

From rivals to partners

We welcome the positive developments in China-India relations

CHINESE President Hu Jintao's recent trip to India has brought the two neighbouring countries close to a breakthrough insofar as overcoming the decades of alienation and standoff over border dispute is concerned.

Beijing and New Delhi now look well set to make a fresh beginning that will benefit the peoples of the world's most populous nations and will also have a positive impact on the region as a whole.

President Hu and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh have said that the two countries will emerge as development partners, leaving behind the legacy of rivalry. We welcome the latest move to promote friendly relationship between the two big neighbours, which, we believe, will usher in a new era of understanding and cooperation between China and India.

The two leaders have succeeded in rising above the narrow visions and have taken a broader view of the bilateral ties in light of today's geopolitical reality. They have agreed to launch joint ventures in some areas, setting aside the border dispute. This is indeed a clear departure from diplomatic maneuverings of the past which were essentially based on the concept of getting an edge, instead of understanding each other's problems and seeking mutually beneficial solutions. Obviously, the border dispute can be resolved if the two sides start working together and create the conditions for addressing it.

The region will surely feel the wholesome effects of the positive change in Sino-Indian relations. It will contribute to promoting regional peace and lessening tension. Good relations between the two biggest countries in the region, both of which have booming economies, will open new vistas of cooperation and lead to an openness that is needed for boosting trade and commerce. The experience of the highly developed countries makes it amply clear that real progress cannot be made in an ambience of mistrust and antagonism.

The lesson to be learned from the latest turn in Beijing-New Delhi ties is that diplomacy, when conducted with great dexterity, can effectively serve the cause of peace and understanding. The countries in the SAARC region should now think in terms of breaking the barriers that stand in the way of their meaningful interaction in different fields.

Jamaat's mischievous drive

Out to destroy our rich heritage and tradition

JAMAAT is out with another unique way of advancing its own programme of destroying our liberal cultural heritage. In its misguided and mischievous so-called attempt to "Islamise" our society, it is changing names of villages and educational institutions, which were there for centuries. Reportedly, their action is the result specifically aimed at removing the contribution of Hindu philanthropists in our institutions.

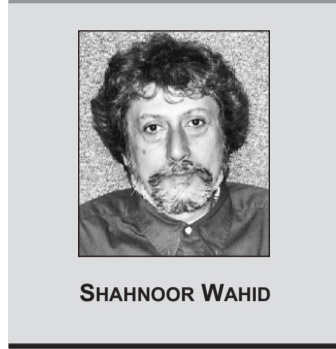
The dubious developments took place in the Shyamnagar Upazila under Sathkira district. The Jamaatis replaced names in use for more than a century with Islamised names in their official writing pads, leaflets and other materials. Most prominent of the many changes made is the change of the names of the Nakipur Harichandra High School into Nakipur Pilot School. The school, established in 1989, was named after Hari Chandra Rai Chowdhury a rich landowner of Shyamnagar of Mughal India. The zealots even installed a Jamaati lawmaker as the chairman of the school's governing body.

Such senseless and deliberate acts of changing names bear ominous signs for Bangladesh and its people who have been well known for their tolerance towards all religious faiths and beliefs.

Needless to say that such actions cast shadows on our centuries old traditions and cultural values. We are simply appalled as to how such changing of names could take place right under the very nose of the local "administration." It is indeed interesting to note that the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) could come up with an apology of a reply, saying that the names of the village and the institutions were not changed officially.

We draw the attention of the caretaker government and strongly urge the administration to put a halt to this heinous act immediately before its fall-out effects begin to erode our social and cultural values and destroy the very image of the country.

Paparazzi and a party and ...



SHAHNOOR WAHID

SENSE & INSENSIBILITY

Such shameful conduct calls for immediate action against the government officials who are trusted with sensitive state secrets. How can we have faith in them after the shameful fiasco at the private office of a politician? How can we ascertain that they have not divulged secret information to other people who were present in the building? We desperately want to believe that the chief adviser of the caretaker government will take stern action against the officials who visited that office on the night of Friday.

THE graphical illustration of some of the illustrious(!) people of the country on the front page of a Bengali daily yesterday and this daily today convinced the cynics that it is not only owls and jacksals that run away from light. And the way some of the high and mighty ones ducked and dodged and tried to hide their faces from the flashing camera also put indecent ideas in the minds of those cynics who always try to find *chhidra* (hole) in everything. In Sanskrit they are called *chhidraneshi* - in English, fault-finders.

Don't the cynics have better things to do at night? We have a feeling they do not. Otherwise, why should they go and gategrash a party where some "Brahmins" were having

some innocuous discussion, like how much paddy gives how much rice, and stuff like that? Don't they have the right to party? Yes, they have, and it is protected in the country's constitution, in their abridged edition that is. Just as the party thrower had the right to file a case against some respected citizens of the country some months back.

So why make all the fuss? They are the exulted ones who have taken the country on a lease for eternity. They have devoured half of the state's wealth in the past years and they are still hungry. That's why they had gathered to eat, drink, and make merry before launching once again on the sacred mission of devouring the remaining half of the state's wealth. Therefore, what right

the secret service agents and paparazzi have to bust the party in the same way FBI chief Edgar Hoover busted secret rendezvous of the Mafia dons?

The secret meeting of high government officials in former energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman's business office sets one wondering when would the government officials learn to maintain their self-respect? When will they learn not to be at the beck and call of some petty politicians who never did anything worthwhile for the millions of poor people of this poor country? When will they learn to believe with conviction that they belong to the highest civilian position this poor country can offer and that they serve the state/people and not the politicians? And when will someone tell them that their

salary is being paid by the people of the republic?

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The speech of the CA-cum-president

This is unbelievable but true. This writer asked a good num-

ber of retired civil servants, teachers, professors, social activists, and business persons on the night before the speech of our CA-cum-president about what did they expect to hear from him, and were they all hyped up about it. In my small survey, all of them (fifteen) said they had fairly good idea about what the CA-cum-president would say and that they were not at all excited about it.

In fact, out of the fifteen, thirteen told this writer that they would go to bed well before the speech. Some of them commented whether Prof Iajuddin Ahmed thought he had much credibility left that people would stay awake till midnight to hear from him something that was already stale. And lo and behold! The CA-cum-president said exactly what those highly respected citizens had told me in the evening!

This is worrisome, isn't it, that people can guess what direction the CA-cum-president was going or how he was operating, sitting in the grotto called Bangabhaban? He has successfully (so far) kept his advisers at bay, thereby raising many questions.

Finding no other work, the



advisers are advising themselves as to what should be their next move. Should we fall sick, again and again? Should we disappear? Should we become tough?

The saddened faces of the advisers are sending ominous signals to the people in general, but surprisingly not to certain quarters. Why do they look so calm and composed? Oh, we forgot about the party ... and the beck and call ... everything is working perfectly ... as per the blueprint.

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A few bad men



KAZI ANWARUL MASUD

GOING DEEPER

Liberty is indivisible and cannot be fettered by law. If unforeseen circumstances appear, these have to be handled with better laws because, as amendments to the constitution abundantly prove, laws are not cast in stone. Instead of throwing a book in the face of an electorate -- the great majority having never read the constitution nor having the literacy to do so -- the better course to follow would be to follow the dictates of higher moral law that will serve the interest of the people better.

DELAY in the reconstitution of the Election Commission through deliberate delay despite the three months leave forced upon the chief election commissioner, which in any case is in total disregard of the will of the people who would like him to leave the post, is yet another trick being played in the game of manipulation of the next general election.

The three other controversial election commissioners remain, as do hundreds of grass-roots level officials appointed by the immediate past government who will be directly involved in the election process. The honourable president's address to the nation regrettably reflects weak governance because the caretaker government (CTG) has been so far unable to face up to the demands of time and the people of Bangladesh for an immediate solution of the seemingly intractable problem. One must always remember that constitution is for the people and it is not the other way round.

One cannot but be confounded by the threat of one

party to the CTG not to step beyond the strict letters (but not the spirit) of the constitution, as the party itself owes its origin to the abrogation of the constitution by an extra-constitutional power, subsequent legitimization of the illegal acts of that extra-constitutional power that had replaced the then government, and amended the constitution changing one of the fundamental pillars of the 1972 constitution.

It is equally ironic that the other party -- the Islamists, banned after liberation because of their collaboration with the occupying Pakistani army, and who owe their revival to the extra-constitutional authority, because that government needed political platform to face the opposition of the secular and liberal political parties, and who are wedded to an Islamist agenda widely believed to be theocratic, trans-national and anti-democratic -- is also claiming total devotion to the constitution.

It was the opposition of this combine to a reconstitution of the Election Commission that has clearly lost the confidence of the people that forced the 14-

party combine to continue their Dhaka siege program despite being acutely aware of causing disruption to the daily life of the people. The ultra-rightist and the Islamist combine perhaps believed that continuance of the 14-party combine's siege program would make them unpopular to the people in the coming elections.

To Bangladeshis the right to vote -- often stolen from them -- is almost sacred because, in the words of Jurgen Habermas: "To vote, interpreted as a positive right, becomes the paradigm of rights as such, not only because it is constitutive for political self-determination, but because it shows how inclusion in a community of equals is connected with individual right to make autonomous contribution and take personal position on issues."

According to Habermas, the state's *raison d'etre* does not lie primarily in the protection of equal individual rights but in the guarantee of an inclusive process of opinion-and-will formation in which free and equal citizens reach an understanding on which goals and norms lie in the equal interest of all. In other

words all the citizens must be given equal opportunity to choose their representatives for the next five years.

So if people are suspicious of the Election Commission that has framed a list of voters totally disproportionate in number to one that would have been consistent with the last population census and has kept in position the party faithfuls appointed as election officials at the grass-root levels by the immediate past government one cannot accuse the people of their suspicion being misplaced.

The question that has to be resolved as to whether the constitutional difficulties in sacking a few persons holding constitutional posts should take precedence over the interest of the overwhelming majority of the people that would be served if that particular person were to be removed. One can argue that in the case of Bangladesh, the honourable president may consider the refusal to resign by the controversial persons mentioned above, not as a constitutional privilege, but as a derogation from the fundamental right of the people to have a free and

fair election. In this case the CEC and his deputies may be considered as lethal quasi-state actors engaged in a war of attrition against the people.

The French Revolution was fought in the name of liberty, equality, and fraternity. We think that if the people win this war, as they shall at the end, Bangladesh will not see the reign of terror following this victory but tranquility as the people chosen to govern will do so for the welfare of the governed. Presidential power being sought to be used to ensure the delivery of political goods, a part of his sovereign authority, is to reconstitute the election commission to provide relief to the people because they are feeling asphyxiated by the inaction of "a few bad men" who could have, and still can, leave with some vestige of respect left to them.

In neighbouring Nepal we just witnessed a peace deal signed by the Maoists who had been waging a decade long war for a fundamental revision of the constitution of Nepal the final form of which will ultimately be decided upon by the people. In Eastern Europe we have seen countries splitting up, sometimes violently, because the people concerned desired it. In Latin America we have witnessed a change of guard from the old to the new again as willed by the people. The central point, therefore, is not money or muscle power having deterministic attributes but the will of the people having supremacy in determining the destiny of a nation.

Bangladeshis' patience have been tested severely after being branded as one of the most corrupt nations on earth, a country with failed governance, a country mired in poverty and widening disparity between the rich and the poor, a country having serious law and order problem and in probability incubating Islamic extremism, and, according to Brussels based International Crisis Group, running the risk of "the growing challenge of militant Islam."

The report of the ICG adds that "the principal beneficiary of messy political equations has been the increasingly influential Islamist fringe led by legitimate governing parties like the Jamaat but extending to violently militant JMB. Circumstantial evidence as well as cold political logic suggests that underground terrorist groups have been cultivated and sheltered by those in power."

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Kazi Anwarul Masud is a former Secretary and Ambassador.

The intransigence of two leaders



ANM NURUL HAQUE

BY THE NUMBERS

Both the former prime minister Khaleda Zia and leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina spent their tension-free days in a foreign land when the nation was groaning in agony caused by the political stalemate over the electoral reform issue. People took it as a cruel mockery that the two supreme leaders, who could have resolved the crisis by sitting face to face, appeared least concerned about the grave situation in the country and were spending an apparently fine time on private foreign trips. Such indifference of the two leaders during grave national crisis has extremely annoyed and frustrated the nation.

the journalists for a comment, as the two major political figures did not exchange even a word, the BNP chief said she talked to all the guests. AL chief, however, said she was happy to be at the event and to meet all the people there, as she has been barred for the last five years from it. Both the leaders were found greeting other party leaders and exchanging pleasantries with them, while constantly avoiding each other.

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The AL lawmakers led by Sheikh Hasina staged their comeback into the parliament in

February, calling off their 19 month boycott. Begum Khaleda Zia, being the leader of the House, deliberately absented herself from the House while the leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina delivered her winding-up speech in the concluding session of the 8th parliament on October 4. Sheikh Hasina did the same thing when Begum Zia delivered her valedictory speech in the parliament in 2001.

One would find it hard to believe that these two top leaders of AL and BNP once led together a successful movement against the autocratic ruler

Ershad in 1991. But they are now at daggers drawn in the race of grabbing power, sacrificing the national interest. We certainly would not like to think that one who lost her great father and the other who lost her famous husband for the cause of nasty power politics, should be themselves so enthralled by power politics.

The Economist, one of the most widely circulated weeklies across the world, published an article entitled: "Bangladesh: State of Denial" in its June 18, 2005 issue, with a caricature picture of Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina, suggesting a brawl between them. It was in fact the manifestation of the belligerent behaviour of our two supreme political leaders that has put the nation to lots of shame. But ironically, the leaders concerned are yet to sense it.

We find a strong tradition of tolerance, compromise and consensus among the political rivals across the world. Like Bangladesh, US politics has also been dominated by two major parties -- the Democrats and the Republicans. Since the 1790s,

the US has been run by one of these two major parties.

In the 2004 US presidential election, John Kerry was defeated by George W Bush with a very marginal difference in votes. Moreover, there was a strong allegation of vote rigging against Bush. Despite of all these things, John Kerry congratulated Bush for becoming US president and still they have a wonderful sense of national unity and political decorum. There are lots of things our main political leaders may choose to learn from US.

We can also cite lots of examples of cordial relationship between political rivals in our country. The leaders of legend, Bangabandhu and Moulana Bhashani maintained cordial relationship with political rivals all through their lives.

There are very little differences to define between AL and BNP. The election manifestoes and promises of both the parties are almost the same. The country is being ruled by one after another of these two parties since 1990 and their styles of ruling are almost identical. The most vital similarity between BNP

and AL is that both of the parties will do anything to gain mileage over their opponents. This is why the top leaders on both sides cannot join hands even for nation's rescue.

The intransigence of two top leaders has made matters harder for our conflicting democracy. A real leader is the embodiment of the hopes, aspirations, and longings of his people. But the two top leaders of ours have not been able to go beyond the narrow partisan territories they have carved out for themselves. Moreover, their oversized ego and quixotic whims have virtually placed them at daggers drawn. It is the people who have to bear the brunt of the vindictive relation of the two leaders. Like many other things, our political leaders also need to be remodeled.

Political impasse has, by and large, been a part of our national political lexicon for quite a long time. Though the AL led 14-party alliance has withdrawn its blockade program, the cloud on the political horizon has not yet been dissipated. So I would like to suggest Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina to devise a "code of

democracy" for them as has been devised by two former prime ministers of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, which may help resolving political conflict between AL and BNP.

I am tempted to tell a joke from another country as it has an eerie relevance to our political arena. Benazir Bhutto, the then prime minister of Pakistan used to carry a rosary in her hand and recites some words running fingers over the beads. This used to occur when she would attend any public functions. One day an old man failing to resist his curiosity, stepped up to her and asked what she was reciting silently on the beads? "Ayatul qursi" said the prime minister. "Absurd, ayatul qursi cannot be recited so fast over the beads," said the bewildered old man. "You must be reciting only 'qursi, qursi' (the seat of a king)."

Anm Nurul Haque is a columnist of The Daily Star.