

# Northern Ireland Peace Accord: Victory of Hope over Hate

by Barrister Harun ur Rashid

*The people of Bangladesh are sure to empathize with the peace accord that has been concluded on the Ulster issue. Our Prime Minister sent a message to British Prime Minister welcoming the accord. We are aware of the significance of peace accord as the Government of Bangladesh has recently concluded a peace agreement with the tribal leaders in Chittagong Hill Tracts.*

THE Peace Accord concluded on last Friday (10th April 1998) would usher in a new era of hope and peace in Northern Ireland (Ulster). The Agreement aims to end the sectarian violence raging in that province for almost 30 years. The Accord, according to British Government, is not a peace "deal" but a political "settlement". Though the negotiations started 22 months ago with an independent Chairman — former US Democratic Senator George Mitchell, the seriousness of the negotiations came about when the British and Irish governments put a deadline, the 9th of April 1998 for the conclusion of negotiations. April 9 happens to be the beginning of Easter Holidays, April 10 being Good Friday (the day of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ).

In a dramatic move Prime Minister Tony Blair of Britain and his counterpart Bertie Ahern of Republic of Ireland joined the negotiations to put in their personal negotiating skill and commitment to secure the settlement. It was a marathon session which continued non-stop for 36 hours and past the official deadline into Good Friday morning (10 April). Despite the fact that the settlement would still have to cross the hurdle of referendums in the province of Northern Ireland (Ulster) and the Republic of Ireland sometime in May, 1998, it is a remarkable achievement for all the eight parties to strike a deal on this emotive and highly charged issue.

**Background:**

To put in simple terms, it is a long-drawn fight between the Catholics/Nationalists and Protestants/Unionists in respect of the political status of Ulster province.

The conflict had its roots when Ireland won independence

in 1921 from the British rule; six counties (districts) of Ireland in the north were kept under British rule because the majority of Protestants in these counties did not wish to join the Catholic dominated Republic of Ireland. The Catholics in Northern Ireland could not reconcile with this fact and a sectarian tension began between the Protestants and Catholics in the province of Ulster. The Protestants wish to remain with Britain whereas the Catholics want to unite with the Republic of Ireland. This sectarian divide is somewhat similar to that existing between Shias and Sunnis among Muslims in the province of the Punjab of Pakistan.

Since 1969, sectarian violence erupted and almost 3200 people were killed by the armed forces of both Protestant and Catholic dominated parties.

The Ireland Republican Army (IRA) — an armed wing of Sinn Fein (the Republican Party) — became notorious for its terrorist activities both in Northern Ireland and in Britain. The people of both sects in the Northern Ireland lived in a constant fear of killing, violence and insecurity. The capital of Northern Ireland — Belfast — was divided into areas of Catholics and Protestants, even after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. On the Catholic side, the Irish flags fly, the graffiti promotes the IRA and huge murals eulogize Republican martyrs. On the Protestant side, the British flag (Union Jack) fly, the writing on the wall says "Irish out" and the murals hail the para-military Ulster Volunteer Force. Buildings in both areas are protected by barbed wire, steel grates and security cameras. Many houses lie derelict, having been bombed, shot up or abandoned. The local police

force — Royal Ulster Constabulary — is 90 percent Protestant and did not earn the trust of the Catholics, as it was perceived to be biased for the Protestants. Instead of alleviating the fears of the Catholic population in Ulster, the British Government strengthened the Constabulary with the dispatch of more Protestant dominated British armed forces.

With the sectarian divide, a socio-economic problem followed. High unemployment rose among the Catholics, almost 60 percent in certain pockets of Catholic dominated areas whereas the overall unemployment in Northern Ireland is only about 8 percent. A big element of the problem is that all British owned industries are located in the Protestant-dominated area and the Catholics/the nationalists could not cross over the line to that area due to the sectarian violence. Further the managers of the Industries gave preference of employment to pro-British Protestants/Unionists.

The framework of negotiations started during the last Conservative Government led by Prime Minister John Major in 1992. Lord Mayhew, the then Northern Ireland Secretary of State, put forward the blue print of the negotiations among the various parties but serious discussions could not be commenced among the opposed political parties.

The ice perhaps, was first broken by US President Clinton when he allowed Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams to visit US to the dismay and annoyance of

the then British Government. President Clinton believed in the role of Sinn Fein in the political settlement of Northern Ireland and took a softer attitude towards the Sinn Fein leader. He then appointed former Democratic Senator George Mitchell (a Catholic) as an envoy to find a political solution to this problem. The women of both sects formed a group (known as Women Coalition) and took initiative to hold peace marches in both areas of the sectarian divide. The Churches supported the peace marches by the women. Gradually the community as a whole saw an imperative need of peace in the province. At the same time the political leaders of the Republic of Ireland realized that its Constitution which lay territorial claim on Ulster province was a stumbling block to the peace negotiations and their attitude had to soften on this issue.

When Mr. Tony Blair formed the Labour Government in Britain, a new initiative was taken by him to meet Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams for the first time. The new Secretary of State for Ireland Dr. Mo Mowlam appointed by Mr. Blair took a no-nonsense attitude towards the parties and spoke frankly to the political leaders that negotiation and not violence was the only way to ensure peace deal. The willingness of taking less than 100 percent by the political leaders of both sides coupled with the formidable pressure from the community for peace underpinned the negotiations on the 65-page text provided by Chairman George Mitchell on the night of 6 April. From then on, intensive negotiations began among the various political parties to arrive at a settlement.

**Issues at the negotiation table:** The Nationalists including Republicans want closer relationship with Republic of Ireland whereas the Unionists want the status quo-namely, the union with Britain. The two opposing positions need to be bridged and apparently it was thought that the negotiations would fail to reach a compromise formula.

The negotiating document presented by Mr. Mitchell to the parties rested on three main principles: (a) the guarantee that a majority of Ulster's population would have to consent to any institutional changes in the province. (The majority constitutes pro-British Protestants); (b) a recognition of the nationalist identity of the large Catholic minority. (Catholics would be considered not only as a religious minority but also a national minority); (c) equality

of treatment between the Catholics and the Protestant majority.

The negotiations were difficult and complex as any settlement arrived at the table will have to be sold to their constituents by their leaders, and also have to be ratified by referendums both in Ulster province and in the Republic of Ireland.

Hard-line Unionists vowed to fight any deal that would give Republic of Ireland a say in the running of the province of Ulster. On the other hand the Nationalists want a stronger role of Republic of Ireland in any settlement. The principle of "consent of majority of people" in Northern Ireland and "the equality agenda" between the Catholics and Protestants appear to be sticky issues which have dominated the negotiations. Furthermore, the structure of the police Constabulary and the release of para-military prisoners were the two other difficult issues. There were also the issues of setting up the Joint Ulster and Republic of Ireland Ministerial Council (Cross-border Council) for taking joint action on common issues such as agriculture and tourism.

**Main features of the Settlement:** The political package appears to be that a person of Ulster province is both British and Irish. While the people re-

main united politically with Britain, the Republic of Ireland will have some role in the affairs of Ulster. There will be a 108-member assembly directly elected in Ulster province on the basis of proportional representation headed by a 12-member executive committee. A new body — North-South Ministerial Council — will be set up to provide participation of the Republic of Ireland in the affairs of Ulster in return of which the Republic of Ireland will have to drop its territorial claim from its Constitution (Articles 2 & 3) on Ulster province. On the equality agenda, the settlement includes Catholics to be considered as a national minority, an international commission to review police structure in the province and a process to release prisoners convicted of terrorist offenses. The net result is that Ulster will never be the same again constitutionally.

The participation of the Republic of Ireland in the joint N.S Ministerial Council tends to weaken the link of Ulster with Britain and the Catholics consider it as a first step towards reunion with Republic of Ireland. At the same time the union of Ulster with Britain is retained and cannot be changed without the consent of the majority of the people of Ulster (which are Protestants). This

provision is a great comfort to the Protestants. The compromise text of settlement appears to be 'no lose, no win' situation for the Catholics and Protestants. Both parties are satisfied because the principles of equality and consent are incorporated in the Agreement for both parties. The settlement is couched in a language that offers to provide all things to all people.

**Difficulties ahead:** Here I would like to quote the words of US President Clinton when he cautioned while welcoming the accord: "In the days to come, there may be those who will try to undermine this great achievement.....All the parties and all the rest must stand shoulder to shoulder to defy any such appeals." The settlement can only take effect once the accord is ratified by referendums both in the province of Ulster and the Republic of Ireland.

While the political settlement is a turning point in history for Ireland, the compromise could be hard to sell to the hard-liners on either side of the sectarian divide. The prospect of a referendum in May to ratify the settlement could lead to further hardening of the position of extremist groups. The break-away faction of IRA and the supporters of Reverend Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (which boycotted the negotiations) may regard the peace settlement as a "sell-out" for completely different reasons and may in the short run resort again to violent activities to disrupt and frustrate the peace settlement. The Republic of Ireland has the hard task of

convincing its people to endorse the amendments of the Articles of its Constitution and this could pose a problem for Ahern government at the forthcoming referendum.

**Conclusion:** It is a comprehensive Peace Agreement which will bring changes in the running of the administration of Ulster. The Agreement is a turning point in history of Ireland — both for the Ulster province, Britain and the Republic of Ireland. The UN Secretary General Kofi Annan welcomed the accord hailing it as the "spirit of compromise". If the optimism displayed by the participating leaders at the concluding Plenary meeting is any guide, it is hoped that common sense and the need for enduring peace will intercede the people of Ulster and the Republic of Ireland to accept the political settlement in the referendums.

The people of Bangladesh are sure to empathize with the peace accord that has been concluded on the Ulster issue. Our Prime Minister sent a message to British Prime Minister welcoming the accord. We are aware of the significance of peace accord as the Government of Bangladesh has recently concluded a peace agreement with the tribal leaders in Chittagong Hill Tracts. I hope that accords such as these may encourage leaders of other nations to take the step of creating mutually acceptable agreements on intractable political issues to ensure peace, harmony and justice among the people and parties involved.

The author is former Ambassador of Bangladesh to UN in Geneva

## A Few Hours with Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan

by Dr Badiul Alam Majumdar

EARLY last month, precisely on March 3, I visited the famous Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) in Karachi. The OPP, a brain-child of the legendary Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, was launched in 1980 with the goal of facilitating the residents of Orangi, a squatters colony, to construct their own sanitation and drainage system. The scope of the project was later extended to work with the people of Orangi and the surrounding areas in the provision of a number of additional services including housing, health, credit for entrepreneurs, education and rural development.

During the visit, I spent about three hours with the 84-year old Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, listening to many of his fascinating stories, experiences and reflections. In addition, I met with his colleagues, Ms Parveen Rhaman (a Bangladeshi-born Pakistani national) and Mr Anwar Rashid, and discussed with them various aspects of the OPP. I also had the opportunity to see first-hand the self-managed, self-financed and self-maintained sanitation work of the Orangi residents.

Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan is a remarkable man with a brilliant mind and strong convictions. Born in 1914, he was educated at Cambridge University in the United Kingdom and Michigan State University in the United States. He joined the highly coveted Indian Civil Service (ICS) in 1936. In a few years he came to realize that, despite his "superman-like" power and authority, he could not solve the problems of the common people. Disillusioned, he resigned in 1945 to take "a different kind of apprenticeship." Following the resignation, he worked as a labourer and locksmith in Aligarh for the working classes. He later taught at Jamia Millia at Delhi and then became the Principal of the Comilla Victoria College.

In 1958, Mr Akhtar Hameed Khan was made the Director of the Comilla Rural Development Academy (now RARD) and he continued in that position until the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The Comilla Academy made significant differences in the lives of the people of 300 villages of Comilla thana and the work received widespread international acclaim for its success. In fact, the success of the Comilla experiment paved the way for the subsequent green revolution in Bangladesh.

After brief stints at the Peshawar Rural Development Academy and at Michigan State University in 1980, he became the Director of OPP. In that capacity he has been working for the last 18 years to create an enabling environment for the people of Orangi not only to set up their own system of sanitation, but also to set in motion a process so that people themselves could achieve better lives through their own efforts, own resources and own leadership. At 84, he is still very vigorous and spends most of each day at OPP.

The remarkable aspect of Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan's work is that he applied the same methodology of *empowering and enabling* people in two different settings and achieved outstanding success in both cases. In Comilla, he worked with farmers coming from the same linguistic, religious and ethnic background. It was a public sector initiative using the vast resources and the authority of the government. It also had Harvard advisers and the assistance of the Michigan State University and the Ford Foundation. The OPP, on the other hand, is a project in an urban setting, a Karachi slum, involving a working class population from all ethnic groups of Pakistan — the Mohajirs or Beharis, Pathans, Sindhis, Pun-



The writer with Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan

jabis and Balochis — which he calls a "mini Pakistan." It lacked government authority and sanctions and also major outside support. It was truly a self-help project. Yet, in both cases, he and his colleagues demonstrated that their approach works.

Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan calls their approach the "research and extension method," which was the underlying philosophy behind the American land grant colleges. In the past century, many colleges and universities were established in rural areas of the United States to research and solve the problems of the farmers, and then make the solutions available to the farming community through extension services. Similarly, in both Comilla and Karachi, Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan first observed and analyzed the problems of the local people and their methods of solving them. Then he and his colleagues developed a better package of advice and improvements and offered it to the people along with technical support, producing remarkable successes. In either case, people were not given a blueprint to follow but an instructive model which galvanized their initiative, creativity and leadership.

Her is a brief account of some the specific issues he dealt with.

**On the OPP:** In 1980, when the OPP was conceived, the people of Orangi faced serious water logging and sanitation problems, causing many diseases. He spent six months in Orangi just listening to the people and understanding their problems before launching the project to address the problems. Now, 18 years later, about 90 percent of the over one million residents of Orangi, living in 110 mohallas, have built their own sanitation system with an investment of nearly Rs. 75 million of their own money. The OPP did not do it, the people did it themselves with technical assistance and mobilization support from the OPP at a cost of less than Rs. 1,000 per family — one-tenth of what it would cost for the government to do it. It was a self-managed, self-financed and self-maintained project under the leadership of community activists. One consequence of the success is that the infant mortality rate in Orangi went down from 130 in 1974 to 37 in 1991. A process is now in place for people to improve their income, housing, education and health through their own initiative and they are succeeding in doing so. Most significantly, what has been done in Orangi is now being

replicated elsewhere. Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan was most adamant that the success of Orangi was due to the methodology used, not the genius of the personality involved. The people of Orangi achieved success because they helped themselves rather than wait for handouts or for outsiders to come and do it for them, becoming dependent in the process.

**On the Comilla Experiment:** People traditionally produced 20-30 maunds of rice per acre. Under the Comilla experiment, they started to produce upward of 45 maunds per acre. Four Japanese farmers were brought to the Comilla Academy and were each given 1.5 acres of land to cultivate. Their yield was 60 maunds per acre as compared to 80 maunds per acre per year in their own country. However, with irrigation and three crops — which is possible in Bangladesh — Bengali farmers could easily produce 200 maunds in each acre every year and the country could export huge quantities of rice. The core programmes of the Comilla experiment began to be replicated in 417 thanas in the early 1960s.

**On Bangladesh:** The best thing that happened to Bangladesh was its liberation. The country has a bright future. It has made significant strides in reducing birth rates and activity of its women. Bangladesh has one culture, one language, no serious ethnic problems and a greater social cohesion. Bangladeshis are also not wasting their energy and resources in attempts to recreate the Khilafat and fight India. Bengali nationalism is Bangladesh's biggest strength. However, the widespread corruption, Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan added, must be of serious concern.

**On the Bengalis:** The Bengalis are like the Chinese — they work very hard. They are wonderful people and are intensive farmers. They have done very well even in Karachi. They are very prominent in the fishing industry and vegetable production in Karachi. During our conversation, Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan expressed genuine fondness and utmost respect for the people of Bangladesh.

**On the Future of Pakistan:** Pakistan has serious problems — ethnic tension, feudalism, corruption — to name a few. The basis of the creation of Pakistan is religion, but the commonality of the religion could not keep Pakistan together. A sense of nationalism is more important than commonality

of religion for a nation, and, unfortunately, there is no Pakistani nationalism. More seriously, Pakistanis are unnecessarily nostalgic about the glory days of the Muslim rule over much of the world and are trying to recreate the Khilafat — although Kemal Ataturk shunned the idea decades ago. For the sake of the future of Pakistan, the people of Pakistan must give up its hostility toward India, which is the outgrowth of the two-nation theory, and bring about real equality of being in the heaven is equivalent to the torture of hell if you go there with the help of your neighbour. Using foreign aid you can create a colossus with the feet of clay. The Diwan must not be for sale — Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan stated, with a poignant reference to the relationship between the Nawabs of Bengal and the British East India Company. He had very strong comments on the dependence on foreign aid and foreign experts, and he admitted that the Comilla project suffered because of its use of foreign support. In Orangi, he had scrupulously adhered to a principle of not using foreign money and utilizing people coming primarily from the local community. He avoided hiring staff from the elite class.

**On his Regrets:** He regretted that although his work received widespread international recognition and is being replicated in many places, people in high places of Pakistan did not pay it much attention. No Pakistani leader or high government official ever came to see his project except for the Chief Secretary of the Government of Sindh a friend, who once came with an entourage of 250. (Incidentally, the Chief Minister of Punjab, who is the brother of the Prime Minister of Pakistan, visited the OPP the day after I was there.)

Spending a few hours with Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan, a very outstanding social scientist and community mobilizer of our time, was an enlightening experience for me. It was a rare privilege to listen to this man of courage, conviction and wisdom. His stories were fascinating and thought-provoking. I came back from Karachi greatly enriched, empowered and most importantly, feeling vindicated. It became clear to me more than ever that self-help is the best and the most lasting help.

The few hours with Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan convinced me that people — even the poorest ones — are the masters of their own survival. They are always solving their problems in their own ways, using the skills, accumulated experiences and resources they have. The best thing I can do is not to take away that responsibility of being the principal authors of their own destiny. The only thing I can do out of my sense of responsibility is to see the realities, as best as I can, with their own eyes and help them come to a better solution of their problems and create an enabling environment for their endeavours to succeed. I must treat them with dignity by not viewing them as beneficiaries and I must not also kill their initiative by giving them handouts. This is the work of my organization — The Hunger Project, in Bangladesh, and in the course of our conversation, Dr Akhtar Hameed Khan was most generous in encouraging me by saying that we are doing what he has been doing in all these years. I am greatly honoured to be a follower of such a trail-blazer.

The writer is the Country Director for The Hunger Project.



## Metropolitan

### Husband kills wife at N'ganj

From Our Correspondent NARAYANGANJ, Apr 13: A rickshawpuller killed his spouse at Kashipur Khilmarket area under Fatahullah thana today in the afternoon. Police arrested the rickshawpuller Khokon, 22, from his residence where he committed the crime, police said.

Khokon hit his wife Nurun Nahar, 15, with a sharp knife in her abdomen and she died on the spot. Her body has been sent to Narayanganj General Hospital for autopsy.

In another incident Siddhirganj thana police arrested seven persons today from Simral intersection on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

Police said the people started damaging vehicles when they heard their leader Nur Hossain was shot by some gunmen at Tikpara area in the evening on Sunday.

Local people captured one of the three gunmen and handed him over to the police, police said. Hossain was a Union Parishad chairman candidate there. He is under treatment at the DMCH.

### Construction of Bangabandhu Bridge Loans to be repaid from its earnings, JS told

The loans taken to construct the Bangabandhu Bridge from different countries and donor agencies will be repaid with interest from its earnings, reports UNB.

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain said this in Parliament during the question hour yesterday.

Replying to Haji Mohammad Selim (AL-Dhaka), he said there is a time frame to pay back the loans with interest — the three development partners who financed the project.

The minister said the time frame to repay the loans along with interest to the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank is from the year 2004 to 2034 and to the OECF from 2004 to 2024.

He said the loan money will be repaid from the tolls to be collected from vehicles and tariff collected from few other organisations like the Railways, Power Development Board, Petrobangla and T&T, which will use the bridge.

In reply to a supplementary query by Mohammad Fazul Azim (BNP-Noakhali), the minister said Tk 508 crore has been realised from surcharge and levy, Tk 342 crore will be collected from levy and tolls, and a proposal has been sent to realise Tk 16 crore and Tk 15 crore respectively from railway and power.

He said the cost overrun was very nominal for the construction of the billion dollar Bangabandhu Bridge Project.

In reply to H N Ashiqur Rahman (AL-Rangpur), the Communications Minister said the government from its own fund will allocate Tk 112 crore for constructing railway track over the bridge and also to construct the approach and access roads.

He said the trains will operate from the first day of the opening of the bridge on June 23.

### Dilara Hashem to get Anannya award

By Staff Correspondent

Noted litterateur Dilara Hashem has been nominated for the Anannya Literary Award 1405 for her remarkable literary works, says a press release.

Dilara Hashem now serving in Voice of America also got Bangla Academy Award. Her famous novel *Ghar Mon Janala* written in 1960s was translated in Russian language.

Her outstanding literary works include *Stabdhatar Kane Kane*, *Amlokir Mou*, *Akada Abong Ananta*, *Shindhu Parer Upakkhan*, *Badami Bikeler Galpa*.

The award which includes a crest and Tk 50 thousand will be handed over to her in October.

### Ex-JN University College teacher shot in city

Prof Quazi Abdur Rouf, a retired teacher of Geography department of Jagannath University College, was shot by some extortionists on April 8 at his residence at Jurain in the city, reports BSS.

Prof Rouf was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Later, he was shifted to a private clinic at Mominbagh, Shahjahanpur in the city.

### Obituary

Nurjahan Begum, wife of late Md Mazam Ali, died yesterday at her residence due to old-age complications. She was 67. She left behind two sons and one daughter and several grandchildren.

Her younger son ASM Nazrul Islam is an Accounts Officer of The Daily Star.

\*\*\*\*\*

Noorjahan Alam, wife of late Md Shah Alam (Alam Seth), a businessman of Habiganj, died of old age complications at a city clinic yesterday. She was 74, reports BSS.

She left behind a son, a daughter and a host of relatives. Her qulhuqant will be held on Thursday after Maghreb prayers at Tenament House No. 1, Old Elephant Road.



Students brought out a procession in the city yesterday protesting tomorrow's hartal, called by the 7-party opposition alliance. — Star photo