

## Land Issue in CHT

Land question is the focal point of attention now for the National Committee on CHT (NCCHT) and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) in their bid to wrap up a peace accord. After 25 rounds of talks since 1988 and the on-going one being the sixth in a series undertaken by the present government, here we are now facing the last hurdle of differences on the land issue pertaining to the legal, settlement and management aspects of it.

It is a complex but not necessarily an intractable problem. The complexity owes its origin to the typical absence of documentation of rights displacement and ownership, the tribals from Kaptai lake area and settlement of plainland people in phases over the years. Basically, the tribal demand for dispossessing the Bengali settlers of the lands they are living on has been scaled down. They are now pressing for the settlers' relocation in government khas lands from the farmlands. Since there is scarcity of khas lands the apparently reduced tribal demand has not quite helped matters. On land disputes we support the view that a judicial commission be constituted to solve these under appropriate terms of reference.

Both sides have shown a laudable concern for land management which is crucial to a durable prevalence of peace in the area. There is the CHT manual dating back to 1900 which recognised exclusive land rights of the tribals during the British era. Subsequently, in the changed context this went through alterations. There are now the relevant provision under the Hill District Councils Ordinance operative since 1989. The PCJSS now insists that all lands be managed by the proposed regional council on the principle that 'outsiders' would not be entitled to any new ownership of land and that transfer of lands too will be forbidden.

The land question being at the core of our relationship with the tribals it has got to be resolved not only quickly but also meticulously and fairly. This is an acid test for the credibility, commitment, skill and sagacity of the negotiators on both sides. There is no 'outsider' or 'insider' to the spectacle in the CHT. The two communities must learn to live in a mutually reinforcing harmonious atmosphere of give-and-take.

## Tinkering Job

The news that some agencies in the utilities sector are dragging feet on helping the DCC to implement its plan for repairing city roads is signal enough of the complete lack of coordination prevailing in this area. One does not know how long this problem which has not only been causing enormous public inconvenience for years but also leading to great wastage of their money, will be taken care of.

We fully endorse DCC's view-point that Dhaka's roads simply cannot wait any longer to be done up. It is not just the vehicle unworthiness of the roads or the chances of accidents that these ribbed, ridged ways are fraught with that call for an immediate repair work. The cost factor has to be considered too; for the longer it takes the authorities to undertake the job, steeper the overall cost would be.

But if the job is done professionally and there is no compromise on the quality of the material used, unforeseen calamities apart, there is no reason why the road network or installed underground system will not last the wear and tear of a considerable time, say ten years. We do not see how the deterring argument that roads may have to be dug if the sunken cable gets burnt or something like that, can be put forward in the first place.

The truth is, a vicious vested interest group has grown around these agencies and they are keen to push back the repair work until the next dry season because their interests will be best served only that way.

Unless these webs of corruption are torn apart ruthlessly, the pattern of frequent digging owing to purposeless and poor repair work will remain unchanged. The problem also brings to the fore how imperative it has become for the authorities to invent ways that will ensure an effective coordination between the DCC and the other relevant agencies.

## Grabbing Trend

We are alarmed at the recent trend of land grabbing now spreading fast around the capital. The Daily Star ran exclusive stories on how the land sharks have been chipping away from railway's own land throughout the country. The big and frightening difference between the situation in the past and now is that what used to happen surreptitiously is now taking place with no fear of the powers that be.

The latest news of probably the most flagrant act of land grab has come from the former aerodrome at Tejgaon. Squatter settlements have sprouted over a vast area of this military estate. Not only that, in order to give the whole act a sanctimonious look and invincibility, these crooks actually built a mosque which the defence personnel razed only to see it re-erected in no time. Reportedly, an unholy nexus between some low ranking army personnel and powerful outsiders have led to this undesirable development.

Using religious sentiment to justify an evil design is nothing new. But the problem here is that it is adding a new dimension to lawlessness. If people can get away with grabbing land owned by various government agencies where is the security for the property of the common man?

We demand the authorities form a task force immediately that in tandem with the relevant agencies like Rajuk and suffering quarters like army, railway would probe into the incidents of land grabbing and illegal possession.

# Madeline Albright's Visit: New Hope for ME Peace

This is the first time the US clearly stated its position against Israeli settlements... it went to the extent of saying publicly that settlement is an "obstacle to peace".

THE possible genetic instinct arising out of her birth in a Jewish family, over which she had no control though she was later brought up as a Catholic probably induced Secretary of State Madeline Albright to initially echo Benjamin Netanyahu's politically motivated "security" phrases which antagonized the other party of the peace process — the Palestinians. Benjamin Netanyahu said "an all out commitment by Arafat to put an end to terrorism must precede further steps by Israel to implement the Oslo Peace Accords". Madeline Albright said she agreed with Benjamin Netanyahu that terrorism must stop and that Arafat had not done enough. But later she came up firmly with words that "Real security depends ultimately on real peace". This is exactly where the truth lies. There could be no real security without real peace and the real peace cannot be established until Israelis vacate the land that belongs to the Palestinians.

There is, however, no denying the fact that security is a must and terrorism must stop but unfortunately Benjamin Netanyahu himself created the security problem by deciding to start the Jewish settlement in Palestinian land at Har Homa in East Jerusalem. As various reports show there had been very little terrorist attacks for about a year prior to the decision on Har Homa settlement. Indeed, Har Homa settlement project on Palestinian land ignited the anger of the Palestinians and obviously the radicals took advantage of the situation and went ahead with suicide bombings killing 20 Israelis since July 30. Therefore, the decision makers of Jewish settlement in Palestinian land and particularly in Har Homa are to blame

mainly for the onset of suicide bombing that killed so many innocent Israelis. Indeed, some Israelis themselves blamed Benjamin Netanyahu government for the bombings.

Moreover, the bombings took place in Jerusalem — an area under the complete control of Israeli security. Therefore, it was the Israeli authorities' responsibility to ensure security to Israeli people and Arafat's self-rule authority had very little to do with providing security within Israel. It is also not known whether the suicide bombers were Palestinians or Israelis. If an Israeli like Yeger Amir could kill Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, it cannot be ruled out that some Israelis of Yeger Amir type went on to commit suicide bombings to destroy the peace process. Even if it is conceded that Palestinians were responsible, one cannot say with certainty that they came from the areas under the control of Palestinian authority. Because even now a very large area of Palestinian land are under the occupation of Israelis. Therefore, it seems a one-sided view to blame solely the Palestinian authority. However, Palestinian authority does have the responsibility to do everything within their control to stop violence that kills innocent civilians.

In any case, the fact remains that peace and security go together and this is what Secretary of State Madeline Albright ultimately tried to bring home to both the tending parties. Unfortunately, it did not go down well with the Israeli authority. Despite Albright's initial set back in her approach she looked very fair and even-handed as the

Saudi leaders put it, when she said during her address to the Israeli high school students that "Israel should refrain from unilateral acts, including what Palestinians perceive as provocative expansion of settlements, land confiscation, home demolition and confiscation of IDs". She called upon the Israeli government to freeze settlement activity and indeed said that "a time-out" from these unilateral actions could help save the peace process.

This changed the atmosphere in the Palestinian Area considerably but soured her relation with Israeli authority. On freezing of settlement Israeli Prime Minister's spokesman

means business she must come down reasonably heavily on Benjamin Netanyahu to take him out of politically motivated obsession on security as security without peace is not achievable. Benjamin Netanyahu must return to the agreed principle of "land for peace" and stop building settlements in Har Homa and other areas belonging to Palestinians. Once an official declaration comes from Israeli government on halting settlements, suicide bombings are likely to stop; at least this will induce Palestinian authorities and Palestinian people and particularly the moderates to work more closely with Israelis to

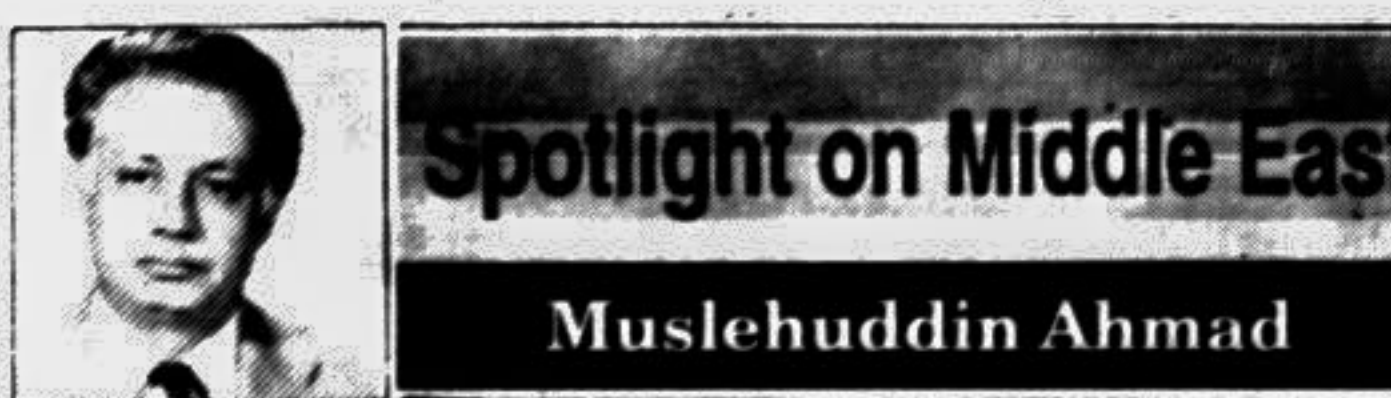
nothing new in the visit as Israeli-Syrian track remains blocked Albright said in the meeting with Hafez-Al-Assad that gap between Israel and Syria is as wide as ever. Saudi leaders described Secretary Albright as "fair and even-handed". Prince Abdullah described Albright as "brave and frank at the same time". Saudi Leaders also indicated to her that Saudis might reconsider its earlier opposition to M-E Economic Summit at Doha which Israel would attend provided the peace negotiation resumes. Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak encouraged Albright's statement as encouraging and similar was the reaction of King Hussein of Jordan. Though Secretary Albright moderately described that "small steps" have been taken, the reaction in the Arab world has been very positive and some leaders said that she 'accomplished more than small steps'.

Secretary Albright's visit has put Israeli government into real embarrassment as this is the first time the US clearly stated its position against Israeli settlements. Earlier position of the US was less clear; it went to the extent of saying publicly that settlement is an 'obstacle to peace' though the US probably advised Israeli government privately to refrain from building more settlements in the Palestinian land.

Albright's forthright statements encouraged Israel's opposition Labour Party to come out openly against Benjamin Netanyahu's position. Thousands of Israelis demonstrated in Tel Aviv with open placards saying "STATE OF

PALESTINE NOW". "Jerusalem CAPITAL OF TWO STATES" — something unheard of in Israel before. Secretary Albright's visit and her open opposition to Jewish settlements, her firm restatements of "land-for-peace" principle have encouraged peace supporters and Labour Party leaders to come up openly with a position that would bring peace in Middle-East. Indeed, Ehud Barak, Opposition Leader and former Army Chief of Staff, said, "Netanyahu's policies are leading us on the path of Bosnia and Belfast. Just beyond the door a dangerous war awaits us". War is already on in South Lebanon. A couple of days back Israel lost 12 Commandos in South Lebanon in their engagement with Hezbollah. This was a single serious set back for Netanyahu's government.

Secretary Albright's visit coincided with the fourth anniversary of the signing of the peace accords and on this day Ezer Weizman, wife of Late Prime Minister Rabin and Arafat signed a document at Ramallah reaffirming Israeli and Palestinian commitment to the peace process. As it seems Albright's visit to the Middle-East apparently with stronger commitments to pursue the peace process has given fresh and new impetus to the Israeli peace supporters. May be those Israelis who are still sitting on the fence in terms of peace with Palestinians on the principle of 'land for peace' would now move positively to the peace side. As the opposition to Benjamin Netanyahu's policies is growing, a time may come when he shall either have to yield to growing demand for peace in exchange of land or go for early poll which may bring Labour to power again. With Labour in power, M-E peace is almost a certainty.



Spotlight on Middle East  
Muslehuddin Ahmad

David Bar-Illan clearly vented Israeli government's view when he said, "We cannot freeze settlement just as one cannot freeze life". This apparently discouraged the Secretary of State Albright. She said, "I am obviously not satisfied". Very small steps have been taken though "big steps were needed", she added. As a part of the "small steps" both parties have agreed to send their advisors at the end of the month to Washington to talk about the Talks. A week after, Secretary Albright would meet the Foreign Ministers, of both parties, in Washington with a view to finding the way to resume the peace negotiations.

If Secretary Albright really stop bombings and other forms of terrorism. This will, however, need intervention of President Clinton in some form or the other as was done by President Bush when he decided against the loan guarantees which Israel needed to raise funds from the USA. Only such pressure can bring Benjamin Netanyahu back in the peace negotiation with some seriousness as he hardly believes in peace with Palestinians.

Indeed Secretary Albright's visit to the Middle East has created some favourable environment in the Arab world. This has been reflected in the statements of practically all Arab leaders except Syrian leader Hafez-Al-Assad who saw

## Indo-Pak Talks and the Role of the United States

by Zagul A Chowdhury

While the guns are active on the borders along Kashmir causing tensions, in the diplomatic front too both countries expelled staff of each other.

THE third round of talks between India and Pakistan — two traditional hostile neighbours — began in the Indian capital and the parleys are to continue for four days. This is the continuation of the bilateral talks that was launched in March, this year, in New Delhi after a hiatus of three years, and then followed up in the second meeting in Islamabad and Maaree in Pakistan in June. The talks are taking place at the level of the foreign secretaries — the top ranking diplomatic positions — with the highest political level leadership pledging that their respective sides are attaching serious importance to the discussions in the pursuit of peace. Former Indian foreign Secretary Salman Haider and his Pakistani counterpart Shamsad Ahmad led the first two rounds of discussions and the political and the media circles in both countries focused enormously on the parleys while the international attention also took note of the developments since the New Delhi-Islamabad contacts at high level resumed after a long gap and the development itself was seen as important regardless of their eventual outcome. The third round of talks will have a change in the leadership of the Indian side as new foreign secretary K Raghunath will head his country's team while Mr Ahmad will continue to lead Pakistan side. Mr Raghunath, the immediate past Indian high commissioner to Bangladesh before the incumbent Deb Mukherjee, was associated with the talks in the second round in Pakistan when his predecessor Mr Haider led the Indian delegation.

The current round of talks is receiving particular attention because prime ministers of both countries are travelling to the United Nations within a few days for the General Assembly

session which often attract the world leaders. Normally, the foreign ministers lead their delegations of the UNGA which every year see some leaders like the presidents, prime ministers and others address the session. Both prime minister Inder Kumar Gujral and prime minister Nawaz Sharif will be there in the third and fourth week of the current round and are expected to meet over breakfast and obviously the complex bilateral issues will come up for discussions even though the talks will be unstructured in nature. But what is more important in this context is the reported interest by the United States that President Bill Clinton, who is likely to be in New York the same time and is stated to meet both the prime ministers, may urge both the leaders of the south Asian region to make more serious efforts for a settlement of their problems.

The signals that came out earlier that Washington is keen to see two neighbours bury their differences and talk more seriously to reduce tension over Kashmir — the main bone of contention in their belligerent ties — were initially interpreted in varying degrees in both India and Pakistan. He has succeeded high-flying Ms Robin Raphel who looked after this region for more than four years after Washington set up the South Asia Bureau in its policy-making territorial desk considering the importance of the area. It was the first visit of Mr Inderfurth after taking up the new assignment and he discussed core issue of tensions and differences in the populous

United States president will cover no substantial Indo-Pakistan matters.

Evidently, New Delhi wants to restrict the subjects related to Islamabad within the bilateral plane. Pakistan is keen to take up serious talks with India on the Kashmir issue in the bilateral context and two countries came up with their own interpretations about the "progress" that was made in two previous rounds of parleys. During the last round of talks, Pakistan says that it has agreed in principle that "Kashmir" issue will be discussed by two countries — a position which India hitherto did not accept while Indian side maintains that there has been no change at all in its approach to the problem centering "Kashmir". Sensing that United States is putting subtle pressure on both the countries for real bargaining in the bilateral relationship, press in both countries have alerted their governments of their own task while making efforts to improve the ties.

The United States Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Carl F Inderfurth has paid a visit to this region and the trip has taken him to both India and Pakistan in addition to Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal. He has succeeded high-flying Ms Robin Raphel who looked after this region for more than four years after Washington set up the South Asia Bureau in its policy-making territorial desk considering the importance of the area. It was the first visit of Mr Inderfurth after taking up the new assignment and he discussed core issue of tensions and differences in the populous

region with the leaders of two countries although he called his trip as essentially to familiarise himself with the on-going developments here. He said the United States is keen to involve itself more closely with the region and this will be reflected in the dealings of Washington in the days ahead.

The visit of the senior US official to this region ahead of the visit of the prime ministers of India and Pakistan to New York and the third round of secretary level talks between two countries adds additional significance and interest to the state of Indo-Pakistan ties. Clearly, the Clinton administration is keen to see that two key players in the south Asian spectrum — India and Pakistan — lessen their belligerence and a more healthy atmosphere conducive to peace and stability is created in the region. Whatever be the American strategy to these two countries, it can be argued that Washington will be at more ease if the two traditional foes play down their differences and effectively make some progress in normalising ties. Both nations are understandably capable of using nuclear weapons and the US cannot relish a situation when such a possibility of their use in the region at any stage becomes distinct. It remains to be seen how the visits of Mr Gujral and Mr Sharif to the UN go off and what transpires from their meetings with the American president. These engagements seem to be on the itinerary of both the leaders.

The third round of Indo-Pakistan talks was about to be marred by certain development not conducive to a healthy bilateral contact. While the guns

are active on the borders along Kashmir causing tensions, in the diplomatic front too both countries expelled staff of each other from missions in their respective capitals. It is not surprising or unusual but certainly does not augur well before a scheduled important meeting.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars on Kashmir with India controlling two thirds and Pakistan one third

## OPINION

### Route of Infection

Dr Sabrina Rashid

In one of the dailies I came across an information that sick cannot understand how they got it. It is so strange, but true that even the educated ones have not much idea how they can catch various diseases, and therefore how they can remain just a little careful so that they don't become ill. I was shocked when one of my educated relatives after getting infected with typhoid and jaundice thought that she got sick because of taking mangoes! And another one after getting infected with thread worms thought that she got it after taking too many bananas! She is a master of political science. Dhaka University student was coughing continuously without covering her mouth. I requested her to do so and asked her why I had said so. She said 'So that dirt doesn't enter my mouth! What an absurd idea.

All these examples show how poor the basic health knowledge is, of our people — the educated ones at that! If one doesn't know how diseases spread or how one can get infected, then how can he take precautions to prevent its spread — to prevent himself and others from getting infected. All the gastro-intestinal diseases i.e. diarrhoea, typhoid, jaundice, food poisoning etc. are caused by taking infected food or drink or by dirty hands and nails. Worms (infestation is very common in our country) enter a person's body in the

same way, except one worm which enters through the sole of the feet and that's why one shouldn't walk barefoot in dirty places. This our poor people are always doing.

Respiratory diseases like cold, cough, flu, pneumonia, lung TB, bronchitis etc. enter the body by inhalation of the bacteria or virus. That is why infected people should always cover their nose and mouth while coughing or sneezing. As at that time a spray of bacteria or virus is thrown out which then enters into other people's nose and makes them sick as well. But I have hardly ever seen anybody covering his nose or mouth at these times, in our country. Either they don't know how they are making others sick, including their close relatives or they just don't care! Then the habit of spitting right and left of our people is also responsible for spreading diseases, as spit is a very good medium for bacteria to grow and multiply and then spread in the air.

Probable reason for all this ignorance is, our people don't much have the habit of reading. Then our mass media like TV and radio are mostly busy broadcasting songs after songs! TV talks by doctors are quite boring and not many people especially the young ones have the patience to listen. So the health education programmes should be made interesting by cartoons and graphics.

## Communication Gap: The Market Pinches BTTB

A Husnain

The public-monopoly operator BTTB recently reduced the overseas telephone call charges by ten per cent, to meet severe competition from the private sector, as small private operators are now offering much cheaper rates for international telephoning and fax, using the Internet.

In fact the professional trade magazines carry many news and comments on the fast growing competition provided by the Internet services, cutting into the high-tariff monopoly of the traditional international telephone service providers. The issue is being hotly debated at ITU level as the financial implications run into hundreds of billions of dollars. Telephoning is going to be much cheaper. There is no point holding back, as the market is changing, driven by technology.

Local BTTB and the regulating body have to be alert during rule-making process so that the consumers get the maximum advantage of hi-tech information systems now appearing in the market as alternatives or options. The government was late in the formation of the in-

dependent telecom regulatory body (compared to the other SAARC members) — the latter will take many months to be operational (UN assisted on consultants during the drafting period).

In yet another local news item, the Telecoms Minister has been overwhelmed with complaints of slow and poor telephone services in the rural areas by BRTA and Sheba private operators.

The government would do well to introduce a crash programme to accelerate the installation of new telephones in the urban and rural areas. Also some administrative reforms in BTTB is called for, including transfer of officials, for introducing fresh air and outlook. Market-oriented development should be virtually independent of bureaucratic delays and influence. The public is not kept well informed about the fast changes which should be introduced — but are not there. Today's business and development is information-driven. The communication gap is fatal for Bangladesh.

## To the Editor...

### The merit lists

Sir, The Daily Star recently published a series of articles on the financial anomalies of the Education Boards. It is not difficult even for an outsider to see that these organisations have basic moral deficiencies which can only be remedied by a strong governing body made of respectable persons from without who can give the boot where required.

The merit lists published by the Boards are a well-known sham. Almost every year, it appears that only one or two institutions get practically all the positions. This year, too, the recently-published list for the HSC Examination contains names from virtually two. Are there no good students in the other colleges? If these two colleges do enroll the brightest students, why do they fare much less well in the admission tests of BUET, the universities and the medical colleges? Why do their latter stage teachers speak contemptuously about their obtaining full-marks in the practical examinations at HSC without having actually done any experiment?

The commercial use of the merit list by the teachers of these preselected institutions has brought them fame and also wealth in the form of coaching fees and undisclosed amounts of 'donations' for help in admission. It is certainly a very credible accusation that these teachers influence where the scripts of the different institutions are sent. Despite computer coding, the centres of the different colleges are known to the Board, and the liberal examiners are assigned for the centres where the favoured students sit. Even the most out-

standing students of other colleges are examined by indifferent or in confident examiners giving low or average marks to play it safe.

The clustering of merit positions can be statistically proved to be a systematic bias. In addition, there are many instances of extraordinary facilities enjoyed by individual students who are: i) On related to the Board officers, ii) come from rich or very influential families, or, iii) have persistent parents hounding the Board. The son of a former Controller, not known to be very intelligent, secured a merit position. The daughter of a multimillionaire construction firm owner greatly impressed her classmates by telling them, quite accurately, her unexpectedly high marks one full month before the supposedly 'untouched by human hands' computerised results were announced. One boy who did exceptionally well in SSC and HSC was later discovered to be a cheat when he was expelled from a College Board (of USA) test held here. His determined father had visited every examiner with help from the Board, to ensure his results, and many would recall the press conference held by the angry 'second boy'.

The Education Commission has correctly recommended that merit lists should be abolished. For the purpose of distributing scholarships there can be a separate Scholarship Examination similar to those at earlier stages, which would ensure a fairer evaluation on a smaller scale. Meanwhile, the media can play down the importance of this controversial list. There are probably more deserving students outside the

lists than in them.

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### Diana and Dodi: Victims of a great tragedy

Sir, People all over the world stood still with shock and disbelief hearing the news of the untimely and violent death of Princess Diana.

She had suffered terribly in her married life with Prince Charles and only a year ago they were divorced. She was beginning to find happiness with Dodi Fayed, who was also killed in the car accident.

A close friend of Diana revealed that the Princess was exceedingly happy in the last few months of her life and was looking forward to a blissful existence. It is a great pity that her hope was not fulfilled.

Accidents happening in this way belies imagination. Who knows what mysterious circumstances contributed to this fatal accident!

Though Diana and Dodi could not stay alive to live together, they at least died together. May their souls will be together in the other world. May the blessing of Allah be with them.

Nur Jahan  
East Nasirabad, Chittagong

### Making Friends and Hubble's Eye's

Sir, I support the suggestion by Raat (Rising Stars, 11.9.97) for introducing a section designed for young people to make friends. But, I think is should

not be completely based on the "phone-friends" idea. For, those people who do not have access to a telephone, will be left out. Accommodate both types.

This proposed section should be interesting and attract various types of people. If you need any help starting out I would be happy to assist.

As a starter, maybe you could put this in the new sections. The article, "Through Hubble's Eyes" (Rising Stars, 11.9.97) by Rumana Tasmin Khan was interesting. I am interested in Astrophysics and everything to do with the Cosmos. Maybe, Rumana Khan also shares similar interests. Could contact or be contacted.

AMM  
Dhaka

### Justice

Sir, Half a dozen senior officials including chief executive officer of Chittagong Steel Mills lost their jobs in August '75. I had the opportunity to work with them as a colleague and neighbour and as a I can vouch for their honesty and sincerity. Unfortunately they were victimised politically. Again, another half a dozen officers of the mill were sent to jail directly in connection with the trial of the then Deputy Prime Minister in 1982.

Fortunately, they were released soon. Under the above fact, it is time to compensate those innocent victims of political jealousy by giving compensation money while money should be realised from wrongdoers in the name of justice and fairness.

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