# The Baily Star

Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Saturday, January 29, 2000

### We Back the Government on This

THE teachers of the country's non-government primary schools, currently staging sit-in and hunger strike at the Osmany Udyan to press home their demands for nationalisation of their schools, have taken the matter too far for anyone's comfort. While their principal demand itself is self-serving, to say the least, their call for resignation of the education minister is simply outrageous. We strongly condemn their action and back the government's stance on the issue. Other than dispelling uncertainty over their jobs, nationalisation of the non-government primary schools would actually bring about no benefit to the students or the standard of education at these institutions. Instead, it would put unnecessary strain on the public exchequer with a further allocation of 150 to 200 crore taka for the primary education sector. Moreover, addition of some 22,000 schools to the 38,000 already under supervision of the Directorate of Primary Education would invariably result in an administrative disaster. Harsh it may sound, but the fact of the matter is: the primary school teachers' demand has no merit whatsoever to even induce active consideration from the government.

Unfortunately, our political leaders, of both the ruling party and the opposition, are solely responsible for letting the issue grow out of proportion. Especially the BNP's shift of position in this regard is simply infuriating. While in power, did it not held firm on their anti-nationalisation stance in the face of intense agitation by the teachers? We wonder what compelling development has taken place since then to induce such a dramatic policy turn-around. The Awami League has performed no less a somersault than its political rivals. It also extended support to the teachers' demand while in opposition. Obviously, both parties let their good senses be overtaken by electoral impulse. While knowing fully well that other than probably winning a few thousand votes nationalisation of the non-government primary schools would actually be of very little benefit for either the students or the standard of primary education.

The primary school teachers' demand should by no means be catered to, and we lend our full support to the government's plan to leave management of the non-government primary schools to local communities and the NGOs. We would urge the opposition to refrain from fanning a situation that has already assumed untenable proportions. Finally, we would request the teachers to disembark from a movement that can only compromise greater national interest for their job security.

### Bravo, Pak Judges!

T is profoundly heartening to note that six judges of the Supreme Court of Pakistan led by the Chief Justice Saeeduzzaman Siddiqui refused to take a fresh oath of office on Wednesday defying the orders of the military ruler Gen Pervez Musharraf. The refusal meant automatic removal of the judges from office. We salute the judges for their courageous act in defence of the country's Constitution. Had this example been set by their peers the country would have been rid of military coups and healthy democratic traditions would have taken firm roots there. This is the biggest affront to the military ruler Gen Musharraf since he came to power and introduced a provisional order that protected the military against legal action without abrogating Pakistan's Constitution. But as it always happens there is no dearth of people who fall in line with a new order of things at the drop of a hat. There has been a very sharp reaction world-wide to the move made to erode the independence of Pakistan's judiciary. Eminent jurists, prominent lawyers and human rights activists have strongly voiced their indignation over this sordid drama being enacted by the army junta.

The sudden action by the General may have stemmed from the fact that cases filed by the deposed politicians challenging the army rule are set for hearing in the Supreme Court on 31 January. This might have been a preemptive action by the military to remove the judges who risked taking a negative view on the legitimacy of the government. The General knew about it and wanted to be absolutely sure that judges owing allegiance to the provisional constitution introduced by the army should hear the case and dispose it of accordingly. Whatever may be the reasons cited for the changeover in Pakistan we cannot support military rule in any form or shape because each time it comes democratic values are tarnished another level down.

#### Antidote to Cheating in Exams

THE education board authorities' decision to I take punitive legal measures against students caught cheating in public examinations, pursuant to the Public Examinations Offences (Amendment) Act, 1992, does not come as a surprise given the high incidence of the malaise. But what certainly is baffling is the way the board authorities are keeping the abettors out of sight. The students are not necessarily entirely responsible for the disquieting turn at the examination halls. If past experience is any guide. some personnel, namely a few teachers, invigilators, guardians and even law enforcers might have extended a helping hand to the

students. The authorities have also decided to implement some more measures like changing the type of question papers that induce cheating or copying from note-books smuggled into exam halls. To rectify the rot in public examinations the authorities need to take some comprehensive measures including improving the standard of class-room instructions. Prevention is better than cure so that we have to strike at the root of the rot. The schools and colleges must shoulder the responsibility of imbibing the right value in the students. At the same time, concrete initiatives are needed for detecting the dishonest individuals engaged in the vile act of question-paper leakage. The dictate of reality, however, is that the entire examination system needs to be remodelled.

Fallouts of Plane Hijack Drama

# Indo-Pak Relations on Fire Again

by A M M Shahabuddin

It is time for President Clinton to act as a peace-maker as he has been doing in Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo and specially in the Middle East where the arch rivals, Palestinians and Israel, and now Syria and Israelies, have been brought together. He has not only brought the horses to the pond, he has been successful to a great extent 'to make them drink' too. Let Clinton enter the volatile (or volcanic) scene in the South Asia to "turn down the heat."

established in South-East Asia region, have been worried to see the gradual deterioration of relations between the two newlyemerged nuclear powers of Asia. America had offered its mediation and cooperation to de-escalate the volatile situation. Theworld community also feels the same way because they all know that to sit on the mouth of a volcano and say everything is OK would ultimately be fatal for all. But to extinguish this fire, they will have to go deeper to find the root of the malady. It is time to recognise the ground reality and call a spade a spade in the interest of peace in the region

Where Lies the Rut? Undoubtedly, it can't be denied that the root cause of I .do-Pak troubles lies in Kashmir which is still on UN agenda crying for solution since the forties when Prime Minister Nehru took the issue to the UN for necessary action against Pak militias who were then litterally knocking on the doors of Srinagar. And the then Pak Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan had to withdraw them down the hills in what is thereafter known as Azad Kashmir (Pakistan control part of Kashmir), lled just as former PM Nawaz Sharif had to do in Kargil sector under US pressure. The UN Security Council then defined Kashmir as a disputed territory and proposed holding of a plebiscite under UN auspices, to obtain the opinion of the Kashmiri people. That his-

toric resolution has never been

implemented for some reason or other. But the fatai cancer has never ceased to spr aci. Meanwhile, India and Pakistan had fought three wars, specially two on Kashmir. Under new development, India gained an edge over Pakistan by striking a new deal, known as Simla Accord, which shows a new track to solve the issue through bilateralism, by-passing the UN resolution. And for obvious reasons, it was appreciated and supported by the world leaders as a novel way to bring peace in the much-tormented sub-continent. But ultimately, its bottom fell through with the passage of time without making any plausible headway. So the two countries are back again locking their horns. So long Pakistan was much weaker in all respects compared to a huge and resourceful country like India but its tit-for-tat nuclear explosion has definitely brought the two at par, both psychologically and nuclear-wise. Hence this is the time for intervention by the United Nations, particularly, its most powerful member, the US, to put them on the right track. They shouldn't hesitate to take steps to cure the disease. instead of rubbing 'ointment' to suppress it.

Turn Down Heat

It is heartening to note in this context, the flurry of diplomatic activities both in Pakistan and India by members of the US Congress, both Democrats and Republicans. and cabinet secretaries and other high US officials. These activities seem to be giving out a very meaningful message to both the countries — 'turn down

the heat'. Of course, India's opposition to third party involvement to resolve the core issue of Kashmir will be there to thwart any move by any country or countries in this respect. But such a stance of India no longer holds good, since India has already broken to get third party involved in two recent events. First, when the Kargil war was at its peak, and tension between the two countries was running high, negotiations took place between Delhi and Washington before Clinton could 'bind' Nawaz Sharif to pull out the 'Pakistan-backed intruders' in Kashmir, that resulted in higia's 'victory' and thereby boosted the morale of Vajpayee and BJP to fight the last general elections. Secondly, on India's appeal many countries were involved to bring to a peaceful end of the Indian plane hijack drama. So now India shouldn't feel shy to accept a third party involvement in the resolution of the Kashmir issue too.

Indo-USA Equation Brightening

Meanwhile, on the eve of President Clinton's visit to India (and he may drop Pakistan from his itinerary for the satisfaction of India), encouraging signals are coming out from Delhi. America seems to have already made substantial progress in establishing its equation, of course, economic, with India in recent times, par-

ticularly since the days of Kargil war when the US President performed miracle by forcing Pakistan to withdraw its militants from across the LoC. Perhaps as a good gesture in return, Indian government had already lifted trade restrictions that nearly for five decades blocked US products in key Indian markets, such as textiles, agriculture and consumer and manufactured goods. This is undoubtedly forging better ties between India and USA, opening not only the so far 'sealed' Indian markets to America, but also showing a great transition from the 'socialist economy' of Nehru-era to a new open market policy.

So America, rather Clinton (the credit goes to him, no doubt), has already made substantial inroads into the hearts of the Indian people. Perhaps it would make easier for President Clinton, as the leader of the only superpower in today's world, to persuade as a peace maker, the Indian leaders to follow a democratic approach for the solution of the much vexed Kashmir problem. It may be mentioned here that Pakistan's military ruler Gen Musharraf has also urged US and Clinton, to play 'a role' to

Time is short and the art is long. The situation in Kashmir is running too fast to get out of control, as the reports from both sides of the LoC indicate. The situation there is like a

promote peace in the region by

addressing the core issue of

Kashmir.

spewing gas field, waiting for a match stick. It would be too late for the world leaders to act if the 'match stick' makes a conflagration out of it. As a Pakistani daily said: "The shadows of war are lengthening in the wake of the latest violation of LoC...At this moment a catastrophic confrontation seems a real possibility." But India has already asked for a dialogue and advised Gen Musharral to give up his 'language of threats' But past experience shows that innumerable dialogues on Kashmir have been held between the two countries but they are still groping in darkness without reaching any solution. The problem stands where it stood, say, two or even five decades ago. They are just moving in a vicious circle. wasting time (or gaining time?) to prolong the hardship, miseries and sufferings of the Kashmiri people. (However, it might have helped some leaders of both countries to consolidate and build-up their leadership by playing to the home gallery!). President Clinton: Role

of Peace-maker So it is time for President Clinton to act as a peace-maker as he has been doing in Ireland. Bosnia, Kosovo and specially in the Middle East where the arch rivals, Palestinians and Israel. and now Syria and Israelies. have been brought together. He has not only brought the horses to the pond, he has been successful to a great extent 'to make them drink' too. Let Clinton enter the volatile (or volcanic) scene in the South Asia to "turn down the heat" to establish lasting peace in the region, by curing the cancerous disease that is spreading in the body-politic of

an epoch-making event in the new millennium, not only for Clinton as an American President, but for all peace loving people of the region.

The writer is a retired UN of-

the subcontinent - the 50-year

dispute over Kashmir. Let it be

# Let's Talk Peace, Sri Lankan Minister Tells Rebels

An assassination attempt that wounded Sri Lanka's president and its justice minister has not shaken their determination to find a solution to the island's civil war. A Gemini News Service correspondent speaks to the minister and points to the formidable hurdles that stand in their way.

7 ITH his shattered right arm heavily sheathed in plaster, Sri Lanka's Ethnic Affairs and Justice Minister shows no bitterness as he speaks calmly of his brush with

ACK to square one again.
There is 'thesis,' and there

is 'anti-thesis'. But, unfor-

tunately, there is no 'synthesis'

in Indo-Pak relations which

has recently nose-dive to the

bursting point again. India and

Pakistan are again at logger-

heads. Sharpening their horns,

and spitting fire and hatred

against each other. The 'ice' that

started melting, following the

'bus diplomacy', led by Indian

Prime Minister Vajpayee last

Declaration' seems to have been

given a freezing burial on the

snow-covered peaks of Kargil

first by 'Kargil war' itself and

then by the recent Indian plane

hijack drama. The latter inci-

dent provided the leaders of

both countries with new 'lever-

age' to squeeze each other,

throwing at each other ven-

omous accusations and

counter-accusations, vilifica-

tions and counter-vilifications,

which seem to be unending and

unlimited. For these politi-

cians, even the sky is not the

limit, for inventing lethal

weapons of war of words with

of a serious clash between the

two armies in the Chamb sector

on the line of control (LoC) di-

viding Kashmir between India

and Pakistan. Each claims that

they had inflicted casualties on

the other, but each admitted

that two of their soldiers had

been killed. So the storm that

was brewing has now begun to

blow wild. Each country has

now warned to teach a lesson to

the other, as if none of them

had learnt anything during the

Earlier, India had accused

Pakistan of masterminding the

plane hijack and Pakistan had

alleged that the whole drama

was stage-managed by Indian

Intelligence (RAW) to discredit

the present military regime and

win sympathies of America to

accept their request to declare

see peace and stability firmly

Naturally those who wish to

Pakistan a terrorist country.

last five decades.

Now comes the stormy news

each other.

year and the consequent 'Lahore

Lakshman Peiris was badly wounded when a suicide bomber set off an explosion in an assassination attempt on President Chandrika Kumaratunga on

December 18. But Peiris is not thirsting for revenge against Sri Lanka's separatist Tamil rebels, declaring instead he is keen for the peace process to be resurrected. He believes talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam should be held without preconditions. Colombo should not insist on its earlier demands that the rebels must first surrender their arms, he says.

Peiris was speaking during a trip to London for medical treatment in January. The former law professor was largely responsible for drawing up devolution proposals which would give the minority Tamils a substantial measure of selfrule. The package has been dismissed by the Tigers, who have been fighting for an independent state in the north and east of the island for 17 years.

"One mustn't allow oneself to be hamstrung or impeded by preconditions that lead to a great deal of argument and disagreement," Peiris says. "Obviously the problem needs to be sorted out. So if there is an evident necessity to get on with the negotiations then nothing must be done to increase the difficulties in respect to the commencement of the negotia-

tions. Both he and Kumaratunga, who may lose the sight of her right eye because of the bombing, say they are determined to

press on for peace. The attack, at a campaign rally three days before December's presidential election. killed 26 people and is likely to cost Peiris at least some use of his arm. He may have to live with a metal pellet embedded in

"I realised later how close I had been to death," he recalls. Neville De Silva writes from London Sri Lanka: the assassins' toll



An estimated 70,000 people have been killed in the 17 year secessionist war in the north and east of the Island.

'The injury in the lung was par-

shrapnel that shattered his up-

per arm just missed a vital

would have brought back hor-

when her father, Solomon Ban-

daranaike, then prime minis-

ter, was assassinated by a Bud-

dhist monk in 1959. Almost 30

years later, her husband, Vi-

jaya, a film star and politician,

was shot dead at his home - ap-

parently by extremists from the

majority Sinhala community

as a punishment for trying to

negotiate with Tamil militants.

ited London two weeks before

Peiris to seek specialist treat-

ment, told journalists she be-

lieved that she had survived the

assassination attempt because

Peiris said: "Even after all

she was meant to be a "messen-

that has happened, the presi-

dent is quite unwavering and

resolute in her determination

to pursue negotiations in order

Kumaratunga, 54, who vis-

For the president, the attack

She was in her early teens

have caused paralysis.

rific memories.

ger of peace".

Vijaya Kumaratunga: Solomon Bandaranaik Prime Minister, killed b a Buddhist monk, 1959

bomber in December. to achieve a viable and durable ticularly serious. If the pellet solution. had veered half an inch it would Not everyone, however, have penetrated the heart." The agrees with the validity of her peace credentials. In November, the Tamil nerve. Damage to this could

Tiger leader, Velupillai Prabhakaran, described Kumaratunga's rule as "the most blood-stained chapter in the history of oppression of the Tamils' He and other critics of the

President Chandrika

escaped death in an

attack by a suicide

Kumaratunga narrowly

president say she has poured more money into intensifying the war, and that her forces have occupied the 'Tamil homeland' in the Jaffna peninsula and carried out atrocities against civilians. Peiris concedes that, given

the current relations between the government and the Tigers, direct bilateral negotiations are unlikely to achieve an early breakthrough. During the civil war, which

has cost up to 70,000 lives, governments in Colombo have engaged the rebels in negotiations three times. The third occasion was in October 1994, when Kumaratunga was prime minister and just before she was elected president. Six months later, the Tigers ended the ceasefire by attacking naval vessels in the eastern port of Trincomalee.

The Tigers, who started out as a small hit-and-run guerrilla outfit, have grown to be the most feared rebel force in the world, commanding a virtual army - with its own naval unit - that has inflicted humiliating defeats on government forces over the last seven years.

Using a combination of terror tactics and conventional warfare, the Tigers have set out their own preconditions: for the army to pull back and for food and other goods to be supplied to Tamil areas. In the current circumstances. Peiris believes that the assistance of a third party is vital to achieve progress.

The pragmatic approach favoured by government members such as Peiris would envisage the setting aside of preconditions by both sides - the question now is whether those advocating peace can carry the hard-liners both inside government and across the political spectrum.

Clearly, Kumaratunga faces formidable hurdles despite winning a second six-year term in the December poll.

She has not been helped by continuing violence in Colombo in January — another suicide bomber killed 13 people near the prime minister's office and a Tamil separatist politician was shot dead - or by vague allegations in the staterun media of a plot to overthrow her. The reports seek to implicate everyone from the Tigers to the opposition United National Party and may end up alienating potential partners in

the peace process. Kumaratunga currently remains secluded in her barricaded residence, but she cannot remain there for ever. She wants to enact devolution legislation, despite opposition from the separatists, and has to call parliamentary elections by August. She will be seeking to boost the slim majority of her ruling People's Alliance to help her push through devolution. But she will be hard-pressed to campaign from behind closed

## Happiest Government in Germany

by Harun ur Rashid

Mr. Schroeder's often distracted look of last year as he struggled to bring a sense of order to his chaotic first year in office has been replaced by beaming smiles and public wise-cracking.

URING his 18 months in power, German Chancellor( Prime Minister) Gerhard Schroeder has every reason to smile at the political misfortune of the country's main opposition party, the Christian Democrats. The Christian Democrats are reeling as the secret donations to the party accepted by the mighty former Chancellor Dr. Helmut Kohl during his 16 year rule are laid bare. Dr. Kohl admitted that he had accepted secret donations but was not prepared to disclose the name of the donors. He promised them not to reveal their names and it was a word of honour for him.

Virtually the entire opposition leadership has been tainted by this illegal affair. Last week, the Christian Democrats sacrificed their long standing leader Dr. Kohl to the scandal, when he had to quit as the party's honorary chairman. The affair is still unfolding every day by the claims of secret bank accounts, money laundering and kickbacks. This scandal relating to party donations is unprecedented.

The opposition seems to be paralysed and its biggest supporter, the big business in Germany has fallen in behind the Social Democrats-Green Party coalition government of Mr. Schroeder. They were once the strongest critic of the government. Mr. Hans-Olag Henkel. the president of the federation of German industry said: "The early frustrations with the government are gone." It is a big boost for Chancellor Schroeder.

Other things have also been going surprisingly well for the Chancellor. German economy is rapidly picking up speed, business confidence is growing and unemployment is falling.

The Chancellor came to rescue last year of the giant construction firm. Holzmann AG, when it was heading towards collapse with the projected loss of 70,000 jobs. The result was that Mr. Schroeder obtained the support from the employees and social welfare groups. He also silenced his left-wing party critics.

Mr. Schroeder wants to modernise his party programmes along the lines of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's New Labour Party. Germany's economic reform is seen as critical to shoring up international investor confidence in the Euro. In addition, changes to the health system and the lumbering state persion scheme have been flagged as well as cutbacks in public spending. By 2001, Mr. Schroeder wants to cut the corporate tax rate to 25 per cent from 40 per cent and reduce the lowest personal income tax rate from 23.9 per cent to 19.9 per

The opposition scandal has significantly improved the Chancellor's chances of winning two key upcoming state elections. He has seen state electoral defeats since his election in September, 1998. That mood has been changed. Mr. Schroeder's often distracted look of last year as he struggled to bring a sense of order to his chaotic first year in office has been replaced by beaming smiles and public wise-cracking.

One Social Democrat official captured the mood when he said: "This is the happiest government we have ever had in Germany.'

The author, a barrister, is former - Bangladesh Ambas. sador to the UN, Geneva.

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"The TSC Saga..."

Sir, I fully agree with Dr. Deepika's implicit condemnation ("The TSC Saga - Millennium at its Best!" 26/1/00) of the horrific molestation of a young woman on New Year's Eve. But it is her analysis which I find most disturbing. She justifies the actions of the molesters by suggesting that it is due to the inherent sexual repressive nature of our Bangladeshi society. Once the men lose control, they are no longer responsible for their act ! I am instantly reminded of an Old Bailey judge, Mr. Pickles who is renowned for a verdict along the lines that if a woman wears too short a skirt, then she is asking to be raped. If the young woman was molested while walking a dark alley by herself in pitch darkness it would be a different matter. But she was out with her friends in a large festive crowd in an atmosphere I imagine not too different from those of the all night street party on New Year's Eve at London's Trafalgar Square or even the summer Notting Hill Carnival. Yet, when was the last time there was a flasco like this in Lon-

don? Rome? Paris or New York's Times Square? Are the young women of Bangladesh then to remain indoors because our men folk cannot control themselves?

I am saddened to see such views. I fail to see how the top brass of the police cannot be held responsible when it is part and parcel of their job. I am sure the Dr. Deepika is aware of the British Home Secretary, Mr. Jack Straw's offer to resign after he himself took his son to the police because the youngster had taken drugs. So responsibility always lies at the top and we expect to be led by example. Making statements like "Men will always be men" and "police will always be dumb bribe sucking rats" is a defeatist attitude for a society which is in dire need of progressive change in our attitudes and our actions. I would also like to point out a possible influence of videos depicting similar illicit crimes. Two young boys in the UK murdered a baby named Jamie Bulger and left the body by the railway tracks: it was an exact copycat murder from a video that was released shortly before this heinous crime (it was subsequently banned).

Forced disrobing of women is a common feature of certain Bollywood videos. Even if there is a proven connection, it is very hard to control dissemination of such material in Bangladesh where the policemen car be "bought" to turn a blind eye for as little as Tk. 50. As president and subsequently sub-warden of one of the largest intercollegiate halls of residences of the University of London, I have come across young women who were molested in lone dark streets. They were neither drunk nor "provocatively" dressed at the time, but yes they were unfortunate. It scarred them for life, shook their selfconfidence and trust.

I don't believe anyone ever "asks for it" as Dr. Deepika seems to resign herself to. Let's stop making excuses for molesters and rapists and condemn all the evil who sought to gain at the cost of the victim including a section of the media which published her disrobed photographs.

Shabbir A. Bashar Visiting Scientist, Cornell University Ithaca, New York, USA.

#### Restore law and

order

Sir, There was a different news in the DS and I cannot help reacting on that. This is a new phenomena that the policemen are being hit by the muggers and recently there have been more than one instances. I cannot imagine the state of law and order in my country now. I used to have high hopes about the policemen in Bangladesh that they can trace anybody out if they want to. I cannot accept the fact that they die chasing the muggers. How dare these criminals fire at the policemen? I think this is a high time the police personnel to take stern measure and prove their worth.

It is my strong belief that they can restore the law and order in no time.

Dr. Rahmari A. Sweden

> Political dissent and our PM

Sir. I fully endorse the views expressed by Mahfuz Anam in the commentary captioned "The

PM Bear Responsibility for this Vandalism" published on 26.12.99. He referred to the AL hooligan's armed attack on Kader Siddiquie's conference. Mr. Anam very correctly commented "If the ruling AL does not understand and respect political dissent then we will have to conclude that it is not fit to be a political party of the 21st century and as such not fit to rule

Will the AL government realise this fact?

M A S Molla Dhaka

Appointment of Returning Officer

Sir, The role of the Deputy Commissioner as Returning Officer and Thana Nirbahi Officer as Assistant Returning Officer has become controversial in the

Election Process. To put an end to this controversy, FEMA-a citizens' coalition has recommended that the responsibilities of Returning Officer and Assistant Returning Officers should be assigned to permanent officer of the Election Commission. In case of dearth of such officers, the Dis-

trict Judge shall be appointed as Returning Officer and Sub-Judge or Assistant Judge as Assistant Returning Officer. Besides, non-partisan members from the civil society should be engaged in conducting polls.

Mostafa Sohel Dhaka

> "Canned date juice"

the letter under the above head-

Sir. This is in reference to

ing published on 22 January. fully endorse the writer's view and invite BCSIR to take initiatives to market our very own natural drink, khejurer rosh. When different countries are

successfully marketing and exporting canned fruits and fruit juice there shouldn't be any difficulty marketing khejurer rosh and other local ambrosia. By exporting our different natural delicacies, we could also

strengthen our economy. All we require is a positive outlook, enthusiasm and successful entrepreneurs.

Tapash Rahman Dhaka