## The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Friday, December 5, 1997

### Why Then the Hartal?

As expected Opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia has rejected the CHT peace deal out of hand.

Between sling-shots and fire-balls there is hardly any difference, so it seems. In a massive but predictable build-up of stridency ever since BNP disassociated itself from the national committee which conducted the peace negotiations with the Shantibahini, the party had been sending out sling-shots. Now, with yesterday's post-accord press conference, Begum Zia has lobbed fire-balls at the peace accord signed and made fully public on Monday in an updated version of reaction virtually accusing the ruling party of bad faith in the negotiations.

It obviously goes to her credit though that her party experts went to great lengths taking a lot of pain to fathom deeply into the various clauses of the pact. A very heavy-sounding litany of charges has been levelled against the ruling party. Highly jarring phrases such as the accord violating the constitution, undermining the parliament, abdicating state authority by indulging in the formation of a powerful parallel government, demoting non-tribals into second class citizens, weakening border security, caving into the dictates of a powerful country, planting seeds of separatism, etc.; have been reeled off. We take all of these evaluative observations of the principal opposition party on the accord very seriously indeed. We really want these to be tested on the touch-stone of truth.

We welcome, without any reservation whatsoever, the BNP chief's declared option that her party might go to the court for a redressal. We have persistently advocated democratic and legal methods of raising an issue like this before the parliament or taking it to the court to solve it in a constitutional manner.

Go to the court if you must and we challenge you to do it in minimum time. But if you have decided to go for it, why then should you take recourse to hartal on Sunday which is obviously predisposed by the sensible and public-spirited option you are thinking about?

### What a Waste!

If ever space did not matter in conveying the gravity or the magnitude of a problem then this was it: a news item on Mymensingh's Agriculture University at a quiet corner in yesterday's issue of a leading Bengali daily. Session jam, an accepted if not appreciated phrase in our academic jargon has taken a kind of toll on students that even the most liberal would find hard to swallow. Reportedly the second year students of a particular batch have not been able to begin their third year class even after five years — yes, 72 months and 26280 days!

Protracted academic year has become a way with the Agri-varsity life. Literally 25 months make a year. Unscheduled holiday due to violence and terrorism resulting from clashes between student fronts of political parties and ineffective examination system are believed to be the main reasons behind this crisis.

We are aghast at such a terrible waste of human life as would be any sane human being. Does the Agri-varsity teachers have any shame or self-esteem? Is there any administration? We urge its seemingly non-existent authorities to make some arrangement immediately to have the backlog cleared as soon as possible. If you can't just step down en masse; you wouldn't do any further harm to your community's image. At least some people would know that there is a thing called administration in the Agrivarsity.

But the people with whom we would like to lodge our anguish and frustration are the leaders of our major political parties. See what an utter wasteland of human resources you have turned an institution into that by Bangladesh's identity as an agro-based country should have been one of the most vibrant, creative and effective seat of learning. Your nasty and invisible manipulation have contributed to the loss of years but can you get them back those wasted years? Could you do that if they were your own children?

### Rickshaw-free Motijheel?

We don't really know what to do with rickshaws. This is confirmed one time too many by a decision of the city care-takers that Motijheel area would be made rickshaw-free. The Task Force on easing traffic jams in a fit of desperation to make a dent in a highly frustrating traffic non-system had recommended it to the city fathers.

We have had a completely rickshaw-free long stretch of an arterial thoroughfare from Shahbagh to Dhaka gate and then with a gap for rickshaws at Mohakhali, right up to the Zia International Airport. While that very long, winding avenue has been relieved of the manually-driven three wheelers, the rest of the city's road network has only swelled with them. There is no mistaking the cause-and-effect relationship. The same thing is going to happen after rickshaws are withdrawn from Motijheel area as the adjoining lanes and bylanes are sardined-packed with them. This shifting of rickshaw pressure to another area will boomerang on the entire flow of traffic, for everybody knows in Dhaka city how a small diversion causes the traffic to snarl all over with disastrous effect.

The decision to rid Motijheel area of the rickshaws is in principle a good one. But adhocism will not do with the details that need to be carefully worked out. We have four suggestions to make: first, phase out the unlicensed rickshaws; second, have separate lanes for rickshaws; third, build parking lots for motorised vehicles on the outskirts of Motijheel; and fourth, contain noise and air pollution.

## CHT Accord: Let Peace Determine Progress

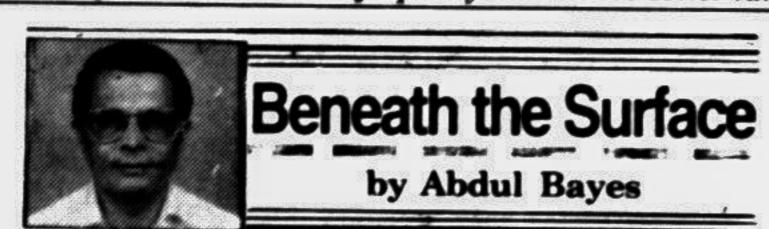
When one-tenth of a country's land area and almost half of its bushes are under fire, its sustainable development always remains to be in jeopardy. And hence better late than never.

ISPELLING all despairs hovering around a possible solution to the decades-old insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region, the landmark peace treaty finally came true. The 68-point accord signed by the government and NCCHT would, we hope, pave ways for the return of a normal civic life in an area so long stripped off by terrorist activities. The present government, especially the PM Sheikh Hasina, duly deserves congratulations for having thrown full commitment, courage, and co-operation in the pursuit and completion of this "risky" job.

The CHT constitutes about one-tenth of the land area of the country. Reportedly, it occupies about half of our forest resources. Unfortunately, this region that ravish with scenic beauty had been ravaged and torn apart by insurgency. All that fueled fire is deprivation. History tells us that the British in 1900 imposed CHT regulations - apparently to help hilly people - but in practice to bar easy entry into and exit from the region. People of that region continued to be captive in own

lands. The construction of the Kaptai Barrage hardly took into due cognizance the adverse impacts that it could impinge on those citizens. As a result, 54 thousands acres of agricultural land got inundated and 100 thousand Chakmas were turned into destitutes overnight. In fact, the seeds of a separatist movement were sown at that time. To add further fuel to the fire, the successive governments in Bangladesh brought in Bengalee settlers from all over Bangladesh and pushed them into the hilly region. Bengalee

us Pahari discord flared up. The hatred and anguish, so mounted, contributed to waging a war against establishments. Thousands flocked to India to take refuge and armed with to fight back. The region allegedly soon turned out to be a hot bed of international conspiracy where militants were trained to ignite separatists in the neighbouring country. The decadesold insurgency cost lot of human lives from both sides of the fence. Destabilisation gripped



the region to hinder socio-economic development.

The military solution in the crisis that were nourished and nurtured by the erstwhile military and quasi-military rulers of Bangladesh over the last two decades or so, was replaced by a move for political solution in early 1990s. The then government in power (BNP) can, perhaps, justly claim a credit for its avowals of a political solution. Unfortunately the solution did not materialise during BNP rule. Bangladesh Awami League - the party in power now - took up the challenge and after few months of hectic political parleys, got the dice rolling and at last on shore.

By any standard of judge-

ment, such an agreement should have taken place much earlier. One can only recall the differences in approaches to similar kind of problems as adopted by Malaysia and Sri Lanka. While the former quickly responded to the call of the hour, Sri Lanka initially paid no respect to Tamils' demands. They chose the military route to a political crisis As a result, Malaysia reaped home the harvests of peaceful co-existence to spur growth and development. Sri Lanka? Still continues to pay heavy price for its mistakes. A stitch in time could save nine in Sri Lanka! Likewise, Bangladesh could also eke out much larger dividends out of a peaceful coexis-

tence. When one-tenth of a country's land area and almost half of its bushes are under fire. its sustainable development always remains to be in jeopardy. And hence better late than never. We hope that members of Shantibahini would surrender their arms to words and thus abjure all force. They would embrace Bengalee settlers there to work in harmony.

One aspect of the peace package tends to lure us to tell something. It appears that the accord gives "sweeping" powers to the Regional Council. Again, as could be gleaned, local level institutions have also been vested with immense powers and prestige. Well done. But why not we make it mandatory that all local level and divisional/district level institutions are vested with such powers. Of course, it has to be within the domain of the constitution. Our apprehension is that local level institutions in Bangladesh are being paid much less respect than what is enshrined in the consti-

tution. We strongly feel that the titanic bureaucratic system of governance should give way to a more populist structure where people could decide their fate through participation. We mean that democratisation of administration should start from top to bottom. We hope that the recently concluded peace accord would be able to give a que in

this respect.
We fully agree with Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, the State Minister for Planning Civil Aviation and Tourism when he described three likely benefits of the package, given the current scenario.

First, facilitating a return of refugees to their own home after surrender of arms; second, allowing Bengalee settlers - who were neither here nor there but constantly under fire - to maximize their economic opportunities by availing the opportunities of an enabling environment and third, providing opportunities for developing new projects for hilly areas that were shelved for so long for fear of insurgency. Let growth and development be on board in CHT. Let peace determine progress.

## Stand Up and Be Counted

It isn't easy not to be a victim. Divorce was scary, uncharted, unpredictable and yes, heady stuff too. Liberation is all that and more. It is the ability to admit you are mortal. And still stand up and be counted. Just the way you are.

"Sorry," I say with a wry shrug. "I'm clean out of husbands That's when they look at me startled. Good grief, she's not married? "Yup. Not married. No hus-

band. Sorry, can't oblige..." Some people feel embarrassed when they realise they have intruded into my personal life. I admire these people because, if nothing else, they are at least honest. It takes courage to blush, to admit you've made a

OMETIMES, I joke about

mistake. But then, there are those people who don't care that they have intruded into my personal space. Who assume not only that I am married and therefore in possession of an able-bodied husband, but also that I will disclose details of my able-bodied husband's life as if it were my own. Like this doctor to whom I dash in desperation after a terrible night of agony in

the pit of my stomach. "So, what does dulabhai do." he asks, casually. Like he's asking if my bowels have moved that morning.

"Dula-who?" What the blazes is he talking about? He repeats the question, casually. His lips twitch as he writes out a prescription for a duodenal ulcer, looking up briefly in my direction as I emit a series of groan-like sounds. []

don't know which is more disconcerting to me: the assumption that I am, (ought to be) a married woman, or that if I were married, my husband would be my doctor's 'dulabhai'. Frankly, both possibilities leave me feeling exceedingly ulcerish.)

"Business, right?" he snaps cheerfully, handing me the prescription and warning me to stay off the spices. Like many other people, he has assumed that my husband is a businessman. Like many other people. he has assumed that I have a husband.

"You're so boring," exclaims my friend (who else would be so charming?) at a dinner party. "I wish you wouldn't go on about your marital status! Listen. women are supposed to have husbands, it's the norm."

Norm. Shorm. Give me a break. My buas at home are the norm. They don't have husbands. Has anyone noticed that buas seldom have husbands? What they do have, invariably, are fatherless children, lots of them, abandoned soon after birth or while in the womb by these so-called husbands-whoare-the-norm. Show me the norm, and I will show you real children, real women, real

challenges. "That's different. Those are not women like us, we're talking about women like us," my friend chides me. "You get so carried away, you can't tell the

difference. So what is the difference? "Didn't your mother teach you anything?" my friend asks with a sigh. (Evidently not. Sorry, ma. For women like us, the whole purpose of life is to find the right match, grab the

don't, they don't talk about it!" So what are women like 'us'

supposed to talk about. "Firstly, no self-respecting women does what you have just done. You don't tell people you don't have a husband. That's an admission of failure. Secondly, if at all you are forced into a corner and have to disclose your marital status, be subtle about it. Don't spit it out, just like that."

That explains it. Each time have used the d-word, people

right man, then hang on to him Coming Home . . .

for dear life, until the day you die," she explains, patiently. "If you fail to do this, if he leaves you or dies or something, it's

What if I leave him? "You're nuts, has anyone told you that? Don't say it so loudly. Okay. So women leave men. But only if they leave them for other men, if they

your fault. You shouldn't have

let it happen.

Almas Zakiuddin have gone all slit-eyed and heavy-lidded on me. Ladies and gentlemen of Bangladesh, I am divorced, if you please. (Indeed, even if you don't please.) Now that we've got that out of the way, may we just get on with life, and forget about husbands

and my marital status, please? "Of course not. You're so naive," my friend reprimands me, That is not the way to do it.

Tell people you are divorced and of course they will be shocked. Of course, they will look away, feel sorry for you, want to know more about it, about you, about how you got divorced, why you got to divorced, who is to blame, where is your husband, where are the children..."

And she is right. I am attending this seminar about women in journalism recently, when blurt it all out. I am encouraged by the fact that they ask me to fill in a form which demands to know not only my husband's name and profession, but also his educational background

and his age. Some of you may be able to imagine the feeling. I choke back the bile and try to explain that the questions are irrelevant and out of line. In the process, I also use the d-word, with reference to myself. One young woman picks up on the fact that I have used my married name

for a long time after my divorce. "So why didn't you change your name? How come you went by your married name for such a long time?" she asks into the microphone. Everyone listens, with rapt attention.

I was afraid, I reply. "How could you be afraid to change your name?" she per-

"Surely, a woman like you, so aggressive and so bold, could not be afraid to change her name?" asks someone else.

"Why did you get divorced, was it because of your career?" asks another participant.

What can I say to these eager. enthusiastic young women that will make sense to them and inspire them. Should I tell them that I don't care. I eat nails for breakfast, joke about my husband and life is one huge big party. Or should I cry and sob and beat my chest, like a hollow-eyed victim on BTV lamenting her plight.

I don't know if I am "aggressive". I know I am assertive. I don't know if I am "bold". I know I speak the truth.

Yes, I was afraid to drop a married name and go back to a birth-name, a birth-right. Can't explain why. Some things are a little more difficult than others,

I know that I am not married. (I really am clean out of husbands). It hasn't been easy. But that's okay. If it had been easy, anyone could have done it.

It isn't easy, for instance, not to be a victim. I don't suffer my divorce. Divorce was scary uncharted, unpredictable and yes, heady stuff too. Liberation is all that and more. It is the ability to admit you are mortal And still stand up and be counted. Just the way you are.

### LETTER FROM AMERICA

# Don't Punish Iraq on Account of its "Civilisation"

Dr. Fakhruddin Ahmed writes from Princeton

The West did not make a distinction between Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi children. Not surprisingly, the West's policy towards Saddam and Iraq to-date has been all stick and no carrot.

height of the holocaust of the ■ Bosnian Muslims Professor of government and strategic P. Huntington, studies. published an explosive paper entitled, "Clash of Civilizations?", in the Foreign Affairs magazine.

N the summer of 1993, at the

In that seminal paper, the Professor hypothesises that beginning with the French Revolution, the conflicts between kings and princes had given way to those between nation states. And after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the conflicts encompassed ideologies democracies, fascism and communism. With the end of the cold war, the international conflicts move into a new phase between civilisations.

According to the Professor there are seven or eight major civilisations - western, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American. African and Islamic. The civilisations are primarily driven by religion, Huntington writes, and because of their history and proximity, Islamic and the western civilisations will clash most severely. And the shameless "I am my western master's voice" drooling of the "torn'

Muslim country Turkey's military notwithstanding, Turkey will never be allowed into the western-Christian club also known as the European Union. The West is at the peak of its power. Global political and security issues are effectively set-

tled by the USA, Britain and France, and the economic issues by the USA, Germany and Japan. Every newly-elected western leader has to learn new vocabulary: the decisions made at the UN Security Council or the International Monetary Fund that reflect the interest of the West, has to be presented to the world as reflecting the desire of the "world community. "The very phrase, "world community" has become the euphemistic collective noun giving legitimacy to the actions reflecting the interests of the United States and its Western

Invariably, western leaders claim to be acting on behalf of the "world community." On De-

cember 21, 1990, newly-elected British Prime Minister John Major had a Freudian slip. On "Good Morning America", Major referred to the actions the "West" was taking against Saddam Hussein. Very quickly, he corrected himself and invoked the "world community."

In the light of the above, during the build up to the Gulf War, there was a dichotomy of interests in the "allied" plan to neutralise Saddam. The Muslim nations' aim was limited; reverse Saddam's Hussein's conquest of Kuwait. The war was an unfortunate but necessary means to that, but the Iraqi civilians were not to be harmed. Gleefully, major Muslim nations, including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Bangladesh contributed troops to the "allied" effort.

The West saw the conflict completely differently. For them the destruction of Iraq was an end in itself. It meant uninterrupted flow of cheap oil,

and elimination of one of Israel's (a country the West had created) worthy adversary. The West did not make a distinction between Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi children. Not surprisingly, the West's policy towards Saddam and Iraq to-date has been all stick and no carrot. France may huff and puff and posture, but at crunch time. French bombs also dropped on

It is astonishing that no leader in the Muslim world seemed to grasp the western agenda. The only person who understood it all and spoke out against it, was the visionary Prime Minister of Malaysia. Mahathir Mohamad. Via the likes of Mr. Soros, look what is happening to him and his country now!

The two most important posts in the US government, after the President and the Vice President, are the Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the Secretary of Defense

William Cohen, both of whom are proud possessors of the Jewish heritage. While both the Secretaries are extremely honourable persons, they have to be true to their own constituency, which is not Muslim. Secretary Cohen, while exhibiting intense sabre-rattling towards Iraq, has been rather cool towards any extended US military's role in protecting the Muslims of Bosnia. Ordinarily, the UN is the US

Congress' favourite punching bag. Even at the height of the present Iraqi crisis, the US Congress embarrassed President Clinton by refusing to pay one billion dollars that the US owes the world body. Whenever an adversary is to be punished. however, the West and the US Congress rally around the UN: "Saddam must not be allowed to flout UN resolutions!" What UN resolutions? The West is very selective in

implementing US resolutions. No one talks of the un-implemented Kashmir plebiscite resolution. John Major's Britain used the UN embargo resolution not to come to the aid of Bosnia's Muslims. Of course, the biggest offender in non-compliance with UN resolutions is Israel. It routinely ignores resolutions it does not like. And no one in the West criticises, let alone punishes Israel for it. Does anyone care to remember that in the spring of 1981, Israeli planes illegally flew over Jordan and destroyed Iraq's nuclear facility, and killed civilians, without so much as formally declaring war? The UN Security Council resolved that Israel should pay compensation to Iraq. The Israeli Ambassador tore up the resolution in the Security Council's face, saying that the resolution was not worth the paper it was written on! Such arrogance and contempt for the UNSC never

lands Israel in hot water. Why? Because, as far as the West is concerned, Israel is "one of us." Israelis "look like us." Yes, the West has had some glitches in their relationship with the Jews, such as the holocaust, but basically the western culture is "Judeo-Christian". Even Australia has woken up to that fact, and lately, through its government and individuals like UN's chief weapon's inspector to Iraq, Mr. Richard Butler, has been championing Israeli causes. Muslim countries do not seem to understand that when push comes to shove, the West will push and shove the Muslims, not the Jews. Ever wonder why Netanyahu is so arrogant? Because he knows

that when it comes to choosing sides, the West will always side with Israel, because they belong to the same "civilisation."

No one country should be under perpetual UN embargo. While paying lip-service to the suffering of Iraqi children, the West has shown no inclination whatsoever, in so much as discussing the lifting of the economic embargo over Iraq and alleviating the suffering of its civilian population. Sure Saddam Hussein is an unsavory character, who would do his country a great favour by simply disappearing. But the West has dealt with obnoxious characters before. The Soviet Union had far more destructive capacity and paranoid leaders than Iraq. Yet, the US dealt with them. So they should with Saddam.

The best way to deal with Saddam is to warn that if he were to use his biological weapons against his neighbours, he would himself personally pay a heavy price. On the other hand, there has to be light at the end of tunnel for Saddam. The West is so consumed with punishing Saddam that they have forgotten that he has to be given incentive for good behaviour. If the Security Council sets no time table for lifting sanctions on Iraq, they will show themselves to nothing more than devious bullies. with scant sympathy for the suffering of the Iraqi men. women and children.

There was little western attempt at understanding the Iraqis and their civilisation. Ignorance breeds extreme contempt. The West should have considered the Beatles song that says that people are the same all over the world. Instead, they assumed the mindset of the Philadelphia baseball manager who, confronted with fielding his team giants the first black player in the major league. Jackie Robinson, in 1947, asked his management whether they considered the Negroes "human!" During the Gulf war six years ago, the Iraqis were demonised in the western press to such an extent that it was made to look a soldier's holy duty to destroy Iraqi life and property. Hard to believe, as the Iraqi soldiers were fleeing Kuwait, the allied pilots were taking aim at their vehicles and firing their guns, uttering crass and blasphemous, "Say, Hi to

President Clinton, who inherited a bad-lraq policy, is a very fair and decent man. Here's wishing that instead of dropping more bombs on Iraq he will do the honourable thing and lift the economic embargo that has caused the lragi civilians so much hardship for so long. Because, to quote the President's favourite expression: "It is the right thing to do!"

#### **BAU's residential** problem

Sir, Residential problem of students of Bangladesh Agriculture University is acute at present. There are only nine halls of resident in which there reside more students than their capacity. For this crisis, many students have to stay outside the campus. As all courses are technical, their studies are

being seriously harmed. According to the general students, there are some vacant seats in many halls, which are illegally occupied by some leaders of various student organisations. In many halls some rooms of large size are openly named as "public rooms' for the new student. But they have no sufficient facilities at

ABM Strajul Islam C/6, Isha Khan Hall BAU, Mymensingh

### DU library: A good dating place

Sir, In all probability, the library of Dhaka University is the largest one in this subcontinent because of its innumerable books, journals, magazines and newspapers. The library is very important for the students of this university and the researchers of home

and abroad. The library has been producing scholars since its establishment. But it is a matter of great regret that in present times the standard of this library has been decreasing because of its abuse by the students (so-called meritorious students of the country) of this university. Of course, mismanagement is also responsible for this.

Some students, especially the 'Romeos' spending hours with their girl-friends inside the library, have turned the library into a good dating place. They do not come for reading and acquiring knowledge. Will the authority concerned took into this matter?

Shahidul Islam University of Dhaka

#### BTV and its news headlines

Sir, As we are aware, an earthquake measuring 6.1 on the richter scale hit Chittagong recently where many people have died. After hearing the news on the same night, I sat in front of the TV to watch the BTV 10pm news. But to my consternation, what should have been the top headline news was relegated to the section when they read the unimportant news. The same

practice was also followed the following night by BTV in their 10pm news. beyond my

comprehension, as to how BTV could put so little significance to the biggest ever earthquake to hit any place in Bangladesh. that they did not give the priority it deserved.

This action of theirs which is devoid of any compassion and consideration leaves one to wonder if this was done inadvertently or intentionally.

A Bewildered BTV Watcher Dhaka

### Securities market

Sir, It is extremely sad that during the last one year, the performance of the stock market was extremely erratic resulting in the complete economic annihilation of a large number of people. It was expected that the government would inject measures to boost the system so that people, who have totally lost their confidence in the stock market can again build up their hopes.

Needless to mention, in a poor country like ours with a very low level of literacy, the fact that a large number of people were enthused enough to invest heavily in stocks and shares, in many cases with all their savings, go to prove that our people are learning fast. It

was sheer lack of vision on the part of our economic gurus not to encash on the possibilities.

We know that all commercial banks have to by statute maintain reserves to the tune of millions of takas with Bangladesh Bank, the central bank of the country. If the commercial banks are allowed to keep a small portion of the reserves in shares, even from the secondary market, the volume of investment and turnover will, without any doubt, infuse the much-needed life-saving drug into the wilting stock market.

It would add further flavour to the efforts to rejuvenate this sector if the insurance companies with their enormous liquidity are persuaded to invest in this sector, even nominally.

Mahbubur Rashid 235, Maghbazar, Ramna,

### Thanks to the DS

Sir, I am very happy to notice that from 10th November. 97 programmes of BTV are regularly printed in The Daily Star. I thank you profusely for noticing my letter about BTV programmes and taking immediate

Nur Jahan East Nasirabad, Chittagong

actions.