

Think Anew

Sometimes choices are so pervasively bad in life that you really have to thank the stars to have been able to stick to the bad and stay out of the worse. Hartal, MK Gandhi's much-used and abused political tool for registering protest, on its umpteenth return to our life after some 51 weeks, could only make us entertain a smiliar feeling. We are relieved to know that BNP's first strike call in the nine month old regime of the Awami League government yesterday passed without any mentionably major visible loss. And a relief it certainly is that the BNP doesn't have any immediate strike on its mind.

The pity as we observed in an earlier leader is that this is only the beginning. But the question about the justification of such paralytic imposition in the name of politics remains unanswered as always. Will the leaders of BNP bother to answer what extraordinary circumstances have led to the alteration of their earlier position on hartal. Does it mean the repeated allusions they made of the huge economic loss due to the recurrent strike calls are no longer valid?

The issues the largest opposition tried to seek rationale from for yesterday's hartal could have been and should have been tackled in a different way—a way that is not as damaging as a call of countrywide strike. The allegations they have brought against the government could have been given a great deal more credibility and genuine popular support through the creation of public awareness with the help of facts and figures.

If BNP thought of and worked along a line that can be best described as premature, the government action of rounding up some of the opposition leaders only made matters worse. This meant an exercise of a black law under a very airy pretext. We are yet to know about any concrete charges against these leaders.

Both the ruling party and the opposition would do well to get it sunken in their mind that hartal as a reflection of popular sentiment has long been dead. People do not come out taking fright of it and also because it has dwindled to the level of an un-scheduled holiday. Economy and people's right are the worst sufferers. Invent some new and less harmful way to register protest.

A Hero of Our Times

It is like a dream come true. President Nelson Mandela is arriving Dhaka today on a three-day state visit. It is not strictly business trip when states strike up deals advantageous to both. He comes responding to an invitation to grace the closing functions of the 25th anniversary of our independence. And nothing could be nicer than for the great man to say that he was coming to say thanks to Bangladesh for her support of the South African struggle against apartheid.

Nelson Mandela is one great liberator of man. Perhaps of the liberators in the modern era, his work will endure the most. From Lenin to Castro, through Mao and Ho Chin Minh — those stupendous workers of social-miracles have but tried to free man from economic exploitation and social injustice as arising from class imbalances. Mandela's revolution has been altogether on a different front — perhaps more fundamental in nature than that involving the class positions. He has freed his people from racist exploitation and is trying his best, and is succeeding remarkably, to ensure that the underdog now raised to full recognition as man, does not take to a path of revenge. So far he has managed wonderfully in keeping the other partner in the seachange, FW de Clark and his whites, from resenting their part in it.

The meaning of what Mandela has done to South Africa can be better grasped if we appreciate that the whole history of the peoples of the subcontinent, wonderful in the main parts, has been bedevilled by racist fallouts that have come to us in the form of castes and an everpresent preference for the paler pigmentation of the epidermis in everything. From Buddhism to the Vaishnavite social revolution of Sree Chaitanya, nothing could blunt the spikes of social superiority of the fair-skinned victors over the dark-skinned in some hoary past at least three thousand years back.

And we are happy that President Suleman Demirel of Turkey and the most famous Arab of our generation, President Yasser Arafat of Palestine will also be here to lend colour and significance to the closing functions of our independence jubilee. We rejoice in welcoming all the three.

Deadly Business

Two young men were shot dead on Saturday in a single action and at the same spot — the Motijheel office of a manpower recruiting agency. It is yet to be established whether the victims were themselves terrorists come to extort money from that agency or they were there to recover their own money which they had paid out earlier for passage abroad. The fact is they have been shot by killers waiting for them.

This incident gives a new and diabolical turn to the already shady world of the *adam* exporters. Dhaka is fast sliding into the ganglands of old Chicago. And this must be stopped. Is there in it a hint of the rise of some kind of Mafia? Whatever the answer, the incident further confirms, in the most sinister way, that the manpower export business, murky from the beginning, is going to be as cloak-and-dagger underworld as there was any anywhere in the world.

The agent may not be a killer himself but he hired gunmen who did commit the ultimate crime. Now it is not impossible for the police to know about the identity of those who shot the two young men dead. The manpower agent who hired them ought to know.

In this particular incident the involvement of one recruiting agent may be symptomatic of the various irregularities resorted to in the operation of the entire business of manpower export. There have been attempts to streamline the operation but without much of a success. Let the government make sure that the business is transparent and only the genuine agents can stay in it.

A Friend Comes to Bangladesh

By the time this writer entered his office, at 5.55 in the afternoon in the Presidential Palace, Ankara, SULEYMAN DEMIREL had already met more than a hundred persons that day. In groups of ten, twenty-five, thirty, they keep coming to him. Three days a week he meets people from all walks of life to, as he says, "keep in touch with reality, and not to allow the walls of the palace to cut him off from his people." After this interview, he planned to meet a group of teachers, and then attend the final of a football tournament, being held in his name. Where from he gets energy to do all this is the best guarded secret in Turkey.

Suleyman Demirel is by far the oldest democratically elected leader in power in the Muslim world. Starting in 1965, he became the youngest Prime Minister of Turkey at the age of 40. Since then he has been elected to that post three more times. In 1993 he became Turkey's President.

In an exclusive interview, first-ever to a Bangladeshi newspaper, the veteran of many crises and unquestionably a survivor of all of them, President Suleyman Demirel discusses the many challenges that Turkey must face in an ever-changing world. Committed to a new and more dynamic relationship with Asia, especially Bangladesh, President Demirel appeared extremely well-versed on the history and economic challenges facing Bangladesh. He said he was proud to be a part of our Silver Jubilee celebrations.

The interview is in two parts. In one he answers questions submitted earlier. In the second he responds to impromptu questions that mainly deal with his style of governance and his personal philosophies. The interview, originally fixed for 20-minutes, lasted for an hour and ten minutes, was taken by The Daily Star Editor, MAHFUZ ANAM, at the Presidential Palace in Ankara, prior to his official visit to Bangladesh from 25-27 March, 1997.

Answers to Questions Submitted Earlier

The Daily Star (TDS): We are honoured by your coming visit to Bangladesh. Can you tell us what message you will be carrying for the people of Bangladesh? Is there a prospect of forging a special relationship between us? Will you take initiatives in forging such a relationship?

Suleyman Demirel (SD): Turkey and Bangladesh are two brotherly countries. Our peoples are bound with deep sentiments and respect for each other. For this reason, it is quite natural for Turkey to closely follow the developments in Bangladesh. We know that Bangladesh is faced with problems of varying degrees. However, we are confident that, with her natural resources, deep rooted culture, highly educated and devoted people, Bangladesh at the threshold of the 21st century is capable of meeting all the challenges and overcoming her problems which stand in her way to economic development.

We also highly value the commitment of Bangladesh to democracy, political stability, secularism and liberal economy.

There is no doubt that Bangladesh will continue to progress and prosper, ultimately achieving her goal to realise "Sonar Bangla — Golden Bangla" in a very near future.

Turkey will always stand on the side of Bangladesh in her endeavours to create a better and prosperous society for her people and for the generations to come. Therefore, I bring from 65 million Turkish people to their brothers in Bangladesh, sentiments of solidarity, respect and affection.

Turkey-Bangladesh Relations

TDS: What is your assessment of the present state of relations between Turkey and Bangladesh? Why has it not moved faster? What can we do now?

SD: One should consider Turco-Bangladeshi relations in the context of Turkey's relations with the Sub-Continent. These relations, which have their roots deep in history, are based on friendship, mutual respect and trust.

There is also a bond of brotherhood emanating from Islam which unites our peoples. Thus, we share the same faith, culture and common values.

On the other hand, we can never forget the invaluable moral and financial support that the Muslims of India and Bengal gave to the Turkish people during its struggle to chase away the occupation powers from the Turkish soil. The Turkish nation has always cherished this gesture with appreciation and gratitude.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, Turkey's political relations with this brotherly country have been excellent, not only on a bilateral basis but in international fora as well. In the UN and the OIC, Turkey and Bangladesh show exemplary cooperation and solidarity.

In spite of the deep sentiments that the two nations foster for each other, most regretfully, due to the geographic locations of Turkey and Bangladesh and the distance between them, their economic and commercial ties could not reach the level they deserve. However, for sometime we have been trying to overcome this obstacle and bring our business circles together. In our world today, where every moment new

technological developments are realised, distance should no longer pose a problem.

Therefore, we are exerting joint efforts with Bangladesh to eliminate any factor which hinders the enhancement of our economic and commercial cooperation. In this context, we support and encourage visits between the businessmen of our two countries. I believe that, we could share each other's experiences to realise common projects, not only in Turkey and Bangladesh but also in third countries. In fact, we are carefully studying every possibility of cooperation with Bangladesh.

It is true that after His Excellency Mohammed Ershad's visit to Turkey in 1990, no official visit at the presidential-level took place between Turkey and Bangladesh. For Turkey the early 1990's were the years of intense activities to cope with the dramatic changes in her region after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and for Bangladesh, they were the years of restructuring her democracy and economy and strengthening her regional position.

However, it will not be correct to define our relations with Bangladesh as inactive during this period, considering the fact that many mutual high-level visits took place after 1990, between our two countries. Especially, in the course of last year, these visits have been intensified.

For example, Navy Chief Admiral of Bangladesh H E Nurul Islam visited Turkey in October 1996. The Minister of Transport and Telecommunications of Bangladesh H E Muhammed Nasim's visit to Turkey took place in December 1996. Also the State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh H E Abul Hasan Chowdhury visited Turkey in January of this year.

On the Turkish side, Commander-in-Chief of the Turkish Armed Forces General Ismail Hakki Karadayi visited Bangladesh in December 1996. So, all these visits show that quite a dense activity is going on between Turkey and Bangladesh.

TDS: Do you see the prospect of any dramatic growth of relations between our two countries, especially in trade and commerce? What are the prospects of Turkish investment and joint ventures in Bangladesh?

SD: The trade volume between Turkey and Bangladesh unfortunately does not reflect the real potential of the two countries. It stands at about 25-30 million dollars a year, which is far too little.

One of the reasons for not being able to promote Turkey's economic and trade relations with Bangladesh is the geographic distance between them. We must try to overcome this obstacle so that our businessmen can get together easily whenever they want to transport their merchandise to each other's countries without any problems. In this respect we must seriously consider to establish direct flights from Turkey to Bangladesh and vice-versa. To set up the legal basis for direct air links, the two sides have already agreed on the text of a civil aviation agreement. This agreement is expected to be signed shortly.

Furthermore, to facilitate the sea transport, we must activate the maritime agreement between Turkey and

Bangladesh which was signed on November 1, 1986.

Another factor which affects Turkey's economic and trade relations with Bangladesh is the lack of information and constant communication.

Through the activities of our embassies in our respective countries and by encouraging frequent exchange of visits especially between the businessmen of the two countries, this negative factor could be eliminated. This is why we strongly support and encourage contacts with Bangladesh.

Apart from the two factors above, we should also complete the legal basis of the economic and trade relations between Turkey and Bangladesh.

Here, I am pleased to point out that the following economic agreements have already been concluded with Bangladesh.

— Trade Agreement, signed on 27 July 1976.

— Economic and Technical Cooperation Agreement, signed on 5 March 1979.

— Maritime Agreement, signed on 1 November 1986.

— Agreement on the Mutual Protection and Promotion of the Investments, signed on 12 December 1987.

— Technical Cooperation Agreement, signed on 14 May 1993.

— Memorandum of Understanding Concerning Cooperation on Different Industrial Sectors, signed on 5 April 1994.

In addition to these agreements, the two sides are actually working on "An agreement on avoidance of double taxation."

On the other hand, involvement of the Turkish contractors in Bangladeshi infrastructure projects as well as setting up joint ventures by our respective businessmen in Turkey and Bangladesh and in the third countries could undoubtedly boost the trade between the two countries.

Therefore, our businessmen should jointly explore the possibilities of investing and establishing joint ventures in each other's countries.

There is another important issue I would like to touch upon. It is establishing cooperation between the small and medium scale industries in Turkey and Bangladesh.

We attribute great importance to the development of our small and medium scale industries (SMSI). In fact, these industries are the backbone of the Turkish economy. To our knowledge, it is the same in Bangladesh.

In this context, we have to support and encourage our medium and small scale enterprises to cooperate with similar enterprises in other countries, so that they could invest, produce and market together. Otherwise, these enterprises will not be able to compete the developed markets of the Far East and Europe.

As you know, the small and medium scale industry enterprises in Turkey are quite successful in setting-up business in foreign countries. For example, we have 4,500 Turkish enterprises of this kind in Romania, 37,000 in Germany, and 50,000 in the European Union as a whole.

In support of the small and medium scale industries in Turkey, the Turkish Eximbank has directed 30 per cent of its export credits, in total, to this sector.

On the other hand, we have the intention of opening representation offices for SMSI's in New York, Paris, Frankfurt and New Delhi. We have already started to work on this project.

Furthermore, we would like to send out delegations to various countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia to find out possibilities of establishing cooperation between our and their SMSI sectors.

In this context, I believe that Turkey and Bangladesh can find many such enterprises which could join their efforts to fight their way into the developed markets.

As you know "The Small and Medium Scale Industry Development Organisation" of Turkey (KOSGEB) gives a great deal of support to and orients the said enterprises. It also organises training programmes for local and foreign participants.

We could put KOSGEB into contact with its counterpart in Bangladesh. These two organisations can exchange information and delegations to assess the modalities of possible coop-



eration between Turkey and Bangladesh.

Undoubtedly, mutual investments of direct or joint nature, will have a very important role in giving content to our economic relations.

I sincerely believe that Turkey and Bangladesh should join their efforts to bring wealth and prosperity to their respective peoples.

Prospect of Joint Ventures

TDS: What are the areas where Turkey can help Bangladesh with advanced technology and science, especially about human resource development?

SD: I am proud to say that Turkey has a fairly developed science and technology base and thus is in a good position to offer assistance to Bangladesh to develop its own human resources.

Bangladesh can make full use of our tertiary education facilities by sending students to our universities which are open to those foreign students who meet their admittance criteria.

Turkey and Bangladesh can cooperate on joint scientific projects and exchange scientists and lecturers. TUBITAK, Scientific and Technical Research Council of Turkey, has cooperation agreements with similar international institutions and will only be pleased to work closely with its counterpart in Bangladesh.

Turkey can also offer technical assistance to Bangladesh within the framework of the programmes designed by TIKA, Turkish Development and Cooperation Agency. TIKA has already been providing technical assistance to the Central Asian Republics and may easily prepare programmes to suit the requirements of Bangladesh.

I may also add that we have a very strong base for small and medium size enterprises. We can provide training to Bangladesh to develop its own small and medium size enterprises.

It comes to my mind that the funds of the UNDP office in Bangladesh may be directed to Turco-Bangladeshi cooperation projects which is to be developed to train Bangladeshi technicians in Turkey.

TDS: As a leading Muslim country how do you see the prospect of modernisation and democratisation of Muslim countries, with special reference to Middle East, South East Asia, South Asia and especially Turkey-Bangladesh relations?

SD: The radical transformation experienced in international relations with the end of the Cold War, in many respects also marked a new phase of human kind's evolution. We are currently in an age where values such as democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights are gaining universal recognition and where the ever-growing inclination among countries for greater political and economic cooperation has stimulated the trend towards regionalisation and globalisation. The globe is indeed increasingly shrinking in size due to the many economic, political and social avenues that are connecting people across the globe. This process of integration has further been propelled by the major leaps and breakthroughs recorded in science and communications technologies. A new age of knowledge is embracing the entire globe.

I quite naturally believe that the Islamic world must also partake and reap maximum benefit from this period of change and progression. I, therefore, wholeheartedly support and wish to see the growing trend towards modernisation and democratisation in the world reflected in Muslim societies as well. For the truth of the matter is, the path to tomorrow's world leads through keeping abreast of contemporary development that are shaping the world today. Those countries that decline to show an effort in this respect, or who fail to grasp the opportunities that modernisation and democratisation will create for their societies cannot aspire to take their place in the international family of contemporary nations. Obviously, all countries have their own distinctive characteristics that are defined by their own history and culture. However, it seems that subscribing to a set of minimum common

criteria, as far as modernisation and democratisation are concerned, is inevitable.

As a democratic and secular Muslim country whose solid and functioning democracy has resolutely demonstrated that secularism and democracy can indeed thrive in a predominantly Muslim society, Turkey, today, is increasingly being perceived as a model within the Islamic world.

I too personally share in this assertion and believe that Turkey's experience in this regard can offer an exemplary case model.

TDS: How does Turkey see its role as a spokesman of the developing world?

SD: Turkey's rich history and unique geographic location simultaneously place it with one foot firmly grounded in the West and the other solidly rooted in the East. The way in which Turkey straddles both worlds and its economic achievements suggest that it is a member of both the developed and developing world. Given this disposition, it would be more accurate to regard Turkey as a bridge between the "North and South", rather than a spokesperson for the developing world. One of the main objectives of Turkish foreign policy has always been to reap optimum benefit from its unique location as well as to place the advantages this geography confers on it at the service of the countries of its wide reaching environment. Thus, Turkey, not only aspires to serve as a vital economic and commercial link between the developed and developing worlds but has also always advocated greater economic cooperation, interaction and solidarity between the two. This, obviously, also implies increased development assistance from the developed countries and greater integration of the developing countries with the world economy.

TDS: Is Turkey making any special effort to improve her ties with Asia? So far it appeared to have concentrated more on Europe. Do you think Turkey has neglected Asia? Do you want special ties with South Asia with Bangladesh playing a pivotal role?

SD: As a developing country we are in need of markets for our products. As a member of EU can Turkey help us in getting wider access to European markets? By virtue of its unique location linking seas and continents Turkey follows a multidimensional foreign policy which allows her to conduct close relations with every country in the world — Asia and the Far East being no exception. Asia has always been of focal interest to Turkey, because our economies complement one another with most of the Asian states, besides the fact that we have, historically, culturally and economically deep-rooted relations. Together with Turkey some Asian countries have been labelled among the 10 "Big Emerging Markets" by the Department of Commerce of the United States. This in itself shows how much our interests converge with Asia.

The emergence of a belt of independent Turkic Republics in Central Asia in the aftermath of the Cold War which enabled Turkey to rekindle its fraternal, historical and cultural ties with these Republics constitutes yet another important dimension of Turkey's keen interest and policy towards Asia.

A recent development, I would like to bring to your attention, which explicitly denotes the importance Turkey attaches to promoting its cooperation with the region, particularly in the economic and commercial fields, is that Turkey applied for and was admitted as a member last year to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), a regional economic commission of the United Nations. Turkey is also a member of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE).

Turkey's Western European and Asian identity is internationally acknowledged and certified by the very fact that it is both the country represented in the only country represented in the Western European and Asian regional groups of the United Nations.

Furthermore, Turkey's broad ranging associations in such diverse organisations as NATO, the OECD, OSCE, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the Western

European Union, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Economic Cooperation Organisation and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation offer insight into the importance Turkey attaches to pursuing a dynamic foreign policy and spreading its weight in a proportional manner between East and West.

Turkey will continue to further expand its intense relations with Europe while diversifying its relations and cooperation with the countries of Asia. It goes without saying that further developing our relations with the fraternal country of Bangladesh is a priority for Turkey.

On the other hand, no one can deny that the Republic of Turkey is closely bonded with Europe. Besides the centuries-old traditional ties we have, Turkey and Europe share the same democratic and secular values that are today a distinct part of the chain of universal values.

Turkey's prospective union with the European Union will obviously benefit the rich ties Turkey enjoys with Asian countries. As a matter of fact, the customs union with the EU can be considered as a starting point in forming the link that Turkey can strengthen between Asia and Europe. No doubt, Bangladesh is to benefit from Turkey's advantageous position.

TDS: Turkey is taking a new leadership role in the Muslim world by forming the so-called group of 8. How do you see that group evolving, and how can a country like Bangladesh benefit from it?

SD: The prospective D-8 is a consultation and cooperation forum where countries with a fast developing economy, a vast potential and similar point of view regarding the world economy come together.

The member countries of the prospective D-8, i.e. Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey make up a total population of 800 million, a total area of 7.5 million kms. a total GNP of over 600 billion USD and a trade volume of 300 billion USD altogether.

The prospective D-8 is a global organisation whose membership will be open to other developing countries, subscribing to the goals, objectives and principles of the organisation and sharing common bonds. D-8 will not prejudice the bilateral and multilateral commitments of the member countries.

All members of the prospective D-8 are at the same time members of the OIC. On the other hand, they maintain close relations with other organisations in their respective regions and are active in various regional groupings as well. ASEAN, BSEC, ECO, OAS, Arab League are some of these organisations.

The idea regarding the establishment of the D-8 was born at the "Cooperation in Development" Conference held in Istanbul on 22-23 October, 1996, with the participation of the same countries.

Following this Conference, the Senior Officials (Commission) of the prospective D-8 countries came together in Ankara on 9 November 1996 and determined a number of areas of cooperation to recommend to their Heads of Government/State. According to the recommendation at this meeting, the Foreign Ministers' Meeting (Council) was held in Istanbul on 4 January, 1997.

The Foreign Ministers decided that the Summit Meeting of the Heads of State/Government will be held within the first half of 1997. It is envisaged to officially establish the D-8 at this Summit.

Before the Summit, Commission meetings will be held in order to accomplish the preparation. The second Commission meeting will be held in Anatolia on 13-14 March, 1997.

TDS: How do you see Turkey's role in global politics in the 21st Century?

SD: Our main goal is to consolidate the Turkish Republic as a powerful, stable, prosperous and democratic country. We will fervently pursue the ideals of Atatürk, the founder of the Republic of Turkey.

In the economic field, our priority is to lower the annual inflation rate to single digit, to