The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Thursday, December 4, 1997

A Breakthrough

The Awami League government under Sheikh Hasina must be credited for having shown a lot of courage, commitment and willingness to take risks in solving the several decades old problem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts area. The accord makes a very delicate balance between the over binding concern to maintain the territorial and administrative integrity of the country, and effectively responding to the genuine concern of the rights of the Hill people. As an accord goes, it is a compromise document. But we feel that in fundamentals of our state and territory, no compromise has been made. That is where this accord is a genuine breakthrough.

After a preliminary study of the contents we find the agreement to be a good one; for although the accord gives almost sweeping powers to the Regional Council it does keep levers and provisions for the government to act in defence of national integrity if and when threatened. If the agreement is not implemented in the spirit it has been signed then it would attract corrective actions of the composite implementation committee. The temporary camps of the Army and VDP would be wrapped up within an agreed time-frame. But they can be deployed in an area in the event of deterioration in law and order, natural disaster etc in the same manner that it is done in other areas of the country in aid of civilian authorities. Whatever lands were legally allotted to Bengali settlers are to remain with them, and for settlement of land disputes a fairly balanced commission headed by a judge has been provided for. Further allotment comes under the jurisdiction of the council. The principle of coexistence between the Bengali and tribal people has been basically upheld over 'oust-the-plainlanders' campaign of the militants.

The government evidently has been more than generous in accommodating the demands of the tribals as is evidence by a high degree of autonomy granted to the Regional Council. In return, what we ask from the Shantibahini is that they surrender their arms, totally abjure the use of force and disassociate themselves from their old connections and linkages in a full compliance with the terms of the accord. The 68-point agreement would be as good as the goodwill and sincerity with which it is implemented. The government has, we believe, given enough proof of its genuine desire to establish peace in the CHT. Now we urge our tribal compatriots to reciprocate it by meeting their end of the bargain.

The accord of such a vital national importance can not go undiscussed in the Jatiya Sangsad. We request President Justice Shahabuddin to whom it has been submitted that he either has it placed before the next session of Parliament or concerns a special session of Jatiya Sangsad for the purpose.

Good Augury for Pakistan?

With President Farooq Leghari stepping down, politics in Pakistan seems to have wriggled out of the impasse it entered as a result of an expansive struggle for power involving both the executive and judiciary. Senate Chairman Wasim Sajjad will become acting President and Ajmal Mian the senior most judge of the Supreme Court is expected to fill the post of Chief Justice left void by the simultaneous departure of Sajjad Ali Shah. This is, however, far from a solution to the crisis brewing over last two weeks that has divided the judiciary, caused a battle between the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice and catapulted the powerful army chief in the role of a mediator. For all practical purposes, it means the departure from the arena of the duo Mr. Leghari and Chief Justice Sajjad Ali Shah, the antagonists of PM Nawaz Sharif in an unnecessary, unfortunate and attenuating battle of supremacy.

An act of decalesence as it is, the move however does not address the inner contradictions of Pakistan politics. Although fears of an army take-over are not completely ruled out, this institution that has time and again, directly or indirectly, controlled the course of its politics in the fifty years of this country's history, has so far maintained a dignified distance. Interestingly, the opposition leader Benazir Bhutto has not been heard of amply in this drama of utter discord. Apparently she has decided to play the role of a waiting cat on the wall for a while which is all very good but the way the crisis spread it was no longer a clash between the presidency and the prime minister or his party but a much broader one that has already undermined the institutions in Pakistan on which democracy is supposed to stand. We believe a collective role has to be played in diffusing tension and bringing Pakistan back on the road to sanity. Unhindered growth of democracy in Pakistan is vital not only for Pakistan but also for this region. Let's hope this act of disengagement will really mean to give democracy a new lease of life in Pakistan.

Calls for a Change

There was obvious substance in one organisation's slogan on the occasion of the sixth International Day for the Disabled yesterday: disabled have to be honoured as human being. Indeed, irrespective of the good words that are tossed about on occasions like these we are yet to develop a mentality to be able to see the disabled as human beings on the same footing.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed summed it up precisely in his message on the day when he said that we have to treat the disabled as our family members. Indeed we have to stop viewing the disabled as a burden. Given proper education and training, the disabled can contribute to nation-building in a significant manner. Indifference to the disabled on the individual level has got to do with the callousness shown in this respect at the national level.

The social welfare directorate's performance in rehabilitating the disabled in the society has been rather appalling. We urge the government to give serious consideration to the directional wisdom and recommendations that are going to emerge from the second South Asian Conference of Community-based Rehabilitation Network for the Disabled. Disabled population must find a place in the development plan of the government. Media, both print and electronic, can play a crucial role in increasing awareness among people about treating the disabled as equals.

Violence in Politics

Jolt, Jerk and Jab for a Democracy

The journey on the road to democracy for Bangladesh is, indeed, an uneven and appears to be somewhat time-consuming one. The rough surface is interspersed with deep and dangerous potholes which sometimes become extremely difficult to negotiate.

donment of the journey. The apprehensive well-wishers await impatiently completion of the journey with cautious optimism.

TNFANCY or childhood for a

_period of learning. In the

process, his success in learning

traits promptly gladdens the

heart of the watchful. Simi-

repeatedly does so, it saddens

one's heart. In a few solitary

cases, the child does learn so

little that he becomes crippled

for the rest of his life. One can

draw a parallel with a nation's

life. An independent nation can

also enter the primary phase of

democracy with a determina-

tion to become a true democracy

by establishing a befitting tra-

dition. However, the way to

democracy is not an even one.

While treading on its rough sur-

face, one is sure to experience

some jolts and jerks. As long as

it does not jab the traveller and

lead him to abandon his pro-

ject, the destination will even-

tually be reached, despite some

delay. It will, no doubt, be an

enjoyable and appreciable sight

democracy for Bangladesh is.

indeed, an uneven and appears

to be somewhat time-consum-

ing one. The rough surface is in-

terspersed with deep and dan-

gerous potholes which some-

times become extremely diffi-

cult to negotiate. The aches and

pains so caused and the fear of

sustaining grievous injury on

the rest of the way may disillu-

sion the traveller even on the

verge of an involuntary aban-

T was too familiar. I have

Araucous scenes from the

press gallery for 35 years. This

time I have watched them from

within the House. My

exasperation is no less than

before. But I have got scared

because I know now that all the

noise and slogans are pre-

planned. The House is only a

platform on which the selected

members play the role they

have been allotted beforehand.

Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP).

This time it is Congress. There

ple at stake, no basic question

for debate. It is just power poli-

tics. Imagine Congress saying

openly that it will not allow

any business to be transacted in

parliament. What happened to

the resolution the two houses

passed three months earlier

that the sessions would not be

9: The rumpus oven the Jain

Commission report was politi-

cally motivated. Congress,

whatever its public pro-

nouncement, did not want to

give more than a year to the I K

Gujral government. Former

prime minister Deve Gowda

warned him many a time. It

thought that the report would

come in handy to get mileage

during the next election. It is

debatable whether the party

would gain. That Congress itself

was having second thoughts on

demanding the exclusion of the

DMK from the United Front

government following Jain

strictures was clear from the

messages it sent through inter-

mediaries. It felt it has gone too

ATHER CHURCH FOR

is no issue involved, no princi-

In the last session, it was the

been witnessing same

The journey on the road to

for the onlooker.

larly, if the child stumbles and

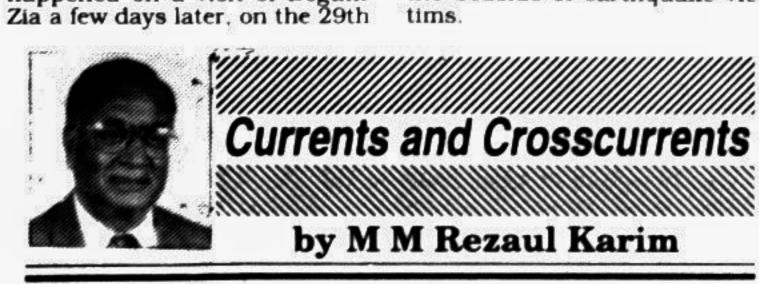
man is a continuing and fast

If the scourge of hartal and the reasons thereof, justifiable or not, represent the uneven surface, the widespread and intense violence with ingenious methods that are now being resorted to almost indiscriminately in the country can be compared to the inextricably deep and dangerous potholes on the road. It is most unfortunate. unprecedented and represents an unhealthy and unsavoury race of rivals to negate what little has been achieved towards reaching the goal of democracy.

All political parties, the major ones in particular, have, from time to time, resorted to hartal as a weapon to realise their demands, mainly from government. In the aftermath, also some violence took place. These, though cannot be condoned, have been accepted grudgingly by the public, if held in moderation. But the outlandish methods practised recently and the explanations advanced to justify such actions pose a matter of deep concern for many. A mammoth public meeting held in Chittagong last week which was addressed by

the BNP Chairperson came under heavy attack. The ensuing melee that followed cost a few lives and several hundred casualties. The BNP called for hartal in protest and the Awami League claimed that it was the BNP who initiated the violence.

Second instance that is worthy of mention is the one that happened on a visit of Begum Zia a few days later, on the 29th broken or damaged It appears BNP supporters later came in and a fierce battle ensued. The BNP leader herself remained in a state of seize for three hours during which all attempts to contact senior officials of law enforcing agencies went in vain. Gunshots were fired at the floor where Begum Zia stood by the bedside of earthquake vic-



ultimo, to the same city, Chittagong. This time the purpose of her visit was purely non-political. She went to visit the places devastated recently by earthquake and provide solace and succour to the victims. As she was about to enter the Medical College Hospital premises, she and her entourage came under heavy attack by slogan-mongering youth. Although she could barely enter the building unscathed, scores of cars be-

longing to her entourage were

Finally, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner rescued the be seized and harassed lady. The police on duty when Begum Zia came to the hospital stood as bystanders and took no action to control the unruly hooligans. The BNP again resorted to hartal in protest and the Awami League, likewise, blamed the BNP to be responsible for the incident. Some of the press coverage reported the incident merely as an usual fight between students belonging to

the two major opposing political parties and the BNP bitterly termed it as an attempt on the life of their leader.

Outwardly, these incidents give the semblance of a normal scenario of conflicts between political parties as the people of this country are used to witnessing it. But a close examination of the incidents will expose an inherent similarity that does not augur well for democracy. Violence in political rallies are commonplace in our country and in the region. But forcibly disrupting a political rally and attacking the entourage of the head of a major political party endangering her life are infrequent. What is more dangerous is to put the responsibility of causing the trouble fully and squarely on the other party has been rare and creates a dangerous precedent for the nation. It represents not only an attempt to absolve itself of the guilt but prepares ground to institute cases against the grievous party. Some criminal cases are being filed, as one understands. against BNP supporters, while concerned Awami activists are roam around happily scot-free. Moreover, an attempt on the life of a political leader, however insignificant he or she

may be, poses a serious danger to people's march on the path to democracy. How could one lend credence to the claim that the BNP will instigate violence to disrupt its own political meeting and cause troubles where the life of their leader herself would be in peril?

Earlier, the government banned holding of meetings on the street. It is an admirable task which the BNP government strived at but failed, owing to non-cooperation of the Awami League. Even the BNP's attempt to assemble people for holding a street procession has been thwarted by the police, obviously at the behest of ruling politicians. What is more fraught with danger is the recent practice resorted to by the ruling party to prevent opposition processions by fielding their own processions. This method is more likely to breed violence than not, with the possible consequence of unleashing a multiplier effect. This method, therefore, needs to be shunned. If hartal, seizure, street rallies and various economically counter-productive methods are to be proscribed, is it not fair for all major parties to come to an agreement before the next general election? This would then be applicable equitably to all concerned after the election and none would be guilty of seeking undue advantage, as the Awami League is accused of now as the ruling party.

Bad in Intent, Bad in Politics

Congress, wanting power desperately, did not think over the repercussions of singling out the DMK for the LTTE mess. Indeed, the Jain report's sweeping remark against the entire Tamil community has become an emotive issue, which may even revive the demand of Dravidian Nadu, not raised for nearly 30 years.

far and wanted a face-saving

Many things were suggested: reconstituting the central cabinet; the DMK supporting the government from outside; dropping the DMK ministers for 10 days and Finance Minister P Chidambaram submitting the resignation on the basis of Jain's adverse remarks. Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah proposed a ceasefire till a three top-lawyer committee gave its pronouncement on the commission's report.

There was also pressure by Congress leaders and the communists on Prime Minister Gujral to resign. He did not agree because he wanted Congress to defeat him in the house with the help of the BJP so that it would look that it has aligned with the BJP to oust the government. The communists' reasoning for his resignation was to avoid bitterness with Congress as it would be needed in certain states to defeat the BJP at the polls. Congress wanted to avoid the debate in parliament to keep many things like the Thakkar report on Indira Gandhi's assassination under cover. (Some Congressmen were named as suspects in the re-

In the game of one-upmanship, certain situations develop in such a way that the party which sets the ball rolling to gain the advantage comes a cropper. This is what has happened to Congress. It could take the first step as it did when it withdrew support from the Gujral government. But it could not control subsequent developments. The entire gamut of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination was bound to be discussed and the role of Mrs Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi for encouraging the militant Tamil group of LTTE

Now everything is coming out, bit by bit. Most of it brings no credit to Congress. What is being defended by the party in the name of national interest is

Dravidian Nadu, not raised for nearly 30 years.

The World Tamil Organisation has already said in a letter to Congress president Sitaram Kesri: "As a member of the Tamil community spread through several countries of the world, we wish to state something which most Tamils feel but are too timid to state. That is, that in India Tamils are treated as step-children or as second class citizens. If this continues the worm will turn one day."

ne day."

The report has not only cast

with the blood of their martyred leader Rajiv Gandhi." But why did he not say the same thing in the same language at the same pitch earlier? The Jain Commission report is like any other document under the Commission of Inquiry Act. There is nothing sacrosanct about it. But to equate the credibility of the report with the legacy of Jawaharlal Nehru, as Arjun Singh has done, "goes beyond the pale of reason and propriety," the words he has used to attack the critics.

In any case, using the report as an occasion for Sonia Gandhi's entry is neither fair to her nor to Congress. Arjun Singh has been wanting her to head the party is known because he proposed her name soon after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. But her reluctance has been clear from the way she has kept away from politics. True, she has been receiving top Congress leaders from time to time, but more as the widow of Rajiv Gandhi than as political leader. Drawing her to politics is actually dragging her to the streets where politics is profane

and personalities perverse.

The party may get crowd through her. She evokes curiosity and respect but she may fail to convert them into votes. People in India are beginning to be less emotional and more choosy. Even otherwise, the sympathy wave after a lapse of six years (Rajiv Gandhi's assas-

sinated in 1991) is something unusual to expect. Congress is in for a surprise. The party may have put even

The party may have put even its present strength of 146 in the Lok Sabha in jeopardy. It does not look like winning as many seats in the next election. Maybe, unwittingly, the party has played into the hands of such Congress leaders who wanted to see Kesri down. An internal battle for supremacy within Congress may cost the nation dearly.

Whether is BJP is able to exploit the ground prepared by Congress is too early to say. But there is every likelihood that the BJP will emerge as the single largest party at the polls. The party is happy to witness the members of Congress and the United Front shouting at one another. And it wants the report to create more bad blood between the two so that their differences deepen still further

With its untimely move. Congress has effaced from the BJP face a substantial part of dirt that had smeared it because of immoral and manipulative politics the party played in UP and other states. If events are to follow the Gresham's law, the theory that bad money will drive out good, Congress has dealt a severe blow to liberal forces in the country. The party

Congress ultimately withdrew support from UF government late last month as the UF refused to comply with the congress demand for dropping DMK from the coalition.

may drive out good.

BETWEEN THE LINES

Kuldip Nayar writes from New Delhi

interference in the affairs of sovereign neighbouring country. How can the accusation against Pakistan for training and arming terrorists in Kashmir hold water when India was doing the same thing? Should it be declared a terrorist State?

Congress, wanting power desperately, did not think over the repercussions of singling out the DMK for the LTTE mess. Indeed, the Jain report's sweeping remark against the entire Tamil community has become an emotive issue, which may even revive the demand of

aspersions on Tamils but also on Sikhs. Is this the document which Congress wants to make a plank in the next election? Some Congressmen are individually unhappy over Jain's observations and blame former minister of state for law Bharadwaj for having selected him. But the Congress party, as such, has not said a word against Jain for having questioned the patriotism of Tamils.

Arjun Singh, a seasoned politician, is probably right when he says that "no Congressman is prepared to bargain

OPINION

Do I Love My Country?

Dr Sabrina Rashid

"I love my country". How many of us can say this without any hesitation or reservation? Most of us will, but is it true in the real sense — not just verbal? Whether it is or not, we can just look back at our deeds — past and present. Our very deeds will tell us how much we love our country and want its well-being above our petty interests. Let each and everyone of us look back on our deeds to find out the

real answer. Did one ever cut down a tree that did not belong to him or her, did someone ever smuggle something into the country, ever get into the drugs business and crippled our youths, ever damage any government property — public transport, office etc., ever make money wrongfully from someone's post or position at the cost of the public or the government, ever misuse government property — car or goods, ever take time or days off from job without proper leave, ever fail to discharge duties properly for which someone draws his/her salary, ever use one's post or position to manipulate something for personal advantage regardless of the loss it caused the government and

the country? If the answer to all these and many more such questions is an unreserved 'no', then only one can say that he truly loves his country. Nowadays, our main problem is we love ourselves far more than our country. It may be true in other countries too, but the gap for them is marginal, between these two loves. Over here, it is an extreme. So much so that many are absolutely damn-care about the country's well-being. Their main and sole interest in whatever they do or pursue is with the view of personal gains

This is not a right or healthy feeling — after all we have but one country only, and if we don't take care of it, look after it, cherish it, we all will suffer one day, no bones about it. Most

of us are intelligent people, we should therefore read extensively, think and make our own judgement on what is good and bad for our country, in the long run. Not for today maybe, but for decades ahead because when you think about a nation's well-being, you think on long terms as it takes years to shape the destiny of a nation. It is not the trifling matters of day-to-day life which matter.

But everybody must think about the country's well-being and love it from heart. Only then will his actions be in the proper direction for the prosperity and development of his motherland, or at least not to hurt it in so many ways when advancing his own selfish interests like cutting of forests, smuggling of goods etc.

We got our country after so much of bloodshed and sacrifice. We should hold it more dear to us than others who got

We got our country after so much of bloodshed and sacrifice. We should hold it more dear to us than others who got theirs easily by inheritance, but we fail to do so. How unfortunate for us! How much our freedom fighters loved our country is incredible. For they laid down their lives for our motherland. Whereas we — we can't even bear to give up our petty interests for the sake of our country.

Then many of us give importance to party interests above national interests. We shouldn't give any party our blind support. If we can understand right from wrong ourselves, then we should have our own opinion and judgement.

We must love our country irrespective of caste, creed and
religion. After all, she is to
which we all belong, whatever
may our beliefs be, the love for
one's motherland should be
above all else.

Have I done anything for my country? For most, the answer is 'no'. But as long as you haven't done anything to hurt it, it will remain grateful to you. Only that much it asks of you—do not hurt it, please!

Un the Unitary

For peaceful UP elections

Sir, With the UP elections, there is an imminent threat to public peace and law and order, especially at places where there are goons already in existence and at places where they have been imported. The government has already declared a package of measures mobilising police, Ansars and

As such, it could be expected that untoward incidents could be minimised — but what needs to be ensured is the neutrality of administration. It has been observed in the past that the law enforcing agencies have been kept at bay by vested quarters and brought in when harm is already done.

Newspaper reports indicate that there might be undesirable incidents at places, thereby making the nation incur loss of lives and property. All we would, therefore, request the authorities is to remain firm, strong and neutral and arrest anyone who violates the law irrespective of his party affiliation.

F Ahmed 5, Bank Bhaban Minto Road, Dhaka.

Silent taxation

Sir, Prior to coming to power, the present ruling party promised to the nation for accountability and transparency of their administration. They also promised for sovereignty of the Parliament. But once in power they seem to have deviated from their commitments. Bypassing the Parliament, it has been imposing new taxes through executive orders so that there is no hue and cry either from the public or the opposition parties. The government has increased the price of petrol, LPG, water, electricity, and there is a rumour that the gas price will again increase

Against this backdrop, I think there is no necessity to place the details of the national budget in the Parliament for long discussion and spend huge amount of money from national exchequer. Without any new tax proposals, it may be

just placed in the Parliament and get it passed by voice votes. But what we see in our neighbouring country where such a new tax proposal of fuel was duly placed in the Parliament after its circulation and then got it passed.

M A Jalil 372/B Khilgaon, Dhaka

Road accidents

Sir, Recently, I read a news item about an accident in Tangail which is classified as the worst ever road accident in the country, where at least 58 people were killed and 25 people injured, as an overloaded bus skidded off the road and sank in a deep ditch at Baghutia in Kalihati on the Tangail-My-

According to the Collins English Dictionary accident is defined as "an unforeseen event or one without an apparent cause or anything that occurs unintentionally or by chance."

But, the news of the accident we read about these days seem not 'unforeseen' but has a definite cause, or lapse of some thing. Like, in the above accident on Tangail highway, we see the bus was overloaded and for this or some other reason the bus skidded off the road and sank in a ditch. In the strict sense an accident cannot be avoided but the Tangail-type accident could have been avoided and in other words that

I read a news many months ago where I remember the Home Minister assured the public that by 'March 1997', 'roads will be made safer'. But to my dismay the recent accidents are more serious and taking more lives than before the announcement of the Minister.

K Anwar Dhanmandi, Dhaka

Peace treaty

Sir, If we look around us we will see how peace is maintained by other countries, when there is any disturbance within their boundaries. The method has been the same everywhere, should we also follow their footsteps being an inexperienced nation, as they are the old

ones and therefore setting examples how these types of disturbances should be dealt with. Remember how a brave and

powerful race like the Sikhs were dealt with, remember the shoot-out and massacre in their holiest shrine — The Golden Temple? So now they have peace in Punjab! Remember how the US remained united after a bloody, long and ferocious war? See how Tamils are dealt with to maintain peace in Sri Lanka, how the Kashmiris the Nagas etc., are dealt with to crush and annihilate anyone who wants self-determination. See, how Israelis who are constantly at war and in a state of emergency, act! Each citizen is ever so fearful of being torn into shreds by a bomb exploding right at his feet. But do they give in for that? Never. They will not give up even an inch of others' land that they have forcefully taken away from them. They will die and suffer but they

will not sign a peace treaty. Is this the rule of the world to deal with any disturbances within its boundaries? No peace treaties. Looks like treaties are not signed with anybody within a country's boundary. There is a different way of dealing with them. In Bangladesh, one hardly feels any disturbance because of a few thousand people in the only area which is mineral-rich, in the whole country. Does peace treaty mean we will be losing those minerals?

Sarah Dhaka

"Raw Jute Success"

Sir. The editorial "Raw Jute Success" (29 Nov '97) contains within itself some major points to ponder for the greatness of our country. If the democratic trends are kept going without any serious political hindrance, we can explore a vast global market for jute, tea, readymade garments, liquid gas and many other unconventional items to earn foreign exchange through export. In this respect the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the support of other departments has been doing extremely good job to attract

foreign investors for their

involvement in the economic and industrial activities of our country.

Unfortunately, the bleak scenario in politics gives rise genuine fears in the minds of the common people of grave situations with grave consequences. Are the party in power and the opposition awaiting solutions for peace, progress and prosperity? God bless us!

Abul Ashraf Noor Uttara, Dhaka

Promotion to senior posts

Sir, The Prime Minister has asked the Establishment Ministry to promote officers to senior posts in the Secretariat against the existing vacancies. It is learnt that the dealing officers in the Establishment Ministry themselves are candidates for promotion and it is alleged that they are twisting and manipulating seniority lists to their own advantage. This will tarnish the image of an elected government.

Hence, it is requested that these officers should be transferred elsewhere and neutral officers who are not candidates for promotion should now be placed in such positions to ensure impartiality.

Will the Prime Minister take timely step before it is too late?

Anwara Begum Mirpur, Dhaka A now r

A new name for Patenga Airport?

Sir, We are upset by the rumour that the name of Patenga Airport of Chittagong may be changed as some quarters are suggesting.

From the very beginning, the existing name is in practice. In the meantime, the government had been changed quite a few times but the name remained as it is. If it is changed during AL regime, it would be very regretting. What would be gained by changing the name which the people of Chittagong love and cherish? What is the use of making unnecessary changes which only create issues?

Nur Jahan East Nastrabad, Chittagong