

Resebrev Nr 28

4–12 december 2005

BANGLADESH

DHAKA–SAVAR–RAJSHAHI–SYLHET–CHITTAGONG–COX'S BAZAR

Fortsättningen på radarparet Staffan Lindbergs och Lars Eklunds månadslånga tjänsteresa för Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET), med besök på universitet och utbildningsinstitutioner i nordöstra delen av Sydasien. Del 3: Bangladesh. Nio dagar i det gudomligt vackra landet som dock skakades av en serie bombdåd som till viss del påverkade vårt fullspäckade besöksprogram. Vi besökte Dhaka University, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), BRAC University, BIRDEM och det välrenommerade International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research (ICDDR,B) i Dhaka, men också Jahangirnagar University i Savar och universiteten i Chittagong, Sylhet och Rajshahi. Dessutom fick vi tillfälle att besöka Cox's Bazar med dess underbara sandstrand och buddhisttempel, samt teodlingarna utanför Sylhet – som för övrigt är min favoritstad i Bangladesh. Läs både de detaljerade universtrapporterna på engelska och de kompletterande reseanteckningarna på svenska.



Begum Rokeya, deputy coordinator for Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders (BIRDEM)

SASNET in the Northeast

Report from a contact journey to India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, November–December 2005

by Lars Eklund and Staffan Lindberg

In the Spring 2002 we made the first SASNET contact journey to four countries of the South Asian region. The purpose was to network with researchers and institutions, and get to know under which conditions and with what expectations they function.

We followed this up in the Fall 2003 through another journey, this time to visit universities in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Now two years later it was time to make a third tour covering the northeastern part of the subcontinent (India, Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh). We travelled for a full month and visited a large number of universities and research institutions in the region, and had fruitful meetings with vice-chancellors, researchers, teachers and students everywhere. The aim of the journey was to spread information about SASNET and higher institutions of learning in Sweden, and at the same time promote research cooperation and student exchange. [Read the detailed itinerary for the tour](#) (as a pdf-file).

• [Report from the contact journey to Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Bangladesh in February–March 2002](#)

• [Report from the contact journey to Pakistan and Afghanistan in November–December 2003](#)

After returning to Sweden we have compiled the reports from all meetings. Welcome to read our reports.



PART 3: BANGLADESH

Saturday evening at about 10 o'clock we landed at Zia International Airport in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, four hours late. The taxi took us on the new first class highway towards the city. We got a feeling that the recent SAARC meeting had meant an uplift of this part of the city, which the elite diplomats travelled through on their way to the conference venue. We reached our guest house in the Banani area, where we were going to stay.

Dhaka, Sunday 4 December 2005

Our first day in Dhaka, with several meetings booked in advance, at Dhaka University/ Dept. of Chemistry, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), and with representatives of James P. Grant School of Public Health, launched in 2004 by BRAC University and the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh. But we also had time to reflect upon the political and economic situation of Bangladesh.

[Report from meeting at the Department of Chemistry, Dhaka University](#)

[Report from Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies \(BIDS\)](#)

[Report from meeting with James P. Grant School of Public Health representatives](#)

[Read Staffan Lindbergs's reflections "Bangladesh – mounting fears of spiralling violence"](#)



Dhaka and Savar, Monday 5 December 2005

In the morning we visited Jahangirnagar University in the town of Savar, 32 km north of Dhaka, along the Trans-Asian Highway (*photo to the right*). We were invited to the university by Asst. Prof. Bashir Ahmed at the Dept. of Government and Politics, who had arranged for a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor Professor Mustahidur Rahman and the university faculty. A visit was also planned to Gono Bishwabidyalay University (also in Savar), involved in research collaboration and student exchange projects with the [Department of Applied Information Technology \(2IT\)](#), KTH School of Information and Communication Technology in Kista, but the visit was unfortunately cancelled.

So instead we returned after lunch to Dhaka, and the rest of the day we spent at Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders, BIRDEM, led by the dynamic Professor Liaquat Ali, renowned biochemist supported by the International Science Programme of Uppsala University. He is also involved in cultural activities, and in the evening we were invited for a musical evening and buffet dinner at the Centre for Cultural Development, set up by Prof. Liaquat Ali as a side activity to his work at BIRDEM,



[Report from visit to Jahangirnagar University, Savar](#)

[Report from meeting with the Biomedical Research Group, Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders, BIRDEM, Dhaka](#)

[Report from a cultural evening at the Shangkriti Bikash Kendra \(Centre for Cultural Development\), Dhaka](#)

Staffan visits Rajshahi, and Lars visits Sylhet, Tuesday 6 December 2005

Staffan travelled 5 hours on the Trans-Asian Highway in a comfortable Volvo buss (made in Bangalore) to Rajshahi in western Bangladesh. With the improved infrastructure in the country (especially the new [Jamuna Bridge](#), inaugurated in 1999) fast long distance bus lines now connect Dhaka with all major cities in the country, certainly a nice and environmental friendly alternative to domestic air flights. Staffan was invited to meetings at Rajshahi University, and was also going to visit the village Thanapara just outside Rajshahi. This village is connected to the work of the Swedish NGO The Swallows since the 1970's, and the undergraduate course students from Österlen folk high school in Tomelilla every year end up their South Asian field work trip with one week stay in Thanapara.

[Report from meeting at the Dept. of Sociology, Rajshahi University](#)

[Report from meeting at the Institute of Environmental Sciences \(IES\), Rajshahi University](#)

[Report from visit to the Thanapara Swallows Development Society](#)

Lars on the other hand flew early Tuesday morning to Sylhet in the northeastern part of Bangladesh, by the private GMG Airlines. A 50 minutes flight in a small propeller-driven aircraft over the lush Bangladeshi countryside, crisscrossed with streams and rivers, and covered with rice fields and agricultural land divided into small plots. Closer to Sylhet the landscape changes into small hills, this is the land of the Bangladeshi tea gardens. Lars was invited to visit the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST).

[Report from Sylhet, and meetings at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology](#)

Return to Dhaka, Wednesday 7 December 2005

Staffan returned from Rajshahi to Dhaka in the afternoon by a Biman Airlines flight, delayed as usual. Still he managed to rush to the Swedish Embassy in the Gulshan area, for a scheduled meeting with the new Swedish Ambassador to Bangladesh Britt Hagström, and the Deputy Head of Mission Anne Bruzelius. A discussion focused on the academic cooperation between Swedish and Bangladeshi institutions was held. Today there is quite a significant Swedish involvement in the natural sciences and medicine, but it would of course be desirable if this interaction could also be extended to the social sciences and humanities. There is also an increasing interest among Bangladeshi students to go for higher studies in Sweden, perhaps as a result of the fact that Muslims feel less welcome in the US after 9/11, and also because of a strong resentment about US foreign policy in the Middle East. Another factor of importance is that Swedish universities do not charge tuition fees. However, the Embassy is today preoccupied with a number of visa applications that prove to be based on false premises, faked bank account statements, etc. It appears as if the opportunities for higher studies in Sweden are being tried by persons with sinister ambitions...

Swedish Embassy web page: http://www.swedenabroad.com/pages/general_24242.asp

Lars also returned from Sylhet in the afternoon, again with a GMG Airlines flight, and after joining with Staffan we spent a nice evening together with the Swedish journalist Viveka Risberg and her husband Olof, working as country representative in Bangladesh for [Save the Children Sweden-Denmark](#). We were invited for dinner, and so was also Anna Gren, project coordinator for the [Swallows India-Bangladesh section](#).



Visit to the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Thursday 8 December

We spent the whole day at ICDDR,B, an institution that once used to be known as the Cholera Hospital in Bangladesh, but since then has grown into being an international health research institution. In collaboration with partners from academic and research institutions throughout the world, the Centre conducts research, training and extension activities as well as programme-based activities. Several Swedish universities are involved in collaboration projects with ICDDR,B and the key person in Swedish academia related to it is Prof. Lars-Åke Persson at [IMCH, Department of Women's and Children's Health](#), Uppsala University, who has worked at ICDDR,B for four years as manager for its Research division on Public health.

Chittagong, Friday 9 December 2005 Terrorism on the increase

This is now a nation in shock, in deep political and human instability. The day before a terrible suicide bomb attack at Netrakona took at least eight lives and injured at least 100. Meanwhile, bomb explosions in Khulna, Nilphaman, Naogaon and Meherpur resulted in death of two and at least six injured.

As we flew out of Dhaka in the morning on board a GMG Airlines plane, heading for Chittagong, we somehow felt relief about leaving the over-crowded city but also the many pessimistic discussions about the mounting fear of terrorist violence and breakdown of civil life. The politicians are blamed for nurturing Islamic extremism in their folds, for not recognising the importance of the bombings and now for not doing anything about it in terms of police and military actions.

But we had only just landed at Chittagong Airport, when we were informed that also this university had been subject to a bomb threat a few days earlier, and that our hosts did not dare to arrange a meeting there the day after. Instead the meeting would have to be arranged in a safe place somewhere else in the city on Sunday.

Cox's Bazar Saturday 10 December 2005

So where to go when no place is safe? It is one thing to avoid crowds, we think as we now walk on the world's longest beach at Cox's Bazar in southeast Bangladesh among holidaying honeymoon couples and middle class families touching the waves in full dress and resting under the umbrellas. It is quite fascinating to see how a western beach culture is being transformed by this Muslim society.

This is not far from Chittagong, and we went here while waiting for the meeting with the faculty and students on Sunday.

Cox's Bazar is one of few beach resorts in Bangladesh and this time of the year usually full of domestic tourists. Now the beach and hotels seemed half-empty and we read in the newspapers that people from Dhaka and elsewhere were afraid of travelling because of the violence. So far no foreigners have been the target, but foreign tourists have also stopped going to Bangladesh, which is quite understandable. We met only two young European girls during our 18 hours stay in the resort.



Chittagong, Sunday 11 December 2005

We checked out from our Hotel Media in Cox's Bazar in the morning and returned to Chittagong after first visiting the fascinating 18th Century Arakanese/Burmese Buddhist temple in Cox's Bazar (photo to the right). This part of Bangladesh was historically not a part of Bengal but of Arakan, and still there is a non-Bengali minority living here, practicing Buddhism.



In Chittagong our local host, Prof. Imam Ali (photo to the left) from the Department of Sociology, Chittagong University, had arranged for a meeting with teachers and students from the faculties of Social Science and Arts, to be held in the Kernel National School & College in central Chittagong.

[Report from meeting with Chittagong University teachers and students](#)



Back in Kolkata, Monday 12 December 2005

From Chittagong we had tickets for the convenient one hour GMG Airlines flight directly to Kolkata. But when it was time to fly it turned out that this route was no longer operational on Mondays. So instead of reaching Kolkata in the morning we had to make a detour via Dhaka and spend several hours in the airport there, before finally hopping over to India in the mid-afternoon.

Too late for any organised SASNET programme. Otherwise we had planned to visit the famous [Indian Statistical Institute \(ISI\)](#), an institution founded in 1931 and which has had an enormous importance for India's planning after independence, through its legendary Director Mahalanobis. Instead we checked in at a hotel near Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, and then spent a nice evening socialising with the Munshi family, Lars' relatives in their Tala Park Avenue residence.



SYLHET

COX'S BAZAR



KOMPLETTERANDE NOTERINGAR FRÅN SASNETS KONTAKTRESA I BANGLADESH

DHAKA

3 december 2005

Bodde hemma hos Rita Afsar

Flyg Kathmandu – Dhaka med Biman Airlines, ordinarie avgångstid klockan 21. Långa köer och mycket byråkrati följt av lång trist väntan. Ankom Dhaka klockan 22:15.

For med pre-paid taxi för 600 taka till stadsdelen Banani och sökte rätt på adressen Gata 13, Hus 137, som vi förmodade var ett hotell eller pensionat. Men blev glatt överraskade när vi upptäckte att det var hemma i Dr. **Rita Afsars** – vår kontaktperson i Bangladesh – och hennes make **Saquis** privatbostad,



4 december 2005

Dhaka University och BIDS

Direkt efter frukost tog vi oss klockan 09:30 till resebyrån Green Channel som vi anlitat för att boka våra flygbiljetter och hotellbokningar samt hyra av bil med chaufför. Men de hade inte öppnat än. Ritas man Saqui stannade kvar tills de öppnade, medan vi for med taxi till Dhaka University för avtalat möte med professor **Mohizuman** på kemiska institutionen inne på det fridfulla Science Campus och i Curzon Hall.

Lunch på fin restaurang i city efteråt och där träffade vi också professor **Qazi Matin Ahmed** från geologiska institutionen.

På eftermiddagen besökte vi Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), Rita Afsars institut. Åter till Banani med taxi i fruktansvärd trafik och ägnade kvällen åt att skriva rapporter.

5 december 2005

Trevligt återseende på Jahangirnagar Uni

Besökte Jahangirnagar University i Savar. Vi hyrde en bil med chaufför för hela dagen, 9-22 för 2 000 takas, men först begav vi oss till bussstationen för att köpa biljett åt Staffan för att i morgon resa till Rajshahi med Green Lines bekväma Volvo-buss. Detta eftersom flyget ställts in.

Så for vi ut från stan ut på Asian highway förbi en rad tegelbruk till Savar. Varmt välkomnade på universitetet och vi hade ett möte med lärarna på rektorns kontor. Träffade **Ghulam Hossain** som deltog i vår stora Sydasienskonferens i Lund



2004. Han tog oss med till med till samhällsvetenskapliga fakulteten. Många vi mötte där var bekymrade över den pågående bombvågen i Bangladesh och orade för ökad islamisering i landet. **Bashir Ahmeds** fru bjöd på lunch i deras lägenhet.

Karismatisk föreståndare för BIRDEM

Klockan 13 for vi åter till Dhaka för nästa avtalade möten, här skildes vi tillfälligt åt. Staffan besökte sociologiska institutionen på Dhaka University medan jag tog mig till BIRDEM – Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders (på bilden).

Där träffade jag den karismatiska föreståndaren för detta institut – **Liaquat Ali** – och den undersköna biträdande föreståndaren **Begum Rokeya**. Tillbringade hela eftermiddagen på institutet – fick se en powerpoint-presentation om dess verksamhet, och därefter ordnades ett möte för mig att presentera SASNET för institutets forskare och studenter. Det gick jättebra – speciellt efter att de fick höra att jag är gift med bengalisk kvinna.



Liaquat och hans hustru .

Musikafton till vår ära

Klockan 17 kom också Staffan till BIRDEM, och Liaquat som är mycket kulturintresserad tog oss med till det kulturcentrum som han skapat i anslutning till BIRDEM-sjukhuset. Det inrymmer ett bibliotek och det bedrivs studiecirkel och konserter och ikväll hade han arrangerat en musikafton till vår ära. Duktiga musiker hade engagerats och många inbjudna personer, bland annat en man som bott i Sverige i 15 år.

Satt på golvet på taket och lyssnade på den klassiska indiska musiken som avslutades med en svensk folklåt i spännande indisk tappning. Vi stannade till sist, för Liaquat insisterade på att Staffan skulle avtacka musikerna och ge dem blommor.

Hem till Ritas lägenhet med hyrd bil klockan 22:45.



6 december 2005

Sylhet fortfarande en fridfull småstad

Staffan och jag jag delade på oss. Jag flög till Sylhet med GMG Airlines klockan 09:05, en 50 minuters flight. Staffan for med Volvo-buss till Rajshahi. Vi steg upp klockan 7 och klockan 08:10 kom bilen och hämtade mig för transport till flygplatsen.

Framme i Sylhet tog jag taxi till Hotell Polash där jag var enda gästen. Kostnad för rummet 1 400 takas.

Bad hotellet ringa **Rezaul Kabir Chowdhury** – min kontaktperson för mötet på Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), och han kom tillsammans med en kollega **Shamim** för att hämta mig.



Vi for med cykelrikshor. Sylhet kändes fortfarande som en fridfull småstad, ingen större skillnad mot när som jag mindes mitt besök i staden 1982. Direkt till ett möte för forskare och lärare från alla avdelningar, med start klockan 12. Em fullsatt aula och det var ett mycket stort intresse för min presentation av SASNET.

På eftermiddagen besökte jag så en rad institutioner där det fanns svensk anknytning: Kemiteknik, Miljöteknik, och Socialt Arbete. Klar med desa möten var klockan 16, och jag tog en promenad med Rezaul runt campus. Besökte sjukstugan på universitetet då jag fått ont i ena örat, och fick medicin.

Sjöng Tagoresång inför fullsatt auditorium

Av en händelse sammanföll mitt besök på SUST med att kemiteknik-institutionen firade 12-årsjubileum. En procession genom campus och sedan arrangerades en kulturfest i universitetsaulan. Jag blev hedersgäst och jag gjorde stor succé när jag ställde mig på scenen och sjöng **Tagore**-sången *Tomar Holo Shuru* på bengali inför en uppskattande publik med rektor och alla professorer närvarande. Jubel efteråt.

Klockan 19 fick jag transport till hotellet. Fortfarande ensam gäst på hotellet. Satt i matsalen på kvällen och skrev rapporter om gårdagens och dagens möten.

7 december 2005

Hinduiska manipuris i Sylhet

Fortsatt ont i örat trots örondroppar. Avslutade rapportskrivningen i tid klockan 10 då Rezaul och Shamim hämtade mig med bil för en sightseing-tur innan jag skulle flyga tillbaka till Dhaka klockan 13:10.

Checkade ut från hotellet och for först till en klädbutik i basaren som sålde Manipuri-sarees – det fanns nämligen en mindre grupp av hinduska manipuris bosatt i Sylhet innan

Indiens delning 1947, och som stannade kvar där trots att Sylhetprovinsen tillföll Pakistan (och sedan 1971 är en del av Bangladesh). Huvudparten av Manipuris bor naturligtvis i den indiska delstaten Manipur. Köpte en saree till Bubu för 750 takas och en schal för 400.

Sedan lämnade vi staden med dess kaotiska cykelriksha-situation och for genom ett kuperat landskap en kort sträcka utanför stan till en teplantage från 1854. Vandrade runt där och fotograferade, och erbjöds köpa te av en plantageförman, men jag avböjde då kvaliteten inte var tillräckligt bra. På väg till flygplatsen fikade vi på Parjatan Motel.



Hembjudna till familjen Risberg

På flygplatsen noterade jag att Sylhet har en utrikes-terminal, det går direktflyg till Enland. Men jag flög givetvis inrikes, GMG till Dhaka. Framme klockan 15 tog jag en taxi hem till Banani. Staffan hade tur att det idag gick att flyga från Rajshahi. Därför hann han med att besöka svenska ambassaden – han for dit direkt från flygplatsen.

Jag däremot vilade några timmar innan det var dags att besöka **Olof** och **Viveka Risberg**, som bjudit in oss till klockan 19 till deras lägenhet i diplomatstadsdelen Gulshan 2.

Olof jobbar som psykolog för Rädda barnen i Bangladesh och Viveca har jobbat som copywriter och kundtidningsredaktör i Sverige. Läs en artikel om deras liv i Dhaka, i Aftonbladet den 22 augusti 2006.

Dhaka är en märklig stad. Total avsaknad av traditionella bengaliska/indiska symboler i gatubilden. Istället västerländskt och modernt i total kontrast mot det djupa armod som majoriteten av befolkningen lever under.



Kom till Risbergs lägenhet i ett nytt bostadskomplex, stor flott våning där Olof och Viveca bor med sina två barn. **Anna Green** som jobbar som volontär för Svalorna Indien Bangladesh var också där.

Dessutom kom en tjej från Lund som just nu jobbar på ambassaden här i Dhaka – journalisten **Helena Thorfinn** som tidigare



jobbat på Skånska Dagbladet på 1980-talet, och är gift med en engelsman som jobbat för Financial Times i Stockholm. Trevlig kväll med samtal om tidningen Arbetet och dess öde med Helena, hon kände redaktionschefen **Bertil Johansson** innan han tvingades dra vidare.

Bjudna på gin och tonic och sedan middag med vin. Allt vore toppen om inte Staffan med sprit i kroppen totalt tog över all konversation, jag fick nästan inte en syl i vädret. Irriterad när han utifrån sina få dagars vistelse i Bhutan och Nepal vet "sanningen" om dessa länder. Ingen chans för mig att prata med Viveca om journalistik, min indiska familj eller mina resor i Bangladesh.

Kvar till 22:45. Inga taxibilar fanns att få tag på, men Anna som också bor i Banani såg till att vi tog en cykelriksha där hon satt på ryggstödet med sina ben vilande över mina. 100 takas betalade vi för att komma "hem" – Ritas och Saquis lägenhet på gata 37, två kvarter från Bananis moské.

8 december 2005

Heldag på ICDDR,B

Nyheter domineras av uppgifter om bombdåd utförda av islamistiska självmordsbombare på olika platser i landet.

Vi hade ett heldagsprogram på ICDDR,B – före detta Koleraskjukhuset i Mahakhali. Ett ytterst ambitiöst program hade lagts upp av forskaren **Mahfuzar Rahman** som disputerade i Linköping 1999. Han känner väl **Martin Tondel** som ingår i SASNET-nätverket. Vi besökte



de olika avdelningarna och snackade med forskarna och såg på deras laboratorier.

Träffade högsta chefen, **David Sack** som i måndags hade **Bill** och **Melinda Gates** på besök, något som gjorde att vårt besök fick flyttas. Många av forskarna på ICDDR,B är utbildade i Sverige, och otroligt många svenska institutioner är involverade i samarbetsprojekt. Sverige bekostar dessutom en stor del av verksamheten.

Samtidigt med oss var även ett par bekanta eminenta svenska forskare på plats: **Lars-Åke Persson** från Uppsala universitet och **Marie Vahter** från Karolinska Institutet, samt en kvinnlig journalist från Sverigrs Radio.

Jag mådde inte riktigt bra på förmiddagen, men blev bättre efter ett lunchpaket och en Cola så jag lyckades hårdas ut fram tills klockan 17 då programmet avslutades.

Handlade i Raang-affär

Vi erbjöds skjuts med en ICDDR,B-bil hem till Banani, tacknämligt. Men först kördes vi till en *Raang*-affär som säljer bangladeshiska hantverksprodukter och kläder. Dessa affärer lockar många utlänningar och ägs enligt Saqui av BRAC. Han ogillar BRAC:s affärsmässighet. Jag köpte i alla fall en axelväska och en blombukett – inte äkta – för att ge i present till Rita på kvällen.

Det var sista kvällen i Dhaka och Rita bjöd på middag, fisk och getkött (*mutton*). Sedan visade Staffan sin Tamil Nadu-powerpoint-presentation för Rita och Saqui, medan jag satt och skrev dagbok i vardagsrummet. Detta innan tjänstekvinnan satte upp våra myggnät och jag kunde gå till sängs klockan 23. Staffan däremot kunde inte sova – han tycks behöva öl och whiskey varje kväll, så han satte sig att läsa en **Henning Mankell**-bok som jag haft med från Sverige.

På ICDDR,B idag fick vi förresten tillgång till internet med bredband. Jag kollade mail och jag blev glad när jag fick höra att **Bengt Hall** fått mitt brev med USB-minnet i måndags. På stickan fanns min layout till Röda Kapellets skivomslag, som nu lämnats till tryck.



9 december 2005

Flyg till Chittagong

Flyg Dhaka till Chittagong klockan 10:20 för en 50 minuters färd med GMT Airlines. Vår hyrbil från i måndags hämtade oss klockan 8 och körde oss till flygplatsen där det blev lång väntan men vi fick tillfälle att läsa dagstidningarna om de senaste bombdåden med många döda. Alla människor oroliga.

Framme i Chittagong väntade en beställd bil (fixat av resebyrån i Dhaka) som körde oss till Hotel Tower Inn i centrum. Lång väg att fara längs hamnen och floden. Ett fint hotell men även här så gott som inga andra gäster än vi. Fick ett rum på sjunde våningen och Staffan ringde genast vår kontaktperson, professor **Imam Ali**. Denne rapporterade om att bombhot riktats mot Chittagong University och vi avråddes därför från





att besöka universitetet. Vi måste ändra på vårt planerade program, och stanna på hotellet. Ågnade hela eftermiddagen åt att skriva rapporter.

Kväll på Chittgong Club

Klockan 19 kom så Imam Ali och tog oss med till Chittagong Club där han var medlem. Exklusiv klubb men ändå billigt i matsalen, han bjöd. Undet bilfärden till klubben reagerade jag starkt över påträngande fenomen med tiggare som krafade på bilens rutor.

Ali var väldigt intresserad av att diskutera ett forskningsprojekt om prostitution och otrohet bland bangladeshiska migrantarbetare. Han föreföll vara en märkligt sammansatt person – sociologiprofessor, rotarian och bingospelare på Chittagong Club. .

Åter till hotellet klockan 21:30, och beställde två burkar öl genom hotellpersonalen som levererade två burkar Heineken för 400 takas styck (det vill säga 50 kronor). Kollade sedan på kabel-TV – från Kina, Sydkorea, Indonesien och Saudiarabien, men också alla Indiska och bangladeshiska kanaler.

10 december 2005

Ledig dag i Cox's Bazar

Sov gott i luftkonditionerat rum och på natten släppte en stor vaxpropp i vänster öra, som gjorde jag knappt kunde höra någonting igår. Frukost efter vi duschat, helt ensamma i matsalen. Turisterna har flytt landet.

Packade ihop alla saker men lämnade en väska på hotellet. Klockan 9 kom resebyrå Green Channels representant **Selim** med bil, chaufför och guide – **Suman** – för färd till Cox's Bazar.

3,5 timmars färd dit på bra väg, men först dock genom smala gränder i Chittagong och över Karnaphulifloden. Fotograferade jordbruk på vägen, risskörden är i full gång. Väl framme tog vi in på Hotel Medic nära stranden, och jag ringde **Bubu** på en lånad mobil, Gav henne hotellnumret så hon kunde ringa upp mig i lunchrestaurangen medan vi åt lunch.





Klockan 16 kom Suman och följde med Staffan och mig på en strandpromenad. Mycket solstolar att hyra och många bangladeshiska nygfta par och familjer men inga utländska turister.

Plötsligt fick jag diarrékänning men jag hann ta mig in på det finaste hotellet – Seagull. Och där har vi också varit på kvällen och ätit middag. Tog underbart god pepparstek för 300 takas, extremt dyrt för maträtter jämfört med andra restauranger här i landet där maten sällan kostar mer än 100 takas. Drack Tiger öl från Singapore, 250 takas styck. Jag tog mig sedan tillbaka till vårt hotell medan Staffan stannade kvar på Seagull för att dricka whisky i baren.



Klockan är 22:45, fem timmars tidsskillnad mot Svergie. Nu är det bara några dagar kvar tills Bubu, **Mattias** och **Daniel** flyger till Kolkata och vi återses. Ikväll är det för övrigt Röda Kapellet's julkonsert – hoppas det fungerar med skivorna.

Staffan har skrivit klart en artikel om det politiska läget i Bangladesh, och vi har båda skrivit färdigt våra universitetsrapporter. Skönt. Sedan tillkommer förstås mycket redigeringsarbete innan rapporterna kan läggas ut på nätet.

11 december 2005

Buddhisttempel från 1700-talet

Sightseeingtur i Cox's Bazar med vår hyrda luftkonditionerade bil. Checkade ut från hotellet



klockan 9 och for med Suman till flera buddhistiska tempel. Stamfolken som bor i området och uppe i Chittagong Hill Tracts är i huvudsak buddhister. Bäst av allt var besöket till ett vackert tempel från 1700-talet i traditionell burmesisk-arakanesisk byggnadsstil.



Bombhot mot Chittagong University

Sedan for vi tillbaka till Chittagong. Väl där rådde ett trafik-kaos utan like i de smala gränderna med cykelrikshor och lastbilar.

Klockan 17 hade Imam Ali ordnat ett möte för oss med forskare, lärare och studenter från Chittagong University på en lokal i stan, ett



college. Detta eftersom man inte kunde garantera vår säkerhet på campus. 15 lärare och 20 studenter var på plats, och intresset för SASNET var stort.

Klockan 19 åter till hotellet. Skrev genast klar rapporten från mötet, eller snarare Staffan skrev, jag stod bredvid. Ikväll kunde Ali inte ta oss med till klubben då inga gäster var välkomna idag. Så vi åt middag på hotellet – kinamat. Bubu ringde till mig på restaurangen och jag talade även med Mattias.

På mail fick jag info från Bengt Hall att konserten igår kväll gått bra, men endast fåtalig publik och 30 skivor sålda med nöd-omslag, resten trycks till jul. Även mail från **Tomas Lofström**. Joan behöver översättningshjälp en vecka i januari, jag föreslår henne Bubus syster **Buku**.

12 december 2005

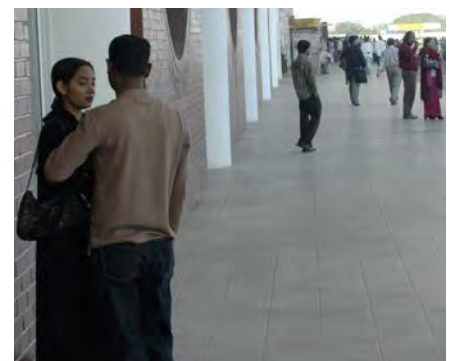
Komplicerat flyg till Kolkata

Staffan och jag flyga från Chittagong till Kolkata. Selim kom på morgonen och bjöd oss på frukost, och följde sedan med oss till flygplatsen.

Vi hade hoppas på direktflyg men något sådant gick inte idag utan istället måste vi flyga klockan 09:20

inrikesflyg till Dhaka och där ta oss från inrikes- till utrikes-terminalen och fyra timmars väntan tills Biman-planet avgick till Kolkata.

Vi såg många migrantarbetare till Mellera Östern som tog farväl av sina familjer.



LARS EKLUND

Fortsättning på Sydasiensresan, se http://larseklund.in/resebrev/29_kolkata2005.pdf

SASNET visit to Department of Chemistry,

Dhaka University, 4 December 2005

View

Edit

Revisions

Nodequeue

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Dhaka University web page: <http://www.univdhaka.edu/>

Department of Chemistry web page: <http://www.univdhaka.edu/departement/index.php?bodyid=CHM>

Dhaka University, established in 1921, is the largest university in Bangladesh with about 1 300 teachers and 28 000 students from undergraduate to PhD levels. It currently has 10 faculties (Arts, Biological Science, Business Studies, Education, Law, Medicine, PGMR, Pharmacy, Science, and Social Science) with a total number of 51 departments. Besides there are nine separate institutes and 18 research centres.



Students at the Dept. of Chemistry, Dhaka University.

We visited Dhaka University already during our contact journey in 2002, but then the

visit was limited to the Faculty of Social Science, and meeting staff from the departments of Sociology and Political Science only (see <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/bangmeet.html>, and <http://www.sasnet.lu.se/dhakmeet2.html>).

This time our visit was devoted to visit the Faculty of Sciences. Its departments are located in the historic Curzon Hall in Ramna (built in 1905 by Lord Curzon, the then Governor General of British India, to be the town hall, but was later taken over by the Dhaka University) and other newer buildings in its close vicinity. More specifically our destination was the Dept. of Chemistry, where we had an appointment to meet Professor [M. Mosihuzzaman](#) (*photo to the right*), to whom we had been introduced by Dr. [Malin Åkerblom](#), International Science Programme (ISP) at Uppsala University. ISP has been involved in a long-standing collaboration with the Dept. of Chemistry at Dhaka University, and given substantial support with material and training.

Prof. Mosihuzzaman (called Zaman) has together with a group of dedicated scientists at his department developed two research programmes in collaboration with Swedish researchers and institutions. The first programme dealt with research on natural products, especially medicinal plants, and was developed in collaboration with the Swedish University of Agriculture (SLU), Ultuna, Uppsala, and the Dept. of Molecular Cell Biology at Uppsala University. The programme has now developed into an International network in Africa, Asia and South America (AFASA), and the plan is to establish an International Centre for Natural Product Research in Dhaka (ICNPR).



The second programme is research on pollutants in food and environment. It was started in collaboration with SLU but has now developed into a network with many Swedish institutions, including the [Department of Environmental Chemistry](#), Wallenberg Laboratory, Stockholm University (counterpart Prof. [Åke Bergman](#)) and [AnalyCen Laboratory](#) in Lidköping.

A first task has been to study organochlorine pesticide residues in fifteen fish and fifteen vegetable samples from Bangladesh. The residues found were not alarming and within acceptable daily intake given by the WHO. In dry fish including shrimps, however, DDT and its metabolites were detected. The suspicion is that DDT, banned in Bangladesh, is smuggled from India and sold and used illegally. Another source could be a closed down DDT factory in Chittagong, which has a stockpile of DDT, which may still be sold. 'We are famous for corruption,' as Prof. Mosihuzamman wryly comments.

Studies now concentrate on a more systematic sampling of the above items and the residues of antibiotics in shrimps. Fish and shrimp export is the second biggest export item in the national economy, second only to garments. Some shipments have actually been rejected by US and European buyers and this is a cause of great concern. In these studies, the department cooperates with the relevant Ministries, a trade association of fish exporters, and an NGO engaged in promoting fish export. But they also need foreign collaboration especially when it comes to the supply of sophisticated technical equipment, since the residues are miniscule and hard to discover with traditional chemical analysis.



The department has set up an Organic Pollution Research Centre, in operation since November 2005. The Centre has been given a strong positive evaluation by ISP and they hope for technical and financial support from abroad.

Two other research programmes carried out at the Dept. of Chemistry are also noticeable: one programme on antidiabetic plant research, that had developed into an International network called ANRAP, Asian Network of Research on Antidiabetic Plants ([more information on ANRAP](#)), and another research programme on arsenic in well water. A workshop on the latter issue was going to be held on 11 December 2005 in Dhaka.

There are two prominent co-workers of Prof. Mosihuzamman with Swedish connections: Prof. [Altaf Hussain](#), who took his PhD in Sweden in 1978 ([read his biodata](#)), and Prof. [Nilufar Nahar](#), who was the first of a number of 18 Bangladeshi students who have received a sandwich training in Sweden for the PhD degree. This is also an important part of the long standing cooperation with institutions in the Stockholm-Uppsala region (supported by ISP). Both Prof. Hussain and Prof. Nahar were in fact on a visit to Sweden for training in new types of analysis technique, so we could not meet them in their department in Dhaka.



After our meeting in Prof. Mosihuzamman's office we were given the opportunity to see the department's advanced laboratories and equipments partly being provided from Sweden.

Finally, Prof. Mosihuzamman hosted a delicious lunch at a Chinese restaurant in downtown Dhaka, to which also Dr. [Kazi Matin Ahmed](#) (*photo to the left*), Professor at the Department of Geology participated. Dr. Ahmed is presently involved in a Linnaeus-Palme students and teachers exchange programme with the [Department of Land and Water Resources Engineering](#) at the Royal Institute of Technology (Swedish counterpart is Prof. [Prosun Bhattacharya](#), well known to us in the SASNET

network).



Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS),

Sunday 4 December 2005

Web page:

<http://www.bids-bd.org>

On Sunday afternoon we visited the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, BIDS, located in Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, in the southwestern part of Dhaka. This was our second visit to BIDS, the first time was during SASNET's contact journey to Dhaka in 2002, when we met a large number of researchers. [Read our report from the 2002 visit.](#)

Dr. **Rita Afsar**, our host in Dhaka, is a Senior Research Fellow at BIDS (and also a member of [SASNET's South Asian Reference Group](#)) and

she had again invited us to the Institute. Since many years she is personally involved in research collaboration with Swedish colleagues, among them Dr. **Alia Ahmad**, Dept. of Economics, Lund University. Together they convened a panel, nr 20 on "*Rural Livelihood and Social Capital: The Case of Bangladesh and South Asia*" at the 18th ECMSAS conference organised by SASNET in Lund in July 2004 ([more information on the panel](#)).

This time Dr. Afsar had arranged for an exchange meeting with her colleagues at BIDS. It was held in the office of Dr. Omar Haider Chowdhury, one of the five research directors of BIDS. The Director General Dr. Quazi Shahabuddin, the research director Dr. Rushidan Islam Rahman, and Dr. Afsar were also present.

The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies is a multi-disciplinary organisation for policy-oriented research on development issues and dissemination of information through books, publications, web site and seminar programs. Among the research topics on the agenda are poverty and inequality, international trade, agricultural development, food security, micro-credit, industrial development, health, nutrition, education, water resources management, environment, gender, migration and urbanisation. Currently 13 senior research fellows, 19 research fellows and 11 research associates are connected to BIDS.

In the call for the meeting, it was mentioned that one important objectives of the meeting was 'to deepen relations between BIDS and relevant universities and research institutions in Sweden for possible future collaboration including visiting scholarships, guest lecture tours, etc.'

The expectations were therefore high on us to deliver concrete suggestions on how to reach these goals, and after our presentation of SASNET we were hard pressed to answer what has happened since our last visit to BIDS in 2002. They mentioned as a model a previous research collaboration that BIDS had with [Christian Michelsen Institute](#) in Bergen, Norway, involving visiting fellowships and joint research projects (contact person at CMI is Dr. **Arne Wiig**).

We explained the very different role of SASNET, not being a research institute but a network and a facilitator bringing Swedish and South Asian researchers together. We offer planning grants to new collaborative research projects, but the contact between partners must be established independently from SASNET, even though we may assist in bringing partners together (and our web site gives much information about possible research partner institutions at Swedish universities).

Dr. Rahman still asked for initiatives coming from Sweden, and Staffan promised to come up with ideas based in our knowledge about what kind of South Asia related research in social sciences that are there in Sweden. He mentioned the research on good governance and corruption, done by the [Dept. of Government](#), Uppsala University, and will find out whether BIDS could become involved in this, especially since BIDS plans for a conference/seminar on good governance to be held in Dhaka in March 2006. The conference is organised by Dr. M. Asaduzzaman.

Another connection that already exists with Sweden is Dr. Malin Arvidson at the [Dept. of Sociology](#), Lund University. She defended her doctoral dissertation on "*Demanding Values. Participation, Empowerment, and NGOs in Bangladesh*", in March 2003, and is now working on a project on '*Institutions and livelihoods: Perspectives of change in rural Bangladesh*,' in close contact with BIDS.

The origin of BIDS dates back to 1959, when it was founded in Karachi as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). In 1970, the Institute was moved to Dhaka, and after the country's independence in 1971 it became the Bangladesh Institute of Development Economics (BIDE), with a mission to address the development problems confronting the newly independent nation. In order to better reflect this broadened research focus, the name was changed again in 1974 to Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.



Rita Afsar, Rushidan Islam Rahman, Omar Haider Chowdhury, Quazi Shahabuddin, and Staffan Lindberg, at the meeting held at Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, BIDS.

Meeting with representatives of BRAC University's James P. Grant School of Public Health, Sunday 4 December 2005

[View](#) [Edit](#) [Revisions](#) [Nodequeue](#)

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

BRAC web page: www.brac.net

BRAC University web page: www.bracuniversity.ac.bd

BRAC – Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee – is probably the biggest Development NGO in the country and maybe one of the biggest in the world. With its nationwide activities in education, health and rural development it is almost like a “state in the state”, which its skyscraper head office in the Gulshan area of Dhaka makes clear. Its success in attracting funds from governments and other donors all over the world makes it one of the most powerful institutions in Bangladeshi society today.

Today BRAC not only works in Bangladesh, but also operates in neighboring countries like Afghanistan to ensure a just, enlightened, healthy and democratic society.

Among its many activities BRAC also runs a private university, BRAC University, established in 2001 with the goal of providing high quality broad-based education for students – the next generation of young leaders – and equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary for taking on the challenges of development. BRAC University now runs comprehensive programmes in Microfinance, Health, Education, and Social Development.

In 2004, BRAC furthermore launched the [James P. Grant School of Public Health](#) (named in honour of James Grant who was a UNICEF representative committed to working in Bangladesh for the poor) to provide public health education of international excellence relevant to the particular needs of the developing world. The school was set up and is jointly run by the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh, ICDDR,B (see our report from [ICDDR,B](#)).

The mission of the School, also known as BRAC School of Public Health, is to improve health outcomes of populations in disadvantaged areas of the world, particularly the poor and women, through the application of the art and science of public health. The school is an example of BRAC's continued effort to contribute towards Human Development worldwide.

The School's first major undertaking is a Master of Public Health (MPH) programme, which opened its doors to Bangladeshi and international students in February 2005. The MPH programme is an intensive 12-month programme. The School has received generous grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, The James P. Grant Trust, UNICEF, UN/Afghanistan and BRAC to finance the first year of the programme. The 1 million-dollar grant that BRAC received from the Gates Foundation in 2004 is being used to initiate an endowment fund for the School. The Masters programme in Public Health also has strong Swedish connections, as it is run in collaboration with Karolinska Institutet Medical University in Stockholm, Uppsala University and Umeå University.

We had been invited for dinner at BRAC Centre Inn, by Professor [A. Mushtaque R. Chowdhury](#), Dean of James P. Grant School of Public Health (*photo to the right*). He is also Bangladeshi team leader of the PHILL project (Primary Health-Care in Later Life: improving services in Bangladesh and Vietnam) run by a Swedish-British-Bangladeshi-Vietnamese research consortium, funded by the European Commission. The Swedish partner consists of the [Division of Geriatric Epidemiology, Department of NEUROTEC](#) (Clinical Neuroscience, Occupational Therapy and Elderly Care Research); Karolinska Institutet, contact person Dr [Zarina Kabir](#). In Bangladesh this research is carried out at the Research and Evaluation Division of BRAC, ICDDR,B, and the Centre for Health and Population Research. An International Conference on “*Mainstreaming Ageing in Health Systems and Rural Development*” was held in Dhaka in November 2005, just before our arrival in the country. [More information on the conference.](#)





We had a nice conversation about BRAC University, its international collaborations, and the Masters programme. Prof. **Demissie Habte** (photo to the left), hailing from Ethiopia with many years of work in Dhaka (for several years he was the Executive Director of ICDDR,B) was also with us for the dinner in the neat BRAC Inn restaurant.



The Masters Programme in Public Health is a very advanced programme running for 12 months and 'uses a multi-disciplinary problem-based learning approach primary areas being: Epidemiology, Biostatistics, Social and Behavioural Sciences, Health Systems Management, Health Economics and financing, and Environmental Health.' It has 25 students and there were about 400 applicants to each programme. When we asked if there are jobs waiting for the students, the answer was that there are none at the moment, but that they anticipate that there will be soon when the government and other agencies realise the need for an integrated approach to health problems.

The course is based on the collaboration of several international partners. Besides the Swedish universities mentioned above, also Columbia University, Harvard School of Public Health, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and University of Amsterdam are participating in the programme. In addition, teachers are flown in from these and other institutions worldwide.

In December 2005 a group of 15 students from Uppsala University participated in a two weeks course on 'Mother and Child Nutrition' at James P. Grant School of Public Health, a course which includes both lectures and field visits.



Staffan Lindberg on 2005 political situation in Bangladesh

[View](#) [Edit](#) [Revisions](#) [Nodequeue](#)

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Bangladesh – mounting fears of spiralling violence Sunday, 4 December

Bangladesh now has a stable government with the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) at the steering wheel. The economy of this country inhabited by 140 million people is stable at around 5 per cent growth of BNP per year, which is not bad, but still lower than the Indian high growth performance at 7–8 per cent a year. School enrolment is higher than in India, and there has been a progressive decrease of people below the poverty line in the last 15 years, according to official statistics. Room for optimism?

It is the garment industry that has fuelled the economy, now making up 75 per cent of exports, but the green revolution has also come to Bangladesh with subsequent demand for industrial goods in the countryside. Add to this increasing numbers of migrant labour to the Middle East and steadily rising remittances, which the many banks not least Arabic in the countryside bear witness to. Moreover, the country is still one of the biggest receivers of development assistance, which the large Dhaka expatriate community from the whole world bears witness to.

Undernutrition and fear for Indian takeover

But the bottom line for Bangladesh was extremely low when this country was born in 1971 and still about half of the population is below the national poverty line, which is the worst record of all South Asian countries. There is severe under-nutrition among at least 30 million people and there is malnutrition among many more. There is low birth weight of a sizable number of newborn babies and malnutrition which in turn is related to low weight among pregnant mothers.

SAARC is now trying to open a freer market in South Asia. However, there is a general fear that Bangladesh will suffer a big loss if and when the South Asian markets for goods and services are opened up fully. The Indian companies would simply outdo the Bangla ones. This comes somewhat as a surprise to us, seeing Indian goods all over in the bazaars. The Indians are already here!

A recent offer by the Tata Group in India to invest about USD 3 billion in a steel plant, a fertiliser factory, a power generation unit and a coalmine is now being considered by the Government here. It is more than the total foreign investment so far in Bangladesh since its independence in 1971. Even so it arouses the fear of an Indian take over of the economy of this young nation.

Tops the corrupt nations list

One great concern is, of course, that Bangladesh now tops the list of most corrupt nations for the fifth consecutive year and that public institutions' performance is extremely poor. So this is also the country, where powerful NGOs and private service deliverers compete with the public sector. People simply vote with their money to get health, education and other services, which means that the poor go without. What can save the public sector from falling into oblivion and become completely obsolete?

But the overriding concern is now the fear of fundamentalist violence in the form of suicide bombers. The simultaneous blasts in 450 places all over the country on 17 August this year has now been followed up with several new bomb attacks, many of them carried out by suicide bombers. The attacks seem at random and can be anywhere, but some at least have targeted courts and judges, policemen and politicians. 'Man's rule of the country have failed, so has military rule, now only the rule of Allah can save the country and give progress to the poor man,' is the saying we hear with increasing intensity. Yesterday's papers reported about thousands of potential young suicide bombers in the counter, ready to attack if they are called to do so. Here is the fear of violence and death, which cannot be prevented by police surveillance.

The army is now contemplating to set up a special terrorist unit to prevent more bombings. 'Otherwise we have to invite the US army to come here and fight the terrorists,' as someone close to Government circles remarked.

And everybody asks: Who is behind it? Is it foreign groups or domestic or both?



Quarrel between the 'widow' and the 'daughter'

On 4 December 2005 Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, leader of BNP and widow of the murdered Zia-Ur-Rahman, invited the leader of the opposition party Awami League, Sheikh Hasina Wajed, to enter into a 'dialogue on ways to cope with the raging militancy in the country. Sheikh Hasina, daughter of the murdered liberation leader Sheikh Mujibur Rahman however bluntly refused any cooperation and instead asked for the resignation of the government. Such is the political quarrel here between two parties, that have about the same ideology (read: 'making Bangladesh a pure Muslim country and fighting back Indian imperialism') but with BNP to the centre-right and Awami League to the centre-left. The main accusation is, of course, that BNP rules with the help of two Islamist parties and have made the fundamentalist ideas politically correct. "Playing with fire" so to say. All along, since the first bomb blasts in 1999, this terrible violence has claimed at least 179 lives. A number of insightful studies have revealed the seriousness of this mounting problem and asked for political remedies. But the reaction of the sitting regime has been first denial of the facts of rising violence with a foreign and domestic backing and then blatant inaction.

Fear for terrorism

A few days later during a bus trip to Rajshahi I conversed with a general surgeon and associate professor at Rajshahi Medical College. He was one of those increasingly scarce Hindus still clinging to his native soil. During the tiffin break, while seated in the restaurant, he leaned somewhat forward and said. 'Can we talk freely since we have time and nothing else to do?' I nodded my head. 'You see, Prof. Lindberg, I think the world is in a big turmoil. One country has invaded another country. The whole world should condemn this, but it is not happening. I am not a Muslim, but I think that this is why fundamentalist terrorism is growing every day and has now also come to us here in Bangladesh.'

In the morning papers the same day there were news about the police arresting suspected members of the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and potential suicide attackers. It seems one target is public prosecutors and the Supreme Court Bar Association has received a letter that it will be bombed soon.

There is something deeply tragic about this transformation of the "ultimate weapon of the weak" of the Palestine people for generations facing Israeli-US over-night on their own land. In Bangladesh Islamic Jihad is clearly invoked, propelled by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but it is the 'evil' of a democratic but rotten system with no relevance for the development needs of the many poor that really forms the resonance bottom of this process. This is the opportunity structure that is being used by those now waging this more than unholy war.

Illiterate and poor young men are the first victims. Trained in madrassas with only teachings of the Koran, they come into the hands of the extremist groups who teach them about the holy mission and the salvation they will achieve. There is money involved too, to the madrassas who provide the young boys and to the families that lose their sons. The terrorism of extremism here blends with criminality.

National cohesion and solidarity is the second victim. When schools are now asked to stop using the national anthem (*Amar Shonar Bangla*) written by Rabindranath Tagore, because it is written by a Hindu – and asked not to hoist the national flag, because it is the flag of the separatists, something has gone fundamentally wrong in the social fabric.

Staffan Lindberg



Report from visit to Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Monday 5 December 2005

Web page: <http://www.juniv.edu/>

Founded just on the eve of Independence in 1970, this is the only residential university in Bangladesh. Like all other universities, it has all academic levels from undergraduate to PhD, but the number of students is small, only about 7 000, due to the limited capacity of the dormitory buildings. There are also foreign students right now from Nepal, Iran and Pakistan.

400 teachers/researchers do the teaching, of which 20 per cent are abroad to upgrade their academic level. There are four faculties (Arts, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences

and Life Sciences) and 24 departments. Strangely enough Anthropology is a discipline here but not Sociology – in this land of relative ethnic homogeneity!

The periphery is starved of contacts and foreign collaborations, so when two Swedes arrived here to open some windows of opportunity, the Vice-Chancellor, Dr. [Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman](#), took our visit seriously (compared to the mostly kind indifference to an almost unknown entity in the academic institutions in the capital). He had called the leaders of almost all the faculties for the meeting, and the meeting was also attended by the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor [Md. Enamul Huq Khan](#), and the University treasure, Professor [A.B.M. Enayet Hossain](#).

The first thing we learn is that Prof. Shaymol Kumar Roy, professor of Botany has received a grant from the [International Science Programme](#), ISP, Uppsala University, to equip a laboratory, which is much talked about. Are we following in the footsteps of Malin Åkerblom, whom many in the science circles in Bangladesh seem to know so well?

The SASNET window of opportunity was carefully listened to, but since it is a small offer from a small country, we sensed that most of the participants considered it quite an abstract possibility to form real alliances.

As regards research profile in the University there is a great diversity of individual research pursuits but some fields can be said to be more prominent, like for example:

- *Arsenic poisoning of well water, which is a research field for botanists, chemists and environmentalists*
- *The Botany department is working with developing a field gene bank for Bangladesh focusing on agricultural crops*

We ended with a general discussion about various issues related to the terrorism. All are scared about the prospects of increasing terrorism in Bangladesh. It is both an international and a national issue.

One understanding goes like this, which most of those present agreed to: After partition och liberation from Pakistan, Bangladesh society has developed into a more and more divided land between rich and poor. It is the combination of traditional Madrassa education and poor and marginalised students that produces the fundamentalist cadre in this otherwise rather moderate Muslim country. Moreover, in modern education there is a lack of teaching of ethical issues, and the rift between modern and traditional education exacerbates the rift. Thus, there is need for a cemented unity in Bangladesh. The politicians lack the ability to fight poverty in a convincing way, and if both elected government and military governments fail, the space is opened for an Islamic government.





We were happy to meet Professor **Golam Hossain** (photo to the left), Dept of Government and Politics, who participated in the 18th European conference on Modern South Asian Studies, organised by SASNET in Lund in July 2004. Prof Hossain was then co-convenor of Panel No. 41 on *"The Political Economy of Bangladesh"* (more information on the panel). Later he showed us around the beautiful campus area of Jahangirnagar university, that even includes a lake full of migratory birds (see photo above).

After the main meeting in the Vice-Chancellor's office we were also invited for a brief visit to the Department of Government and Politics. Professor **Abul**

Kashem Mozumder and the other political scientists present at the above meeting took us there. Prof. Mozumder himself is interested in research on Public sector management.

We were welcomed by Assistant Professor **Naim Sultan**, chairman of the department, whose research interest is comparative politics of South and Southeast Asia. He is a specialist on Indonesia.

Other researchers at the department being present were Assistant Professor **S.M. Tariqul Islam**, Lecturer **Tarana Begum**, Lecturer, and Ms. **Tamalika Sultana**. Examples of studies carried out in the department are Corruption, Islam and political development, Rights of women, and the relation between Madrasa education and terrorism. The department has about 500 students with a total staff of 16. The Department publishes an annual journal called *Asian Studies*.

One of the assistant lecturers of the department, **Bashir Ahmed**, is currently studying in the Masters Programme in Asian Studies at Lund University. Bashir had in fact been instrumental in inviting us to visit Jahangirnagar University, and even though he was not present (he was still in Sweden at the time), we were after the meeting invited for lunch by his wife Ms. **Shamima Sultana**, Lecturer at the Dept. of Bangla Literature in their house.



Sharmina Sultana

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Report from visit to BIRDEM, Dhaka, 5 December 2005

Web page: <http://www.dab-bd.org/aboutbird.htm>

In the afternoon Lars visited the Biomedical Research Group (BMRG) at the Bangladesh Institute of Research and Rehabilitation in Diabetes, Endocrine and Metabolic Disorders, BIRDEM (run by the non-profit social organisation, Diabetic Association of Bangladesh), in their hospital building on Kazi Nasrul Islam Avenue, next to the Sheraton Hotel.

BIRDEM is a well-known institution in Dhaka. It was established in 1980 by the legendary Dr. Mohammed Ibrahim (who foresightedly had founded the Diabetic Association already in 1956). The hospital is housed in two buildings, one 15-storied with 542 beds for paying patients, and a three-storied one. The income from this plus from diagnostic tests makes it possible to treat on an average 3.000 people free of charge in the largest diabetes out-patient clinic in the world.

Dr. [Liaquat Ali](#) (*photo to the right*), who spent several years in Sweden and defended his PhD at the Dept. of Medical Cell Biology, Uppsala University in 1990, is Professor at the Dept. of Biochemistry and Cell Biology, and the coordinator of the Biomedical Research Group (BMRG), which has three major research fields:

1. *Plant materials as a source of drugs.*
2. *Etiopathogenesis of diabetes and its complications in Bangladesh population.*
3. *Nutritional evaluation of food materials.*

Diabetes is growing fast in Bangladesh, due to changed life styles among a part of the population with less exercise and a change in food habits. Liaquat Ali was instrumental in initiating a collaborative Swedish-Bangladeshi research program on anti-diabetic plant materials in 1991, also joined by the Dept. of Chemistry, Dhaka University ([see report on our meeting with Prof. Mosihuzzaman](#)). It was supported by the [International Science Programme](#) in the Chemical Sciences (ISPIC) at Uppsala University from the start, and has been ever since. ISPIC has contributed with laboratory equipment and other research infrastructure. The Third World network for research on anti-diabetic plants, AFASSA, has its office within the same premises as BMRG.



I met Liaquat Ali in his office room, along with the deputy coordinator of the research group, Dr. [Begum Rokeya](#) (*photo to the left*), and Dr. Mohammed Zahid Hassan. Dr. Ali showed a power point presentation about BIRDEM, the unique concept of public-private partnership, with capital investments coming from the government, through which also all foreign grants go, and the running expenditures self generated, and enough to fund the free services.

He is a visionary and a real enthusiast in everything he works with. In the research group he has actively worked to incorporate various disciplines into biomedical research through core members representing Medicine, Chemistry, Pharmacy, Biochemistry, Zoology, Food and Nutrition, and Health Economics. Also through other means, for example by improving the working environment, stimulating the researchers to visit International conferences, and the quite charming introduction of a typical Swedish coffee/lunch room, the general atmosphere has become so positive that researchers like to remain in the popular research group. More than 100 PhD's have come out of the research since 1991, and the gender balance within the group is more or less equal.

Liaquat Ali is also actively working with an even bigger project for the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DBA), namely the Health Care Development Project, HCDP. It is a nation-wide expansion of BIRDEM's work in Dhaka, with a network consisting of BIRDEM, 21 branches of the National Health Network, an enterprise established by the DBA in 1996, and 53 affiliated associations all over the country. This forms an independent, decentralised health network that is second only to the government, with which it works in collaboration.



Funding for HCDP has been secured through a grant from the Dutch government, that has given 19.3 Million Euros. Local banks in Bangladesh have provided the same amount, so again it is an example of private-public partnership. Within the HCDP framework a teaching hospital is currently being built in Mirpur, as well as a chain of 20 regional hospitals all over the country. It also includes a Medical College that will provide teaching also in allied subjects such as medical anthropology and health economics. Nursing courses are also planned.

A meeting was arranged in the coffee room, and 20 researchers turned up to listen to a presentation by Lars about SASNET. They were eager to find out about possible new forms of collaboration with Swedish researchers, besides the ones they are already involved in.

Participants:

- Hafizur Rahman, PhD
- Omar Faruque
- Kazi Ruhana Ahmed
- Shirin Jahan Mumu
- Fadia Afnan
- Farzana Rahman
- Fadema Jebunne SA
- Monnjan Nargis
- Nurunnohan Sumi
- Shuhana Sultana
- Salima Akter
- Kaaniz Fatima
- J.M.A. Hannan
- Kazal Boron Biswas
- Masfida Akhter
- Tanveer Tazib
- Tonima Mustafa
- Junaaida Khaleque
- Samira Humaira Habib



Shangskriti Bikash Kendra

[View](#) [Edit](#) [Revisions](#) [Nodequeue](#)

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Cultural evening at Shangskriti Bikash Kendra (Centre for Cultural Development), Dhaka, Monday 5 December 2005

Dr. Liaquat Ali is a creative person. Besides his scientific work at BIRDEM (see our report from BIRDEM) he is also initiator and chairman of a cultural organisation that started in 1991 in the form of ambitious study circles on philosophy (again an idea borrowed from the Swedish society that he was part of during the late 1980s).

Before we left Sweden Dr. Malin Åkerblom at

ISPIC in Uppsala had enthusiastically told us about Dr. Liaquat Ali's cultural centre, and she has been one of its well-wishers since the start, donating for example complete volumes of the Science magazine to its library.



Dr. Liaquat Ali and his wife

welcome guests to the Centre for Cultural Development in Dhaka.

The philosophical study circles are still running, each one with weekly meetings for a period of two years in order to accommodate studies of the entire World philosophical traditions from Plato and Aristotle, the Vedas and the Upanishads, Ibn Sena and Imam Gajjali, Karl Marx all the way up to 20th Century philosophers such as Bertrand Russell. Since then other study circles have been introduced, on literature, music and development economics.

After Staffan had joined us at BIRDEM, we walked over to Shangskriti Bikash Kendra, located at 1/E/1 Paribagh in central Dhaka. In honour of our visit, Liaquat Ali had organised a get-together program for members of the various study circles and associates of the centre (including many of his colleagues at BIRDEM). A program including a buffet dinner, served from the centre's popular cafeteria Shushwado, and a classical musical evening show with renowned artists: Mustafa Faruque Wahid on violin, Kamal Zahir Shamim on shahar, Prosanta Kumar Das on tabla, Rashedul Gani Rintu on esraj, Mahamudul Hassan on violin and Haripada Sutradhar on tabla.

It became a magic evening sitting on white sheets rolled out over the top floor of the building, listening to wonderful North Indian classical music, and meeting a large number of interesting people, Bangladeshi intellectuals and researchers, the expatriate Europeans involved in the HDCP project to build hospitals all over the country, and many others.

The Swedish connection with Bangladesh is not limited to scientific collaboration, a large number of Bangladeshis have settled in Sweden during the past decades, and one person came up to us and introduced himself in perfect Swedish. He had lived 13 years in Stockholm, running a restaurant, but had since then moved to Coventry in UK.



We were most surprised when it was time for the final concert piece for the evening, and it turned out to be a Swedish folk song, again in honour of our presence.

A folk song that the musicians modified so that it turned into a raga, as beautiful as the other pieces they played during



the evening. Staffan was then requested to conclude the evening by holding a short speech and presenting flower bouquets to the artists. We returned back to our Dhaka home in Banani in a joyful mood. All thanks to Dr. Liaquat Ali and his persistent efforts to bring together the best of East and West, in research as well as in culture. Just like the great Rabindranath Tagore envisioned a century ago.

SASNET Viisit to to Rajshahi University, December 2005

View Edit Revisions Nodequeue

Submitted by admin on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Tuesday 6 December 2005

– by **Staffan Lindberg**

Rajshahi University web page: <http://www.ru.ac.bd/>

A visit to Rajshahi University (located only a few km away from the border to West Bengal/India) had been arranged by Prof. [Raquib Amed](#), Dept. of Geography, whom we met on our first visit in 2002 (see our report from that meeting), and also by Prof. [Kazi Tobarak Hossain](#), Dept. of Sociology. Rajshahi University is the second largest University in Bangladesh and is the highest seat of learning in the Northern region of the country. It was established in 1953 to serve as centre for higher learning in the Northern part of erstwhile East Pakistan. These areas were comparatively lagging behind in higher education and the University of Dhaka, then the only of its kind in the country, being situated in the capital was not very easily accessible to the student of this part of the country.



I had two meetings at the Sociology department, one with professors and one with MSS and M Phil students. There was keen interest in what I said about SASNET and the opportunities to start research interaction and teacher/student exchange via the Linnaeus-Palme programme. Students were also interested to know more about higher studies in Sweden. On request, I also presented a short note on my ongoing panel field study in Trichy District.

One professor had applied to a three month course on Peace and Conflict Studies in Uppsala funded by Sida, but had not been selected. He thought that this was due to his lack of a certificate of knowledge of English – he had been studying in English medium schools and published everything in English during his academic career. (Maybe he was overqualified, the course being aimed at Masters and PhD students?)

There has also been an attempt to apply for Asia Link programme with the Sociology Department at Uppsala University, but it failed because they could not find a second university department in another EU country.

Sociology here has about 20 teachers, with five positions vacant, and 3 teacher abroad for higher studies (for PhD degree). There about 550 students from BA to PhD, with ca 10 at the M Phil and 3 at the PhD level.

This is set within the second biggest university in Bangladesh with about 22 000 students, 1 000 teachers and 52 departments divided into 8 faculties including Medicine and Agricultural sciences. Quite a few students are resident in dormitories here. Female students have to reach their dormitory before 18 pm, so that set a time frame for our meeting which started only at 15.30.

Research interests within the Sociology Department were divided into several fields like gender, development studies, environment, agriculture and criminology. I was presented with two studies of prostitution and trafficking in Rajshahi, which was quite a big social problem according to the discussion we had. The incidence of hiv/AIDS is still low but gradually growing.

Sociology professors met with:

M. Faizar Rahman, Chairman of the Dept. of Sociology

AHM Mustafizur Rahman

[Muhammad Hasan Imam](#)

Sabyasachi Saha (passed away on 26th June 2007 in Alor Setar Hospital, Kedah, Malaysia)

[Abdur Rahman Siddiquee](#)

[M Zulfiquar Ali Islam](#)

+ [Kazi Tobarak Hossain](#), and [Raquib Ahmed](#), Prof. of Geography and Environmental Studies

Students met with and their research interests:

[Shahin Fendour](#), MSS level: The relationship between norms, values and the employment of women outside the family sphere.

Students met with and their research interests:

Shahin Fendour, MSS level: The relationship between norms, values and the employment of women outside the family sphere.

M.D. Lutbar Rahman, MSS: Marriage, family and kinship relations in Bangladesh.

Nirman Mandal, MSS: A comparative study of local government in Bangladesh and some western country, like for example Sweden.

Shahnaz Sarker, MSS: Women, agriculture and changing urban society in Bangladesh.

Mina Raho Mahato, MSS: Health consciousness of rural women in Bangladesh.

Muaz Hurayra Morshad, MSS: Development studies with special focus on agriculture and traditional societies.

M.D. Azizur Rahman, M.Phil.: Social forestry.

Before departing, I was told about the fear of more terrorist attacks and also concern about the social and political development in its wake. There seemed to be consensus among the professors about this. As we drove out of the University compound, city traffic was a little bit more intense than earlier in this 600 000 population city. There had been a political meeting in the main street, but there was really no jam and it was so different from the ultra rapid mess of people, cycles, cycle rickshaws, cars, trucks, and buses in Dhaka.

I suddenly realised that the only way to drastically improve air quality and transport efficiency in Dhakawould be to prohibit all private cars and cycle rickshaws, at least until metro lines have been constructed. But would that be practically possible?

Rickshaws must be one of the greatest sources of employment and air-conditioned cars the individual way for the rich to sit comfortably and imagine that they do not inhale any poisonous gas.

Meeting at the Institute of Environmental Science (IES), Faculty of Life and Art Sciences, Rajshahi University, Wednesday 7 December

Dept. of Geography & Environmental Studies web page: <http://www.ru.ac.bd/geog/Geography.htm>



Professor Raquib Ahmed (photo to the left) had arranged a meeting with his colleagues at the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, and we were about 20 persons around a big conference table at the Institute. IES is an autonomous centre drawing researchers from various departments at Rajshahi University. After Staffan's presentation of SASNET a discussion of the various research interests among those present and at the Institute followed. The most important of these appeared to be:

- Biodiversity
- Plain wetland ecology, that is, studies of marsh land, which is very prevalent in various parts of Bangladesh
- Coastal environments, mangroves, water life, etc.
- Social forestry
- Solid waste management

Persons met with:

M Sarwar Jahan, Professor and Director of IES

Raquib Ahmed, Prof. of Geography and Environmental Studies (GES)

Shitangsu K. Paul, Assistant Prof. of GES

Mohammed Norul Bashar, PhD fellow IES

Md. Aminaly Islam, M.Phil fellow IES

Md. Nozrul Isiam, P.Phil feloow IES

A Z M Shoel, Associate Prof. GES

A H M Hedayatul Islam, Assistant Prof. GES

Md. Nur Islam, Fellow IES

S M Shafuluzzaman, Lecturer IES

Md. Redwanur Rahman, Lecturer IES

Md. Safinur Rahman, Prof. at Dept. of Zoology

Md. Rejaur Rahman, Assistant Prof. GES

M Mizanur Rahman, Associate Prof. GES, Urban and Regional Developmetn & Planning, Environmental Management

Noor Mohammad, Prof. GES

Syed Rafiqul Alam Rumi, Prof. GES



Visit to Thanapara Swallows Development Society – a Self-Help Village Support Organization in Rural Bangladesh, Wednesday 7 December

Web page: <http://thanaswallows.org/>

Thanapara lies 32 km east of Rajshahi. For Swedes this is famous for its careful implementation of classical 1960s International NGO activities like employing women in a handicrafts programme and running a model school. The background is a massacre of over hundred men in the village by the Pakistan Army during the liberation war in 1971.

In 1973, the [Swallows India/Bangladesh section](#) based at Lund, Sweden,

started relief activities here by providing food and clothes. Soon this developed into a full-fledged community development programme. Today, the Thanapara project caters to the needs of the local Upazilla of about 10 villages and a population of about 8 000. The Handicrafts activity consists of spinning, dyeing, weaving and garment production and employs 162 persons, most of them women (see photo above).

The project activities have also broadened to include sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation, social forestry, land rights (helping villagers to get cultivation rights on government owned land), and gender equity and women's rights.



The latter is a broad approach to women's situation in the village, and includes combating violence against women, creating awareness of legal rights, and fighting against human trafficking. Swallows cooperates with BRAC in several programmes, for example non-formal education, continuous training of primary school teachers, etc.

Thanapara is today also used as a model project for NGO work among Swedish and other international study groups. Students from several secondary schools, folk high schools, study circles etc. regularly visit the project for some period, during which they can stay at guestrooms located within the project compound. Mr. Bo Kramsjö, one of the pioneer volunteers at Thanapara was due to arrive the day after our visit with a group of Swedish teachers participating in a course organised by the [Global School](#). Students from Österlen's Folk High School in Tomelilla also come here every year as part of their field work in South Asia, and the next group is due to arrive in April 2006 for a week's study visit ([more information on the South Asia course in Tomelilla](#)).

When I (Staffan) and Prof. Raquib Ahmed arrived at the project, Mr. Raihan Ali, the Director, and his wife Ms. Mahmuda Begum (Guinea), Assistant Director, was just about to receive a group of Tamil Nadu farmers who had come to study the ecological farm activities run at the project. Along with the group was Andreas Holmberg, the advisor at the Swallow's Kudumbam Ecological Farm near Tiruchirapalli in India.

We were cordially received and had a very interesting discussion with Mr. Raihan and Ms. Mahmuda Begum. One thing that struck my mind was the ambitions of these two very hard working project leaders. It is not a question of replacing public welfare and educational activities. Rather, it is one way of many to try to influence the activities within the public sector, by providing a model and by giving training to teachers and others.

'Today there is better supervision and transparency within the NGO and private sector than in the public sector. Our aim is to influence the latter to do better and to fight corruption and lethargy,' says Mr. Raihan.

SASNET has another relation to Thanapara through Birgitta Göransson, long time coordinator for the The Swallows India/Bangladesh section with head quarters in Lund. She is a member of SASNET's board.



Shahjalal University of Science and Technology

[View](#) [Edit](#) [Revisions](#) [Nodequeue](#)

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), Sylhet, 6 December 2005

Web page: <http://www.sust.edu/>

Early morning on Tuesday 6 December I (Lars) went to Sylhet in the North Eastern part of Bangladesh, by GMG Airlines. It is a 50 minutes flight in a small propeller-driven aircraft over the lush Bangladeshi countryside, crisscrossed with streams and rivers, and covered with rice fields and agricultural land divided into small plots. Closer to Sylhet the landscape changes into small hills, this is the land of the Bangladeshi tea gardens (*photo to the right*).



Sylhet was the only part of British India that at the time of partition in 1947 was given the right to hold a referendum on whether the then Assamese region of Sylhet should become part of India or Pakistan. Sylhet had a majority of Muslim Bengalis and opted for Pakistan, so then the first division of Assam took place, cutting links with the neighbouring Khasi and Jaintia Hills (now in the Indian state of Meghalaya). Till 1965 trains did however still ply between Sylhet district and Guwahati via Silchar, but after the 1965 India-Pakistan war all train lines connecting India and the then East Pakistan were closed, and so are the communications still after 40 years.

On the way from Sylhet Airport (an airport which has international flights direct to England as there is a sizable population of Sylhetis in Britain, not least in the restaurant business) you pass through tea gardens – the oldest from 1854, that stretch all the way to the city limits. As my flight was earlier than scheduled (I was supposed to arrive only in the afternoon) my contact persons in Sylhet, the two lecturers [Md. Abdul Mumin](#) (called Shamim), Lecturer of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science, and [Rezaul Kabir Chowdhury](#), Lecturer of Civil and Environmental Engineering, had not come to the airport to receive me (the contact was actually established through Professor [Sarif Masud](#), currently working in El Paso, Texas, friend of Rezaul and Shamim).



I took a taxi and asked the driver to take me to a good hotel in town, reached Hotel Polash in the city centre and got an excellent room for 1400 takas, approximately 20 US-dollars. It seemed as if I was the only guest staying at the hotel.

A meeting at the university, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST), was planned for the following day only, but after informing my hosts over telephone that I had already arrived, a new programme was immediately set up.

Shamim and Rezaul picked me up at the hotel and we went with a university vehicle through Sylhet, with streets crowded with cycle rickshaws, out of the city centre and reached the SUST campus located in a beautiful environment, surrounded by hills and with rice fields stretching even between the department buildings (*see photo below*).

Rezaul Kabir Chowdhury, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering; Md. Aktarul Islam Chowdhury, Head of Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering/Architecture; and Shamim (Md. Abdul Mumin), Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science.

SUST is a young university that started in 1991 with only three departments: Physics, Chemistry and Economics, and 200 students. It has since grown and has today 6 000 students and 240 teachers. The university consists of seven schools:

- *School of Agriculture and Mineral Sciences (including a department of Forestry).*
- *School of Applied Science and Technology*
- *School of Management and Business Administration*
- *School of Physical Sciences (Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and Statistics)*
- *School of Social Sciences (Anthropology, Economics, English, Political Studies and Public Administration, Sociology, and Social Work).*
- *School of Medical Sciences (with three affiliated medical colleges).*
- *School of Life Sciences (Biotechnology and Genetics, and one affiliated Veterinary college).*



Several university teachers are currently undergoing Masters and PhD training abroad, and others are planning for it. One of them, the sociologist **T.M. Abdullah al Mamun**, happens to be very well-known to us, as he recently completed the Masters programme in Asian Studies at Lund University, a programme with links to SASNET.

Meeting at the Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science

I was taken to the Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science at the School of Applied Science and Technology, and was received by Professor **Mohammed Zainal Abedin**. He studied at the Free University in Berlin and received his PhD in 1978, and he had fond memories of a visit to Denmark and Malmö.

Dr. Abedin called colleagues at his own and other departments for a meeting in the seminar hall at 12 o'clock, and

the interest was large. More than 20 people turned up to listen to a presentation about SASNET, and many questions were raised. Of the 240 teachers in the university no less than 20 have received their PhDs in other countries.

Participants of the meeting:

- **Md. Aktarul Islam Chowdhury**, Head of Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering/Architecture
- **Muhammad Azizul Hoque**, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **Rezaul Kabir Chowdhury**, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **Dr. Md. Jahir B. Alam**, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **Rauibul Alam**, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **Dr. Mushtaq Ahmed**, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **Saidur Rahman Chowdhury**, Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering
- **M. Faruqui Uddin**, Dept. of Sociology
- **A. H. M. Belayeth Hussain**, Dept. of Sociology
- **Prof. M. Z. Abedin**, Dean of Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science
- **M. Mashbum Rahman**, Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science
- **Dr. M. R. Khan**, Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science
- **Salma Akhter**, Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science
- **Md. Jasim Uddin**, Dept. of Tea Technology
- **P. M. Rabiul Islam**, Dept. of Tea Technology
- **A. Z. M. Manzoor Rashid**, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Forestry
- **Dr. Tulsi Kumar Das**, Dept. of Social Work
- **Redwanur Rahman**, Dept. of Political Studies & Public Administration
- **Dr. M. Mizanul Haque Kazal**, Head of Dept. of Economics

Meeting with the Vice-Chancellor

After the meeting Dr. Abedin brought me to the Vice Chancellor's office. On the way we met a jolly group of students, celebrating the end of the semester and the 12th anniversary of the Chemical Engineering department. Festivities were planned for the evening, and the students now asked for my presence.

The Vice Chancellor, Professor **Musleh Uddin Ahmed**, had just returned from a tour to universities in Germany, and was happy to meet a representative of Swedish universities. The registrar, Dr. **Jamil Ahmed Chowdhury**, a man working also with Statistics and Forestry, was also present at the meeting.

Dr. Ahmed has previously worked for UNDP, and is eager to involve his university in international collaboration projects also with Sweden. SUST is already a partner university in two different European



Commission funded Erasmus Mundus research programmes.

One programme is on **Water and Waste Management** with the Dept. of Life Sciences, Karlsruhe University; a technical university in Calabria, Italy; and a university in Chingsu, China.

The other programme is **about IT**, and SUST's partner institutions in this case are Fachhochschule, Berlin, Germany; Tampere Polytechnics in Finland; and Bangladesh University for Technology and Engineering (BUTE) in Dhaka.

Other research areas, in which SUST is especially strong is environmental studies, business studies and governance.

Negotiations are underway to initiate collaboration on the latter issue with Heidelberg University.

Meeting at the Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering

I was then invited to visit the Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering and had a meeting with [Md. Aktarul Islam Chowdhury](#), Head of the department. He also expressed a great interest in collaboration projects with Sweden within the fields that his department is strong, namely water and waste treatment, and sustainable development.

Chowdhury has been very productive and showed articles in scientific journals that he has published. His personal fields of interest are industrial wastewater management, industrial pollution, especially air pollution, and environmental management assessment. He is planning for a PhD project on arsenic contamination.

My local host [Rezaul Kabir Chowdhury](#) was a student at the department who graduated with high marks in 2002. He is now lecturing at the department, and just like many other young ambitious teachers at SUST he also hopes for PhD training outside Bangladesh (and thereafter return to Sylhet). Rezaul's interest is mainly water modelling and water resources management.

Meeting at the Dept. of Social Work, School of Social Sciences



Associate Professor Tulshi Kumar Das and Shofiqur Rahman Chowdhury, Dept. of Social Work.

A separate meeting was set up at the Dept. of Social Work at the School of Social Sciences, on request from Dr. [Tulshi Kumar Das](#), Associate Professor and Head of the department. One student from the department, Ms. [Amina Pervin](#), has been admitted to a Masters programme at the Dept. of Social Work, Göteborg University, and another one, [Shofiqur Rahman Chowdhury](#), is on a waiting-list for the same programme.

They were interested to know about funding possibilities and get general



Md. Abdul Muin Noman, Amina Pervin, Neaz Ahmed and A.K.M. Mahbuburzaman, Dept. of Social Work.

information about Swedish conditions. In particular they asked for information regarding the different departments of Social Work at Swedish universities, and I referred to the departments that are described on SASNET's web site.

Social Work at SUST is mostly connected to studies of community development, and is not a discipline directly linked to getting a job as social worker, which is often the case in Sweden.

Other participants at the meeting:

- [Muhammed Muazzam Hussain](#)
- Md. Abdul Muin Noman
- [Neaz Ahmed](#)
- Dr. [A.K.M. Mahbuburzaman](#)

Celebration in the auditorium

Finally it was time for the evening festivities in the University auditorium, organised by the students at the Dept. of Chemical Engineering, celebrating the 12th anniversary of their department, and also an occasion where the students of the final year welcomed the new students for the semester that starts in January.

As it turned out I was requested to sit on the stage as a guest of honour along with the Vice Chancellor Dr. Ahmed, and the Head of the department, Prof. Abedin, and then the chairman of the student union (who had learnt about my special family relation to Bengali culture) asked me to introduce the evening by holding a speech and sing a song by Rabindranath Tagore. I entered the rostrum, and after holding a short speech I sang in Bengali the beautiful song "*Tomar holo shuru, amar holo shara*", an old man's song to a young man, and the audience, consisting of circa 300 students and teachers, responded with enthusiastic cheering. A fitting end to my day-long visit to Shahjalal University of Science and Technology in Sylhet.

The following day my hosts, Shamim and Rezaul, took me around for a sightseeing tour by auto-riksha in the charming city of Sylhet, visiting a bazar and then one of the many tea gardens that surround Sylhet, before boarding the GMG plane back to Dhaka in the afternoon.



Handing over an official gift from the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology to SASNET. From left to right: Professor Mohammed Zainal Abedin, Dept. of Chemical Engineering and Polymer Science; Lars Eklund; University Registrar Dr. Jamil Ahmed Chowdhury; and the Vice-Chancellor Prof. Musleh Uddin Ahmed.

SASNET visit to ICDDR,B – Centre for Health and Population Research, Dhaka

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Thursday, 8 December 2005

“Little Sweden in a life saving effort of great importance”

ICDDR,B – Centre for Health and Population Research, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Web page:

www.icddr.org

The International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh is since more than 35 years an important international research institute to help solve the alarming health problems that people in Bangladesh and similar developing countries are facing. To understand the significance of the Institute: it is the only global health research environment that matches the international agricultural research institutes like [Centro](#)



[Internacional de Mejoramiento de Maíz y Trigo \(CIMMYT\)](#) in Mexico and the [International Rice Research Institute \(IRRI\)](#) in the Philippines.

The mission is 'to develop and promote realistic solutions to the major health, population and nutrition problems facing the poor people of Bangladesh and other settings.' Placed in Bangladesh, one of the biggest and absolute poorest nations, and with most of the empirical material derived from its conditions, it works out solutions that work. It was here that the revolutionary [ORT \(Oral Rehydration Therapy\)](#) method was first developed and continues to be refined. One estimate is that ORT alone saves more than 3 million lives every year! Since 1978 the Institute has trained more 20 000 health professionals from over 78 countries. It provides treatment to a great number of patients in its hospitals in Dhaka and some districts, which is also a prerequisite for working out new ways of treatment and prevention.

Supported by 55 donor countries

Today the Institute engages more than 2 000 health researchers, doctors and assistants, has a budget of close to US \$ 20 million and a vast network of academic collaborators around the world. It is supported by 55 donor countries, UN specialised agencies, foundations, universities, etc. It is in this context that Swedish Sida/SAREC has made and continues to make a major contribution (in 2004 the Swedish contribution to the budget was close to 7 %, or 1 million 216 thousand US \$). There may be as many as around twenty of the most qualified researchers in the staff, who have received PhD degrees and further research training at Swedish Universities, including Uppsala, Karolinska, Umeå, Linköping, Lund, Göteborg and Linköping. So this is also an "abode" of friendship with Sweden in this mega-city.

It is still the interaction between poverty, nutrition problems, failing sanitation and vector-borne infectious diseases, which is the core focus of the activities, but more recent challenges like sexually transmitted diseases (Hiv/AIDS), arsenic in groundwater, ageing problems among the poor are also included in the vast research agenda. Thus, children's and women's health situation is a major focus, but so are also the poorest groups at large in rural and urban settings, minorities, sex-workers, and so on.

Realistic understanding of health issues

The Institute also tries to integrate cultural and social interaction dimensions in the research. The grim cultural practices here, for example, "eating down" during pregnancy in order to avoid large babies, is an illustration to the kind of challenges that face the researchers, or the fact that breast feeding is uncommon among female factory



workers in Bangladesh's now two million strong and female dominated export garment industry. Nutrition and health is not just a question of the overall availability of food.

We found a realistic understanding of health issues among people we met at the Institute. When Bangladesh now experiences improvement of health status in many fields, like for example, reduced infant and maternal mortality in the last 20 years, everybody more or less understand that the major causes are to be found among others in the progress of agriculture and the boost to the economy that the new export oriented garment industry has created. Even so, here is an Institute that strives at practical medical solutions in the current context of continuing large poor groups and in a far from perfect public/private health care environment, and also tries to affect public opinion about the distribution of food, health services and other basic amenities.



Visits to several divisions of ICDDR,B

We spent a whole day in this neat, clean and fascinating little microcosm of all kinds of health research and related activities, warmly hosted by Dr. Mahfuzar Rahman (photo to the left), Environmental Epidemiologist at the Public Health Science Division (with a PhD from the Division of Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Department of Molecular and Clinical Medicine, Faculty of Health Sciences, Linköping University.

He defended a thesis entitled "Nonmalignant Health Effects of Arsenic Exposure" in 1999.

The programme for the day was prepared by Dr. Rahman and his colleague from the Public Health Science Division, Co-ordination Manager M Haniful Rahman, Co-ordination Manager.

• Laboratory Sciences Division (LSD)

Web page:

<http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=5&searchID=5>

The lab facilities are also used by graduate students from Dhaka University.

We met the Director G. Balakrishna Nair and the two Associate Scientists Rubhana Raqib (defended her PhD at Karolinska Institute in 1995) and Motiur Rahman (Head of the RTI/STI Laboratory, defended his PhD at Karolinska Institute in 1997), and were shown around in the laboratories.



G Balakrishna Nair



Rubhana Raqib



Motiur Rahman

• Executive Director Division



Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=1&searchID=1>

We met the Executive Director David Sack (photo to the left) and Ishtiaq Zaman, Head of the External Relations and Institutional Development Office, ERID, for an hour and had a discussion on the Swedish involvement in ICDDR,B. Sack has been the Director since 1999, but has altogether worked for the institution for 12 years. Sack is much involved in research collaboration with Professors Jan Holmgren and Ann-Mari Svennerholm from the Division of Medical Microbiology and Immunology, Institute of Biomedicine at Sahlgrenska Academy, Göteborg University, These are the two Swedish researchers behind the successful development of mucosal vaccines, most notably against gastrointestinal

infections (including the internationally widely registered oral cholera vaccine Dukoral).

We were informed about the excellent journal published by ICDDR,B, called *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*. It is fully available on the Internet, see <http://www.icddrb.org/jhpn>.

VISITORS

4-6 December 2005

Professor Lars Ake Persson, Professor and Chair, International Child Health, Department of Women's and Children's Health, International, Maternal and Child Health (IMCH), University Hospital, entr 11, SE-751 85 UPPSALA, Sweden,
Phone: +46 18 611 9294, Fax: +46 18 50 80 13,
Email: lars-ake.persson@kbh.uu.se
Homepage: <http://www.kbh.uu.se/imch>

Marie Vahter, Carolinska Institute, Sweden
Ann Louise Martin, Sweden
Journalist, Radio Sweden

5-7 December 2005 – Professor Wim Van Lerberghe, Professor, Department of Public Health, Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine, 155 Nationalestraat, B-2000, Antwerp, Belgium (email: wlerberghe@itg.be).

8 December 2005 – Lars Eklund, Deputy Director, Prof. Staffan Lindberg, (SASNET) Swedish South Asian Studies Network, Lund University, Sweden



• Public Health Sciences Division (PHSD)

Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=6&searchID=6>

We met the present Director of the division **Marge Koblinsky**, and the Senior Scientist and Head of the Matlab Health Research Programme **Mohammad Yunus**.

By chance our visit to ICDDR,B coincided with a visit by Professor **Lars-Åke Persson** from **International Maternal and Child Health (IMCH)**, Department of Women's and Children's Health, Uppsala University, who previously worked for four years as manager for ICDDR,B's Research Division on Public Health. He had come to Dhaka along with Prof. **Marie Vahter** from the **Division of Metals & Health, Institute of Environmental**



Marge Koblinsky



Mohammad Yunus



Marie Vahter

Medicine; Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm (who is doing research on Cancer and reproductive effects of inorganic arsenic), and a Swedish radio journalist, **Ann Louise Martin**, preparing for a programme.

• Training Education Unit (TEU), Information Sciences Division

Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=38&searchID=38>

We had a meeting with Dr Ahmed Nurul Alam, Head of the Training Education Unit. Dr Alam defended his PhD in London in 1980, and was head of the Cholera hospital that preceded ICDDR,B, during the 1980's, and had at that time close contact with **Arne Dahlquist**, nutritional researcher at Lund University. Together they had a project on malnourished children.

He is now in charge of training courses and programmes that ICDDR,B arranges both for local Bangladeshi doctors and administrators, and for international visitors from developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some courses run for 1-2 days, others are more long-term. More than 20 000 people pass these training courses every year, but out of these the great majority come only for one-day training in how to deal with diarrhoeal diseases. 200-500 people pass longer and more structured courses. Special month-long courses on Tropical diseases are organised for Japanese physicians, and another target group are the International NGOs like WHO and Care. They are offered two-weeks courses twice a year on disaster management and epidemiology. courses that are also open to government candidates.

The training unit also organises training programmes for medical students coming from many countries in Europe and America, including Sweden. A group of students from Uppsala University's course on Global Medicine for example spent two weeks at ICDDR,B in Dhaka and Matlab in January 2005, and right now plans were made for a similar visit by Public Health students from Harvard, arriving in January 2006.



• Social and Behavioural Science Unit, Public Health Science Division

Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=59&searchID=59>

We met **Abbas Bhuiya**, Senior Social scientist, Head of the Poverty & Health Programme & Social and Behavioural Science Unit, and had a discussion with him.

After that we were offered a nice packet lunch in a conference room. During the break we had an interesting conversation with **Sharful Islam Khan**, a medical anthropologist working at the Social and Behavioural Science Unit, and **A M Waheedul Hoque**, PhD candidate in a sandwich programme with **International Maternal and Child Health (IMCH)**, Department of Women's and Children's Health, Uppsala University.

Hoque is involved in the the so-called MINIMat research project along with Prof. **Lars-Åke Persson**, and Dr **Shams El Arifeen**, dealing with under-nourished pregnant women in Matlab upazila, Bangladesh, the well-established field site of ICDDR,B. [Read more about the MINIMat research project.](#)

• Clinical Sciences Division (CSD)

Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=2&searchID=2>

A meeting was arranged for us to meet **Mohammed Abdus Salam**, Director for the Clinical Sciences Division (CSD). Dr. **Jena Derakhshani Hamadani**, Associate scientist and coordinator for the Child Development Unit within CSD, and the PhD candidate **Md. Shafiqul Alam Sarker**, also participated in the meeting.

We were informed about interesting research projects, in the fields of nutrition studies, breast feeding, nursing services, etc. They are carried out within the division, some of them with Swedish connections.

Sida/SAREC finances a project on child health by

Dr. **Baitun Nahar**, a researcher that was awarded "The Young Investigator Award" of the 2nd World Congress of Pediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, held in Paris in July 2004, for a presentation titled "*Do severely-malnourished hospitalized children differ in their development and behaviour from severely-malnourished children attending community nutrition centres?*"

Since 2001 Md. Shafiqul Alam Sarker is a PhD candidate in a sandwich programme with the **Division of Clinical Immunology**, Dept. of Laboratory Medicine at Karolinska Institute Medical University, Stockholm. The supervisor is Prof. **Lennart Hammarström**, and the doctoral project is titled "**Evaluation of Immunoglobulinemia and Probiotic agent in infectious diarrhoea in children**". Sarker will preliminary defend his thesis in June 2006.

• Information Sciences Division (ISD)

Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=4&searchID=4>

We had a meeting with the Director **Peter Thorpe**

• Health Systems and Infectious Diseases Division (HSID)

Web page: <http://202.136.7.26/org/orgunits.jsp?idDetails=3&searchID=3>

Our last programme for the day was a visit to the HSID division, and a meeting/discussion with the Director Dr. **Charles Larson** from McGill University in Canada; and the American **Steve Luby**, Head of the Programme on Infectious Diseases and Vaccine Sciences.



Abbas Bhuiya



A M Waheedul Hoque



Sharful Islam Khan



Md. Shafiqul Alam Sarker



Jena Derakhshani Hamadani



Iqbal Hossain



We finally thanked Dr. Mahfuzar Rahman, who had been our guide through ICDDR,B during the day, and the researchers we met for sharing of their valuable time.

A small reflection afterwards: Many at the Institute seem to share our feeling that the acronym ICDDR,B is somewhat awkward and the subtitle Centre for Health and Population Research less than catchy. Anyone should feel free to suggest a better name and thus honour this important institution.

Submitted by [admin](#) on Wed, 2011-08-10 16:00

Meeting with teachers and students at the Social Science and Arts Faculties, Chittagong University, Sunday 12 December 2005

The University of Chittagong was founded in 1966 and now has six faculties: Arts, Science, Social Science, Commerce, Law, and Medicine. There are 15 000 students taught by 600 teachers.

A few days before our arrival a bomb threat was announced against the Faculty of Arts. That is why we unfortunately did not visit the Chittagong University campus during our visit. Instead our host, Professor [Imam Ali](#) (photo to the right, along with [Staffan Lindberg](#)), Dept. of Sociology, had arranged for a meeting to be held in the Kernel National School & College in the central part of Chittagong city.

In the meeting there were about ten teachers representing various departments from the two faculties of Social Sciences and Arts, and also 20 students of Sociology. The Dept. of Sociology at Chittagong University has about 600 students and 18 teachers.

We first informed about SASNET and the various forms of opportunities to increase cooperation and exchange. The presentation evoked a lot of interest and also an interesting discussion about ongoing research at the two faculties.

Research interests discussed:

in Sociology:

- *Inequality and social stratification between religious and ethnic groups*
- *Social class in Muslim society*
- *Urban – rural relationships*
- *Social Mobility*
- *Family system in Bangladesh society*
- *Neo-Marxist theory*
- *Development of the Bangladeshi intelligentsia in contemporary society*
- *Corruption in Bangladesh society today*
- *Political unrest in Bangladesh and its causes*



in History:

The development of the Bengali Muslim intelligentsia 1905–1947.

Teachers in [Bengali literature](#) expressed a wish to develop a comparative study of Bengali and Swedish folk literature. A professor of [Political Science](#) expressed a wish to make a comparative study of women in politics in Sweden and Bangladesh.

A professor of [Law](#) wanted to have Swedish cooperation in researching and teaching about the relation between law and society. The reason is, he thinks, that in Bangladesh there is wide gulf between abstract laws on the one hand and actual legal and political relations in society on the other.

Teachers we interacted with:

- [A F Imam Ali](#), Prof. of Sociology
- [Emran Hossain](#), Prof. and Chairman, Dept. of History, former Dean of Arts
- [S M Monirul Hassan](#), Assistant Prof., Dept. of Sociology
- [Mahbubul Haque](#), Associate Prof., Dept. of Bengali
- [Bhuiyan Iqbal](#), Dept. of Bengali
- [N M Sajjadul Hoque](#), Dept. of Anthropology
- [Abul Quassem Chowdhury](#), Prof. of Sociology
- [Qamar Banu](#), Dept. of Zoology
- [Md. Mamunur Rashid](#), Dept. of Law
- [Md. Liaquat Ali](#), Dept. of Sociology

Students from the Department of Sociology:

- [Md. Mahbubur Rahman](#)
- [Fahmida Sultana](#)
- [Nurul Hossein](#)
- [Hasina Ahmed](#)
- [Allauddin](#)
- [Shamima Yasmin](#)
- [Farzana Sultana](#)
- [Farjana Akhter](#)
- [Harunur Rashid](#)
- [Shomsul Asafin](#)
- [Shabauddin](#)

