

## Bangladeshi student wins UNDP medal

"Every two seconds, a child dies of starvation somewhere in the world," says UNDP's Peace Medal recipient Bangladeshi student Kamal Ahmad, of Harvard University. Yet, he says, "enough food is produced each year to feed every child, woman and man."

Determined to alter both the odds and statistics, Ahmad and his brother Nazir, at Stanford University, founded the Overseas Development Network (ODN) in 1984.

The Cambridge-based project to recruit US college students for overseas development work is one of the fastest growing projects of its kind in US. It has campus chapters on both the East and West Coast, and ODN organisers say they expect to have more than 100 chapters on American college campuses by June 1986.

The strong support of the US academic community is reflected in ODN's Board of Directors, which includes professors from five disciplines at Harvard University and Mt. Holyoke College, and the presidents of Radcliffe College and Philips Exeter Academy. Additionally the board includes an officer of the World Bank and a former director of US policy planning at the US State Department.

In recognition of his work, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) last spring awarded the 19-year-old Harvard University second-year student its Peace Medal. But Ahmad was busy taking a university examination so it was accepted on his behalf by the Bangladeshi Ambassador to the United Nations.

"I'm happy, very happy that my son has earned such a recognition," said his nutritionist father Dr Kamaluddin Ahmed in Dhaka. "His concern for people, for poor people is so great that I knew he would do something like creation of the DDN even there" His father is director of the Institute of Nutrition and Food Sciences, University of Dhaka.

### FIRST RECIPIENT

At his school, Philips Exeter Academy in the USA, Ahmad was able to influence the mood of his fellow students.

His activities moved students and teachers of the academy so much that the Academy established a new "Award for Meritorious Service" of which he was the first recipient.

Ahmad says he began working on development projects in Bangladesh about seven or eight years ago when he was 13 years old. "I really can't recall what triggered my interest or involvement but I suppose it must have had something to do with growing up in Bangladesh during the War." Ahmad says both he & his 26-year-old brother Nazir have travelled widely in Bangladesh and that their shared concern for development "must have come from what we've seen."

His father said, "He is made that way. I have seen in him since adolescence a concern for the distressed."

Talking informally with USIS, his father recalled: "Ahmad used to visit Kamalapur railway station with a basket of biscuits to distribute among poor children. He would give many of those children money. With that money they would buy loaves

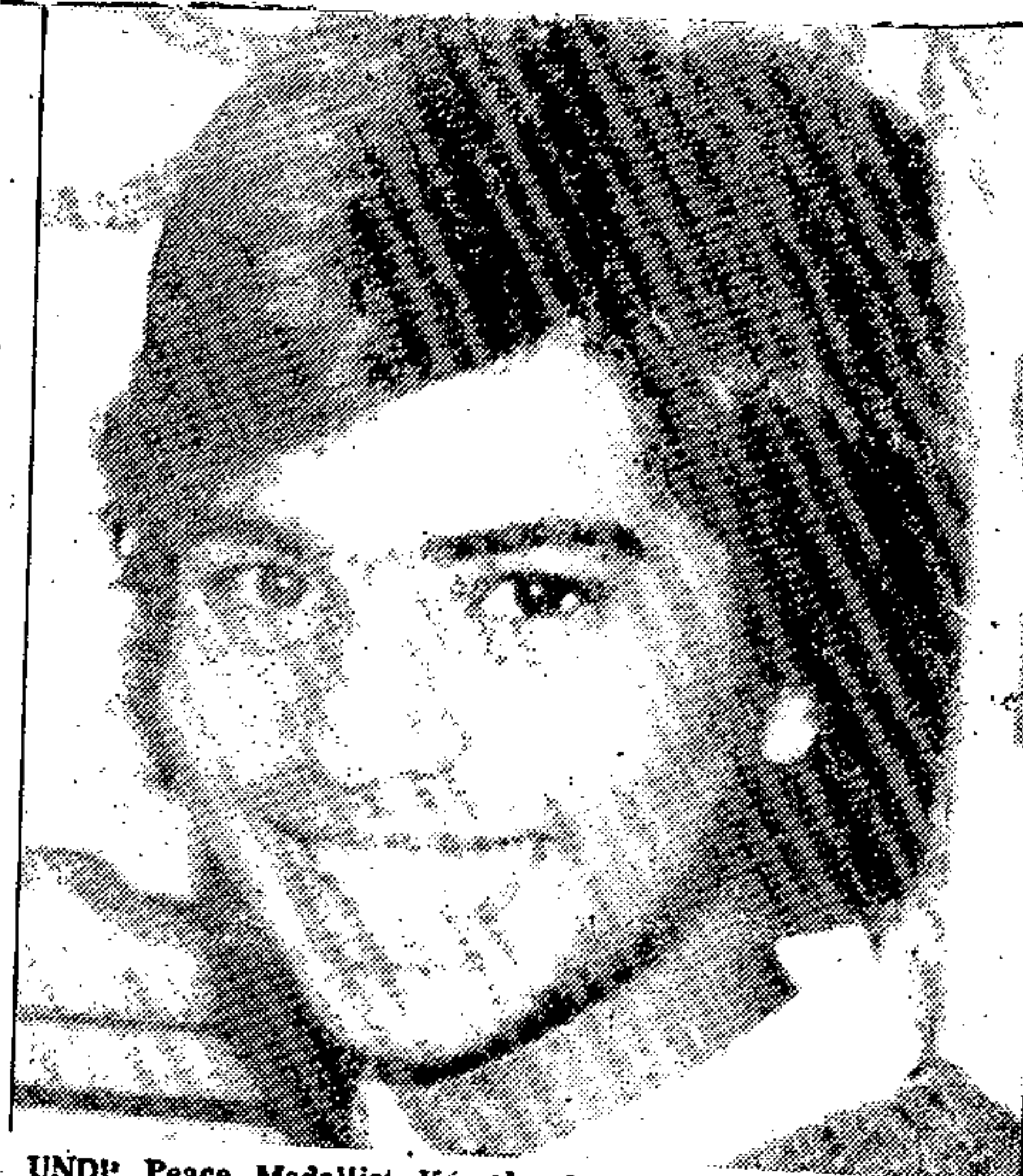


Nutritionist Dr. Kamaluddin Ahmed.

to sell by the roadside. He used to do things like this when he was only a teenager. He managed to get money from his mother.

Ahmad started a day care center in Dhaka for the children of young, deserted mothers. Due to his absence "we, however, couldn't run the center" lamented his father.

Ahmad says co-ordination of the rapidly growing pro-



UNDP Peace Medallist Kamal Ahmad.

ject in the United States has required a great deal of travel in America often to Stanford University to co-ordinate efforts with his brother. The 20-year-old Harvard junior plans to take the next semester off to go to look at some of ODN's overseas projects.

Personal involvement is critical to the success of the Overseas Development Network, he explains. "We want to personally involve students in the challenges of the development process."

"Development simply means people organising and being involved in helping a given community sustain itself. It can mean building new roads, schools, sanitary facilities, learning new agricultural techniques, new health processes, or educational programmes for them eedy. It can create new technologies to improve water access or transportation — in general do whatever is necessary to enable a community to sustain, extend and enrich life. The wider the range of projects the greater the possibilities for participation become."

The Stanford University chapter established a partnership with "Sebika", a cooperative of self-employed women, single mothers and their families in Bangladesh. The chapter raised 5,900 dollars to buy sewing machines,

raw goods, and to train women in a skill which would yield a stable income. "Our Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) chapter collected over a thousand books last year to ship to the college for the Harijans in West Bengal, Sudhir Ranjan Lahiri College, located in an impoverished rural area of West Bengal.

Another project just underway in Bangladesh, Ahmad says, will be hosted by the Comilla Proshika, one of the largest development groups in the country. ODN will send a team of American college students to Bangladesh for six months. Proshika has more than 600 groups of landless people in 20 upazilas affiliated with them. They will be grouped teams of three to work in three different rural projects — probably at Sarail in Brahmanbaria, Laksam in Comilla and Raajan in Chittagong or Ramgati in Noakhali. They will be accommodated in Proshika central office in Comilla."

Returning to the United States the participants will go on a tour of 120 American colleges and universities, telling about their experiences in trying to generate more enthusiasm and interest on the part of students elsewhere. "We will be doing the same programme in Colombia, Kenya and Zimbabwe," Ahmad added.