

Tuning Friendship into Partnership

A warm welcome awaits the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Saad Al-Abdullah Al-Salam Al-Sabah. The current state of Kuwait-Bangladesh relations is excellent. It is our hope that this important visit of the Prime Minister will further add to the considerable areas of economic cooperation that currently exists. The most important characteristic of our relations is that it stands on the tested ground of true friendship. Bangladesh is proud of the fact that it was the first country outside the Middle East to provide military assistance, in the form of sending troops, to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi invasion.

This newspaper itself, which was only a few weeks old at that time, is proud of the bold support that it lent to the Kuwaiti cause, unlike many others who took a more opportunistic line. After the defeat of Iraq, Bangladesh army's assistance in clearing the huge and extremely dangerous minefields stunned our Kuwaiti friends, for the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the operation. It is perhaps in recognition of all these and other gestures of true friendship, that Kuwait responded by taking a higher than pre-invasion level of workers from Bangladesh — 60,000 before to 110,000 now — resulting in a rise of remittance from Tk 480 crore to Tk 700 crore.

This visit provides an opportunity for Bangladesh to take our bilateral relations to a higher level of economic cooperation. A very important aspect of the visit is the large contingent of potential investors that the Crown Prince is bringing along with him. The eighty-member party consists of some of the richest and most powerful members of the Kuwaiti private sector. They are coming to our country because they have been impressed by our economic achievements to date, and would like to see for themselves as to what can be done.

We should take full advantage of their presence and show them the various possibilities of investment that exist. We would like to impress upon our important visitors that a combination of our diligent labour force, huge reservoir of technical human resource, considerable amount of management talent, coupled with the large financial resource base of the Kuwaiti investors and their international business experience and connection, could make for a very effective cooperation between two brotherly countries who have been each other's friends in times of need.

Desai Remembered

The region has lost a friend in the passing away of Morarji Desai and, India, a true Gandhian, a conscientious objector to political aberrations and a reference-point of alternative leadership to Congress rule.

Desai's sympathetic understanding of the sensibilities of India's small neighbours of which Bangladesh had been a beneficiary during his prime ministership from 1977 to 79, had endeared him to the region. He practised his self-proclaimed dictum of "beneficial bilateralism" with countries in India's neighbourhood to a recognisable degree during his short-lived tenure as PM. For Bangladesh, this yielded results in the shape of a water sharing formula pertaining to the lean season flow of the Ganges and stoppage of cross border-troubles. Desai was a proponent of the idea that it not only behoved India — and was expected of it — as the largest country in South Asia that she be conscious of the needs of a small neighbour but she also stood to gain the maximum from such a lion-hearted approach, in the long run. This school of thought remains in India as a tribute to free thinking India whose one of the finest symbolic representative-incarnates Desai undoubtedly was. No question about that.

Even by India's standards of a political firmament studded with old guards, Desai was an elderly statesman by a few decades senior to the rest; so that the loss at his demise is bound to be felt very deeply in India. From his austere home in Bombay he was latterly playing a symbolic role in politics harking back to Gandhian way of life and somewhat reminding of Jayaprakash Narayan's longings for sanity in politics.

Success in the attainment of a high state position came late for him at the ripe old age of 81 when he became India's first non-Congress Prime Minister since the country's independence. Desai was an epitome of maturity in Indian politics, through the alternating peaks and troughs of politics in India he is sure to be revered.

Iodised Salt

To have 70 per cent of the country's population suffering from bio-chemical iodine deficiency and about 45 per cent from goitre is a tragedy of gigantic proportions. More so because this is avoidable. It is exactly in this context that the first national conference of the producers of iodised salt held at Hotel Purbani on Saturday carries so much importance. A small amount of iodine intake with food can prevent goitre. But our misfortune is that we are yet to get this message through to a large majority of our population.

The right message could be driven home substantially just by banning the production of salt which is not iodised. A law taboing the production and sale of such salt is there but some do still violate it. The question of manufacturing iodised salt at an affordable price for the poor arises here. If the producers of iodised salt can bring down their production cost to the level of the non-iodised one there will be little enthusiasm for non-iodised salt in the market. So attempt has to be made to do this job.

Here is one case that cannot be ignored because iodine deficiency does not only cause physical deformity but also a low level of intelligence among children. The proportion of iodine-deficient people is therefore extremely frightening. Surely we don't want to end up as a nation of morons one day. This is why we must add wisdom to our economic concerns. Since the salt producers alone cannot bring down the cost of producing iodised salt, let the government come forward and help them do it. To ensure the health, and intelligence of our people, the government may even think of initially subsidising the production of iodised salt — if need be.

Turkey Invades Iraq to Hunt Down Kurdish Rebels

On March 20, 1995, Turkish army crossed into northern Iraq in hot pursuit of Turkish Kurd guerrillas. Over 35,000 Turkish troops participated and they occupy about 40 km width of Iraqi territory along Turkish border. And allied forces allowed this to happen as they are in-charge of northern Iraq after the Gulf war for protecting Iraqi Kurds from Iraqi forces.

TURKISH Prime Minister Tansu Ciller was of course, right when she said — terrorists must be eradicated — while defending Turkish military's large scale attacks across the border into Iraq on Turkish Kurd guerrillas. But are the Turkish guerrillas terrorists? Turkish Kurds form about 20% of Turkey's population and on their behalf Kurdistan Workers Party — a Marxist-Leninist group which is known as PKK has been fighting for over a decade for a separate Kurdish homeland. As various reports show, Turkish Kurd guerrillas generally attack Turkish army, and in the process, however, they also attack Turkish villages where often civilians become casualties. Thus Turkish Kurds have long been waging a small war against Turkish Government. Therefore, they should not simply be dumped as terrorists. If they had bigger army and armaments, the character of war for a homeland or autonomy could be different. Similar wars were waged and are being waged elsewhere in the world and the international community view them differently.

The issue of Kurdish homeland is not new. Kurdish population in the neighbouring Iraq and also in Syria is big and they also have a similar demand for which they have been fighting for long. Iraqi Kurds seem to be the "chosen" people who enjoy full protection from the allied forces after the Gulf war though in terms of demand and consequent rebel activities there is hardly any difference. Only difference lies in the fact that Iraq itself is a rebel regime for the allied governments and Turkey is a part of Europe and a member of NATO. Turkey also extended considerable help to allied forces during the Gulf war.

On March 20, 1995, Turkish army crossed into northern Iraq in hot pursuit of Turkish Kurd guerrillas. Over 35,000 Turkish troops participated and they occupy about 40 km width of Iraqi territory along Turkish border. Plain and simple, Turkey has occupied this big area, a part of northern Iraq as Israel has done in Lebanon in the name

of eliminating terrorist bases. And allied forces allowed this to happen as they are in-charge of northern Iraq after the Gulf war for protecting Iraqi Kurds from Iraqi forces. Indeed, allied forces did not carry out any aerial 'protection' sorties over northern Iraq when Turkish air force planes flew over northern Iraq to give aerial support to Turkish ground forces' operation against Turkish guerrillas. This was probably done to avoid aerial clashes but one may assume even some prior understanding between allied forces and Turkish attacking forces. In case such an understanding existed, this could bring serious damage to allied forces' position in northern Iraq. If allied forces were not in northern Iraq, the situation could have been quite different as Iraqi army would have defended Iraq's sovereign territory. It was also quite possible that Iraqi army would not have allowed any Turkish Kurds to enter northern Iraq and these rebels would have slipped into Turkish hilly areas and fought guerrilla war from there. Even now a large group of PKK is in the eastern province of Turkey. Indeed, Turkish army started simultaneous military operation in eastern province and are reportedly facing serious problems due to shortage of long range artillery and helicopter gunships as these have already been deployed in a massive way in northern Iraq.

Thus it seems that over the years Turkish Kurds have gained considerable fighting strength and with additional finance and supply of armaments, which may not be hard to obtain, PKK could turn out to be a formidable force against Turkish authority. In such a situation it would be still more difficult to dump Kurdish guerrillas as terrorists as these rebels would then fight a regular war for Kurdish homeland which may attract further support from many people around the world. After all they are all Kurds — whether Iraqi Kurds



Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad

or Turkish Kurds — a sizeable population of the region fighting for autonomy or independence. Again, the dilemma over a territorial integrity of a state vis-a-vis autonomy/independence movement of a sizeable population with distinct ethnic and cultural background is a real one and being faced often by the international community. The international reactions to all these conflicts are always mixed — depending on political and strategic interests of the concerned governments.

Even now most of the European governments including Germany and France have been very critical of Turkish cross-border raid against PKK guerrillas. Indeed, German government has been very vocal and demanded immediate Turkish withdrawal from northern Iraq. German Foreign Minister asked visiting Turkish Foreign Minister to withdraw Turkish troops immediately, "if possible, tomorrow". Germany has also suspended military assistance to Turkey. Germany's position is, of course, special as it has a big Turkish community. The most decisive action has, however, been taken by the European Parliament by voting overwhelmingly to condemn Turkish military intervention in northern Iraq and its violations of international law and human rights.

The US's reaction to Turkish military action was that the US "do not object to the Turkish government dealing with a terrorist organisation seeking to dismantle the territory of Turkey". From this initial position of showing understanding and even sympathising with Turkish gov-

ernment which has been of solid help to the allied forces during and after Gulf war, the US has now started showing some concern about the civilian casualties. However, the US has yet "not declared the incursion to be a violation of international law". The US administration has also not yet asked Turkish government to withdraw its troops from northern Iraq. One does not know what stand the US will take in the Security Council as Iraq has already asked UN Security Council to direct Turkey to withdraw immediately from northern Iraq.

Under heavy pressure from European governments and particularly Germany and France, Turkey has, for the first time since its invasion of northern Iraq, announced that it would withdraw within weeks and it has also reportedly made a token withdrawal of some 3,000 troops out of the contingent of over 35,000 troops now in Iraq. However, some reports say the troops were simply redeployed. The UN Security Council faces a real challenge over Turkish violation of Iraq's sovereignty, independence and integrity.

The UN Security Council has not yet said anything specifically on Turkish invasion of northern Iraq. Such a silence on such a vital issue of invasion of a sovereign territory only erodes UN's credibility. The UN Security Council was expected to at least come out with a call for immediate Turkish withdrawal and such a call would have put some moral pressure on Turkey. As it appears only the European Parliament and some individual governments with some leverage had worked on

Turkey and exerted pressure. The world has to wait and see how quickly Turkey would pull out and pull out completely.

Turkey has already indicated that it may create a buffer or security zone to stop further Kurdish attack. It is welcome to do so in its own territory along Iraqi border but security zone in some other's territory would attract world wide condemnation. The best course for Turkey would be to go for negotiation with Turkish

Kurds for an amicable settlement including some form of autonomy, however, maintaining Turkish territorial integrity. Turkey should not continue to ignore the demand of a nearly 20% Kurdish population. May be the entire 20% Kurdish population has not risen up for independence but the demand for some form of autonomy has been in the agenda for over a decade. Turkey being a democratic country and an European partner practically in all respects would only risk its political and economic future by fighting the Kurds militarily which it can not win as indeed there are too many Kurds in the region and they all fight for the same cause.

An Evening with the Desais

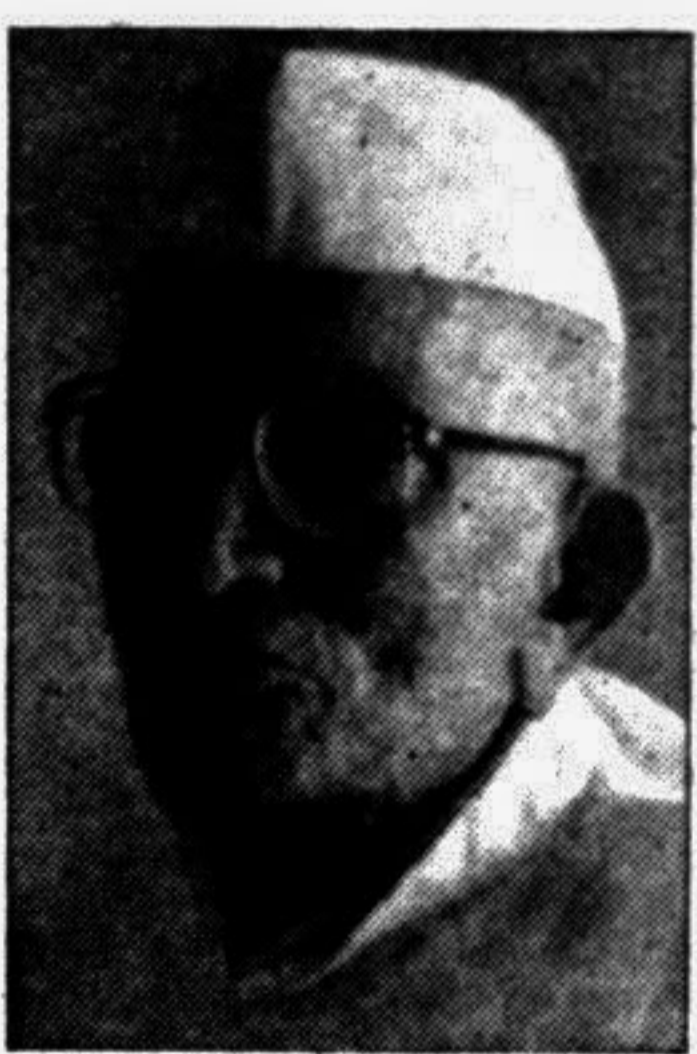
On January 17, 1957 Abul Mansur Ahmad, Commerce and Industry Minister of the Government of Pakistan, in the cabinet of Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, led a delegation to sign a trade pact with India. The Indian Commerce and Industry Minister was Mr. Morarji Desai. During the visit Mr. and Mrs. Desai invited the visiting Pakistani minister and his wife to a private family dinner. A detailed description of this dinner was published in the political autobiography of Abul Mansur Ahmad, whose English title is "Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It" (original in Bangla).

As a mark of respect to the memory of Mr. Desai, we publish an English translation of an abridged version of that description to depict the simple lifestyle of this great Indian leader who fought in the Indian freedom movement and, as a lieutenant of Jawaharlal Nehru, participated in the building of independent India.

ONE day after the official meeting, Mr. Desai came over to my suite and invited me and my wife for a private family dinner. I was told by officials that it was a rare invitation, and that the near ascetic and strict Hindu Brahmin was not known to extend such invitations to visiting foreigners. I had no idea why Mr. Desai decided to honour in such a manner.

We arrived at his residence on time and discovered that it was truly a family dinner. There were nobody besides us. We were taken to, what turned out to be extremely modest family quarters. We sat around and talked for a while, and then were called for dinner, which turned out to be a truly unique experience. From the warmth of the host and hostess, to the large number of items of food served on the table (all cooked and personally served by Mrs. Desai), to the brass utensils that were used, and the extremely courteous and personal attention which they showered on us, that evening became a memorable event for us.

There was small dinner table that could sit six people. There were Mr. and Mrs. Desai and my wife and myself. We spent a total of two hours together in peace and quiet, without any officials being around. We were warned that Mr. and Mrs. Desai were strict Hindus. In the family dinner there were none of the official trappings. It was truly private and family affair. Whatever fear we may have had, they were soon cast aside by the warmth of welcome and the extremely friendly behaviour of Mr. and Mrs. Desai. We were totally charmed by them. We were



overwhelmed by the hospitality extended to us by them. As can be expected in the house of a strict Brahmin, there was of course no meat or fish on the table. But Mrs. Desai showed us how a tremendously sumptuous dinner could be prepared without any such items. She had prepared the dinner herself. She also personally served her guests without the help of any domestic aid. Mrs. Desai seemed to get along extremely well with my wife, she with her broken Hindi and my wife with her Bengali-Urdu. It seemed they did not need the help of any language. We both deliberately avoided raising broader issues of Pakistan-India relations at this private encounter, and confined ourselves to talking about trade and commercial aspects of our bilateral relations. From this glimpse of Mr. and Mrs. Desai's private life we both were extremely impressed, and I became terribly attracted to him.

Islam is the Secret of the Black Swans

Paul Hockenkos writes from Kakanj, Bosnia-Herzegovina

Bosnia's crack Black Swans unit adheres to strict Muslim discipline — not out of religious fundamentalism, says their battle-scarred commander, but because it makes for a more effective fighting force. Gemini News Service reports on a significant shift from multiculturalism.

IN his jet-black uniform, Hase Tirc, the 27-year old Brigadier of the Black Swans, the Bosnian army's elite commando unit, cuts an imposing figure. His shaved head marbled with scars, the barrel-chested commander exudes the ruthless professionalism that is his unit's trademark.

In contrast to the often rag-tag regular army troops, the Black Swans are the Bosnian army's most disciplined and effective fighting force. The key to their success, says Tirc, is Islam.

The 600-man Muslim brigade lives according to Islamic law — daily prayer, no alcohol or women, exemplary personal hygiene.

"We're not fundamentalists," says Tirc, like most of his soldiers a newcomer to religion. "These rules simply ensure the highest military standards."

The Black Swans are just one unit in the Bosnian armed forces that have taken Islam to heart. Since the war began three years ago, the once-multinational Bosnian military has become an almost exclusively Muslim force. For a growing number of units, Muslim nationalism and Islam rather than multicultural coexistence have become their rallying cry.

In part, the upsurge of religion in the military reflects a new interest in Islam among many Bosnian Muslims. The hardship of the war and the pressures of the rampant nationalism around them has led ever more people to look to Islam for orientation. Before the war Bosnian Muslims were

overwhelmingly secular, their fondness for drink and earthly pleasures legendary across former Yugoslavia. Today, mosque attendance is up as never before and religious education classes are full.

In the armed forces, young soldiers too are eager to learn about Islam. At their base camp high in the mountains of north-eastern Bosnia, the Black Swans have two hours of religious training a day.

"I am here to tell these boys what they're fighting for," says Hamza, the unit's Hodja, or religious leader. "First they learn the rules of Islam and follow them, then comes faith."

Until recently, the Bosnian government has either denied or played down the existence of the all Muslim units, carefully concealing them from the international media.

Even many Bosnians reacted with shock to the third anniversary celebration of the Seventh Muslim Brigade, televised across the country earlier this year.

The packed sports hall in Zenica shook with cries of "Allahu Akbar" ("God is Great") delivered from columns of soldiers, clad in olive green uniforms and bright green headbands with Islamic insignia. Bosnian President Alija Izetbegovic inspected the 3,000 troops, the army's first and largest religious outfit. "That's not my army," says Mevlid Vljacic, a chemist from Tuzla, shaking her head. Vljacic, a Muslim, is married to a Serb — nothing out of the ordinary in ethnically mixed Tuzla. "My army is the Bosnian army and

they speak Bosnian, not Arabic."

The taboo issue first entered the public spotlight the day after the Zenica celebration. Five members of the multinational seven-person Bosnian presidency, including the four Croat and Serb representatives, sent an open letter to Izetbegovic protesting over his participating as tacit approval of the Islamic brigades.

The Islamic units, with a Muslim nationalist ideology, implicitly contradict the government's multicultural philosophy. Until now, the Bosnian government has insisted that the Muslim majority, together with many Serbs and Croats, are fighting for a secular, multinational state.

But Izetbegovic testily defends the Muslim units: "Those who want to talk about the ideology of the Bosnian army should first count the graves."

The reply underscored the fact that numerically the Bosnian Muslims are by far the war's greatest victims and that it is Muslim soldiers who are defending the country. According to military sources, the Bosnian army today is over 90 per cent Muslim, with a combined total of about five per cent Serbs and Croats.

The Serb and Croat Generals in the Bosnian high command have become window-dressing for the international community, maintain high-ranking Muslim officers. They also contend that the multinational presidency has outlived its political legitimacy: government-held Bosnia is effectively a Muslim state. The

To the Editor

Moral responsibility

Sir, I wish to congratulate you for the excellent editorial of 6 April, 'Moral and the Real Responsibility', on the resignation of Industry Minister Mr. Nurul Uddin Khan on the current sad and depressing event of what has come to be known as the fertilizer crisis. Your comments are perfectly valid. You have rightly hinted at the fact that the Industry Ministry is responsible only for the production of fertilizer and the mechanism for distribution of fertilizer to the final consumers, that is, the farmers, should have been a steam lined, one. In this case, the mechanism seems to have been extremely confusing. This is a matter which must be enquired into by an impartial judicial committee, because this unfortunate crisis has vitally af-

fected the welfare of the entire nation.

To my remembrance, Mr. Khan's resignation by accepting moral responsibility is the third one. The first one was the resignation of Mr. Nurul Huda, ex-Minister of State for Establishment Division. This resignation was probably involuntary. The second resignation from the Cabinet was that of Mr. Nazmul Huda's the ex-Information Minister. This was reportedly due to his making a statement on an important political issue concerning the BNP of which the party high command was not perhaps aware. The three resignations were not for identical reasons. However, the concept of acceptance of responsibilities by the ministers for the wrong actions under their ministries, are well on the way to the set-

ting up of an important democratic tradition in Bangladesh where democracy is young and still beset with difficulties — political, economic and social.

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Domestic savings

Sir, Congratulations to the honourable Finance Minister Mr. M Saifur Rahman for the wonderful declaration 'Domestic savings reach 15 per cent'. The news has been published in the different newspapers on April 05, 1995, under different headlines. However, the honourable Finance Minister did not specify the sources where from the 'domestic savings' all on a sudden reached 15 per cent, while all through Bangladesh had less than five per cent. Pakistan more than 11 per

cent and India more than 21 per cent purchasing and saving capacities. Of course, our honourable Finance Minister did not speak of the purchasing capacities of the people, but on the investment. It will be a miracle should our investment increase up to 18 per cent and the Annual Development Programme up to 43 per cent without the purchasing capacities of the people being increased.

One calculates, since our domestic savings have reached 15 per cent, without increasing the purchasing capacities of the people (which is the contradiction), soon we shall be in a position to flood foreign markets with the products of

Bangladesh!
Andrew O'Costa
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OPINION

Political Body Language

M M Ahmad

As a peaceful and law-abiding citizen, it is one of my hobbies to monitor the public displays (I have no access to the inner workings) of leadership and statesmanship in our society. Why such close monitoring is necessary by amateurs like this ordinary, modestly educated citizen? Perhaps the professional monitoring systems to watch our leaders has failed to explain to the public the strange behaviour patterns of our leaders, particularly the political netas. The leaders in the other sectors (literature, culture, etc) are not such a nuisance, as they do not directly affect the daily routine life of the citizens (if routine is disrupted, the leaders on both sides have failed). They do not seek too much limelight, too much of the time, as the politicians do, who (the latter) apparently consider such attention as their right and privilege. We have spoiled our politicians.

It was disappointing to read (Star, March 21) the parroting interview of Mr. Suranjit Sengupta, a veteran politician, who cleverly chose not to derail himself, ardently following the technique of his new leader, a better and more bitter parrot. One calculates, since our domestic savings have reached 15 per cent, without increasing the purchasing capacities of the people (which is the contradiction), soon we shall be in a position to flood foreign markets with the products of Bangladesh!
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