Founder-Editor: Late S. M. Ali Dhaka, Monday, August 28, 1995

Refreshing Partnership

The economic cooperation agreement reached between Dhaka and Bamako on con clusion of the 3-day visit here of the Malian President Alpha Oumar Konare will go down very well with the votaries of South-South cooperation. Here is an instance of two LDCs coming together not out of any self-pity but from a position a newly-discovered strength, based on an identification of their economic complementarities and a shared resolve to fully exploit these to their mutual benefit.

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. And for a country of that size Mali's population is not even one-tenth of Bangladesh's. Such statistics do reveal the tremendous potential for give-and-take between the two countries

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. Effective demands can be created in Mali for our goods.

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. President Zia having visited Mali in 1981.

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 allout to cultivate durable links with the Malian private enterprise. Sky is the limit in Mali. Let there be a partnership for development with that country.

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. And to carry the decision taken on Saturday to its logical culmination the admission tests to universities and degree collèges and medical and engineering degree courses should also go - and from this very year. There is no use half-removing a gangrenous leg, you have to go for amputation. The good intention and wise considerations behind the decision will largely be defeated if all those other admission tests are not abolished. We welcome the decision in anticipation that it will not end in half a measure.

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. Colleges bent upon letting only the truly deserving in and not those flaunting padded marksheets, took recourse to this sifting mechanism which was a thousand times more satisfactory device than the SSC exams, riddled as these were with a thousand holes. Exactly as students, their parents and even their schools spent all their energy in beating the board examinations, coaching centres in the open and individual teachers in the privacy of their residences mounted a campaign to beat the admission tests, charging the equivalent of all that a pupil had spent on the whole of his or her 10year schooling.

By one fell stroke the education authorities have set this roaring business at nought. 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 — his or her true worth for admissibility to higher education. This is a far bigger challenge than the coaching business. And the authorities have invited themselves to this crucial piece of jousting. They must succeed here. This is more important.

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. But these must not contribute to alienate their pupils from their roots only for the fact that the medium is English. For one thing English is now not just the language of England alone. It is now native to many lands, including very much the antipodal New Zealand. The English language and the English medium of education there do not detract from the pupil's becoming a very good New Zealander.

In Bangladesh, however, following perhaps a subcontinental pattern, EMS have largely worked as spawning ground for an other-thannative culture. In the symposium sponsored by this journal on this problem, Dr Innas Ali, the national professor, called on Saturday for an integrated education rather than the present compartments of EMS, BMS and madrassa education. That should be the goal. But for the present it is urgent that, as demanded in the symposium, a course in Bengali be made mandatory at all levels of EMS.

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. In fact, a very impressive range of what-to-do ideas were thrashed by the meet. May we add to those introduction of courses in nature study and countryside excursions and required performance in Bengali elocution and

recitation and music? 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?

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

religion alone could not be the basis of a nation state.

terday revolutionary movement in Bengal..."

N my young days my fa

ther used to refer to a

Muslim religious leader.

Haji Shariatuallah, who play

ed a leading role in the 19th

century in the revivalism of

innate 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). Haji Shariatuallah

gave leadership to what has

come to be known as Faraizi

Movement. The whole of

then Eastern Bengal, particu

larly the Swath comprising

Faridpur, Kushtia, Jessore,

Khulna, specially came under

the influence of the Move-

The relevance of the story

becomes more and more

meaningful to me now when I

realize that my grandfather

was given the Sobriquet of

Faraizi because of his strong

and unstinted espousal of this

spiritual movement for the

downtrodden peasants of the

area. He refused to be won

over by the British and always

stood for the cause of the

poor. My father's family tree

for generations are firmly

rooted in the soil of Bengal

although my mother's ances-

tors pride themselves to have

come to India from the town

of Izmir in Turkey whose one

scion is the now retired chief

architect of the Govt. of

India, Habib Rahman, known

for his magnum opus' the

Habib is better known as the

husband of Indrani Rahman,

once Miss India and perhaps

the best-known exponent of

Bharat Natyam in India: She

is still basy in her profession

teaching dances in New York!

today that "As in the mutiny

and the Great uprising of

1857 Hindus and Muslims of

Northern India had joined

together to fight the British,

so also in the indigo distur-

bances of 1858-60 in some of

the districts of West and

South Bengal and the peasant

revolt of 1872-73 in the

Pabna district. Hindu and

Muslim rural masses had

combined to resist exploita-

tion." And it has rightly been.

quoted by Prof. Salauddin

Ahmed "Titu Meer's revolt

and the Faraizi uprising

seemed to have inspired lat-

nor of the kisan praying for

the rains so that he may have

a good crop. This year this

time the politician is also

anxiously watching if the

monsõon would be as

and the prices would shoot

up and thereby would fetch

much less of votes than what

Congress circles are so wor-

ried this time is their con-

sidered calculation that

nothing short of a miracle

can get them even a slender

majority in the Lok Sabha.

The very carefully considered

opinion of all sections of the

Congress is that the party

may be nowhere a majority in

the Lok Sabha, and so will

have to think of a coalition

after the poll. Not unexpect-

edly, Narasimha Rao did have

a talk with Ramakrishna

Hegde before the latter pub-

licised his view in favour of a

coalition of all parties barring

the BJP, and that coalition

Hegde wants Rao to lead. As

it looks on paper, this may be

a sound proposition, but in

actual life there is little

chance of its being realised.

As it has turned out, Hegde

could not sell his plan to his

own party colleagues, as the

Janata Dal at its recent

Bangalore session turned it

down - sticking on to their

old thesis of fighting two en-

emies at the same time — the

Congress and the BJP. The

root cause of the Janata Dal

leaders' aversion to having

any alliance with either of

these two parties lies in the

The reason why the

they have been hoping for.

CANNING the sky is

no longer exclusively

the weatherman's jobs

It is interesting to note

Gandhi Ghat on the Jamuna.

Every Bengali Muslim middle-class family of today whose memory is still not jaded, remembers with certain amount of pride and exaltation that particular period of the Faraizi Movement in Bengal. In many ways it was a time of what we call the Bengali Renaissance — a period of Enlightenment. While the British Raj stranglehold had its near complete sway in Bengal as in the rest of India, Bengalis were trying to express themselves, this creativity in various ways, and in different planes: side by side we witness the rise of Brahma Samaj Movement. Raja Ram Mohan Roy's initiation of a movement for social and religious reforms, of which Tagore was an adher ent, and anti-colonial move ment in parts of Bengal, including Chittagong.

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. Syed Altaf Hossain, former left party leader, always chased by the British. later in Pakistan hounded by Ayub Khan. After his stint with Bhashani NAP, he became the founder-President of Gonotantri Dal in

Bangladesh. 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! The third and the last Syed Masood Rumi, my first cousin, who expired only recently was elected MP under BNP platform in 1979. He was the founder-president of the BNP in Kushtia. He also initially joined Bashani NAP like Syed Altaf Hossain. And if my memory serves me well Syed Altaf Hossain, before becoming founder-president of Gonotantri Party, had a stint as Minister for Roads

last cabinet of Bangabandhu. 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

and Communications in the

enemy of democracy. And his system was rejected by the

British people. 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. The three members of my family who are no more to represent the three distinct and differing political views

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." Today's House of Commons and the way it is conducted in the Westminster could certainly not be envisioned by any stretch of imagination by King John when he was forced to grant the Magna Carta to the British people! With the benefit of hindsight we can say that Cromwell was an aberration but he also played his role in the making of the British government. But it is certainly true that Cromwell's Puritanism was too severe and it smacked of intolerance — the greatest

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 gentleman, leaders in their own right, left their footprints, bold and clear, for their honesty, integrity and idealism. Their motto was 'pro-bono publico' Their passion and brio made them acceptable to the people across the political spectrum in the areas they represented. Syed Altaf Hossain, had to go underground many times during the Ayub regime (as during the British times) merely because he stood up for the rights of the Bengali people. Once when I was a school boy he spent some time in our village home incommunicado and it was perhaps the most memorable period of my life. His idealism was magnetic and his sense of value pristine: one

couldn't but be influenced by

the egalitarian thoughts he so much believed in. He very often quoted classical literature, an influence that has remained with me ever since.

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. Syed Altaf Hossain was greatly attracted to Plato's philosopher-king. Justice and justice alone would be the decideratum of ruling a state. And be thought that universal education was a sine qua non for achieving that objective. Syed Masood Rumi, and Dr Khademul Islam copiously referred to Kautilya's Arthashastra and Machiavelli's Prince. For successful statecraft and diplomacy introduction of moral underpinning was essential Koutilya and Machiavelli, of course, were themselves not so much concerned for the ruled as for the rulers!

But all three left this world leaving behind practically nothing excepting their name and fame! Syed Masood Rusar Sved Altaf Hossain and Di Khademul Islam not only lought for democracy and democratic values, they also inspired all and sundry to light against the hydraheaded monster of communalism and fundamentalism. They very often excoriated the British Raj for creating the Hindu Muslim differences and readily quoted Sir John Strachev to prove the point, who in 1888, hardly made any effort to hide the British imperial stratagem The truth plainly is that the existence side by side of these hostile creeds is one of

the strong points in our

lives, to not only establish economic and political rights but also to prove that religion — and the impoverished and the benighted, we were not parucularly 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

> thropy 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 Talmud we

political position in India!"

Leadership demands care.

picty, sacrifice and love for

the people one represents.

When my late father be-

queathed a Trust comprising

of two thirds of our property

for the welfare of the poor.

feet with honour and dignity.

spirit of sacrifice and philan-

Now we all appreciate the

非非非非非非非非

the lootsteps of history.

read, one of the most diffi-

cult things to give away is

kindness - but it is usually

returned Those three

have proved it. I do discern

Inscrutable are the Ways of God

Both Abdul Qayum and Salma Tahabbur died in harness. While their souls have gone away to consort with the stars in heaven, we mortals still crawling around for survival are yet unaware of our powerlessness, our inability to understand the logic of Nature, the epistemology of the forces controfling our Life and Death! Don't be angry if I quote Tacitas, Fortune tayoured him... in the opportune moment of his death." Because he was a good man. And Tahabbur will pause and listen, "Death has made her darkness beautiful with thee....." May God bless them both in Heaven.

Inida: Post-election Prospects?

Nikhil Chakravarty writes from New Delhi

The picture that emerges from this over-view 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

generous as it has been in the last seven years. Particularly those belonging to the ruling manner in which both of Congress party are conthem had treated it when it cerned that a poor monsoon was in power in 1989-90. might fail the main harvest 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. The fact of the matter was that the BJP itself at that moment was caught in the jam of its own contradiction — the dilemma of conducting itself as a responsible party while having to keep step with its fundamentalist fringe represented by the VHP and Bajrang Dal. In a sense, Advani's ratha yatra of 1990 reflected this contradiction, as he was concerned to keep his flock together. For the Janata Dal leadership, this BJP volte face was a sort of a great let-

down. 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. The bitter polemics that the Congress leadership launched against V P Singh's government had almost a subjective factor. namely Rajiv Gandhi's difficulty to adjust himself and his party as an Opposition, out-of-power party.

The Janata Dal's bitterness

tried to uphold the cause of

the Muslim Umma on a num-

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 Chandrashekhar'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. While on the count of the OBC, the Narasimha government has regained some lost ground by quietly taking over the essence of the Janata Dal's Mandal dispensation, it has hardly recovered the confidence of the Muslim minority particularly after its inaction during the Babri Masjid demolition and the failure to contain the subsequent communal violence; and on top of that, the reckless abuse of the TADA alienated community further. In this situation, it is not surprising that the National Front — that is in effect the Janata Dal leadership — could not be too enamoured at the prospect of a coalition with the Congress, as per the Hegde formula.

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. On this score, the position of the breakaway Arjun-Tewari point of attack against Narasimha Rao has been that ated from Rao and his govinhibition about an under-BJP against Mulayam Singh's government. To the surprise of Tewari and many others, Mulayam Singh's ouster was brought about by the somersault of the BSP in which Narasimha Rao's hand might have been as effective as the BJP's. Perhaps only Jayant Malhotra can tell the whole With all its failings and in-

firmity, the Congress as a whole finds it difficult to have an open alliance with the BJP. If any section of the Congress leadership has such an alliance in mind, it would

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 essen tially regional parties such as the BSP and even the AlaDMK on the basis of the principle that while the lion's Congress is rather peculiar. share of the seats in the While Arjun Singh's main Assembly would go to the regional party, the Congress in return will get the bigger the Muslims have been alien- chunk of the Lok Sabha seats the sort of understanding ernment, Narayan Dutt that Indira Gandhi had struck Tewari appears to have no with the AIADMK in 1971 which the Congress has constanding with the BJP's tinued ever since in Sangh Pariwar. In the spe- Tamilnadu. In Bihar. it will cific condition of Uttar not be surprising if such a Pradesh, Tewari was all set deal is struck by Rao with for a joint attack with the Laloo Prasad who would rather like to reinforce his position in Bihar with the Congress blessings than bother about Janata Dal strength in Lok Sabha Taking such regional parties. one by one, it is possible that Congress under Narasimha Rao's leadership may be hoping to manage a majority in the Lok Sabha. In much the similar way.

the BJP leadership is equally engrossed in identifying who could be its ally in different states. It may not have many choices on this score, but it knows that without allies, it

has no chance whatsoever of getting anywhere near power at the Centre. It is one thing to score impressingly 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. If the recent developments in West Bengal are an indicator of shape of things to come, it appears that the Left has passed its meridian. It can hardly afford to ignore the signals sent out by its decline in the prestigious Calcutta Municipal Corporation election. And there is no sign of its growth, whether it is in Tripura or Kerala, in both of which it is virtually on a

plateau - no sign of advance. The picture that emerges from this over-view 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. The force of events is driving the Republic towards genuine federalism - but most of our leaders seem to be fighting shy of boldly fac-

ing such an eventuality. — Mandira

The writer is an editor of Mainstream

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 perpetuated 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. I wonder, how long our anguish will continue! I know there is no short-cut, but is it not the time for someone to stand up?

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

ber of occasions. Of late, we are also happy to see our Prime Minister putting her efforts to convene an urgent summit meeting of the OIC heads of states. From the bottom of our heart, we wish her a meaningful success. But for our unfortunate Bosnian brethren, time is fast running out and a very quick action is the need of the hour. As such, I appeal to our Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto and Turkey's Tansu Ciller to join together their motherly hearts to unite the Muslims for standing up against the Serbian enemies. As a quick follow-up of the call for OIC Summit meeting on the Bosnian issue, the three Prime Ministers should immediately make joint visits to the capitals of the Islamic countries to drum up the Bosnian cause. They should start from

the East, where they will find

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

Meanwhile, I will urge our Prime Minister to invite both the Prime Ministers of Pakistan and Turkey to Dhaka so that they can set out for the mission from the capital of the second largest Muslim country in the world. I understand, Begum Zia has domestic political problems, but for a few days, she should gloss over these temporal difficulties for the sake of the greater cause of the Muslim Umma. Bosnia is bleeding: our fellow brothers are being lined up for mass execution by the Serbian hordes, our mothers and sisters are being torn apart by the Serbian hyenas under the very gloating eyes of the Yeltsins, the Majors, and even the Clintons. For the Muslim world. there is no time to waste.

Ahmed Ghani a willing partner in Malaysia, and then proceed westward Lalmatia, Dhaka.

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 go vernment showing different cogent reasons and the political turmoil in our country continues unabated.

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.

Three major opposition political parties - Awami League, Jamaat-e-Islami and Jatiya Party — have announced simultaneously from separate public meetings on August 16, 1995 fresh agitation programmes including identical 32-hour nationwide hartal on September 2-3, 1995 to gear up their movement demanding holding of general elections un-

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 an other for the last eighteen months at the cost of untold suffering of the people.

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

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 may easily and safely get rid of the great political impasse and an impending catastrophe provided BNP. AL. JI, JP and others sincerely and honestly agree to hold three to four general elections under a caretaker government to be headed by the Chief Justice of Bangladesh like former Chief Justice and Acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed who headed the caretaker government after the resignation of President Hussain Mohammad Ershad.

O H Kabir Dhaka-1203