

Refreshing Partnership

The economic cooperation agreement reached between Dhaka and Bamako on conclusion of the 3-day visit here of the Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare will go down very well with the votaries of South-South co-operation.

The West African Republic of Mali has a huge land-area — 12,39,998 sq km — as compared with Bangladesh's only 1,43,998 sq km.

Our agricultural experts and workers can help develop fertile lands in the vast basins of the Niger river to grow more crops and fruits for our Malian brethren at much less cost than what hired skill and labour from other countries would entail for them.

We also have the know-how to assist them in setting up fertiliser factories, pharmaceutical units, fruit preservation and processing industry and, above all, jute industries.

In the realms of primary education, health and social welfare Mali can rely heavily on our experiences to forge ahead.

In breaking new grounds in the African continent we have prudently begun with a tried out friend — Mali. Our relationship with that country has been reinvigorated after a lapse of some fourteen years.

While we hail the economic cooperation agreement reached in Dhaka, we urge both sides to provide adequate institutional underpinnings to it with our private sector going all-out to cultivate durable links with the Malian private enterprise.

A Journey to Sanity

This is unbelievable. And yet true. Admission tests for HSC classes in colleges have been abolished. It amounts to a mini-revolution in our educational dispensation.

Why were these admission tests started? Who started these? It is beyond question that the SSC results at a certain point of our tortuous history, started to become highly unreliable.

By one fell stroke the education authorities have set this roaring business at naught. We wish them success. But this success will fail the nation if the SSC exams are not developed to be a very dependable measure of a student's true merit.

Let this decision be the beginning of a journey to sanity for our education sector.

More about Bangladesh

If not quite a leap, it was indeed a giant step forward. As things are, English medium schools cannot simply be wished away.

In Bangladesh, however, following perhaps a subcontinental pattern, EMS have largely worked as spawning ground for an other-than-native culture.

It is wonderful that the call for eliminating the causes of alienation came from the EMS pupils themselves supported in a big way by their teachers.

Now, what about the Bengali medium schools? How much the pupils over there are aware of the glory that was our country and the promises that it now holds and the beauty that is still here?

In my young days my father used to refer to a Muslim religious leader, Hajj Shariatullah, who played a leading role in the 19th century in the revivalism of minute Islamic faiths — such as honesty, devotion and charity and restoration of Islamic practices as they existed during the time of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be on Him).

The relevance of the story becomes more and more meaningful to me now when I realize that my grandfather was given the Sobriquet of Farazi because of his strong and unstinted espousal of this spiritual movement for the downtrodden peasants of the area.

In the brief span of last months, I have lost three very important members of my family — important to me at least. All three were contemporaries, but following three different philosophies in life, almost representing three shades of views now dividing this beloved land of ours.

Doctor Khademul Islam (Shishu) joined the War of Liberation as an MP elected from the Awami League platform, a gentle, soft-spoken, honest politician deeply influenced by Gandhi and philosophy of peace and service whose nature was more in giving than in expecting!

Footsteps of History

The War of Liberation of '71 was a historic struggle for the Bengali nationhood and nationalism. Our valiant freedom fighters sacrificed their most precious possession, their lives, to not only establish economic and political rights but also to prove that religion — and religion alone could not be the basis of a nation state.

terday revolutionary movement in Bengal... Every Bengali Muslim middle-class family of today whose memory is still not faded, remembers with certain amount of pride and exaltation that particular period of the Farazi Movement in Bengal.

When I sit back and reflect, I instantly realize that our family is almost a microcosm of the political scenario in the country. The country we achieved on the blood of

cently was elected MP under BNP platform in 1979. He was the founder-president of the BNP in Kushtia. He also initially joined Bhashani NAP like Syed Altaf Hossain. And if my memory serves me well Syed Altaf Hossain, before becoming founder-president of Gonoatantri Party, had a stint as Minister for Roads and Communications in the last cabinet of Bangabandhu.

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When the cortege of Syed Masood Rumi was carried by road from Dhaka to Khustia on Friday, August 18, people belonging to all political parties thronged to pay respect to him. The same phenomenon was observed after the passing away of Dr Khademul Islam, whose honesty, simplicity, and dedication galvanised the whole region.

But all three left this world leaving behind practically nothing excepting their name and fame! Syed Masood Rumi, Syed Altaf Hossain and Dr Khademul Islam not only fought for democracy and democratic values, they also inspired all and sundry to fight against the hydra-headed monster of communalism and fundamentalism.



Waliur Rahman

millions of martyrs can only survive as a democracy in a pluralistic political dispensation. The experiences we are going through are the teething aches of every nascent democracy. Don't we remember when a visiting Englishman asked Alexander Hamilton, "Sire, what is the most important experience in your life?" Pat came with his reply, "It is the effort to give the people their right to choose."

perhaps had one quality in common, the most seminal characteristics in the sustenance of democratic values i.e. tolerance, towards other's point of view, the a priori condition of democracy. All three gentlemen, leaders in their own right, left their footprints, bold and clear, for their honesty, integrity and idealism.

political position in India! Leadership demands care, piety, sacrifice and love for the people one represents. When my late father bequeathed a Trust comprising of two-thirds of our property for the welfare of the poor, the impoverished and the benighted, we were not particularly happy at that time; but this he did in the same tradition of my grandfather who helped the poorest of the poor to stand on their feet with honour and dignity.

Now we all appreciate the spirit of sacrifice and philanthropy that is perhaps more than giving a weekly feed in an orphanage. And that is more, much more than salvaging one's conscience. This in affect is also the building blocks of democratic culture, and creating institutions for democracy.

Standing at the cross-road in our nation's quest for a viable and democratic future, I feel deeply optimistic. We can make it. Haven't we proved in the elections of 1970, 1973 and lastly in 1991? Given necessary determination, political will and above all but most important kindness, our present political leaders can do it because it is doable. In the Taimud we read, one of the most difficult things to give away is kindness — but it is usually returned. Those three have proved it. I do discern the footsteps of history.

India: Post-election Prospects?

Nikhil Chakravarty writes from New Delhi

The picture that emerges from this overview of the Lok Sabha election prospects is that no party is in a position to offer even a stable coalition, leave alone the hope of a single-party majority. Which ultimately means that India after the general election will have a weak centre

manner in which both of them had treated it when it was in power in 1989-90.

For one thing, the Janata Dal leaders understandably cannot forget the shabby manner in which the BJP leaders brought down the VP Singh government despite all the earnest efforts that government made to meet their demand at Ayodhya.

As for the Congress leadership, it could not reconcile itself to the fact of its defeat in the 1969 general election in which it lost outright despite the huge majority that it commanded in the previous poll in 1965.

with the Congress leadership was no less when they found the Congress ganging up with the BJP to throw it out of power in November-1990 and then they discovered Chandrasekhar's break-away group sneaking into power with Rajiv's help.

In the last four years, the Janata Dal and the Congress have moved further apart particularly over the question of retaining the confidence of the minority Muslim community — an asset which the Janata Dal leadership has closely preserved along with enlisting the support of the OBC contingent through the VP Singh government's Mandal recommendations.

On the other side, could there possibly be a coalition between the Congress and the BJP? At the personal level, the BJP leaders are friendly disposed towards Narasimha Rao. It would however be a mistake to think that among the senior Congress leaders, he is the only one whom the BJP regards as friendly.

have to reckon with the possibility of some sections of the Congress walking out of such an entente. A careful Congress leader — such as Narasimha Rao has always been — would prefer to avoid such an eventually. Instead, he may be aiming to have an understanding with essentially regional parties such as the BSP and even the AIADMK on the basis of the principle that while the lion's share of the seats in the Assembly would go to the regional party, the Congress in return will get the bigger chunk of the Lok Sabha seats — the sort of understanding that Indira Gandhi had struck with the AIADMK in 1971 which the Congress has continued ever since in Tamilnadu.

has no chance whatsoever of getting anywhere near power at the Centre. It is one thing to score impressively and another thing to break the political sound barrier, that is, knocking together a majority in Parliament.

In this whole game, the Left has only a marginal role to play. For one thing, its numerical strength in terms of winning seats in Parliament, is very small. Secondly, it is largely confined to some pockets — much less than the BJP — and that comes in the way of its making a political dent at the national level.

The picture that emerges from this overview of the Lok Sabha election prospects is that no party is in a position to offer even a stable coalition, leave alone the hope of a single-party majority. Which ultimately means that India after the general election will have a weak centre though most of the State level governments promise to be stable and effective.

To the Editor...

Appeal to the three prime ministers

Sir, The Muslim world is in complete disarray in the absence of an able and dynamic leadership capable to rally round their brethren in Bosnia to protect them from suppression and oppression systematically perpetrated by the so-called civilized and non-fundamentalist Western world. Everyday our life starts with the agonizing news of the Bosnian Muslims being killed or exterminated and their mothers and sisters being raped or gang-raped seemingly under the nodding approval of the protagonists of human rights and the vanguards of modern civilization.

Hartals and caretaker government

Sir, It appears that Bangladesh Nationalist Party, Awami League, Jamaat-e-Islami, Jatiya Party and others have agreed not to agree with each other on caretaker government showing different cogent reasons and the political turmoil in our country continues unabated.

Appeal to the three prime ministers

via Central Asian countries, Afghanistan, Iran and so on. Iran's Rafsa-njani will be another active supporter.

Hartals and caretaker government

der a caretaker government. It may be recalled that the above three-in-one has been demanding general elections under a caretaker government holding innumerable hartals, strikes, street agitations, public meetings, road, railways and riverways blockade and Dhaka seize etc. continuously one after another for the last eighteen months at the cost of untold suffering of the people.

Hartals and caretaker government

would accept peacefully the results of the general elections under a caretaker government, what about if the caretaker government is found committing misconduct and so how the caretaker government would be dealt with?

We the Bangladeshis have been somewhat proud to see that ours being the second largest Muslim country has over the years steadfastly

Ahmed Ghani Lalmita, Dhaka.

According to a survey conducted in sixty districts during June-July 1995 by Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP) 82.4 per cent people are against 'hartal' and strike.

But we are very much surprised and shocked that the AL-JI-JP and others have never spelled out as to who would be the head of the caretaker government, how and who would elect or select the head of the caretaker government, what would be the powers and functions of the caretaker government, to whom the caretaker government would be accountable and responsible, what is the guarantee that the caretaker government would hold free and fair general elections, whether all the opposition parties and the government

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