

Uttaran Annual Report

July 2006-June 2007



শাহীদুল ইসলাম : সংগ্রামী দরিদ্রবান্ধব

সেলিম এম রফিক



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Print

Procharoni Printing Press
Khulna. Phone : 041-810957

Published in April, 2008

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Message from the Director

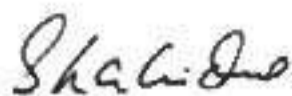
Last year has been a time of struggle for Uttaran. My arrest and torture, on January 27, 2007, by the Joint Forces, and subsequent release, had put Uttaran in a test. But it was a test for the whole nation; it was a trial of its political system, democratic tradition and practice. Declaration of Emergency Rules in January 2007 suspended fundamental civil rights of citizens. Bangladesh has a long history of struggle for freedom, democracy and justice. I am confident that this nation will overcome the crisis; democracy and rule of law will triumph again.

It is my personal pleasure that Uttaran has successfully overcome the crisis and, once again, showed that it has matured as an organization over the years. I am happy that my colleagues remained on course and never for moment deviated from their mission. Uttaran continued to work for the development and well being of communities in southwest region.

I am overwhelmed by their trust in me by reinstating me as the Director of Uttaran. Their confidence is inspiring for me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the communities and colleagues, friends and partners, national and international, for extending solidarity, for showing resilience and spirit of struggle in a difficult time, for standing by Uttaran. Your cooperation and solidarity is essential for the smooth implementation of Uttaran's mission. A special mention is due to Dr. Kamal Hossain, Barrister Sara Hossain, Ex justice Nizamul Huq Nasim and advocate Firoz Ahmed. Thank is an word not enough to describe the support you extended to me.

Uttaran, for decades, has been working to ensure marginal peoples access to land rights, defending human rights, reducing the risk of disaster. Development is nothing without education grounded in the history and tradition of the nation. Over the years we have learned that stewardship of environment is integral to development. Uttaran's work on community based river basin management and adapting to climate change is embedded to such learning.

It is a long journey; we have a long way to go. I hope you will continue to be with us. We hope that coming months will heralds a new beginning for Bangladesh, we are confident that democracy will prevail, emergency rule will be withdrawn, elected government will takeover. People in Bangladesh are not amnesiac to political participation. People in this nation have always shown their resilience in times of crisis and transition. We believe that the spirit of people will be reconfirmed. We will overcome the insecurities, injustice and turmoil. We will collectively build our own future.



Shahidul Islam

Director
Uttaran

Rights, Justice and Integrity

2006-07 has been one of the most challenging one in the history of Uttaran. On January 27, 2007, at about 10.30 am the Joint Forces arrested Mr Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran from the Uttaran Training Centre in Tala under Emergency Powers Rules and took him to the local Army Camp, where he was then allegedly physically tortured without any specific reason. He was neither told why he was being taken into custody, other than to speak to the Army Officer in charge of the area. He was neither given opportunity to inform a lawyer nor family member of his arrest. Eyewitnesses present on the field outside the Camp reported hearing his screams from inside the building, and also noted that when he was taken out of the building at about 2.30 pm he was limping, and his right foot appeared broken. At about 3.00 pm, the Joint Forces handed over Mr. Islam to Tala Police Station; at that time he could not walk himself as toes of his foot were broken. On January 28, Mr. Islam was taken to Satkhira Jail, where he was served with an order of preventive detention, issued by the District Magistrate, which contained a number of vague and unspecified allegations of his intending or being likely to commit 'prejudicial acts'. Mr. Islam was moved to Satkhira Sadar Hospital on 29 January, 2007 where he remained under police guard.

Shahidul Islam's brother challenged this detention by filing a habeas corpus petition. On January 31, 2007, the High Court asked the Government and other concerned parties to show cause within 14 days as to why Shahidul Islam should not be brought before the Court so that it may satisfy itself that he is not being held in custody illegally or improperly. Before the matter could be heard, the detention order expired on February 28, 2007 and later he was given four separate criminal cases. After his arrest, Mr. Islam was allegedly tortured and his foot was broken. While the detention order was operative he was not allowed access to his lawyers. Mr. Islam enjoys the respect of goodwill of many individuals and organizations across the country and abroad for his contributions to the alleviation of poverty and to empowerment of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of society.

Representations to the Government seeking the release of Shahidul Islam have been submitted by local people in Satkhira, prominent civil society activists, national and international organizations, and by various diplomatic missions as follows:

- ✓ Eminent citizens of Bangladesh submitted a memorandum to the Chief Advisor and Law Advisor for early release of Mr. Shahidul Islam.
- ✓ International organizations such as the NGO Forum on the ADB, The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, the ICRC, Oxfam GB, ActionAid Bangladesh, ICCO, The Netherlands, Misereor Germany, Both Ends, Food for the Hungry International, Fian Germany, EDM Switzerland, Frontline Ireland, and Trocaire Ireland sent appeals to the Government of Bangladesh.
- ✓ Diplomatic missions such as the US Embassy, The Netherlands Embassy, Embassy of Japan and Embassy of Switzerland raised concerns in this regard.
- ✓ Two representatives from Amnesty International met with Uttaran representatives.
- ✓ Just after the incident, European Commission organized an emergency meeting with

representatives of Uttaran. Representatives from the Canadian High Commission and The Asia Foundation were present at the meeting.

- ✓ National organizations such as Ain o Shalish Kendra, BRAC, the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB), Manusher Jonno Foundation, Nijera Kori, Proshika, PRIP Trust also came forward to support Uttaran.
- ✓ The Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh (FNB) representatives met with the Law Advisor and raised Mr Islam's issue.

Shahidul Islam was granted bail for this case from the High Court on 14 August 2007. After getting bail of this case, he is released from Satkhira prison on 21 August 2007.

One of the article published in newspapers demanding release of Shahidul Islam

The Case of Uttaran's Shahidul Islam

Khademul Islam, The Daily Star, April 8, 2007.

The court building and its premises in Satkhira are something out of Upamanya Chatterjee's novel *English, August*: peeling paint and bustling tea stalls, typists, petitioners, families with children, and adda-loving lawyers swirling amid the frayed hum of a hundred separate conversations. In a small ground floor office our group settles down with the local lawyers to review the outlines of the case.

It isn't pretty. We, Sara Hossain as part of the legal defense team and I from The Daily Star, have come to Satkhira to attend the bail hearing of Shahidul Islam. He is the founding head of Uttaran, an NGO in Satkhira that has been involved with water-logging, flooding, and landlessness issues.

The southwest coastland of Bangladesh is a mare's nest of conflicting interests and deadly political rivalries. Shrimp farms, many of them set up by powerful business-cum-political interests, have uprooted families and increased landlessness, bringing in their wake social instability and heavy-handed attempts by the state at restoring order. The area is wracked by various factions of the Sarbahara party/ies involved in political brigandage. MP nomination struggles for the two main parties had given rise to bitter, long-standing rivalries, muscle politics, and violence.

It is in this context that Uttaran has been conducting its advocacy programs and services, distributing khas land to the landless in close co-operation with the relevant government agencies, at first opposing but eventually partnering with the Asian Development Bank to revise mega-project plans in order to prevent further water-logging and homestead uprooting, and providing food and succor to flood victims. Most importantly, it works to give hope to the luckless.

By virtue of working in this volatile nexus of business, land politics, political power and radical re-organization of social/economic power, Uttaran, and by extension Shahidul Islam, has attracted unwelcome attention over the years. Starting as a village school, Uttaran has grown in size and reach, making it a player in the social and economic life of the community and an object of envy. A price was put on Shahidul Islam's head by the sarbaharas, extortion and toll demands by mastans became almost a way of life, house confinement for long periods necessary and police protection needed and provided. Various innuendoes in bazaar talk and newspapers controlled by vested land interests/groups were made in attempts to link him to murder cases, or tie his organization to political radical movements. But Shahidul Islam carried on with his work.

Which came to an abrupt stop when on January 27 he was picked up in the morning from the Uttaran Training Center in Mobarakpur village, Tala Upazila by army personnel, taken to Tala Government B Dey High School where an army camp had been set up under the charge of a major, blind-folded, his hands tied behind his back, allegedly shoved into a toilet and beaten

brutally. People gathered outside the school gates could hear his screams. There was no official case against him at that time. Then two doctors called in hastily provided medical assistance and probably saved his life. He was then handed over to the police thana.

On January 28 the local authorities ordered him detained for one month under the Special Powers Act on the ground that he was likely to commit a "prejudicial act" by disrupting the maintenance of law and order and causing harm to the economic and financial interests of the state. Shahidul Islam was transferred to the medical unit of the district jail. He was later transferred to Satkhira Sadar Hospital on January 29 when his condition worsened. Two days later he was taken back to the district jail. He is still there, in the medical section.

Shahidul Islam's case aroused widespread concern and attendant media coverage. We at The Daily Star have been publishing news items relating to him since January 28. Both national and international NGOs rallied to his support. Prominent civil society members and intellectuals signed a petition protesting the incident. International and national human rights groups, associations and organizations have made their deep concern evident. This combined pressure resulted, to the army's eternal credit, in an internal investigation by the army into the tragedy, at the end of which neither Shahidul Islam or Uttaran were charged with any offences. There are no arms hidden beneath its buildings, there are no underhand financial dealings, there are no links with radicals.

The outcome of this clean bill of health resulted in a small mercy: the original detention order was not extended. Shahidul Islam, in theory, at the end of his detention period was free to go -- true, with a plaster cast on his foot, but free to go. But, in a cynically-used pattern of extended prisoner incarceration that human rights advocates in Bangladesh have become dismally familiar with, an old murder case involving an ex-BNP bigwig was resurrected and Shahidul was forthwith charged by the local police with involvement in it. Shahidul Islam was now being subjected to a different turn of the screw.

It was for the bail hearing of this case that Sara Hossain had joined other lawyers (prominent among whom were Firoz Ahmed -- "Firoz Bhai" to us all -- from Khulna, a long-time activist in the field of human rights, and Shah Alam, the secretary of the Satkhira Bar Association) in Satkhira Sessions Court on March 11. It was evident that interested parties who had framed the initial incident were still pulling the strings at the local administration level. This became further evident when, on the way to court on the morning of March 11, we learnt that, perhaps anticipating that Shahidul Islam might be freed on bail, yet another case had been lodged against him. The practical result of being cleared by the army's own investigation, of the expression of civil society concern, has effectively been zero.

Bail, despite the eloquent pleas from the gathered defense lawyers, was denied by the magistrate. At this point the team decided to obtain the required order from the ADM and meet Shahidul Islam at the district jail. It is, ironically, a pretty jail, with red brick buildings, flowerbeds and swept courtyards. The jail superintendent proved to be an impeccable blend of official responsibility and personal courtesy. The order arrived and the team finally found itself face to face with him. Reportedly Shahidul Islam was younger than expected. Speaking Bengali with the distinctive Jessore accent, he was very much the picture of the idealist snared by

machinations beyond his understanding. In the morning we had driven past the school building with students playing on the field that had been Uttaran's start. Beside it had been the college that Shahidul Islam had funded with the Ashoka Fellowship grant he had been awarded for his services to the poor and the distressed. And here he was now before the assembled group, pale, stressed, a man visibly traumatized by his experience. To his fellow Uttaran members he said, carry on, it's in your hands now, judge for yourselves and take the decisions yourselves. His lawyers talked with him. Finally, in a reversal of roles they offered him hope and told him that good people, in Satkhira, Dhaka and the larger world, were on his side. Then they walked out of the prison gates silently, heads bowed.

In the current regime of necessarily sweeping powers and detention laws this case perhaps represents an aberration. This is one that fell through the cracks. However, even one such case is one case too many. One mindless act of violence has paralyzed a fine institution and wrecked tens of lives. The Chief Advisor Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed has spoken about the need for controlling market prices and to refrain from razing slums so that the poor are not doubly victimized. The poor, he has declared in no uncertain terms, must not be harmed.

Shahidul Islam and Uttaran are nothing if not the friends and advocates of the poor and the marginalized, of the landless and the distressed. He is still in jail, with the Damocles Sword of two trumped-up cases and attendant police remand/s hanging over him. It would not only be pro-poor-people policy in action to initiate measures to save him from further torment, but also an affirmation that the powers that be are indeed sensitive to the potential problems that lie before us on the rocky road to becoming the nation we want to be.

Justice denied to NGO leader Mr. Shadhidul Islam of Satkhira after his arbitrary arrest, torture, detention and the fabrication of charges

Human Rights Report - 2007, Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

At around 11:00 am on 27 January 2007 two army personnel, one warrant officer (WO) Mr. Amir Hossain and one army constable, came on a motorcycle to the UTTARAN Training Center based in Mobarakpur village, Tala upazilla (sub district), Satkhira district, Bangladesh. At around 11:25 am, the warrant officer Mr. Amir told Mr. Shahidul that Major Mehedi Hasan of the Tala army camp would like to talk to him. The officer did not inform Mr. Shahidul that he would be arrested and did not produce any arrest warrant or other valid documents. Within five minutes, an army van full of army personnel arrived at the UTTARAN training center and told Mr. Shahidul to go with them to the Tala Army Camp, which was temporarily established in the Government B Dey High School in Tala town.

Mr. Shahidul was put into the army van and taken before Major Mr. Mehedi Hasan of the army camp. The military officers then started interrogating Mr. Shahidul, while accusing him of depositing black market money and asked him to reveal its sources. They also accused him of involvement in terrorism activities and underground politics.

Meanwhile, a relative of Mr. Shahidul (the name is withheld for security reasons) was informed about Mr. Shahidul's arrest and went to the army camp within 40 minutes after the arrest was made. However, the army personnel did not allow him to meet either Mr. Shahidul or Major Mehedi Hasan and simply assured him that Mr. Shahidul would never be tortured in army custody and that they would hand over him to the Tala police when the interrogation is finished.

No sooner had the relative left the army camp, a group of soldiers, namely Mr. Gopal, Mr. Mizan, Mr. Newaz, Mr. Didar and Mr. Shakil blindfolded Mr. Shahidul, tied his arms and took him to a toilet in the army camp, where Mr. Shahidul was severely assaulted with hockey sticks on his legs and back. It was alleged that different groups of soldiers assaulted Mr. Shahidul in turn in several phases.

Due to brutal torture, Mr. Shahidul was severely injured. At around 2:15 pm, the army then called Dr. Hedayetul Islam, the Upazilla Health and Family Planning Officer of Tala town to the army camp to treat Mr. Shahidul. Eyewitnesses reported that Dr. Hedayet's behaviour was very unusual when he returned to the hospital from the army camp and he shouted at his colleagues not to go to the camp when they received any phone calls from the army.

According to local people, including journalists and Mr. Shahidul's relatives, who were present about 50 meters away from the army camp premises (the school campus), heard the cries of Mr. Shahidul and immediately the army personnel chased them away from the campus.

At around 3:00 pm, Mr. Shahidul was carried by four army men before Major Mehedi Hasan, who simply ordered them to hand him over to the Tala police. Four army men then carried Mr. Shahidul by the arms and handed over him to the Tala police at around 3:30pm.

According to eyewitnesses, Mr. Shahidul could not walk due to his injuries and his eyes were blindfolded and arms tied when he was taken to the police station. Inspector Mr. Md. Abdur Razzak,

the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of the Tala police station, did not agree to take Mr. Shahidul because he has received no complaints and charges against him. He was also concerned with the victim's severe physical condition. At this point the army men got angry and called doctors from the Upazilla Health Complex, which is the only public hospital in the town.

The Resident Medical Officer (RMO) Dr. Zahirul Hassan and Medical Officer Dr. Humayan Kabir Apu of the Upazilla Health Complex rushed to the Tala police station to treat Mr. Shahidul, who was lying on the floor and not able to move and speak due to severe pain. When the doctors and the police tried to raise him to a sitting position, Mr. Shahidul fell unconscious. There were multiple red and black bruises all over his body, especially, on the lower limbs, back of the chest and abdomen as a result of beating with blunt weapons. Further, both sides of his feet were dark due to beating with blunt weapons.

On the evening of January 27, Mr. Shahidul was sent to the Satkhira District Jail without being produced before any court of the country, which is in a clear violation of law. The state of human rights in eleven Asian nations in 2007 – Bangladesh ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION prison authority then sent him to the medical unit of the jail. On the following morning on January 28, the jail authority transferred Mr. Shahidul to the Satkhira Sadar Hospital due to his deteriorating condition. The X-ray report at the hospital showed fractures in the second and fifth toes of his right foot. A medical source informs that Mr. Shahidul's blood pressure status was, then, 90/60, which was normally 150/90 before his arrest, according to his relatives. Mr. Shahidul is now in police custody at the hospital, while being handcuffed at the hospital bed.

The Deputy Commissioner ex officio District Magistrate, Mr. Md. Kefayet Ullah, later issued an order sheet dated on 27 January 2007 (the date was changed from January 28 to January 27 on the certificated copy of the order sheet that Mr. Shahidul's lawyers received), that Mr. Shahidul received 30-day detention order under the Special Powers Act-1974. This Act is one of the country's laws being abused for arbitrary detention of the arrested without any judicial review in the current situation of the State of Emergency in the country. Mr. Shahidul has never been produced before any court since his arrest on January 27. It is a clear violation of Article 33 of the Constitution of Bangladesh and Section 61 of the Code of Criminal Procedure of Bangladesh.

A case of false implication in a murder by the army:

It is reported that in order to cover up the illegal arrest and detention of Mr. Shahidul, the army allegedly pressured the Magistrate's Cognizance Court-Ga Area of Satkhira district to show that Mr. Shahidul was arrested relating to one murder case. This murder case is bearing case number 3 dated 05/05/2004 at the Tala police station relating to the assassination of the Chairperson of the Tala unit of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Mr. A B M Altaf Hossain on 4 May 2004.

According to the information received, Mr. Badrul Alam, Joint Secretary of Satkhira district unit of the BNP, was arrested by the joint forces from Mr. Abdul Latif's house in Khajra village under the Ashashuni police station of Satkhira district on 30 January 2007. Since the arrest, Mr. Badrul was kept in military custody, while he was allegedly beaten and intimidated to be killed in pre-planned "crossfire", unless he gives a false statement accusing Mr. Shahidul of involving in Mr. Altaf's murder. Mr. Badrul finally gave the false statement against Mr. Shahidul fearing for his life.

It is alleged that at around 2:00am on 2 February 2007, the army handed over Mr. Badrul to Inspector Mr. Haripada Bishwas of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Satkhira

district. Although this is not the office hours, the army officers also contacted First Class Magistrate Mr. Saidur Rahman to come to the court and record Mr. Badrul's "confessional statement" under section 164 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. The magistrate then came to his office room of the Deputy Commissioner cum Magistrate's Court building at around early hours at 2:00am and recorded Badrul's statement by 3:45pm.

According to the magistrate court's administrators, on February 6, Mr. Shahidul was "shown arrest" in the Altaf murder case with an order signed by a magistrate of the Magistrate's Cognizance Court-Ga Area, which was issued based on "confessional statement" of Mr. Badrul. The decision of "shown arrest" of Mr. Shahidul was only disclosed on February 7 but strangely the court order's signed date is February 6 (the paper carries the wrong date of 16-2-2007 by mistake).

However, interestingly, on February 2, the Investigation Officer (IO) of the said murder case, CID Inspector Mr. Haripado Bishwas, submitted a remand prayer, which is also signed on 6 February 2007, in advance before a magistrate seeking 7-day police remand of Mr. Shahidul for an inquiry. It should be noted that based on the court arrest order dated 6 February 2007, Mr. Shahidul was not under arrest relating to the said murder case till February 6. According to the legal procedure, the police can only apply for taking Mr. Shahidul in their remand after February 6 because the court order document shows that the magistrate signed the arrest order on February 6.

The certificated copy of the court documents shows that on February 6 the magistrate signed on both the papers: the custody warrant (shown arrest) order sheet and the remand prayer of the police both dated on 6 February 2007. However, we suspect that the magistrate might have signed on both papers on February 2.

Meanwhile, the hearing on the remand prayer officially held at the Magistrate Cognizance Court-Ga Area on February 7 and the magistrate later decided to hear the police's remand prayer after Mr. Shahidul's 30-day detention is over. Mr. Shahidul was not produced before court at this time.

The irregularities of the court documents and unusual police action are extremely confusing. While the custody warrant of Mr. Shahidul shows that the magistrate signed the order on February 6 (or 16) but the police unusually moved Mr. Shahidul's remand prayer on February 2, four days before Mr. Shahidul was under arrest in this murder case. This has been a proof of distortion of the truth and fabrication. This, together with the unlawful and unusual actions of the magistrate and the police clearly indicates that all these things were set up and coordinated by the army to justify their illegal arrest and detention of Mr. Shahidul.

On February 8, Mr. Shahidul's lawyer Advocate Mr. M Shah Alam lodged a petition seeking bail for the victim before the Magistrate's Cognizance Court-Ga Area of Satkhira. However, the Second Class Magistrate Mr. Zahid Hassan rejected the bail prayer. The lawyers then filed a Criminal Misc case (case no. 126/2007) with the Session Judge's Court of Satkhira on 14 February 2007. The next hearing for bail application is fixed for 6 March 2007.

Meanwhile, the Magistrate Court refused to supply the certified copy of Mr. Badrul's statement to Mr. Shahidul's lawyers. Advocate Mr. M Shah Alam, the General Secretary of the Satkhira District Bar Association, applied three times separately on February 7, 8 and 11 seeking the certified copies of the First Information Report (FIR) of the murder case that Mr. Shahidul was implicated with, the copy of Mr. Badrul Alam's statement, the copy of the "shown arrest" order and the copy of the remand prayer by the IO of the 21

The state of human rights in eleven Asian nations in 2007 – Bangladesh ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION murder case. On February 11, Third Class Magistrate of Satkhira Magistrate Court Record Section, Mr. Manjurul Islam, approved all the papers to be provided to the lawyers except the copy of Mr. Badrul's statement and the lawyers received those copies on February 13.

Mr. Shahidul's relatives claim that the deceased Mr. Altaf's family alleges that the former Member of Parliament elected from Satkhira-1 constituency, Mr. Habibul Islam Habib, was directly involved in the killing of Mr. Altaf. In fact, Mr. Altaf's family openly claimed this allegation in their written statements in two press conferences held in Varsa village under Patkelghata police station in Satkhira district separately held on 2 and 6 November in 2006.

They further claimed that the political leaders and the police managed one Mr. Abdur Rahman, who is known as "Goru Chor (cattle thief)" in the area, to lodge the murder case of MR. Altaf with the Tala police station, while the family received death threats from the armed cadres of the former MP Mr. Habib to pressure them not to lodge a case against the real murderer.

Meanwhile, Mr. Shahidul's elder brother Mr. Nazrul Islam lodged a writ petition with a High Court Division Bench on 31 January 2007 challenging his brother's arrest and detention. The judges of the Bench then issued a rule nisi and directed the concerned authority to explain why the arrest of Mr. Shahidul shall not be declared unlawful within two weeks time. However, the concerned authority has not furnished the required explanation before High Court to date although the deadline of submission was expired on February 13.

Mr. Shahidul is currently warded in a private hospital in Dhaka after having been released from the prison after his prolonged arbitrary detention without any reason as well as a protracted legal battle in the lower and higher courts.

There is no explanation from the government as to why the magistrate became so serious as to need to record Mr. Badrul Alam's "confessional statement" in early hours (at 2:00am) in relation to a murder case that occurred more than two years ago. Such an unusual action was taken by the magistrate; while the former MP Mr. Habibul Islam Habib was never arrested, despite the open accusation from the deceased man's family. Two separate written statements of the family were not recorded by the police and judicial authorities.

Furthermore, the magistrate's refusal to supply a certified copy of the "confessional statement" made by Mr. Badrul Alam to Mr. Shahidul's lawyers without any explanations violates Mr. Shahidul's fundamental rights.

Meanwhile, no investigation has been made and no one has been arrested so far relating to the alleged torture of Mr. Shahidul.

A True Leader of the Oppressed

April, 2007

Ric G. Ontal-VSO Volunteer for Uttaran (2004-07)

On 11th January 2007 was the declaration of the State of Emergency that totally changed the entire scenario of the country. Alas, the President and the Caretaker Government had made the right decision and the country is leading to normalcy. The people of the country are now having a breathing space of freedom and peace of mind. And the economy was saved from the turmoil of country-wide hartals and further penury.

I have been living and working for 43 months by now as VSO volunteer in Bangladesh. Though I am from Philippines but I considered the country as my second home already. I sincerely felt at home and proud to be here. People are very friendly, hospitable and generous. I am currently at my second placement working as Programme Management and M&E Adviser in Uttaran, a regional and rights-based organization in Tala, Satkhira. My tasks are to improve organizational management system, develop policies and assist in project development and implementation. Uttaran's overall goal is to reduce poverty and empowerment of the poor in the Southwest region particularly *women, children, religio-ethnic minorities, outcaste, untouchables, landless and persons with disability* through implementing holistic programs and interventions. My journey as volunteer is indeed fulfilling amid myriad challenges. Never had I regretted of coming here. Lots of desire of continuing my volunteering work in the future, because I am truly enthused by the aspirations and principles of my director named Shahidul Islam whom I called 'Dada'.

But on 27th January 2007, Saturday at around 10:30am, was a shocking day for me. My director was arrested by the military with no specific case lodge against him. Instantly I asked myself: *Why him? Is this the accolade of protecting and upholding the rights of the oppressed?* I just can hardly understand why this happening to my Dada whose only passion is to serve and live with his poor people in the region through capacitating them to become empowered agents for their development and emancipation from the fetters of poverty, oppression, discrimination, marginalization and disempowerment. I thought that I would be very happy to go home this April as we had made a lot of positive and enabling changes at both organizational and community levels in particular and the region in general. I was rather wrong and saddened with the turned of events. People might say, why am I really affected with what is going on to my Dada, after all, I am going home soon. I am affected because I know him so much personally. He is honest, principled leader and a good friend indeed.

My Dada has inspired me to sustain my passion and development endeavors. He molded me into maturity as development worker; stirred my innate potentials; and broadened my horizon. I thanked him for giving me the opportunity to experience the true to sense "*sharing skills and changing lives*" ethos of volunteering. It is not just about 'technical sharing' but also about solidarity among the lowest rung of our society. And my little way, he gave me that opportunity to touch their lives and shared to their struggle.

April is approaching so fast and I need to go home, yet I have the high hopes that he will be free and I could hug and bid goodbye. Or else my journey in Bangladesh is never complete. I pray that the government of the good people of Bangladesh will release him so soon and never allowing Shahidul's aspirations be rotten in the cold bars of not his own making. And never let a truest leader of the oppressed be gone. The people of our region need him much to fuel their energy to create change in their lives and community. Still my hopes remain.

Background

The Socio-economic crisis and poverty profile of southwest part of Bangladesh is more acute than other parts of the country. More than 80% of the people are living below poverty line. Based on a recent survey conducted by Uttaran, it has been revealed that 27% of the households of the Tala Upazila of Satkhira are landless according to the set criteria. According to a study of JBIC in 2007, “the incidence of poverty is the highest in the Western areas (of Bangladesh) including Rajshahi Division, following Khulna Division. Compared with Barisal and Rajshahi Divisions, the poverty reduction rates are higher in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet Divisions. The rate of poverty has slightly (rather) increased in Khulna Division.”¹ Land formation has been ceased and water logging has engulfed a huge area of this region. This has resulted in a wiping out of a significant number of the estuarine river networks in the area and makes people more vulnerable to losing valuable assets and resources as well as to, irresponsible shrimp farming practices. The southwestern region of the country is considered to be a disaster prone area. It has been regularly visited by calamities due to its geographical context and severe ecological devastation brought about by human neglect and highhanded ill-planned development interventions. Projects like Coastal Embankment Projects (CEPs) and KJDRP, which started in the 60’s (till middle 70’s) in the pursuit of green revolution, aimed at increasing agricultural production and rural income. However, the projects were carried out without due consideration of the strategic implication on region’s ecology and bio-diversity, livelihood or economy. The region is also experiencing rising sea levels as an adverse effect of global climate change due to global warming. This mounting problem results to major water logging, poor drainage through river systems, siltation and saline intrusion which seriously disrupts the farming systems in the southwest with few coping mechanisms available for the local people to confront this situation with. The southwestern part of Bangladesh where the project will be operated is a coastal area and wetland of the world’s largest mangrove forests, the Sundarbans. A large constituency of low caste Hindus and *atarf* (asharf-atraf, caste like divisions by cultural construction of Bangladeshi Muslims) live in this area.

According to the Education Development Index (EDI) scores of Khulna and Jessore are 0.64 to 0.67 respectively and EDI scores are for Pataukhali, Dhaka, Barisal, Noakhali and Comilla are 1.00, 0.96, 0.87, 0.73, and 0.73 respectively.² Access to quality education has been a longstanding battle cry among the marginalized poor in this part of Bangladesh. Low completion rate, high dropout rate and repetition, lack of classrooms and poor educational facilities prevail.

In the global context, women contribute sixty-six per cent of the total production. However, women consume only ten per cent and control only 1 per cent of the production. The scenario in Bangladesh is no exception. Women are subject to discrimination in all spheres of their personal, social, economical and political involvement. Most of the poor women suffer from malnutrition and their average life expectancy is less than that of their male counterparts. Even

¹ *Poverty Profile: People's Republic of Bangladesh: Executive Summary; October 2007; Japan Bank for International Cooperation*

² Source: Bangladesh. Regional Poverty Profile and Development Indicators - A GIS Based Analysis Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic and Adjustment Policies in Bangladesh (MIMAP) Technical Paper No. 08

in legal aspects, a woman is entitled half of a man's entitlement. Dowry, divorce, and women trafficking are quite frequent in the rural areas and women fall easy victim to these social problems.

Since women are compelled to confine their activities within the household, their access to different institutions like schools, hospitals, courts, etc. is limited. As such, they remain practically dormant in different social and political activities. In other words, a woman's role and status is that of a subordinate one and thus the women are discriminated throughout their life cycle.

In the Southwest region of Bangladesh, the inhabitants are currently enduring the problems of landlessness, limited access to public land and water, and other vital resources. The public land use situation is further complicated due to the aggressive growth of the shrimp industry. The shrimp industry has been responsible for carrying out some of the worst forms of human rights abuses and exploitation among the landless people on their khasland claims and rights. It has aggressively violated the land rights of the small landholders using coercive tactics and violence. Subsequently forcing poor marginal farmers to give up their agricultural land and evict them from their khasland homestead. Shrimp farming has further contributed to an increase in food insecurity due to the massive conversion of agricultural land for shrimp production –further diminishing valuable land area needed for rice and food production. The hardest hit from this result in land conversion are the poor landless inhabitants of the region.

The rise of fundamentalism is evident in this part of the country. Day by day the number of religious educational institutions has been increased. Secular responses in the forms of extended, well-equipped educational provisions are decreasing.

Our Development Programmes

1. Integrated Rural Empowerment and Development

An Integrated rural empowerment and development program lies at the core of what Uttaran is trying to achieve. The program includes formation and development of primary organizations and the creation of inter-organizational structures. It also involves consciousness-raising activities pertaining to gender issues, untouchability, social hierarchy, injustice, exploitation, land issue and sustainable water management issues. It also focuses on economic activities like agriculture, poultry, dairy, livestock, fisheries, petty trading and other small enterprises. The integrated human development programme has two major goals. The first is to remove the barrier of social inequalities, encountered particularly by the landless, women and the outcaste, to pave their access to different social and public organizations. The second is to make marginalized people economically self-reliant.

Primary organization

In rural Bangladesh, the majority of the population is poor and landless. They have virtually no access to the public resources and have no representation in the local elected councils. As such, their participation in the decision-making process is quite insignificant. In this context, Uttaran has been emphasizing the formation of an organization for the landless men and women. They have also been encouraging them so that they can collectively emerge as an important actor in the rural power structure. Uttaran aims at equipping the participants with the tools needed to deal with their social, environmental, health and economic predicaments - in their quest for social and economical emancipation through the primary organizations. To date, Uttaran has formed about 2,293 primary organizations in the rural areas.



A primary organization of Uttaran

The members of the primary organizations generally belong to an 18-45 age group. A maximum of two people (female and male counterpart) from one family can become members.

The primary organizations of Uttaran are run by a set of documented rules and regulations. The admission of each new member, internal elections, resolution of disputes, and other decision-making activities are governed by rules and consensus. Members are allowed to amend the rules if needed. Uttaran's Field Organizers facilitate the operation of the primary organizations. Each primary organization has a 5-member committee that consists of a Chairperson, Secretary/Leader, Cashier, Legal Cadre and Health Cadre. The members form this type of committee through consensus or election once every two years. This provision for holding elections infuses democratic norms and develops leadership skills. Thus, the leaders and the members of primary organizations have acquired the skills needed to resolve internal and inter-organizational conflicts. They also exercise a critical role in the operation of local *Shalish* (traditional mediation).

Weekly meetings of the primary organizations are held as per rules, according to the schedule prepared by the members. In these meetings, various issues are discussed including gender equity, dynamics of *khasland* distribution, local council elections, electoral rights, legal issues, health care, environment, climate change, waterlogging, fair wages, economic ventures, etc. Through the exchange of ideas and views, the members get an opportunity to widen their perception on different social, political and economic issues that help in dealing with their problems and development issues more prudently. It is worth mentioning that Uttaran has conducted a customized social, economical and occupational skill training for 31, 443 (female 19, 625 and male 11, 818) group members selected from 54 unions in upazilas under Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts respectively. These include training sessions on leadership and group management, gender and development, land law and management, and legal literacy and law cadre development, pond fisheries, beef fattening, goat rearing and poultry rearing.

During the reporting period, Uttaran had facilitated, to form and strengthen, a total of 2293 primary organizations with total 44, 678 members (35, 726 women and 8, 952 men) from 478 villages, 54 Unions and 10 upazilas, under Satkhira, Khulna and Jessore districts respectively. 30% of the total memberships are Outcastes, Untouchables, and other religio-ethnic minorities. These newly formed groups' members are those direct participants of the sustainable livelihood piloted project and those who had completed the reflect circles. Hence, they were also formed into federation with the end view to integrate circle members into mainstream groups of Uttaran. All these POs are being managed and supervised by thirteen development centers namely in *Jatpur, Chuknagar, Dacope, Patkelghata, Debhata, Kapilmuni, Satkhira Sadar, Assasuni, Kaligonj, Shyamnaga, Paikgacha, Shaashkati, and Burigoalini*.

Gono Unnayan Federation

The primary organizations of Uttaran, under the coverage of each Development Center/Area office, form a joint federation with the view that achieving greater goals and objectives comes through better cooperation. Uttaran has been striving to develop federations of primary organizations through a vertical network at the Union and Upazila (*Sub-district*) levels to intensify the activities for the emancipation of landless and marginalized families. The prime

goal is to infuse the spirit of democracy with a view to creating a society based on equal rights of men and women as well as caste and creeds.

The federations are guided by set rules and regulations. A governing body of the federations, at the Union and Upazila level, are elected for two years by the representatives of each primary organization and consist of 4 women, 5 men and 2 members from the outcaste. The main objectives of a federation are:

- to assess the activities of the primary organizations and to identify relevant problems;
- to devise mechanisms to raise social movement/initiatives to deal with such issues; and
- to guide the primary and intermediate organizations.

In 2006-2007, the federations have played a vital role to identify for recovery of 4, 489.97 acres of *khasland*. They also organized a signature campaign and appeal to the Bangladesh government for the immediate release of Uttaran director. The federation concretely increased the understanding on various right-based issues like human and legal rights, gender and development, governance and ways to access local structure, land rights and *khasland* issues, caste and untouchability issue, decreased cases of women repression such as dowry, domestic violence, early marriage, polygamy etc; increased capacity on organizational development matters like effective leadership and facilitation, group formation and management, group meeting, minutes/report writing, resolution making, effective negotiation and communication; increased solidarity and collective initiative at the community level through federation; developed/strengthened confidence and asserting capacity to claim and exercise their fundamental rights and problems to government concerned authorities and structures like UPs, upazila administration, health complex etc; improved women participation in family, group and community level decision-making and have stake to issues like education for children, resolving resource allocation gap to both boys and girls children early marriage, household management and domestic affairs; increased bargaining capacity of the group members especially among women; increased women's mobility to hat-bazaars, health complex/hospital, bank, unions, NGOs and among others.

Savings

The poor in Bangladesh hardly have any savings to face the crisis. In this context, Uttaran motivates the poor to develop a habit of savings. Previously, in crisis a situation, the have poor had to borrow money from the rural moneylenders (at a very high interest rate) which eventually rendered them total destitute. Savings not only help the poor in an emergency but also help to increase economic productivity. Savings also create a sense of unity among the members. During the reporting period, Uttaran's primary organization members have realized total savings amount of Tk. 18802309. It should be mentioned that a huge number of primary organization members withdrawn their savings due to heavily increasing market prices.

Credit and Employment Generation Activities

Credit is one of the major components of integrated rural empowerment and development program. It is provided for various activities to enhance the employment and income generating opportunities of group members. The loans are collateral-free and subject to intensive monitoring and supervision. Generally the loans are provided at a 12.5 per cent interest rate, but Uttaran does provide interest free loans during an emergency time. Uttaran has created an opportunity named Bhumi Tahbil for the extreme poor to facilitate khasland and water bodies leases from the government as well as for production purposes.

There are certain credit policy criteria that act as a framework for credit application and for granting loan. A borrower is therefore required to follow these credit policies to qualify.

Credit Disbursement

During 2006-2007, 7792 group members received loans totaling amount of taka 3,60,43,739.00 was disbursed to 1909 men and 5883 to women. More than 75.50 % per cent of this amount was issued to women members that reflect Uttaran's policy of emphasizing women development.

Item wise Loan Disbursement in 2006-2007

SI No	Activities	Recipient			Total disbursed (Amount in tk.)	Rate %
		Male	Female	Total		
1	Agriculture	81	943	1024	7670000	21.28
2	Livestock	32	1023	1055	8824000	24.48
3	Small Trading	69	865	934	4918000	13.64
4	Handicraft	83	864	947	4177000	11.59
5	Fisheries	74	584	658	3574000	9.92
6	Poultry	56	661	717	2978000	8.26
7	Others	1514	943	2457	3902739	10.83
Total		1909	5883	7792	36043739	100

Agriculture

Uttaran has been providing seasonal agricultural loans to its group members so that they may meet the necessary cash requirements during the cultivation. In 2006-2007, Uttaran extended Taka 7670000 as agricultural loan to 1024 members.

Livestock

Livestock development is another sector of undertaking in this program. This part of the project has helped widened the scope of income generation. The program consists of three specific activities:

1. Training on livestock
2. Vaccination
3. Upgrading of local breeds through artificial insemination.

Local Livestock Departments are helping Uttaran carry out the necessary animal vaccinations and inseminations. In 2006-2007, Uttaran extended Taka 88,24,000 loan to 1055 members.

Small Trading

Rural trading covers a variety of activities, which are mainly seasonal but have the potential for income and employment generation for rural poor. A good number of Uttaran's group members are involved in these activities, which offer quick return and widen the informal market in the rural areas. During the reporting period, about 4918000 Taka was advanced to 934 members.



Handicrafts

An increasing number of the group members are undertaking rural handicrafts as their profession. These include bamboo and cane crafts, red mats, and pottery, which encompass both traditional and modern skills. In 2006-2007, Uttaran extended Taka 4177000 as handicrafts loan to 947 members.

Fish Culture

Uttaran's fisheries activities include hatchery, nursery ponds, carp, crab, golda (Lobster) polyculture, rice-fish, pond fisheries, leasing and restocking open water resources such as Beels and giving training and credit to group members. During 2006-2007, Uttaran provided credit to 658 members and a total of Taka 3574000 was disbursed in this sector.

Poultry

The poultry activity program is designed to generate and income opportunities for the rural landless, particularly women. Uttaran has designed a viable model for poultry development which includes eight specific activities: 1) Training of cadres as poultry workers, 2) Regular Vaccination, 3) Establishment of feed sales centers, 4) Egg collectors, 5) Credit and 6) Follow-up on a regular basis, During 2006-2007, Uttaran extended poultry credit to 717 members and total credit stands at Taka 2978000.

Others

Uttaran provided loans of a total of taka 3902739 to 2457 group members. Loan were then used to purchase rickshaw/van, spices processing and other income generating activities.

Now the **outstanding loan blance** as at **30 june 2007** is given below:

SI No	Particulars	Closing Browers			Disbursd amount in tk.
		Male	Female	Total	
1	RLF	787	8190	8977	24952110
2	Housing	0	669	669	5756100
3	Livelihood	91	281	372	3192555
4	Foshol	32	56	88	1112000
5	MJ- APPAR	478	23	501	3880739
Total		1388	9219	10607	38893504

Asset Transfer and Development

The present trend of progress towards poverty reduction in Bangladesh is very slow. Various economists and the experts in different institutions have expressed the opinion that the poverty of the hardcore people cannot be reduced through the micro credit programme alone. They think that asset transfers may help to reduce poverty of the hardcore people e.g. government lands distribution among the landless and giving ownership of lands to them, housing, cattle and poultry and moveable and non-moveable assets transfer etc. The poverty of the hardcore people will reduce and/or be alleviated when they will gain ownership of assets and production.

Uttaran is one of pioneer NGO for scalling up the asset transfer concept in development sector. This organization has been implementing different type of development activities with the hardcore people for couple of years.

2. Health

From the very beginning Uttaran has been providing primary health care services, particularly preventive health care to its members. There are government run hospitals and health centers at union and Upazila levels, however, preventive aspects of health services tend to be ignored. Therefore, Uttaran felt an urgent need to devise a preventive health care mechanism to provide health services to the millions of poor as well as to raise their general awareness about preventive health care skills. These measures are in place as to help reduce the child mortality rate and increase the average life expectancy of the population. Uttaran's health care services are:

Health Education

Uttaran selects an individual from among the primary organization members as a health cadre member and then provides the needed training for promoting their capacity on primary health care. Health cadres, in their turn, discuss the acquired skills and share the ideas with other members during the weekly meetings of the primary organizations. Through this process, other members learn the basic skills of preventive health care.

Sanitation

The Bangladeshi Government has stated that the nation will achieve one hundred per cent sanitation by 2015. But the actual achievement was not satisfactory. NGOs, local government administration, LGI and civil society at large quite involved installing latrine. Some Upazilas (sub districts) declared coverage of one hundred per cent sanitation but the behavioral change has not been taken place. Many poor people still use open ground toilets for defecation which often can cause health problem like diahorea, dysentery, typhoid and other water borne diseases. With this Uttaran initiated a pilot project in 5 union under Assasuni upazila of Satkhira district to aim behavioral change for covering 100 per cent sanitation. Uttaran organized massive survey, formation of 124 Village Action Committee, Developed Village Action Plan, organized monthly and fortnightly meeting, organized court yard meeting, arranged workshop and seminar, training, organized focus group discussion, wall painting and writing, poster dissemination, billboard installation and folk song and drama presentation etc. With these initiatives impact is very high. The poor people are now maintaining their latrine and washing their hand properly. During the reporting period, Uttaran provided 800 latrine support for the people of 5 union under Assasuni upazila of Satkhira district and also provided 1200 latrine in Tala upazila of Satkhira district and Keshabpur upazila of Jessore district

Supply of Pure Drinking Water

Southwestern part of Bangladesh has limited access of safe drinking water due of excessive shrimp farming, salt-water intrusions lack of sweet water aquifer and arsenic contamination. Most poor households have to either buy or fetch water from distant sources. Both options do not always guarantee 100% safe drinking water due to the spread of arsenic contamination and



Now women are collecting safe drinking water from pond sand filter (PSF)

saline intrusion in the area. The situation bears significant impact to gender relation and equity in the area. The climate change coupled with the current trend of the sea level rising has aggravated the situation in this context.

Uttaran has been sustaining its efforts to create access to the poor to safe drinking water supports in collaboration with the *Paani/Water Committee* (a civil society committee), UPs and local administration in its working area. During the reporting period, Uttaran provided support for setting up seven PSF, five community based rain water harvesting systems, and fifteen household rain water harvesting support systems. Moreover, Uttaran provided support for re-excavation of two reserve ponds in the saline water areas. The Assasuni and Debhata upazilas, under Satkhira district, received the maximum amount of Uttaran's support in the fiscal year 2006-2007.

Eye Care

Sight Savers International initiated a project with Uttaran. The findings of this project showed that there are around 6000 blind children (in the age group below 16 years) from amongst a total population of 1.51 crore in Khulna division excluding Magura district. The project also helped to arrange diagnosis of all the blind children as a means to screen out cataract cases and arrange surgery of all cataract cases including necessary follow-up visits. The project was started in September 2005 to ended in December 2008. During the reporting period Uttaran implemented this project in Satkhira, Jessore, Kushtia and Khulna district. Out of some 1680 blind children, 447 cataract children were operated on and 425 of those operated children received follow up support.



Shathi is six years old. Her father's name Rayhan Ali, mother's name Shika Katun, village: Gatpara, Union: Mirpur district: Kustia, Division: Khulna, Diagnosis: Development Cataract B/E, Child ID no: 0201060047. Shathi could not see clearly in her childhood. Her father is poor, so she was not taken to doctor for treatment. Her eyesight was deteriorated when she became four years old.

At that time she was taken to an eye specialist for examination of her eyes. The Doctor advised for her to go for an operation and gave an estimate of Taka 20,000 (twenty thousand) only for this. But the parents were unable to bear the operation costs. They were very much helpless. She was brought in the eye camp of Uttaran under the project of BCCC and identified as a patient of ophthalmologist cataract child. One of her eyes was operated on in the BNMB hospital of Khulna on 17-8-2006. The 1st follow up of operation was done on 7-9-2006 and the other eye also received surgery on the same date. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th follow up were done on 9-9-2006, 28-9-2006, 28-11-2006 and 29-12-2006 respectively. Both operations were successful. Shathi can see clearly now. Now she plays with the children and goes to school. She is very happy. Her parents are very grateful to Uttaran for saving her daughter from blindness.

3. Education Program

Article 17 (a) of the Constitution of Bangladesh guarantees free and compulsory education to its all its citizens. It has been thirty-three years since the Constitution put into effect the above proclamation. Yet the education system receives little attention from the government. The main reason for this being the government's lack of prioritization, neglect to education, large scale irregularities, lack of political will and commitments including the lack of public arrangements to advance the already ebbing education system of the country.

In response to this growing problem Uttaran first initiated an education programme in 1985 through establishment of a secondary level school and gradually scaled up its education programme for marginalized, outcaste and untouchable community people. Uttaran provided education support for the children, youths and adults.

Innovative Primary Education Program (IPEP)

In the beginning of 1989, Uttaran implemented its Non Formal Primary Education Program (NFPE) in partnership with South Asia Partnership wherein the Community-based Feeder Schools were established. In 1992, this initiative was continued with the assistance from CARE-Bangladesh wherein 20 schools had benefited and replicated BRAC-NFPE approach and eventually expanded to around 200 NFPE schools through Trocaire Ireland, EDM, ICCO and ActionAid Bangladesh support. Through this initiative Uttaran, with DFID assistance, developed pilot areas for 'child centered-teaching learning methods' otherwise known as the Innovative Primary Education Program (IPEP) in 30 schools. This was done with help of three (3) VSO volunteers who by then worked within the organization to improve and build up IPEP program and capacity of the education department of Uttaran. The organization has pioneered the IPEP initiatives in the SW region, which to this date have been continued and sustained with assistance from ActionAid-Bangladesh. Some 14000 children have graduated under the IPEP and NFPE projects of Uttaran. During this reporting period some 750 children has also benefited from these projects.

The IPEP schools hold certain key principles that underpinned their teaching methods. The programs teaching philosophy is best seen in action in our schools as children learn through being involved and are encouraged to ask questions and express ideas and opinions. Wherever possible, the teachers plan the children's activities according to the student's actual ability so that the child's learning rather than the primer dictates the curriculum pace. The children's confidence has improved as a result and they eagerly take part in many learning games that are a feature of the schools.

Adult Education - REFLECT Circles

In 1989 Uttaran started to run an adult education program with the assistance of Oxfam GB for their male and female groups. The curriculum was based on the FIVDB model that aimed to improve social awareness and raise levels of literacy and numeracy. In 1997, Uttaran decided to use the REFLECT approach to adult literacy development as developed by ActionAid Bangladesh. It was felt that this method was more appropriate to achieve Uttaran's overall goal

because it concentrated more on human development. REFLECT is a participatory learning process that encourages creativity, analytical discussion and problem solving relating to the situation of the participants' community. This empowers people and puts them at the center of their learning, through the construction of locally generated graphs and diagrams that are used to define community power and relationships. From 1997 to June 2007, Uttaran facilitated 144 circles for 144x25 learners. During this reporting Uttaran provided support for 250 learners through 10 REFLECT circles.



REFLECT learners

After a basic nine month course, participants are encouraged to continue their learning through post literacy circles. These last for one year. These circles are based on the REFLECT system of action, reflection, action, with the intention of increasing the sustainability of learning. Reading and writing skills are further developed through the use of reading materials that supplement the graphs and diagrams. Training is given on issues such as human rights, democracy, gender, environment management, etc. After completing the REFLECT circles, the circles were then integrated with the mainstream primary organization and federation of Uttaran.

Early Childhood Development

Since 1996 Uttaran has been addressing Early Childhood Development (ECD) through its “Non-Formal Education for the working children” intervention programme. The programme involves children from the poor communities in the age group 6-14 years who are not enrolled

in schools (either because of non availability of schools or unsuitability of school timings and curriculum to their requirements as working children) and those who have dropped out due to socio-economic compulsions but wish for a second opportunity of learning. The programme covers the whole or part of the primary education cycle with the goal to then enroll the graduates into equivalent grades in the formal education system.

Uttaran has also been organizing bi-monthly meetings with spouses of the REFLECT circle participants to discuss various topics, issues and concerns that they face in their respective communities. The most frequently discussed topics in these meetings are the importance of ECD as well as ways to ensure pre-primary schooling for their children. Uttaran has always seen early childhood development as one of the top priorities.



Campaign for Quality Primary Education

Under Commonwealth Education Fund, for promotion of quality education activities, Uttaran carried out a massive study on the situation of primary education situation in Tala upazila under Satkhira district. Through this study it was identified that a low rate of enrollment, irregular attendance, high rate of dropout and re-enrollment are the major problems for improving quality education of public primary schools. The survey found that the rate of actual enrollment in the primary schools is 86%, attendance is 60.82%, drop out rate is 37% and re-enrollment rate is 23%. Community participation is very low.

To address the above satiation, Uttaran has been implemented a series of activities during 2006-2007. Such activities include the forming of union-based education committees headed by the union parishad (UP) chairman, developing school based Parents teachers Associations (PTA), strengthening School Management Committees (SMCs), surveying and regular monitoring of school catchments areas, organizing regular meetings of different committees,

maintaining strong linkage with the local administrations, activating relationships with district and upazila level education administrations, organizing union based annual sports, arranging exposure visits to nationally recognized primary education institutions, perusing the government for additional support from upazila parishad to develop school campuses for creating more facilities, and holding various seminars, workshops, and rallies to ensure strong community participation.

Uttaran has been actively facilitating the development of Participatory People's Plan of Action (PPA) addressing the issue of quality primary education at Khalilnagar union of Tala upazila under Satkhira district. Uttaran conducted community audits in Khalilnagar, Tala and Islamkati union under Satkhira district. The community audits were done to collect information around how much education allocation was actually being provided for the mentioned union parishad and how these funds were used. The plan reported that actual enrollment rate is more than 96 per cent, with the attendance rate being around 90 per cent, and the drop out rate being lower than the past, and Khalilnagar union parishad and primary schools of that union parishad are getting more attention by the local and national administration.

Formal Education

Secondary School - Samakal Madhyamik Bidyapith

In 1985 Uttaran's first education initiative was to establish a secondary school. Priority was given to the enrollment and equal treatment of students from minority groups. The school now enrolls students in class 1-10 and follows the government curriculum. In addition, students are given the opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding on such topics as development issues, discrimination, exploitation, human rights, history of liberation, environmental issues, etc. The number of students enrolled was found to be 603 during the reporting period. Untouchables, outcastes, and especially female students are enrolled on priority basis.



Technical Education

Uttaran has established two technical schools, one in Chuknagar in the Khulna District and the other at Parulia in the Satkhira District. The schools are designed for people from poor communities who have dropped out of school during classes 6 - 10. In these schools, students have the opportunity to learn a variety of skills, generally over a period of 6 months. The schools offer classes in carpentry, mechanics, electronics, tailoring, and typewriting. Since 2007, 2508 students have completed several trade courses. About 86 per cent of these students are now employed in their chosen occupations.

Shaheed Muktijodhya Mahabidylaya

Shaheed Muktijodhya Mahabidylaya is an eminent and reputed higher secondary and tertiary education institute in the region. The institute was established in 1994 as an intermediate college for conducting Higher Secondary Certificate Course: Grade 12. This program was created with the financial support of Shahidul Islam (Director, Uttaran), who was awarded as scholarship for Asoka Fellowship, as well as from the inspiration of a Japanese doctor named Dr. Ishikawa and Italian Father Luigi Paggi, Uttaran, Proshika and funding by CIDA's and the contribution of local community. In 2001, the college came out as a full-fledged education institution offering degrees in a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS). It is because of this programme that the marginalized, especially outcaste minorities, untouchables, women and landless students are receiving a special opportunity to complete their education. In each year, both in the higher secondary and tertiary education levels, 93% of the students of the tertiary level and 86% of the higher secondary level successfully passed, which is around 25-35% higher than the national level.

The college authority supplements the government curriculum with the extra-curricular education including social issues such as discrimination, exploitation, human rights, history of liberation, and environmental issues.



4. Rights and Justice

Human and Legal Rights Awareness and Legal Education Cadre Development

Uttaran promotes building the capacity of primary organizations and federations that focus on human rights issues particularly human and legal rights of Bangladeshi citizens irrespective of caste, creed and sex. Uttaran selects an individual from each of the primary organizations it works with to act as a legal contact. Legal cadres undergo a 5-day training session covering different laws including family law as well as criminal and civil laws. During the reporting period, 576 legal cadres were trained. In the weekly primary organization meetings the legal cadres help raise the level of legal awareness among their respective members. They also help in settling disputes among the members of the primary organizations as well as aim at reaching amicable solutions between its members and other persons or organizations.

In addition, all members are taught about the adverse aspects of childhood marriage, unregistered marriage, divorce, birth registration, land law, dispute resolution and mediation, gender equity, human rights and justice, domestic violence and trafficking, untouchability, and acid throwing prevention. Uttaran proudly claims, through its sincere efforts, the current rate of divorce among its members is quite negligible and almost all marriages in the areas are registered. The legal cadres are capacitated to be vocal, courageous, and have literacy with articulation and facilitation skills. They are capable of providing judicious advice and ways of approaching amicable settlements, and if needed, are available for legal protections aside from their awareness education function.

Alternative Dispute Resolution/Mediation

Uttaran always tries to make sincere efforts to resolve local disputes without any involvement of the formal courts. Mediation and dispute resolution works promptly and effectively and as a result has become very popular among the community people. This concept however is not new to rural Bangladesh. The system of *Shalish*, outside the purview of the court, has been in use for centuries. Uttaran has adopted a number of strategies to help popularize the *Shalish* system again.

First, Uttaran forms groups of 7-10 members consisting of leaders of Uttaran's primary organizations, schoolteachers, community leaders, etc. The group members are trained in arbitration skills and basic laws. As a result, these trained individuals are able to perform more effectively in arbitrating and settling disputes. Hundreds of cases are now amicably settled outside the purview of the courts.

Litigation Support

During this reporting period Uttaran provided support for cases which demanded exemplary punishment. Due to the high expenses involved in taking a case to court, along with the lengthy procedure of a time-consuming judiciary system, victims are often denied justice. In response to this reality Uttaran developed a legal support mechanism to assist the victims. In 2006-2007, 226 lower court cases have been supported, of which, 76 cases had been resolved while 16 high

court cases have been supported, of which, 8 cases had been resolved, all in favor of the victims. Five other cases were filed to secure release of Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran. For four of them Uttaran had to move the case up to the higher court.

Mohammad Ali Morol: A victim of a greedy land grafter

Mohammad Ali lives in the village of Murakalia of Tala Upazalla in Satkhira district. He is the 3rd son out of 3 sons and 3 daughters of late Jabbor Ali. Mohammad Ali was born in 1948. He was grown up with struggles. His parents arranged his marriage with a daughter of their neighboring village when he was 21 years old. He lived happily with his family. In the meantime, the liberation war was started in 1971. Mohammad Ali is a freedom fighter and took part in the war and backed home after nine months fighting. His wife left him and married another person during the war. He was very soaked. His parents arranged his 2nd marriage in 1972. Mohammad Ali has one daughter. Mohammad Ali's father was died. He got 39 decimal of land as his share from his paternal lands where he has been living with his family. Shamsul Rahman a neighbor of Mohammad Ali captured his land by force. He also filed a false case for ownership claiming of the land. Muhammad Ali was unable to run the case. Uttaran provided legal aid support to him. The lower court ruled out verdict in favor of Mahammad Ali. He backed to his home with help of the villagers. Few days after, Shamsul Rahman attacked Muhammad Ali with his hired hooligans when he stared to give boundary of his land. The boons of his chest and hand were broken. New he can't wok and lives on begging. Shamsul Islam appealed against the verdict of lower court to high court vides case no. civil revision no. 3363/2006. Uttaran has been continuing legal aid support to this helpless person for protection of his land.



Social Mobilization

Uttaran established a strong linkage between the civil society, LEBs, CBOs and NGOs that realize the importance of active engagement on the promotion of the human rights in the southwest region of Bangladesh. Uttaran has set up a regional Network for Asserting Human Rights (NAHR) involving the civil society at large. The support network has organized rallies, demonstrations, persuasions, and lobbying for establishing rights of the poor people. In 2006-2007, Uttaran facilitated trainings, seminars, and workshops in collaboration with the network on domestic violence, acid throwing and prevention, untouchability and justice. Roughly 1775 people participated in these workshops, seminars and training sessions. The network also organized a massive rally in Tala upazila to aware people about women rights. The NAHR organized a rally and human chain on a Human Rights day. Primary organization members, federation members, *shalish* committee members as well as civil society representatives and like minded NGOs actively participated in this event. These events were arranged in Satkhira, Jessore and Khulna district. NAHR activities were mostly supported by LEBs, UPs, NGOs, civil society representatives. Sometimes community members requested NAHR network's intervention for the smooth and faster *shalish* and mediation process and they also requested to NAHR to include more women and religio ethnic groups participation in the network.

Khasland Recovery and Settlement

Due to centuries-old systematic pauperization by the elites and the rulers, most of the people involved with agricultural production in countryside of Bangladesh are without any asset or power to claim their rights and control over productive natural resources. They are the landless people in Bangladesh. *Khasland* policies were first enacted by the then Pakistan government during 50's decade, again just after the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971 and in 80s. These policies were reformulated with the elements covering land reforms, ceiling of land ownership, entitlement of sharecroppers, and ownership of landless peasants over *khasland*. Each of these governments, as a means to implement policies to distribute *khasland* to the landless, formed Taskforces. However, till to date, little headways have been made in giving public land back to the landless. Lack of capacities (in terms of mobilization, organizational and education) to assert rights by the landless, distressed coupled with a large population of marginalized people to reclaim their rights and access to natural resources make this situation grimmer. Unfortunately, those (mere numbers) who have received land from the government have failed to establish their control over their land due to lack of legal assistances. Due to Corruption, landless people become the worst victims of deprivation. Moreover, the participation of women members from poor landless families is low in the land rights movement as they have little access to quality services from the local government. Local district governments in Bangladesh do not have the capacity, or even willingness, to engage themselves in issues surrounding redistribution of agricultural *khasland* to the landless people in either a systematic or participatory manner.

Moreover, some of the non-agriculture land is turning into agriculture land due to natural processes here and there--land that neither enters the *Khatian* # 1 nor considered as added *khasland* for redistribution. Besides, if the so-called vested property land could be leased out to relatively better off people, why it cannot be distributed among the landless? There is seldom

any evidence that even an acre of the ceiling-surplus land so far could be recovered and redistributed among them. In most cases the *khasland* settlement and management committees at upazila and district levels are ineffective and dysfunctional. Neither are the landless people truly represented at the land distribution meetings as state officials at upazila and district levels typically nominate almost all their own members. There is no representation from NGOs or any community organizations. Party-political influence on the decisions is often too much pronounced. Starting in March of 2004 out of response to the landless poor being underrepresented, Uttaran and its fellow 10 Partner NGOs such as Banophul, Nari Unnyan Sangstha, Nakshi Kantha, Palli Chetana, Shushilan, IDEAL, ASDO, Muktir Alo, Mukti Parishad and RUPALI created and carried out the Apar project.

Uttaran continues to decisively address the set of interrelated problems and constraints with landlessness poor with respect to their limited access to land, waters and other vital resources. The most pivotal and pronounced one of these issues is confronting the vast majority of the resource-deprived people of the entire southwest region of the country. Roughly, two-thirds of the population is absolutely or functionally landless in a predominantly agrarian setting where land continues to remain the principal means of production. The hard-core, or ultra poor include working women and children with the lowest per capita income in the world. It is they who in a word represent the prisoners of poverty and underdevelopment. The processes of people becoming landless and land concentration coming into the hands of a tiny minority are proceeding at an alarming pace. The land-ownership structure is skewed and inequalities and disparities of the highest order characterize the retrogressive agrarian relations. Virtual denial of the right of access of the landless poor to *khasland*, tight grip of the vested interests on land management; and continued bypassing of the agrarian reforms inter alia are crucial issues. As our own survey findings suggest, there has been an area of 150,214.64 acres of *khasland* including other public land and water bodies etc in the southwest region. Amongst other major problems and constraints are a very limited access of the landless to the public sector education and training facilities and institutional credit sources; vulnerability to calamities—both natural and man-made; dwindling of natural resources and environmental degradation; very low level of social organization and mobilization; and an inadequate level of popular participation and representation in the local level governance and decision making institutions affecting their lives. Addressing all these interrelated problems and constraints in a holistic and integrated manner is expected to result in establishing their rights of access to *khasland*, water bodies and other public resources, and enhancing their participation and representation in the local governance and institutions and thereby developing and empowering them to lead their lives as real human beings with human dignity, security and justice, while equally contributing to the national economy, politics and culture.

The Strategic project areas Uttaran has covered of the southwest region include 456 villages, 54 unions and 9 upazilas of Satkhira and Khulna districts. Of the 9 upazilas, Tala, Satkhira Sadar, Assasuni, Debhata, Kaligonj and Shyamnagar under Satkhira district and Paikgacha, Batiaghata and Dumuria of Khulna district. It covers 27,880 landless households, of which 69% of are landless women. During the reporting period, a total of 4,489.97 acres of *khaslands* were recovered and distributed among the 6,654 landless poor man and women of which 3330.20 acres are temporary and 1159.77 acres are permanent settlement.

To date the organization has made a significant impact on its current interventions, which have led towards creating greater access and establishment of the land rights among the landless people. These are (1) creating social capital e.g. awakens the awareness of the poor landless people of the area about their rights to the *khaslands*; organized the people into groups which have given the extra cumulative energy; (2) contribution to poverty alleviation e.g. land, whatever small amount it is, provides scope for extra earning for the household and reduces poverty; transparent and land settlement process reduced scopes of bribing and corruption and

Nurjahan Begum stands on her feet with full self-confidence

Once upon a time, Nurjahan Begum (40) was crippled with many folds economic and social problems. Her family did not have the financial ability to meet their daily needs and even they can hardly make both ends meet. Indeed, her family had to take one or two meals in a day. She passed the time by engaging herself in the domestic work and bringing up her children. Sometimes, she helped her husband by going outside in the agriculture work. Her husband Nazrul Islam (55) was a day labor who worked in



agriculture field. Her husband worked in and around his village Jiala Nalta and adjacent areas of Tala Upazila under Sakhira District. Nurjahan Begum has four children's among them one is a son and the remaining three are daughters. Nurjahan Begum had no idea how to gain *khasland*. They were not even aware that the poor and landless people have a right to access over *khasland*. One day, Nurjahan Begum was introduced with Anisur Rahman, a field organizer of Jatpur centre for Uttaran. In fact, Anisur Rahman inspired her to enlist as a group member of Jiala Nalta village. And he helped to show her a betterment livelihood. In early 2007, Nurjahan Begum was enlisted as a group member in the "Mukti Mahila Samittee". She started to deposit and laid aside group savings to meet the future needs for her family. In the meanwhile, she got social and occupational skill training from Uttaran such as land law management, leadership and group management, poultry and pond fish culture etc. As a result, she became aware about *khasland* management right to access over *khasland*. Nurjahan Begum tries to communicate with union land (tahsil) and AC (Land) offices to get the *khasland*. Uttaran had helped to facilitate the upholding of the landless people's rights over *khasland*. Nurjahan and her husband jointly got 40 decimal *khasland* as permanent settlement. Now, she has land for living (homestead) as well as for cultivation. Nurjahan is using her land for paddy cultivation and fish culture. Her family sold taka 4500 (four thousand five hundred) through harvesting fish and got 15 mound (approx 600 Kgs) rice through paddy cultivation.

Nurjahan, in the meanwhile, arranged marriage of her eldest daughter but remaining two daughters are engaged in school to get on their study. While her son is helping his father to generate more income to make them more well off and meet their family needs. Nurjahan has been able to stand on her feet with full self-confidence and getting dignity from the society.

has saved a lot of money of the poor people; it has also reduced the trend and incidence of case filing with the police station and courts; it has helped reduce unwanted and prolonged expenditures in courts; assisted with helping the landless retain more income and reduce expenditure of the poor which ultimately contributes to poverty reduction; reduced bribing

culture e.g. normally landless people had to pay bribe to the local land administration for assuring DCR and even permanent settlement. The landless people still have to pay the bribes, but the amount and frequency of the bribes has reduced in comparison to the past. Enhanced communication among the stakeholders has contributed to this reduction in corruption. This has been especially evident in the case of land settlements where the upazila administration, landless people, civil society, UP chairmen/members kept up frequent and open communications and also face-to-face meetings. As a result, those who once demanded bribes no longer have as much capacity of doing so than before.

Uttaran has been able to serve the causes of the landless people as it supported them with social mobilization activities coupled with legal aid provisions. Uttaran facilitated support of the CS groups as they helped create a public opinion favorable to the landless people and made the public officials properly distribute *khaslands*.

Media Campaign

Media plays a vital role in creating positive change within people's opinions. Uttaran is quite involved with using print and electronic media for the promotion of people's opinions, rights and information sharing. The organization sees these outlets as effective tools for creating access for the disadvantaged people. For the year 2006-2007, Uttaran facilitated set of activities with media and media workers.

Press Conference and Workshops

Uttaran along with its partners and the wider community, including civil society groups and the newsmen (i.e. newspaper correspondents, reporters) and electronic media news persons have begun to work together towards developing a mutually shared in-depth understanding of the issues and concerns related with advancing the resource-poor people's access to public resources, establishing human rights between. Uttaran has carried out a number of special activities e.g., press conferences, workshops and fact-finding visits. It has addressed 15 press conferences on *khasland*, electoral and human rights violations, and sustainable water management issues. All of which were held at district and upazila level of Satkhira, Khulna, Jessore district.

Fellowship to Journalists

Uttaran provided fellowships to four newspaper and electronic media reporters as a means to promote investigative reporting on *khasland*, electoral and human rights violations, and sustainable water management issues. The reports were then carried in their respective newspapers. The fellowships were for 3 to 4 months in length.

The provision of fellowship is quite good for its purpose. It considerably sensitized the reporters, and hence the print media too, while informing the public on the issues affecting their lives as well as the public authorities for appropriate decisions and actions.

Campaign Materials

A number of campaign materials on Uttaran activities were developed and published as per plan. These materials came in the form of flip charts, posters, bill boards, stickers, and leaflets on land rights, water management, civic rights, human rights, women empowerment, education, and the environment. The materials focused on raising public raising as well as on demanding the establishment of peoples rights. Uttaran also published a quarterly newsletter called 'Matir Dak' for the development, public officials, donors, media person and the wider local community people too. With the support of Oxfam GB and ActionAid Bangladesh Uttaran also developed two documentary films on the waterlogging issue.



Uttaran published poster for campaign

Civic Awareness on Electoral Rights and Participation

Civic Awareness on Electoral Rights and Participation

A democratic and credible government is essential for the development of Bangladesh. With this point of view, Uttaran took part in the election process in partnership with European Commission, CIDA and Election Working Group (EWG)-a project of The Asia Foundation.

The National Parliament Election of Bangladesh was scheduled on January 22, 2007. Uttaran implemented a number of activities for having a creditable and well-accepted election to all in seventeen (17) constituencies in Satkhira, Khulna, Jessore and Bagerhat districts. List of the activities accomplished by Uttaran is given below:

a) Formation of different Forums:

i. Formation of Civil Society Brigade (CSB):

A total of seventeen CSBs were formed in 17 constituencies with local leaders, UP Chairman and members, teachers, religious leaders, social workers, businessmen, women leaders, youths, NGO workers, journalists, lawyers etc. Each Brigade consisted of 35-40 members. These Brigades arranged meetings with the DCs and other government departments to discuss and undertake initiatives for a free and fair election. The brigades also took part in civic education. The Brigades started to observe the election environment three months before the election date. Uttaran provided technical assistance for building up capacity of the brigades members. Uttaran arranged trainings, workshops and discussion meeting with the brigade members for their capacity building.

ii. Formation Election Campaign Cell (ECC):

A total of 286 ECC's were formed in village level with local leaders, UP members, teachers, religious leaders, social workers, businessmen, women leaders, youths, NGO workers. Each Cell was consisted of 35-40 members. The ECC monitored voter registration so that every voter's name was on the list. They also campaigned for free and fair elections and wider access of vulnerable voters. Uttaran provided technical support to the ECC members for getting effective and meaningful services from the ECC.

iii. Formation of Violence Resist Committee (VRC):

A Violence Resist Committee was formed in Union, Upazila and District level comprising with government officials, UP members, civil society and representatives from different political parties. A total of 78 VRCs were formed. The main purpose of the committees was to resist political violence before, during and after the Election Day in their own area.

b) Training, meeting and workshop:

i. Training & Orientation to Journalists

A training module was developed for giving comprehensive and fruitful training to the journalists. Uttaran arranged 10 trainings and orientations for the journalists in different places of the 17 constituencies. Duration of each training course was 2 days. About 25-30 journalists participated in each training session. A set training module was followed in the training courses. The journalists were imparted with knowledge and experiences on investigative and issue based media reports for making the election free, fair, democratic and meaningful.

After the training, 27 journalists in the area were given fellowship so that they can report on election matters at grass root level properly and effectively. The Journalists were very active. They regularly published election related reports in their papers. This action helped to make the citizens who read these articles conscious for taking their decision on election.

ii. Community sensitization meetings:

During the election run-up community sensitization/motivational meetings were arranged at the village level. A total of 2608 sensitization and Information Dissemination Meetings were facilitated in community level in the 17 constituencies. Some 60-70 community voters participated in each of these meetings. General information about the vote and voting system were dissemination among the voters through these meetings. Relevant print materials were distributed in these meetings. The voters became aware about the importance of casting votes, quality participation in election, free and fair election and democratic value and finally to make the electorate aware about the needs and situations of vulnerable voters. Voters' participation

in the meetings was satisfactory. They were very hopeful that they could cast their vote peacefully.

iii. Sensitization Meeting with religion-ethnic minority group:

The minority group voters are typically forced to cast their vote to the candidate associated with musclemen. They are also sometimes threatened not to go to voting center at all. Uttaran facilitated 268 sensitization Meetings with religion-ethnic minority groups. There were some 50-60 participants in each meeting. The facilitators gave communication to the voters especially the women, disabled and minority communities, to resist the type of election violence that happened during last parliament election. They also tried to motivate them to go to the polling centers for casting their votes to their chosen candidate without any threats and unfairness. The Cell members arranged their regular meetings and shared/discussed about the election situations in their locality.

Meeting with Persons With Disability (PWD):

Disabled people in Bangladesh society is considered as a burden of the family as well as in society. They are neglected and detached from the mainstream of the society. They were not given attention in preparation of voter list previously and it was a normal practice in our society. The Election Commission Bangladesh (ECB) has been giving special attention to the disabled people

in election process now. They are encouraged to enjoy their voting rights through the activities of this project. The candidates have started to evaluate the disabled people, as they are voters now.



v. Dialogue with the past and present candidates, Political Leaders and civil society:

Prior to the election date Two hundred five (205) participants from different political parties, ex-MPs and present candidates, civil society members, local leaders, journalists, teachers, social workers and villagers participated in the workshop including past candidates and ex-parliamentarians. The participants shared their previous experiences. There was constrictive debate among the leaders of the political parties. Everybody criticized the post election violence of the last parliament election and promised that they would not be involved in any election related violence this time around. They also promised that they would maintain peaceful environment in their areas. They also showed their interest to be a member of the anti-violence committee.

The participants asked many questions to the ex-parliamentarians. The political leaders promised to give more attention to the area's development in future. The political leaders discussed about their own development agenda in the session. The political leaders realized that the people are becoming more conscious about their rights and they will lose their leadership if they can't give service according to the commitments in future.

c) Publication of Election related hand-books:

i. Hand book for the polling agents:

Uttaran printed 27,500 copies of **Poling Agent's Handbook** in Bangla in consultation with the officials of ECB. These handbooks were distributed to the political parties to orient their polling agents before the elections so that they perform effectively during the polling.

ii. Hand book on election guidelines, policy brief on "election laws"

A total of 1000 hand-books on election guidelines, policy briefs and "election laws" were printed and distributed among the political parties, brigades, committees and stakeholders. in raising their knowledge and experiences on election rules and regulations

d) Round table:

i. Regional round table:

Uttaran arranged 14 round table discussions with the regional newspapers in Khulna, Satkhira, Bagerhat and Jessore districts. The main topics of the round tables were "Code of Conduct and Reality ". Editors of the news papers, journalists, political leaders, ex-MPs, teachers, social workers, scholars, different professionals, chairman and members of UPs, candidates of the election, civil society representatives, government representatives, youths and students participated in the events. Many very valuable discussions on the election issues occurred. The participants got the opportunity to acquire knowledge about election laws, code and conducts through the discussion sessions. The political parties and the candidates promised to follow the code of Conducts of election. The political parties got opportunity to share their political manifesto and their planning for the area with the participants of the round table.

ii. Round Table with Educational Institutions:

A round table meeting with the Education Institutions was arranged in the training centre of Samadhan, Keshobpur, Jessore on 28-12-2006. Samadhan is a partner NGO of Uttaran network. Thirty-nine (39) teachers from different schools and colleges in Monirampur and Keshobpur Upazillas participated in the round table meeting. Mr. Khan Md. Nurul Amin, Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Keshobpur Upazilla was the chief guest of this event. The thematic title of the round table was "*Civic Education into the formal academic institutions in Bangladesh*"— important issue for institutionalizing the concept of having free and fair election with quality participation of all the stakeholders.

e) IEC materials develop and dissemination:

Uttaran produced different types of IEC materials for sensitization of the people for a free and fair election with everyone's participation. The IEC materials were stickers, posters, billboards, video presentation, T-shirt, cap, hand-books etc. The materials contained information on free and fair election and democratic values. Two major issues were addressed in IEC materials; one was voter education and another was civic education at large. Voter education was targeted to deliver basic voter information that every voter should know. Civic education was focused much more on broader concepts supporting a democratic society such as the respective roles and responsibilities of citizens, government, political parties etc.

Unfortunately the present Care Taker Government on 11-1-2007 canceled the election because the major political parties' involvement in election was not ensured. The parties thought that the Election Commission and the Government's (at that time) preparation was not in favour for a free and fair election.

5. Natural Resources and Risk Reduction Management

The coastal areas of Bangladesh are quite different from rest of the country not only because of its unique geo-physical characteristics but also for different socio-economic and political consequences that often limit people's access to endowed resources and perpetuate risk and vulnerabilities. There is a close proximity between livelihoods of the coastal people and such vulnerabilities. This is because of the way livelihood earnings of one people has become a catastrophes to others (for instance monoculture of shrimp limits crop farming by small farmers). Although the affect of natural catastrophes i.e. flood, cyclone, tidal surge etc. are common for all coping with these is quite different among different class of people. As the coping capacity is a function of ones asset base (both ownership and access too). The poor are more vulnerable as their asset base is significantly low or all together non-existent. The vulnerability of all the people in the area is accelerating further because of the current change in the planets climate. A World Bank's study on the impact of Sea level rise in Bangladesh reveals that, 15 to 17 percent land areas of i.e. 22135 to 26562 square kilometers will be inundated within next 100 years by 100 cm sea level rise. This will in turn make 2 crore (20 million) people environmental refugees. Bangladesh simply may not be able to support such huge migration uprooted people.



Uttaran upholds that natural resources land, water, soil, plants and animals should be used or managed in a way that focus on quality of life for both present and future generations which means sustainable development. Uttaran is therefore undertaking advocacy, research, and capacity building activities to ensure proper management of the areas natural resources while at the same time reducing risk and vulnerability of the people and area.

Advocacy:

Revival of tidal rivers, addressing the water logging problem, access to safe drinking water, the negative impact of large-scale infrastructural development project, have been the focus areas of natural resource related advocacy activities. Several workshops, meetings and discussion were held. One significant activity was the people's consultation meeting held in Tala. A few other worth mentioning are the Round table Conference with Daily Samakal at Dhaka press club, and a publication of a booklet on the need of safe drinking water in south-western coastal belt of Bangladesh.

Round table conference

A Round Table Conference on the water-logging problem in South-Western Coastal Region was arranged with leading national daily newspaper *Samakal* in mid December 2006 at Dhaka Press Club. All major key stakeholders were present including government representatives, policy makers, think tanks and donor agencies. Hua Du, Country Director of ADB also attended the round table. Excerpts of their opinions are highlighted herewith. In the conference it was revealed that despite several efforts taken at different times, major problems still exist. The water logged areas are facing large scale human and financial disaster. Yet despite this fact it has not been identified as a national disaster. In the conference, expert opined that, TRM is a

চাই স্থানীয় জনগণকে নিয়ে প্রকৃতির সঙ্গে সামঞ্জস্যপূর্ণ পানি ব্যবস্থাপনা ও প্রকল্প

১৩ অক্টোবর প্রতিবেদন

উত্তর-পশ্চিমবঙ্গে জলাবদ্ধতা যা আরও বাড়তে পারবে, এ উদ্বেগে বিবেচনা করে এ বছর দুটিই জলাবদ্ধতা নিয়ে পরিচালিত করে হয়েছে এবং বর্তমান বন্য জলাবদ্ধতাও যদি বর্ধিত হয়, এ প্রকল্প নিয়ে গবেষণা করা হবে। প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য হল জলাবদ্ধতা নিয়ে স্থানীয় জনগণকে নিয়ে একটি গোলটেবিল সভা করা হবে। এ সভায় স্থানীয় জনগণের মতামত জানা হবে এবং প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে আলোচনা করা হবে। এ সভায় স্থানীয় জনগণের মতামত জানা হবে এবং প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে আলোচনা করা হবে।



উত্তর-পশ্চিমবঙ্গে জলাবদ্ধতা নিয়ে গোলটেবিল সভা করে স্থানীয় জনগণের মতামত জানা হবে।

প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য হল জলাবদ্ধতা নিয়ে স্থানীয় জনগণের মতামত জানা হবে এবং প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে আলোচনা করা হবে। এ সভায় স্থানীয় জনগণের মতামত জানা হবে এবং প্রকল্পের উদ্দেশ্য নিয়ে আলোচনা করা হবে।

suitable solution but not enough to resolve the entire existing problem. Solutions to the water logging also lie in enlivening and connecting the Mathavanga with the Kapotaksha and Bhairob, having coordination between stakeholders, ensuring accountability and transparency of Water Development Board and having the people's involvement in the decision making process.

The consultation meeting and Round table conference was successful as the Bangladesh Water Development Board and ADB accepted the idea of formation of Multi-stakeholder Forum (MSF) for water management projects in the area and carrying out an Evaluation of Khulna-Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project. The ADB started its evaluation of the project in March when first Evaluation mission undertaken on 13 March to 3 April 2007, Second Mission on 23 May-1st June 2007.

Peoples' consultation meeting:

A peoples' consultation meeting was held in mid 2006 at Uttaran IDRT in Tala. Representatives from BothEnds, Oxfam-GB, ActionAid, IWM, CEGIS, Royal Netherlands Embassy, ADB-Bangladesh office, ADB- Manila Office, BWDB, BGS, Paani Committee, WMA, Uttaran, UP Forum, elected representatives of UP and members of civil society attended the meeting. In this consultation meeting, the negative impact of KJDRP, waterlogging problem, Tidal River Management (TRM) as viable technical solution to waterlogging problem and silt deposit on the river bed, role of WMA, BWDB and ADB were discussed. In the meeting Uttaran, on the behalf of the people of South-Western Coastal zone, proposed the adoption of TRM instead of construction of polders and switch gate, provision of compensation to the people living in the TRM area, Evaluation of KJDRP and formation of Multi Stakeholder Forum (MSF). One poster he on water logging issue was published during the reporting period.

Action research on saline tolerant integrated fish, crop and vegetable cultivation

Shrimp cultivation has been the prime economic activity of the people of Satkhira. This monoculture goes against the natural ecosystem of the area and has a severe negative impact on environment as well as on livelihood activities of the poor. In 2005, Uttaran initiated an action research project to promote environmental friendly poly culture. Since then various pilot projects surrounding integrated cultivation of various vegetables, fishes and crops have been started.

Initially a committee of 50 landless people was formed under the name of *Malakuray Krishi Unmayan Kendra* to carryout this initiative. Presently 4.13 acres of land have been brought under the piloting activity. Important research findings are: Reed and fish culture simultaneously can be carried in the same field, Reed cultivation is profitable as various types mates made of Reed demand in the market; Fish culture as well as vegetable cultivation on the dykes of fish farmer is possible; BR 28 Paddy and fish can be cultivated in the same field.



Uttaran's action research to promote environment friendly poly culture

Promotion of crab cultivation

Uttaran has been promoting crab cultivation and fattening under the project named 'Integrated Approach for Promotion of Crab to EU Counties'. The aim of this project is to have shrimp farmers move from away from the practice of a Shrimp based monoculture. Another important aspect of crab cultivation is, compared to shrimp cultivation, it allows poor farmers to adopt this profession, as it requires a small amount of land, energy, and money. The cultivation project was implemented in some part of Satkhira and Khulna Districts.

Activities of the crab cultivation project were: mapping of crab farmers; training of 1000 farmers and 25 depot owners, establishment 40 demonstration plots, 25 day long workshop, district level seminars, and a farmer conferences. One hundred and fifty persons participated and 1000 farmers attended the conference. The creation of IEC materials like training modules, a brochure on crab fattening, booklet: A Guide for Farmers, briefing paper, and seminar paper were developed under the project. Lesson learned through this project were: 1) Success of the project highly depended on the appropriate selection of the site. 2). Collection of premature crabs for fattening from similar environment is congenial. 3). The farming of crab culture/fattening is mostly community based. 4) If any project has direct implication increasing ones income in a very short time it then receives appreciation and quick acceptance. 5) Women are more efficient in any livelihood activities that need intensive and close care 6) Crab fattening is a viable livelihood option for the poor women of coastal belt. 7) Demonstration plots play an important role for replication.



A woman crab farmer

Coastal biodiversity conservation through creating alternative income generation facilities

This 4-year project has been initiated in December 2006 in Kaligong and Debhata upazilas of Satkhira. The primary objective of the project is to improve alternative livelihoods as well as planting and conserving existing indigenous flora. Till now, under this project three fresh fish demonstration plots have been developed, 250 paroi (special fish collectors) are given training on fresh water fish farming to reduce their dependency on Sundarban forest through promoting alternative livelihood. Moreover, 2500 saplings of 16 endangered species were distributed among 47 families for plantation.

Capacity building of marginal people to sustainable livelihood

The project began in 2005 for 4 years in Tala and Satkhira Upazila to assist marginal people to secure sustainable livelihood. Under this project people are trained and aware about Integrated Crop Management (ICM), System for Rice Intensification (SRI) methods, use of Leaf Color Chart (LCC), use of guti urea, improved fertilizer management, and quality rice seed production and preservation through proper roughing to ensure better yield. Demonstration plots on these methods are also developed under this project. During this specific year 297 SRI, 594 ICM demonstration plots were developed. Moreover, 3201, 2078, 1210, 858 and 218 households practiced ICM, used LCC, improved fertilizer management, quality rice seed production and preservation through proper roughing and applied guti urea for better yield respectively.

During this year special attention was also given to vegetable production and to improving the current food security situation. Project beneficiaries applied various types of methods for vegetable production (for detail see table below).

Activity	Number of household
Homestead vegetable cultivation (bed)	2309
Homestead vegetable cultivation (pit)	1913
Homestead vegetable cultivation (macha)	822
Vine cropping	942
Dike cropping	247
Artificial pollination	158
Pond side vegetable cultivation	318
Roadside vegetable cultivation	243
Integrated Pest Management practice	769
Preparation of Farm Yard Manure (FYM)	959
Compost preparation	672
Vegetable nursery	55
Vegetable seed production	526

Besides the above activities, several initiatives related to Tree management, aquaculture and livestock were undertaken. Under the tree management activity 12 nurseries are developed and plantation of 3226 trees was done. In the area of aquaculture 162 households practiced pond fish culture while 38 carried out rice cum fish culture activities.

Under this project attempts were also made to promote livestock related activities. These activities are beef fattening, Milchy cow rearing, artificial insemination, and Cow and poultry shade improvement, vaccination of poultry, duck, cow and goat and de-worming of cow and goat (see table below). Apart from it, 408 households cultivated fodder.

Activity	Number
Beef fattening	696
Milchy cow rearing	150
Artificial insemination	170
Cow and poultry shade improvement	1136
Vaccination practice	8268
De-worming	1131

6. Disaster Risk Reduction Management

Bangladesh faces various types of disaster e.g. floods, water logging, river erosion, cyclones and drought etc. With every disaster the people and the country loose such things as their shelters, household materials, crops, trees, livestock, communication systems, infrastructures, buildings, institutions, and sanitation systems. During these events safe drinking water is not available and the people are forced to use unsafe disaster-affected water causing the spread of waterborne diseases like diarrhea, dysentery, skin disease and scabies to occur. The affected people lose their earning sources and suffer from food crises and other needs. Many people die of waterborne diseases, lack of proper treatment, snake biting and scarcity of food and safe drinking water. Livelihood in the disaster affected areas become challenging.



The geographical location of Bangladesh is partially responsible for these natural calamities, the rest are caused by the unwise and unplanned so-called development projects undertaken by the government and development agencies. Moreover, Bangladesh is one of the worst victims of climate change caused by global warming and the green house effect. Environmentalists have cautioned that persistent water logging will submerge a greater portion of the southern Bangladesh as the sea level is rising.

Our country is facing ever more frequently devastating disasters. Our economic growth and development is constantly being challenged. With each disaster the people become increasingly vulnerable. With proper planning, preparation and management we can reduce the amount of sorrow, suffering and damages that occur during these events.

The disaster response community is now shifting its emphasis from immediate relief to *Disaster risk reduction management* (DRRM) for reduction of peoples' vulnerability in disaster. Considering this view, Uttaran has undertaken Disaster Risk Reduction Management projects in collaboration with Oxfam GB and CDMP (Comprehensive Disaster Management Project), a joint project of the government of Bangladesh and UNDP.

Southwest region districts of Satkhira, Khulna, Bagerhat and Jessore are considered high-risk disaster areas. Uttaran has taken initiatives to reduce the vulnerability of the disaster-affected people in these areas through building awareness on DRRM.

Uttaran's intervention on DRR

a) Formation of DRRM Committees in different levels

DRRM Committees have been formed and/or reactivate the old committees in village, union, upazilla, pouroshava and district level. The committees have been formed comprising the government officials, UP members, social workers, NGO workers, teachers, religious leaders, political leaders, journalists, youths and students. There are 30-35 members in each committee. The committees are comprised with male and female members. The committees meet at least once a month for discussion about disaster risk reduction management in their area and to create plans for preparedness of reduction of the vulnerability of the people if they face disaster in future. Uttaran provided technical support to the committees for their capacity building and in making awareness on risk management.

b) Capacity Building of DRR Members and Volunteers:

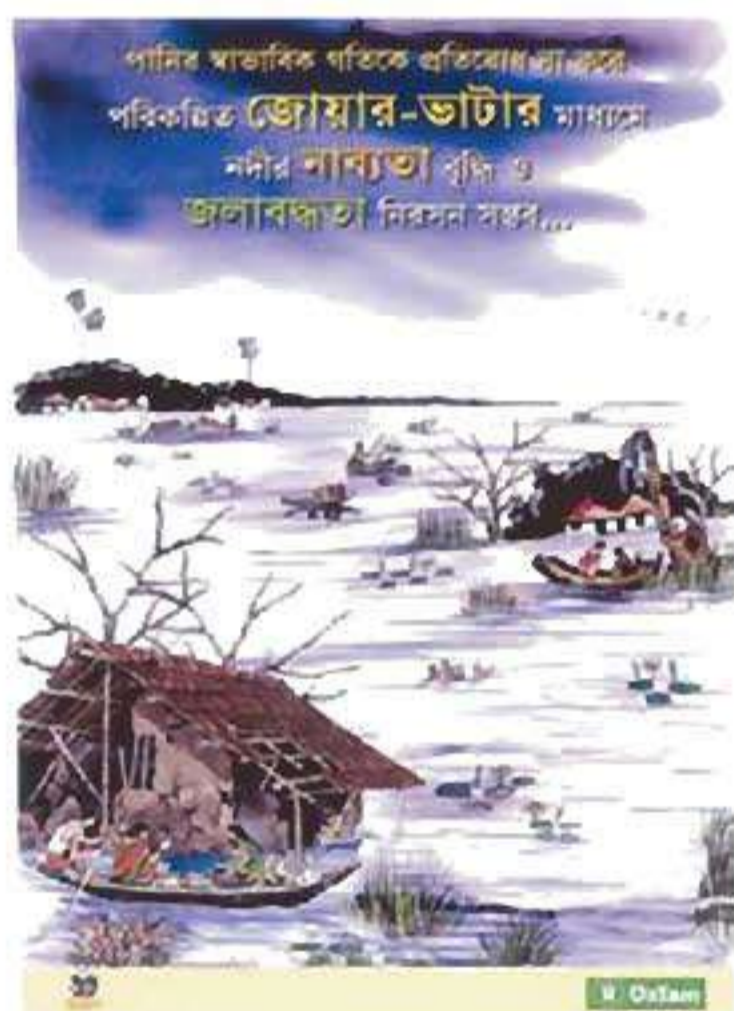
Uttaran facilitated training sessions for the committee members of different levels and the volunteers on DRR for their capacity building. A total of 2080 DMC members of different committees along with volunteers have been given training for 5 days duration including 2 days follow-up training. The trained participants shared their learning with the community people as the cascade approached. Apart from this, other meetings and workshops were arranged with the stakeholders on DRR in Upazila and district level. Discussion topics of these workshops included saving money, storing food, collecting firewood, matches and fodder, flood resistant house building, raising homestead, and creating of latrine and platform of the tube wells above flood level.

c) Income generation:

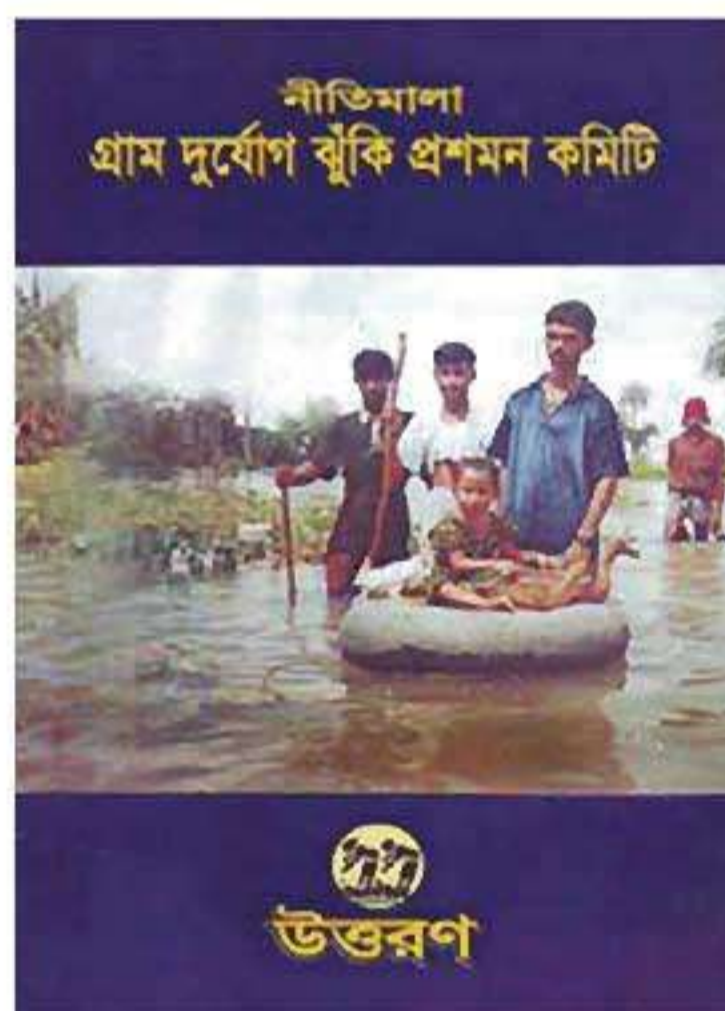
A total of 60 distressed women were given training on homestead gardening and goat rearing training for 2 days. After training 20 women were given vegetable seeds and fertilizer and 40 were given female-goat for their income generation. These initiatives increased their income and savings and it helped them to meet their need in disaster period.

d) Awareness Raising:

For building awareness on DRR, Uttaran produced and displayed posters, leaflets, billboard and IEC materials. A discussion meeting was arranged on National Disaster Preparedness in Tala, Satkhira on March 2007. Through this daylong awareness campaign and discussion, the participants understood the reasons of water logging and flood problem in the area and their preparatory work for reducing their suffering. The event created an opportunity to have dialogue between the community people and the government administration and raising the people's demand for the solution of the water-logging problem in the area. Approximately 300 participants participated in the discussion meeting.



Booklet



Poster

f) Advocacy:

Uttaran undertook a tactical battle by engaging key actors such as civil society, upazila and district Administration to take up the flood and water logging issue of ensuring sustainable disaster management for the region. Uttaran supplemented its activity through continuous publicity and media campaign, intensive persuasion work or lobbying for pushing the adoption of peoples' alternative option for sustainable disaster management and adaptation strategy, and mobilization to project grassroots agenda and ensure media coverage.

g) Institution Building and Input Support:

Uttaran formed 30 Village Disaster Management Committees, 40 Union Disaster Management Committees (UDMC), 4 Upazila Disaster Management Committees, 1 Pouroshava Committee and 1 District Disaster Management Committee in Satkhira district. All committees were very active. They arranged their meetings regularly and try to take necessary actions for reducing problems of the people in the areas. Apart from this, the committee influenced the necessary authorities to take necessary measures like VGF cards distribution, food/cash for work, road repairing and construction, earth raising activities, tube well repairing and installation, and supplying sanitary latrine materials.

Uttaran's initiative has immensely contributed to the development of disaster preparedness knowledge of the Disaster Management Committee members as well as communities, which is directly reducing the risk of the peoples' life and assets.

Relief and Rehabilitation Program

Southwest region of Bangladesh is known as disaster prone area due to its morphological and geographical situation. The area is experienced in flood, cyclone, high tidal surge and water logging calamity in frequently. A vast area of the region became submerged and marooned due to loss of drainage system of the rivers in the area as the rivers bed have been silted and raising the sea level gradually. The rivers have lost their navigation abilities and are drying up as an affect of constructed embankment in the coastal belt in the name of green revolution in 1960s. As a result, a permanent water logging has been created in the area for last 20-25 years. The people in the water logging area facing flood if there is heavy down pour, high tidal surge and on rush water flowing from the upper stream.

In the year of 2006, the people in the water-logging area experienced unprecedented severe flood during the rainy season, thus causing severe water logging and human suffering. The marooned people lost their paddy fields, homesteads and livelihood. They were forced to sale their livestock. Many people had to leave their house and take shelter in the nearby schools, flood shelters and even on the side of roads and embankments. Sanitation was become a nightmare and waterborne diseases like diarrhea and scabies became endemic. Many people permanently moved onto embankments and roadside. Educational institutions severely damaged and children were forced to discontinue education. Safe drinking water was a rarity. The unemployment situation was very high and people were migrating to town/cities in search of livelihood. People in the flood-affected area became very vulnerable. In response to this Uttaran undertook *Relief Operation and post flood rehabilitation projects* in the flood-affected area with the support of Miserior, Oxfam GB, Trocaire and Action Aid. Uttaran operated Relief and Rehabilitation activates in 8 Unions of Tala Upazila, 1 Union of Satkhira Sador Upazila in Satkhira district, 7 Unions of Keshebpur, 1 Union of Monirampur in Jessore district and Atulia Union of Dumuria Upazila in Khulna district.

Flood 2006 response of Uttaran has been given below:

A. Relief Operation:

1. Emergency shelter materials supply:

Most of the houses in the area are made of mud foundations and walls and tiled roofs. Many houses were completely damaged by the flood. The people took shelter beside the road. Uttaran supplied plastic sheets, bamboo, rope and other materials to 1017 families for making temporary shelter; otherwise they had to live in open sky. This support gave security of the homeless people from weather as well as risk.

2. Food package supply:

A good number of people in the flood affected areas lost their house, crops, cattle, livestock, and other belongings. They became jobless. As a result they passed their days without food or inadequate food. To save the life of the vulnerable people, Uttaran supplied food package to 8740 families. Total food package supply was 366,600 H/H days. The food packages contained rice, pulse, potato, edible oil, salt, baby food etc. The food package reduced vulnerability of the people in flood-affected areas.

3. Non Food Items supply (NFI):

The people in the area are very poor, as they can't cultivate their land due to water logging for 8-9 months in a year. No job is available in the area. So as a result the people are very poor in the area. Moreover they had to leave behind all their domestic utensils, cloths and other useful things when come to the safe place for shelter. Most of their useful things were damaged. Uttaran supplied NFI package to 4900 households. The package contained rice cook pot, pan, bucket, plate jug, glass, shari, lungi, baby dress, stove, firewood, hurricane, fire box etc. These helped them to maintain a normal life.

4. Hygiene materials supply:

The flood affected area created unhygienic environment. Water was polluted, rotten things were laying here and there, clay, and dirty things were everywhere. The people were in risk to maintain their health condition. Uttaran supplied water purification tablets, laundry and bath soaps, sanitary napkins, ORS saline, alum etc. to 4900 families. The affected people were able to maintain their health well.

B. Rehabilitation Activities:

1. Cash for work:

When the floodwater was drained out and/or dried up then the people who took shelter in Schools, colleges, community healths centre, roadside and other safe places returned to their home. But there was no job available in the area. Uttaran started the cash for work programmed for the affected people. A total of 650 people, one from one household were provided job for 30 days. A total 19500 household days job were created through this activity. The objectives of Cash for Work are two-fold; one is income generation for meeting family needs and the second is repairing the deplorable roads, removing silt from the cannel, earth raising on public places and school grounds etc. Each worker was paid Tk.70/ per day.

2. Housing support:

Uttaran selected 100 most vulnerable families for rebuilding their houses. The families lived in mud houses that were fully damaged by the flood. Their home yards were also under water. The beneficiaries took shelter in schools and in temporary make shad on roadside. They had no capacity to rebuild their houses by themselves. Uttaran supplied bamboo, RCC pillars, bricks, cement, sand and tiles for roof and accessories for rebuilding houses in their home yards. Uttaran put an emphasis on building long lasting flood resistant houses. The floor of the houses were raised above flood level, the outside of the foundation is covered with bricks wall for protection of soil erosion by flood and used RCC pillars so that the houses do not lie down in flood or storm in future. Uttaran technical staff provided support to the homeowners when houses were constructed. A sanitary latrine was also built with each house. The beneficiaries have been happily living in their new houses ever since.

3. Sanitary latrine Support:

All the latrines in the flood-affected area were fully damaged. The people used open sky and/or bushes as latrine. Women cannot use open sky for latrine purposes in day. So they had to wait up to dark for latrine uses. It was a big problem for them. The people lived in risk for spring out diseases in the area. The poor people were unable to reinstall their latrine due to lack of money. Uttaran supplied five pieces of concrete rings and one slab for reinstallation a sanitary latrine in her homestead. Sanitary latrine support has been given to 672 families.

4. Tube-well support:

There are not enough tube-wells in the area. Moreover the tube-wells are being drowned in water lodging for most of the times of the year. The floodwater reached up to spout of the tube-wells. So, the people had a problem of collecting safe drinking water in the area. Surface water in the area, used for cleaning, cooking and bathing became polluted. As a result, the people suffered from water borne diseases. They collected drinking water from as far as 4-5 Km away. For availability of drinking water in the areas, Uttaran installed 161 tube-wells in the project areas. The tube-wells installed in a height of above flood level so that these do not affect in flood in future. These have been installed in the places from where the villagers may collect drinking water easily. The villagers bear the maintenance costs of the tube-wells together. In average 30-40 households are collecting safe drinking water from one tube-well. About 6000 individual is getting safe drinking water from these tube-wells.

5. Livelihood support:

Uttaran provided livelihood support to 500 households for their income generation. The support was provided in different components. Specific support given can be seen in the list below:

a) Instruments for Drum party:	60 H/H
b) Supply Dheki (Traditional paddy husking Tools):	80 H/H
c) Sewing machine support :	100 H/H
d) Tools for Carpenters, Masons and Weavers:	90 H/H
e) Fishing net and boat support:	170 H/H
	<hr/>
	500 H/H

C. Education support:

1) Provided Examination fees:

The vulnerable families had no capacity to bear examination fees of their children who would appear in SSC and HSC examination. As a result the children were in direct risk of getting behind in their school year. Another problem is that the education syllabus changed for each session. To help the students of SSC and HSC, Uttaran provided examination fees to 220 students. As a result the students got opportunity to appear in the examination.

2) Supply education materials:

The flood damaged books of the students. It hampered to continue their study. The parents were not able to purchase books and other educational materials for their children due to lack of money. Uttaran supplied books and other materials to 840 students from class 3 to class 8. The students were very happy and started to go to school again.

During the flood time, Uttaran published two types of poster for shelter people. The main messages of these two posters were to describe how to prevent diahorea and use safe water in all activities.



Food distribution during flood time



Uttaran Published poster on health



Uttaran published poster on safe drinking water

Monowara's voice

Monowara lives in Pazia village of Pazia union of Keshabpur Upazila: under Jessore district. She is a separated woman. She has one son and old father and mother. She is the main income-earning member of her family. This year flood she became jobless. She is selling snails and in an average earns maximum 500-600 taka in a month. She told us that if they did not get food package, they could not manage their food because of flood situation. At the moment she believes that during the time of disaster, some organizations like Uttaran come forward to support the affected people. She is very much grateful for receiving package support of Oxfam GB through Uttaran.



6. Good Governance and Democratization:

There are many formal structures of democracy in Bangladesh, but most of them function in an undemocratic manner with very limited transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and openness to public input. The local government continues to remain an extension of the central government in Bangladesh. Uttaran is consciously taking governance as crosscutting strategies to all its current initiatives to ensure sustainability in the light of transparency, accountability and local stakeholdership. Uttaran is actively implementing programs for strengthening local government of Southwest Bangladesh, NGOs and greater civil society to contribute in changing the current role of the UPs towards becoming democratic, responsive, transparent and accountable institutions.

In this reporting period, Uttaran has implemented trainings on Responsive Governance, Gender base governance, Mediation, UP manual and Act, Gender and development, Women and child rights, Participatory impact monitoring, Art of advocacy, Responsive governance workshops on local resource mobilization, incorporation of social issues in the Ups plan, freedom from external influences of Ups, observed relevant international days and submitted Memorandum to legal authorities, organized press conferences on social issues and challenges concerning governance and local governments, which participated by journalists, UP members and civil society organization leaders in the southwest region, reactivated, regulated and functioning the activities of District Legal Aid Committee and Village court by facilitating regular meeting, sharing session, public hearing at UP level and continuing support to the victims for court cases.

Uttaran also facilitated the formation and strengthening of Standing Committee through conduct series of meeting at different level, given workshops on various themes on democratization and good governance. These process were facilitated to increase understanding on various issues and its underlying implications such as on environment, climate change, gender, khash land recovery, women and child trafficking, quality primary education, water and sanitation etc.

7. IDRT: Building Capacity for Development Activists

Uttaran has incorporated capacity building as an integral part of all its programs. The main objective of the training division of Uttaran is to strengthen the skill and knowledge of Uttaran and other NGO staff as well as larger civil society actors.

To achieve the best results of the courses and to ensure the uniformity of all program interventions, a need-based, learner-centered, flexible and participatory approach is adopted. With this view in end, Uttaran carried out different learning approaches in its programmes such as brain storming, small and large group discussion, case study, field visit, role playing, mobile plenary, simulation games, video demonstrations, open discussion, debates, seminars and workshops.

Uttaran has a very good and furnished training and resource centre called the IDRT on the riverbank of Kopatakha at Tala upazila under Satkhira district. The training hostel has 36 bed accommodation facilities. It also has well equipped training halls, library, audio-visual aids and entertainment facilities.



Uttaran training centre at Tala, Satkhira

Uttaran uses its training to enhance the capacities of its development partners. There are two types of trainings provided for the development partners. The social sector training includes basic concepts of human development, gender and development, human rights and legal aid, primary health care and environment education. The other sort of training lies with operational and technical skill training including account management, plant nursery, regenerative agriculture, fresh water aquaculture, duck raising, crab fattening, and poultry.

Uttaran
Tala, Satkhira

Balance Sheet as at 30 June 2007

PROPERTY AND ASSETS	Notes	2006-2007 <u>Amount in Taka</u>	2005-2006 <u>Amount in Taka</u>
Fixed Assets	13	17,485,437.91	16,835,484.54
Revolving Loan Fund	14	38,893,504.00	32,081,315.00
Advances Accounts	16	864,228.76	864,228.76
Loan Account	15	690,937.00	690,937.00
Cash and bank Balances	17	7,962,508.00	13,321,335.81
TOTAL ASSETS		<u>65,896,615.67</u>	<u>63,793,301.11</u>
 FUND AND LIABILITIES			
Fund and Equity Account	10	43,750,991.13	46,736,344.57
Current Liabilities	11	3,343,315.54	1,639,511.54
Group Member Savings	12	18,802,309.00	15,417,445.00
TOTAL LIABILITIES		<u>65,896,615.67</u>	<u>63,793,301.11</u>

Director

Coordinator (A&F)

Signed in terms of our separate report of even date annexed

Date: Dhaka, Bangladesh
February 04, 2008

MM HOSSAIN & CO
Chartered Accountants

MM HOSSAIN & CO
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Uttaran
Tala, Satkhira

Income and Expenditures Accounts for the year ended 30 June 2007

INCOME	Notes	2006-2007 Amount in Taka	2005-2006 Amount in Taka
Donor Grant Received		95,394,655.00	31,306,757.97
Uttaran General Fund		169,869.00	-
Overhead Received		591,087.00	534,397.00
Staff Contribution		-	458,125.00
Other Income (MCP)		155,855.00	436,806.00
Service Charges		4,428,322.00	5,186,037.00
Other Received		2,732,228.00	1,403,023.00
Networking Income		-	149,187.00
Bank Interest		90,013.00	22,302.85
TOTAL INCOME		103,562,029.00	39,496,635.82
EXPENDITURES			
Personnel/Salary		19,960,598.00	13,779,876.00
Program Cost		64,595,937.00	15,108,736.00
Administrative Cost		14,488,398.81	9,927,687.11
Overhead Cost		991,087.00	448,874.00
Grant Refund		-	957,226.00
Interest on Savings/CARE		1,349,527.00	46,945.00
Depreciation		1,765,789.63	1,537,227.42
Surplus transferred to Balance Sheet		410,691.56	(2,309,935.71)
TOTAL EXPENDITURES		103,562,029.00	39,496,635.82

Director

Coordinator (A&F)
Examined and found correct

Date: Dhaka, Bangladesh
February 04, 2008

MM HOSSAIN & CO
Chartered Accountants

MM HOSSAIN & CO
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Uttaran

Tala, Satkhira

Receipts and Payments Accounts for the year ended 30 June 2007

RECEIPTS	Notes	2006-2007 Amount in Taka	2005-2006 Amount in Taka
Opening balances	18	13,321,335.81	10,043,001.26
Donor Grant Received	19	95,394,655.00	31,306,757.97
Uttaran General Fund	20	169,869.00	-
Overhead Received		591,087.00	534,397.00
Other Income	23	2,621,289.00	894,931.00
Loan Account		-	886,298.00
Fund Received		-	11,788,978.90
Savings and Credit Program	21	49,890,634.00	46,103,664.00
Networking Income		-	149,187.00
Loan Received (Outside)	24	392,907.00	-
Advance Realization			51,227.00
Bank Interest	22	90,013.00	22,302.85
Gratuity Fund Received		456,836.00	-
TOTAL RECEIPTS		162,928,625.81	101,780,744.98
PAYMENTS			
Personnel/Salary	26	19,960,598.00	13,779,876.00
Program Cost	25	69,588,676.00	15,108,736.00
Administrative Cost	27	10,464,524.81	9,927,687.11
Capital Cost	28	2,415,743.00	2,092,743.00
Grant Refund/Adjusted		514,567.00	957,226.00
Loan Account	29	1,034,540.00	3,526,257.06
Gratuity Fund Refund		695,859.00	141,887.00
Overhead Cost		991,087.00	448,874.00
Savings and Credit Program	30	49,200,523.00	42,476,123.00
Dues Refund to SCUU		100,000.00	-
Closing Balances	18	7,962,508.00	13,321,335.81
TOTAL PAYMENTS		162,928,625.81	101,780,744.98

Director

Coordinator (A&F)
Examined and found correct

Date: Dhaka, Bangladesh
.February 04, 2008

MM HOSSAIN & CO
Chartered Accountants

MM HOSSAIN & CO
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Donor Grant Received

Name of Donors	2006-2007 Amount in Taka	2005-2006 Amount in Taka
Manusher Jonno (APAR)	11,997,315.00	11,184,824.00
European Union (CRAB)	6,304,382.00	-
European Union (CAP)	10,839,466.00	-
European Union/WJCC (Lobster)	1,000,000.00	-
ActionAid Bangladesh (Livehood Munshigonj)	1,549,424.00	1,176,536.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (Livehood Dacop)	-	1,328,617.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (Sanitation Project)	-	500,000.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (DA)	5,001,374.00	5,701,721.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (CEF)	231,252.00	1,573,305.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (FoSHoL)	3,704,447.00	3,618,792.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (Sponsoship)	-	22,702.00
ActionAid Bangladesh (Relief Activities)	7,885,216.00	-
MISEREOR (Regular Project Activities)	1,304,723.00	1,210,116.00
MISEREOR (Relief Activities)	956,925.00	-
Oxfam-GB (Regular Project Activities)	1,786,112.00	938,049.00
Oxfam-GB (Relief Activities)	7,206,250.00	-
Oxfam-GB (ECHO Relief Activities)	17,500,000.00	-
CDMP	2,549,860.00	-
CARE RVCC	-	121,058.00
TROCAIRE (Regular Project Activities)	-	1,262,885.00
TROCAIRE (Relief Activities)	6,751,168.00	-
CIDA Election	1,356,411.00	-
CIDA Gender	1,179,166.00	-
JOCS-Relief Activities	433,118.00	-
SSI-BCCC	1,869,710.00	1,874,777.00
Arrannyak Foundation (Coastal)	683,237.00	-
Arrannyak Foundation (Agro Forestry)	228,582.00	-
Japan Bangladesh Friendship Society/M.College	589,146.00	-
The Asia Foundation (Election)	1,098,727.00	-
OPEC-ASEH	1,363,644.00	-
AED	-	394,623.00
NGO Forum/Khodama	-	347,537.97
Forest Department	-	51,215.00
SAP	25,000.00	-
TOTAL TAKA	95,394,655.00	31,306,757.97

Director

Coordinator (A&F)
Examined and found correct

Date: Dhaka, Bangladesh
February 17, 2007

MM HOSSAIN & CO
Chartered Accountants

Annex

18 Magh 1413 .
31 January 2007

The Deputy Commissioner
Deputy Commissioner's Office
Satkhira

Sub: An appeal for Mr. Shahidul Islam, Executive Director, Uttaran

Dear Sir

Greetings from ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB).

We have come to know from the newspaper that the Director of Uttaran, Mr. Shahidul Islam has been arrested and put under detention for one month. This is indeed shocking news for us.

Uttaran is a partner of ActionAid Bangladesh for the last 8 years. Before selecting partner, AAB goes through an extensive scrutiny process to find the most suitable partner in term of honesty, transparency and capacity. Uttaran had go to through such a scrutiny process and the organization as well as its Director proved himself to be honest, transparent and most devoted to the welfare of the poor people.

Uttaran has commitment to land rights issues in regards to landless and poor peoples in the area of Satkhira and Khulna. The organization, led by Mr. Shahidul Islam, has so far shown optimum commitment to changing the lot of landless people by the covering Khas land and distributing them among the have-nots. So far as many as 26000 poor peoples, mostly women of Satkhira and Khulna have been benefited from receiving Khas land which has given them the opportunity of better livelihood options. AAB is very satisfied with the performance of UTTARAN and the commitment of its director.

So far our knowledge goes, we have not found Mr Shahidul Islam having adapted any non-transparent and unfair means in dealing with the program activities of different donors including ours. We strongly believe that Mr Shahidul Islam is an activist with the devotion to the welfare of the poor people and posses an honest disposition of the highest order. Uttaran is also implementing, in joint partnership w with ActionAid Bangladesh, an emergency project in the waterlogged area in Satkhira. Because of his arrest that entire wok and its progress has been halted and programme beneficiaries are suffering.

ActionAid is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world - a world without poverty.

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ActionAid was established
in UK in 1972 and
in Bangladesh in 1983


Therefore, the tribulation he is now suffering due to the arrest is very unfortunate. We appeal to you for his early release, humane treatment during his detention and no further extension of detention. It would be very sad for an honest man like him to be punished for any unfounded crime.

We are quite aware of your sympathy to innocent people and hope you would be kind enough to consider our appeal with maximum feelings and treat Mr Shahidul with honour and dignity.

Looking forward to your heartiest cooperation in this regard.

Thanking you

Sincerely yours



Shoaib Siddiqui
Interim Country Director

ActionAid is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world - a world without poverty.

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ActionAid was established in UK in 1972 and in Bangladesh in 1983

Ambassador Shamsheer M. Chowdhury
Embassy of Bangladesh
3510 International Drive, NW
Washington, DC 20008, USA

February 1, 2007

Dear Ambassador Chowdhury,

We are writing to express our extreme concern over the arbitrary detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam by authorities in Bangladesh and to request your immediate efforts for his release.

Mr. Shahidul Islam is a leading human rights defender and the Executive Director of Uttaran, a non-governmental organization based in Satkhira in the southwest coastal region of Bangladesh. Besides working on issues related to land, water, and rivers, Mr. Shahidul has been an important advocate for the protection of people's rights in relation to the Khulna-Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project (KJDRP), funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

According to available information, on January 27, 2007, members of the military detained Mr. Islam from the Uttaran training centre in Tala Upazilla and brought him to an interrogation cell, where he was allegedly tortured. On the same day, the military handed Mr. Islam over to the local police station.

On January 28, 2007, Mr. Shahidul Islam was given a one month detention order under the so-called Special Powers Act and was sent to jail. No official charges were brought against him.

The Special Powers Act 1974 provides for the detention of individuals who might commit "prejudicial acts" against the State. Under Section 2(f) of the Act, "prejudicial acts" include those that "prejudice the sovereignty or defence of Bangladesh," "prejudice

the security of Bangladesh or endanger public safety or the maintenance of public order,” “create or excite feelings of enmity or hatred among various communities, classes, or sections or people,” and “cause fear or alarm to the public.”

According to the United Nations Development Program, “The definition of ‘prejudicial acts’ as provided by the Act is...vague and open to interpretation by Government and its Executive...and may be interpreted rather widely. The magistrates, upon the advice of the police and instigation of the political party in power, frequently use the legislation to suppress political opposition and party workers....The Act constitutes a great injustice upon the person detained, as the order is always passed in the absence of the individual, without even giving that person the opportunity to state their case before being detained.”¹ The UNDP determined that such a lack of attention to due process means that “it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Special Powers Act of 1974 is one of the most inhumane security laws in Bangladesh.”²

We, the undersigned organizations, express our deepest concern regarding the detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam and fear for his physical and psychological integrity. We also consider his arbitrary detention as a violation of his basic human rights.

We call on your Excellency to:

- i. take all necessary measures to guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Shahidul Islam;
- ii. secure the release of Mr. Shahidul Islam immediately and unconditionally, as his detention is arbitrary;
- iii. seek an order that initiates an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture of Mr. Shahidul Islam in order to identify those responsible, bring them to justice and sentence them according to law;
- iv. seek an end to all acts of harassment against Mr. Shahidul Islam, as well as against any human rights defenders in Bangladesh;
- v. seek to ensure that authorities comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998;
- vi. seek to ensure respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

¹ United Nations Development Program. 2002. Human Security in Bangladesh: In Search of Justice and Dignity. <http://www.un-bd.org/undp/info/hsr/>

² Ibid.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent appeal.



Peter Bosshard, Policy Director
International Rivers Network
Berkeley, CA, USA



Jennifer Kalafut, Senior Associate
Bank Information Center
Washington, DC, USA



Joanna Levitt, Director of Programs
International Accountability Project
Berkeley, CA, USA



Peter O'Driscoll, Executive Director
ActionAid International USA
Washington, DC, USA



Anne Perrault, Senior Attorney
Center for International Environmental Law
Washington, DC, USA

Bangladesh

Death in custody and reports of torture

3

Human rights activist Shahidul Islam

According to testimony received by Amnesty International, **Shahidul Islam**, the founding director of *Uttaran*, a non-governmental organization (NGO) working for the social and economic empowerment of poor and disadvantaged communities in the western districts of Khulna, Satkhira and Jessore, was arrested and taken into Joint Forces' custody on 27 January 2007.

He was brought by a military jeep to a temporary army camp near the Tala B.Dey Boy's School in Satkhira District. *Uttaran* staff members, who gathered in front of the school building, reported that they heard Shahidul Islam being beaten inside the camp. Several days later when Shahidul Islam was allowed to have visitors, he had been severely beaten on his legs and his back as Joint Forces personnel accused him of possessing illegal weapons. His injuries from torture were reportedly serious, and he was sent to Satkhira Sadar Hospital for treatment. He was later returned to Satkhira District Jail where he remains.

Following arrest, he was served with a Detention Order under the Special Powers Act (SPA) on the unspecified grounds that he had "engaged in acts of terrorism and had harboured terrorists". *Uttaran* colleagues and prominent personalities from other NGOs who know Shahidul Islam well have refuted the allegation and have called for his release. Police subsequently filed several criminal charges against him, apparently as additional means of securing his continued detention.

Amnesty International is unaware of any investigation as yet conducted into the reported torture of Shahidul Islam, or of any suspected perpetrators being brought to justice.

Background

On 11 January 2007 President Ijuddin Ahmed declared a state of emergency following weeks of violent election-related clashes between the supporters of the former ruling coalition and supporters of parties opposing them. Elections scheduled for 22 January were postponed indefinitely and a new civilian Caretaker government, backed by the army, sworn in. Under the Emergency, political rallies and other political activity were banned, and some restrictions were imposed on the right to freedom of expression.

According to reports in the Bangladesh media, more than 100,000 people have been detained, often in mass arrests, since early January. Arrests, usually conducted by army personnel, are on grounds of alleged corruption or criminal activity. Many of the detainees are believed to have been released but Amnesty International has not been able to establish the total number of those who remain in detention. Among the detainees are reportedly more than 150 politicians and businessmen arrested on charges of corruption.

Amnesty International recommendations

Regarding the death in custody of Cholesh Richil, Amnesty International is urging the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh to:

- Make public the terms of reference of the judicial commission formed to investigate the death in custody of Cholesh Richil.
- Ensure that its mandate is extended to cover allegations of torture of Tohin Hadima, Piren Simsung, and Protap Jambila.
- Ensure that all witnesses are able to submit evidence to the commission without fear or threat of reprisal.
- Ensure that its findings and the report that it will submit to the government will be made public.
- Ensure that those identified as responsible for the death in custody of Cholesh Richil are brought to justice in a fair trial without delay.

Regarding the alleged torture of Shahidul Islam, Amnesty International urging the Caretaker Government of Bangladesh to:

- Institute an independent and impartial investigation into the allegations that Shahidul Islam has been tortured.
- Ensure that the terms of reference of the investigation includes access to the Joint Forces personnel accused of involvement in torture. Ensure that all witnesses, including family members and human rights defenders are protected by the Caretaker government against possible reprisal by the perpetrators of torture.
- Ensure that the outcome of the investigation is made public, and those identified as perpetrators of torture of the Shahidul Islam are brought to justice in a fair trial.

Amnesty International's recommendations on the prevention of torture in Bangladesh:

Amnesty International is urging the Caretaker government to:

- Establish clear and enforceable safeguards against abuse of administrative detention procedures during the state of emergency which result in torture.
- Publicly declare that all reports and complaints of torture must be promptly, thoroughly, independently and impartially investigated. A clear and unequivocal message should be given to the army, police and other security agencies that torture is a prohibited act, that it plays no part in the combating of crime or the maintenance of public order, and that it will never be tolerated.
- Take urgent steps to ensure access to detainees, especially during periods of custodial interrogation. Relatives, doctors and lawyers should have access to detainees without delay and regularly thereafter.

H.E. Mrs. B. Ferrero-Waldner
European Commissioner for External Relations
Telefax: +32 22981299
Cc.: e-mail: benita.ferrero-waldner@ec.europa.eu

Date: 1 February 2007
Subject: Detainment of Bangladeshi Director of NGO, Mr. Shahidul Islam

Your Excellency,

I write this letter as Director of Both ENDS and on behalf of BOOM, the Dutch network of NGOs in support of development and human rights in Bangladesh. BOOM ("Bangladesh Overleg Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Mensenrechten") consists of the following members: Oxfam Novib, Cordaid, ICCO, Plan Nederland, Amnesty International NL (observer status), Both ENDS, Simavi, Wemos and Bangladesh People's Solidarity Centre.

BOOM cooperates with counterpart organisations in Bangladesh and conducts at several policy levels a dialogue with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as with several European Directorates.

Last October BOOM organized an experts' meeting in the European Parliament, sharing the latest information about the irregularities in the Bangladesh election process.

Now, with urgency, we would like to raise your concerns regarding the arrest that took place on Saturday 27 January of a Bangladeshi partner of Both ENDS, the Executive Director Shahidul Islam of the local organisation Uttaran in Tala, SW Bangladesh. Mr. Shahidul Islam was taken by the army and detained without charge in the local police station of Tala (Tala Thana). No official charge against him has been issued. In the mean time he is imprisoned for one month and he has been taken to hospital for injuries sustained from possibly having been tortured.

At this moment we want to express our serious concerns about the detention and the well being of Mr. Shahidul Islam. I request you to urgently undertake action towards the responsible Bangladeshi Authorities, and to refer to the following article 1 in the EU - Bangladeshi Cooperation Agreement:

"The serious deterioration of the human rights situation in Bangladesh warrants urgent EU initiatives to give substance to article 1 of the EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement. We therefore call on the EU to propose to the Council of Ministers and the European Commission concrete mechanisms to regularly assess compliance with Article 1 by all contracting parties to the EU-Bangladesh Cooperation Agreement, with a view to bringing about verifiable progress. These should include: regular and impartial monitoring of developments in the field of human rights and civil liberties; monitoring of the extent to which NGOs are free to act and speak out in defence of the rights of others; issuing specific recommendations, compliance with which can be regularly measured, that these are aimed at improving the human rights situation and take into account the recommendations made by the UN human rights bodies about the country concerned; make appropriate démarches towards Bangladesh in individual cases where violations of basic human rights standards have taken place; making the assessment of compliance with Article 1 a separate agenda item in all meetings held under the Agreement."

Both ENDS
Nieuwe Keizersgracht 45
1018 VC Amsterdam
The Netherlands

telefoon +31 20 623 08 23
telefax +31 20 620 80 49
e-mail info@bothends.org
website www.bothends.org

A letter with an equal scope has been sent to the Dutch Ambassador in Dhaka and to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in The Hague.

My colleague Pieter Jansen and I are willing to inform you further if necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Also on behalf of BOOM,

Sjef Langeveld
Director Both ENDS

Cc.:
Mr. L. Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid.
Mr. B. Bot, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.
Mrs. A. M. A. van Ardenne, Minister for Development Cooperation of the Netherlands.

Association
Enfants du Monde
Chemin Auguste-Vilbert 14
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Tél : +41 (0)22 796 88 81
Fax : +41 (0)22 79100 34
E-mail : info@edm.ch
www.edm.ch
CCP 12 415 4



Mrs Dora Rapold
Ambassador
Embassy of Switzerland
Banani, Dhaka
Bangladesh

27 February 2007

Subject: Detention of Mr Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran, EdM's former partner in Bangladesh

Dear Mrs. Rapold,

We have been informed of the arrest of Mr Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran, on the 27th January 2007 by Joint Forces in Bangladesh. Uttaran, a long term partner of EdM, is a reputed development NGO working in Tala Upazila in the Satkhira District, Bangladesh. EdM has supported Uttaran's work from 1998 to 2003.

We are writing to express our deepest concern regarding the detention of Mr Shahidul Islam and to request your support in securing his immediate and unconditional release. We have been informed that he was taken to an interrogation cell and has been allegedly tortured. Joint Forces handed him to Tala Police Station on the same day and later he was given one-month detention.

We call on your assistance to urge the Bangladesh authorities to:

1. Take all necessary measure to guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical and psychological integrity of Mr Shahidul Islam;
2. Release Mr Shahidul Islam immediately and unconditionally, as his detention appears to be arbitrary;
3. Order an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture of Mr Shahidul Islam in order to identify those responsible, bring them to justice and sentence them according to law.
4. Put an end to all acts of harassment against Mr Shahidul Islam, as well as against any human rights defender in Bangladesh;
5. Comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN general Assembly on December 9, 1998, in particular, article 1, which states that "everyone has the right individually or collectively, to promote the protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", as well as article 12.2, which provides that "the



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www.edm.ch
CCP 12-415-4




State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually or in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;

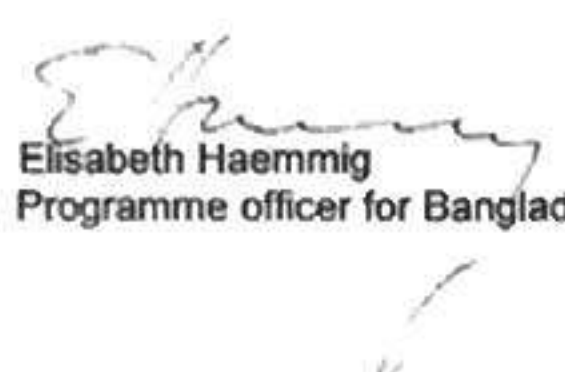
6. Guarantee the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

Please do not hesitate to contact Ms. Lily Jebunnessa in our Dhaka office should you require further information.

The Swiss Embassy's support in this most urgent matter is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,


Carlo Santarelli
Secretary general


Elisabeth Haemmig
Programme officer for Bangladesh



To: District Commissioner
Satkhira District
Bangladesh

Utrecht, February 1, 2007

Our reference	TtB-AZEO/NvdP/JvD/decos 333
Subject	letter of appreciation for Uttaran
Direct dial number	(030) 69 2 7945
E-mail	nellie.van.der.Pasch@icco.nl

Dear Sir,

Through this letter of appreciation we would like to bring the following to your kind notice.


ICCO, a Dutch Development Aid organisation, has been supporting Uttaran in Satkhira since 1993. From this time onwards ICCO, as longstanding partner of Uttaran, has had intensive contact with Uttaran, its staff and especially its director Mr Shahidul Islam. Over all these years we kept appreciating the tremendous work that Uttaran is fulfilling in the district, including poverty alleviation and social justice matters. Particularly Mr Shahidul Islam has been the driving force for Uttaran over all these years and ICCO feels that his energy, his courage and his commitment to the wellbeing of the poorest people in the district and Bangladesh in general is commendable and an example of Bangladesh citizens' strong commitment to poverty alleviation. He has been with the people in difficult times and has strengthened them in many ways to get access to basic services and increase their living standard.

ICCO would like to share this feeling of appreciation with you and your staff and would welcome any action from your side which ensures that Mr Shahidul Islam and his staff can keep on fulfilling their role in Bangladesh society. Uttaran and its staff and particularly Mr Shahidul Islam deserve all positive attention from the local and district government since Uttaran has been instrumental in many ways to assure that the development goals of the Government of Bangladesh are within reach.

ICCO would like to learn from the District Commission in Satkhira which steps will be taken to secure the role and position of Mr Shahidul Islam in Bangladesh society and to ensure that he and his staff can continue their impressive work today and in the coming future. We welcome any correspondence with you on this matter. Your early action is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

ICCO Interchurch Organisation for Development Co-operation

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to be 'Hans Bruning', is written over the typed name and title.

Mr Hans Bruning
Director Foreign Department
ICCO The Netherlands

Yahoo! ID

Web Search

YAHOO! MAIL

Welcome, uttkhulna
[Sign Out, My Account]

Mail Home Mail Tutorials Help



Loading

Addresses Calendar Notepad Mail Upgrades - Options

Check Mail

Compose

Search Mail

Search the Web

Messages: 11
(11 in 2 folders)

Forward | Home | Back to Messages

Delete

Reply

Forward

Spam

Move...

Folders: All (11)

Inbox (46)

Draft

Sent

Bulk (2)

Trash

My Folders: (14)

This message is not flagged [Flag Message - Mark as Unread]

Printable View

Date: Thu, 1 Feb 2007 06:18:23 -0500

From: Nerd

To: banglapraxis@gmail.com

Subject: [Praxis.News] JACSES letter to Japanese Embassy on detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam

Dated 2007/02/01

Mr. Taro Aso, The Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Masayuki Inoue, the Honorable Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh,

Sub: Regarding the human rights violations in Bangladesh.

Dear Sirs,

We would like to bring to your attention the human rights violations taking place in Bangladesh ever since the declaration of a state of emergency. The newspapers and other media have reported that about 33,000 people have been arrested since the declaration of emergency.[1] We have information from the local NGOs that more than 1800 active NGO personnel have been arrested or restrained by organizations related to the army and some of the citizens are undergoing extreme torture.

Mr. Shahidul Islam, a representative of the Bangladesh NGO Uttaran[2] (a member of the international NGO network), is also one of the people arrested and tortured. According to a local NGO the following restraints and torture were carried out with any warrant:



Profile Name
E-mail Address



Profile Name
E-mail Address



Profile Name
E-mail Address



Profile Name
E-mail Address

- + On 2007/1/27 (Sat) 9.30am (Bangladesh time), Mr. Shahidul Islam was taken away by army personnel from the Uttaran office in Satkhira and detained by army.
- + Same afternoon, Mr. Shahidul Islam was handed over to the police and was later in the night police sent him in the district jail of Satkhira with one month detention.
- + During his confinement he was tortured for more than 2 hours by the joint forces, under the direction of the army troops.
- + The prison authorities are not allowing Mr. Shahidul Islam's medical examination by a doctor in spite of his bad condition.

According to newspaper reports, arrests similar to the one described above, without stating the reason and without any arrest warrant are taking place. Also due to the declaration of a state of emergency where the basic human rights of the citizens are suspended,[3] all activities for the release of Mr. Shahidul Islam are restricted as well. We believe that these are considerable human rights violation. We have information from European NGOs that the European Union's Delegation to Bangladesh is making efforts to deal with this situation.

In the ODA Charter of Japan, as a part of the general rules for execution of support/furtherance, "the promotion of the democratization in developing countries" and "sufficient attention to be paid for basic human rights and the guarantee of freedom", have been clearly defined and prudent measures taken regarding provision of furtherance to countries with serious human rights violations have been praised.[4] In addition, Mr. Aso, the Foreign Minister has said that "Japan will develop diplomacy based on 'universal values' which includes human rights" in his speech[5].

Thus, we expect the following action from the Japanese Government in this regard:

1. Verification of basic human rights and the guarantee of freedom in Bangladesh.
2. If it is judged that the basic human rights and freedom is not guaranteed then the Japanese Government should publicly express its concern and pressure the Bangladesh government works towards the improvement in the conditions.
3. Even after following the above approach, if the situation in Bangladesh does not change, then barring the humanitarian aid, the new ODA provisions to Bangladesh should be suspended.

We keenly await your response and swift action in this pressing matter.

Yahoo! Mail - uttkhulna@yahoo.com

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Miwa Fujinuma

Program Staff

Japan Center for a Sustainable Environment and Society

(JACSES)

29 January 2007

The Deputy Commissioner
Deputy Commissioner's Office
Shatkhira

Sub: An appeal for Mr Shahidul Islam, Executive Director, Uttaran

Dear Sir,

Greetings from Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF).

We have come to know from the newspaper that the Executive Director of Uttaran, Mr Shahidul Islam, has been arrested and put under detention for one month. This is indeed a shocking news for us.

Uttaran is a partner of MJF for the last 3 years. Before selecting partners, MJF goes through an extensive scrutiny process to find the most suitable partners in terms of honesty, transparency and capacity. Uttaran had to go through such a scrutiny process and the organization as well as its Executive Director for itself to be honest, transparent and most devoted to the welfare of the poor people.

Uttaran has commitment to land rights issues in regard to landless and poor people in the areas of Shatkhira and Khulna. The organisation, led by Mr Shahidul Islam, has so far shown optimum commitment to changing the lot of the landless people by recovering Khas lands and distributing them among the needy. So far as many as 26,000 poor people, mostly women, of Shatkhira and Khulna have been benefited from receiving Khas land which gives them the opportunity of better livelihoods options. MJF is very satisfied with the performance of Uttaran and the commitment of its Executive Director.

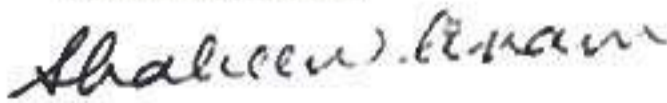
So far our knowledge goes, we have not found Mr Shahidul Islam having adopted any un-transparent and unfair means in dealing with the programme activities of different donors including ours. We strongly believe that Mr Shahidul Islam is an activist with his devotion to the welfare of the poor people and possesses an honest disposition of the highest order.

Therefore, the tribulations he is now suffering due to the arrest is very unfortunate. We appeal to you for his early release, humane treatment during his detention and no further extension of detention. It would be very sad for an honest man like him to be punished for any unfounded crime.

We are quite aware of your sympathy to innocent people and hope you would be kind enough to consider our appeal with maximum feelings and treat Mr Shahidul Islam with honour and dignity.

Looking forward to your heartiest cooperation in this regards.

With sincere thanks,



Shaheen Anam
Executive Director

To:
District Commissioner
Satkhira District
Bangladesh

12.02.07
Broe

Letter of Appreciation for Uttaran

Dear Sir,

Through this letter we would like to bring the following to your kind notice.

Misereor, a German development aid organisation, has been working with Uttaran since 1996 in a longstanding partnership.

Over the years our appreciation and trust towards the work of the staff and especially the Executive Director of the organisation, Mr. Shahidul Islam, has grown substantially. We very much appreciate and trust in the strong commitment of Uttaran and its Director for the welfare of the poorest members of society in Bangladesh and Satkhira District. Mr. Shahidul Islam has proven his strong commitment in various ways and at different times very strongly and has been with the people when the need was greatest and times were most difficult.

Dear Sir, we trust and hope that your kind self and your staff do the utmost to support Mr. Shahidul Islam and his staff to further on work for the people of Bangladesh and to accomplish their role in Bangladesh society especially with regard to their commitment in fulfilling the development goals of the Government of Bangladesh. Mr. Shahidul Islam and the staff of Uttaran are worthy of all positive attention from the Local and District Government to realize these goals.

In this spirit we remain

yours sincerely,
For Misereor



Dr. Ulrich Fuesser
(Head, Asia Department)



Corinna Broeckmann
(Programme Officer for Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka)

Bangladesh Programme
G.P.O. Box 568
Dhaka-1000
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E-mail: oxfamdbd@oxfam.org.uk
Website: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk>

January 31, 2007

To
The Deputy Commissioner
Satkhira

Detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam, Director, Uttaran

Dear Sir,

At Oxfam GB, we were very concerned to hear from the media about the arrest of Mr. Islam, his torture and subsequent detention.

As you may be aware, Oxfam GB has been working for the poor and downtrodden citizens of Bangladesh since 1971. We have had a very valued partnership with the Government of Bangladesh over all these years.

Uttaran is one of our partner NGOs in Bangladesh. Mr. Islam as a trusted partner and committed activist, working for the poor, landless and flood affected in that area, was one of the major reasons for Oxfam GB to decide to work with Uttaran. We do believe that Mr. Islam and Uttaran, have been carrying out very noble work in the interests of Bangladesh and its poorer citizens.

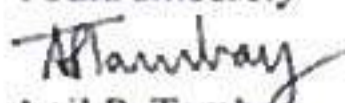
Just today, Uttaran has completed a major flood response project co-funded by Oxfam GB and ECHO to assist 7,600 families in the Satkhira area.

I would therefore earnestly request you to kindly consider all these issues and review Mr. Islam's case for early release. We also pray that you take steps to ensure that Mr. Islam is well treated by all concerned during his detention and that his detention is not extended under any circumstances.

Being a partner in development and no doubt well aware of the facts in the matter, we do hope that you will take early and concerted steps to end this unjustified treatment of Mr. Islam.

Thanking you and with our regards

Yours sincerely



Anil P. Tambay
Country Representative
Oxfam GB

Oxfam works with others to overcome poverty and suffering

Founded in 1942, Oxfam GB is a member of Oxfam International. A company limited by guarantee and registered in England No. 612172.

Registered Office: Oxfam House, John Smith Drive, Cowley, Oxford OX4 2JY, UK. Registered Charity No. 202918. Oxfam is registered in Bangladesh under the Foreign Donations (Voluntary Activities) Regulation Rules 1978 and the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982.



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND

Consular
Sector: Bangladesh
Opening
hours: Sun-Thu 10:00-12:00

Carlo Santarelli
Secretary General
Association
Enfants du Monde
Chemin Augusta - Vilbert 14
Case postale 139
1218 Grand-Saconnex

Our reference: 771.22-RAK
Date: 02.04.2007

Detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran

Dear Mr. Carlo Santarelli and Ms. Elisabeth Haemrig,

I would like to thank you for your letter dated 27 February 2007, on the above subject.

The arrest and detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam, Director of NGO Uttaran, has been widely presented in the media. Different groups including civil society members, national and international NGOs, human rights organizations have expressed their concerns and have appealed for his immediate release.

I have been closely following the developments in this regard. However, as a foreign mission, we are not in position to intervene in a pending case concerning a Bangladeshi citizen, without knowing the full background and all the relevant facts.

I have the utmost regard for Mr. Islam and the valuable contributions he has made for the cause of destitute people in his area. The overwhelming solidarity that has been shown by you and many other organizations is ample testament in his favour.

Respect of fundamental human rights is one of the main elements of Swiss Foreign Policy. For this reason I will continue to carefully monitor this case and also the overall situation in Bangladesh.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

THE AMBASSADOR OF SWITZERLAND

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Dora Rapold

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OurWorld

SIT alum detained and tortured in Bangladesh

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

Shahidul Islam, a graduate of the SIT-BRAC Global Partnership in Bangladesh and executive director of a grassroots human rights Alumni of SIT and others in the World Learning community are urged to come to the aid of Shahidul Islam, a graduate of the SIT-BRAC Partnership program in Bangladesh and executive director of a grassroots human rights NGO. In February, Shahidul was detained and tortured by the army. He remains in jail, in poor health, without a hearing, and has been falsely charged with a murder. A very detailed account of the situation is available through the Asian Human Rights Commission website: <http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/General/2223>

The AHRC site also provides a sample letter and a list of nine persons who need to receive such letters. Below is a copy of a shorter letter that is based on ones that are being sent from the president's office of World Learning/SIT and from the faculty. You are welcome to copy and paste it. Most of the persons on the AHRC's list only have fax numbers; so if you only have time or budget to send one, we recommend the president's office. Below is a list of the persons on the list and their addresses. If you only have time or resources to send email, the list includes email addresses for one of those persons -- the Government's Chief Advocate.

date

Prof. Iajuddin Ahmed, President
People's Republic of Bangladesh
Bangabhaban, Dhaka
BANGLADESH

Dear President Ahmed:

I am writing to request the immediate release of Mr. Shahidul Islam from the Satkhira district jail. He is the Executive Director of UTTARAN, working for the development of the rural poor. He and I are both graduates of the School for International Training alumni.

According to accounts by the Asian Human Rights Commission and credible sources, Mr. Islam was wrongly detained and severely beaten on 27 January 2007 at the Tala Army Camp, Satkhira. He remains in poor health in the jail medical unit. I am concerned that Mr. Islam received a 30-day detention order under the Special Powers Act-1974, but has not been produced before any court to date since his arrest, a violation of Section 61 of the Code of Criminal Procedure and Article 33 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. I am also concerned that the Bangladesh authorities have failed to provide their explanation before the High Court, which issued a Rule Nisi on 31 January 2007 and directed the concerned authority to explain why Mr. Islam was arrested and detained by February 2007. Finally, I am gravely concerned that the victim is falsely implicated in a murder case, alleged to have been fabricated by local authorities.

Mr. Islam completed an international postgraduate diploma course in Leadership and Management offered in Bangladesh through the South Asia International Training and BRAC's Training Division. He is well known to many of the SIT faculty members, who can attest that he and his colleagues have adamantly utilized only legal means of promoting landless and Bangladeshis' rights, including lobbying for better water management policies in Parliament and arranging for lawyers to represent the landless.

The Interim Government of Bangladesh has taken dramatic steps to improve law and order; this has significantly improved the government's situation and helped improve Bangladesh's image at home and abroad. Keeping with this very positive direction, I urge you to take prompt action to immediately release Mr. Islam and withdraw the murder charges against him. An independent and thorough investigation will reveal his innocence, and he can return to his family and work for the poor and disadvantaged.

Sincerely,

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THE OBSERVATORY

for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

L'OBSERVATOIRE

pour la Protection des
Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme

EL OBSERVATORIO

para la Protección
de los Defensores de Derechos Humanos

URGENT APPEAL - THE OBSERVATORY

BGD 001 / 0107 / OBS 010

Arbitrary detention / Ill-treatments

Bangladesh

January 30, 2006

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), requests your urgent intervention in the following situation in **Bangladesh**.

Brief description of the situation:

The Observatory has been informed by the Centre for Organisation Research & Education (CORE) about the arbitrary detention of Mr. **Shahidul Islam**, a leading human rights defender on land, water and river issues in the southwest region of Bangladesh, and Executive Director of the development NGO Uttaran, based in Satkhira and which works in favour of the rights of the landless people. In particular, Mr. Shahidul Islam has been campaigning for years against the Khulna-Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project (KJDRP), funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

According to the information received, on January 27, 2006, military members picked Mr. Shahidul Islam from the training centre of Uttaran in Tala Upazilla and brought him to an interrogation cell, where he has allegedly been tortured. On the same day, the military handed Mr. Islam to the local police station.

It has to be recalled that on January 11, 2007, President Iajuddin Ahmed proclaimed a state of emergency in the face of violent political protests and a multiparty alliance threatening to blockade voting places before the planned 22 January elections, which were then indefinitely postponed. Under the state of emergency, some basic constitutional rights, including those of freedom of speech, assembly, and movement, have been suspended. Furthermore, law enforcement agencies have been allowed to enter into any place without any warrant and arrest any individual on suspicion, in order to ensure "peaceful" atmosphere before and after the first scheduled elections. Since the new caretaker government assumed power, it has called on the army to stay in the streets pending elections.

On January 28, 2006, Mr. Shahidul Islam was given one month' detention order under the so-called Special Powers Act and was sent to jail. No official charges were brought against him.

The Special Powers Act 1974 provides for the detention for long periods of individuals who might commit "prejudicial acts" against the State. Under Section 2(f) of the Act, "prejudicial acts" include undermining the sovereignty or security of Bangladesh, creating or exciting feelings of enmity and hatred between different communities and interfering with the maintenance of law and order. The Act provides no guidance on the burden of proof necessary for the government to conclude that an individual is likely to commit a prejudicial act. As a result, detentions under the Special Powers Act generally rely on allegations with very little evidence.

The Observatory expresses its deepest concern regarding the detention of Mr. Shahidul Islam and fears for his physical and psychological integrity. The Observatory also considers his detention, which aims at sanctioning his human rights activities, as arbitrary.

Action requested:

Please write to the Bangladeshi authorities urging them to :

- i. take all necessary measures to guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical and psychological integrity of Mr. Shahidul Islam;
- ii. release Mr. Shahidul Islam immediately and unconditionally, as his detention is arbitrary;
- iii. order an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture of Mr. Shahidul Islam in order to identify those responsible, bring them to justice and sentence them according to law;
- iv. put an end to all acts of harassment against Mr. Shahidul Islam, as well as against any human rights defenders in Bangladesh;
- v. comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN General Assembly on December 9, 1998, in particular article 1, which states that "everyone has the right, individually or collectively, to promote the protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", as well as article 12.2, which provides that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually or in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration";
- vi. guarantee the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

Addresses:

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser, Head of the Interim Government, Fax : +880 2 8113243, Email: Info@pmo.gov.bd

Ministry of Home Affairs, Bangladesh Secretariat
Building 4, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Email: mediacell@homemin-bd.org

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka, Bangladesh, Email: info@minlaw.gov.bd

Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations in Geneva, 65 rue de Lausanne, 1202 Geneva, Switzerland, Fax: +41 22 738 46 16, E-mail: mission.bangladesh@ties.itu.int

Embassy of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in Brussels, 29-31 rue J. Jordaens, 1000 Brussels, Belgium, Fax: +32 2 646 59 98; Email: bdootbrussels@freegates.be

Please also write to the diplomatic representations of Bangladesh in your respective countries.

•••

Geneva - Paris, January 30, 2006

Kindly inform the Observatory of any action undertaken quoting the code number of this appeal in your reply.

The Observatory, a FIDH and OMCT venture, is dedicated to the protection of human rights defenders and aims to offer them concrete support in their time of need.

The Observatory was the winner of the 1998 Human Rights Prize of the French Republic.

To contact the Observatory, call the emergency line:

Tel and fax: FIDH : +33 (0) 1 43 55 20 11 / 33 (0) 1 43 55 18 80
Tel and fax: OMCT : + 41 (0) 22 809 49 39 / + 41 (0) 22 809 49 29
Email : Appeals@fidh-omct.org

fidh

International Federation for Human Rights
17, Passage de la Main d'Œn
75 011 Paris, France

OMCT

World Organization Against Torture
Case postale 21 - 8 rue du Vieux-Billard
1211 Genève 8, Switzerland

Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed
Chief Adviser
Head of Interim Government
Bangladesh

15 February 2007

Dear Dr Ahmed

Subject: Detention of Mr Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran

We have been informed of the arrest of Mr Shahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran in Tala Upazila, Satkhira District, Bangladesh on the 27th January 2007. Trócaire, as the Irish Catholic Aid Agency for World Development, has worked in partnership with the development NGO Uttaran since 1995.

We are writing to express our deepest concern regarding the detention of Mr Shahidul Islam and to urge you to:

1. Take all necessary measures to guarantee, in all circumstances, the physical and psychological integrity of Mr Shahidul Islam;
2. Release Mr Shahidul Islam immediately and unconditionally, as his detention appears to be arbitrary;
3. Order an immediate, independent and impartial investigation into the allegations of torture of Mr Shahidul Islam in order to identify those responsible, bring them to justice and sentence them according to law;
4. Put an end to all acts of harassment against Mr Shahidul Islam, as well as against any human rights defenders in Bangladesh;
5. Comply with the provisions of the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders adopted by the UN general Assembly on December 9, 1998, in particular article 1, which states that "everyone has the right individually or collectively, to promote the protection and fulfilment of human rights and fundamental freedoms at the national and international levels", as well as article 12.2, which provides that "the State shall take all necessary measures to ensure the protection by the competent authorities of everyone, individually or in association with others, against any violence, threats, retaliation, *de facto* or *de jure* adverse discrimination, pressure or any other arbitrary action as a

consequence of his or her legitimate exercise of the rights referred to in the present Declaration”;

6. Guarantee the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms in accordance with the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and other international human rights instruments ratified by Bangladesh.

Your urgent attention to this matter is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Mike Williams
Head of International Department

US State Department Report

BANGLADESH

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

While the law prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading punishment, security forces, including the RAB, military, and police, frequently employed severe treatment as well as psychological abuse during arrests and interrogations. According to human rights organizations, the use of such techniques increased after the interim government declared the state of emergency on January 11. Abuse consisted of threats, beatings, and the use of electric shock. According to human rights organizations, security forces tortured 30 people to death. The government rarely charged, convicted, or punished those responsible, and a climate of impunity allowed such abuses by the RAB, police, and military to continue.

On January 27, according to international and local human rights organizations and witness accounts, soldiers detained Shahidul Islam, the director of the NGO Uttaran at the organization's training center in Tala, Shatkhira district. According to witnesses, 20 soldiers led by Major Mehedi Hasan took Islam to the Tala army camp where they questioned him about Uttaran's activities and accused him of possessing illegal weapons. They blindfolded him and beat him below the waist for several hours before turning him over to the Tala police station in a semi-conscious condition. On January 29, the police transferred Islam to the local hospital, where doctors treated him for multiple fractures to his leg and a subcutaneous hemorrhage. He spent several weeks in the hospital before being sent to Satkhira prison to await trial on four criminal accounts. On August 21, the High Court ordered Islam released on bail; meanwhile, police issued final reports dismissing all four cases. The government did not launch an investigation nor pursue disciplinary action against the army personnel accused of beating Islam.

(See page no. 6)

উত্তরণের পরিচালক গ্রেপ্তার

কোনো নিরপরাধ মানুষ যেন হয়রানির শিকার না হয়

সারা দেশে সেনা, র‍্যাভ ও পুলিশের সন্ত্রাসবিরোধী অভিযান চলছে। শুক্রবার এ অভিযানে গ্রেপ্তার করা হয়েছে সাতক্ষীরার তালা উপজেলার বেসরকারি সংস্থা (এনজিও) উত্তরণের পরিচালক শহীদুল ইসলামকে। তাঁর গ্রেপ্তার হওয়ার বিষয়টি স্থানীয় জনগণের অনেকেই বিস্মিত করেছে। কারণ, এলাকায় তিনি সমাজকর্মী হিসেবে একজন জনপ্রিয় ব্যক্তি। তাঁর গ্রেপ্তার হওয়ার বিষয়টি ন্যায়সংগত হয়নি বলেই তালা উপজেলাবাসী মনে করে।

শহীদুল ইসলাম বিভিন্ন প্রগতিশীল আন্দোলনে সহযোগিতা করে থাকেন। তবে সরাসরি কোনো রাজনৈতিক দলের সঙ্গে জড়িত নন। মানুষের উপকার করেন। যেকোনো প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগে বিপন্ন মানুষের পাশে থাকেন। বিশেষ করে তাঁর বেসরকারি সংস্থা উত্তরণ ভূমিহীনদের ভূমির অধিকার আদায়ের ব্যাপারে সহায়তা করে থাকে। এ সংস্থার পরিচালককে গ্রেপ্তারের পেছনে কী কারণ থাকতে পারে, তা স্থানীয় জনগণের বোধগম্য নয়।

সন্ত্রাসবিরোধী অভিযানে দেশের বিভিন্ন স্থান থেকে অনেক সন্ত্রাসী ধরা পড়ছে। মানুষের মনে স্বস্তি ফিরে আসছে। তাই এ অভিযানকে সর্বস্তরের জনগণ স্বাগত জানিয়েছে। এ অভিযানের মাধ্যমে দেশে আইনশৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতির উন্নতি হবে বলে আমরা আশাবাদী। তবে এসব অভিযানে কোনো নিরপরাধ মানুষ যেন হয়রানির শিকার না হয়, সে বিষয়টিও নিশ্চিত করা উচিত। তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের প্রধান উপদেষ্টা ড. ফখরুদ্দীন আহমদও জাতির উদ্দেশে তাঁর ভাষণে দৃঢ়তার সঙ্গে বলেছেন, দেশের কোনো নিরপরাধ বা নিরীহ মানুষ যাতে অযথা হয়রানির শিকার না হয়, তা নিশ্চিত করতে সংশ্লিষ্টদের নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে।

সুতরাং আমরা আশা করব, উত্তরণের পরিচালক শহীদুল ইসলাম প্রকৃতপক্ষে কোনো সন্ত্রাসী কর্মকাণ্ডে জড়িত কি না, তা তথ্য-প্রমাণ সাপেক্ষে খতিয়ে দেখা হোক। তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে কোনো সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগ না থাকলে তাঁকে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হোক। তাঁকে যেন বিনা কারণে হয়রানির শিকার হতে না হয়।

শহীদুল ইসলাম : সংগ্রামী দরিদ্রবান্ধব

সেলিম এম রফিক

শহীদুল ইসলাম। দরিদ্রদের মানুষ হিসেবেই ঘরে সম্মিত পরিচিত। ১৯৮২ সালে তিনি রাজশাহী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে ইতিহাসে অনার্স সহ মাস্টার্স ডিগ্রি লাভ করেন। শিক্ষাজীবনে তিনি অত্যন্ত মেধাশীল ছাত্র ছিলেন। এছাড়া তিনি এনভিও-এও ডেভেলপমেন্ট স্টাডিজের একটি বিশেষ পোস্ট গ্রাডুয়েট ডিগ্রি অর্জন করেছেন।

সত্তর দশকের শেষার্ধ্বে গল্পকাহিনী রচনা জাতীয় গ্রামে প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন গল্পকাহিনী এবং 'এলাকার সুব' সমাজকে সংগঠিত করে দরিদ্র মানুষের কল্যাণে বিশেষ করে নিম্ন শ্রেণীর বহু সম্প্রদায়ের উন্নয়নে তাদের জৈবিক উন্নয়নের বিকাশে উদ্যোগ নেন। যৈরি করেন উত্তরণ সংঘ।

শেখশাহা শেষে সুযোগ থাকা সত্ত্বেও তিনি কোনো সরকারি চাকরিতে চেষ্টা না করে এলাকার মানুষের উন্নয়নের কারণে থেকে ১৯৮৩ সালে স্থানীয় মুক্তনগর কলেজ প্রতিষ্ঠার উদ্যোগের সঙ্গে সম্পৃক্ত হন।

এ সময় তিনি বিভিন্ন সামাজিক মানবিকতার সংস্থার আকর্ষণীয়তা-এ সংস্পর্শে আসেন এবং উন্নয়ন কর্মকাণ্ডে ব্যাপকভাবে জড়িয়ে পড়েন। এলাকার পরিবেশের উন্নয়নে 'জালা উপজেলার ব্যাপক বনায়ত কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা এবং উপজেলাকে সবুজে ঢেকে তোলায় সরকারি উদ্যোগকে সর্বোচ্চ সহযোগিতা করেন।

১৯৮৫ সালে উত্তরণ সংঘের নাম পরিবর্তন করে 'উত্তরণ' নামকরণ করা হয়। পরবর্তী সময়ে সমাজসেবা অধিদপ্তর কর্তৃক নিবন্ধনের মাধ্যমে 'উত্তরণ' বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা হিসেবে কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করার হস্তিষ্ঠা অনুমতি পায়। এ সময় সাল্লাউদ্দিন, প্রথমিক স্বাস্থ্য পরিচালক, উপায়ুক্তসিদ্ধ শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান পরিচালনার পদাধীনে পরিচালনার উন্নয়নমূলক কর্মসূচি হাতে নেয় এবং সাধারণের সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন দাতা সংস্থা ও সরকারি পুষ্টি-স্বাস্থ্যকর্তার তা বাস্তবায়নে উদ্যোগমাধ্যমে অবদান রাখে।

১৯৮৬ সালে তিনি সরকারের কৃষি খাস জমি ব্যবস্থাপনা ও বন্দোবস্তের জন্য গঠিত টাঙ্কজেনের সদস্য হিসেবে মনোনীত হন। ১৯৮৮ সালে জালা উপজেলার কৃষিহীনদের মধ্যে প্রায় ১ হাজার একর খাস জমি বিতরণ ও বন্দোবস্ত প্রতিষ্ঠার সংকল্পের সহযোগী হিসেবে বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে কৃষিকা করেন।

১৯৮৯ সালে এলাকার দুবকলের কর্মসূচির জন্য এবং তাদের বেসরকারি মূত্র করতে প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন 'চুকনগর গ্রাম স্কুল' এবং ১৯৯০ সালে সারস্বতীর, সেবায়ীরা 'সারস্বতী গ্রাম স্কুল'। এছাড়া পরবর্তী সময়ে জালা উপজেলার সিরাজগামেই প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছেন 'টেকনিক্যাল' এড বিজনেস-ম্যানেজমেন্ট কলেজ।

বাংলাদেশের সচিবালয় নাগরিক সমাজ ও এনভিও সংস্থার পক্ষে ওয়াশবী সংস্থার তিনি আর্থিক এবং বাংলাদেশ প্রতিষ্ঠা। জালা সংসদ শাসি বইটি সংগ্রহ করে আর্থিক নিয়ন্ত্রণ না কেন্দ্রে ভারতের ১০টি দলীয় দলীয় দলীয় ভারতে নেওয়ার 'পরিচালনা' পুনর্বিস্তারের জন্য

এডভোকেসি করে থাকে। এ পলি বাংলাদেশকে না নিলে দেশের দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিমভাগের নদীসমূহে লবণাক্ততা বৃদ্ধি পাবে এবং দেশের উত্তরভাগে চাষাব্যবস্থা স্থগিত হবে।

১৯৯৪ সালে তিনি এলাকার একটি কলেজ প্রতিষ্ঠার উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেন এবং কলেজটির নামকরণ করা হয় 'শহীদুল মুক্তিযোদ্ধা মহাবিদ্যালয়'। এ বছরই শহীদুল ইসলামকে উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে উন্নয়ন ও পুষ্টি-অসুখ বাধার স্বীকৃতিস্বরূপ ফোর্ড ফাউন্ডেশন, আমেরিকার 'সহযোগী' প্রতিষ্ঠান 'অশোক ফাউন্ডেশন, বাংলাদেশ থেকে নেওয়া হয় অশোক ফেলোশিপ।

১৯৯৬ সালের ১০ মে একটি স্বার্থাঘেী মহল-কম্বা-ব্যবহার করে সাতক্ষীরা জেলার কালিমা ও সেখহাতি উপজেলার অর্থহীন মানুষেরা ও অসুস্থ ১৫টি গ্রামে বিখ্যাত হাল দলবাসীর কৃষিহীনদের উদ্দেশ্য করে। তাদের আক্রমণে তিন শতাধিক ঘরবাড়ি তলসীভূত ও বিধ্বস্ত হয় এক শত শত লোক হয় আহত। আক্রমণের

৩২টি ঘিঘা মাঝে মাঝে করে। ঘটনার পরপরই উত্তরণ আহতদের চিকিৎসা ও আশ্রয় পরিচালনার সকল সহায়তা প্রদান করতে থাকে এবং বৃহত্তর নাগরিক সমাজকে আশোপালনের সঙ্গে একাত্ম করে। ঘটনার জন্য সাতক্ষীরায় সমগ্র দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিমভাগের মানুষেরা ঠাকুরক হয়ে কৃষিহীনদের প্রতিবেশে আশোপালনে অংশ নেয়। আশোপালনের উদ্ভূতা বৃদ্ধির এই পর্যায়ে প্রধান প্রধান রাজনৈতিক দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃবৃন্দ অভিযাত্র এলাকা পরিদর্শন করেন এবং কৃষিহীনদের মহাসমাবেশে তাদের দাবির প্রতি অকৃত সমর্থন প্রদান করেন। আশোপালনের উদ্ভূতা ও ব্যাপকতায় ১৮ আগস্ট ১৯৯৬ তারিখে তৎকালীন মাননীয় প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা অত্র এলাকার আসনে এবং কৃষিহীনদের ৮ দফা দাবির পরিপ্রেক্ষিতে ঘোষণা দেন কৃষিহীনদের মধ্যে হালজমি বন্দোবস্ত নেওয়া হবে এবং পরবর্তী সময়ে প্রশাসনে ব্যাপক জনকল, কল্যাণ ও বিমোশন নেওয়া হয়। এ সময় ঘটনার স্বার্থাঘেী মহল কম্বা-ব্যবহারের প্রাথমিকভাবে, কখনো লশতালকে ব্যবহার

বোঁধতাগেই-উত্তরণের-সহযোগিতায়-সম্পূর্ণ হয়েছে। জেলা এবং উপজেলা প্রশাসনের সঙ্গে উত্তরণ যৌথভাবে এ কাজে অংশ নিয়েছে।

'শহীদুল ইসলাম-এলাকা' কেন্দ্রীয় পরিষদ ও Voluntary Health Services Society (বিএইচএসএসএস), কেন্দ্রীয় নির্বাচী পরিষদের সদস্য ছিলেন এবং এলাকার 'এই নির্বাচী পরিষদের সদস্য, এফআইএএই ইন্টারন্যাশনাল (German based donor working for land rights)-এর সদস্য ছাড়াও 'আইডি' ও 'আইডি' নির্বাচী উন্নয়ন প্রতিষ্ঠানের সঙ্গে জড়িত জড়িত। তিনি এই এলাকার স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে 'পাড়া' ও 'উন্নয়ন সংগঠনসমূহের উন্নয়নে তিনি উদ্যোগমাধ্যমে কৃষিকা' বেছেছেন এবং 'বৌধতাগেই-স্বার্থাঘেী কর্মসূচি-বাস্তবায়ন করেন।

'উন্নয়ন' ও 'পরিচালনা' বিমোশনে 'অধীকারবদ্ধ উত্তরণ' ও 'তার পরিচালক শহীদুল ইসলাম নিবন্ধনকারে-কাজ' করে আসছেন। মানুষের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা-নিবেদিত এ মহান-পাড়া মানুষকে ২৭ জানুয়ারি '০৭ টেকসইভাবে' লেন্দে-কারণ ছাড়াই মোড়ার করে, শান্তিচিত্রিতকরণ করে। তার বিলম্বিত কোনো স্বার্থাঘেী মহল হাতে বিভিন্ন মাঝামাঝি সঙ্গে সম্পৃক্ত করার 'চেষ্টা' চালিয়ে। তৎকালীন-প্রভাবশালী ব্যক্তিগত মালিকানাধীন কৃষিসমূহের সহযোগী হয়েকটি পরিকা-আক্রমণি এবং পরিবেশন করে জনবলে বিক্রান্তি সৃষ্টি করে একজন সং-নেপথ্যিক ও উন্নয়নে-জন্য নিবেদিত মানুষের চরিত্রকে জলজিত করার মাধ্যমে ঘাঘনা-প্রোচিত 'চেষ্টা' করছে।

চরমানে উত্তরণে আক্রমণ এইই বাংলাদেশ, মানুষের, জন, অশুভকার্য-জিবি-ইউরোপীয়ান কমিশন, ডিএনও বাংলাদেশ, নিউজিও-কার্যনি, হ্যাঁচিউই ইন্টারন্যাশনাল বাংলাদেশ, এফিও কোরাম, সাইট, সেভাকস, ইন্টারন্যাশনাল, জ্যান্ডিয়ান, সিআ, মি এশিয়া, ফাউন্ডেশন, সিডিএমপি এবং আর্থিক ফাউন্ডেশনের সহযোগী সংস্থা হিসেবে বাংলাদেশের দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম অঞ্চলে কাজ করছে।

শহীদুল ইসলাম যিনি ব্যক্তিগত স্বার্থাঘেী পরিহার করে, সং ও সাধারণভাবে জীবনযাপন করেন, সুযোগ থাকা সত্ত্বেও যিনি বাড়ি-পাড়ি, ব্যক্তিগত-সম্পদ-বানানোর কোনো চেষ্টাই করেননি, যিনি তার সারা জীবনকে উৎসর্গ করেছেন মানুষের ও জাতির কল্যাণে তাকে এ দেশের হস্তিষ্ঠা সে স্বীকৃতি না দিয়ে পুরস্কার হিসেবে সরকারি বাহিনী কর্তৃক শাস্তি ও চরিত্রকে কালিমালিও করার অপপ্রয়াস চালায় তা হবে এ জাতির জন্য চরম অপমানকর, দুঃখ ও হতাশাজনক। গণতন্ত্র ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য আর কতো মূল্য দিতে হবে আমাদের?

বাংলাদেশের দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিমভাগের স্বার্থাঘেী স্বার্থাঘেী এ উন্নয়ন সংগঠন 'উত্তরণ' ও 'তার পরিচালক' শহীদুল ইসলামের 'অধীকার' বেসরকারি জালাবাসী ও অকৃত সমর্থন। সেলিম এম রফিক, সংস্কৃতিবৃত্তী।

শহীদুল ইসলাম যিনি ব্যক্তিগত স্বার্থাঘেী পরিহার করে, সং ও সাধারণভাবে জীবনযাপন করেন, সুযোগ থাকা সত্ত্বেও যিনি বাড়ি-পাড়ি, ব্যক্তিগত সম্পদ বানানোর কোনো চেষ্টাই করেননি, যিনি তার সারা জীবনকে উৎসর্গ করেছেন মানুষের ও জাতির কল্যাণে তাকে এ দেশের হস্তিষ্ঠা সে স্বীকৃতি না দিয়ে পুরস্কার হিসেবে সরকারি বাহিনী কর্তৃক শাস্তি ও চরিত্রকে কালিমালিও করার অপপ্রয়াস চালায় তা হবে এ জাতির জন্য চরম অপমানকর, দুঃখ ও হতাশাজনক। গণতন্ত্র ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য আর কতো মূল্য দিতে হবে আমাদের?

আক্রমণের কারণে কৃষিহীনরা সংগঠিতভাবে প্রতিরোধ করতে বাধ্য হয়। এ ঘটনা স্বার্থাঘেী গণমানুষের মধ্যে ব্যাপক প্রতিষ্ঠা সৃষ্টি করে। এ সময় চিত্তি ইমারা ব্যক্তিগত করার জন্য কৃষিহীনরা মাত্র শিষ্টান করে এবং বিভিন্ন মহল থেকে এ ঘটনার প্রতি নিষা জ্ঞান ও প্রতিবাদ জানানো হয়। কিন্তু কোনো প্রতিষ্ঠার না হওয়ায় প্রভাবশালী কৃষিসমূহ আরো বেশরোয় হয়ে ১৯৯৮ সালের ২৭ ফুলাই পুনরায় আক্রমণ চালায়। পুলিশ ও জাতিগো সন্ত্রাসীরা কৃষিহীনদের ওপর হুলস্থূল করে এবং পুষ্টি-স্বাস্থ্যকর্তার শহীদুল ইসলাম এবং ২২ জন আহত হয়। এ ঘটনার সময় ও পরবর্তী সময়ে বিভিন্ন বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান বৈতিক ও আর্থিক সহায়তা প্রদান করে আসছে। উত্তরণ সাতক্ষীরা-ফুলনার স্থানীয় সংস্থা হিসেবে এ কৃষি আশোপালনে-সমর্থন দেয়। কৃষিহীনদের বিকৃত কৃষিসূচ ও সন্ত্রাসী বাহিনী প্রশাসনের সহায়তায়

করে উত্তরণ ও এর পরিচালক শহীদুল ইসলামকে তাদের শত্রু হিসেবে চিহ্নিত করে আসছে এবং স্বার্থাঘেী হস্তিষ্ঠা করে শাস্তি করাও চেষ্টা অব্যাহত রেখেছে। অপরাধিত উত্তরণ নীতিগত কারণে কৃষিহীন পরিচালকের পক্ষে সবসময় অবস্থান নিয়েছে এবং সাতক্ষীরা ও ফুলনা জেলায় প্রকৃত কৃষিহীনদের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠায় সকল কৃষি আশোপালনে নৈতিক সমর্থন নিচ্ছে। এর কারণে ক্রমাগতভাবে এক বা একাধিক প্রভাবশালী মহল সবসময় উত্তরণের জন্য হুমকি ছেঁড়ছিল।

অপরাধিত বিগত তিন বছরে উত্তরণ সাতক্ষীরা ও ফুলনা জেলায় প্রায় সাত্বে ৬ হাজার কৃষিহীনকে প্রায় ৫ হাজার একর খাসজমি সরকারের কাছ থেকে পেতে সহযোগিতা করেছে।

Eminent citizens want release of Uttaran executive director

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty eminent citizens of the country have appealed to the caretaker government (CG) for an early release of Shahidul Islam, executive director of Uttaran, a reputed development organisation.

The joint forces arrested Islam on January 27 and handed over to Tala police of Satkhira district the same day. Later, he was given one-month detention.

In a letter sent to the chief adviser and law adviser, the citizens said Islam was not charged with any specific accusation adding the charges were more of general in nature.

"Shahidul Islam is a well-known and popular personality for his

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Eminent citizens

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contribution in the field on human rights and poverty alleviation. He has been working tirelessly for the last two decades in upholding the rule of law and human dignity. He has longstanding partnerships with the government. His leadership has been instrumental for community development in the southwest region. He has been working to ensure marginal people's right to land and on the decade-old water-logging problem," read the letter.

The signatories said the CG has taken bold steps to improve the law and order situation nabbing the godfathers and the corrupt people.

"We believe this has significantly improved the governance situation in Bangladesh and helped improve its image in home and abroad. Now people feel much safer and have got back their trust in the your government. This, indeed, is a major landmark achievement of your effort, especially when you have been able to do it in a short period," the letter stated.

The signatories are Shoaib Siddiqui, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, Azzizul Hoque Moni, executive director of Ulashi Sreejony Sangha, Jessore, Anil Tambay, country representative of Oxfam GB, Rina Roy, director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, Khushi Kabir, coordinator of Nijera Kori, Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of PPRC, Md Abdul Kader, executive director of SAMATA, Rezaul K Chowdhury, general secretary of SUPRO, John D Marsden, director of Food for Hungry International, Abed Khan, editor of Shamokal, Toab Khan, advisory editor of Janakantha, Tahera Yasmin, consultant of Development Consultant, Hameeda Hossain, founder member of Ain O Salish Kendra, Md Nur Khan, acting executive director of Ain O Salish

Kendra, Gawher Nayeem Wahne, head of program (PSU) of Save the Children (UK), Shyamal Datta, editor of Bhorer Kagoj, Thomas Costa, lecturer of Anthropology department at Dhaka University, Shahana Hayat, country director of VSO Bangladesh, Shirin Akhter, executive director of Karmojibi Nari, Taslimur Rahman, executive director of Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust (BLAST), Khondoker Ashraful Munim, associate professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University, Sharmind Nilormoi, associate professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University, Ahsanuddin Ahmed, executive director of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, Shamsul Huda, executive director of Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Abul Barkat, professor of Economics at Dhaka University, Syeda Rezawana Hassan, director of BELA, Md Azahar Ali, executive director of SPACE, Rashed Al Mahmud Titumur, assistant professor of Development Studies at Dhaka University, Gayanath Sarkar, deputy manager of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Md Abdul Hye, coordinator of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Khalilur Rahman, graphic designer of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Ak Azad, assistant officer of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra, Mesbah Kamal, associate professor (Human Rights Campaigner) of Dhaka University, M Abdus Salam, chief executive of Gana Unnayan Kendra, Gaibandha, Mozibur Rahman, executive director of SDS, Shariatpur, Shah I Mobin Jinnah, executive director of CDA, Dinajpur, Habibullah Bahar, director of Manab Mukti Sangstha, Sirajganj, Zakir Kibria, executive director of Bangla Praxis, Sabbir Bin Shams, executive director of Advancing Public Interest Trust.

Release of Uttaran chief demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and five US-based organisations have urged the caretaker government (CG) to take steps for immediate and unconditional release of Shahidul Islam, executive director of Satkhira-based NGO Uttaran.

In a letter to Chief Adviser to Caretaker Government Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, The Observatory- a joint programme of International Federation for Human Rights and World Organisation Against Torture- expressed deep concern and 'fears for his physical and psychological integrity'.

Terming his detention arbitrary, the organisation also called for an investigation into allegations of torture on him and punish those responsible for the torture.

The joint forces arrested Shahidul, who has been working for the rights of the landless people in the area, from Tala upazila on January 27 and handed him to police in the afternoon.

He was sent to jail a day later with one-month detention.

Meanwhile, ActionAid International USA, Centre for International Environmental Law, International Rivers Network, Bank Information Centre and International Accountability Project have sent separate letters to Asian Development Bank President Haruhiko Kuroda and Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States Shamsher M Chowdhury, asking them for taking necessary steps from their parts for immediate and unconditional release of Shahidul.

The organisations also demanded an end to harassment on Shahidul and punishment for those involved in torturing.

মানবাধিকার কর্মীর মুক্তির আবেদন

প্রধান উপদেষ্টা ও আইন উপদেষ্টার দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ করে এক যৌথ বিবৃতিতে ৩৯ জন বিশিষ্ট নাগরিক সাতক্ষীরা জেলার তালা উপজেলার উন্নয়ন সংগঠন 'উত্তরণ'-এর পরিচালক শহীদুল ইসলামকে মুক্তি প্রদানের আবেদন জানিয়েছেন। শহীদুল ইসলামকে গত ২৭ জানুয়ারী যৌথবাহিনী আটক করে। পরে তাকে তালা থানায় পাঠানো হয় এবং এক

(১৯শ পৃ: ৮-এর ক: প্রা:)

মানবাধিকার কর্মীর

(২০শ পৃ: পর)

মাসের আটকাদেশ দিয়ে জেলে পাঠানো হয়।

বিবৃতিতে তারা বলেন, শহীদুল ইসলাম মানবাধিকার ও দারিদ্র্য বিমোচনের জন্য জনপ্রিয়তা অর্জন করেছেন। আইন সম্মুখিত ও মানবিক মর্যাদা রক্ষা করতে তিনি দুই দশক ধরে নিরলসভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছেন। তারা এই প্রেক্ষভাঙ্গের বিপরীতে একটি দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি বলে উল্লেখ করেন।

পরে স্বাক্ষরকারীদের মধ্যে রয়েছেন এ্যাকশন এইড বাংলাদেশ-এর কাপ্তি ডিরেক্টর সোহেব সিদ্দিকী, অত্রফান জিবির দেশীয় প্রতিনিধি অনিল তাম্ব, মানুষের জন্য স্ট্র্যাটেজি পরিচালক রিনা রায়, নিজেদের কবির সমন্বয়কারী খুশী কবির, সমকাল সম্পাদক আবেদ খান, জনকন্ঠের উপদেষ্টা সম্পাদক তোয়ার খান, ভোবের ক্রান্ত সম্পাদক শ্যামল দত্ত, আইন ও সালিশ কেন্দ্রের ভারপ্রাপ্ত নির্বাহী পরিচালক মো: নূর খান, জাহাঙ্গীরনগর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের সহযোগী অধ্যাপক শব্বকার আশরাফুল মুনিম ও ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের অধ্যাপক ড. আবুল বারাকাত।

উত্তরণ পরিচালক শহীদুলের মুক্তি দাবি করেছে আইরিশ মানবাধিকার সংস্থা

বেসরকারি সংস্থা উত্তরণের পরিচালক শহীদুল ইসলামের মুক্তি দাবি করেছে আয়ারল্যান্ডের মানবাধিকার সংস্থা টুকায়ার (ওয়াকিং ফর এ জাস্ট ওয়ার্ল্ড)। তার বিবৃতিতে যদি কোনো অভিযোগ থেকে থাকে তাহলে একটি নিরপেক্ষ ও স্বাধীন তদন্ত কমিশন গঠনের ৬ দফা দাবি জানিয়েছে সংগঠনটি। এ ব্যাপারে তারা তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের প্রধান উপদেষ্টা ড. ফখরুদ্দীন আহমদের কাছে একটি চিঠিও দিয়েছে। সংগঠনের আন্তর্জাতিক বিভাগের প্রধান মাইক উইলিয়ামস স্বাক্ষরিত এক সংবাদ বিজ্ঞপ্তিতে এ কথা জানানো হয়েছে।

Release of Uttaran chief demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 400 teachers, students, social-workers, civil society members and NGO activists of Jessore, Satkhira and Khulna have appealed to the chief adviser (CA) to caretaker government for immediate release of the executive director of Uttaran, a Satkhira-based NGO.

In a memorandum to the CA, they said Shahidul Islam devoted his life to uphold human rights and good governance and establishing landless people's rights on khas land apart from organising people to address water-logging crisis in the south-western part of the country.

"He and his organisation have been playing a pioneering role in various developmental activities including tree plantation, sanitation, protecting bio-diversity, ensuring right to pure drinking water and education programmes in the region," reads the memorandum submitted to CA on February 22.

Shahidul was arrested by joint forces from Tala upazila on January 27 and handed over to police. Later he was sent to jail with one-month detention.

মানবাধিকার আরিফ হাসান | শহীদুল ইসলাম : বিবেকবন্দি এক দরিদ্রবাক্ষব

স্বাধীনতা প্ৰথম সুযোগ থাকা সত্ত্বেও তিনি সরকারি চাকরির চেষ্টা না করে এলাকার মানুষের উন্নয়নের আদি থেকে ১৯৮৩ সালে দ্বিতীয় চুক্তির পরেও প্রতিষ্ঠার উপযোগের সত্ত্বে সম্পূর্ণ হন এক স্বেচ্ছা। অইবর্তনিক শিক্তক হিসেবে যোগদান করেন এবং একই পথে এলাকার মানুষের শিক্তকর আনোয়রনে জাতপূর গ্রামে প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন সমকাল মাধ্যমিক বিদ্যালয়। বর্তমানে তিনি এ বিদ্যালয়ের সভাপতি। বিদ্যালয়টির ৫ শতাব্দিক নিয়মিত ছাত্রছাত্রী রয়েছে। ১৯৬০ সালের সাতকীরা জেলার তাল্লা উপজেলায় এক শতাব্দীর পুরনো পরিবারে জন্মগ্রহণ করেন শহীদুল ইসলাম। এর সেক চাচা ছিলেন দীর্ঘকালীন সরকারি কলেজের অধ্যাপক এবং অপর এক চাচা বাংলাদেশ ব্যাংকের ডেপুটি ম্যানেজার ও ম্যানেজার হাই ও বোলেন্দা নবাই উচ্চশিক্ষিত এবং সরকারি ও বেসরকারি বিভিন্ন প্রতিষ্ঠানে উচ্চপদে কর্মরত।

১৯৮২ সালে রাজশাহী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে ইতিহাসে অনার্সের মাস্টার ডিগ্রি লাভ করেন। শিক্ষাজীবনে তিনি অত্যন্ত মেধাবী ছাত্রী ছিলেন। এছাড়া তিনি এনজিও অ্যাড কন্সল্টেন্ট ম্যানেজমেন্ট বিষয়ক পোস্ট গ্রাডুয়েট ডিগ্রি অর্জন করেন। সত্ত্বেও সরকারি চাকরিতে ছাত্রোদ্যোগে তিনি তার জাতপূর গ্রামে প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন গণস্বাস্থ্যগার এবং এলাকার যুব সমাজকে সংগঠিত করে দরিদ্র মানুষের কল্যাণে, বিশেষ করে নিম্নবর্ণের স্ত্রী সমাজের উন্নয়নে তার তৈরি ইচ্ছাশক্তির বিকাশে উদ্যোগ নেন। তৈরি করেন উত্তরণ সংস্থা।

এ সময় তিনি বিভিন্ন আন্তর্জাতিক মানবাধিকার সংস্থার অ্যাকাডেমিকের সংশ্লিষ্ট আবেদন এবং উন্নয়ন কর্মকাণ্ডে ব্যাপকভাবে জড়িয়ে পড়েন। এলাকার পরিবেশের উন্নয়নে তাল্লা উপজেলায় শাপক বনায়ন কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করেন এবং উপজেলাকে সবুজ করে তোলায় সরকারি উদ্যোগকে সর্বোচ্চ সহযোগিতা করেন।

১৯৮৫ সালে উত্তরণ সংস্থার নাম পরিবর্তন করে 'উত্তরণ' নামকরণ করা হয়। পরে সমাজসেবা অধিদপ্তর কর্তৃক নিবন্ধনের মাধ্যমে উত্তরণ বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন সংস্থা হিসেবে কার্যক্রম পরিচালনা করার স্বাধীন অনুমতি পায়। এ সময় স্যানিটেশন, আবাসিক যাত্রা পরিচর্যা, উপাদানগত শিক্ত প্রকৃতি কার্যক্রম পরিচালনার পাশাপাশি পরিদ্রুতী বিভিন্ন উন্নয়নমূলক কর্মসূচি হাতে নেয় এবং বিলাকলের সঙ্গে বিভিন্ন সূত্র সংস্থা ও সরকারি পৃষ্ঠপোষকতায় প্রকল্পগুলি উন্নয়নমূলক অবদান রাখে।

১৯৮৬ সালে সরকারের কৃষি খসড়ায় ব্যবস্থাপনা ও যোগাযোগের জন্য গঠিত টাস্কফোর্সের সদস্য হিসেবে তিনি অলৌকিক হন। ১৯৮৮ সালে তাল্লা উপজেলায় কৃষিখসড়ার মধ্যে গ্রাম এক হাজার একর খস জমি বিতরণ ও যোগাযোগ প্রক্রিয়ায় সরকারের সহযোগী হিসেবে বিভিন্ন পর্যায়ে কৃষিকার্যে যোগান।

১৯৮৯ সালে এলাকার যুবকদের কর্মসংস্থানের জন্য এবং তাদের বেকারের দূর করার প্রচেষ্টা করেন 'ফুডব্যান্ড ট্রাষ্ট ফুড' এবং ১৯৯০ সালে সাতকীরার লেবোরেটরি 'পার্কলিগা ট্রাষ্ট ফুড'। পরে তাল্লা জাতপূর নিজ গ্রামেই প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছেন 'টেকনিক্যাল

ফোর্ড স্যানিটেশন, আমেরিকার সহযোগী প্রতিষ্ঠান অংশেক স্যানিটেশন, বাংলাদেশ থেকে নেওয়া হয় অংশেক কেলেগিশিপ। ১৯৮৮ সালের ২৯ নভেম্বর বাংলাদেশের দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে প্রলয়ঙ্করী ঘূর্ণিকর্ক ও জলোচ্ছ্বাস হয়। এ সময় থেকে এ অঞ্চলে প্রতি বছর জলবহুতা সেবা নিতে থাকে। পানি উন্নয়ন বোর্ড ১৯৯৭ সালে এ সমস্যা নিরসনে কর্তব্য শ' কোটি টাকার কেজেডিআরপি প্রকল্প গ্রহণ করে। প্রকল্পটি মূলত ছিল পরিবেশ অনুশোধনী। দীর্ঘমেয়াদি জলবহুতা নিরসনে কেজেডিআরপি প্রকল্প বর্ক করতে এলাকার পানিবর্কি মানুষের পাশে উত্তরণ ও

শহীদুল ইসলাম যিনি ব্যক্তিগত স্বচ্ছন্দ্য পরিহার করে, সং ও সাধারণভাবে জীবনযাপন করেন, সুযোগ থাকা সত্ত্বেও যিনি বাড়ি-গাড়ি, ব্যক্তিগত সম্পদ বানানোর কোনো চেষ্টাই করেননি। যিনি তার সারা জীবনকে উৎসর্গ করেছেন মানুষের ও জাতির কল্যাণে, তাকে এ দেশের রাষ্ট্রযন্ত্র সে স্বীকৃতি না দিয়ে পুরস্কার হিসেবে সরকারি বাহিনী কর্তৃক লাঞ্ছিত ও চরিত্রকে কালিমালিঙ্গ করার অপপ্রয়াস চালায় তা হবে এ জাতির জন্য চরম অপমানকর, দুঃখ ও হতাশাজনক। গণতন্ত্র ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য আর কত মূল্য দিতে হবে আমাদের?

আজ বিতর্কিত ম্যানেজমেন্ট কলেজ'। বাংলাদেশের সর্বোচ্চ নাগরিক সমাজ ও এনজিও সমন্বয়ে গড়ে ওঠা নবী সংস্থার তিনি আনুষ্ঠানিক এবং বাংলাদেশ প্রতিষ্ঠা। ১৯৯৪ সালে তিনি এলাকায় একটি কলেজ প্রতিষ্ঠার উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেন এবং কলেজটির নামকরণ করা হয় শহীদ মুক্তিবাহা নবাবিলাস। বর্তমানে এ শিক্ত প্রতিষ্ঠানটি এলাকার শিক্তর আনোয়রনে ব্যাপক ও উন্নয়নমূলক কৃষিকার্যে। উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক ও ডিগ্রি পর্যায়ে এ কলেজে এখন গ্রাম ৬ শতাব্দিক ছাত্রছাত্রী রয়েছে। এ কলেজ থেকে ১৯৯৭, ২০০০ এবং ২০০১ সালে সফলিত মেধা অধিকার স্থান পায়। এ বছরই শহীদুল ইসলামকে উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে উন্নয়নে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদান রাখার স্বীকৃতিস্বরূপ

চালায়। পুলিশ ও তাকতিয়া সন্ত্রাসীরা কৃষিখসড়ার ওপর ক্রিয়াকর্ম করে এবং গৃহবধু জারেল শহীদ ও ২২৯ জন আহত হন। এ ঘটনার সময় ও পরে বিভিন্ন বেসরকারি প্রতিষ্ঠান সৈনিক এবং আর্থিক সহায়তা প্রদান করে আসছে। উত্তরণ ঘটনার পরপরই আহতদের চিকিৎসা ও মাঝমা পরিচালনার সব সহায়তা প্রদান করতে থাকে এবং বহুজর নাগরিক সমাজকে আন্দোলনের সত্ত্বে একত্র করে। এ ঘটনার জন্য সাতকীরার সমগ্র দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম অঞ্চলের মানুষ ঐক্যবদ্ধ হয়ে কৃষিখসড়ার প্রতিরোধ আন্দোলনে অংশ নেয়। বাংলাদেশের তীব্রতা বৃদ্ধির এক পর্যায়ে প্রধান প্রধান রাজনৈতিক দলের শীর্ষ নেতৃবর্ক জরিপেও এলাকা পরিদর্শন করেন এবং কৃষিখসড়ার মহাসমাবেশে তাদের দাবির প্রতি অকুণ্ড সমর্থন প্রদান করেন। আন্দোলনের তীব্রতা ও ব্যাপকতার ১৮ আশু ১৯৯৮ তারিখে তৎকালীন প্রধানমন্ত্রী শেখ হাসিনা এ এলাকায় আসেন এবং কৃষিখসড়ার ৮ লক্ষ দরিদ্র পরিদ্রুতকে খেড়কা সেন, কৃষিখসড়ার মধ্যে খসকর্মি বন্দোবস্ত দেওয়া হবে। ২০০৪ সাল থেকে সরকার সোচ্ছিত শতভাগ স্যানিটেশন অর্জনে সাতকীরার জেলা জাহাজেবে অন্যান্য জেলার তুলনায় দুইগুণ স্থাপন করে, যার বেশিরভাগই উত্তরণের সহযোগিতায় সম্পন্ন হয়েছে। জেলা এবং উপজেলা প্রশাসনের সত্ত্বে উত্তরণ যৌথভাবে এ কাজে অংশ নিয়েছে।

মানুষের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠায় নিবেদিত এ মহান শত্রু মানুষটিকে ২৭ জানুয়ারি সৌখ বাহিনী কোনো কারণ ছাড়াই প্রেক্ষতার এবং শারীরিক নির্যাতন করে। তার বিকল্পে কোনো মাফলা ও জিডি না থাকায় তাকে ডিটেনশন নিয়ে এক মাসের জন্য জেলখানাজে পঠানো হয়। বিভিন্ন যাত্রাবর্ধী মহল তাকে বিভিন্ন মানসিক সত্ত্বে সম্পূর্ণ করার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছে।

শহীদুল ইসলাম যিনি ব্যক্তিগত স্বচ্ছন্দ্য পরিহার করে, সং ও সাধারণভাবে জীবনযাপন করেন, সুযোগ থাকা সত্ত্বেও যিনি বাড়ি-গাড়ি, ব্যক্তিগত সম্পদ বানানোর কোনো চেষ্টাই করেননি। যিনি তার সারা জীবনকে উৎসর্গ করেছেন মানুষের ও জাতির কল্যাণে, তাকে এ দেশের রাষ্ট্রযন্ত্র সে স্বীকৃতি না দিয়ে পুরস্কার হিসেবে সরকারি বাহিনী কর্তৃক লাঞ্ছিত ও চরিত্রকে কালিমালিঙ্গ করার অপপ্রয়াস চালায় তা হবে এ জাতির জন্য চরম অপমানকর, দুঃখ ও হতাশাজনক। গণতন্ত্র ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠার জন্য আর কত মূল্য দিতে হবে আমাদের?

আজ বিতর্কিত ম্যানেজমেন্ট কলেজ'। বাংলাদেশের সর্বোচ্চ নাগরিক সমাজ ও এনজিও সমন্বয়ে গড়ে ওঠা নবী সংস্থার তিনি আনুষ্ঠানিক এবং বাংলাদেশ প্রতিষ্ঠা। ১৯৯৪ সালে তিনি এলাকায় একটি কলেজ প্রতিষ্ঠার উদ্যোগ গ্রহণ করেন এবং কলেজটির নামকরণ করা হয় শহীদ মুক্তিবাহা নবাবিলাস। বর্তমানে এ শিক্ত প্রতিষ্ঠানটি এলাকার শিক্তর আনোয়রনে ব্যাপক ও উন্নয়নমূলক কৃষিকার্যে। উচ্চ মাধ্যমিক ও ডিগ্রি পর্যায়ে এ কলেজে এখন গ্রাম ৬ শতাব্দিক ছাত্রছাত্রী রয়েছে। এ কলেজ থেকে ১৯৯৭, ২০০০ এবং ২০০১ সালে সফলিত মেধা অধিকার স্থান পায়। এ বছরই শহীদুল ইসলামকে উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে উন্নয়নে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ অবদান রাখার স্বীকৃতিস্বরূপ

■ শেখক : সাংবাদিক

NGO director arrested in Satkhira

STAFF REPORTER

The joint forces yesterday arrested Shahidul Islam, executive director of a Satkhira-based NGO, Uttaran.

Police said they picked up Shahidul Islam in the morning from his house in Tala upazila. He was handed over to the police in the afternoon.

Uttaran has been working for
SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

NGO director

FROM PAGE 1

the rights of the landless people in the area and it is alleged that certain quarters are behind Shahidul Islam's arrest as Uttaran's bold stance against their interests, said sources.

উত্তরণ-পরিচালক শহিদুলের মুক্তি দাবি

জনকণ্ঠ রিপোর্ট : বেসরকারী সংগঠন উত্তরণ-এর পরিচালক শহিদুল ইসলামের মুক্তি দাবি করেছেন খুলনা, যশোর ও সাতক্ষীরা জেলার ৪১১ ছাত্র, শিক্ষক, সাংবাদিক, ব্যবসায়ী, সমাজকর্মীসহ এলাকাবাসী। প্রধান উপদেষ্টার কাছে পঠানো এক খারকপিপিতে তারা মর্মেতে শহিদুল ইসলামকে মুক্তি দেয়ার জন্য সরকারের প্রতি আহ্বান জানান। গত ২৭ জানুয়ারি যৌথবাহিনীর সদস্যরা সাতক্ষীরার তালা উপজেলার উত্তরণ সংগঠন উত্তরণের পরিচালক শহিদুল ইসলামকে গ্রেফতার করে।

(১১- পৃষ্ঠা ৩-এর ৩য় সেকশন)

উত্তরণ-পরিচালক

(১২-এর পাতার পর)

গত ২২ ফেব্রুয়ারি প্রধান উপদেষ্টার কাছে পঠানো খারকপিপিতে সমাজের বিভিন্ন পেশার প্রতিমিত্ররা তাঁর মুক্তি দাবি করে বলেন, যৌথবাহিনীর সদস্যরা শহিদুল ইসলামকে গ্রেফতার করে নির্বাসন করে। পরে তাঁকে এক ঘাসের আটকামেশ দেয়া হয়। তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে কোন সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগ নেই। তিনি মানবাধিকার ও সুশাসন প্রতিষ্ঠার একজন নিরলস কর্মী হিসাবে সুপরিচিত। তার পরিচালনায় উত্তরণ খালসমিতির সুমিহীনদের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠার লক্ষ্যে কাজ করে আসছে। মানুষের জন্য আটকামেশের সত্যসত্যটা তিন বছর মেয়াদী একটি প্রকল্পের মাধ্যমে সাতক্ষীরা ও খুলনা জেলার বিভিন্ন স্থানে প্রকল্পকর্মীদের মনসে ধাক্কা হওয়ায় ৪৪০ একর খালসমিতিতে সুমিহীনদের অধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠার লক্ষ্যে কাজ করে আসছেন। যাত্রের একটি অধীভার পূরণে উত্তরণ ও এর পরিচালক শহিদুল ইসলাম যাত্রী এবং সরকারকে মহাশয়িতা করছেন। অথচ তাঁর বিরুদ্ধে যাত্রের সম্পত্তি বিক্রি করে সেখান থেকে অতিমূল্য তোলা হয়েছে। এছাড়াও বৃক্ষরোপণ, স্যানিটেশন কার্যক্রম, পরিবেশ, শিক্ষাসহ সরকারের নানাবিধ উন্নয়ন কর্মকাণ্ডে তিনি ও তাঁর সংগঠন অগণী ভূমিকা পালন করে আসছেন। ২০০৪ সালে সাতক্ষীরা জেলার স্যানিটেশন কার্যক্রমে পরচাপ সাতক্ষীরা অর্ধশতাব্দীর সহযোগী হিসাবে উত্তরণের কর্মকাণ্ড এলাকাবাসী ও সরকারের প্রশংসা লাভ করে। তাঁরা মর্মেতে শহিদুল ইসলামকে মুক্তি দেয়ার জন্য সরকারের প্রতি আহ্বান জানান।

শেখের কাগজ

মুক্ত প্রাণের প্রতিচ্ছবি

ঢাকা • রবিবার • ২০ ফাল্গুন ১৪১৩ • ৪ মার্চ ২০০৭

১০

৫৬৫ জন উন্নয়নকর্মী উত্তরণের নির্বাহী পরিচালকের মুক্তি দাবি করেছেন

কাগজ প্রতিবেদক

সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগ ছাড়া যৌথবাহিনীর হাতে গ্রেপ্তার হওয়া বেসরকারি উন্নয়ন প্রতিষ্ঠান 'উত্তরণ'-এর নির্বাহী পরিচালক শহিদুল ইসলামকে অবিলম্বে মুক্তি দাবি জানিয়েছেন দেশের ৫৬৫ জন উন্নয়নকর্মী। তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের প্রধান উপদেষ্টার কাছে প্রেরিত এক পত্রে তারা শহিদুল ইসলামের মুক্তি দাবি করেন।

এসিকে বাংলাদেশ পরিবেশ আন্দোলনও (বাপা) জেল হাজতে আটক এনজিও কর্মকর্তা শহিদুল ইসলামের মুক্তি দাবি করেছে।

প্রধান উপদেষ্টার কাছে প্রেরিত উন্নয়নকর্মীদের আবেদনে বলা হয়, সাতক্ষীরার তালা উপজেলার বেসরকারি সংস্থা উত্তরণের নির্বাহী পরিচালক শহিদুল ইসলাম একজন জনপ্রিয় সমাজকর্মী। তিনি বিভিন্ন প্রগতিশীল আন্দোলনে সহযোগিতা করে থাকেন। তবে সরাসরি কোনো রাজনৈতিক দলের সঙ্গে জড়িত নন।

তার সংস্থা থেকে কোনো প্রাকৃতিক দুর্যোগে বিপন্ন মানুষের পাশে থাকে। তিনি দীর্ঘদিন খুলনা যশোর ও সাতক্ষীরা এলাকায় নদী ও পানি ইস্যুসহ ভূমিহীনদের অধিকার রক্ষায় আন্দোলন করে যাচ্ছেন।

তাই তার গ্রেপ্তারের পেছনে কি কারণ থাকতে পারে তা জনগণের বোধগম্য নয়।

তাই তার বিরুদ্ধে কোনো সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগ না থাকলে তাকে অবিলম্বে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হোক।

আবেদনপত্রে স্বাক্ষরকারী ৫৬৫ জন উন্নয়নকর্মীর মধ্যে রয়েছে যশোরের ৫৩ জন, বাগেরহাটের ৩০ জন, খুলনার ১০৮ জন এবং সাতক্ষীরার ৩৭৪ জন।

সমকাল

১০ ফাল্গুন ১৪১৩, ২৪ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০০৭

উত্তরণ পরিচালকের মুক্তি দাবি

যৌথ বাহিনীর হাতে আটক সাতক্ষীরার তালা উপজেলার উত্তরণ সংগঠন 'উত্তরণ'-এর পরিচালক শহিদুল ইসলামের মুক্তির জন্য প্রধান উপদেষ্টা ও আইন উপদেষ্টার কাছে দেশের প্রতিভ্যশা ৪০ জন অনুরোধ জানিয়েছেন। তারা বলেছেন, শহিদুল ইসলাম মানবাধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা ও দাবিদার বিমোচনের জন্য জনপ্রিয় এবং খ্যাতিনামা ব্যক্তিত্ব হিসেবে পরিচিত। আইনকে সমুদ্রত রাখতে এবং মানবিক মর্যাদা রক্ষা করতে দুই দশক ধরে তিনি নিরলসভাবে কাজ করে যাচ্ছেন। তারা বলেছেন, শহিদুল ইসলামের বিরুদ্ধে আনীত অভিযোগের বেশিরভাগই সাধারণ। তার বিরুদ্ধে কোনো সুনির্দিষ্ট অভিযোগ দেওয়া হয়নি। তারা তত্ত্বাবধায়ক সরকারের সার্বিক পদক্ষেপের প্রতি সমর্থন জানিয়ে বলেছেন, শহিদুল ইসলামের প্রতি এবং তার কাজের প্রতি তাদের সবার বিশ্বাস রয়েছে। বিবর্তনাতাদের মধ্যে রয়েছে আকশন এইড বাংলাদেশের কাপ্তি ডিরেক্টর সোভেব সিদ্দিকী, দৈনিক সমকাল সম্পাদক আবেদ বান, জনকণ্ঠের উপদেষ্টা সম্পাদক জোয়াব বান, জোরের কাগজের সম্পাদক শ্যামল দত্ত, আইন ও সালিশ কেন্দ্রের সুলতানা কামাল, ঢাকা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষক মেসবাহ কামাল, নিজেলা করির খুশী করির, হোসেন জিলুর রহমান, আবুল বারকাত প্রমুখ।



Uttaran