

# The Daily Star

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# The Superpower Approach to Arms Treaties

## LDC Positioning for the Seattle Conference

STAKES are high for Bangladesh at the third ministerial conference of the WTO scheduled to take place between 30 November and 3 December, 1999 at Seattle in the United States of America. Not only is she the mirror-image of an LDC she also has the onerous responsibility of a coordinator for the LDCs, leading, as it were, the charge of collective bargaining for the Least Developed Countries vis-a-vis the affluent group of economies. This obviously puts a premium on the quantum and quality of the know-how we have been able to master over the subject to negotiate representatively and effectively at the highest decision-making forum of the WTO. There is no gainsaying the fact, therefore, that we do need to carefully select the members of our delegation to the Seattle conference. While we ought to be a stickler for negotiating skill and experience due weightage has to be given to the private sector to strike a pragmatic balance in the composition of the team. Since the WTO negotiations conjure up a continuous process the need for capacity-building can hardly be emphasised.

At the WTO forum, the face-off between the developed and developing countries has often been marked by a conflict between form and substance, with the former somehow taking precedence over the latter. The four-day Seattle ministerial would obviously be time-pressed for the range of topics it is set to address. First of all, the stock-taking of the implementation of the decisions arrived at the Singapore ministerial in 1996 and the Geneva ministerial in 1998 is an important exercise at hand. The LDCs are certain to focus on the pledges for preferential treatment made to them by the affluent countries in those ministerial conferences which, for the most part, remain unfulfilled even to this day.

The next order of business would be negotiating the future action plan for the WTO. Because much of the previous agenda designed to curb marginalisation of the LDCs in the world trade order has yet to be redeemed we want this to be incorporated in the new list of agenda but invariably with safeguards built into them for their fail-safe implementation. Furthermore, the dangers of an exponential exacerbation in the sidelining of the LDCs from the global trading system warrant that the WTO negotiations are not only unprotracted but are also result-oriented.

Multilateral or interdependent trading system is a misnomer when the LDCs share in the global trade is not even half of one per cent. This hiatus in wealth creation between the rich and the poor economies needs to be gradually but progressively bridged through a coordinated, need-driven response from the industrialised countries and the multilateral financial and development institution to the problems of trade and development being faced by the Least Developed Countries. Unless a robust collective political will of the OECD countries is brought to bear on this crucial task it will continue to be intractable.

The points at issue for the LDCs are: zero-tariff market-access to the importing countries on a non-reciprocal basis; spurning linkage to any labour or environmental standards the rich countries are prone to setting; free flow of labour like that of capital across the world; renewed emphasis on technical assistance to developing countries; reduction in their debt-burden; and enhancement of the supply-side capacity in the LDCs to enable them to benefit from the likely increase in trading opportunities.

If the LDCs take a unified stance on all such issues at the Seattle conference, the affluent members of the WTO might feel goaded to summon the required political will collectively for a turnaround in the inequitable global trade order.

LATE last week, leaders of thirty European nations met in Istanbul to sign the landmark Conventional Forces Treaty aimed at controlling conventional weapons in Europe. The new treaty, signed at the summit of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), will reduce the levels of weapons allowed in Europe to almost half its current level. This treaty is an updated version of an agreement originally concluded in 1990, at the end of the Cold War.

The 1999 version sets limits on a national basis instead of the bloc-to-bloc totals set in the 1990 document, which saw Europe in terms of two opposing blocs — NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Negotiations leading to the signing of the treaty saw some manoeuvring by, among others, Clinton and Yeltsin.

However, the treaty will not be ratified until Russia ends its offensive in Chechnya, which currently puts it in breach of the levels of weapons allowed in the new treaty. Russia is engaged in a seven-week military offensive in the breakaway republic, which it accuses of harbouring separatist Islamic guerrillas. Yeltsin earlier rejected OSCE offers to mediate.

While in Istanbul, Yeltsin signed a draft law approving a global nuclear test ban and urged the Russian parliament to ratify it without delay. Yeltsin also urged all nations to follow Russia's example and back the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Obviously, what he had in mind was the recent rejection of the CTBT by the US Senate.

However, shortly before Yeltsin's announcement, the Russian Navy made its third test missile launch in a month. Russia has been alarmed by a US proposal to amend the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty to allow the US to build a missile-defence system to protect against limited nuclear attacks from so-called rogue states.

This raises an interesting issue relating to the recent behaviour of both the United States and Russia regarding arms control treaties.

During the Cold War and the years immediately followed, it was generally assumed that the United States and Russia would honour the arms control treaties they had spent so much time and energy agreeing on. Although some Western policy analysts thought that the Russians

would cheat, they believed that the big danger would emanate from the Third World — countries not part of the arms control regime might get involved in the weapons programmes the agreements were designed to prevent.

Like a lot of other Cold War beliefs, this one has proved to be false. While some Third World countries, notably India

and Pakistan, have lately tested nuclear weapons, fired ballistic missiles or flexed their muscles in other ways, the legal architecture of arms control has come under siege by the two superpowers — the very nations whose leadership was supposed to be shining beacon of maturity and restraint.

In early November, the Clinton administration made explicit what it had broadly and repeatedly hinted at earlier: that it might begin work on a national missile defense sys-

tem, even though doing so is clearly prohibited by the ABM Treaty, a 1972 agreement between the US and the Soviet Union. Indeed, preventing the emergence of missile defense is the precise purpose of the treaty.

The Russians have not just talked about breaking their obligations; they have actually broken the law. The treaty on that, Clinton and his predecessors have urged the developing nations to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which is designed to keep nuclear weapons out of the hands of countries that don't possess them now.

The importance of this treaty is obvious: the use of nuclear weapons becomes more likely as ever more countries acquire them. The danger is worsened when such countries are ruled by crackpots or terrorists get their hands on them. But Clinton isn't going to convince reluctant government to sign treaties like the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty if Clinton himself begins to ignore solemn, binding obligations that he suddenly finds not so solemn or binding. The US cannot, on the one hand, say arms control agreement is essential to the safety of the world and, on the other, belittle or ignore them.

For its part, Russia cannot violate treaties, even modest ones like the one limiting conventional arms, and then turn around and, citing the sanctity of such pacts, complain when other countries threaten to violate the ABM Treaty.

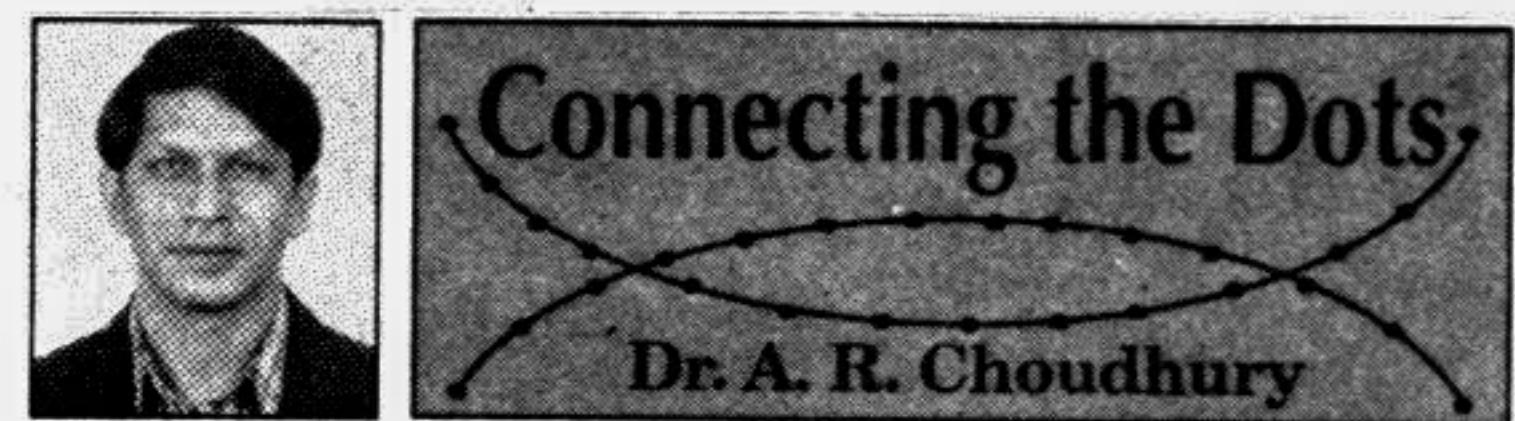
In fact, violating arms control treaties and making such

breaches more commonplace and acceptable unravels the whole fabric of international law — not only the law on weapons proliferation, but the law on such other things as trade, environmental pollution and human rights. The world, in short, becomes more lawless and chaotic.

The US threat to break out of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty is generating friction not only with the Russians, but with other US allies. At a committee in the United Nations recently, 47 countries (including four European nations) voted for a Russian-backed proposal that opposed any new measure which attempts to undermine or circumvent the ABM Treaty.

It is not an accident that nuclear weapons have not been used in war since the end of World War II, nor an accident that only a relatively few countries possess them. If the world is a safer place than it used to be, it is partly because arms control treaties have made it that way. They need to be honoured, not scoffed at, and certainly not deliberately violated.

That the two super powers need to be reminded of that is both demoralising and appalling.



Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, negotiated in 1990, limits the number of troops and conventional weapons that may be deployed in parts of the former Soviet Union. According to most international observers, Moscow's military buildup in and near Chechnya has put the Russians over the limit.

These threatened or actual treaty breaches may seem overly legalistic and trivial, but they are much more — and much more dangerous — than

## Friday Mailbox

### Expectations from Kader Siddique and Santu Larma

Sir, With much interest and optimism, we have been watching the two national leaders Kader Siddique and Santu Larma making important moves in the political arena of the country. While I congratulate them for their bold steps, I have the following requests to make. I would request both of them to kindly refrain from creating yet another "political party". Instead, they should consolidate their positions in their own regions and generate interest and support among the people of these regions. If they try to form something at the regional level such as in greater Mymensingh and greater Chittagong Hill Tracts districts respectively, I believe their efforts will produce more benefit for the people. And in course of time if these two leaders can mobilise large public support, we can hope to have two important participants in the national politics. Many of us would be happy to see some more stake holders in our politics instead of the two major ones. We need more people who can play important roles and create a healthy balance of power in the politics of Bangladesh.

Mostafa Shiblee  
Executive Director  
Working for Better Life  
House-19, Road-30,  
Sector-7 Uttara, Dhaka.

### Tangail-8 by-election

Sir, Kader Siddique, an acknowledged freedom fighter was bestowed with the highest gallantry award. He resigned from the Parliament recently and decided to contest as an independent candidate. The disillusioned Tiger was suspended from Awami League's primary membership for his outspoken and bold attack on Awami League policies. Instead of pacifying the Tiger, the AL went on a systematic campaign to discredit him. It is a pity how fast people tend to forget the good works done by a person. The question is: why? What has he done to get this harsh treatment?

Sometimes, we wonder whether the two major political parties, AL and BNP, have anything democratic within the party decision-making process. At least on this one point both the parties are similar and are run on autocratic lines. Flexibility, understanding and accommodating each other's views, party policies and administrative management are unheard of in both these major political camps. Confrontation is practically head-on. The resultant damage to the society is beyond comprehension. The anarchic situation is slowly getting out of control. Terrorism is at its peak. Extortion, harassment and all conceivable vices have reached dizzy heights. There is a fast degradation of human values. Security of life and property is now at its lowest level. Does the ruling party know about these facts or are they being shielded by a group of sycophants.

The Tangail-8 by-election boycotted by the opposition parties has been a total farce. We are confident that the government party is fully aware of all this. Actually, to please the top bosses in the camp, the leaders and the government officials went for a straight kill. Unfortunately it was overdone. The independent watchdogs overseeing the elections have all made their comments which are not at all praiseworthy. Bangladesh is no longer a basket case. We

FROM day one of the present government they have never been without a point. At times, points multiplied to make them sizeable and imposing. And at the other, they silently subtracted or sustained mathematical jugglery of combination and permutation hardly settling at any point any time. The trend has been so erratic and elusive that it is very difficult to keep track. In the process, it has boiled down to two or two in one.

In recent times, the BNP led four-party alliance has been frantically trying to upbeat its agitational programmes against the government. The blunt weapon of 'hartal' is being quite frequently used. But to the utter dismay of BNP leadership and those of the other three it has so far proved ineffectual. In spite of the apparently well-attended meetings at different places their programmes on the streets have not been able to mobilize adequate number of leaders and workers to show their numerical strength, at least considerably. The experience, till now, has been both utterly frustrating and unrewarding. The BNP Chairperson was reported to be furious with some of the leaders of the party who were indifferent to their responsibilities available on the street. These so-called hardliners, mostly implanted from other parties, made an abortive attempt at justifying their points with Begum Zia but were rebuffed and severely admonished. Still then, the 'movement in the street' is yet to gain the desired momentum.

The scenario in the districts has been all the more disappointing. Leaders and workers in the mufassil areas continue to bitterly lament the suicidal decision of BNP high command not to participate in the Union and Municipal elections. Even though some of the party workers did participate in those elections as independent candidates and a few got elected and many lost to their opposite party. The communication gap between the central leadership and the districts had been so wide that none in the latter could be sure about the ultimate decision that could be forthcoming from the former. They were consequently plunged into total disappointment and they only knew how much costly it was for the party bases due to the indecision at the top or its belated decision to abstain from the local government elections.

On the schedule we have Upazilla election set, till now, on December 27, 1999. The BNP led opposition perhaps to have been realizing that their decision of BNP specifically to boycott the union and municipal elections was a colossal blunder strategically. And now in spite of their announcement not to participate in any election under the present government their request to the Election Commission to defer the election to any date after Ramadan, that is, after 27th December, seems a strange and somewhat contradictory. Such a stance may be substantiated by the fact that, despite

ing party once sat in the opposition while that killer was in power and again formed government with the support of his party. Not only that, the ruling party leader had also once shared the same political platform with the party that was created by an alleged conspirator of her father's killing. If the leader of the opposition had once formed a government with "the killers of 1971" and has now formed an alliance with them, the previous leader of the opposition had also formed an alliance with them to unseat the previous government. The question also comes to mind that while so much is being done to restore the spirit of 1971 distorted in twenty-one years in the absence of this ruling party from power, why doesn't this government do something about Golam Azam and his flunkies?

According to Locke's theory of government, there is little that is original. As a rule, the man who first thinks of a new idea is so much ahead of his time that everyone thinks him silly, so that he remains obscure and is soon forgotten.

OPINION

## Point One Onwards

by Kazi Alauddin Ahmed

their absence in the regular session of the Jatiya Sangsad over the past few months, the opposition MPs have been regularly attending the standing committee meetings. Political observers believe that their eventual participation in the Upazilla election to be preceded by city corporation election (except Dhaka) would heal much of the damage done to their respective parties at the grassroots level.

The funniest part of the whole game has been that, irrespective of their public announcement to boycott all elections under the present government they have already pronounced the names of their mayoral candidates for the four city corporations. Now that city corporation elections for Rajshahi, Chittagong and Khulna will be held on December 06, 1999 under the existing administration, it will be of immense interest to see how they react. If they continue to stick to their 'decision' to abstain, it might be tantamount to inviting a sort of political burial. On the other hand, the announcement of the Election Commission to hold elections to the three city corporations on December 06, 1999 is likely to create a serious breach

## Academic Colonisation

Muhammad Azher Zafar Shah

THE destiny of Bangladesh relies on the kind and content of education our society obtains. He who dominates and guides the content of education of any society dominates their opinions and perceptions.

After a period of two centuries of British colonial rule, our institutionalised education has had only one objective: to westernise the perceptions and conduct. The subjects offered, the curriculum, the textbooks, the structure of courses and the system demonstrate the aims of Bangladesh higher education intended for British.

The entire operation is pursued for the purpose of internationalising 'knowledge', which actually represents the internationalisation of European knowledge without in-depth consideration of the knowledge, culture, past and contemporary civilisations, and philosophies of the Asian societies.

For example, comparative analysis indicates that the contribution of Islamic civilisation to human progress have survived the test of history. It has contributed significantly to the birth of modern technology, particularly in science and mathematics.

After the First World War, the colonial authority recognised that it could not forever occupy its South Asian territo-

## Open Letter, Closed Mind

by Mohammad Badrul Ahsan

his memory until one day all his knowledge jumbled in the head and congested it. Suddenly, Funes was no longer accessible either to information or impetus. The burden of memory proved fatal in the end and Funes died young. The same affliction also characterised the letter and stifled its openness as the writer tried to apportion credit for the liberation war to the ruling party. The dream, which pulsated in the blood of Isha Khan, Nabab Sirajoddowia and Titumeer, culminated in the sacrifice of a twentieth-century politician. But that cannot be monopolised by his daughter or party as a carte blanche to justify their actions.

And if we talk about the Chief Election Commissioner being nominated by the opposition party, one can only talk about the unbreakable cycle of trust and betrayal if not anything else! Two candidates who won elections on the opposition ticket crossed over to the ruling side. In the past, to blame for this or the other, Dissent and betrayal are sadly ingrained in the nature of politics and one is never too late to resent any of these. If the CEC hasn't done his job, why cannot

the opposition demand his resignation even if it had nominated him? If that is the case, then people don't have the right to criticise the government, which they have voted to power. For the same reason the killers of the father of this nation may not be tried because he had once trusted them!

To come back to that bitter letter, its partisan tone has defeated its purpose. That is one fault line, which runs through the emotional terrain of our anguished hearts, where the party loyalty clambers over love of country in the subconscious corner of mind. According to Richard Aldington, English poet, novelist and biographer, "Patriotism is the lively sense of collective responsibility." If this country belongs to us all so do its politics. Let our patriots come together from wherever they are and take their country back. That brings us to the most important note, which the letter from Canada may have raised. Let us write an open letter to all our politicians. If they don't shape up anytime soon, they are going to have to ship out.

The write is a banker

The much awaited summit of the topmost four leaders tentatively set for this month is still as uncertain as before. To keep this agenda alive the Secretary General of each of the four parties met recently together in order to prepare the ultimate agenda of the envisaged summit. At this stage of my writing Ershad is away to Saudi Arabia, his 'go between' Kazi Jafar Ahmed is in Australia for Medical treatment and the Secretary General Nazim Rahman Manzur is in New Delhi. And at home other JP leaders are perhaps, still in the stupor of somnolence, singing lullaby to their children. Their reactivation is not yet in sight. Ershad himself cannot ordinarily be expected to make a full-throated call to his party to beef up his party's stand against the government. The palpable reason is the number of cases against him in the court engaging his immediate and unfettered attention. His visit to the Holy place so often may be seen as a self-purging endeavour at seeking the benign mercy of God. However, there is nothing to grudge or to be speculative about it.

Jatiya Party's political wedlock with BNP is viewed by independent political observers as an absurd proposition. This absurdity has been justifiably attributed to the vicious hostility or hatred that the two leaders had been nursing against each other. Some of the stingy remarks that the BNP Chairperson made against Ershad between March, 1988 and February 1991 are worth a record. Ershad of 'lying in the sacred premise of the mosque' and considered incongruous his 'establishing' Islam in a country where 90 per cent of the population were Muslim. Or her hateful remark "a thief and a traitor has been removed that would still ring in our ears. Nor can we forget her firm conviction that 'Ershad's ideal place is in jail' and that 'Ershad cannot be allowed to go without severe punishment'."

Likewise, till December, 1997, Ershad castigated Begum Zia and her BNP quite often. We quote a few remarks: "Begum Zia spoke against hartal 140 times. Now she herself is indulging in hartal." Or "BNA has sold a mill worth Taka one hundred crore at only Tk 3,000 crore and the rest it has swallowed." "The person who indulges in utter falsehood about her own birth date is easily the one I would hate most" is yet another statement of condemnation. And "even if I embrace death I will not support BNP" or "Khaleda Zia tried to kill me" are again some of the critical remarks Ershad made.

And in spite of all these words of mutual distrust the two adversaries have now joined hands to overthrow Sheikh Hasina by December 1999. We have got to wait and see the results. But we shall not be surprised if the table is turned upside down on them. Nor, if their one point movement becomes a pointless one or compounds into many more points hence!

The fundamental cause of our present tragedy is the miseducation of our decision-making elite. All attempted cures for our national disease have failed because each diagnosis is incorrect.

During the era of colonialism, the West controlled us with their armed forces, but now they dominate and exploit us through subtle and effective thought-control. This is the age to rule by ideas. If our society is to get on the right track, it must undertake a radical psychological decolonisation first.

We require a system of higher education that fits our own environment. The present system produces graduates who either form a misinformed elite or expand the horde of frustrated and disillusioned unemployed.

The author is an Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka.