

UNHCR
Report

IV. 2

A story of anguish and action

The United Nations focal point for assistance
to refugees from East Bengal in India



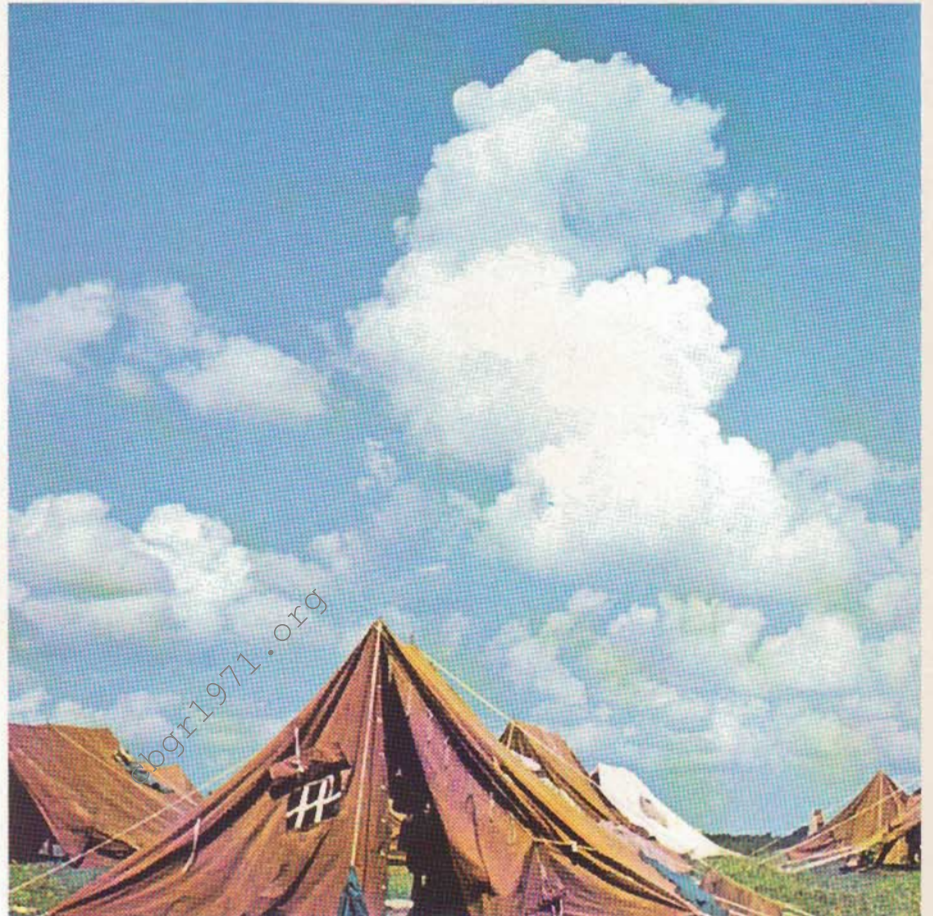
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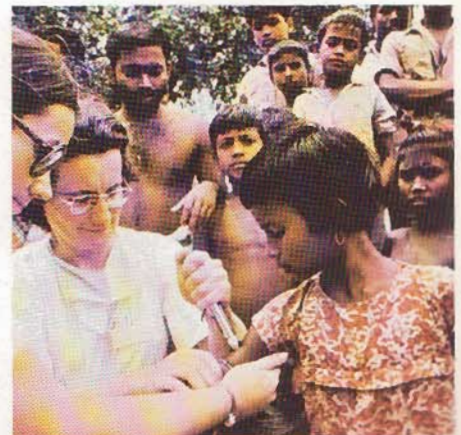
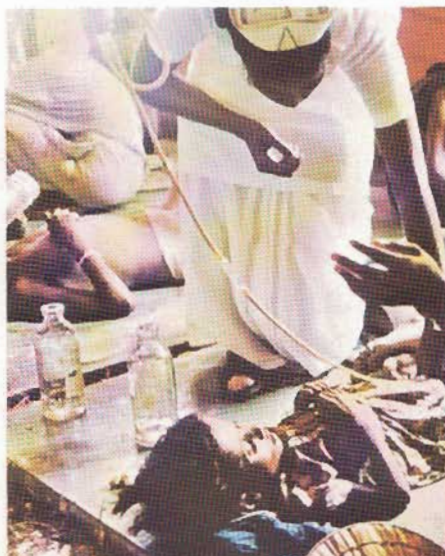
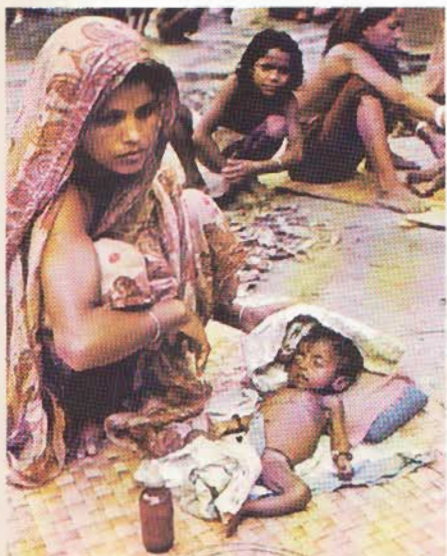
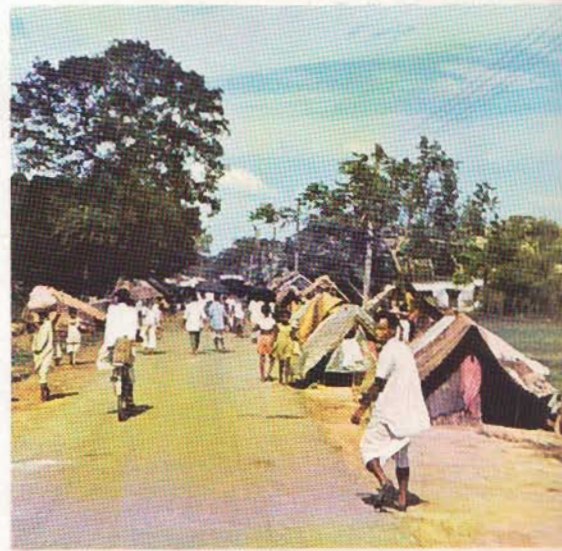
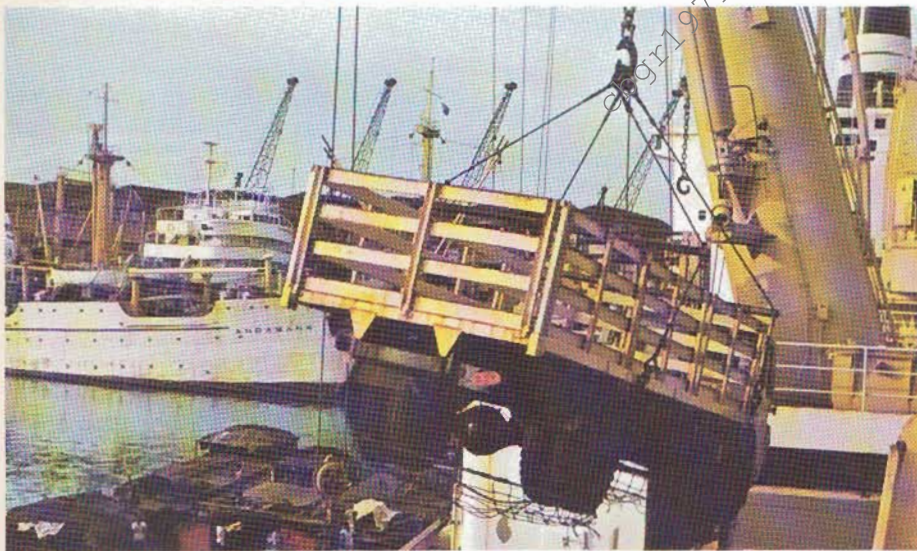


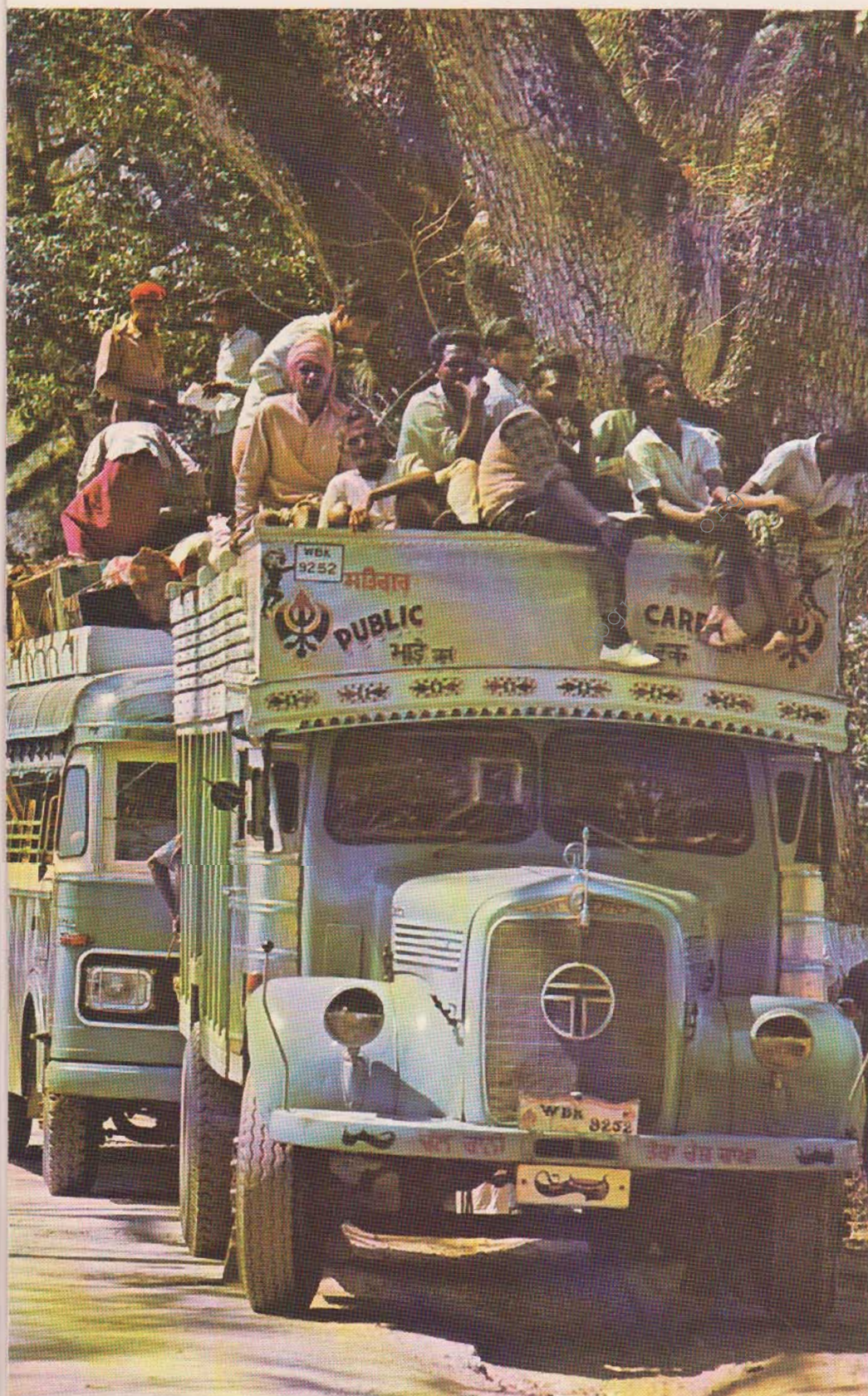


"I keep gazing on the far-away gloom
of the sky, and my heart wanders
wailing with the restless wind."

(Tagore)

MMR JALAL





"A Story of Anguish and Action" is published by UNHCR as focal point for the humanitarian assistance to East Bengali refugees in India by and through the United Nations system.

UNHCR is the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

UNHCR has two main functions:

Protection—to promote and safeguard the rights of refugees in such vital fields as employment, education, residence, freedom of movement and security against being returned to a country where their life or liberty would be endangered because of persecution.

Material assistance—to assist governments of countries of asylum in the task of making refugees self-supporting as rapidly as possible.

Though UNHCR is sometimes called upon by governments to provide emergency relief, its assistance is intended primarily to promote permanent solutions to the problems of refugees through voluntary repatriation, local integration or settlement in another country.

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In the collection of poems "Gitanjali" there is a song in which Rabindranath Tagore, the great Bengali poet, expresses an immensely lonely and sorrowful longing for a mystical beloved, the metaphysical Being from whom everything springs and to whom everything returns. Knowing his love for his native soil, the sad words of the poet might form an almost prophetic lament for the millions of Bengali people during their temporary exile in India. In the hearts of the human beings lost in the crowds of the congested camps, not knowing when or whether there would be a return home, there must have been the cry:

"I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind." The millions of refugees who went to India between March and December 1971 were the innocent victims of cruel events which added a tragic chapter to the long and troubled history of the sub-continent. Their exile began barely a few months after the worst cyclone of the century had struck their country, killing hundreds of thousands and rendering over two million homeless. The work of relief and reconstruction which a commiserating world had started was to be interrupted when other events, this time man-made, followed by internal conflict and a long period of increasing unrest, added new dimensions to the suffering. Millions of human beings went into exile in the neighbouring areas of India.

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The imagination balks at the thought of what might have happened if there had not been available in India in 1971 sufficient reserve food stocks on which the authorities could draw to feed the refugees and if there had not been a sufficiently strong supplementary action on behalf of the international community to provide at short notice the medicines, shelter, replacement stocks of food, ambulances, jeeps and trucks, blankets, clothing and a supplementary feeding programme for the children. The history of past famine disasters, like the one in 1943 when over one and a half million people died in Bengal, are sufficiently harrowing to suggest how much worse the calamity might have been. Even so the sum total of suffering in and outside the refugee camps can never be assessed. But within the possibilities of human endeavour the lives of millions of refugees were preserved until the day when it was possible for them to return home.

The responsibility for maintaining life and health fell on the Government of India which carried out a vast relief operation. Faced with the heavy charges this entailed, an

appeal was addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for international assistance. In providing this, the United Nations played a vital and major part.

The position of the United Nations was delicate. There were the baffling aspects of the political controversies. Passions ran high and the Organization saw itself exposed to irate criticism on the part of a large section of the mass media. As for the relief action, both the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner who had been given specific responsibilities as "focal point" for assistance by and through the United Nations system realized the importance of maintaining a strict attitude of humanitarian neutrality. Only by doing this could they ensure that the multi-lateral channel would enjoy the widest possible support of the parties concerned and of the international community as a whole.

It is significant that both India and Pakistan, even at the height of the crisis, recognized the validity of this attitude. They extended, each in their own field, their full co-operation to those in the United Nations engaged in this life-saving undertaking, even if on certain aspects they held strongly

differing opinions. These did not, however, in any way hamper the relief operation since those subjects on which no agreement could be reached related to matters other than material help.

In the appropriate organs of the United Nations, notably the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly, recommendations and resolutions in support of the relief work were passed by acclamation. Furthermore, 52 Governments channelled their aid through the United Nations. This, by the end of the operations, had reached a value of over \$183 million. Bilateral governmental aid on its part represented some \$60 million, while direct non-governmental support has been estimated at \$46 million. These figures illustrate how large was the part of the United Nations in the total volume of assistance given by the world at large during the ten months of the emergency.

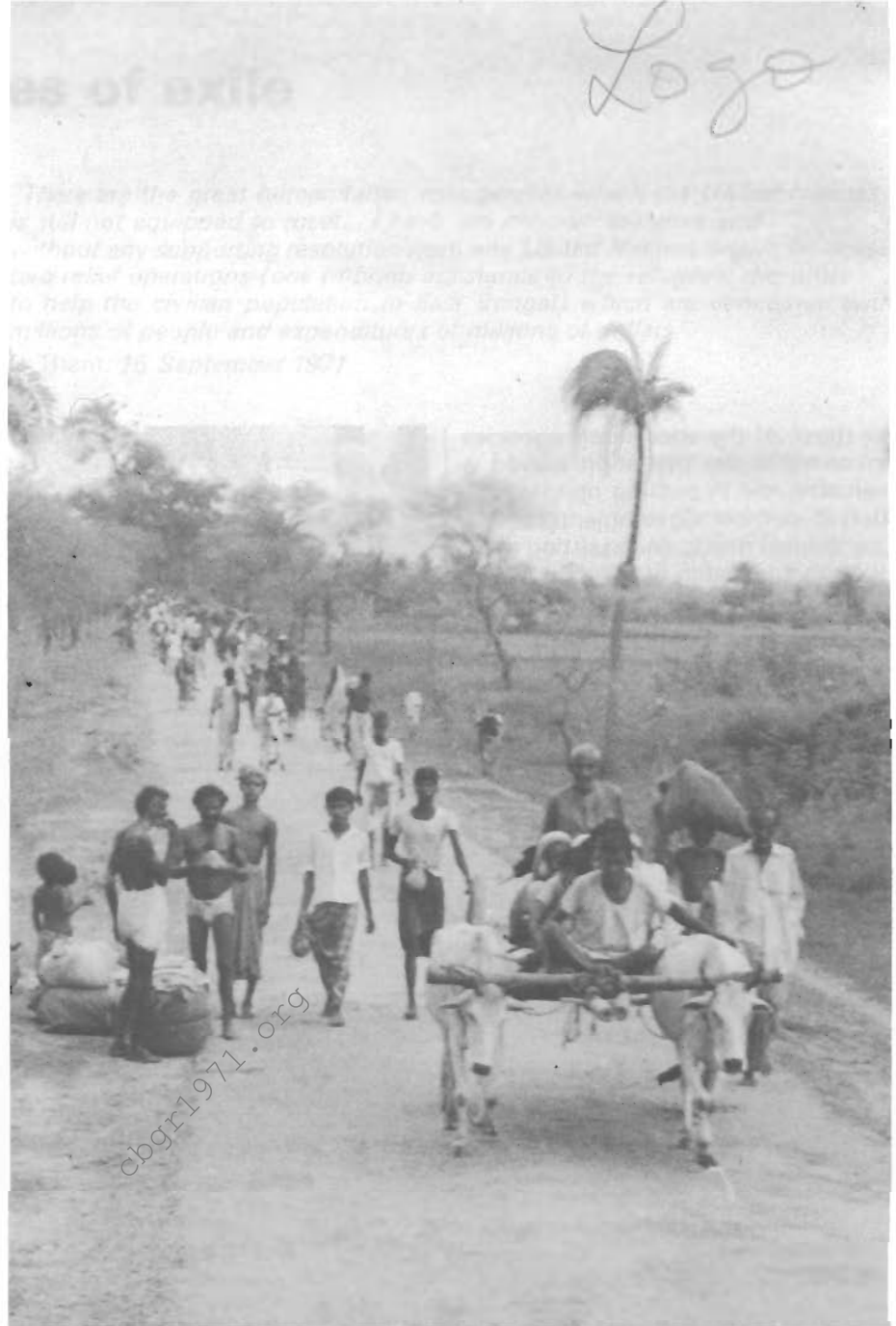
In helping to meet the refugee situation in India, the United Nations' role was at once less direct and more massive than on many previous occasions. It brought to India the funds and the goods needed to help the Government meet the situation. It did not itself distribute goods, nor had it officers in the camps. Yet because of the close co-operation established between the authorities and the United Nations, and because of the system that was devised to plan the action and to implement these plans, the assistance proved effective and efficient.

The role of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was, at the request of the Secretary-General, that of a clearing house for information regarding the needs and the assistance given, of planner and co-ordinator, of fund-raiser and of liaison channel with Governments and non-governmental organizations. As such it was referred to as the "focal point" for United Nations assistance to the refugees from East Pakistan. Three other United Nations agencies: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food



Programme (WFP), were associated with this focal point. They undertook the buying of supplies and the shipping; in an advisory capacity vis-à-vis the Government of India, they gave technical advice on health, food, sanitation and nutrition matters. Closely linked with this system was the action of the League of Red Cross Societies in support of the work of the Indian Red Cross. And, of course, many of the voluntary agencies who although acting on their own were regularly in touch with focal point so as to obtain the greatest degree of effectiveness in bringing the right kind of help to the refugees.

This over-all co-ordination was fully operated at Headquarters and field level. Essential in this was the focal point office in New Delhi which, in collaboration with the other United Nations agencies, was in daily contact with the Indian authorities, the Indian Red Cross and the voluntary agencies. The focal point kept diplomatic representatives of donor countries constantly informed of developments. The world-wide network of Resident Representatives of the United Nations Development Programme, and of UNHCR, as well



as those of the specialized agencies involved in the operation played a valuable role in passing on information to member Governments, advising them of needs, and assisting them with the despatch of relief goods.

What is remarkable when looking back on this United Nations experience is the swiftness with which the Organization could act. There has been in the past a great deal of criticism regarding the way in which the world body has sought to solve problems of peace and security in various parts of the globe, and even of some of the activities of the United Nations system in the social and economic field. But in this human crisis of unprecedented proportions, the Organization proved that it had in its structure and in the quality of its officers the unquestionable ability to mobilize resources, bring these to the points where they were needed and establish an effective channel of co-ordination between host and donor Governments.

Now that the task of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees as "focal point for United Nations assistance to East Bengali refugees in India" belongs to history, it is perhaps timely to recall the efforts that were made to help the masses of the unfortunate people while they were in exile.

For all those concerned with this humanitarian task, it was an unforgettable period of anguish lest their action in mobilizing international resources were not to succeed in bringing the assistance vitally needed in good time to all those who depended on it for their survival.

Today, the refugees have joined their friends and neighbours in the arduous task of reconstructing their country. International assistance through the United Nations, through bilateral arrangements, the Red Cross and other voluntary agencies continues.



Food, medicine, trucks and barges, tools and seeds and other necessities are being brought to the area through UNROD (the United Nations Relief Operation Dacca) and others. The United Nations experts are working with the authorities on plans to repair and to build.

It is against this setting, that of the present and that of the past, that the story of "focal point" is being told.

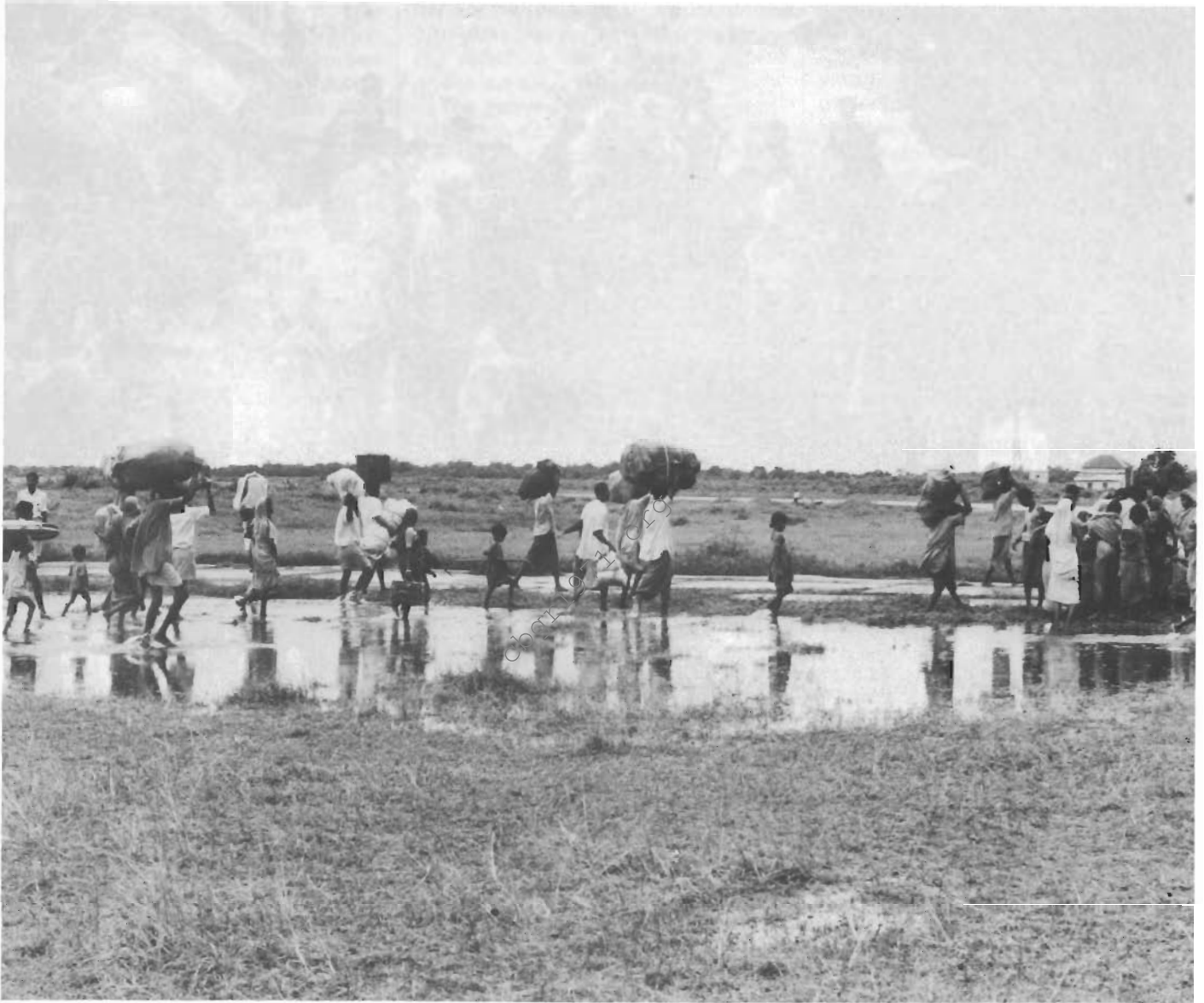
The need to help India in its efforts to provide humanitarian aid to the vast masses of refugees placed the United Nations system before a tremendous responsibility. It had quickly to harness the world's resources to bring supplies of all kinds to the areas of suffering in the shortest possible time. The challenging task of co-ordinating this work was given to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

MMR

The opening gates of exile

"There are the great humanitarian emergencies which the United Nations is still not equipped to meet... I have, on my own initiative and without any supporting resolution from any United Nations organ, launched two relief operations (one to bring assistance to the refugees, the other to help the civilian population in East Bengal) which are concerned with millions of people and expenditures of millions of dollars."

U Thant, 16 September 1971.



The world had entered the year 1971 with all its old ills, and its latent crisis problems. The Viet-Nam war was continuing, notwithstanding the peace talks in Paris. In the Middle East, the Israeli-Arab conflict continued its uneasy state of ceasefire accompanied by impatient statements made by the leaders of the States involved. In some Latin American States subversion and uneasiness continued. In Africa there was talk of a settlement in the Sudan, but problems also concerning Rhodesia and Namibia. The world's monetary situation was worsening, following the weakness of the US

dollar. On the other hand, disarmament talks between the major powers were entering a more positive phase. Britain, suffering from strikes, hoped to join the Common Market. In Brussels 50,000 farmers held violent demonstration in the streets. And Sweden was to surprise the world with a 38-day walkout by its civil servants. And there were the long-term worries: population, drug traffic and pollution, amongst many others.

In the sub-continent there were many clouds darkening the horizon. The Indian Parliament had been dissolved and the election campaign was accompanied by some disturb-

ances, particularly in West Bengal. In Pakistan, too, there had been elections for a national assembly which was to establish a new constitution to lead to the ending of martial law. But opinions as to what this constitution should be differed profoundly. The breakdown of the negotiations was to provoke by the end of March an eruption of violence which was to trigger off a massive refugee movement that was to last until the end of the year.

The events in East Bengal of January till end March 1971 which are now part of history, were to justify the worst fears. Yet until

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Shortly after the events in March in East Bengal, all roads in India along the border were overcrowded with a stream of refugees seeking a place in neighbouring camps. Many of them pitched their tents, or built makeshift huts, at the side of the roads.

fighting broke out in Dacca and Mujibur Rahman was arrested on 25 March, the world's information media had shown no more interest in the events in East Pakistan than in many other news items. Then suddenly it was realized that the situation had turned from political confrontation into an internal armed conflict. At that time, however, news concentrated on the events inside East Pakistan, the setting up of a provisional autonomous government, on the operations of the secessionist and Pakistan armies.

Until 15 April there was practically no reference in the world's Press about refugees. The Indian newspapers on their part spoke of some few thousand people crossing the border to escape military operations. But it was not until 16 April that the French newspaper, *Le Monde*, carried a banner headline "*East Bengali refugees cross the Indian border in a massive wave*". The *Statesman* of Calcutta announced that 30,000 had arrived and quoted an official as saying: "*What was only a trickle yesterday has become a stream*". Ten days later it was said that half a million refugees had already reached India. Most of them were seeking refuge with friends and relatives in the border areas.

Four days after events had taken their dramatic turn in Dacca, the Representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in India sent a dispatch to his headquarters telling them that informed observers in New Delhi feared a vast influx of refugees in the near future. The Representative recalled that according to Press reports of the previous year some 150,000 refugees had come into India in 1970, but that the authorities had taken care of them without asking for any international assistance. He was not sure that the Government would adopt a different attitude in the present situation, but he drew attention to a particular statement made the previous Saturday in the Indian Parliament when the Minister of External Affairs had said: "*We are prepared to make our contribution once again... in consort with a num-*

ber of international humanitarian organizations concerned with bringing relief to the innocent victims of the conflict."

The same day that the Representative wrote his letter to the High Commissioner in Geneva, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Samar Sen, asked to see the Secretary-General, U Thant. This was to be the first of many calls that he would be making on the Secretary-General during the next nine months, in addition to sending a number of notes and letters, most of these relating to basic issues between India and Pakistan. His opposite number, Ambassador Agha Shahi of Pakistan, would be a no less frequent visitor in connexion with the crisis.

U Thant, at the time he received Ambassador Sen, was a deeply worried man. He realized all the dangers inherent in the situation, as he was to state publicly later: "*These human tragedies have consequences in a far wider sphere. The violent emotions aroused could have repercussions on the relations of religious and ethnic groups on the sub-continent as a whole. The relations between the Governments of India and Pakistan are also a major component of the problem. The conflict between the principles of the territorial integrity of states and self-determination has often before in history given rise to fratricidal strife and, in recent years, has provoked highly emotional reactions in the international community. In the present case, there is an additional element of danger for the crisis is unfolding in the context of the long-standing and unresolved difficulties between India and Pakistan—difficulties which gave rise to open warfare.*" During the long conversations in the Secretary-General's office on the 38th floor overlooking the East River, Ambassador Sen outlined the views of his Government on the crisis. This included a reference that there might soon be need for an international relief action as his Government expected a large influx of refugees into Assam, Tripura, West Bengal, etc.

The same view had been aired in New Delhi in informal talks with some diplomatic missions. High Government officials had given to understand that India would probably need blankets, food, medicines and shelter material. This had induced several technical departments in a number of countries to examine various aspects of sending relief to India, preparatory work which would prove most useful when on 19 May the Secretary-General was to launch his appeal. However, in early April the expected large-scale influx did not take place. During the next two weeks the authorities and the Indian Red Cross appeared not to be too much worried about their ability to meet the problem. This was indeed the sense of a telegram sent by the Indian Red Cross to the League of Red Cross Societies in Geneva in reply to a question whether they needed help.

When on 15 April reports reached New Delhi that some 20,000 to 25,000 refugees had crossed the border, a senior official in the Department of Rehabilitation discussed the situation with the High Commissioner's Representative. How might his Government best obtain assistance from the international community? In a report on this conversation, the Representative told the High Commissioner that for the time being: "*Nobody speaks of the need to resettle any of these refugees. They are considered as temporarily staying in India and that they will be able to return to their homes in the not too far away future. Consequently all thinking goes in the direction of relief only.*" This was indeed to be the basic thinking of the Government of India throughout the emergency. Both they and the Government of Pakistan always considered that voluntary return would be the final solution of the refugee problem. This view was to be fully shared by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Refugees, and indeed by the international community as a whole.

But while this was generally accepted, it was also understood that the return of the refugees depended

on the creation of a climate of confidence. U Thant said: *"The civil strife which erupted in East Pakistan in March 1971, and its aftermath, are matters of deep concern to me as Secretary-General of the United Nations. While the civil strife in itself is an internal affair of Pakistan, some of the problems generated by it are necessarily of concern to the international community."* And in another statement he said: *"That was the main reason why I submitted a confidential memorandum to the President of the Security Council on 20 July. I still maintain that view, but to my regret the Security Council has not taken any action so far."*

World opinion was to express through the organs of the Press, radio and television and in parliaments, serious disillusionment with the reluctance of the Security Council to tackle the root of the problem. In many countries there was criticism of their own government's attitude. There were others who stressed the inviolability of the Charter which prohibits interference in the internal affairs of a member State. The dilemma was great, as U Thant was to say: *"The restoration of a climate of confidence is not within the competence of the Secretary-General. But everybody with whom I talk agrees that this is the first prerequisite to the restoration of peace, and that it would be the only inducement for the return of the refugees from India to Pakistan."*

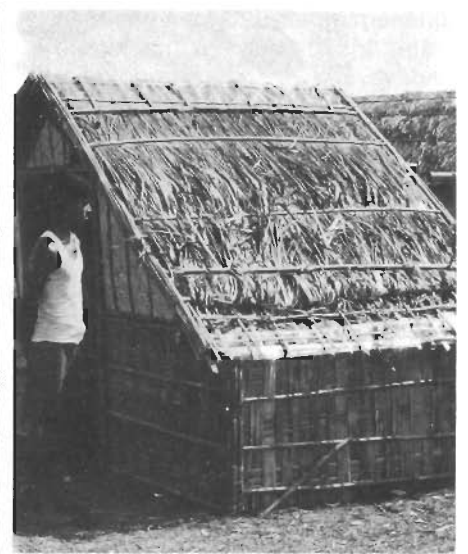
On his part, Sadruddin Aga Khan from the outset was deeply pre-occupied with the situation. He realized that his Office might be asked to lend its assistance essentially in mobilizing international help. But for him to act it was essential that the Government of India should take the initiative and make a formal request to his Office.

Not many people are aware of the conditions that have to apply before the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees is concerned with new refugee problems. UNHCR is not automatically involved when there is a refugee movement somewhere in the world. Normally it will inform itself of a situation when circumstan-

ces indicate that the refugee might come within UNHCR's mandate. If the refugees are people moving from one part of their country to another they probably do not; if they cross a border they are likely to be. If problems of protection are involved and the host country is party to any of the international agreements concerning the status of refugees, the Office is almost immediately in touch with the authorities. If the host country is not a party to any agreement, the Office offers first of all its services and seeks through diplomatic contacts to assist both government and refugees in finding solutions. In the protection field, therefore, it is more often than not the High Commissioner who takes the initiative. The situation is different where it concerns material assistance. It is the responsibility of governments, even of those who are parties to international agreements, to decide whether they wish to obtain UNHCR international material assistance. In several cases in the past, countries decided to take care of the displaced persons themselves, sometimes allowing voluntary agencies to operate on their territory, sometimes not. In these circumstances, UNHCR has to confine itself

Photographic impressions of camp life in India during the time millions of refugees from East Bengal sought refuge in the neighbouring country. All kinds of materials were used to provide the displaced persons with at least a roof over their heads: a tent, plastic material or dried leaves or matting placed over bamboo frames. . . . All schools and public buildings were opened to house them yet thousands squatted in the railway stations awaiting a more permanent place to live.







to its protection functions to the extent they are needed, but it cannot and does not force any country to accept material assistance.

As events developed it was not in his capacity as High Commissioner for Refugees that Sadruddin Aga Khan was to concern himself with the refugee influx from East Bengal into India, but at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General as "focal point", the co-ordinator for the United Nations system, a function entirely distinct from the normal duties of his Office.

In the meantime, in India the newspapers were increasingly voicing the opinion that aid should be sought from the United Nations. During the third week of April the influx was beginning to assume major proportions. The burden on the administration and on the local population was increasing. A number of measures had been taken: the reception of the refugees was being organized, all arrivals were given identity and ration cards, vaccination was taking place at the border. A special branch of the Department of Rehabilitation had been created in Calcutta to take charge of all relief measures for the refugees. The Indian Red Cross had its volunteers in the field and a group of individual agencies, as well as Indian chapters of international organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, were lending assistance.

The *Times of India* of 29 April reported some immediate effects of this sudden inflow on the life in the Indian border villages. Writing from Dawki in the state of Meghalaya, a reporter said: "*Seven thousand refugees crowding this small border town will be shifted in a day or two to six tented camps opened a few miles above Dawki. The need for moving them has become urgent because there is a threat of breakdown of sanitary arrangements here. The town has become dirty. It is not built to take in so many refugees.*" The *Indian Express* described the situation in the refugee camps, taking as an example the one in Shikarpur village in the Nadia district of West Bengal.

In several places, such as Amdanga, even temple grounds were turned into refugee camps. Here some 30,000 people were given temporary shelter.

"There in the sparse shade of a grove of the flame-of-the-forest trees, ablaze with blooms, more than 2,500 men, women and children are passing their days.

"A higher secondary school and its hostel near the grove are packed with about a thousand refugees, while the rest live in the open, anxiously scanning the skies for the dreaded monsoon clouds.

"There are about 600 children, mostly naked and pot-bellied. They send up a continuous howl, crying from hunger or unable to stand the simmering April heat. Many children are ill with dysentery but there are no public lavatories.

"The whole grove is littered with belongings; cloth bundles, lanterns and aluminium vessels. Flies swarm over the doleful scene.

"A few people hawk eatables like bread, buns and crude biscuits, but there is no sign of their doing much business. The evacuees have little money and that, too, in Pakistani currency. Hawkers accept it at half its face value.

"The Government is supplying 'kichiri' once a day at the rate of about 500 gm. per adult while children are provided milk.

"Daily there is a seemingly interminable queue at the kitchen door, the evacuees squatting in a meandering line to receive the dole. Fresh batches arrive now and then, and the doling goes on from morning till late night."

The Indian and world Press would be describing far more harrowing scenes when cholera broke out, the monsoon turned the camps into mirepools and death and sickness threatened to take on catastrophic proportions. But the situation was worrying.

On 22 April the Indian Press reported that there were now 600,000 refugees. The following day, late in the evening, Ambassador Samar Sen once more went to see the Secretary-General and handed him India's formal request for assistance. The letter, *inter alia*, stated: *"Any assistance, either in cash or kind, that your Excellency can arrange for this ever-increasing number, will be*



gratefully received... The Government of India would continue to organize relief to the refugees... and would suggest that such help as may be extended by the international organizations could be channelled either through the Government of India or the Indian Red Cross." The letter also suggested that discussions should take place in New Delhi with the Representative of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

At the time when Ambassador Sen called on U Thant, the High Commissioner, Sadruddin Aga Khan, was in Scandinavia in connexion with a major refugee fund-raising campaign planned a long time before the refugee emergency in India and launched by various bodies of voluntary agencies in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway, and which was to raise some \$7 million.

The leaders of the voluntary agencies, as well as the cabinet ministers of the governments of the countries took the opportunity of Sadruddin Aga Khan's presence to discuss with him the various aspects of the refugee situation in India. They gave private promises that should there be a need for help, he could count on their full support. Similar promises had also been received from the United States and the United Kingdom Governments and it was with these assurances that the High Commissioner flew directly from Oslo to Switzerland to meet U Thant in Bern, where on 26 April a meeting

was to be held of the ACC at the Headquarters of the Universal Postal Union.

Some of the names given to committees in the United Nations have a somewhat forbidding ring. In this case the initials ACC refer to meetings of the executive heads of the agencies belonging to the UN system. On these occasions the Secretary-General airs his views on general policy and on matters of common interest; there are discussions on practical aspects of how programmes should be co-ordinated and on how co-ordination can be improved among the agencies. The April meeting in Bern had been scheduled as part of the year's normal inter-agency discussions. As it so happened it allowed a timely exchange of views on relief for the refugees in India.

The consensus was that one agency should be entrusted with the role of general co-ordinator. When in May 1970 vast devastation had been caused in Peru by an earthquake, a high United Nations official had been appointed to be "focal point" for the relief action. The Secretary-General felt that the same arrangement should be made in the present emergency. The High Commissioner for Refugees was, in his view, the most qualified person to be this "focal point".

While these discussions were taking place in Bern there was a new development in New Delhi. On 27 April the UNHCR Representative



received a telephone call from the Ministry of External Affairs to invite him to hear an important communication. The Government of India had decided formally to approach UNHCR and the League of Red Cross Societies for assistance to East Pakistan refugees who had come to India from March 1971 onwards. The High Commissioner upon his return from Bern discussed with senior colleagues this request and that same evening sent a cable to New Delhi saying: *"In order to make direct assessment situation and discuss with Government ways and means provide assistance required, propose to send immediately New Delhi mission, composed of Deputy High Commissioner Mr. Charles Mace, Director of Operations Mr. Thomas Jamieson and Legal Con-*

sultant Dr. Paul Weis." The Indian Government replied on 3 May agreeing to the mission.

The scene was set for the international relief operation to begin.

The forging of the international instrument

"Here is where the entire United Nations battery of health and relief forces should be geared up to meet the need. It should do what the world's conscience demands: refugees are everybody's responsibility."

Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio, 10 June

Twenty-two days after the first massive wave of refugees crossed the Indian border, twelve days after the Government of India appealed to the Secretary-General for international assistance, eight days after the Bern meeting of the ACC, three days after the proposal for a fact-finding mission to visit India was accepted, the team composed of the Deputy High Commissioner, the Director of Operations and the Special Legal counsellor boarded their New Delhi-bound plane in Geneva. The number of refugees had increased, according to Indian sources, from 25,000 on 15 April to 600,000 on 23 April, while on 1 May there were said to be over one million. When the three-man team arrived in the capital of the Union of India, the Indian newspapers reported that the number had passed one and a half million, about half of them accommodated in 155 camps, the others staying with friends and relatives.

The world was now seriously worried about the uncertain situation in East Pakistan, by the threat of famine and epidemics among the civilian population. Nervousness was also felt lest the refugee inflow into India lead to threats to peace and the security of the sub-continent. Editorialists and political leaders were asking questions: What are our governments doing? What is the United Nations doing?

When the High Commissioner met the Press in an overcrowded briefing room at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 5 May to tell them of the decision to send a fact-finding team to India, tension and anxiety among even the most hardened journalists was palpable. "Why", asked one journalist, "why did you have to wait one week before you sent this mission?" The High Commissioner recalled the timetable. If this reply satisfied correspondents in Geneva, editorialists did not show the same understanding. Impatient enquiries were voiced while the team was in Delhi. "What are their findings?" "What does the United Nations intend to do?" These questions were repeatedly put to the Secretary-General's spokesman in

New York as well as to the Press Officer of the High Commissioner's Office in Geneva. The fact that the world's television screens brought scenes of bewildered and destitute refugees crossing the border or waiting for their rations in camps caused strong emotional waves of concern.

A number of voluntary agencies had sent out volunteers and had despatched relief goods which arrived helter-skelter in Calcutta. Public opinion rightly wanted action. And it was disappointed by the lack of evidence of "official action". It may therefore be appropriate to insert here a few observations regarding the speed with which international aid can be mobilized. In most disasters, natural or man-made, the strong desire to bring assistance as rapidly as possible to the areas of distress invariably finds expression in a number of initiatives, local or international, some co-ordinated, others improvised or based on impulsive decisions.

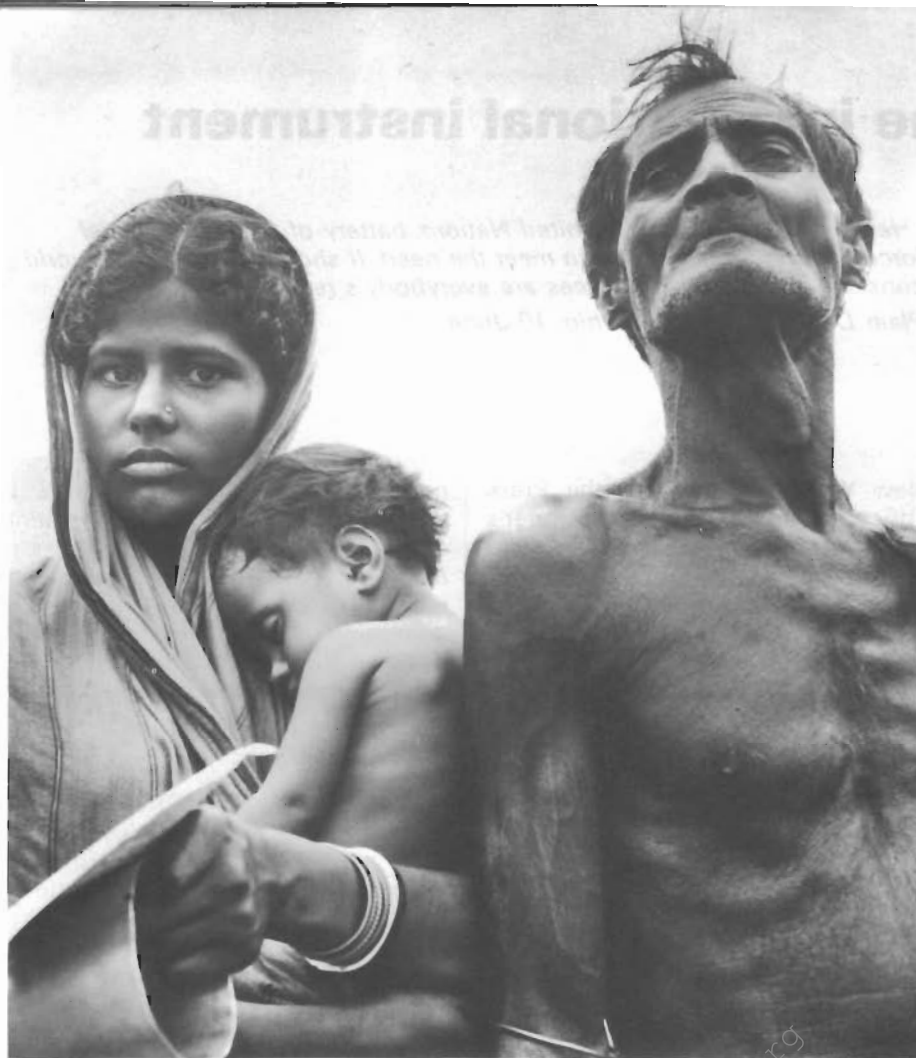
A system has been built up over the years to channel international aid. There is the League of Red Cross Societies to send goods and international teams to assist the national Red Cross society in the area of disaster which in all probability will have been, with the national authorities, the first on the spot to organize aid. The International Committee of the Red Cross is the co-ordinating Red Cross body when the disaster concerns internal upheavals or armed conflicts. Outside this channel, there will be a host of voluntary agencies prepared and willing to help, some of them with chapters in many countries, such as Caritas, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, Christian Aid and such others, like OXFAM in Britain, CARE in the United States, AUSTCARE in Australia, CORSO in New Zealand or Rädde Barnen in Sweden, too many to mention them all.

The government concerned may address an appeal for help to other governments, or it may decide that it will itself deal with the emergency—even if, as sometimes happens,

competent international observers are of the opinion that the extent of the catastrophe requires outside aid. There are several examples in recent history where private foreign voluntary agencies initiated relief action without the approval and even against the wishes of the country concerned, thus raising serious political controversies.

As for the United Nations, there are agencies with a humanitarian character which can lend assistance such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) or UNHCR, depending on the nature of the emergency. Generally speaking the UN agencies need a request from the government concerned to start action. There was, however, in 1971 no special masterplan in case the United Nations system was asked to act in the event of a disaster. It was only on 14 December of that year that a General Assembly resolution was passed setting up an Office of Co-ordinator for Disaster Relief which began its work in March 1972. Its main task is to ensure that in case of disaster the world's response will be swift and effective. It has to stimulate preparedness in disaster-prone countries, also encourage countries and organizations, especially the Red Cross or the United Nations system, to make advance arrangements for the provision of aid.

Thus, when the United Nations received the Indian request, the Secretary-General had to make an *ad hoc* decision. However, even before the system of focal point began to operate, the UN agencies in a position to help had taken immediate action. WFP, from its reserves, released several thousand tons of butter oil and milk powder for an estimated value of over one million dollars. UNICEF made an immediate appropriation of \$300,000 for the supply of relief goods, including medicines and jeeps, and paid for an airlift of badly-needed relief goods. UNHCR allocated \$500,000 from its emergency fund. These were no more than "fire-fighting" actions.



To mobilize from the world at large the massive help needed, it was necessary to establish first of all a detailed list of requirements, and to organize the co-ordination of the international action on a firm basis. As the High Commissioner explained in his 5 May Press conference: *"Relief operations to be effective have to be co-ordinated. We have seen how in countries like Nigeria, or even recently in East Pakistan, following the cyclone, lack of co-ordination can be extremely counter-productive. What I very much hope to achieve by sending this team to New Delhi is a better co-ordination of the United Nations system, to see what others are doing, what we can do and assess the problems in a very precise way."* In the face of the multitude of relief goods required, governments in particular needed guidance as to priorities, in addition to a global assessment. This, the team was to bring back from its mission, in time for the Secretary-General to make his world-wide appeal.

For practical reasons, as well as to introduce right from the beginning a pattern of close co-ordination, the team decided to invite the representatives of the UN agencies in New Delhi to form part of the fact-finding group. They were received at the highest level by the Indian authorities and saw, among others,

Minister R. K. Khadirkar of the Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation, Mr. G. S. Kahlon, Secretary of the Department of Rehabilitation surrounded by his senior staff, Mr. T. N. Kaul, Foreign Secretary, and Mr. Dhavan, the Governor of West Bengal. In their discussions they were to feel how much the Indian authorities realized the immensity of the task that had to be accomplished. They were also exposed to the strongly-expressed views about the situation developing in the sub-continent, it being India's contention that the United Nations and the international community had to intervene with Pakistan with regard to its policy in East Bengal. The team had to stress that its mandate was exclusively concerned with organizing humanitarian relief, that it had no powers beyond this mandate. This distinction was well understood. The *Hindustan Times* of 19 May for instance said in an editorial: *"Though the United Nations team has very properly refused to be drawn into a public discussion of these political aspects, it is imperative for the world body in its other capacities, and the governments of the world, to take urgent note of them."*

There was unity of views between the Indians and the team before and after the group had visited the refugee areas; the refugees were in India for a limited period of time,

and voluntary repatriation was to be the only solution. Indeed all individual refugees they met said they wanted to return when they were sure they could do so in peace and security.

The authorities made it clear that they saw a time limit of six months to the presence of the refugees. Minister Khadirkar said this when he explained that: *"The Government was hopeful that conditions (by then) would be such that these refugees would return home."* At any rate it was on a six-months basis that the Government made certain calculations regarding the cost of refugee relief, arriving at \$175 million as the expected expenditure for caring for 3 million people of whom 2 million would be in camps. This attitude, which was never relinquished during the development of the emergency, was to have some repercussions on the relief operation from the point of view of advance planning. In the official report which the High Commissioner presented to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in July 1972, there appears the following significant paragraph: *"The Government of India, from the beginning of the influx, took the position that the refugees would have to return to their homeland within a period of six months. This stand was, in the words of the International Bank for Reconstruc-*



tion and Development, one of the major 'policy constraints' in planning the assistance programme. In these circumstances there were no formal grounds to make even contingency plans for a longer period. The six-month period was initially regarded as having started at the time of the first refugee influx, i.e. immediately after the events of the end of March in East Bengal, and was therefore to expire at the end of September 1971. As time went by, it became only too clear that the refugees would not have left India by that date. The Government of India was reluctant to formally acknowledge this fact but the realities of the situation had to be faced and practical measures to be taken and these amounted to a recognition of it."

The overcrowded conditions in the camps, as well as the absence of adequate sanitary arrangements, to which were added the rigours of the climate, multiplied the dangers of infectious diseases spreading among the refugees.





During the discussions with the team, India also made it clear that it expected the major part of the expenditures it was incurring to be refunded by the international community. The country was accepting a flow of displaced persons which might take on gigantic proportions; it was doing this in a spirit of humanitarian concern but saw its action as part of an international responsibility. The country was opening its food reserves, was already spending enormous sums on the creation of camps and on running them, and the danger of weakening its own economy was very real. It would need tents, medicines, additional transport facilities, sanitary equipment.

The team had to stress that it was not realistic to hope that the United Nations would formally accept full responsibility for the financial burden; however, focal point and the component agencies were pledged to giving their fullest support. Yet they depended entirely on the contributions which governments would ultimately be willing to make. There can be no doubt that this cautious but realistic stand caused some initial disappointment in Indian circles. This was not to say that the Government of India was considering the team's work as an academic exercise only. It made every effort to explain its basic views

on the nature of the international assistance India hoped to receive.

The itemized list of requirements the Government had drawn up gave a large indication of the size and magnitude of the aid that was to be extended to the refugees. The Indian officials stressed that India had the manpower and the technical skill to run the relief operation through its own administration, helped by the volunteers of the Indian Red Cross and the national voluntary agencies. They indicated that in these circumstances the presence of foreign personnel, of United Nations experts or private volunteers, who were not likely to speak the local languages, know the resources of the country or the customs and traditions of the people, would in their view only complicate a situation which was difficult enough as it was. The team agreed with the view that the United Nations would channel all its aid to the Government of India in the same manner as the League of Red Cross Societies would be giving its support to the Indian Red Cross, and that no "operational" responsibilities were to be assumed by the United Nations.

There were not only official meetings. The team went to see the situation on the spot. On 9 May they went to Calcutta and as they drove that evening through its overcrowded streets they might perhaps

have seen among the poorest of its inhabitants displaced persons from earlier days.

The first impression was that the local authorities were doing, in most difficult circumstances, a tremendous job to help the refugees. All were given rations, efforts were made to group them in camps, even if overcrowding was such that men, women and children touched each other under the canvas tents. In the public buildings that had been opened, great numbers had found no other place than a few square feet on staircases or a verandah. Queues of thousands stood all day long in front of the distribution points for food and water. When the team drove along the roads to visit camps they could see throngs of people camping next to the highway under flimsy straw mats flung over poles. In or outside camps, sanitation was a frightening problem; many of the refugees suffering from dysentery relieved themselves in the neighbouring fields and officials worried about serious pollution problems. But what struck the team perhaps most was the aspect of the people. Clad in rags, they were emaciated, with sunken eyes and hollow cheeks, with a blank expression on their faces, still they maintained an attitude of dignity and quiet acceptance of their suffering. Some told the team that they had walked for days,



The United Nations Agencies participating in the humanitarian action met in Geneva with the UNHCR focal point to review the current situation and take decisions on immediate action. Observers from the League of Red Cross Societies and sometimes from the International Committee of Voluntary Agencies attended these discussions.

eating and drinking little, carrying their elderly parents on their backs, a sick child in their arms and sometimes burying their dead by the roadside. And once in India, many had searched for two or three days before finding a camp that could accept them.

The suffering was immense. Gigantic efforts had been made by the authorities but they had been overwhelmed by numbers.

The HCR team flew, under the worst possible weather conditions, to Assam and Tripura. They landed in heavy rains that never stopped. During their four-day stay they saw camps, public buildings, hospitals. They saw thousands of elderly people, women and children who had practically no shelter against the water falling from the skies and the dampness rising from the ground. They saw overcrowded hospitals, with inadequate facilities, patients lying on the ground and no means to separate infectious diseases from others. "Words fail me to describe the human plight we have just seen", Charles Mace told correspondents upon his return to New Delhi.

But the team kept its eye open for possible means of bringing urgent help. As the UNICEF representative remarked, "An interesting experiment has been conducted by a District Magistrate in Tripura. He is using polythene sheets between two bam-

boo frames as roofing material. This requires only a thin layer of thatching but provides far better protection against the rains. Polythene is fairly inexpensive, of light weight and not bulky. It lends itself much better to airlifting." This remark was to be remembered when in the following months shelter material was flown to India as part of the international effort to provide a roof to cover five million people.

About the situation of the children, the UNICEF man said: "Small children suffer severely. Several cases of seriously under-nourished and starving children have been observed. The only supplementary diet found in these camps was barley powder in tins. Some of the children cannot digest the milk powder that is available, the need for a more appropriate type of food is very strongly felt." And further: "It would appear advisable to have centres in each camp where small children could be brought to be fed and medical care extended to them on a regular basis." And he already gave some indication of how those centres could be run. It is interesting to compare this recommendation with the structure of the "operation life-line" that was to be created several months later to fight the threat of malnutrition to which some two million children were exposed.

The WHO observer amongst his

Opposite page:

Refugees received their rations directly from the Indian authorities. Some voluntary agencies provided additional food such as bread.



To keep the world currently informed of the needs of the refugees was one of the responsibilities given to UNHCR as focal point. Here a United Nations radio reporter interviews the officials of a large refugee camp on prevailing conditions.

At the initial stages of the emergency many voluntary agencies sent teams of volunteers to India. These were later replaced by Indians receiving logistical support from the international community.



remarks stressed the need for bleaching powder, cleansing materials and additional tube-wells in camps. *"The conditions are such that, even when everything possible is done to prevent water-borne and filth diseases, some outbreaks will occur. The danger of widespread deaths from diarrhoeal diseases is grave. The need for speed in definitive action cannot be overstressed."* These words were to be remembered when three weeks later a sudden cholera epidemic was to break out causing thousands to die.

A daily flow of telegrams from India to Geneva, repeated to the Secretary-General in New York, had kept the High Commissioner and the Heads of the UN system informed of the findings of the team. Exchanges of views took place by telex and telephone on how the appeal was to be phrased, whether each agency would issue an appeal of its own, what kind of contributions were needed and to whom they would be announced. A great deal of cable traffic concerned the division of responsibilities. Opinions differed, then crystallized. There was a search for the most economic and efficient method of co-ordination, not always found immediately. It was to take a few days, for instance, after the appeal was launched to reach agreement that governments should be advised to address themselves on all matters, whether they were the concern of UNICEF, WHO or WFP, to the High Commissioner as focal point, except obviously on purely technical details regarding contributions. Not all governments understood this, some earmarking percentages of their contributions to each of the agencies. But by that time co-operation within the system was working so well that when direct support was received for one part of a programme this was offset against the general availability of funds at the disposal of focal point and thus overlapping and duplication was avoided.

While the team was in India, Sadruddin Aga Khan created a special focal point unit in his Office which he headed personally. It was

a small team composed of some five officers headed by the Director of HCR's Afro-Asian Division, Mr. Gilbert Jaeger. The others were drawn from various sectors of UNHCR who were detached from their normal duties to devote their time entirely to the relief operation in India.

The Geneva unit was to meet the High Commissioner almost daily to decide on immediate problems, to air views frankly with "neither rank nor seniority counting".

On 14 May the High Commissioner sent a telegram to all executive heads of the United Nations system in which the first paragraph read: *"Had further discussions with Secretary-General and we believe it would be extremely useful in order to respond to India's request in most effective manner and to avoid duplication and overlapping if permanent consultations could take place between those UN programmes and specialized agencies most directly concerned."*

This group, called the Standing Inter-Agency Consultation Unit, which was to become known as SICU, met for the first time under the personal chairmanship of the High Commissioner. Later it was presided over by Mr. Jaeger. There were representatives of the United Nations Secretariat, UNICEF, the World Food Programme/the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization and an observer from the League of Red Cross Societies. SICU in the 24 meetings it was to hold in 1971 was to prove the king-pin of the UN action at Headquarters level. Discussions centred exclusively on practical problems leading to immediate decisions. In many ways the atmosphere was to be compared with that of a general directors' meeting of a worldwide enterprise where everyone is interested in results and sets aside agency policies and considerations.

At field level, focal point in India was headed by Thomas Jamieson. This team of HCR officers was closely associated with the Representative of UNDP and those of WFP, UNICEF and WHO. This group worked constantly with a special

committee called the Central Coordinating Committee (CCC) which had been set up by the Government of India. This was at first composed of members of Indian Ministries and voluntary agencies, but after the appeal of the Secretary-General included the representatives in India of focal point and the UN specialized agencies. Meetings were always headed by a most senior Indian official. There were representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Food and of the Red Cross. All information from the field was directed for discussion to this unit; in particular there was a very close link with the Rehabilitation Ministry Secretariat in Calcutta which co-ordinated all official relief operations in the refugee areas.

To the meetings of the CCC came all the immediate problems, the long-term problems. Here suggestions were made and decisions were taken. For instance, during the first meeting on 3 June, the agenda included an exchange of information concerning offers of assistance received from abroad. Then came a report that there had been some cases of cholera. India needed saline and molar lactate immediately for it would take about two weeks before sufficient quantities of its own production could be sent to the field. Was it possible for WHO, UNICEF and the Red Cross to supply these two items urgently? This depended on air transport. The UNHCR representative assured the meeting that his Office could organize free air freight.

Then followed discussions on internal transport problems. UNICEF, in addition to the forty-one vehicles already transferred to the Ministry of Health, offered to provide ten more to the Government and ten more to the Indian Red Cross. The problem of shelter was reviewed. 1,800,000 families were still without cover, said the Indian official in charge of this question. Orders had been placed for tents and tarpaulins but these would only be delivered in July, by which time the monsoon would have broken. It was agreed

to make a further extensive search on the Indian market for more material and to use plastic sheeting and ask Geneva for priority allocation of money. The idea of air-lifting shelter material was considered impractical because of cost (a view that was to change rapidly as the massive needs for shelter became a nightmare). There was the question of milk powder. Within the next few days WFP would be receiving in Calcutta 4,500 tons which was destined for the Indian Red Cross. There were storage problems. Could the Food Corporation of India put them in their "godowns" until the Indian Red Cross, which enjoyed certain privileges with the Indian railways, could arrange transportation to the refugee areas? This was decided upon.

When Mr. Jamieson arrived in New Delhi as Chief of the focal point unit and attended the second meeting, the CCC decided in view of the complexities of the problems to set up four sub-committees: shelter, food, transport and health. Thus within a brief time the structural basis of the assistance channel had been laid: with CCC in New Delhi as the co-ordinating source of information and action in India, with its direct link from the Indian Ministry of Rehabilitation to the relief operation's Headquarters in Calcutta; with SICU in Geneva as the platform where information from India, from donors and on activities by UN agencies was exchanged and with focal point as the fund-raiser and the decision-taking body. It was now up to the international community to respond to the appeal launched by the Secretary-General on 19 May when he said:

"On behalf of the entire United Nations family, I earnestly appeal to governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as private sources, to help meet the urgent needs for humanitarian assistance in the present tragic situation."

Urgent to Calcutta

"The United Nations has been acting with some success as a channel to India for the largest refugee programme it had to undertake."

The Guardian, 17 June 1971



When U Thant made his appeal on 19 May, world opinion had not then fully realized the extent of the disaster. Newspapers outside India were only occasionally bringing reports on the exodus. It was not until the horror word "cholera" appeared in news despatches that people on the other continents woke up to the need for urgent action. In the meantime chancelleries were following events with anxious interest and in the humanitarian field were making preparations for the despatch of aid.

Early soundings by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Refugees had indicated a readiness on the part of several powers to make significant contributions. Nevertheless few observers believed that the nations were likely to bring together the full complement of aid as listed in the Indian memorandum. The mobilization of resources was to be a supreme testing time for the Organization. To succeed, it had to prove that it was not only a valuable instrument of action in the humanitarian field but one which the world community could and should use.

In the past, agencies like UNICEF, WHO, WFP and UNHCR had shown in their respective domains their ability to tackle problems effectively. In the humanitarian field some of these agencies had been able to lend assistance almost at a moment's notice, albeit on a limited scale as "fire-fighting" measures until the world community could assemble support commensurate with the nature and size of the disaster. They had thereby earned the confidence of governments and the public. But the system as an integrated operation to meet a disaster situation had so far not really been able to show its strength. There was a widespread belief abroad that it was over-administered and too slow in coming to decisions to be really effective. From the earliest moment of the emergency there was, therefore, need to bring evidence of its capacity to tackle the task with which it was entrusted. The experience accumulated by each of the agencies had, however, favoured the growth of certain practices. For instance, all agencies now have reserves in their budgets to meet emergencies, some

A sudden outbreak of a cholera epidemic brought the plight of the refugees to the forefront of world opinion. The urgency with which this threat had to be met stirred a deeply-worried world into action.

of them have organized stockpiling of relief goods; in addition, some switching over of resources from existing projects is always possible.

The World Food Programme utilizes food for economic and social development and also reserves a portion of its resources to provide emergency assistance. In the refugee situation in India, WFP was authorized by the Director of the Food and Agriculture Organization, Dr. Addeke Boerma, who has the power to act in cases of emergencies, to provide some 5,830 metric tons of

dried skimmed milk, 1,310 tons of edible oil and 200 metric tons of beans. WFP's immediate contribution was thus over \$2.8 million.

UNICEF on its part reacted to the needs by immediately assisting with diet and drug sets worth \$100,000; it paid for the cost of transporting by air seven tons of WFP milk powder available in India and which was badly needed in Assam and Tripura. Soon, with the supply of vehicles borrowed from some of its projects, 41 jeeps, 20 trailers, hospital tents, medical kits and baby food, its

demics or initiate urgently needed projects. Admittedly as far as UNICEF was concerned this was to support work of direct interest to mothers and children, but the system enabled WHO on a reimbursable basis to act within its general terms of reference. This freed its action from immediate production and availability problems, particularly in areas such as health where delays can have the direst consequences. For instance, when on 4 June WHO was called upon to help the Government of India in its fight against a sudden outbreak of a cholera epidemic among the refugees, it responded immediately by sending the following day 2.5 tons of medical supplies, and some 30 tons of equipment and medicines were supplied from the Copenhagen warehouse.

Thus with UNHCR's own contribution of \$500,000 the UN system had been able to extend assistance to the value of \$4.3 million even before governments took action in response to the Secretary-General's appeal. But the contribution of these UN agencies was, of course, extremely small as compared with needs and India's efforts. The list of requirements which the Government of India had given to the United Nations was formidable. Basing their calculations on three million refugees for six months, they estimated that not less than 399,000 metric tons of food were needed plus over 7,000 tons of milk powder and baby food; tents and tarpaulins for 500,000 families; nearly 800 vehicles plus a full list of medical supplies. The total cost, including the running of camps and hospitals, amounted to \$175 million.

The United Nations had made its contribution promptly. But what about its action in mobilizing resources? One factor was to mark the situation. Practically no supplies of the most urgently needed commodities were available in the area. Undoubtedly had there been more foresight on the part of nations to build up emergency reserves in suitably located warehouses from where massive help could be directed in case of a catastrophe in the region,



"fire-fighting" aid totalled some \$600,000.

As for health matters, WHO dug into its stocks for a value of \$165,500 to meet the most pressing demands. An initiative taken jointly by UNICEF and WHO in 1953 was to prove immensely valuable. At that time the decision was taken by UNICEF to create a general warehouse in Copenhagen to stock drugs and equipment with the technical advice of WHO, to enable the two agencies to fight outbreaks of epi-



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things would have been different. As it was, assembling the goods and cash was to require time, so was the actual transporting of relief donated or bought abroad with contributions made to focal point. Ships with food or trucks took between three weeks to two months to reach India. Because of this and in view of the urgency many bulk items had, in fact, to be flown in at great cost to the operation.

Immediately after the Secretary-General had made his appeal, detailed information about the refugee situation was sent to governments, together with an explanation as to the way in which the system intended to carry out its task. This was done through focal point New Delhi, through direct contact with missions by Headquarters Geneva and New York and through the network of UN representatives throughout the world.

Britain and the USA had been among the first countries to inform

themselves of needs. On 12 May, when the Mace mission was still in India, Mrs. Rita Hauser, the US Delegate to the Economic and Social Council, announced during a debate on the East Pakistan situation that her Government was appropriating two and a half million dollars for relief purposes. The major part of this first donation consisted of food given to American voluntary agencies for distribution to the refugees in India, and of a direct contribution of \$500,000 to UNHCR as focal point. The USA in early June allocated a further \$15 million after they had been able to study the Indian "shopping list" in great detail. America was, in fact, to become the major donor with over \$82 million in cash and kind channelled through focal point including support given to certain voluntary agencies.

The United Kingdom on its part reacted immediately to U Thant's appeal with an announcement in the House of Commons on 20 May that

it was giving £1 million to focal point. This, too, was a first gesture which on 24 June was followed by a second allocation of £1 million, in addition to bilateral aid. Britain was to become the second largest contributor with over \$25.8 million.

The first US contribution of \$500,000 added to HCR's \$500,000 from its emergency fund permitted the immediate transfer of \$1 million to the Government of India. Britain's contribution served to buy tenting material in India and abroad, including some 40 big hospital tents in Singapore which were a few days later flown to Calcutta. The contribution was also to allow WHO to meet part of the impressive list of medical requirements which the Government of India had submitted. In the days that followed, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, Cyprus, the Netherlands, Belgium, Botswana, Nepal and France pledged their support, bringing the total pledged contributions to \$38 million by 8 June.



Outside the focal point action had also been taken on a bilateral basis by a number of other countries. The USSR had promised 50,000 tons of rice and 100 million units of smallpox vaccine; Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic, Canada, Sweden, Norway, Australia and Britain, directly or through support given to voluntary agencies, rushed cash, food, shelter and medicaments to the sub-continent. Barely one month after the Secretary-General's appeal, an estimated \$160 million worth of aid had been promised, pledged and partly put in the supply pipeline to India, through and outside the UN channel.

In other circumstances this would have appeared not only impressive, but exceptional. But the requirements were so immense and the problems were assuming such vast proportions that even this massive international assistance was dwarfed in comparison. For while resources were being mobilized, the hallucinating exodus of the refugees into India continued unabated.



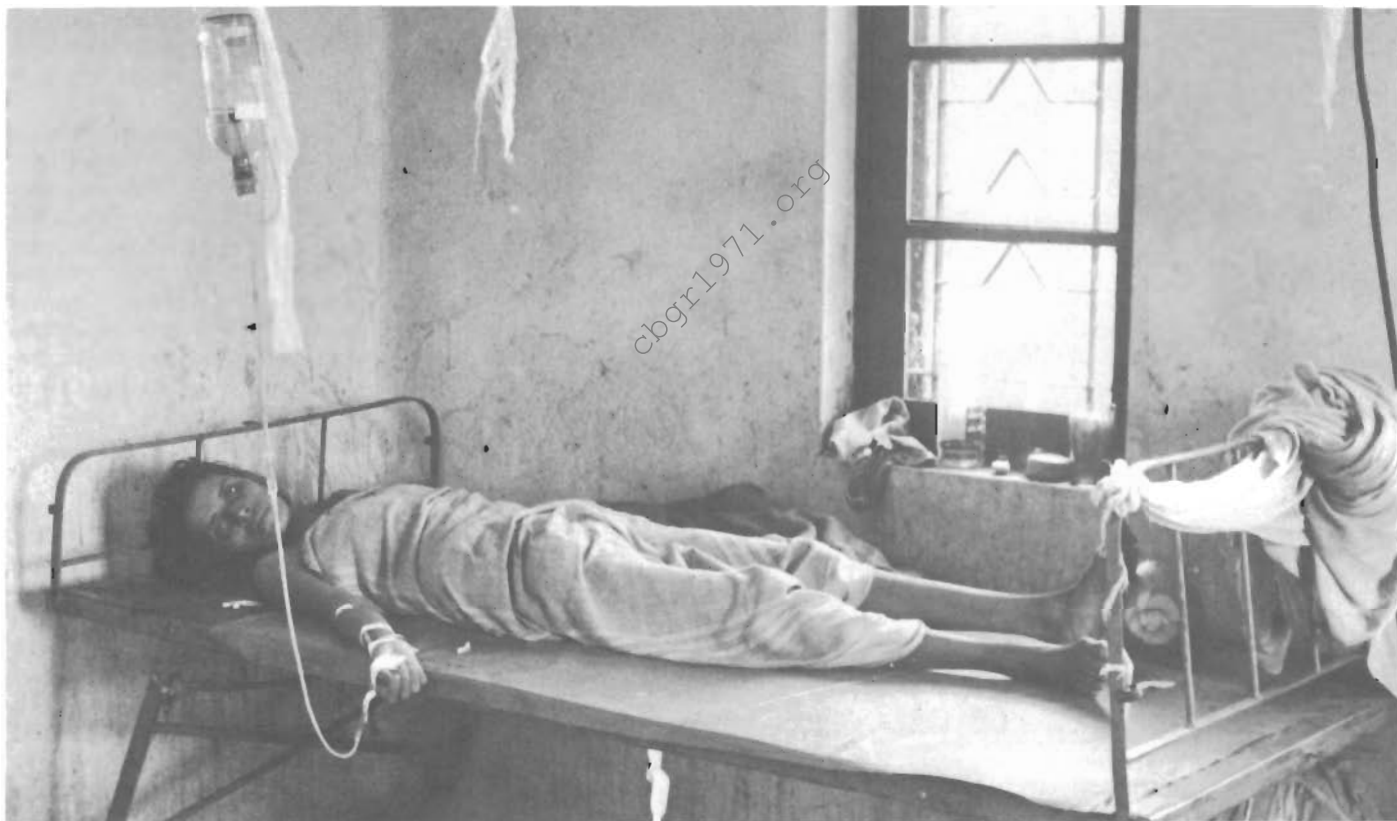
When the United Nations mission arrived in India on 6 May there were reported to be 1,600,000 refugees; the day they left on 19 May, there were over 2 million, according to the Government of India, half of them accommodated in some 400 camps. By the end of the month the Indian statistics stood at 4 million, a fortnight later it reached the figure of 6 million.

India was desperately coping with this human avalanche. A variety of measures were taken, including the

creation of 20 huge camps run by the Central Government with the aid of retired army personnel. The Government decided on the evacuation of masses of refugees from the border states and arranged with the USSR and the USA to have transport planes provided for this purpose. These planes were to bring relief goods to outlying areas and to evacuate refugee families on the return flight. Trains and buses were pressed into service. But because of the continuing influx none of these

from infectious diseases. Some 626 doctors and 60 refugee doctors are trying to cope with this overwhelming situation, aided by some 800 para-medical personnel. Over 2,700 beds have been added to the existing 42 hospitals, but what will the situation be tomorrow? On this day a further 100,000 refugees have arrived in the Nadia district alone."

In these circumstances it was not surprising that India was impatient: in its eyes the world was doing too little, too slowly to help it in its



efforts seriously relieved the pressure in the border areas. The authorities were finally to concentrate their efforts on creating sufficient camps in these areas and to abandon the evacuation movement.

"Law and order problems now plague our officials in the border states", wrote the Hindustan Standard on 30 May, "thousands are squatting on land and property of our citizens and serious health problems are being created for millions. Many of the refugees are suffering

gigantic task. "The help we have received from international organizations is very poor", said Minister Khadilkar meeting the Press on 31 May, "all we have been given amounts to about \$15 million", and Mrs. Gandhi on 15 June told the Indian Parliament that international assistance so far was "pitiful", only a tenth of what was required. In fact, contributions announced to focal point then stood at some \$33 million but most of this had in fact not yet been paid in and

The United Nations, and particularly WHO, played a vital part in flying tons of vaccines and rehydrating fluid to Calcutta from all parts of the world.



only a portion of what had been given had reached India in the form of goods and cash.

This criticism was to be joined by a chorus of editorials in the world Press blaming the United Nations for alleged lack of action. But was this justified? Undoubtedly there was ignorance about the way in which the system could operate, there was also irritation caused by the apparent inability of the United Nations to tackle the root of the problem. Was not on 4 June an irate journalist at the UN Headquarters in New York to challenge U Thant: *"You and the United Nations have remained silent, dealing only with the peripheral humanitarian problem in a half-hearted way. Does the United Nations deserve public support with such a record?"*

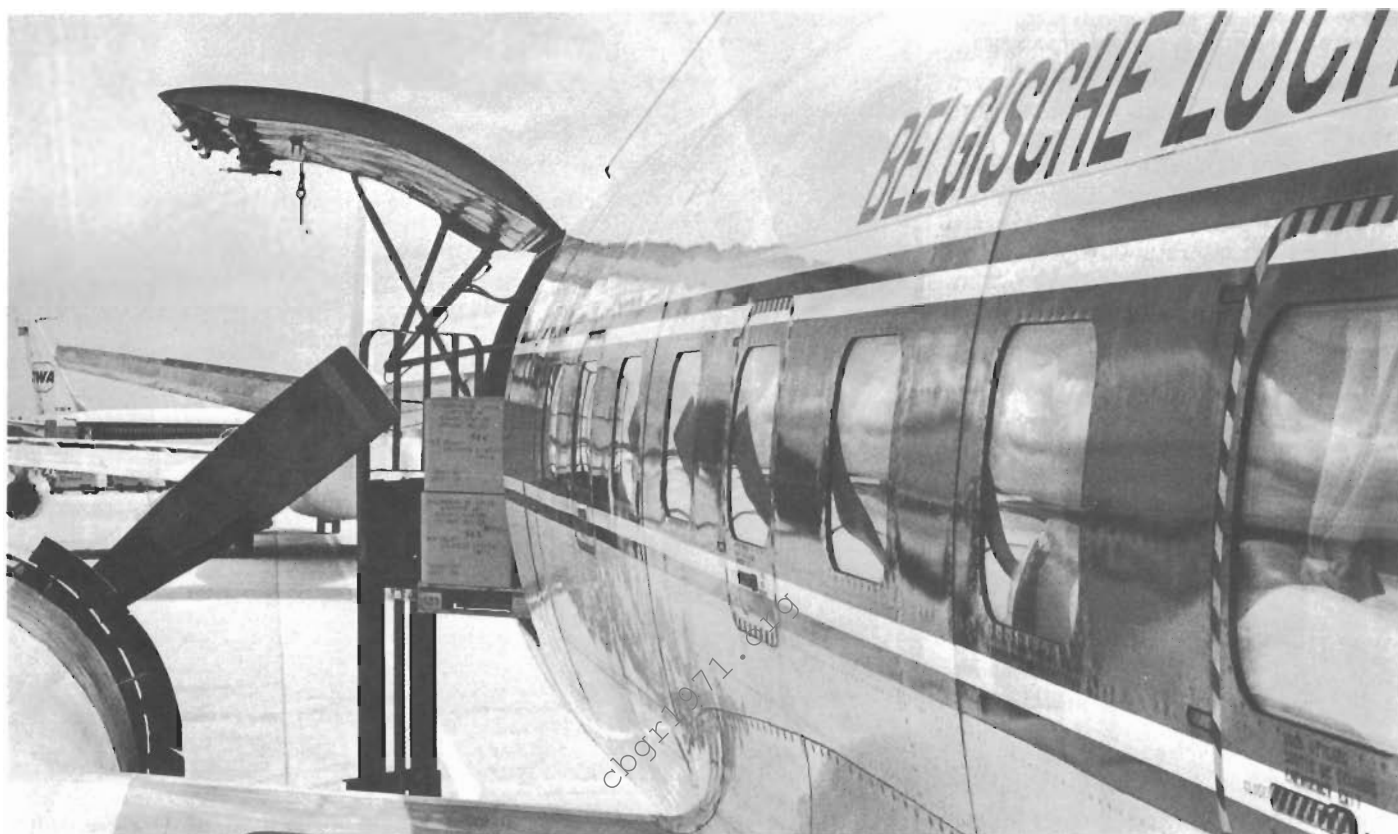
The confidence crisis in the Organization's peace-keeping ability was to inspire a great many writers to utter harsh words in the months that followed, and these were not confined to the United Nations' political role. Apart from the many political elements which placed the United Nations, as in so many other

crises, in the position of having no power to influence the course of events, its positive action in the humanitarian field remained hidden from the public eye. For instance, on 13 June the *Sunday Times* carried an article written by a correspondent in India: *"Most of Britain's official aid and effort is to be channelled through the United Nations. One million pounds was pledged three weeks ago, but there is as yet no evidence to suggest that any of it is here."* In this particular instance, the million pounds had been transformed into tents, hospitals and medicines, all of which had either been bought in India or had reached the sub-continent. None of these items bore, however, any UN markings; they had been added to the pool of equipment and relief goods finding their way through Indian channels to the refugees.

It was this lack of visible evidence, among other things which at this period made observers wonder about the United Nations' effectiveness in the humanitarian field. Reporters expected to meet UN relief

officers in the field, there were none; UN emblems on goods, there were none; on relief planes, there were none. In fact, when at the request of focal point Britain lent RAF planes to take urgently needed cholera vaccine and rehydrating fluid to India, an agency dispatch said: *"The British Government by-passed the slow moving international organizations today and mobilized its own emergency airlift."*

Had the system in fact been slow, had it erred, procrastinated or lost itself in red tape entanglements? Little did opinion realize the complexities of an aid operation of this magnitude. Even if, in essence, it was to help India to carry out its work for the refugees, it was not simply a matter of ringing the bell, transferring cash and announcing priorities of need. Governments when making contributions wish to be very precisely informed of the nature of the requirements; often they also express their wish as to how, say, cash contributions are to be used. When for instance the USA pledged \$15 million, focal point did not immediately receive this money



but had to call forward money transfers on the basis of specific requests giving detailed justifications. This procedure not only included cash but also contributions in kind, such as rice or baby food, of which the monetary value was deducted from the over-all pledge, or of services—for instance aircraft or shipping. Other governments, too, earmarked pledges for specific purposes, it being understood that changes could be made as and when needed and agreed to. The role of focal point in these matters was essentially to guide governments, balancing initial offers against priorities, suggesting items and uses to be made of cash, persuading them sometimes to alter the nature of contributions in kind. These continuous discussions undoubtedly somewhat encumbered the operation but they were unavoidable.

One important example will illustrate this. In the list of requirements, bulk food represents major items; rice 415,000 tons, and wheat 157,000 tons, or in the daily ration

100 gm. of wheat against 300 gm. of rice. Through UN focal point, buying undertaken by WFP or direct donations, some shipped by WFP, about 332,000 tons of rice were provided. However, in making contributions in kind, several governments selected wheat as in their early budgeting they had earmarked important tonnages of this commodity to give food aid to certain developing countries under the Food Aid Convention. This operates under the International Grain Agreement, whereby certain governments pledge to provide certain quantities of wheat. In the face of the emergency, a number of countries proposed to use part of these reserve quantities for India.

The Government of India, which itself had some 4 million tons of wheat in buffer stocks, amply sufficient for its needs, found itself in the impossibility of storing more. Therefore it insisted with focal point that wheat offers be changed by donors, either into cash or into rice, oil or sugar. Focal point thereupon undertook the necessary negotiations,

which, in some cases but not all, resulted in other commodities being made available. In others, after lengthy exchanges of views, for instance in the case of Argentine which had offered 4,000 tons of wheat, these contributions were diverted to the Relief Operation in Dacca.

All the major donors were constantly in touch with focal point Geneva and New Delhi, they checked the situation through their diplomatic missions in New Delhi, through their contacts with the authorities and with the representatives of the UN agencies there. This procedure had the merit of associating governments very closely with the action; it facilitated a more effective international co-ordination as many governments used their knowledge to discuss action with their national voluntary agencies which themselves in turn were in touch through their counterparts with the situation in the field and also with both focal point Delhi and Geneva. The excellent liaison

The focal point organized one of the longest and biggest airlifts ever undertaken in the service of a humanitarian cause to bring medicines, shelter material, blankets, even jeeps and ambulances, quickly to India to help the authorities meet the needs of the refugees.

established between governments and focal point was such that there was no loss of time. There were practically no administrative delays.

In all this, the establishment of lists of priorities was imperative, but the choice was difficult. Indeed, except for food, items which were supplied from the buffer stocks in India and could, therefore, be replaced with less urgency, everything else was needed at once. It was only a matter of degree that one item should receive more urgent attention than others. Except for shelter.

Because of the oncoming monsoon, shelter was obviously most immediately required. Hundreds of thousands of refugees—soon to be over a million—were sleeping in the open. Public buildings, schools, railway stations, post offices, etc., were overcrowded, camps could not be erected fast enough. Finding suitable material to build more camps was becoming increasingly difficult. Focal point had sent cash to the Government of India to help with

local purchases, but on 12 June Mr. Jamieson sent a top priority message to Geneva: *"All procurement possibilities India appear to have been exhausted. Every effort must now be made to airlift by any means shelter soonest. People are in the open, under trees, cardboard, cloth. Any reasonable material would be extremely welcome."*

UNICEF at the request of focal point started world-wide enquiries, placed orders, organized deliveries. The League of Red Cross Societies appealed to all national societies, many voluntary agencies were making arrangements for the airlifting of plastic sheets, tarpaulins and tents. Governments stepped in. From Switzerland, for instance, the army gave individual "soldiers' tents" which were flown out in their tens of thousands. This gigantic effort resulted in bringing shelter to 500,000 people in India in slightly over one month, while buying went on to provide for 2 million more. By 3 July the Government of India, partly with international aid, had been able to house millions in basha huts (these are basically bamboo frameworks supported by wooden posts covered with locally-available materials, like thatch or sun-grass roofs), tents or tarpaulins for 800,000 were available or on order, from abroad materials for another million were in the pipeline, but at that time so many more refugees had arrived that there was again an uncovered gap of over 1 million people sleeping in the open. But such was the effort that by August the full target of supplying shelter to 3 million refugees had been met.

In the meantime, another calamity struck. In late May, several Indian newspapers had been referring to a number of cases of gastro-enteritis, possibly cholera, among the refugees. The local and central health authorities had taken immediate measures. In several districts where outbreaks had occurred, bazaars and shops had been closed, the sale of fresh fruit had been forbidden, the camps had as much as possible been isolated, new arrivals were inocu-

lated at all known crossing points. But such was the rapid spread of the epidemic that on 30 May Dr. Jamal Abedin, Minister of Health of the Government of West Bengal, declared that all his medical stocks to fight the disease had been spent. The Central Government, too, saw its reserves dwindle all too rapidly and on 4 June appealed through the WHO regional representative in New Delhi and its permanent delegation in Geneva for immediate assistance. A similar appeal was sent to the League of Red Cross Societies.

The request for 2.5 million doses of vaccines and 200,000 litres of rehydration fluid was received at WHO Headquarters at 7 a.m. on 5 June. Instructions went out less than an hour later to WHO's warehouse at Geneva's Cornavin Station to prepare deliveries for airlifting that same day from Cointrin Airport. Air India and Swissair were contacted and requested according to IATA regulations to accept the emergency supplies on their first available flights. Both companies offered their cargo space free and on 5 and 6 June 2.5 tons were on their way to Calcutta.

Calls were made on UNICEF's warehouse in Copenhagen for jet injectors, syringes, needles, as well as for tetracycline tablets. The Pasteur Institute in Paris was asked to provide millions of vaccines (they were offered free); the Selavo laboratories in Italy were contacted. The British and German laboratories could not, however, accept orders as they were fully engaged in supplying vaccines for India at the request of the British and the Federal German Governments. As for transportation, focal point contacted the permanent missions and Canada, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the USA, and Switzerland responded immediately with offers of flights. The rehydrating fluid factory in Geneva stepped up its production and in a matter of two days a full airlift schedule had been worked out that was to take some 330 tons of medicines to Calcutta, at the rate of 30 tons per week.

WHO in taking this action ex-

hausted its emergency fund and focal point had to provide finances to meet the cost of this first airlift and the buying of the medicines: some \$700,000. On 22 June, WHO was to report that 80% of all supplies requested by the Government of India had been delivered, while focal point had transferred some \$300,000 to help the Government of India to buy medicines locally, and had given UNICEF a credit of \$1 million for more international buying.

The news of the cholera epidemic had struck world opinion with a feeling approaching horror. Dispatches from the field drew a picture of nightmarish misery. A French correspondent described the horror march of the refugees reaching India in these words: "*Often one witnesses heart-rending scenes. A woman, a family wait near a body which they will soon abandon after having burned or buried the corpse. But often there is no other resting place than the slow flow of a river...*" and Murray Sayle wrote in the *Observer*: "*Cholera is a horrible and humiliating way to die. The only mercy is that*

it is comparatively quick. The cholera wards are two buildings behind the main hospital block. There are no beds. The patients lie on metal sheets covering a concrete floor. The disease produces uncontrollable, continuous diarrhoea and vomiting, the results of which are everywhere. Those who still can fan themselves weakly; those who are too far gone to do so are black with flies. There are men, women and children of all ages. All are getting the same treatment—a bottle of saline solution dripped through a tube and needle into a forearm, a foot or a thigh. Some small babies have their mothers, also afflicted with the disease, lying beside them. One woman has two small babies beside her, all three connected by thin plastic tubes to the saline bottles slung from a rope overhead. One child, a girl about 10, is dead. Two women wail loudly over her body as it is wrapped in a cotton cloth for burial."

An immense wave of human solidarity swept through the world. Appeals were organized on radio and television by the Red Cross and

Urgent to Calcutta...

In meeting the desperate needs of the millions of uprooted people in India, the airlift played a vital role in bringing quick relief.





other voluntary organizations. Sir Evelyn Shuckburgh, Chairman of the Disaster Emergency Committee in the United Kingdom, made a national appeal. £500,000 was raised in three days. The Governments of the Scandinavian countries held a special meeting of their ministers of foreign affairs to determine the size and nature of their contributions. Soon afterwards they announced their first commitments: Sweden \$4.5 million, Denmark and Norway \$1 million each and Finland \$475,000. The Scandinavian voluntary agencies on their part were already active. The World Council of Churches appealed to all its 230 church members. The Netherlands launched a public fund-raising drive. In Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and the USA private groups collected funds. Aircraft with medicines and other relief goods arrived from all parts of the world in an increasing and unending stream at Dum Dum airport in Calcutta. Working day and night, the airport officials tried to cope with the massive inflow of aid, not all of it properly marked—What do packages contain, to whom should they be sent, what vaccines have to be stored in refrigerated warehouse? At one time the airport had to ask relief planes to delay their arrival by 48 hours to give them time to clear the accumulated goods.

In view of the extent of the

emergency, many leading personalities of the voluntary agencies operating in India came to discuss with their local staff the extent of the problems and the best methods of aid. But many *ad hoc* teams of volunteers also arrived—some immediately applying themselves to urgent tasks, others unfamiliar with the region adding confusion to an already overstrained situation. Few people outside India realized that the country had all the qualified manpower needed to deal with the problem, medical as well as administrative. The Indian Red Cross and voluntary organizations were in strength on the spot; they were rendering immense services. In addition, the administration had matters well in hand. As Col. P. N. Luthra, who headed the Branch Secretariat of the Ministry of Rehabilitation in Calcutta explained: *"In the face of the vast problems we took measures to improve the infrastructure of states by having separate refugee relief departments and secretaries in the governments. In certain states separate ministers were appointed. Apart from the camp staff in the shape of camp supervisors, camp commandants, camp superintendents, we created the necessary administrative machine for looking after the refugees in all aspects of the work such as public health, the issue of supplies and the day-to-day administration in camps."*

The Indian authorities told the foreign agencies that whilst they welcomed their support those who previously had not been working in India should channel their aid through the Indian Red Cross or through such voluntary agencies as were authorized to continue their operations mainly with Indian personnel, such as OXFAM, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Christian World Service/Lutheran World Federation and others.

There was a strong reaction in several countries. Meetings held in Calcutta under the chairmanship of Colonel Luthra helped to clear the air. In the meantime, the battle against cholera continued with increasing vigour and effect. The number of new cases began to diminish. On 18 June the world Press reported *"the cholera epidemic has been brought within bounds"*. On 29 June WHO said: *"The availability of vaccine is now past needs."*

The significance of the help given through the United Nations in this battle found its reflection in a moving account in the American magazine *Newsweek* of 20 June. Writing on the effects of the rehydrating fluid on the patients of which tens of thousands of litres had been airlifted from Geneva to Calcutta, the writer said: *"They literally have life pumped back into them and you can see them gradually gaining strength as the bottle empties."*

One crisis had been overcome, not without cost in human lives—some 5,000 of the 45,000 declared cases had died. But the fear that millions of the local population might have been affected did not materialize and this because thousands of men and women in India had fought hour after hour against the deadly invader. As *Newsweek* said: *"India's medical services performed impressively."*

Yet many more worrying and harrowing days were ahead. With the curtain of the monsoon descending over the Bengal area, new threats were writing their signs on the leaden skies and in the muddy ponds of the camps.

From any corner of the Earth

"It is as though the Evil One was there in person, insolent and destructive, like in a drawing by Holbein."

Fernand Gigon

(Swiss journalist upon his return from refugee camps in India).



The rains came down early that year, a sure indication that the monsoon was going to be heavier than usual. The refugees continued to come in their thousands, plodding through the mud and crossing swollen rivers, under the drizzle, under the downpours. The lucky ones brought their umbrellas, huge-looking black mushrooms held close to the head. Mothers would undress their children, keeping the clothes dry in their bundle of belongings and clutching the naked bodies to their breasts as they walked along. Others plucked the wide leaves from the banana trees to cover their heads. But when the curtain of water became too heavy, thousands would cram into the little shops in the villages along their road, pack on verandahs of the houses they passed, or cluster under the dripping trees. Those who had created a little shelter, with a piece of cloth or cardboard held up by a few bamboo poles, tried to stem the invading waters with little dykes of mud. And when the heavy rains stopped, the roads and fields remained waterlogged, slushy and a

drizzle accompanied by gusts of wind was no kinder than the sharp downpour.



The Indian Red Cross, supported by the League of Red Cross Societies, chartered many planes to fly medicines and other relief supplies from Calcutta to the northern part of West Bengal, Assam, Maghalaya and Tripura.

Under the rains the primitive bamboo constructions over which floated wisps of smoke rising from the huts came to look from above like a mass of flotsam left behind by a receding stream. Between the triangular tents a few naked children would dash from one place to another, but when the time of food distribution came, the thousands who had stayed inside in their cramped quarters would form long queues of patient, silent men, women and children.

When the monsoon rushed down in all its force, descending from the Himalayas to drench half the Asian sub-continent, the rivers Ganges and Bramaputra could no longer carry all the waters to the ocean, they overflowed and inundated the land. In the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh millions were marooned in swirling waters. 13,000 localities were overrun by the floods, 17,000 square miles were inundated. 200,000 lost their homes in West Bengal and in Assam hundreds died. The damage to India's economy was said to have reached \$96 million.

The effect on the refugee situation was dramatic. A German doctor witnessed harrowing scenes of thousands of people standing in the open all night in the rain: *"Women with babies in their arms. They cannot lie down because the water*

comes up to their knees in places. There was not enough shelter and in the morning there were always many sick and dying of pneumonia." (Time Magazine.)

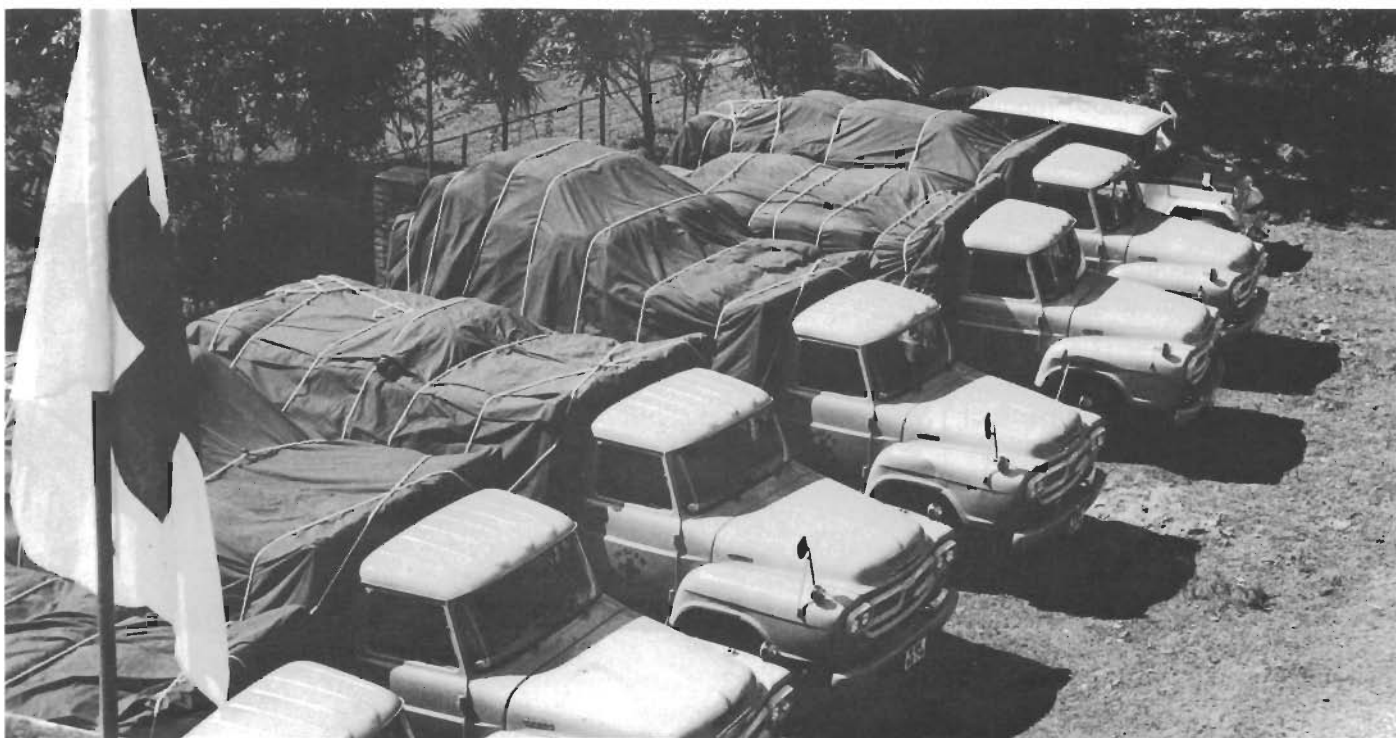
Thousands left their camps for the higher lying roads, forming human barrages that forced traffic into a one line lane, and on these roads were the supply lines of food and all other relief goods. There was a nightmare worry to beat the floods and mud to get the supplies through, particularly to Assam and Tripura, before the roads were blocked completely somewhere along the 1,700-mile route from the port and airport of Calcutta. Peter Gill reporting on 8 July to the *Daily Telegraph*, London, on the situation in Tripura said: *"Anxious officials are fighting a 'do or die' battle to preserve their desperately tenuous supply routes with the outside world."*

In this battle, fought by Indian Government officials and the Red Cross, disaster was warded off only by a fine margin. Food reserves in Tripura calculated to feed 1.5 million inhabitants during the monsoon now had to be stretched to meet the needs of an additional 1.4 million refugees. Airlifts were organized but stocks continued to go down. Rations were halved and the refugees were given money instead of



Unloading of trucks in the port of Calcutta.

Over a thousand vehicles had been brought to India to strengthen the supply line of relief goods between the port of entry and the refugees. A world-wide purchasing operation was undertaken for focal point by UNICEF to bring heavy trucks, jeeps, ambulances, trailers, etc., to India.





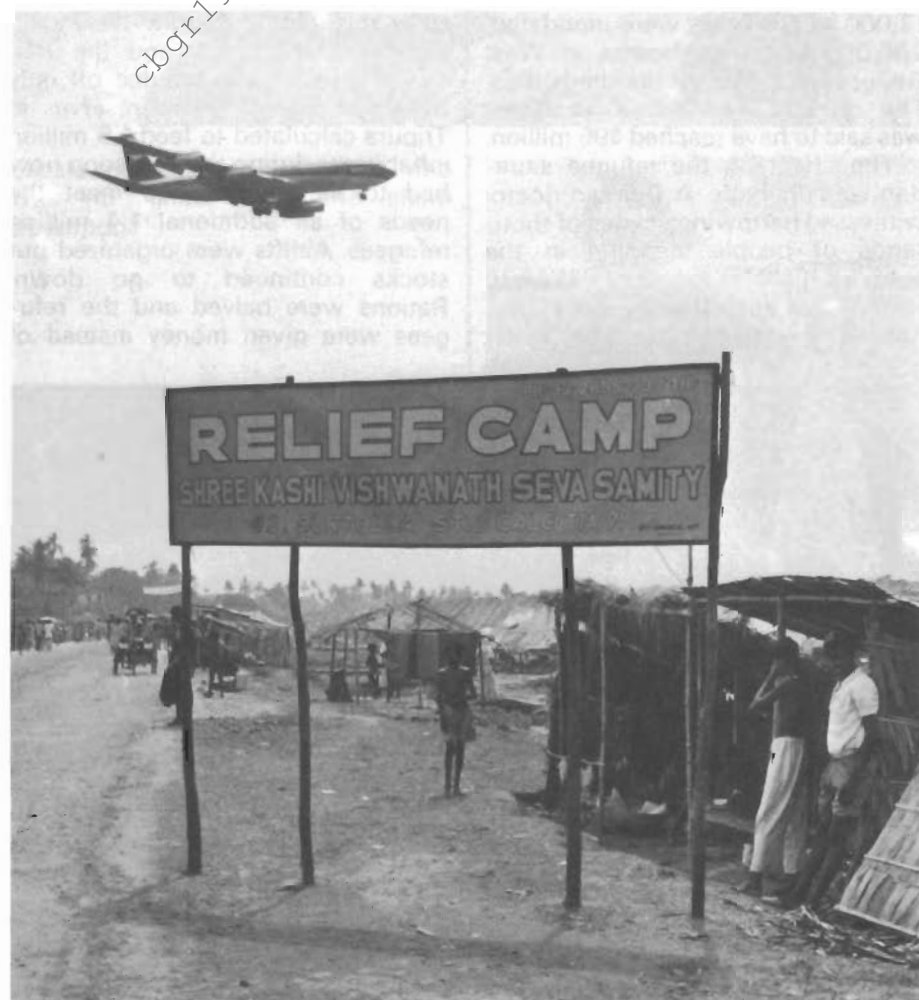
food. Prices rose. At one time a crash airlift was envisaged to bring rice direct from Burma to Agartala in Tripura, notwithstanding the cost. But thanks to the tenacity of the truck drivers and the organizing ability of the administration, famine was averted.

With the oncoming of the monsoon, priorities had shifted. "The need of the hour here is not for inoculations now but for tarpaulins", said Dr. P. Saha, State Director of Health Services in West Bengal. This did not mean that no further vaccines had to be brought to India, or that there were no further health problems requiring supplies of drugs and medicines. There were still cholera cases, about 352 daily in West Bengal; malaria had to be fought; there was an outbreak of measles; bronchial and pulmonary diseases were rampant. But over the weeks, the army of doctors, nurses and auxiliaries had been built up to form, by mid-July, over 1,000 medical teams, including 200 composed of refugee doctors and nurses. Focal point through WHO was continuing to supply by air between 30-40 tons of vaccine and medicines and equipment. The League of Red Cross Societies was continuing to send, through its national societies, medical supplies according to a priority list prepared by WHO, and many voluntary agencies in many parts of the world were helping. What Dr. Saha meant was that shelter had now become the paramount prerequisite for preventing disastrous effects of the weather on the health of refugees.

Tarpaulins, polythene and other

plastic sheeting had been sent to India right from the beginning of the emergency. Australia under a bilateral arrangement had been the first to do so. The measures taken by the Government of India had ensured accommodation in camps and schools for about 3 to 4 million people (situation as of 1 June).

Others were staying with friends and relatives. But with the continuing influx of refugees—there were now over six million—some 1 to 2 million were still without a roof over their heads. Focal point India told Geneva on 22 June that orders had been placed in India by the Government for tents to house 68,000



At one time hundreds of trucks lined some of the main avenues of Calcutta where they were being checked by technicians before starting their service in the refugee supply line.

families, but it took two months before all of these were delivered. "There is an immediate need for 150,000 tarpaulins of 450,000 tents or a combination of both", said Mr. Jamieson. At that time UNICEF had brought by airlift from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Japan and Europe enough material to help 500,000 people. "Shopping" for 2 million more people was in progress in all parts of the world. Private organizations were bent on the same task, several governments sent tents. "At this point", said Mr. Jamieson, reminiscing on his focal point functions in India, "I had the feeling that the UN was really on the job". Yet there still remained a gap. A month later *The Times* wrote: "As monsoon rains continue to fall over eastern India, the enormity of the refugee disaster became even

closer today when a senior Government official asked the international community to airlift urgently, from any corner of the earth, 3,000 miles of six-foot wide material to house 3 million refugees not yet in camps." Perhaps the reference to 3,000 miles of material was technically inaccurate. Indeed the choice of tarpaulins, tents, plastic sheeting was a matter of constant discussion. Some plastics were recommended by UNICEF New York: "24-foot wide in 100-foot rolls, translucent and milk white, already used Viet-Nam same purpose, good for six months strong sun, nine months monsoon conditions."

Focal point Delhi gave the Government of India's opinion: "Any utility tents no smaller than 10 feet by 10 feet and all the way up to marquee size tents will do. Tarpaulins of canvas or synthetic material

Passengers on incoming flights flew over large refugee camps before landing at Calcutta airport. Many of the commercial planes brought free of charge urgently-needed supplies to India (left).



Blankets in their millions donated or bought by UNICEF with focal point finance arrived in Calcutta airport for immediate despatch to the hilly regions where the refugees were exposed to bitterly-cold nights (right).

should be no smaller than 18 feet by 18 feet but no upper limit on size as it could be cut locally. Preference on size would be approximately 7.5 metres by 5 metres. All tarpaulins should have rings and eyelets approximately 2 metres apart. Synthetic sheeting of any type capable of withstanding 3 months monsoon conditions (temperature 100 °F and torrential rain) is acceptable. Australia has supplied poly-fabric which is high density poly-thene woven fabric 20 by 20 weave laminated one side, outdoor formulation 15 mm thick in rolls 50 yards by 72 inches. Government advise that this is suitable. Government further advise that non-inflammable pvc coated light cotton fabric would also be suitable. Shelter material takes top priority and must be airlifted to India to be of use as monsoon is already in full swing." The purchasing process was to reveal itself a most complicated one where ideal specifications, approximations and alternatives had to be balanced against availability and urgency. Financial considerations too played their part as liquid funds were constantly over-committed, and the search for free air-space—in view of the charter cost involved—therefore played an important part.

Nevertheless, by early July the Government and UNICEF with focal point funds had provided or bought enough material to shelter about 2 million people. More funds were released and by August the target of procuring this type of shelter for 3 million people had been met. In addition 79 hospital tents had been sent and 100 more were on their way. The Red Cross of the German Democratic Republic, the New Zealand Government, the Swedish Red Cross, OXFAM, War on Want, the American Catholic Relief Service and CARE had also contributed many tarpaulins, hospital tents and plastic sheeting. Others were to do so in the following months.

Thus in mid-July the situation appeared under control and the item "shelter" was removed from the top priority list. Once more this did not mean that further assistance was no





Above: Clean water was one of the major necessities in the refugee areas. Floods and pollution threatened the health of millions. Many new wells had to be sunk and others had to be drilled in rocky areas with the help of equipment lent or bought by the UN system.



Left: Such was the overcrowding in camps that many refugees squatted under any form of shelter, as for instance this refugee who made a cement drainpipe his home.

Opposite page, left: The Indian authorities had devised a method whereby rations were supplied every week from the regional "go-downs" (large silos or warehouses) to the refugee camps.

longer needed in this field; but with moneys available, the choice of the allocation of funds was now for items of greater urgency. Nevertheless there were refugees outside Salt Lake Camp seeking protection from the rain in huge cement tubes which had been brought there by the authorities to serve as sewers for a new housing estate. The battle of shelter was to continue until the last moment, for as the number of refugees continued to rise, and as the floods invaded more and more camps, new clusters of basha huts and tents had to be erected. In all 1,289 tons of shelter were flown to India through the UN system.

Many other items remained. For instance, clean water was a major problem. The UNICEF Liaison Officer in West Bengal reported that in many camps "hand-manipulated pumps drew mud or muddy water. This is becoming a most serious situation". The Liaison Officer for UNICEF in Tripura told the Calcutta office where an emergency unit had

been set up by UNICEF, headed by Mr. J. G. Andersson: "I took the first opportunity of calling on the First Secretary of the Union Territory, Mr. Gupta. I asked him point blank what in his opinion was the main requirement. Mr. Gupta said, "water, transport—transport, water—transport", and then added, "I really cannot determine which of these two relief matters deserve prior consideration for both of these items are vital, as much for refugees as for Tripura's own survival". No truer words could have been uttered as

I found out for myself. The provision of water at refugee camps was indeed a difficult proposition. To solve the problem wells would have to be sunk, plain drinking water on the hilly sites could be struck at a normally deep depth."

UNICEF arranged at considerable cost to fly out to Gauhati a self-propelled boarding rig. From there it was driven by road to Agartala. This road the Liaison Officer described as a narrow ribbon, crazily zig-zagging through the hills, "a challenge both to the skill of the driver and to the

my experienced driver blurted out. He was only taking another scared man into his confidence."

In the High Commissioner's official report on focal point's activities, the following extract deals with this problem: "A field survey was undertaken in June by a joint team of the Central Public Health engineering Organization and UNICEF, who acted as the UN system's check-point in this sector as well, to assess the requirements of drinking water and sanitation in the existing and the proposed camps.



sturdiness of the vehicles in the course of following these countless bends and equally countless, self-repeating ups and downs". He referred to his own experience: "One drives along, sitting rigid and tense, watching one range giving way to another, and to yet another, and another, at places passing by the side of thick bamboo forests, dark, mysterious and disturbing on both sides of the road, all the time expecting a tusker to break through or a leaping big cat to cross the path. I no see this sort of road before, I sort of feel a little dizzy, maybe even scared,

During the survey, the team examined the type of soil in camp sites, in order to determine what type of rigs would be required to drill wells. It classified the soils into two broad categories: hard, rocky strata, found in Bilaspur and Mana in Madhya Pradesh and at Charra in Purulia District of West Bengal, where only the powerful pneumatic drills could be useful; and alluvial soil, found in most of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura where the less sophisticated rotary rigs could serve the purpose.

"The survey, which was under-



Throughout the emergency the greatest worries for the authorities were transport, clean water, shelter.

taken in great haste, made a tentative list of the equipment which would be needed in the different locations, and listed the agencies in the different states which could be entrusted with the execution of the water supply schemes.

"In all UNICEF procured 14 rigs—10 of them pneumatic and 4 rotary—and other accessories, 500,000 feet of galvanized iron pipes and 420 tanks of various kinds. In addition, the UN focal point made a cash contribution of \$2,750,000 to the Government of India for implementing the water supply and sanitation schemes."

In the meantime, other priority requirements demanded urgent action. Focal point's main worry became the allocation of funds—far short of needs—to individual items. Indeed this "balancing" of requirements against liquid funds was to mark the whole history of UN assistance. In the middle of July contributions to the focal point amounted to nearly \$100 million of which \$47 million was in cash but only \$13.3 million had actually been paid in, all of it committed. Some

risks could be taken in authorizing further purchasing programmes, for which no immediate liquid funds were available on the basis of pledges received but not yet paid in, but these risks had to be strictly limited to realistic expectations of early payments. On 1 August, for instance, paid contributions had risen by only \$4 million to \$17.4 million.

The participating agencies, UNICEF, WHO and WFP could from time to time draw on their working capital but this was by no means calculated to permit purchases of the magnitude required by the assistance programme. At one time UNICEF called urgently on a \$2 million reserve to meet its immediate needs in view of its heavy buying. Purchasing of shelter material through UNICEF, excluding air transportation, cost nearly \$3 million, while the Government of India received over \$12.2 million as focal point's contribution to the construction of basha huts, plus \$1.7 million for tents. Vehicles cost nearly \$10 million for which the urgency was increasingly felt as the battle of supply reached its culminating point.

When the monsoon came...



In a telegram on 15 July UNICEF requested *"Would focal point take steps earmark additional funds as transport absolute key whole operation."* It was done, although with difficulty.

Irrespective of the volume of assistance that focal point could transmit within the limits of contributions received in cash and kind, the Indian authorities had to face all the demands of the situation.

The Indian Parliament had in May approved an appropriation of the equivalent of \$80 million, and in early August this was increased to \$346.6 million to take care of the situation till the end of the year. In December yet another appropriation was made, bringing the total provision to \$480 million. As the official report explains: *"These funds were placed in part at the disposal of the State Governments to enable them to finance assistance in the camps under their jurisdiction, which were the vast majority, and in part made available to the Rehabilitation Branch Secretariat in Calcutta, mainly to finance central camps."*

As will be recalled, in the beginning the governments of the various states had made themselves responsible for the setting up of camps as needs arose. Later, as these became too congested, large camps for at least 50,000 people each were built by the central authorities, the Branch Secretariat in Calcutta. Detailed plans had been worked out for the layout and running of these huge communities—some were as large as 250,000. In command of each

of these centres was a retired officer of the rank of colonel or lieutenant-colonel assisted by a major or captain. Under them worked some 60 or more people. They were responsible for law and order, health services, distribution of rations, educational and recreational activities, helped in this by volunteers and Red Cross workers. The camps were built with locally available material, with roofing of tarpaulins or plastic sheets, and as these were exhausted tents were erected. Most of the roofing material and tents came from abroad, supplied largely by focal point but also by a number of governments and voluntary agencies.

The materials supplied by focal point were received by UNICEF officers of the Special Emergency Unit at Dum Dum Airport in Calcutta, which throughout the emergency was a beehive of activity, or at the sea port. After checking and clearance through customs, Col. Luthra's men took over. But in quite a few cases the UNICEF officers helped in organizing inland transport. WFP had an officer in Calcutta to receive all food supplies.

There were of course a great number of individual donations sent by voluntary agencies, often in great haste. Their clearance was not always an easy matter as the nature of the goods, destinee and donor were sometimes not clearly marked or documentation was not sufficient. The goods were loaded on to trucks plying their way along the road to the refugee sites. Some of them were also loaded on to aircraft for

Assam and Tripura.

As for food supplies, these were taken in charge by the Food Corporation of India which moved them from the port to the "godowns" to replenish reserves. From these "godowns", huge warehouses or silos, the camps drew their rations. Every item was recorded, its movement directed, its end use described. At one time the Branch Secretariat employed all over the refugee area not less than 38,000 people.

One of the main subjects of worry in the month of June till the end of the monsoon, apart from shelter and health, concerned the vital supply lines linking Calcutta with the camps along the 1,700-mile border of what was then East Pakistan.

Indeed in normal times all precautions are taken to have the vital reserves in the warehouses before the monsoon interrupts truck traffic and slows down railway transportation. The rapid inflow of refugees had placed a heavy load on the communications system. The area least of all affected was perhaps West Bengal, divided by the Ganges into North and South Bengal. It has very good rail and road facilities in the South and practically all the camps located in this area were easily accessible—except during the monsoon. North Bengal is accessible from the southern and western regions of India by three arterial routes which pass through Farakha, Barauni and Makameh. In Farakha, railway cars were still at that time ferried across the Ganges in powered

barges. This presented a major bottleneck for only a limited number of railway cars and trucks could be transhipped in a day. It was not until the end of November that the railway bridge over Farakha was opened and this serious handicap thus overcome. Barauni and Makameh, however, had rail and road bridges, and transshipping was therefore unnecessary.

The greatest difficulty concerned the states of Assam and Meghalaya, both landlocked and surrounded on three sides by what is now Bangladesh. The primary communication and transport centre is Gauhati, accessible both by road and rail and boasting a serviceable airport capable of receiving heavy freighter aircraft. The road from Calcutta to Gauhati is a natural highway but at the best of times and under the most ideal conditions a loaded truck takes a minimum of four days to complete the trip. With the rains and the floods, road conditions became almost impossible.

The road from Gauhati to Shillong and on to Dawki (Meghalaya border) was fairly good with two-way traffic until one reached the half-way point, Shillong. The number of refugees camped along this road was, however, negligible. Their greatest concentration in Meghalaya was accessible only by roads which varied from indifferent to impossible. As an example, the road from Shillong to Balat, where Meghalaya currently had an influx of 150,000 people, was good for 60 kilometres, indifferent for 14 kilometres and the remaining 36 kilometres were practically impossible. The potholes were unbelievably deep and wide.

Roads within Assam were good and in reasonable repair, except for the stretch between Shillong and Silchar.

The transport problems of Tripura were the most serious of all. Two airfields serve this area—Agartala, and a smaller one near Dharamnagar, 130 miles from the capital city to the north-east. The railway system and the meter gauge linking Tripura with the rest of the country ends at the Dharamnagar Railhead. Dha-

ramnagar is also the north-eastern tip of the state from which the Assam-Agartala highway passes. It was therefore this road which links Dharamnagar and Agartala that bore the brunt of surface communications. This highway, in fairly serviceable condition, passes through the mountainous areas for approximately 90 miles. It was to this road that the UNICEF Liaison Officer referred in his report on the "water situation".

The majority of the refugee camps in Tripura were to be found on high ground and were widely scattered, thus presenting serious transportation problems. The survival of the camps, as well as the entire state, depended upon the availability of adequate numbers and various types of road transport. The influx of the refugees had stretched the already limited transport available to the limit.

Since trucking agencies in neighbouring states became reluctant to employ their vehicles under such road conditions, the state governments of Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura had to restrict themselves to locally-available transport.

The relief operations strained the rolling stock available to the authorities to the utmost and for this reason the Government of India had included in its estimates of needs a request for some 320 trucks, 230 jeeps and 50 ambulances. These were to supplement the vehicles already being used to bring food and other items to the refugees. They were specifically intended to establish lines of communication between the new camps that were being created by the central government and the sources of supply, another 100 trucks were intended to lift stores from the railhead at Dharamnagar to Agartala and from there to the refugee camps in Tripura, and a number were to be used to move emergency supplies.

As the number of refugees increased, however, the authorities and focal point felt very strongly that the first list of requirements, not only of rolling stock but of all other items, were below the needs. A new list was prepared which was transmitted

to the United Nations on 16 June. This brought the total target from \$175 million to \$400 million. For instance, food requirements were now estimated at 580,000 tons of rice, 120,000 tons of pulses, and transport was set at 768 trucks, 480 jeeps and 120 ambulances. Focal point New Delhi informed Headquarters that at least 320 trucks were needed immediately, particularly since they wanted to move the vehicles needed for Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura to these regions before the roads risked being cut off by rain and floods during the monsoon.

An effort was made to rent commercial vehicles. Said an official: "We invited tenders. A number of meetings were held with commercial contractors and eventually firms came up with offers of vehicles all at very exorbitant prices. When the Government and UN focal point agreed to pay them these exorbitantly high rates they backed out with many excuses, saying that they would like firstly to make a reconnaissance of the country, they wanted to explore the terrain, discover the prevalent conditions their transport would be meeting. After lengthy discussions the transport agencies were finally persuaded to give about 100 vehicles, but they never turned up. The fact of the matter was that the agencies were reluctant to divert their transport, firstly because with drivers operating in a part of the country with which they were not familiar risks of damage were great, secondly there was fear that conflict or war might erupt between India and Pakistan and their fleet of vehicles might get damaged."

A priority allocation was therefore made for an immediate buying programme. First efforts were made to find as many vehicles as possible in India, both with manufacturers and in the second-hand market. At first it looked as if 200 trucks could be procured within a relatively short time, but upon further investigation it appeared that the body-building was likely to take too long. The Government intervened and eventually 708 vehicles including trucks.

jeeps, trailers and ambulances were bought in India. Still, international purchases had to take care of an impressive list. UNICEF New York and Paris surveyed the world market and several governments were asked to assist in this task. For instance, the Government of Japan invited tenders from manufacturers with guaranteed priority deliveries and shipping. After careful consideration of the aspects of standardization so that the right kind of spare parts would be available in the country, a narrow selection of manufacturers was made.

All this did not take a long time. By 13 July orders had been placed for all the 5, 7 and 8-ton trucks: 318 in Japan, 284 in the United Kingdom with deliveries in Calcutta starting by the end of July and staggered over a period of five months. UNICEF released from existing projects in India some 298 jeeps plus 15 one-and-a-half ton pick-ups. A further 200 ordered in the United States were shipped practically immediately. There were also orders for some 240 trailers; a number of ambulances were airlifted from Japan as they were urgently required in the outlying areas. 50 other ambulances came from Europe.

Thanks to the co-operation of the shipping lines from the United Kingdom to the Indian sub-continent the shipping space problem was solved in a brief period.

Until the foreign trucks arrived in India measures were taken to strengthen the rolling stock. In Tripura, for instance, the army immediately provided 200 trucks.

Notwithstanding all this, no amount of human effort was to win the battle against the elements. When in August the monsoon raged with unprecedented force there were breakdowns. Yet, undaunted by the rains, floods, mud and broken-down bridges, the authorities performed miracles of ingenuity to prevent the total disruption of the supply lines. Few stories have reached the outside world of the life of the truck drivers during those days, but one can imagine the *endurance they displayed in the face*



of what were impossible odds.

When the monsoon came to an end, all the UN vehicles were ready to take to the road with their supplies of rice, medicines, blankets, clothing and utensils. For the vehicles reached Calcutta on schedule, even if many of them had to be parked in public places—it caused an uproar in the Indian and international Press—because blocked roads and floods prevented them being driven to their allocated areas.

In all focal point provided 985 trucks, 152 ambulances, 536 jeeps and 181 trailers. The manufacturers sent several of their technicians to check the vehicles on arrival and instruct the Indian drivers in manipulating and maintaining them. When, in January 1972, the final return movement of the refugees started, the rolling stock, marked with the UN emblem, served to carry hundreds of thousands of refugees

back to their homeland. Later many of these vehicles were transferred by the Government of India to the Bangladesh authorities to help in the reconstruction of the new country.

But there were many months of anxiety before this stage in the history of the sub-continent was reached. There was the threat of malnutrition to 2 million children, there was the threat of the cold weather after the monsoon, the need for clothing, blankets, utensils. Above all, the world was to continue worrying about the tension existing in the sub-continent.

The involvement of other nations

"In tragic circumstances such as these it is all too easy to make moral judgments. It is far more difficult to face up to political and human realities of the situation and to help the people find a way out of their difficulties. It is the latter course which, in my view, the United Nations must follow."
U Thant.

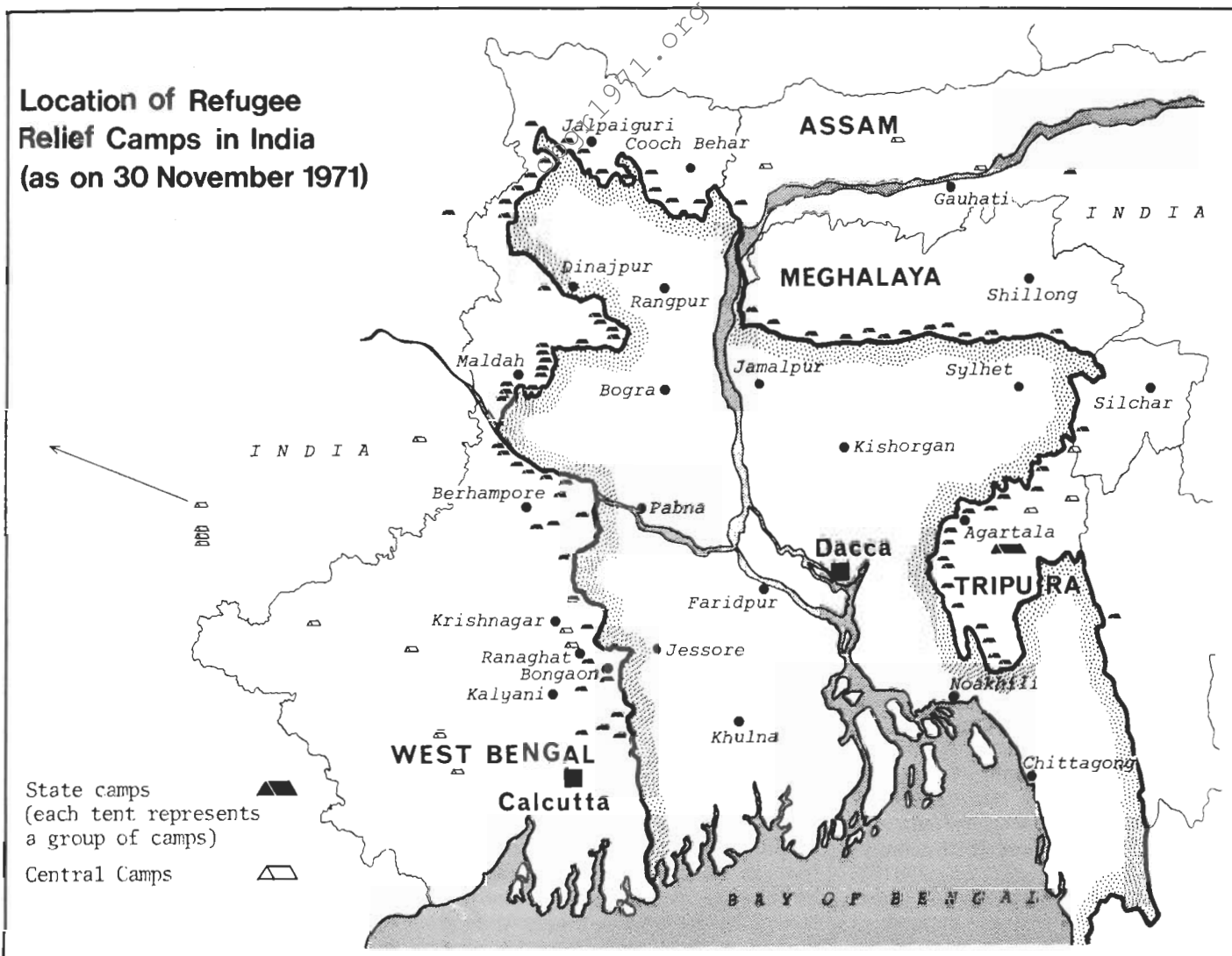
On Saturday, 5 June, late in the evening, Sadrudin Aga Khan boarded a Swiss plane, destination Karachi, for a twelve-day mission to the Asian sub-continent. In Islamabad he was to see the Pakistan President, General Yahya Khan, and other senior government officials. Then he was to go to Dacca and various areas in East Bengal. After a brief return to Islamabad, a special UN plane was to take him on a direct flight to New Delhi to meet India's Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, and ministers and high officials responsible for foreign affairs and refugee relief. Together with Mr. Jamieson, he was to visit refugee camps in West Bengal. Afterwards meetings were scheduled

in New York with U Thant, and in Washington with Secretary of State William P. Rogers. Then he was to visit London to see the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas Home, and afterwards meet with France's Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, in Paris.

The Press speculated whether this mission formed part of a behind-the-scenes diplomacy and if the High Commissioner had not been secretly given a task of mediator. This was denied in New Delhi. No-one, of course, questioned the necessity of such a visit by the person responsible for the co-ordination of the humanitarian relief effort. It was part of his functions to glean an over-all and detailed view of the elements

of the problems. Direct contact with the leaders of the two Governments directly involved would also enable the visitor to gain a deeper insight into the complex basic issues. It was of equal importance to acquaint the governments concerned with the nature of the UN focal point functions both regarding the relief operation and the possible role it could play in the promotion of solutions, even if these were only to be part of the technical aspects of repatriation. Nevertheless the visit could be seen against the background of efforts made by others to bring influences to bear on the situation, even if the purpose of his mission was strictly limited to the terms of his functions as focal point.

Location of Refugee Relief Camps in India
(as on 30 November 1971)



Before the High Commissioner left Geneva there had been long consultations by transatlantic phone with U Thant. Both knew that the solution of the refugee problem depended essentially on a political settlement, without which a massive return of the refugees could not be envisaged. But they hoped that a physical focal point presence in the Dacca area might introduce an element conducive to the return of greater confidence and security.

U Thant had obtained the agreement of the Government of Pakistan to the resumption of the UN relief operation for the civilian population in East Bengal. Created to meet the emergency following the November 1970 cyclone, this humanitarian action had been interrupted by the March events. On 22 April the Secretary-General had asked Pakistan to allow the United Nations personnel to resume their operation in the area. In reply a message had been conveyed to the Secretary-General by Pakistan's Minister of Economic Affairs accepting in principle the installation of a UN team which would administer the international humanitarian aid in East Pakistan. In fact the High Commissioner was to meet Mr. Ismet Kittani, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Inter-Agency Affairs, in Islamabad where the latter had gone to discuss the setting up of the resumed relief operation.

Apart from humanitarian considerations, U Thant hoped that if sufficient international relief could be brought to the stricken people of East Bengal they might at least be spared the fear of famine and disease which could induce hundreds of thousands more to leave for India. Likewise he hoped that the stationing of a UNHCR representative in Dacca might open possibilities for the United Nations to establish a network of officers who would be available to provide returning refugees with advice and aid. In this trend of thought neither the activities of UNEPRO nor of UNHCR were expected to have a direct influence on the political aspects of the situation; they were seen as the

kind of assistance the United Nations could give and which, when accompanied by substantive developments in the political field, might contribute to establishing a greater degree of security and confidence. The High Commissioner explained this in London when he met the Press: *"The roots of the problem are bound up with political questions of major interest to the parties concerned. I think U Thant would very much stress this also; it is together, governments, UN agencies, the UN Secretariat, that we may influence the course of events (...). The concerted efforts of others, the Secretary-General, the major powers, the parties concerned, India and Pakistan and those of the High Commissioner, should take place at the same time. That is what I tried to do when I went to the area. But I have some limitations, obviously, because my mandate is very precise."*

The Pakistan Government had by June established some ten reception centres to receive in transit returning refugees (eleven more were being created) and the High Commissioner when he was in East Bengal was able to visit two of them. They were well-organized but at that time housed only a few returnees. Bad weather prevented him from seeing other centres.

The authorities during the months that followed published certain figures, in the end reporting the total number of voluntary repatriates as being some 200,000, most of whom were said to have arrived through "unauthorized routes", meaning they had not passed through the centres. Incidentally, throughout the crisis, the question of refugee statistics was one of extreme delicacy, Pakistan questioning the figures given by the Indian authorities and producing its own estimates based on village checks; these never exceeded 3 million, although in an interview granted by General Yahya Khan to the magazine, *Newsweek*, he was said to have admitted to the possibility of some four to five million. In fairness to both parties the United Nations and UNHCR, decided to include both figures in their official communica-

tions; for practical purposes they based their work, as it related to each of the areas, on the relevant governmental estimates that were provided.

Shortly after reaching Islamabad, the High Commissioner cabled the Secretary-General on 8 June: *"Reached full agreement on all questions relating to repatriation including presence East Pakistan UNHCR focal point. Modalities to be finalized later."* A few days later the High Commissioner appointed his London Representative, Mr. John Kelly, to head the focal point office in Dacca.

This was a modest step forward and so it was recognized, but its value had to be assessed against a swiftly growing atmosphere of distrust, tension and erupting violence. There were in July few comforting elements in the situation. True there was agreement by all parties on the essentials: the stay of the refugees in India was limited in time; the solution was their voluntary repatriation. Some people expressed doubts as to whether all refugees would be able to return. This was not the opinion of Prince Sadruddin when he said in Geneva on 13 October: *"It seems to me that just as the outflow of people took place without anybody organizing or checking on it, if there should be a trend in the other direction and the flow should be reversed, it would be the kind of movement, some organized and a lot not organized that would take place."*

This is exactly what took place in the first three months of 1972. But when Prince Sadruddin went on his mission in June 1971 the future was darkly clouded by troubles and uncertainties. President Yahya Khan had appealed to the refugees to return to their homeland, promising security and amnesty. Still the outflow continued. The President reiterated these appeals, but the situation did not alter. International opinion grew more and more apprehensive. Parliaments and Press clamoured for action without precisely knowing or suggesting what could be done. Replying to a question at a Press



conference in Paris in July, Prince Sadruddin touched the root of the problem: *"There is a basic problem in respect of the sovereignty of states. This is a fact which unfortunately has often to be reiterated. For people like myself, principally concerned with the humanitarian aspects, it is sometimes difficult to understand this, for questions of human rights concern all individuals in all states, but on the plane of international relations, governments are bound to respect the sovereignty of states, those of India and Pakistan. It is not for me to say which means should be used to influence sovereign governments; all I can say is that it is necessary. I am confined to speaking of the need for voluntary repatriation. Everybody agrees that conditions must be created to enable this repatriation to take place—the Indian, Pakistan and all other governments. One can, of course, hold differing opinions concerning methods that would create a situation that would make this repatriation possible."*

Most governments held the view that such influences as could be exerted should be applied through the channels of "quiet diplomacy". Countries giving economic and military aid to Pakistan had, however,

in addition decided to apply restrictive measures pending more favourable developments. But there was a definite reluctance, particularly on the part of the major powers, to have the problem brought for open discussion before the Security Council. They did not believe that this would bring any nearer the solution of what was essentially an internal problem. As for the Secretary-General, his initiatives were, by virtue of his office, practically restricted to personal contacts. U Thant in his last year of office was a man exposed to a great deal of Press criticism. He was a deeply worried man, beset by many problems, suffering from ill health. Indeed when the High Commissioner went to discuss the situation with him in September, he was received by U Thant at home where he was convalescing. Nevertheless day and night he exerted himself in trying to bring the parties together. In July, when he felt the situation was taking on threatening proportions, he decided to address a letter to the President of the Security Council expressing his fear that the situation in East Pakistan vis-à-vis the adjoining Indian states, constituted a threat to international peace and security. He suggested

Informing the mass media on all the aspects of the humanitarian operation was one of the duties of the High Commissioner, *Sadruddin Aga Khan*. After the end of every mission, as well as at all crisis moments during the relief action, the High Commissioner shared his thoughts and anxieties with the journalists and discussed with them all the points on which the international press was at times voicing misgivings. A constant stream of information thus brought the public at large a detailed and almost daily account of developments.

that the Security Council, after carefully considering the situation, should reach some agreed conclusions as to measures which might be taken. This suggestion was not taken up. In fact the Security Council did not meet on the situation until December when war between the two countries had virtually broken out. In the face of the worsening situation, U Thant again took the initiative: on 2 October he offered "his good offices" to the two parties: *"Recent developments have only served to increase my anxiety that this situation could all too easily give rise to open hostilities which would not only be disastrous for the two countries principally concerned but might also constitute a major threat to the wider peace... In this potentially very dangerous situation, I feel that it is my duty as Secretary-General to do all I can to assist governments immediately concerned in avoiding any developments which might lead to disaster."* This too was to remain without effect.

Thus neither the political nor the diplomatic moves emanating from the United Nations Headquarters in New York were to have any effect on the conclusion to which events were leading. Nor were the other diplomatic moves to fare any better...

If there were baffling dilemmas in the political field, several of the major powers were greatly in favour of further initiatives being taken by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner in regard to refugee assistance. There were some hopes that by providing certain increased material facilities to help those refugees wishing to return, some headway could be made towards an improved outlook.

When Mr. John Kelly arrived in Dacca, he had as one of his tasks to undertake negotiations for the establishment of a team of "field assistants" who would regularly visit the reception centres and perhaps be permanently stationed in them, but the situation never allowed this. Indeed four more UNHCR officials joined him in September, but by

then the more ambitious scheme, of which the Dacca part formed an element, had come to an abortive end. This concerned the stationing of UNHCR officers on both sides of the border. On 19 July U Thant had addressed a memorandum to the Permanent Representatives of India and Pakistan in which he said: *"The Secretary-General is anxious to do everything possible, in co-operation with the governments concerned and complementary to their own efforts, to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of the refugees in a secure and orderly manner which takes due account of their welfare. One possible method of doing this might be to establish a limited representation of the High Commissioner for Refugees on both sides of the border."* They *"be stationed at collecting points on the Indian side, at border crossing points on both sides and in reception centres on the Pakistan side."* He suggested that a test should be made *"in two or three selected areas"*, and when this arrangement proved useful, *"it would then be possible to expand it gradually to include most, or all, of the repatriation points"*.

Every word of this memorandum had been carefully weighed, every sentence had been sharply scrutinized to ensure that the exact functions of the UNHCR representation would be conveyed to the parties concerned. But as a result of an unfortunate misunderstanding and a garbled leak in the world Press, this suggested corps of field assistants was described as a group of some sixty "UN observers" and this immediately suggested the idea that these officers were to be entrusted with functions such as those performed by UN military observers in the Middle East and in Kashmir. The Indian Press reacted immediately and most negatively. On 2 August the Government of India rejected the proposals outright on the grounds that the country was not preventing any refugees from returning.

This setback did not, however, affect the growth of the relief operation. Perhaps this was partly due to the somewhat comforting fact that

here was at least one form of non-controversial action in which governments could participate and which in a practical way could both alleviate the human suffering and lighten the burden borne by India.

Furthermore there was a strong flow of public opinion to encourage governments to respond generously to the Secretary-General's and the High Commissioner's appeals. In more than one country demonstrations took place; in others paid advertisements appeared; in Switzerland a well-known leader of a voluntary agency went on a hunger strike.

The relief action was also discussed in the United Nations. During the May session of the Economic and Social Council in New York, the matter had been brought up. At that time the humanitarian action was only in its initial stage, and the explosive situation entirely dominated the scene. The overtones of the debate were definitely political and no specific action followed. Delegates intervened more to outline the position of governments than to suggest formal conclusions or decisions. The approach was different, however, during later discussions in ECOSOC when, as is customary, it transferred its session to Geneva. The members expressed the formal wish to hear both the High Commissioner, in his capacity as focal point, and Mr. Kittani, as the responsible Assistant Secretary-General for the United Nations East Pakistan Relief Operation (UNEPRO), on the action they had taken and on what the future requirements were.

The ECOSOC meeting took place on 16 July in an overcrowded Council room in the Palais des Nations with the spotlights of television reporters sharply illuminating the presidential table. As delegates filed into the room there was a palpable atmosphere of tense expectation. Most observers feared a head-on collision between the Indian and Pakistan representatives, with each one making statements "for the record" and thus relating the item "aid" to a secondary place. This was not to be. The packed

Press gallery noticed that the atmosphere of tension gradually changed as statement followed upon statement, first a factual and measured report by the two UN officials, then the quiet but profoundly worried interventions on the part of the members commending the relief operation, urging all concerned to seek compromise solutions that would enable the refugees to return, and stressing the need for powerful material assistance in the face of tremendous needs. When Ambassador Shahi for Pakistan and Ambassador Krishnan for India spoke, the audience had almost come to expect that both would show restraint and moderation. This proved to be the case, although remarks reflecting the strong differences separating their points of view drew from both a right to reply. Nevertheless, when Ambassador Driss of Tunisia, Chairman of the Council, summed up the meeting, he could express the unanimous feeling of "profound concern" with the situation and of "sincere support" for the focal point: "*I cannot over-emphasize the duty of the international community when faced with this problem of unprecedented magnitude*", he said.

This meeting gave focal point a useful lever with governments to elicit further financial and material support. The meeting of the Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's programme in early September, and the meeting of the Third Committee of the General Assembly in December had a similar effect. They gave timely opportunities to governments to obtain up-to-date information on the High Commissioner's action and to lend him strength in his approaches to the international community. He was fully aware of the value the governments attached to these discussions where they could obtain detailed clarification on the action. In view of this he decided in November 1971, just before the General Assembly discussed the relief action, to make a second visit to India and Pakistan. The General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution saying *inter alia*: "*The voluntary participation of gov-*

ernments and organizations should be continued and intensified with a view to assisting the Secretary-General. . . and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees acting as focal point in their meritorious humanitarian action for the relief of the suffering of the refugees."

Focal point assembled a volume of assistance that by all standards assumed unprecedented proportions. Its value was fully recognized by the Indian Government in a memorandum to focal point dated 20 January 1972 in which it expressed "*the deep appreciation of the indispensable role played by the United Nations family in its tremendous task of caring for refugees*". Not less than 64 governments contributed in cash and kind, as well as various inter-governmental agencies and several voluntary bodies and private donors for a total of \$183.2 million. Bilateral aid by comparison was estimated at some \$60 million given by 25 governments and by several inter-governmental organizations, while the efforts of the voluntary agencies in supplying their counterpart agencies or the Indian Red Cross passed the \$46 million mark, including \$10.5 million through the League of Red Cross Societies and some \$6.3 million given by some governments to support the action of their national voluntary organizations.

The United Nations therefore by far represented the main international relief channel; it succeeded through judicious choice of priorities in making a direct impact on the situation even if in volume the aid remained considerably below the level of expenditure incurred by the Government of India. But it brought indispensable and vital support in various fields; without in the emergency might in several of its phases have assumed catastrophic proportions.

These results were, however, not to be achieved without hard "fund-raising" efforts at all levels: memoranda to governments, approaches by representatives to the ministerial departments in the capitals to which they were accredited, personal visits

to capitals by the High Commissioner, by the Deputy High Commissioner and by other senior staff members, while in New Delhi there was daily contact between focal point and the diplomatic missions of donor countries, as well as with voluntary bodies. This was a time-absorbing but essential part of the work of the focal point team in Delhi. There were four distinct stages in the fund-raising. There was the first appeal of 19 May for \$175 million based on the initial estimates provided by the Government of India for an expected number of three million refugees to be cared for in the camps during six months. Then, barely a month later, there was a revised estimate provided by the Government of India on 26 June, this time on the basis of 6 million refugees for six months, which increased the target to \$400 million. A third revision was announced during the session of the High Commissioner's Executive Committee in September in Geneva, when Mr. G. S. Khalon, Secretary for the Department of Rehabilitation, outlined requirements for a total volume of \$558 million to look after 8 million refugees in camps. (In fact this figure was never reached, at the end of the emergency there were an estimated 6.7 million in camps and 3.1 million staying with friends and relatives.) Finally when the refugees started to return in early 1972, the special repatriation needs had to be considered.

There were several crisis moments in the provision of aid. Thus in August the Office was compelled to inform the Press that: "*It had practically exhausted all the resources then valued at \$100 million placed at its disposal. . . if in the next three weeks it were not to receive between \$20 to \$30 million, the operation might find itself in jeopardy.*" Indeed, so serious was the situation that the Deputy High Commissioner went to New York to report to the Secretary-General. On 13 August the Secretary-General called together a special meeting of potential major donors. The list of invited countries had been carefully drawn up: two

criteria had been used. First, the major contributors to the regular budget of the United Nations and secondly those who, in the past, had significantly contributed to the voluntary activities of the United Nations. In the circumstances neither India nor Pakistan were invited. The group was provided with a memorandum drawn up by the Secretary-General's office outlining both the requirements of focal point for assistance to the East Pakistan refugees, and those of the United Nations East Pakistan Relief Operation.

A second financial crisis induced the High Commissioner to launch a strongly-worded world-wide appeal on 12 October: *"The floods which have recently affected the area have added a new dimension to this frightful tragedy",* he said. *"If I turn to you today it is because I realize that words which are not followed up by actions are so many insults to the hopes of these human beings. . . . We need your help through the United Nations and its agencies, through the Red Cross and through the many voluntary agencies, so that we can continue to bring relief to the refugees until the day when hopefully they can go back and live in peace in their homeland."*

But not all appeals were based on humanitarian consideration alone. The international community had been apprised by the World Bank of the serious effect of the refugee situation on the economy of India.

In June the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development had convened a meeting in Paris of the India Consortium. This is a group of 13 countries lending financial backing to the development programmes of the Government of India. Mr. Mace, the Deputy High Commissioner, attended this meeting as well as Mr. McDiarmid, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in New Delhi. The usefulness of the discussions was that it brought to the notice of financial and economic experts in governments the potentially dangerous side-effects on India's future economic expansion if that country were not to receive



sufficient international assistance towards the relief operation for the East Bengal refugees.

When the India Consortium again met on 26 October in Paris, to study a report prepared by experts of the World Bank, Mr. I. G. Patel, Secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs in the Ministry of Finance, gave some indications of the effects of the refugee situation on the country's position. He said that all "non-plan expenditure" (meaning those not directly concerning development) had been cut by 5%, civil servants' salaries had been reduced by 20%, tax collection had been stepped up, all Ministries were applying themselves to effecting the greatest possible savings in their budgets with all that this implied in reduced activities, surcharges had been introduced on railway and air fares, cinema entrance, etc. There were signs of rampant inflation in the areas harbouring millions of refugees. He also mentioned that the floods caused by the monsoon had further aggravated the situation with damage to housing, roads, bridges and land, exceeding \$200 million.

The experts of the World Bank on their part underlined the fact that the volume of relief required from the Government of India equalled 12% of the economic plan. They warned that if no outside resources came to the aid of the Government there

On several occasions the then Secretary General, U Thant, conferred in New York with Sadruddin Aga Khan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, on the various aspects of the relief action.

Chart of contributions

The dotted line shows the amount of cash actually paid to focal point as compared with pledges received (**bold line**). Several times, lack of liquidity threatened the urgent buying operation. One of focal points functions was to allot available monies to constantly shifting priorities and to alert governments when immediate transfers of monies were required.

was a serious threat that the refugee expenditure would absorb more than the foreseen budgetary increase for 1971 which, in their words, might

mean that: "All hope of even approaching the aims of the fourth plan would have to be given up. The whole development process would

be disrupted severely."

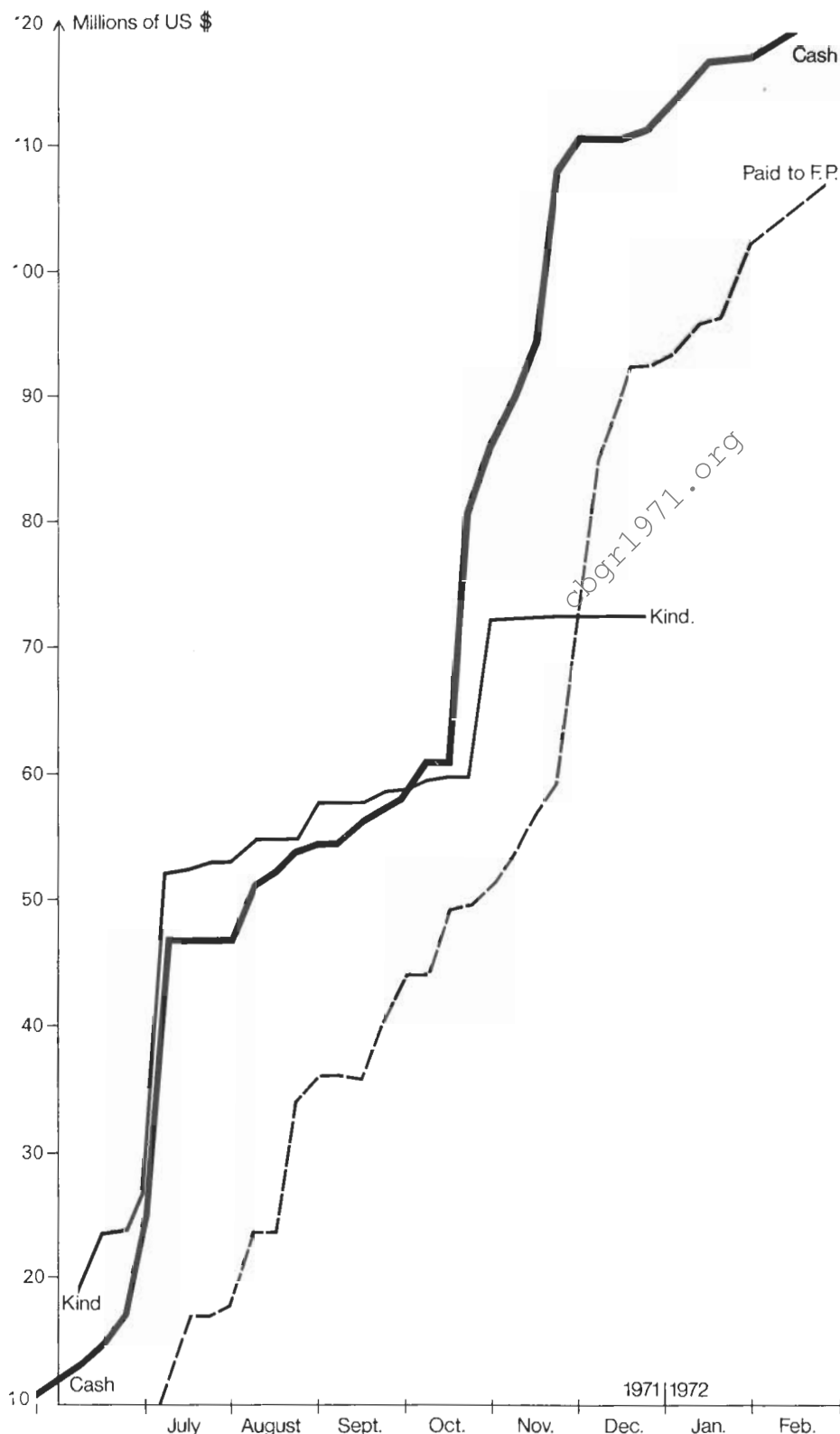
So strongly did the members of the India Consortium feel that at one moment they considered a resolution apportioning to the participating nations a set percentage of the burden, but in view of certain practical difficulties regarding its implementation, confined themselves to a strong recommendation that the assistance to refugees should be *additional* to the contributions made for the normal development assistance to India and secondly they expressed the firm opinion that all nations should make a serious effort to meet at least a substantial part of the total need.

It is not without interest to study the graphic chart of contributions as they were made during the emergency. They indicate the various reactions to the appeals as well as the changes that occurred in the proportion between cash contributions and donations in kind, resulting from advice given by focal point. They also reveal some of the difficulties that were encountered as a result of timelags between pledges and cash paid in by governments. The official report contains some pertinent remarks on these cash contributions.

"As the major part of contributions to the focal point were made by governments, it may be useful to analyse the pledging and payment machinery applying to cash contributions between the governments and the focal point and to draw some conclusions which might be helpful in future co-ordinated actions of this type.

"An amount of US \$19,060,792.— was contributed in cash without any conditions attached as to the use of the funds. This category of contributions is naturally the easiest to handle, and the usefulness of a maximum amount of unearmarked contributions cannot be sufficiently stressed, particularly in the initial phase of an emergency operation, when immediate measures must be taken which cannot be planned beforehand and which do not lend themselves to protracted negotiations with donors.

"An amount of US \$78,913,009.—



was contributed by governments for specific purposes. These earmarked contributions did not present a difficulty to the extent that they were earmarked for well-identified items of expenditure or, alternatively, for a spectrum of items which provided flexibility in the actual use of the funds.

"In other cases (US \$13,917,291.—) contributions pledged by governments were payable only on specific proposals from the focal point, which not only entailed negotiations between the Indian authorities and the focal point, but very often necessitated negotiations at various levels in Geneva, New Delhi and also in the capital of the donor country.

"In other cases a limited number of governments chose to pledge funds to the focal point but, in actual fact, channelled part of these funds through specific programmes or specialized agencies of the United Nations system, or through national voluntary agencies, or managed the funds themselves, through their own machinery of bilateral assistance. While these funds have certainly been very useful inasmuch as they increased the total volume of international assistance, the methods of the actual utilization of these funds was not under the control of the focal point and this created some co-ordination problems."

The final table of contributions shows that sixty-four countries announced contributions for a total of over \$183 million, of which over \$119 million were in cash. Of these countries, three gave more than \$10 million: the USA over \$82 million, the United Kingdom nearly \$26 million and the Federal Republic of Germany over \$17.6 million. Ten countries gave more than \$1 million: Sweden over \$9.5 million, Canada over \$8.9 million, the Netherlands over \$5.7 million, Japan over \$4.8 million, Denmark over \$4.6 million, Norway nearly \$3.8 million, France nearly \$3 million, Australia over \$2.3 million, Switzerland over \$2.2 million and Belgium over \$1.1 million.

An equally significant reflection of the international effort appears when contributions are compared on

the basis of 100 inhabitants per country. This reveals the extraordinary effort made by the Scandinavian countries: Sweden \$118.91, Norway \$97.45, Denmark \$95.14. The next three countries: United Kingdom \$46.42, Netherlands \$43.97, USA \$43.97, with all the major donors (those of \$1 million and above) finding themselves among the first twenty countries which include such contributors of smaller amounts as Finland \$12.29 per 100 inhabitants, Libya \$10.69, Kuwait \$8.45, San Marino \$8.01, Ireland \$7.35, Mauritius \$6.4, Liechtenstein \$5.22. A study of the table shows the remarkable effort of so many of the developing nations, much of it given in kind. Thus Brazil gave 18.5 tons of milk powder, Ceylon 250,000 sarongs, Colombia 15 tons of sugar, Guinea 2 million units of smallpox vaccine, Guyana 57 tons of rice, Iran one million doses of cholera vaccine, Mauritius 500 tons of sugar, Peru 1,000 tons of rice, Thailand 200 tons of rice and 10 tons of sugar.

Tables and statistics do not make absorbing reading. But in their factual way they indicate that the peoples of our planet do not remain indifferent in the face of suffering and are able to act together, in the humanitarian field, once their conscience is aroused.

The months of agony

"Man's body is so small, his strength of suffering so immense."
Tagore.

The rains kept pouring down, they were not to stop till November. The floods swirled over the lands until little dry soil was left in West Bengal. The food supply line of ten million inhabitants was cut by the invading waters. Refugees in many camps had to seek safety on the high embankments of the roads "their improvised hutments on both sides of the road presenting a pathetic sight. Groups of naked children virtually reduced to skeletons, played in pools of stagnant water." (*Times of India*.) The wind,

sometimes of cyclone force, blew the tarpaulin roofs or plastic sheeting off the communal basha huts, walls sagged, tents were swept away. One emergency report in October stressed that roofing was urgently needed for 3 million more people.

The days passed, became months. The refugee influx did not abate. In late October, a member of the UN Information Centre in New Delhi sent the following dispatch to UN radio:

"About 14 miles from Bongaon is the village of Bagda on the

bank of the Indian river Kuttla. Most of the huts are set like beads in a string along the bank of the winding river. Upstream the village ends rather abruptly with a huge tree growing at a steep angle over the water. Across the fields, through a small clearing wrested from the trees, in the distance is East Pakistan. This is one of the several routes out of East Pakistan along the border with West Bengal State, India, through which refugees were coming across on a rainy afternoon in October when I visited the site. Women holding whimpering children in their arms, sons carrying their aged parents on their backs, young boys in loin cloths with bundles on their heads bigger and heavier than themselves. A few fortunate ones did not have to walk because they were moving in bullock carts in which peering through the straw cover were children, unmindful of the uncertainty ahead in contrast to their parents, taking the strange surroundings as a kind of treat. At the main village centre there were interminably long queues of refugees waiting for their rations with their border slips given to them earlier at the point of entry. Over 4,000 refugees, the District Magistrate of the area had told me, had crossed the border and entered Bagda on that particular day. They were mostly of



A world which for years had ignored the fact that one in every three children in the under-developed countries dies before its fifth birthday, mainly because of malnutrition, suddenly discovered how hundreds of thousands of refugee children in the camps were exposed to its murderous attack.



the peasant stock. An elderly woman looking woefully lost was among them. She had arrived in Bagda that morning with her husband and children but didn't know where to find them. That is what she told me when I was talking to her late in the evening. A younger woman in an advanced state of pregnancy who could not have been more than 20 had an even sadder story to relate through her wailing. She had been separated from her husband during the disturbances and she could not tell me what had happened to her three year old child."

The shelter position worsened. At one time in Bongaon alone around 200,000 people were without a place where they could sleep.

More floods came. Communications broke down. The eastern states were practically cut off from Calcutta for one and a half months. One report mentioned that 4,000 railway wagons during one month waited to cross the famous Farakha ferry. Supplies, which normally took four to six weeks to reach the eastern regions by rail, were held up somewhere along the line with no-one knowing when they would arrive. Even by the end of October when the worst was over, Col. Luthra explained that of the 500 to 600 wagons needed to bring supplies daily to Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura, only 150 to 200 were available. Of 25 jeeps sent to Tripura before the monsoon blocked the roads, only 15 arrived, the last one battling through the increasing mud and rising waters, after that the weather closed the roads to the others. Fifty trucks sent from Uttar Pradesh to alleviate the transport situation in Tripura were not heard of for weeks.

The security situation too worsened along the borders. Newspapers reported raids and incursions, shelling. It affected the supply line. For instance, in Tripura 300 men carried on their backs 100 tons of essential food every day along a 40-mile track running close to the border as trucks dared not pass. Some Red Cross convoys were organized with army protection.

100 tons of milk powder had been flown out to the Eastern area by UNICEF before the monsoon struck. The Indian Red Cross was therefore able to maintain its milk programme. But ordinary rations depending on supplies in the "go-downs" had to be reduced when reserves fell below the danger line or transport failed. Money instead of the missing commodities was distributed to the refugees. Inflation burst upon the whole population. At one time it was contemplated flying in massive supplies of rice, but the weather and the situation of tension made the authorities look for alternative measures. An airdrop organized by the Indian Air Force brought every day 35 tons of the most essential goods; in Meghalaya alone 600 tons were dropped and, as a result of tremendous ingenuity on the part of the local authorities, the worst was avoided.

In Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura, camps were on high ground. The weather was colder. When a visiting League of Red Cross Societies' delegate arrived wearing his light summer suit, he shivered his way through

fog-bound camps. And the refugees were more lightly clad than he! The low temperature brought its dangers in the form of pulmonary diseases, but at least the refugees were dry.

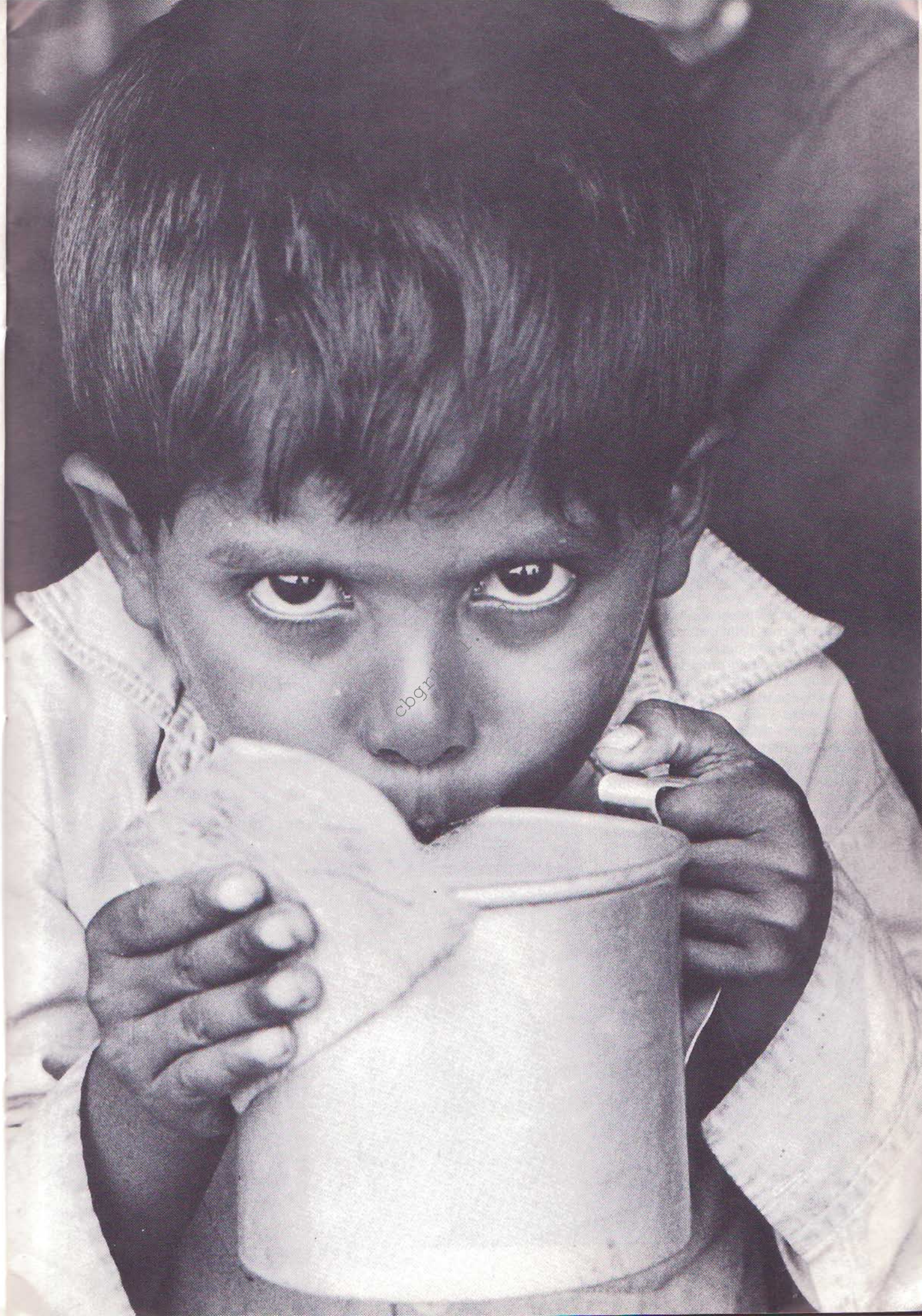
Those in North and West Bengal suffered from incessant dampness. Although they were nearer to the supply base Calcutta, floods disrupted arrangements. A focal point officer touring the area reported that he was unable to reach certain camps because of landslides. It would have taken him over a day to walk the distance, but volunteers did, carrying supplies on their backs to keep the people alive.

At one time quantities of milk powder were accumulating at railway sidings. In some cases there were no wagons going north, in others trucks could not get through to take the milk and protein food to the camps. "We have enough supplies in the country", sighed one UNICEF official, "but communications and distribution problems are today serious bottlenecks."

Most visitors from abroad, leaders of voluntary agencies, personalities of many countries, photographers



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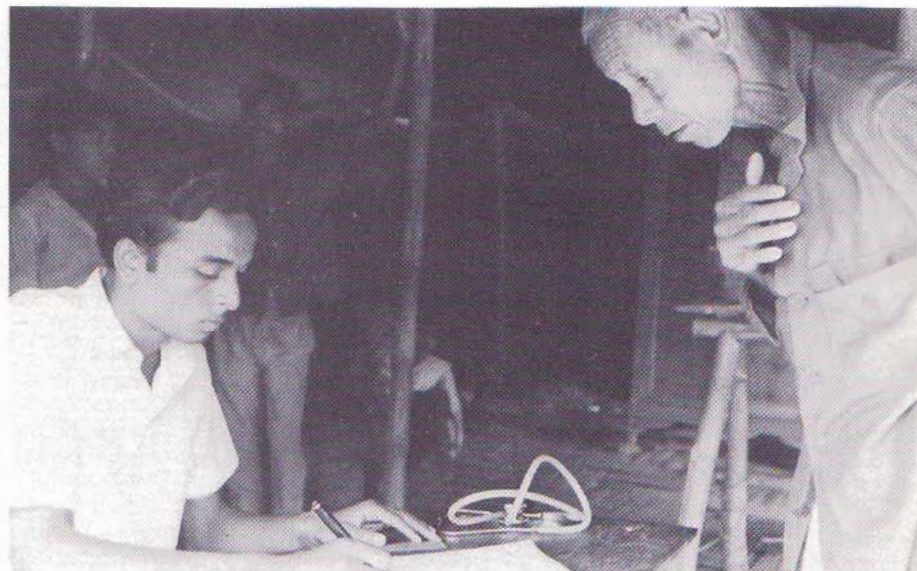
and news reporters were not able to reach any region except West Bengal. But all saw the rows of drain-pipes outside Salt Lake Camp and took pictures of these improvised shelters which were reproduced in the newspapers of every continent. But not only Salt Lake Camp was shown to the world. A British Sunday paper produced a special illustrated supplement from which the mask of death of babies stared readers in the face. *"While Europe prepares to go on vacation, Bengali children are dying in India"*, wrote a Swiss paper in July.

A new tragedy was developing which was to shock an already deeply perturbed opinion. A world which for years had ignored the fact that one in every three children in the under-developed countries dies before its fifth birthday, mainly because of malnutrition, suddenly discovered how hundreds of thousands of refugee children in the camps were exposed to its murderous attack. *"The death rate among the refugee children is about three times higher than among the local population"*, said a WHO report.

Thomas Jamieson on his first return visit to report to focal point Headquarters in Geneva at the end of July told a silent group of agency representatives, *"What I have seen of the death rate among the children in*



To fight malnutrition which caused an alarming rise of the death rate among young children UNICEF inspired the creation of a special feeding programme called *Operation Lifeline*. The international community brought together the high protein food mixtures needed for the curative nutrition therapy programme and for the supplementary rations and supplied equipment, medicines, blankets and transport. The operation itself was carried out by the Indian health authorities and the Red Cross in India with the assistance of thousands of volunteers.



the Calcutta area is appalling". And Dr. Nevin S. Scrimshaw, a famous United States nutritionist who had accompanied Senator Edward Kennedy on his tour of the camps in West Bengal, told a meeting of focal point in early August that in one camp with a capacity of 12,000 people he had counted 30 little bodies in the morgue.

The Indian UNICEF Liaison Offi-

cer for West Bengal, a former Army officer and father of several children, wrote in his report: "As a family man it is almost impossible to bear the sight. A visit to a camp brings sadly home the deplorable state of health of every third child one meets. You have merely to enter a communal basha or nissen hut, or a cowshed where the refugees live, to be struck by scenes that will keep haunting you for days. Among the families too many children are listless, hair thinning, the ashen skin having no layer of fat under it; you can count every rib, every bone. But it is worse when you visit a hospital where serious malnutrition cases are huddled together. Mothers sit in rows, their babies next to them in cots, some uttering little pathetic cries, others too feeble even to move, eyes half closed, the skin in places peeling with patches of rash and boils, and nothing is more heartrending than when a mother with her gentle fingers guides the little mouth to her breast but the baby is too weak to suckle the nipple."

A doctor in the Nadia district of West Bengal, a little oldish man moving gently from one child to another, sighed in despair to a visiting journalist: "We can only take the most serious cases because we lack space and trained personnel. And even so there is little we can





Child in one of the refugee hospitals shows the ravages of malnutrition.



do. The mothers bring their children when it is almost too late for the child to respond to treatment. The death rate is about 50%." He showed his visitor four cases of blindness caused by vitamin A deficiency. The journalist saw one mother quietly sobbing holding the body of her baby to her breast. "He must have been dead", wrote the reporter, "because his face was covered with a rag. Next to her was sitting a young woman letting water drops drip from her water-soaked fingers into the child's half-opened mouth. The child's breath was unsteady and his eyelids were half-open. When I asked a doctor "What about him?" he sadly shook his head. "His chances

are questionable", he said."

Newspapers and voluntary agency workers told a startled and horrified world "hundreds of thousands of little children are in mortal danger". Others went further, "one million may die". A field director of a major voluntary agency said: "Nothing can be done to save their lives or even ease their suffering. They are finished. It is too late to do anything for the majority. They are skeletons now and there are more graves every day." He believed 100,000 might die during the following ten days.

These reports created waves of shock and dismay throughout the world. Fortunately, as events were

Youngsters at Salt Lake Camp near Calcutta get their daily ration of milk.

to prove later, these accounts and assessments were dramatically exaggerating a situation which nevertheless in its real proportions was tragic enough. Mr. Labouisse, Executive Director of UNICEF, returning from a visit to camps in early October was to tell the Press: *"Malnutrition among refugee children may get worse before it gets better and a few thousands deaths in the coming weeks could not be ruled out."*

The world reacted with offers of help, milk powder, sugar, protein food. Many national campaigns were organized. Pope Paul VI called for a day of prayer and fasting. George Harrison, Ravi Shankar and other prominent artists gave a concert in Madison Square Garden, New York. Yet few people, even at the height of the crisis, realized the real nature of the problem and how it arose. Even the hundreds of articles and photographs in the Press had not been able to convey the extent of the natural disaster that had added so much suffering and created so many more problems. Yet this was largely responsible for the threat to the lives of the little ones. As *The Times of India* was to write on 1 October: *"The situation is particularly bad in areas where supplies have been disrupted by floods. In every camp there, one comes across large numbers of pot-bellied children queueing up for a glass of milk or a couple of biscuits."* Already weakened by the hardship and starvation which many of the children had suffered during the exodus, which sometimes took up to one month, with little to eat and miles to walk, they were exposed, as one doctor explained, "to any attack of gastro-enteritis or pulmonary disease". And the threat of infection was formidable. With the constant arrival of newcomers, added to the difficulties created by the floods and rains, all efforts to improve sanitary conditions had failed. In some camps there was only one latrine for 1,400 people. As for clothing, few refugees had more than the bare minimum, a cotton shirt, a pair of trousers, a thin sari, often reduced



to rags. With dampness in the air and rising from the ground there was a constant threat of disease.

An accumulation of several circumstances accounted for the growing threat of disaster.

In June UNICEF staff had brought to the notice of the Central Coordinating Committee in New Delhi that protein malnutrition diseases were beginning to appear in several of the refugee camps. The Government immediately requested two leading nutritionists, Dr. Ramalingaswami, the Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, and Dr. B. N. Tandon to investigate the situation. They examined in West Bengal some 800 infants and children below 5 years of age. They reported early in July that nearly 50% of the infants and pre-school children were suffering from moderate or severe degrees of protein malnutrition. The team recommended special measures for some 300,000 infants and pre-school chil-

—it is almost impossible to bear the sight. A visit to a camp brings sadly home the deplorable state of health of every third child one meets—

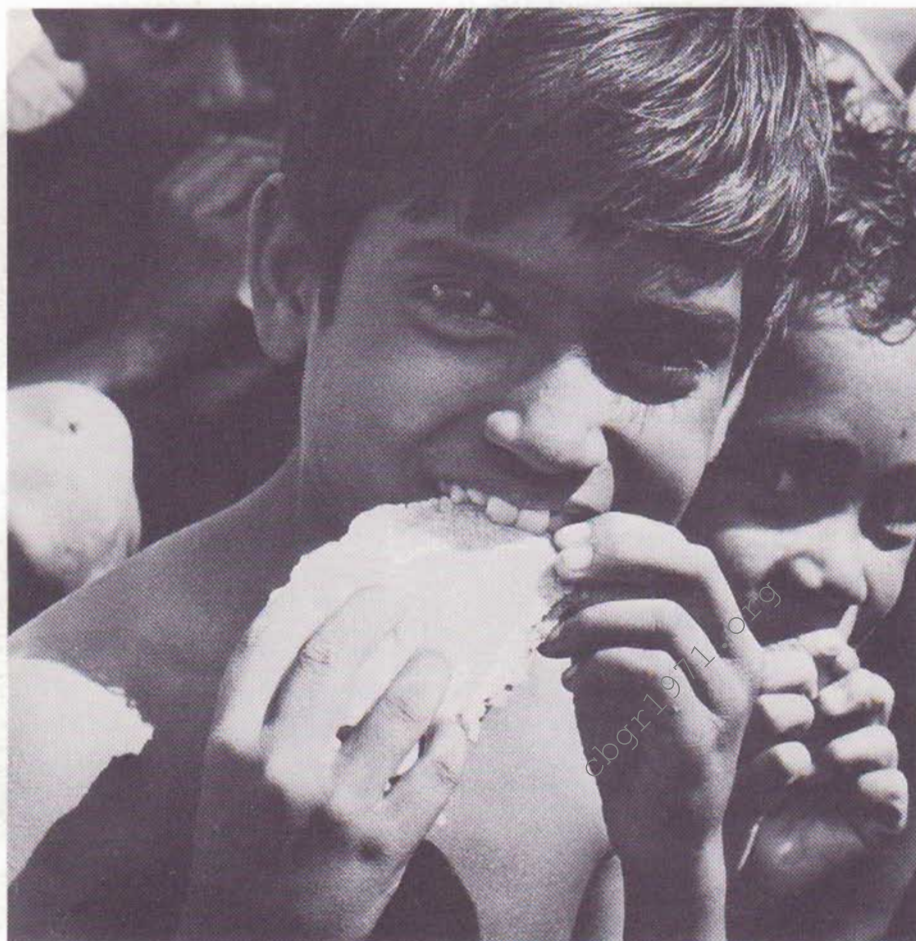
dren who in the words of the report were *"at the edge of a precipice, nutritionally speaking"*.

It was not lack of foresight that had brought on the crisis. Right from the earliest days of the emergency the Indian authorities had taken into account the special nutritional needs of the young refugees. The daily basic ration for children below the age of eight was in principle adequate, for it provided just over one thousand calories and 26 grams of protein. This was about half the adult ration and according to international standards was sufficient to maintain life and health. But to provide for the additional needs of the growing child in protein, certain minerals and vitamins, a special supplementary feeding programme had been planned. In the division of responsibilities this programme had been entrusted to the Indian Red Cross. A target had been set for the establishment of some 1,500 milk stations for one and a half to two million children up to five years of age and lactating mothers and pregnant women.

The threat of malnutrition starts when a child is weaned. As a UNICEF report has pointed out, breast-fed children receive from the mother all the minerals, vitamins and proteins it needs, except of course when the mother herself is in weak health. But when the child is switched over to the traditional staple food which generally does not contain the needed vitamin A nor enough protein, trouble may develop. The name "kwashiorkor" given to one of the main nutritional deficiency diseases means in an African language "the disease the first child gets when the second child comes". Milk, which experts have often called "the perfect food", will prevent nutritional deficiencies if taken daily.

To help the Red Cross to set up this supplementary feeding programme UNICEF had, in early May, released some 1,750 tons of milk powder from its stocks in India, and Dr. Addeke Boerma, Director-General of the FAO, had authorized WFP to divert to Indian ports 6,250 tons





which were on the high seas for other destinations. Also the League of Red Cross Societies and other voluntary agencies had sent milk supplies and baby food. Unfortunately staffing problems, shortage of equipment, of finances, but particularly communications difficulties had slowed down the early stages of implementation of the scheme. When Mr. Henrik Beer, the Secretary-General of the League of Red Cross Societies, and Mr. Stanley Mitton, of the World Council of Churches, visited the refugee areas, both expressed their anxiety about the severe distribution problems that were being encountered. And this notwithstanding the fact that other Indian and international voluntary agencies had been distributing milk, vitamins, vitamin-enriched bread etc. For instance, Caritas developed its own "enriched" food: crushed banana, milk, sugar and vitamins, which it

distributed to 2,500 children in Salt Lake Camp.

This camp, with its 200,000 inmates, its 2,000 huts, its 40,000 people from outside drawing rations (those living in the famous drain-pipes and in the nearby railway station) had 60 distribution points for 20,000 children. The milk powder was prepared in the local dairy and brought in UNICEF supplied milk cans to the camp. But the situation was far less satisfactory in other areas. The Central Co-ordinating Committee on July 5 examined ways and means to help in this matter, as at that time only 220,000 of the intended 1,500,000 children were being reached.

The Food Corporation of India, for instance, offered its storage facilities to the Red Cross at the urgent request of Major General Maitra, Secretary-General of the Indian Red Cross, so that the stocks of milk powder, and later of the special protein food, would be available in all areas at the "go-downs". Instructions were also given to the Indian railways to treat the transportation of supplies for the supplementary feeding programme on a top priority basis. Although this did not in all circumstances solve the problem, yet together with other measures it helped to improve the situation. By early August 890 milk stations were in operation and more were being installed. Some 5,000 volunteers were at that time on the ground. By the end of August, 1,000 stations were working.

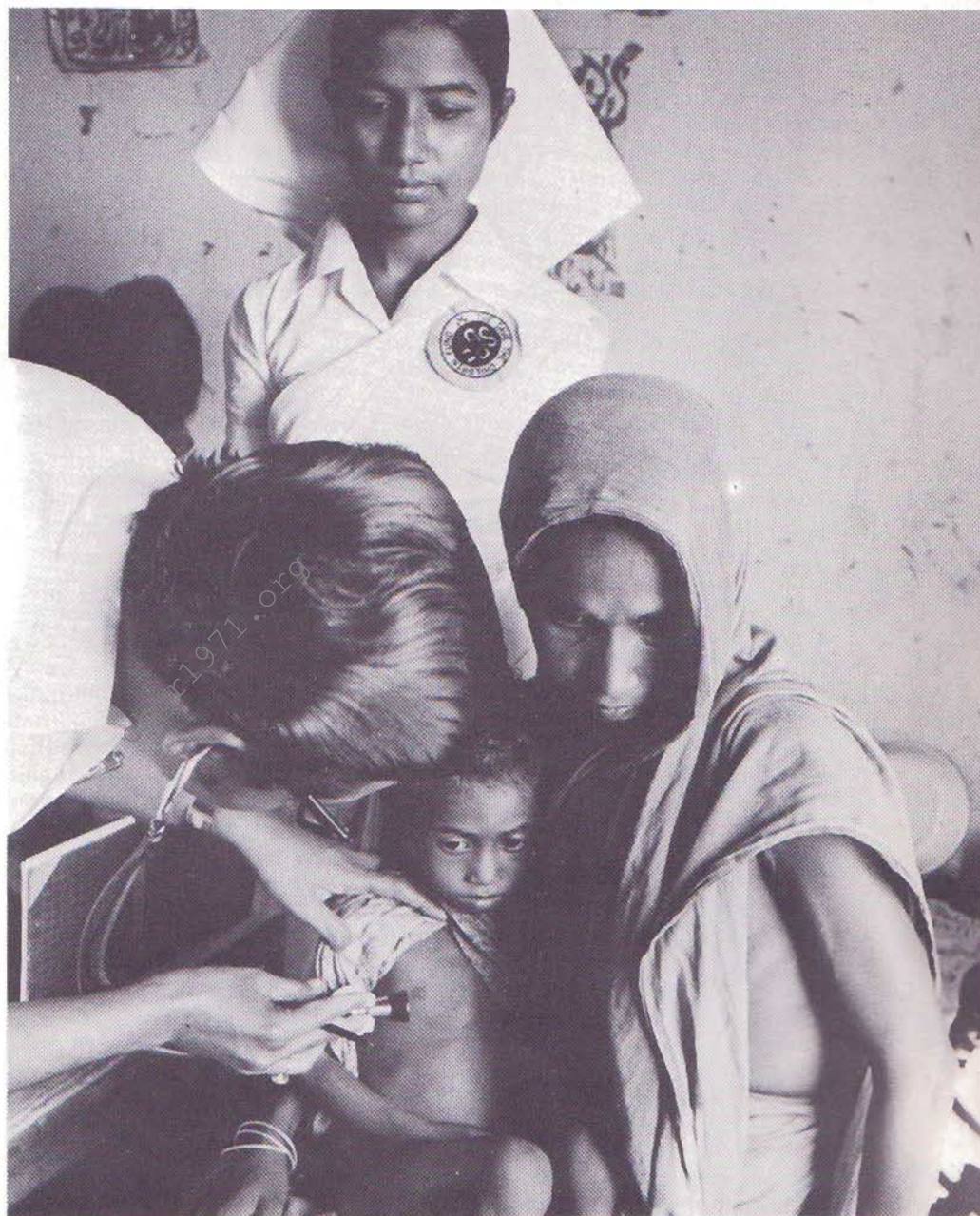
This was to be of vital importance for the programme which UNICEF had suggested to combat malnutrition and to which the most appropriate name had been given: "life-line". This consisted of two parts. The first one, "Alpha", was to bring a daily ration of between 50 and 100 grams of protein-rich food to all children up to 8 years of age, and to lactating mothers and expectant women. The second part called "Beta", concerned the creation of special medical centres where the severe cases of malnutrition would be treated. It also provided for an "out-reach" service under which

trained personnel were to visit the children in the huts and tents to discover those beginning to show signs of advanced malnutrition.

At the suggestion of the Central Co-ordinating Committee in New Delhi, a meeting was held in Calcutta on 31 August at the Branch Secretariat of the Ministry of Rehabilitation, which brought together the Red Cross and the other voluntary agencies. As a result a co-ordinated programme was set up in which all the services of the volunteers were integrated in the "Alpha" part of the "lifeline" programme. In this plan the following took part: CARE, Caritas, Christian Relief Services, Cooch Behar Refugee Service, OXFAM, Save the Children, War on Want, Bharet Sevashram Sangh Rama Krishna Mission, the Indian Medical Association and, as the major co-ordinating agency, the Indian Red Cross.

Focal point on its part increased its buying of milk powder and protein rich food from abroad. The immediate milk situation was not disquieting. The 6,250 tons which WFP had diverted at sea had reached Calcutta in June. In addition, 300 tons from the Netherlands and 90 tons from Switzerland had been flown in. By 13 July the World Food Programme representative was able to inform focal point Geneva that all quantities requested by the Government of India for the supplementary feeding programme had been bought or donated. And on 3 August the same representative was able to confirm that the supplies available in India were sufficient to give one and a half to two million children their daily ration. The League of Red Cross Societies and many voluntary organizations, *ad hoc* private bodies and governments, had on their part assembled impressive quantities.

But such was the pressure of this massive buying that prices rose alarmingly on the world market. Already in 1966 UNICEF had experienced difficulties as a result of a shortage of dried skimmed milk; the new policies being followed in agriculture, particularly in Europe,



had not improved the situation. The World Food Programme representative at a meeting of focal point in Geneva on 10 September complained that when he had placed an order for \$1,148,000 in Europe the prices had shot up from \$300 to \$842 per ton. Answering a question whether gifts or special terms could not have been obtained he said: "Yes, we have in many cases, but with the quantities needed the law of offer and demand could not be avoided."

In fact, focal point alone brought over 11,000 tons of milk powder to the refugee areas.

International supplies of food, edible oil, milk powder, etc., were as from June arriving in vast quantities. Shipping was spaced out to enable a quick turn round in the port of Calcutta—between 3 or 4 days—and the onward dispatch of goods by the Food Corporation of India. On 6 October, when a UN radio reporter accompanied the WFP

Representative in Calcutta to the port to supervise the unloading of 500 tons of milk powder, 20 ships had already come and gone, five more were expected that week. A Japanese ship with 5,500 tons of rice was lying at the mouth of the Ganges. Twenty more ships were scheduled to arrive the same month. Every consignment addressed to World Food Programme was checked and the goods were taken by truck to the storehouses of the Food Corporation of India, from where they were distributed by trucks or rail to the refugee area according to pre-arranged schedules.

Why, notwithstanding these efforts, malnutrition had taken such a hold, even in the areas where the milk distribution had been working from the early days, puzzled the observers of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. They were convinced that under the system not all children were receiving their full ration. Not that they or any other observers found evidence of malfunctioning or worse at the distribution points. They believed the cause to be different. Not all the children drank their milk at the distribution centres. In some camps they took the milk powder home for mixing. Milk was seen by the mother as part of the family's ration. The breadwinner, even if he is not working, is given the best part of the food, then the mother, who is usually breast-feeding or pregnant, after which the children are given their share. Even the special infant foods sometimes shared the same fate. Some efforts were made to inform mothers that this food was exclusively for babies; the rations were packed in small plastic bags with a picture of a child on each. But the people did not realize that the milk and special baby food were vitally important to the health of their little ones. To them, if a child eats its normal food till its hunger is satisfied, everything should be well. They do not know that nutritional elements are missing. And the parents may not at first notice that the child is ill, so gradual are the signs. As Mr. Andersson of UNICEF

in Calcutta explained to an enquiring Press: *"The children don't say anything, their bodies just become weak. The parents only recognize how serious the situation is when it is too late. You have to go around the camps to pick out the little patients and see that they get proper attention."*

In the circumstances, the situation was worsened by the incidence of diarrhoea caused by the weather and pollution. It is the custom in the area when a child suffers from gastro-enteritis that he is no longer given solid food. Instead the mother prepares a "sago"—a kind of tapioca—and barley water. This by itself does no harm, but it means that the child is receiving still less food. Soon signs may appear of kwashiorkor characterized by a swollen belly, or marasmus—loss of weight to the point that the body becomes a living skeleton. Sadly enough in an area where malnutrition is endemic and which has produced the world's leading nutrition experts, many doctors and health workers still have little or no notion of the nature of these diseases not of how to cure them. Often antibiotics are used and medicines that have no effect whatsoever. Vitamin injections help, but have to be supported by the introduction of special protein rich food which the child's body can digest.

To prevent the occurrence of malnutrition diseases, UNICEF, in co-operation with WHO, had worked out various protein rich food mixtures, such as CSM—developed in 1966 as a mixture of corn, soya and milk, WSB—wheat and soya blend, instant CSM—sweetened and fully flavoured pre-cooked CSM which was first manufactured to UNICEF specification in 1968 for the Nigerian emergency. In India itself another mixture had been prepared called "balahar"—wheat flour, peanut flour and chicken flour. To treat severe cases, UNICEF during the civil war in Nigeria developed a special mixture of great therapeutic value called K-Mix-II. It consists of three parts of calcium caseinate, five parts skim milk powder and

ten parts of sucrose. The product mixed with water and with added vegetable oil requires no cooking and can be fed to the ailing child through a nasal tube if necessary. To help the emergency treatment by K-Mix-II a post-kwashiorkor food mix was developed under the initials PKFM composed of 40% corn-meal flour of the pre-cooked CSM type, 38% of full-fat soya flour, 15% sugar for greater caloric density, 5% dry skim milk, 2% vitamin mineral mix and vanilla flavouring.

Dr. V. Ramalingaswami, Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences, learned of the K-Mix-II at a Symposium on Famine: Food and Relief Operations in Times of Disaster, held at Stockholm in August 1970. He was therefore greatly enthusiastic about the UNICEF proposals for "lifeline Beta" and on 23 July a working group was set up by the Central Co-ordinating Committee in New Delhi to study, without delay, how this programme could be implemented. This group was composed of representatives of the Ministries of Health and Rehabilitation, the Indian Red Cross, UNICEF, WHO, WFP and focal point. The necessary finances, some \$1.86 million for the running of both "Alpha" and "Beta", were freed by focal point to enable an immediate start. In the meantime, UNICEF had already ordered and supplied in June, 5,000 tons of high protein food, and on 3 June obtained from the USA confirmation that 10,000 tons available in the Gulf ports of ports of the Middle East would be shipped to Calcutta. On 18 June it offered 150 tons of baby food available in Bombay to the Indian Red Cross and enough "balahar" was bought in India to feed one million children. On 7 July UNICEF ordered a further 30,000 tons of protein rich food in the USA.

As for K-Mix-II arrangements were made with a factory specializing in baby food in Aligarh. The first 40 tons of calcium caseinate were flown by air from the Netherlands, together with sugar and appropriate individual polythene bags on 3 August. The dried skimmed milk





needed for the mix was provided by the US Agency for International Development from available stocks. On 17 August a further 33 tons of calcium caseinate and 90 tons of milk powder were air-shipped by the German Government. In all, UNICEF purchased 140 tons of calcium caseinate, 60 tons from the Netherlands. In September the USA offered 40,000 tons of sweetened CSM and on 13 October another quantity of CSM and WSB. There was a dock strike at the western ports of the USA at that time, but an approach by the HCR representative in the USA to the leaders of the longshoremen's union resulted in a special dispensation being issued allowing the dockers to load this vital food on to the India-bound ships. In November, Australia gave 330 tons of calcium caseinate and the Netherlands 660 tons.

But the start of the operation was not to be without its anguish and delays. There was an unexpected shortage of sugar in India brought on by a combination of floods in Bengal and drought in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. In its earlier requests India had not included sugar. Now there was a need; the children's programme alone required 12,000 tons. Because sugar was not readily available, "balahar" could not be sweetened. The children refused to eat it. In desperation UNICEF bought quantities of sugar in the open market pending the arrival of sugar from

abroad, 1,000 tons given by the Philippines were allocated to "Alpha" and "Beta" in September, 500 tons from Mauritius in October. There were in addition bilateral donations, 3,000 tons of sugar made by the USSR and 2,000 from the EEC (European Economic Community). Through focal point some 7,638 tons were provided, including 5,000 tons from Australia.

There were also initial difficulties in obtaining the necessary jeeps and trucks for "Beta" teams. They were finally provided by the Ministry of Rehabilitation from the vehicles purchased by focal point. But there were other transport difficulties. In September large convoys of supplementary food were bogged down by mud and floods. The Red Cross was compelled to run a shuttle service of DC-4s between Cooch Behar, Gauhati and Agartala, each time bringing 7 tons of supplies for the emergency programme. As late as November, conditions made it impossible to reach Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya with the K-Mix-II.

Concerning the "Beta" part of "lifeline" which came under the authority of the Indian Ministry of Health, the first project had been started as a "pilot" in Salt Lake Camp with spectacular results. Thereafter teams of nutrition experts from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences went to the field to train doctors in diagnosis and treatment. Sets of nasal feeding equipment

were flown by UNICEF to India. 82 sick bays were thus opened giving treatment to 16,000 severe cases including malnutrition cases among small Indian children. In fact, it was found that the estimates of the number of severe cases, based on the sample investigation in West Bengal, were fortunately over-pessimistic. This, and the effectiveness of the scheme, resulted in the situation gradually being brought under control.

When Dr. Ramalingaswami went to check on results at the end of the year, he reported that in Kala-danga camp out of 250 cases he had observed, 35 to 40 had been brought moribund to the ward, 12 were so far gone that they died within the first day, among the remainder, however, there were only two deaths. After two weeks all the other children had gained appreciable weight and were progressing to CSM feeding. At the end of six weeks they were back to normal, mortality had been reduced to zero.

With the satisfaction that this battle for life was finally won, all those who witnessed the suffering or helped to bring about "Operation Lifeline" will feel sadness for the loss of so many little victims who could not be saved. At least one lesson has been learned. The fight against malnutrition must be fought early in organized battalions and on a permanent basis.

Today, the Indian Government has decided, with the assistance of UNICEF, to operate a regular children's feeding programme, designed to prevent the ravages of malnutrition and to save those over whom death seeks to cast its shadow.

The Ultimate anxieties

"While the battle to provide the uprooted millions with makeshift shelter, security and, to some extent, a semblance of life has been won, the real battle for their survival as healthy people is yet to be fought."

Motherland, 1 October 1971.

In early October, with the worry about the fate of the children pre-occupying everyone, an Indian newspaper, the *Hindustan Times*, sent a journalist to the border areas. One of his dispatches relates an encounter with a doctor in Tripura, in charge of a 30-bed hospital, who said, looking at a group of youngsters playing outside his ward: "What is worrying me is what is going to happen to them when the cold weather comes. Do you think they will survive the winter if no woollens are provided for them?"

The clothing situation of the refugees was indeed bad. With the onset of winter much suffering had to be feared, especially in the hilly regions where night temperatures sharply drop below freezing point. In the High Commissioner's official report appears this paragraph:

"The only clothes that the vast majority of the refugees had on entering India was what they wore on their bodies. These clothes were soon worn and tattered and it became obvious that unless clothing was provided the refugees would be lacking protection against nature and even nakedness. Even for reasons of health, a change of clothing was necessary to avoid skin diseases which the use of dirty clothes in a humid climate tends to aggravate."

Many of the international voluntary agencies working in India and the League of Red Cross Societies assembled new and second-hand clothing, particularly woollens, for the children. From late August and September this began to reach Calcutta where the Indian Red Cross and the other voluntary bodies took over.

The Indian authorities had seen to that every day over 130,000 blankets could be moved from Calcutta docks and airport by road convoys taking three days to Siliguri in North Bengal.



MMR JALAL



But the immensity of the requirements was such that it would have been unrealistic to expect the private sector to meet all the needs. A high United States State Department official gave an indication of the vastness of the task saying that it was like having to clothe all the inhabitants of Chicago! A vast programme had therefore to be developed for over six million refugees, and this the Central Co-ordinating Committee in New Delhi undertook to do. In the middle of August, a working party was set up, with the participation of the Department of Rehabilitation, the Indian Red Cross, UNICEF and UN focal point, which examined all the aspects of the problem of how to protect the refugees against the cold weather. The basis for the planning was the geographical distribution of the camps and the climatic conditions in the regions. The needs of the refugees in the higher lands, notably in Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya, ob-

viously had priority over those in the north of West Bengal, and the latter over the people in the south of West Bengal. This provided the pattern for the distribution schedule. As for quantities, every refugee adult was to receive one set of cotton clothing—woollen garments would have increased the bill to unrealistic proportions and it was foreseen that for night protection blankets were to be provided—for the people in the higher regions, there were to be woollen garments. According to the plan, every male Hindu in the camps was to receive a "dhoti", a kind of long, white piece of cloth—some 4½ yards long and 45 inches wide—which is wrapped around the body, plus a "kurta"—a loose shirt. Muslims would receive a "lungi" or "sarong" plus a shirt. The women of both Muslim and Hindu tradition were to receive one sari and a blouse—the sari 5½ yards long of white cotton and 46 inches wide. Boys were to be given a shirt

and a pair of shorts and girls a dress and some underwear.

From the focal point's optic, the problem was seen largely as a matter of providing cash. These traditional garments are readily available on the Indian market. Since focal point was to provide the finances, discussion concerned who was to be responsible for the buying—the Government of India or UNICEF. There were many arguments in favour of decentralization. To avoid major transportation problems and in view of the manufacturing possibilities in all states, it was decided that the Central Government would provide each state government with sufficient funds to buy the clothes on the local market. Initially it was believed that the programme to clothe 4.8 million adults and 1.5 million children would cost at least \$10 million. In fact, calculations made in September revealed that it would considerably exceed \$11 million.

At that time focal point was



severely hampered by a lack of available cash; certain donor countries were approached specially. As a result some initial allocations could be made to the Government of India but, even on 27 October, New Delhi had to send a cable insisting on an immediate transfer of \$3.5 million cash as "clothing was now an absolute priority item and the Government of India had committed itself on a buying programme." Focal point sent \$1.6 million given by the Netherlands and United Kingdom Governments. More was to follow in November from the United Kingdom, the USA, the Dutch Committee for Refugees and Diakonische Werk (Germany). In total, focal point was able to transfer some \$12.5 million.

As agreed, the Indian Central Government placed the funds required at the disposal of the state governments. Fairly rapidly the first orders were passed for clothing that was immediately available on the market. Distribution started almost at once. But there was to be a serious disappointment regarding cloth and garments that were to be manufactured. The initial optimistic



The approach of winter brought new changes. Millions of blankets had to be distributed. Once more a vast life saving operation had to be put into motion.



assessment of production possibilities and early deliveries that were at the basis of the Central Coordinating Committee's decision did not materialize. There were considerable delays. When, in January 1972, the refugees were massively returning home, there were many orders outstanding. To cancel them would have cost heavy penalties. The decision was therefore taken to truck all these clothes as they became available to Bangladesh. Partly as a result of this, focal point's contribution for clothing was adjusted to \$5,380,000, the other \$7 million being diverted to other items.

Fortunately the operation "blankets", which had been conceived in conjunction with the operation "clothing", was conducted with such energy, at all levels and by all concerned, that much of the hardship could be alleviated. As one member of focal point explained

when reporting to Headquarters in Geneva: "Fortunately, most of the families during the nights have straw mats to guard them against the dampness from the ground and blankets to wrap around themselves." This was in November.

Straw mats were one of the items which it had been decided to distribute to all those families who were forced to sleep on the bare soil. Most had received these in good time.

Furthermore, in Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya, all the refugees had received their woollen blankets by the middle of November. In West Bengal there were then still gaps because not all of the quantities ordered abroad had been received. There were some strong psychological stresses among the refugees in West Bengal who saw truck after truck pass them by on their way to the northern states without

On several occasions the High Commissioner, Sadruddin Aga Khan, visited the refugee areas and discussed the situation with the authorities in New Delhi, Islamabad and Dacca. Here he is seen in Dacca in March 1972 at the conclusion of focal point's task when all the refugees had returned home.

a single one discharging its blankets for them! Only when a truck was blocked by road problems would it unload in a West Bengal camp, but later, when the north and east had been serviced and cotton blankets arrived in strength, the refugees in West Bengal began to receive theirs.

The "operation blankets" was to be focal point's most extensive and most complicated action. The problem had first been raised in August in connexion with the setting-up of "operation lifeline". The Swiss Red Cross had flown out 10,000 light woollen coverings but hospitals and the intended "Beta" centres needed 30,000 more. The UNICEF representative in New Delhi had therefore cabled his Headquarters, asking that the 30,000 available in UNICEF stocks in Singapore be shipped to Calcutta immediately. The answer was positive.

It was, however, in early September that the question of blankets for the refugee population was considered in depth by the Central Committee. At first it was believed that the Indian market might produce at least one million. Unfortunately only 20,000 cotton and 74,000 woollen blankets were offered plus another 60,000 for delivery at the end of November and it was doubtful whether significantly higher quantities could be obtained in India. There were later offers but these were not accepted because by the time they were made all available moneys had been committed abroad. The possibility of importing wool to produce blankets locally was also explored. But a number of uncertainties regarding shipping times and production problems made the idea impractical. There was one other alternative to offshore buying. UNICEF New York and Paris had already made preliminary enquiries and the news that some one million might be provided almost immediately came as a great relief.

In Europe, over 300,000 were ready for shipment from Holland, Belgium, France, Spain and Yugoslavia, while options could be taken on hundreds of thousands more. But there was the baffling problem

of bringing the blankets to India. Focal point New Delhi had suggested that a minimum of 100,000 of these should be flown out immediately to help at least the eastern states on a priority basis. A number could be taken on a free cargo basis by the airlines. But for the main quantities in Europe other arrangements were necessary. The cost of flying them out, according to a phone call from the UNICEF Paris office, would amount to no less than \$2 million, as fifty-seven DC-8s would be needed to move the blankets. This was far above focal point's financial capacity. The decision was therefore taken to ship them by surface to Calcutta. Although at the earliest they could not arrive before November, it was hoped that negotiations with some governments which were nearing agreement might lead to the establishment of a vast airlift, particularly for the woollen blankets needed in the eastern states.

UNICEF Paris had been in touch with the German Federal Government as they had heard that a ship was about to take relief goods, mainly assembled by German voluntary agencies, to India. Agreement was quickly reached but the blankets had to be trucked to the port of Antwerp within a matter of five days. It was nothing short of a miracle in view of the arrangements that had to be made with manufacturers and transport firms in so many countries, plus customs formalities, that all the consignments arrived, except for those from Spain (they were to be flown out later) and those from Yugoslavia (of which there were 100,000 to be loaded in Rijeka on 25 October). By the end of September, 400,000 more blankets were assembled in Hamburg. In view of the urgency the German authorities asked the shipping line to cancel all intermediary calls along the route via the Cape to Calcutta. In early October, the USA Government purchased some 600,000 more blankets immediately ready for shipment.

When meeting the Press in Geneva, a spokesman for the High Com-

missioner, in outlining the difficulties in locating on the market this mass of blankets said: "One cannot just go to the nearest big store and order them." This was certainly true for Europe, where innumerable contacts had to be made. As for the USA, Frank L. Kellogg, Special Assistant to the Secretary of State for Refugee and Migration Affairs, told a conference of non-governmental organizations in March 1972, recalling the participation of the US Government in the relief operation: *"And with winter weather ahead in a matter of four months, we located, bought and delivered to India 1.25 million blankets. It interested me that our State Department procurement people in seeking out this vast supply went, among other places, to where any one of us might go for a blanket—Sears, Roebuck."* (A well-known American department store and mail order house.)

By early October, the picture looked encouraging. Caritas had assembled 350,000, the Diakonische Werk in Germany 50,000, in Sweden the Save the Children Fund, Church Aid and UNICEF had launched a joint public campaign for 500,000 woollen blankets, used or new (or the equivalent of \$1 in cash) while UNICEF had located or bought 600,000 in the USA, Canada, Japan and Europe. This, with the US purchases, made a total of 2.4 million blankets. Ten days later the figure reached 3 million—one million woollen and about two million cotton blankets. But estimated requirements had also gone up from 3,260,000 to 4,321,000 and needs were increasing every day!

In India there were early in October at first only the 154,000 blankets bought locally which had been immediately distributed. But a few days later ships and aircraft brought supplies to over 1.5 million. To move these from Calcutta other decisions had to be taken. Focal point New Delhi sent a cable: *"In view floods situation rail extremely slow and hazardous and therefore no certainty blankets will reach eastern states before middle December. All eye-witnesses report that*



The High Commissioner with Mr. Abdus Samad Azad, Minister of Foreign Affairs at Dacca airport, before their departure to Sylhet on 2 April 1972 to visit the groups of repatriated refugees.

Floods and swollen rivers created severe difficulties for land transport.

lack of warm clothing and blankets has already assumed proportions of tragedy in hilly areas. After detailed discussion, we decided in consultation with UNICEF to mobilize all trucks available in Calcutta as airlift not very promising except shuttle between Dauhati and Agartala. Cost amounts to \$400,000. Please confirm commitment." The immediate reply was "go ahead".

Focal point's worry in Geneva was setting up the air bridge for the vast new quantities that had been bought and this to keep the Calcutta-eastern states pipelines filled. "Could more free air freight be obtained?" was the question raised in New Delhi and Geneva. "Not for these quantities" said the expert, who told the Standing Inter-Agency Meeting in Geneva: "The dock strike at eastern seaports in America is having a serious effect on air transportation in general. Most charter companies have their aircraft flying the Atlantic route to bring commercial goods from the USA to Europe. At the same time the seasonal flights from the Far East to bring Christmas goods to Europe are nearing the end. This means that charter flights on the eastern routes are at present very difficult to find. In other words if air space is to be

bought it threatens to be expensive." This was at the end of October. It was to be a real crisis moment. At a tense staff meeting held at UNHCR Headquarters the decision was taken to give top priority allocations to the setting-up of the airlift. As a spokesman explained at the weekly Press briefing: "Obviously the world cannot let it happen that blankets are ready in Europe, America and Canada while children in Tripura, Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal are exposed to cold and disease."

On All Saints' and All Souls' Day most offices in Europe are closed. Nevertheless on Saturday, 30 October, telexes went out to all charter companies asking for immediate bids. Within twenty-four hours a Scandinavian church organization, which had airlifted two years before considerable stocks of relief goods to Nigeria during the secession war, replied with important offers of air space. During the following forty-eight hours others followed.

The Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) had in the early days of the emergency through its Director, Mr. John F. Thomas, offered to assist UNHCR in its focal point functions in all matters regarding transportation. It had

seconded two of its officers who had been most helpful during the airlifting of medical supplies and children's food to India. The organization of the blanket airlift was to be their supreme testing time. A schedule concerning 24 flights taking not less than 702 tons could be set up at surprisingly competitive prices taking into account the shortage of air space: 70 to 72 (US) cents per kilo. British, German, Danish, Dutch, Lebanese and Luxembourg companies were involved. Two central airports were selected from which all European blankets were to be flown: Schiphol in the Netherlands and Frankfurt in Germany. Flights were spaced in consultation with UNICEF Paris to enable manufacturers to deliver the goods according to a specified schedule. In fact one manufacturer in the Netherlands, who had produced some 400,000 blankets, was used by UNICEF as a "special buffer stock". Whenever trucks did not arrive on time, quantities were taken from this source to fill up the missing freight. This was notably the case when 20 trucks between 6 and 12-ton each from Milan were held up for several days by a customs strike at the Italian border.

The US Government on its part

had made itself responsible for providing aircraft for the movement of all blankets produced in the USA and Canada; they were also to take blankets from Europe for which no charter flights could be booked. On 19 November, a welcome cable from New Delhi arrived in Geneva saying: "All refugees in Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya have received blankets." The first part of the battle had been won.

But there were still those in North Bengal. The Indian authorities had seen to it that every day over 130,000 blankets could be moved from Calcutta docks and airport. "In view improved communications road convoys take three days to Siliguri and less to Malda and West Dinajpur", Jamieson cabled to his Headquarters. But he added: "Suc-

cessful continuation trucking obviously depends on over-all developments and tension whole area. Should trucking be difficult restrictions would affect air traffic even more."

The date of 24 November 1971 will probably be remembered by all working in focal point for its tension and uncertainty. There were two pieces of good news. UNICEF stated that it had completed all its buying (3.5 million pieces at a cost of \$6.6 million), and when adding up information received from all quarters, it was clear that the purchasing phase of "operation blankets", except for the major problem of getting them all to India, was now over. That day, too, news was received that all arrangements had been made in the USA to fly out its blank-

ets at a rate of one plane every six hours, including eight planes to lift the supplies from Canada. But the rest of the news was worrying. Airlines told focal point that in view of the worsening situation all charter flights to Dum Dum Airport in Calcutta had been cancelled because the authorities would only receive regular passenger airlines. An immediate telex to New Delhi elicited the reply that the Government was making all arrangements for planes engaged in the operation to continue to land. There was, however, one change that had to be made. Until then aircraft had landed in Karachi on their way to Calcutta. Now they had to refuel in Bombay, and this had some slight repercussions on payload and prices. On 24 November also news was re-



ceived from New York that UNEPRO had decided to withdraw all its non-essential personnel in Dacca and send them to Bangkok to await further developments. The UNHCR team, with the exception of Mr. John Kelly, flew out with them. UNEPRO had also decided to redirect all its supply ships from Chittagong to Singapore. It was on the whole a gloomy day.

The High Commissioner, who had been in India between 6 and 8 November, was following with increasing anxiety the growing tension in the area. While in India he had, accompanied by Mr. Jamieson, visited refugee camps in Assam, Meghalaya and West Bengal, he had discussed the relief operation with the Prime Minister, the Minister of External Affairs, Mr. Swaran Singh, the Minister for Labour and Rehabilitation, Mr. R. Khadilkar, the Minister for Health, Mr. U. S. Dixit, and with several other high officials. On his way back to New York, he had passed through Islamabad and had seen once more President Yahya Khan and others. He had thus been able not only to assess the situation regarding the refugees, but to appraise the potential dangers of the worsening atmosphere. His worries as focal point concerned essentially the supply lines. On 2 December, when there was already considerable border fighting, he had received assurances from focal point Delhi *"relief unaffected"*. But the following day Calcutta and New Delhi airports were closed and the blankets *"en route"* had to be unloaded at Bombay. The Government advised to hold up further shipments for 72 hours. War broke out on the 6th.

When the flights could be resumed, the charter companies were told that their aircraft would not be able to refuel at Calcutta airport for their return flight. This meant that in order to make room for additional fuel, one-third of the cargo had to be left in Bombay. There was no certainty—in the conditions of war that then prevailed—that an internal airlift could be organized, or that by surface the goods could be transported to reach the refugees in time.

All this plus the rising cost of petrol and insurance created innumerable new problems. The shipping lines, too, had raised their insurances for war risks by 45%. The position of the port of Calcutta, which was open only during the daytime, added another element of uncertainty. After consultation with the Secretary-General, an announcement was made at noon local time in New York on 7 December: *"In view of the prevailing situation shipments of relief commodities and equipment to India are being diverted for practical reasons until the situation permits resumption of deliveries."*

One factor which made it somewhat easier to take this decision was that, apart from the urgency of the airlift, there were sufficient quantities of high-protein food for *"operation lifeline"* in the country to take care of that operation for at least six to eight weeks. The eleven ships then at sea were mainly carrying replacement food stocks for which deliveries were not so urgent, plus a few trucks and spare parts, some ambulances and, of course, a quantity of blankets. Anyhow, the decision was seen as a very temporary measure until the New Delhi office could clarify the situation. Therefore on 10 December already the High Commissioner could announce that *"shipments of relief commodities and equipment to India were being resumed"*.

In the meantime, at the United Nations in New York the problem of peace and security in the sub-continent had become, as from later November, a matter of deep concern. The worsening atmosphere and the increasing number of armed clashes between India and Pakistan prompted a number of Member States, including the United Kingdom and the United States of America, to request an immediate meeting of the Security Council. The Council meeting on 4 December and the two following days sought, in vain, to find agreement on a text of a resolution that would stop the fighting. Not less than eight drafts were prepared, only four of these actually were brought to the vote; two of

them were defeated by the veto of a major power, one did not unite a majority, and the one which was finally adopted did, in fact, recognize the lack of unanimity among the permanent members of the Council, and therefore referred the matter to the General Assembly. The world body met the following day, 7 December. After a full discussion it adopted by 104 votes to 11 a resolution which notably asked the parties to *"bring about an immediate cessation of hostilities... urged that efforts be intensified in order to bring about, speedily... conditions necessary for the voluntary return of the East Pakistan refugees to their homes"* and *"called upon the Security Council to take appropriate action in the light of the resolution"*.

In fact the Council was to meet again on 21 December after the fighting had stopped on 17 December.

Yet while delegates in New York took part in the dramatic debates, and while the tragedy of war unfolded on the sub-continent, the relief ships entered the port of Calcutta practically at scheduled times, the airlift continued to bring supplies and trucks rumbled along the Indian roads with food, blankets and medicines for the refugees. But it was the beginning of the final phase.

With the fall of Dacca the political map of the sub-continent changed. In the wake of the advancing army, refugees began to return home. *"The refugee tide ebbs"*, wrote the London *Economist*, reporting that on 12 December 30,000 had left camps in West Bengal. *"But the Indian and the Bangladesh Governments would both prefer to wait a little for conditions to stabilize before giving the general go-ahead signal."* Soon there was indeed to be a plan agreed to between New Delhi and the authorities in Dacca for a three-month repatriation movement beginning 1 January. It was to form the basis for the vastest and fastest population movement of all times, which without incident was to be concluded several days before its planned ending date.

The return home

"The Government of India would like to express its deep appreciation of the indispensable role played by the United Nations family in the stupendous task of caring for the refugees."

(From an official aide-mémoire, 20 January 1972)



Refugees board train in Petrapole on 1 January 1972 as they make their way home from camps in India to resettlement in their homeland.

There are in the UNHCR files among the thousands of cables relating to the focal point operation quite a few which future historians will wish to consult. Among them are four sent from Dacca by Mr. John Kelly, the Focal Point Special Representative, which will be of particular interest.

He, together with a number of other UN officers, including Assistant Secretary-General Paul-Marc Henry, the head of UNEPRO, had not left Dacca when the fighting started. In the final days, several of the civil and military authorities turned to the UN representatives for assistance in obtaining a cease-fire. Part of this story has been told in the London Sunday paper *The Observer* of 19

December whose correspondent, Gavin Young, in dramatic circumstances accompanied the Special Representative on several of his meetings.

After the end of the fighting the UN officers returned to their Headquarters in New York and Geneva, but for a short while only. The United Nations humanitarian relief operation for East Bengal soon resumed its operations under a new name—the United Nations Relief Operation in Dacca (UNROD)—and UNHCR, in view of the massive repatriation movement, continued its presence in Dacca.

The return home had started already during the fighting. Refugees

MMR JALAL



The return home...
In January, an average of 210,000 persons daily crossed the border.

whose homes were in the bordering areas started the trek back without waiting for any organized transport. Some went on foot, others on bicycles or pulling rickshaws filled with aged parents and young children, some reserve food and a few meagre belongings. They followed the tracks and roads leading to their districts in an impatient rush to their homesteads.

Immediately after the cease-fire this spontaneous movement became a massive stream which continued even after the Indian authorities mounted a vast repatriation operation.

On 6 January, Mr. Thomas Jamieson cabled a report on the situation a few days after the repatriation plan had been started. *"One million refugees have already left India,"* he said. *"Prodigious and co-ordinated efforts are made on both sides of the border."* He added that *"special trains are leaving every day and more are planned for the coming weeks"*. He reported that the refugees were being re-grouped according to their home districts; they stayed only a few hours in the staging centres to receive their rations and their small journey allowance, but many were

leaving on their own. At the rate the repatriation was taking place he felt that *"as far as this side is concerned, focal point will have completed its mission and will no longer have its raison d'être. Having prepared its report it should be withdrawn soon. This may be very soon"*.

His forecast was perhaps somewhat over-enthusiastic, not concerning the rate of return of the refugees but regarding focal point's withdrawal from New Delhi. Indeed, several aspects of the final phase of the relief operation were to require close attention; these related partly to goods still in the pipeline, transfers of money for repatriation purposes, but essentially the disposal of the international supplies which India had received but which were no longer urgently needed there, whilst shortages were being acutely felt in Bangladesh where refugees were returning. Under an agreement made with the Government of India, all contributions channelled by UN focal point to India became, as from the moment they were unloaded at Calcutta's sea or airport, the full property of the Government. This stood to reason. The Union of India had appealed for international assistance in support of its efforts to help



the refugees. It had, without waiting for this help, disbursed enormous sums. The international assistance given was to relieve India of part of the burden. The agreement foresaw, however, that the eventual end use of such materials and equipment as would no longer be needed once the refugees had gone home should be the subject of consultation between the two parties. This was particularly relevant where shelter, vehicles and drilling rigs were concerned. As a matter of fact, there were to be no divergent views on such transfers as the Government of India proposed.

To quote from the official report:





Visitors to the camp areas in January 1972 marvelled at the unending streams of people on the trek, walking, riding bicycles or rickshaws, standing on truck platforms with the single purpose in mind of reaching as soon as possible their native places.

"Immediately after the cease-fire, focal point informed the Government of India that it would regard as entirely acceptable, and in keeping with the spirit of the donations received, that the refugees carry back with them on returning to East Bengal such items as clothes, blankets, domestic utensils, distributed to them in India from contributions provided through the United Nations. Focal point similarly endorsed an agreement between the Indian Red Cross and the Bangladesh Red Cross under which the equipment and supplies of the nutritional centres operated in India could be transferred to the Bangladesh Red Cross, which would thus be able to carry out similar preventive programmes among returned refugees and other needy sectors of the population of Bangladesh. The Government of India later proposed to transfer as a grant to the Government of Bangladesh 800 trucks, 300 jeeps and 136 ambulances received from the UN focal point and the latter formally agreed to this measure.

"Some relief supplies such as

blankets, clothing and utensils had not been delivered to the refugee camps by the time the repatriation started. By arrangement with the two Governments, it was agreed that when goods were delivered distribution could be effected in Bangladesh. In this, as in other instances, UNICEF lent its logistical services to the Government of India to carry out such transfers of supplies to Bangladesh. By 30 March 1972, the special UNICEF unit operating in Calcutta for the programme of assistance to refugees had thus organised the transshipment by road or sea of over 30,000 rolls of plastic roofing material, about 150,000 sets of domestic utensils and 700,000 blankets. Similar transshipments on an even larger scale were carried out directly by the Government of India. It should be mentioned that, since the contributions channelled through the United Nations focal point were intended to help the Government of India carry the economic burden of the refugees, such transfers of relief supplies to Bangladesh were effected only upon request from that

Government."

But there were also relief goods in the supply line en route for Indian ports. For instance, UNICEF, after consultation with the donor country, the United States, diverted to the port of Chittagong some 7,000 tons of rich-protein food that were en route to Calcutta so that it might continue its "Operation Lifeline" which was following the refugees into Bangladesh.

In all these questions of transfers, the presence of UNHCR officers in Dacca was invaluable. They were not only in touch with the authorities and their colleagues of UNROD engaged in the first phases of the UN relief action, they visited the various districts to which the refugees were returning in great numbers. Their reports on the conditions under which the returning population were trying to start a new life and on the material difficulties they and the authorities were encountering, enabled the UNROD leadership to include the specific problems of the displaced populations in their over-all assessment of needs. The

same reports were transmitted both to Geneva and to focal point New Delhi, which on its part shared the information with the Government of India. All this served to pin-point possibilities of action on the part of the Government of India. Indeed, the Indian authorities were providing massive assistance to Bangladesh and they welcomed all suggestions made by focal point concerning the transfer of selective relief goods to particularly needy areas. Thus blankets, polythene sheets, rigs for drilling wells were urgently dispatched from India to Bangladesh. At one time focal point made an allocation of \$1 million for a "huge trucking operation taking blankets and clothing to Bangladesh", which was organized by UNICEF from Calcutta.

When John Kelly met the Relief and Rehabilitation Minister in Dacca, Mr. Kammazzaman, at the end of January, when already 6 million refugees had reached their homes, a large exchange of views took place. Kelly had just concluded a visit to Comilla and Noakhali districts where repatriation had almost been entirely concluded. He could tell the Minister that the local authorities and the Red Cross personnel were coping efficiently with the repatriation task. He had been impressed by the warm welcome given by the villagers to the returnees. They received considerable assistance under the collective "help your neighbour" schemes. His main worry at this point, which was shared by the Minister, was that the returnees were likely to face serious difficulties once they had finished the rations distributed to them at the time of their return, for they were not yet in a position to earn their own living. The Minister felt that this specific problem would probably be alleviated as the efforts to improve road transport and the other measures to help the population as a whole would take their effect. Indeed, the smoothness with which the returnees, those from India and those from inside the country, re-integrated into their communities resulted in the problems becoming those of the whole population. This



allowed the authorities to tackle the difficulties without having to single out any particular sector of the population.

UNHCR's usefulness at that time as far as Bangladesh was concerned was that of an "adviser" with a number of voluntary organizations and Governments particularly interested in helping the returnees rebuild their new lives. Some of these Governments and agencies had responded to the High Commissioner's appeal made in late January for assistance towards the repatriation movement. Indeed, after the Government of India had prepared the plan for the massive return of the nearly 10 million refugees and while the operation was taking place, focal point had once more been asked to

make a special effort to raise international assistance for this purpose. An aide-mémoire from the Government of India dated 20 January was distributed to all Governments. The Indian memorandum contained the following paragraph: *"The UN High Commissioner for Refugees may like to remind the international community that, with a little additional effort, it is now possible to bring to a happy conclusion the task of sending the refugees home in dignity and with renewed confidence. The task of rehabilitating these refugees in their own country remains to be accomplished and it is hoped that the world community will soon be able to devote its full attention to it. India, on its part, would be happy to contribute to its utmost to this phase*





also, as indeed it has already begun to do".

In response to the High Commissioner's approaches special contributions amounting to \$14.2 million were received by focal point for repatriation purposes. This included \$6.3 million from the three Scandinavian countries, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, which in agreement with the Indian authorities was transferred in foreign currency to the Bangladesh authorities to ease their financial situation, while the counterpart national currency was to benefit the returnees as a whole.

The repatriation which the Indian Government had organized was a major undertaking. The High Commissioner's official report has this to say on the subject: "The order of magnitude of the expenditure envisaged in connection with the return movement proper amounted to well over \$50 million."

For transportation alone, the Government of India estimated that it would have to spend \$4 million.

During the peak months of January and February 1972, the repatriation effort placed great pressure on all means of transportation in Eastern India, not to mention the still greater pressure on communications within Bangladesh. Refugees, especially those who had been living near the border and did not have to travel great distances, were encouraged to go back on their own power, if necessary on foot.

In fact, encouragement was hardly needed. Visitors to the camp areas during that period marvelled at the unending streams of people on the trek, walking, riding bicycles or rickshaws, standing on truck platforms, with the single purpose in mind of reaching as soon as possible their native places in East Bengal. In January, a daily average of 210,000 persons crossed the Bangladesh border.

Those of the refugees who were not transported by the Government were given journey allowances. The rates depended on the distance:

Rs. 2 up to 10 miles from the border, Rs. 5 for a journey of 10 to 30 miles, and Rs. 10 for longer distances. Half rates were applied to children between 3 and 12 years of age. However, for the majority organized transportation had to be provided. Apart from the special trains used for those living in outlying "central" camps in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, 3,500 trucks and 30 launches were in use in January, as well as steamers and barges for the evacuation of refugees from South Bengal and Assam. The problems involved in such a massive population movement were not confined to transportation. The refugees had to be given rations for the journey, medical assistance, and enough to eat for a short period back in Bangladesh, until they could find their feet again there. On departure from the camps in India, the refugees were given two weeks' basic rations, in certain cases partly in cash. They were at the same time requested to surrender their ration cards, border

slips and registration cards. They received in exchange a "refugee return card" on the strength of which they were admitted into Bangladesh as returning refugees, and were entitled to further help there.

Once in Bangladesh, refugees on the trek home could, if they so chose, transit through "staging camps" where they could find shelter for a day or two, cooking facilities, clean water and medical services. 271 such camps were functioning in Bangladesh in January and February 1972. Wherever necessary, food rations consisting of survival biscuits, tinned milk and milk powder were distributed by the Red Cross; inoculations, first-aid and hospital treatment were also arranged if required. In transit centres, returnees were also registered and issued with an identity paper, constituting evidence for the local authorities of the returnees' home-place and of their eligibility for cash doles, housing grants and other benefits.

Free transport was supplied for the homeward journey from the transit centres. Some fears had been expressed at the planning stage that the refugees might tend to linger on in these staging camps, but few wished to stay there for more than a few hours or a day. Furthermore, the vast majority of those who had lived in India with friends and relatives left spontaneously immediately after the cease-fire, heading straight for their communities without calling at the registration offices in the Indian camps or at the Bangladesh transit centres.

The report concluded: *On the whole no major complaints or disputes seemed to have arisen as a result of the return of refugees to their land and other property and of the sharing of the previous seasons' crop between the returnees and the "caretakers" (fifty per cent, in accordance with tradition, was kept by the "caretakers").*

On the morning of the 29 March the following information was received from the Government of India: *"The last batch of refugees from the central camp at Panchanpur near Gaya in Bihar left for Bangladesh*

on 25 March 1972. With this all the refugees accommodated in both central and state camps have been repatriated. At the peak period of refugee influx, the number of camps both central and state, set up for providing shelter to the refugees was about 1,200. There are about 60,000 refugees who are staying with their relatives. They are expected to go back to Bangladesh on their own."

Focal point's task had thus come to an end, bar the administrative winding-up of the operation. Some moneys and relief goods were still in the pipe-line and the report had to be written to provide donors with full justification of the use that had been made of their contribution in cash or kind. But there was to be a final act. The High Commissioner wished to mark the end of his responsibilities as focal point by making a personal visit to the returnees, to the authorities in Dacca, to the UNROD leadership there who were engaged in channelling UN aid to the area, to the Government of India with which focal point had been working so closely for nearly a full year, and to the UN representatives in New Delhi, and finally to the new leaders of Pakistan who were facing the many fundamental changes in the sub-continent, to give them a personal account of HCR's humanitarian role in the now concluded action.

On 31 March all Dacca newspapers reported under banner headlines: *"Sadruddin due in City today"* and reproduced lengthy reports on UNHCR's action for the refugees. They also printed a message which the High Commissioner delivered at the airport, which he concluded with the words, *"in view of their return to their homeland, the governments which contributed to the action and the millions of people in many countries who through the UN or private agencies associated themselves with this humanitarian work, rejoice with you that this tragic episode is over."* The *Dacca Observer* carried a full-page article the following day on the problems of the returnees set against the general background of the countries' efforts. One paragraph said:

"Unfortunately the food supplies available to the Government are insufficient to enable the authorities to give all the benefits (that were initially foreseen in the repatriation plan) to the returnees at present. The most urgent requirements are food until they are self-sufficient, repair and reconstruction of their damaged or destroyed houses, and assistance towards becoming self-supporting." These problems and many others that face the new country were discussed with Sadruddin Aga Khan by all the high authorities he was able to meet during his 4-day stay. He saw President Mr. Justice Abu Sayeed Choudhury, Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Abdus Samad Azad, with whom he visited several refugee areas, and many others.

The visit to the areas where there was a high concentration of returnees enabled the High Commissioner to make a personal assessment of the situation. For three days he moved from one place to another in a small aircraft placed at his



disposal by UNROD. Wherever he landed, whether in Kushtia, Dinajpur, Sylhet or Mymensingh, he was met by a huge cheering crowd of returnees. He went to see their living conditions, spoke to many heads of family to learn of their problems. Before he left he addressed the crowds, telling them of the UN effort to assist them while they were refugees and pledging his continued interest in their future and in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of their country to which the United Nations, through UNROD, is dedicated.

When he returned to Dacca he met Sir Robert Jackson, who on 23 March had been appointed by the new UN Secretary-General, Dr. Kurt Waldheim, to head UNROD as successor to Mr. P. M. Henry. This permitted a wide exchange of views by all concerned.

Before the High Commissioner left Dacca for New Delhi, the Foreign Minister gave a dinner in his honour. In proposing the toast, Mr. Abdus Samad made moving references to

the tragic events of the previous year and the role UNHCR had been playing in helping his people. He concluded: *"As you are winding up your activities in connection with this unfortunate mass of humanity who have now become returnees instead of refugees, we note with gratification the role your Organization played in alleviating their suffering"*, and he added: *"I am aware of your personal commitment to your task, whose humanitarian nature takes it out of the arena of power politics. I wish you all success and I assure you of our continued co-operation"*.

In New Delhi the High Commissioner was to meet with the same warm welcome and feeling of appreciation. He saw the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, the Secretary of the Department of Rehabilitation, Mr. G. S. Kahlon, and the Minister for Labour and Rehabilitation, Mr. R. K. Khadilkar, as well as various high officials who had played such an important part in the relief action. Once more there were public ac-

knowledgments of the assistance the United Nations had given. During his stay in India the High Commissioner naturally saw all the members of his focal point office and the representative of the United Nations system who had worked so closely together as a team in the service of the humanitarian task that had been entrusted to the United Nations.

When he left New Delhi for Islamabad to be received by President Bhutto and various members of his Government, the High Commissioner's task as focal point was completed.

Prime Minister Mujibur Rahman received the High Commissioner, Sadruddin Aga Khan. He expressed the gratitude of the Bangladesh Government for the help the United Nations had provided to the refugees during their stay in India.

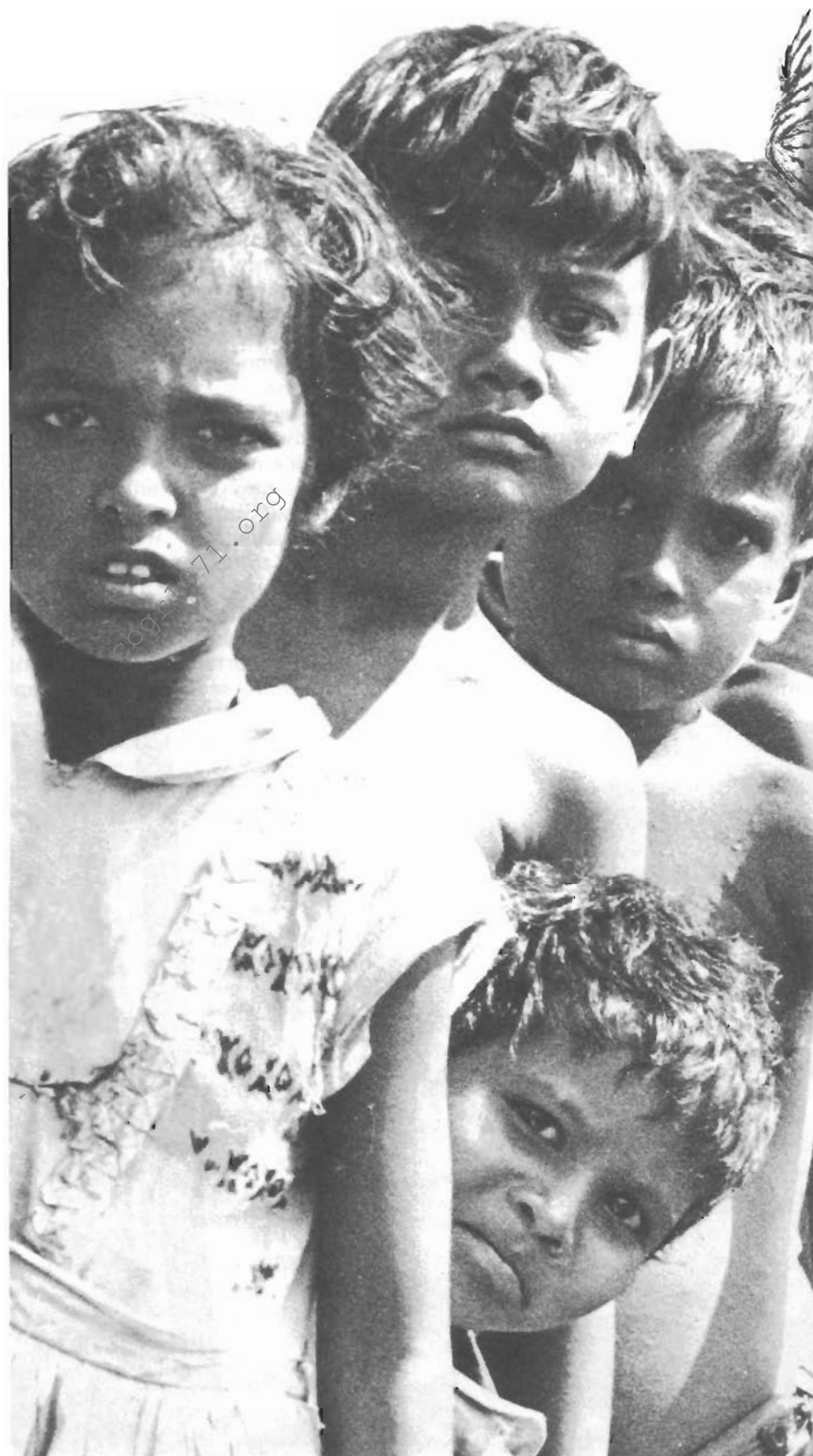


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The eager and alert faces of these refugee children taken on the eve of their return home bear testimony to the success of the mammoth relief operation.