countries to streamline the process of handling disasters (*Independent*, 10 February 2001).

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina stated in a meeting that since embankments and barrages were made on common rivers, it is necessary to discuss with the government of neighbouring states on addressing the impact of the flash flood and reducing people's sufferings (*Sangbad*, 11 October). A 10-member joint Indo-Nepal technical team agreed to a series of measures to control flooding on 13 January 2001. As part of the measures, India had agreed to pay for the construction of an embankment on the Nepalese side. On the other hand, the 34th Meeting of Indo-Bangladesh Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), held from 12 to 13 January 2001, came up with an agreement to cooperate in future to tackle natural calamities. India also agreed to assist Bangladesh to prepare a detailed project report for constructing the Ganges Barrage across the river Padma, jointly take measures to improve drainage system, and to provide advance information on such eventualities in future (*Independent*, 14 January 2001).

Conclusion

The flash flood in the Southwest of Bangladesh in 2000 again revealed serious lack of preparedness, and planning to combat such natural calamities. The events also prove that we have to seriously put our efforts in dealing with natural disaster with a collaborative way involving government, civil society and the affected people. Once more the common people put in great effort in combating the disastrous flood together, which can be a good lesson to the concerned authorities.

FLOOD AND DISPLACEMENT: WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

Shasanka Saadi
Steps Towards Development

The Issue of Displacement

The flash flood in the Southwest of Bangladesh during September – October 2000 was unprecedented in the sense that in more than 70 years there has not been any occurrence of such disaster. Nearly 90% of Chuadnaga, Meherpur, Jhenidah, Satkhira and Jessore went under floodwater. Crops, households, valuable belongings, trees, educational institutions, roads and highways were damaged by the flood. Millions of people were affected, as they had to relocate themselves in order to search for a dry and safe place.

Displacement due to the flood starts with the loss of housing, assets, crops, and often human lives. This leads to involuntary displacement for a brief period. It further leads to social as well as economic insecurity due to the prolonged impacts of the flood and failure of recovery from the physical losses. This situation further leads to voluntary displacement, either for a short period in cases where the victim is able to recover the loss, or for a longer period, often a permanent displacement where the victim has no opportunity and purpose of coming back to the habitual residence. Every year nearly 1,00,000 people are displaced through flood and other natural disasters, especially river erosion, cyclone etc. But it was a new experience to the people of that region. Most of the people below the age of 70 years excluding the migrated group never experienced flood since these areas are identified as high land. The flash flood compelled the people of this region to go through the magnitude of devastation.

We can identify a simple pattern of displacement through the situational analysis of the condition and position of the displaced. From different reports published in newspaper and visiting the area, it is

evident that people did not take shelter at a distant place from their area of residence. The number of people migrating toward towns and the rate of migration at the time of flash flood showed that people are unwilling to move to a safer place even at the time of such calamity. This coincides with the basic laws of migration and it can be identified as short-term displacement. Since the water was not stagnant in most places except Satkhira, the displaced people returned to their respective homes within 20-30 days after being displaced. In terms of time this is a long period but in terms of destination it is not that far.

Displacement across the international border due to flood occurred. The flash flood compelled around 600 families of West Bengal, India, to move beyond the national boundary and take shelter inside Bangladesh. Around 3,000 Indian nationals became externally displaced due to the flood. They returned to their homes soon after the floodwater receded.

Cause of Displacement

A common pattern of the housing is evident in the south-western region of Bangladesh. Most of the houses are made up of mud, bamboo, and straw, as these materials are easily available and less expensive. This kind of house survives for years if the owner takes regular care. Occasionally, continuous rain before the flood creates holes and mudslide. The strong current of water dislodges the basement of such houses. Only the brick-built houses survived. People took shelter on the roads and barrages. Many left their villages and took shelter in the relief centres of nearer town.

Changes in Socio-economic Perspective

As a high-land people, the affected families mainly depend on the general crops such as rice, wheat and sugar cane. But the loss of one crop affected them severely. Day labourers found it difficult to cope with the situation, as there was no work available for three months. Farmers generated their innovative character and shifted to the short-term vegetable production. Many undertook this initiative for the first time. A good number of people tried to get employed in other jobs like pulling vans. People felt that it would take at least 6 months to recover from the losses sustained during flood.

People for People

Through the whole period of uncertainty and poor condition, the affected people received full support from people. General people acted promptly after the sudden shock. Even the first warning in Satkhira town came from a person who runs a satellite channel network. He showed a video clip of flood in West Bengal to their viewers and people responded very quickly. But it was reported that the person was harassed by the government agencies for illegal transmission.

People from all walks came to help the affected people. They provided the victims with shelter and food for almost 20 days as the quantity of relief was very much inadequate for the first two weeks. Students came forward to give voluntary service to the affected people. Local NGOs tried their best to mitigate the sufferings at that time. But NGOs mostly targeted their own beneficiaries. Active steps taken by the defence forces saved many lives and they provided extended support in restoring road links, reaching relief in the far areas along the border and keeping law and order situation under control.

Responses from the government and donor agencies were very poor and slow. The government failed to present the true picture of affected areas in proper time. As a result many donors did not act at all. Others acted cautiously. Moreover, the political parties and public representatives of these areas also performed poorly. It was alleged that relief was distributed among the persons who showed allegiance to a particular party rather than the people in real distress. But nonetheless, the grassroots workers of all parties including the left wing groups worked together in most areas.

Issues of Concern

The following issues may be taken into considerations in the post-flood rehabilitation and reconstruction programme:

Firstly, Chuadanga and Satkhira have common border with India that creates opportunities for easy access to both countries. In recent times, groups have been active in these two districts for trafficking in women and children since they are the most vulnerable due to acute poverty. The flash flood further deteriorated their condition leading to two consequences: first, most of the families are still homeless and floating, especially the women headed households, and second, there is an increasing need of essential items such as food, cloth and shelter. In this scenario, many of them have to move to places unknown to them for their subsistence. This may lead to extreme vulnerability and make them prone to trafficking by *dalals* (agents) and touts to the urban areas or to the neighbouring countries.

Secondly, most of the school-going children lost their educational materials after being affected by the flash flood. This will hamper their educational life for this year and also for the next year. In the rural areas, specially among the poor families, there is a common trend to collect books and other materials from senior students. But after the flood no old books and other materials will be available in the next year. As a result drop out rate of children; especially girl child from the educational institutes is likely to increase.

Thirdly, Chuadanga and Satkhira districts are known as the area of highest and lowest temperature of Bangladesh for the last 5/6 years. This year, nearly 90 percent people of these districts lost their belongings including warm clothes due to flood. The malnourished and undernourished children and the aged will be affected most by the winter cold.

Fourthly, since most of the crops of this area were destroyed, the misery of the marginal and landless farmers will increase. Many of them took early loans from the buyers, i.e., most of the sugarcane growers traditionally take money in advance from Darshana Sugar Mill. Among them, a good number of families are women-headed. When they will fail to repay the loan, they may have to take more loans or they may have to look for other opportunity, including that of migrating to cities and towns.

Changes in the Policy Level Needed

The following measures may be taken into consideration in the long-term policies in the post-flood rehabilitation programmes:

First, a proper policy for protection from flood. The government should have sector-specific as well as a region-specific long-term flood policy. Second, it is more important to rehabilitate the affected people than to provide them with relief. The primary priority is obviously relief but this should not be the end. Third, rehabilitation process should be quick as slow-go process compels affected people to migrate to the towns and cities. It should also be based on the socio-economic environment or else it will be rejected by the people. For example, this year nearly 5,000 family received corrugated iron sheet for construction of houses. Since these are not compatible to the pattern of the houses in this region, many families refused to take the relief and others sold it for cash. Fourth, cash relief is more effective than other form of relief as most people are land based and they can put the money into cultivation. Fifth, support should be provided for at least four months. Sixth, women and children should be given top priority in relief and rehabilitation and their need should be assessed properly.

In order to deal with the impacts of the flood on women and children, we need fresh policy and planning in a more effective way. The following steps may be considered in addressing future flood cases:

- ❑ Mass awareness programme and campaign in order to prevent trafficking in women and children, particularly in distress situations;
- ❑ Development of economic assistance programmes for the destitute women as well as the female-headed households;
- ❑ A fair amount of support of educational materials for the school-going children to prevent increase in drop out;
- ❑ Warm clothes for the affected families, especially for the children and the aged; and

- Agricultural support as well as small-scale financial support to restart economic activities and to prevent migration towards urban areas as well as the trafficking in women and children from these areas.

Conclusion

People have now become cautious about the situation and they have learnt a good lesson from this flood. They have already built and repaired their houses with, or, in most cases, without any help from others. According to Dr. Ainun Nishat, Bangladesh Representative of IUCN and water expert, the loss could be reduced if people were warned in time. There is a necessity to develop such early warning system and there should be coordination among the different functionaries who deal with disasters. So what they need is a timely forecast of the impending disaster, guidance and information. NGOs can play an important role but it is the government, who has to gear the state machinery to provide timely support in case of emergency.

The feature is based on the author's visit to the flood-affected districts of Satkhira and Chuadanga in the first week of December 2000, press reports and District Flood Reports of Satkhira and Chuadanga 2000.

Need for PROTECTION OF MINORITY RIGHTS UNDERScoreD

A visiting scholar and human rights expert from Australia stated that violation of minority rights caused frustration among the minorities that may contribute to wage struggle for self-determination. Senior lecturer of Murdoch University, Australia, and Director, Asia Pacific Centre for Human Rights, Dr. Fernand De Varennes gave a talk on *Minority Rights in International Law*, organised by RMMRU at Dhaka University on 6 November, 2000.

Dr. Varennes stated that the minorities' language rights are important, which could be divided into two broad categories: right to private use and right to public use. Their rights have been enshrined in the International Covenant on Minority Rights, European Charter for Minority Rights, Oslo Recommendation and the UN Declaration on Rights of Minority Languages. He said that prior to 1956, non-inclusion of Bengali as the state language of Pakistan was a violation of an important right. He also referred to Tamil struggle in Sri Lanka and the movement of the tribal people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as examples of tension due to non-recognition of minority languages. He said that international system could not supervise the implementation of minority rights.

Seminar Urges ENSURING SECURITY OF WOMEN

Speakers at a seminar observed that adequate concern are to be paid to female labour force of Bangladesh. The discussants also emphasised on the issue of empowerment of women being a key factor to the various security dimensions of this marginalised section of the society. These views were expressed at a seminar titled *Nari Jiban: Tracing Women's Migration and Work Lives*, organised by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) and held at the University of Dhaka on 25 January 2001. Dr. Kathryn B Ward, Professor in Sociology, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, was the keynote speaker.

Dr. Ward identified five kinds of work where women are engaged: agricultural, sex, domestic, micro credit, and factory. She argued that migration plays an important role in this regard. Dr. Ward associated migration of female labour force with demand and supply and explained how the demand of labour makes the rural women to migrate to urban areas, and often to another country as domestic, sex, or factory workers. She further argued that how developing tourism industry with international support might lead to the flourishing of sex work, often through trafficking. She explained how government initiatives of rehabilitation programmes are responsible for the decline of their income, and makes them more vulnerable. Dr. Ward further argued, referring to her experiences from the field visits, how increased economic activities by the women, regardless what the job is, develop the sense

of empowerment among them. Later she referred to the success rate of engaging women in the micro-credit schemes, which is also subject to the supportive role performed by the male counterparts.

Following the presentation, a lively discussion took place where the issues of defining empowerment, different aspects of trafficking, global economic factor vis-à-vis the domestic aid and the future of the garment workers were raised. The session was presided over by Dr. C R Abrar. A number of teachers and students of the University and NGO representatives attended the programme.

PUBLICATIONS

Towards National Refugee Laws in South Asia, ed. Chowdhury R Abrar and Shahdeen Malik, by RMMRU, October 2000, 96 pp. Tk 50.00, US\$ 4.50

This book constitutes a part of RMMRU's ongoing campaign for the enactment of national laws for refugees in South Asia. The campaign gained impetus following the adoption of the Model National Law for Refugees at the Fourth Consultative Meeting of Eminent Persons Groups (EPG) of South Asia in November 1997 in Dhaka.

The first part of the volume comprises of two papers: one by Sri Wijeratne examining the model law in the light of 1951 Convention on Refugees; and the other by Lim-Kabaa comparing the model law with various regional initiatives. Both the papers were presented at the Kathmandu Meeting of the EPG in 1998. The second part presents a comparative perspective on the need for national laws under different national contexts. This comprises of interviews of a select group of lawyers, refugee scholars, civil society activists and former UNHCR officials of different countries of the region. The third part deals with Bangladesh in terms of refugee law. This section consists of C R Abrar's paper focussing on the country's experience in dealing with refugee flows and articulating the need for a national refugee law in Bangladesh, the proceedings of the 1st National Consultation on this issue organised in August 1999 by RMMRU, and Shahdeen Malik's article with his reflection on the prosaic arguments made by some participants at the consultation opposing the law. The Model National Law for Refugees is incorporated in the annex.

The Kitchen Spoon's Handle: Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaids, Michele Ruth Gamburd, Cornell University Press, 2000, 275 pp. ISBN 0-8014-8644-0.

According to a common Sinhala proverb, "A woman's understanding reaches only the length of the kitchen handle". In this beautifully written book on the effects of female migration from Sri Lanka, Michele Ruth Gamburd shows that the length of that handle now spans several thousand miles, rather than a mere twelve inches. *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle* skilfully blends the stories and memories of returned migrants and their families and neighbours with interviews with government officials, recruiting agents, and moneylenders, showing the confluence of global and local processes in the lives of the villagers.

In nine chapters the book covers issues of labour migration in the national and international contexts, administrative structures, the role played by the moneylenders, women's work experiences abroad, flow and use of remittance, social mobility and land reform in terms of caste relations, the changing roles played by the male counterparts, different aspects of motherhood in case of the female migrants, and abuses done to the female migrants by the employer.

Dr. Michele R Gamburd is Assistant Professor in Anthropology at Portland State University.

ACTIVITIES OF THE UNIT October – December 2000

Consultation: The 2nd National Consultation on the *Need for a National Law on Refugees* was organised by RMMRU at CIRDAP Auditorium on 26 October 2000. Among others, eminent legislators, NGOs, Legal Counsel of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and human rights activists participated in the programme. Dr. Shamsul Bari, former Director of UNHCR was the principal speaker.

Symposium: A day-long symposium on *Short Term Women Labour Migration from Bangladesh* was organised at CIRDAP Auditorium on 15 November 2000. Dr. Tasneem Siddiqui presented her research findings in four sessions. Academics, representatives from recruiting agencies, migrant workers' associations, lawyers, policy makers, NGO and human rights activists participated at the programme.

Talk: A talk on *Minority Rights in International Law* by Dr. Fernand De Varennes, Senior Lecturer, Murdoch University, Australia, and Director, Asia Pacific Centre for Human Rights, was held at the University of Dhaka, on 6 November 2000.

Refugee Law Course: A short course on *International Refugee Law* was organised at the University of Dhaka on 5-6 November 2000. The course was participated by 30 students from the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka. Dr. Borhanuddin Khan, Department of Law, Dr. Shahdeen Malik, Legal Advisor, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, Dr. Syed Refaat Ahmed, lawyer, Dr. C R Abrar, and Mr. Obaidul Haque, Department of International Relations, and Mr. S M Akram, Research Associate, RMMRU conducted the course.

Publications: A book titled *Need for National Refugee Laws in South Asia* edited by C R Abrar and Shahdeen Malik was published in October 2000.

Issue 14, October – December 2000 of the Unit newsletter, *Udbastu* (the Uprooted) was published in October 2000.

Monthly Meeting: Two monthly meetings were held in November and December. In November, a paper was presented on *Biodiversity: The Bangladesh Context* by Rahat Chowdhury, Department of Anthropology and Student Associate of RMMRU. In December, a paper on *Peace and Conflict in the Middle East* was presented by Mahbubur Rahman, Department of Political Science and Student Associate of RMMRU. The presentations were followed lively discussions from the floor.

Field Work: The field visits of the research project on *Remittance and Micro-finance Institutions* was held in December 2000. With a target group of 100 interviewees, a team of four Associates visited Kalihati, Tangail and Mirersharai, Chittagong. The team interviewed 50 remittance receiving migrant workers' families in each of the two research sites. Along with that, interviews with national and local micro-finance organisations and banks were also conducted.

Visitor: A team led by Mr. Rob Anderson, Policy Adviser, Education and Developing Countries Division, from Royal Netherlands Embassy paid a visit to the Unit on 18 October 2000.

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Editorial Assistance : S M Akram, S Rozana Rashid

Published by:
RMMRU
Room 4019, Arts Building, University of Dhaka
Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh
Tel: 80-2-9661920 ext. 4483, 4547
Fax: 880-2-8117962
e-mail: rmmru@aitlbd.net

Price: Tk 5.00

RMMRU Workshop on
EFFICIENT FLOW AND EFFECTIVE USE OF
MIGRANT WORKERS' REMITTANCES

Participants: Representatives of banks, micro-finance institutions (MFIs),
and migrant workers' associations

Chair: *Professor Wahiduddin Mahmud*, Dhaka University (Session on Banking Sector)
Dr. Salehuddin Ahmed, Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (Session on MFIs)

Venue: Hotel Purbani, Dhaka
Date: 12 April 2001 at 9:30 a.m.

RMMRU ORGANISED
AWARENESS CAMPAIGN WORKSHOP FOR
COMMUNITY LEADERS AND ACTIVISTS ON LABOUR MIGRATION PROCESS

Participants: *Union Parishad* members (local level public representatives),
NGO activists and representatives of returnee workers' associations

Venue: BIAM, Eskaton Road, Dhaka
Date: 27-28 April 2001