

## CHT Accord

## 18 years too many to implement!

DECEMBER 2 will mark the 18th Anniversary of the signing of the CHT Peace Accord, and, regrettably, we are still talking about its full implementation. The Accord of 1997 was a welcome development that held the prospect of permanent peace in a region that had witnessed turbulence and bloodshed for a good part of twenty years. And the best we can say about the Accord is that it has been only partly implemented; some of the more complex issues have been left in a limbo. The Accord was swept under the carpet during the BNP tenure between 2001 and 2006, but it is quite inexplicable that the Accord should be floundering during the last seven years of the rule of AL which was the author of the Accord.

It will be well to remember that the Accord was a commitment of the state to a particular segment of the people, a commitment that the state cannot go back on. If there are any intractable issues that are resisting implementation then the only reasonable step is to engage all stakeholders to devise ways and means to address those. Keeping quiet and doing nothing gives rise to misunderstanding which seems to be the case at the moment.

Bangladesh has a very small ethnic population and it seems incongruous that when the rest of the country is developing rapidly they are suffering because the state has not fully delivered what it had promised them. The simmering discontent should be addressed sincerely and promptly before it boils over. Not only are we obligated by an accord to do so, it is also in the greater national interest that it is done.

## Child-safe Internet

## Need for awareness

A lot of children who use the Internet are being exposed to harmful materials and there has to be proper monitoring to ensure safety of children as well as the state. That's the concern that was expressed at a recent roundtable attended by eminent members of the civil society, educationalists and development activists.

Bangladesh has one of the fastest growing Internet users in the world. According to a study, by 2017, about 100 million children would have internet access, 90 percent of whom would use it via smartphones. That means they would have an infinite source of information and knowledge at their fingertips. The problem is, the Internet world is a lot like the real one imbued with potential for immense good as well as bad. We must protect our children from the bad while getting the best out of one of the biggest endowments to mankind.

And there are solutions to prevent the 'worst' getting to the children: legal, technological, and societal. From the legal and technical angle, the government could ban websites containing materials not suitable for children or order service providers to shut down such sites. But people will find smarter ways of circumventing that. The best way, we feel, is the awareness solutions where the role of the parents as well as teachers assumes salience. The 2013 Child Act and the current education policy, reportedly, do not address Internet safety, which it should. Social campaigns should be launched to raise awareness about the judicious, knowledge-based use of the Internet.

All said, the real solution, perhaps, lies in parents and teachers engaging with children and spending more quality time with them. Digital connectivity, no matter how valuable, can never substitute live interaction.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

letters@thedadlystar.net

## Bring the perpetrators to book

We condemn the recent attack in a Shia mosque in Bogra. The government must look into the matter seriously in order to avoid such attacks in the future. Islam preaches peace; it does not condone attacking people in the name of religion. The sooner the bigots understand this, the better. The common people alongside the government can play a part in combating extremism and restoring peace in Bangladesh, and the government must find those behind this terrorist act and bring them to book.

Nasif Ferdous  
Sylhet

## Killing of Bangladeshis

BSF, yet again, killed two Bangladeshis and this time it took place along Toluigachha border in Satkhira Sadar upazila on November 26. We often read news reports of BSF's killing of Bangladeshis. Have our government and international organisations started believing that this is the norm? Every time a killing takes place, we see a flag meeting, and statements of regret by BSF. That's all. No effective measures have yet been taken to stop these criminal acts carried out by the BSF. I don't understand why our government doesn't take this issue to the International Court of Justice.

Jahan Ara Begum  
Dhaka

## Rural transformation in focus

## MACRO MIRROR



FAHMIDA KATUN

RURAL Bangladesh is changing its face. Both physically and structurally. With the rise of various new and emerging activities, today's rural economy is different from that

of the eighties or nineties. Not only is there more concrete and electricity, one now finds agents of bKash helping to send and receive money through mobile phones or info-ladies equipped with a laptop, mobile phones and apparatus travelling on bicycles providing advice on health, family planning, education, legal issues and marketing. One also finds beauty parlours and cyber shops.

Infrastructure and technology have played an important role in bringing about such changes which, in turn, have led to economic and social transformation. For example, road infrastructure in rural areas has created employment and income opportunities for both men and women in many ways. Poor and landless people, including destitute women, can work in construction and maintenance of road. On the other hand, improved roads have reduced travel time and increased accessibility of jobs outside rural areas. Better infrastructure has also enabled us to develop rural markets. Private investments for shops, restaurants, pharmacies, tea stalls, saloon, etc. have created employment opportunities for the rural population. Expanded connectivity between rural and urban areas has also increased the value of land significantly.

Better roads have reduced travel time and increased access to social services including health and education. As a result, mobility of women, both in terms of work and accessing maternal and child healthcare programmes, has increased. A large number of schools in rural areas operated by both the government and non-government organisations have contributed to increased accessibility of rural girls to education.

The other stimulus has come from the use of technology in rural areas. Farmers are now able to receive market information through mobile services. A large number of women enjoy services provided by mobile technology. Mobile-based services such as mobile money, healthcare, education and information and helpline services have flourished in Bangladesh rapidly during the last decade. These have created

opportunities for rural livelihoods.

Participation in microcredit by a large number of women has undoubtedly increased their household income and empowered them socially. Additionally, technology and information flow has also contributed towards empowerment of women. Girls' education has not only created increased employment opportunities for them, but it has also made a positive impact in a number of areas, including increased decision-making power of women and girls, higher marriage age of girls and greater say in choice of spouse. Women's education and access to information are critical factors for increased use of

national level, 21.1 percent in rural areas and 7.7 percent in urban areas. Similar trends exist in case of access to health, education, technology, water, sanitation, electricity and other services.

Hence with the majority of the poor located in rural areas, the real effort towards poverty alleviation initiative has to be focused more on rural poverty alleviation. Diversified employment opportunities and increased productivity can play a key role here. Though the share of agriculture in the economy has reduced over time, a large number of people still eke out their livelihoods from agricultural activities. With a share of only about 18 percent of the total gross domestic

recent times. But there is still scope for further adoption of advanced technologies in the sector for diversification of agricultural commodities and production of high-value crops for the export market. This requires increased resource allocation for research and development for the agriculture sector. Skills development of human resources is equally important.

The recently launched "The Least Developed Country Report 2015" by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has highlighted some of these challenges to rural transformation. While the importance of the rural economy for



PHOTO: AP

maternal health services and improved health outcomes, as well as reduced fertility and improved family nutrition.

Despite such spectacular changes, rural Bangladesh lags far behind urban areas on many counts. With about 70 percent people living in rural areas, economic and social opportunities are far less than that of urban areas. The rural-urban divide is obvious in poverty statistics. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2010 shows that the percentage of people living below the poverty line is much higher in rural areas than both the national and urban levels. For example, according to the HIES 2010, the incidence of extreme poverty is 17.6 percent at the

product, the agriculture sector absorbs 42 percent of the total labour force of the country. Understandably, productivity per labour is very low as there is an excess supply of labour. This pushes agricultural wages downward.

Again, the adoption of technology in the agriculture sector is crucial. With limited agricultural land, technological innovation for high-yielding varieties has played a key role in higher production. However, innovation in the agriculture sector has to be an ongoing process as the country is vulnerable to weather variability and climate change. Water-tolerant and drought-resistant crop variety has been introduced in

holistic development is undeniable, we tend to overlook this reality, preferring to focus all our attention to the urban economy. However, as we enter into a new global development regime in the post-2015 period, the focus has to shift more towards a balanced growth both in urban and rural areas. Eradication of poverty of all forms and from everywhere, as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 1 formulated by the UN, is not possible without poverty alleviation in rural areas where a lion's share of poor people live.

The writer is Research Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

## An ambiguous UN resolution and a downed warplane

## FROM A BYSTANDER



MAHMOOD HASAN

THE situation surrounding the Syrian civil war is getting worse by the day. The war on terrorism is getting more complicated. Two developments deserve close analysis: the open-ended, ambiguous UN

Security Council Resolution 2249 (2015) adopted on November 20, and the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet by Turkish air force near the Turkish-Syrian border on November 24.

The audacious attack, amid monumental intelligence failure in Paris, by ISIL on November 13 was a direct challenge to France. France is a Nato power and a permanent member of the UN Security Council. In a way it was a challenge to all the five powerful permanent members of the United Nations. ISIL has demonstrated its reach and ability to attack a powerful country. ISIL also had the temerity to threaten attacks on New York and other western targets.

French President Francois Hollande has declared war on terrorism and has vowed to destroy ISIL. Hollande was in Washington on November 24 to meet President Obama and met President Putin on November 26 to discuss the formation of an international coalition to fight ISIL.

Earlier, on November 20, 2015, the UN Security Council met to discuss the threat posed by ISIL. The Security Council adopted French-sponsored Resolution 2249 unanimously, which is open to interpretation of convenience. The positive element of Resolution 2249 is that it was adopted unanimously, which is rare these days. Terrorist attacks have spurred the P5 members to close ranks. The Resolution unequivocally condemned the Paris attack.

A careful reading of the Resolution will reveal that French Quay d'Orsay drafted the resolution cleverly, which none of the members found difficult to vote for. Legal experts have pointed out some of the lacunae in the language of the Resolution. The Resolution has been described by experts as 'creative ambiguity'.

First, the 8-para Resolution, with the usual preamble, was not adopted under Chapter VII. Chapter VII actually authorises

military action in order to restore peace and security. The Resolution urges member states to "take all necessary measures in compliance with international law" against ISIL. Here 'necessary measures' have been left vague – open to interpretation of convenience. Thus an aggrieved France took a strong stand against authorising self-defence against armed attacks and tripling its air strikes against ISIL, under article 51 of the UN Charter.

Interestingly, the Resolution has not authorised military action directly – but has authorised it implicitly. It has now given post-facto legitimacy to French and American bombing of ISIL. Earlier, Russia entered the war on Syria's request. Britain, which has not yet joined, is now invoking self-defence to go after ISIL. Prime Minister Cameron is currently seeking House of Commons' approval. China is unlikely to join the fray.

Second, Res 2249 has implicitly recognised ISIL as a state, as it has elements of a state – such as significant territory, a population and access to natural resources (oil).

Third, in its preamble, the Resolution talks about 'respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and unity of all states' – but by authorising actions against ISIL it has purposefully ignored the sovereignty of Syria and Iraq.

The other extremely dangerous development that put everyone on tenterhooks was the shooting down of a Russian jet by Turkish air force on November 24. Since Russia started its operations in Syria, such an incident was just waiting to happen.

Turkish military said it shot the plane after it was repeatedly warned about violating Turkish airspace. Moscow said that the jet was well inside Syrian territory. The Russian plane fell inside Syrian territory and one of the two pilots was killed by a Syrian rebel commander who boasted of the killing. The bellicose narratives coming out of Ankara and Kremlin are contradictory. Who is telling the truth is difficult to ascertain at this stage.

Outraged President Putin has described the incident as a 'stab in the back... by accomplices of terrorists'. He also said Moscow-Ankara relations will have 'serious consequences' and has imposed sanctions on Ankara. Russia has accused Turkey for this 'planned provocation', hinting that it was instigated (by US?) to scuttle the Syrian peace process.

The shooting created panic in Europe as

Kremlin is already at odds with Nato because of Russia's annexation of Crimea. Alarmed Nato members went into huddle on November 24 at its headquarters in Brussels. Nato and the United Nations have urged Turkey and Russia to show restraint and to de-escalate the tension. Russia, however, has moved anti-aircraft missiles in Syria to protect its warplanes.

This sudden escalation of tension between Turkey and Russia will have wide ramifications for the war against ISIL. The UNSC Resolution 2249, despite its vagueness, created an opportunity to build a broad international platform to defeat ISIL. That may now be difficult. The possible casualty of the shooting will be the Syrian peace deal, which is being negotiated in Vienna.

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The fight against ISIL is actually not a fight between Islam and the West. It is in reality a fight by young people, who happen to be Muslims, against depravation, alienation, discrimination and gross injustice. One has to go into the origins of the rise of this violent force and its ability to survive and grow in strength over the past three years. But that is another story.

With so many players in the war against ISIL the situation has definitely become extremely complex and dangerous. Too many cooks spoil the broth.

The writer is former Ambassador and Secretary.