

Is the opposition for something new?

It should now be obvious to all that there is popular discontent with all political forces. That does not translate into voting out an incumbent administration, however. After three elections, the voters have seen the best and worst of all the major parties.

FARID BAKHT

THE top brass of the Awami League look very long in the tooth. As some of the stalwarts wearily don their snazzy black waistcoats to demonstrate their loyalty to Sheikh Mujib (and the fact that they were with him), they must be wondering if this is their last chance. The future looks bleak if they do not come out winners in the next election. The new faces are either not to be seen or occasionally stick their heads above the parapet. Contrast that with the governing party. The ruling BNP is caught in a sandwich of old and new, co-existing uneasily. They resemble two tectonic plates, which have not yet completed their clash. That is why we have a jumbo cabinet where the old guard are still clinging to their full ministerial posts, while the new breed have elbowed their way in as state ministers. It is a certainty that if the regime were to return to power, we would be saying farewell to most, if not all, of the old-timers.

Will the AL do something new?

Despite the attempt to wipe out the top echelons of the Awami League leadership last August, there was an almost absent reaction from the people. There was profound shock but precious little support. If any one, especially the "Camelot" family, wishes to see their legacy continue, as the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty has in India, then was the time to take.

One of the commonly heard complaints heard about politicians is that they want power. Well, of course they do. That is their primary objective and reason for being. The real complaint is that they never prepare themselves for the leadership and therefore are next to useless when they do attain office. Or they prepare to look after their friends and benefactors, but forget about the voters.

The Awami League has failed to take advantage of a government seriously adrift. Rocketing food and fuel prices, a depressed rural economy, uncertainty over the garments industry, worsening electricity and water supply should be sufficient for any opposition to build up a movement. Joining parliament, making their case and showing maturity would have gone down well. Instead, they remain besotted with legal and electoral processes, which seem quite irrelevant to ordinary people.

There cannot be much more callous an action than calling successive harlots. This amounts to closing down workers' and businessmen's factories, shops, and offices. They are denying them the right to make a living.

More of the same?

It is likely the Old Guard will ride out any challenge until after the next election. That will ensure that Awami League has a good chance of losing the next election, and those front men will be kicked out. But then, it will be too little, too late.

Are there any AL Young Turks out there with new answers? If there are any, they will take heart if Joy dumped his job, returned to Dhaka, and made a new start. Otherwise, those waiting on the sidelines will keep their powder dry. But even if he did, what would he do? Without a compelling vision, it would merely be a case of securing the dynasty. That would not be acceptable to the wider public.

The only plausible reason for entry would be to make changes to the Old Guard, cleaning up the party at the top. That signal would do more to generate public support than any "movement on electoral reform." Reform should start at home by democratising the party.

No guarantees

It should now be obvious to all that there is popular discontent with all political forces. That does not translate into voting out an incumbent administration, however. After three elections, the voters have seen the best and worst of all the major parties. They are not likely to be impressed by "more of the same" from the opposition, despite their reservations about the failures of the current regime. It may be reasonable to attack the incumbent over corruption, but is anyone going to believe that it will be any different if the other lot are in power? They will naturally ask themselves if the alternative bunch could do any better. The answer would probably be no.

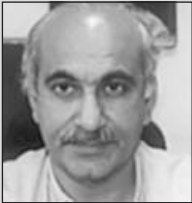
Certainly in their current format

Unfortunately, the opposition seem keen to keep to the familiar pattern. This seems to mean forming an "alliance" with so-called progressive parties (who have no electoral base) and polarising the country in a battle between secularism versus fundamentalism. This will not be enough to secure victory. It may even backfire.

It may also lead to a situation beyond their control.

Farid Bakht is the founder of Futuurebanga Network.

Jinnah



M.J. AKBAR

WELL, young man. I will have nothing to do with this pseudo-religious approach to politics. I part company with Congress and Gandhi. I do not believe in working up mob hysteria"

The young man was a journalist, Durga Das. The older man was Mohammad Ali Jinnah. The reference is from Durga Das' classic book, India from Curzon to Nehru and After. Jinnah said this after the 1920 Nagpur session, where Gandhi's non-cooperation resolution was passed almost unanimously.

On October 1, 1906, 35 Muslims of "noble birth, wealth, and power" called on the fourth earl of Minto, Curzon's successor as Viceroy of India. They were led by the Aga Khan and used for the first time a phrase that would dominate the history of the subcontinent in the 20th century: the "national interests" of Indian Muslims. They wanted help against an "unsympathetic" Hindu majority. They asked, very politely, for proportional representation in jobs and separate seats in councils, municipalities, university syndicates and high court benches. Lord Minto was happy to oblige. The Muslim League was born in December that year at Dhaka, chaired by Nawab Salimullah Khan, who had been too ill to join the 35 in October. The Aga Khan was its first president.

The Aga Khan wrote later that it was "freakishly ironic" that "our doughtiest opponent in 1906" was Jinnah, who "came out in bitter hostility toward all that I and my friends had done ... He was the only well-known Muslim to take this attitude ...

He said that our principle of separate electorates was dividing the nation against itself."

On precisely the same dates that the League was formed in Dhaka, Jinnah was in nearby Calcutta with 44 other Muslims and roughly 1,500 Hindus, Christians, and Parsis, serving as secretary to Dadabhai Naoroji, president of the Indian National Congress. Dadabhai was too ill to give his address, which had been partially drafted by Jinnah and was read out by Gopal Krishna Gokhale.

Sarojini Naidu, who met the 30-year-old Jinnah for the first time here, remembered him as a symbol of "virile patriotism." Her description is arguably the best there is: "Tall and stately, but thin to the point of emaciation, languid and luxurious of habit, Mohammad Ali Jinnah's attenuated form is a deceptive sheath of a spirit of exceptional vitality and endurance. Somewhat formal and fastidious, and a little aloof and imperious of manner, the calm hauteur of his accustomed reserve but masks, for those who know him, a naive and eager humanity, an intuition quick and tender as a woman's, a humour gay and winning as child's ... a shy and splendid idealism which is of the very essence of the man."

Jinnah entered the central legislative council in Calcutta (the capital of British India then) on January 25, 1910, along with Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee, and Motilal Nehru. Lord Minto expected the council to rubber stamp "any measures we may deem right to introduce." Jinnah's maiden speech shattered such pomposness. He rose to defend another Gujarati working for his people in another colony across the seas, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Jinnah expressed "the highest pitch of

Khan attended the League session of 1914, and in 1915, the League tent had a truly unlikely guest list: Madan Mohan Malviya, Surendranath Banerjee, Annie Besant, B.G. Horniman, Sarojini Naidu and Mahatma Gandhi. When Jinnah did join the League in 1913, he insisted on a condition, set out in immaculate English, that his "loyalty to the Muslim League and the Muslim interest would in no way and at no time imply even the shadow of disloyalty to the larger national cause to which his life was dedi-

meeting had to be adjourned. It reconvened the next day in the safer milieu of the Taj Mahal Hotel. The next year Jinnah became president of the League for the first time, at Lucknow.

Motilal Nehru, in the meantime, worked closely with Jinnah in the council. When the munificent Motilal convened a meeting of fellow-legislators to his handsome mansion in Allahabad in April, he considered Jinnah "as keen a nationalist as any of us. He is showing his community the way to Hindu-

lims would make a "joint demand for a Representative Government in India."

Enter Gandhi, who never entered a legislature, and believed passionately that freedom could only be won by a non-violent struggle for which he would have to prepare the masses.

In 1915 Gokhale advised Gandhi to keep "his ears open and his mouth shut" for a year, and see India. Gandhi stopped in Calcutta on his way to Rangoon and spoke to students. Politics, he said, should

"Mr Gandhi." There were instant cries of "Mahatma Gandhi." Without a moment's hesitation, Jinnah switched to "Mahatma Gandhi." Later, he referred to Mr Mohammad Ali, the more flamboyant of the two Ali Brothers, both popularly referred to as Maulana. There were angry cries of "Maulana." Jinnah ignored them. He referred at least five times more to Ali, but each time called him only Mr Mohammad Ali.

Let us leave the last word to Gandhi. Writing in Harijan of June 8, 1940, Gandhi said, "Quaid-e-Azam himself was a great Congressman. It was only after the non-cooperation that he, like many other Congressmen belonging to several communities, left. Their defection was purely political." In other words, it was not communal. It could not be, for almost every Muslim was with Gandhi when Jinnah left the Congress.

History might be better understood if we did not treat it as a heroes-and-villains movie. Life is more complex than that. The heroes of our national struggle changed sometimes with circumstances. The reasons for the three instances I cite are very different; their implications radically at variance. I am not making any comparisons, but only noting that leaders change their tactics. Non-violent Gandhi, who broke the empire three decades later, received the Kaiser-I-Hind medal on June 3, 1915 (Tagore was knighted the same day) for recruiting soldiers for the war effort. Subhas Bose, ardently Gandhian in 1920, put on uniform and led the Indian National Army with support from Fascists. Jinnah, the ambassador of unity, became a partitionist.

The question that should intrigue us is why. Ambition and frustration are two reasons commonly suggested in India, but they are not enough to create a new nation. Jinnah made the demand for Pakistan only in 1940, after repeated attempts to obtain constitutional safeguards for Muslims and attempts at power-sharing had failed. What happened, for instance, to the Constitution that the Congress was meant to draft in 1928? On the other hand, Congress leaders felt that commitments on the basis of any community would lead to extortion from every community. The only exception made was for Dalits, then called Harijans.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, who remained opposed to partition even after Nehru and Patel had accepted it as inevitable, places one finger on the failed negotiations in United Provinces after the 1936-37 elections, and a second on the inexplicable collapse of the Cabinet Mission Plan of 1946 which would have kept India united -- inexplicable because both the Congress and the Muslim League had accepted it. The plan did not survive a press conference given by Nehru. Jinnah responded with the unbridled use of the communal card, and there was no turning back.

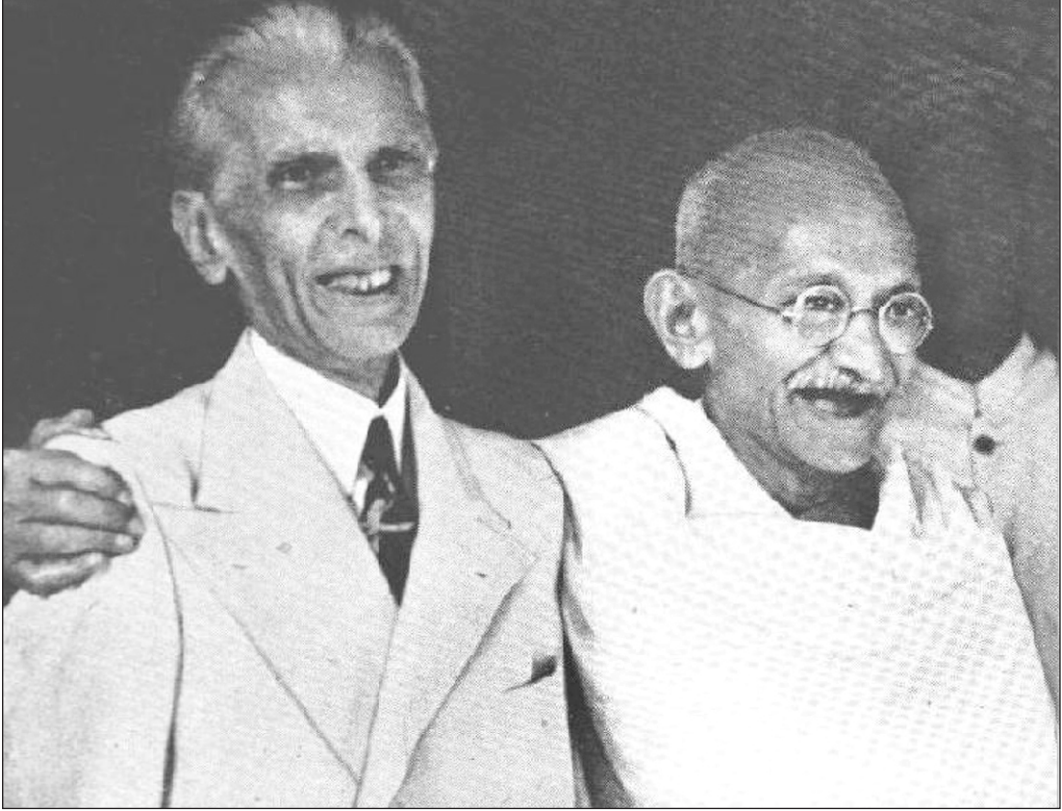
A deeply saddened Gandhi spun August 15, 1947 as a false dawn (to quote Faiz). He spent the day not in celebrations in Delhi but in fasting at Calcutta. Thanks to Gandhi -- and H.S. Suhrawardy -- there were no communal riots in Calcutta in 1947.

Facts are humbling. They prevent you from jumping to conclusions.

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BYLINE

Non-violent Gandhi, who broke the empire three decades later, received the Kaiser-I-Hind medal on June 3, 1915 (Tagore was knighted the same day) for recruiting soldiers for the war effort. Subhas Bose, ardently Gandhian in 1920, put on uniform and led the Indian National Army with support from Fascists. Jinnah, the ambassador of unity, became a partitionist. The question that should intrigue us is why. Ambition and frustration are two reasons commonly suggested in India, but they are not enough to create a new nation. Jinnah made the demand for Pakistan only in 1940, after repeated attempts to obtain constitutional safeguards for Muslims and attempts at power-sharing had failed.



Jinnah with Gandhi

indignation and horror at the harsh and cruel treatment that is meted out to Indians in South Africa." Minto objected to a term such as "cruel treatment." Jinnah responded at once: "My Lord! I should feel much inclined to use much stronger language." Lord Minto kept quiet.

On March 7, 1911 Jinnah introduced what was to become the first non-official act in British Indian history, the Wakf Validating Bill, reversing an 1894 decision on waqf gifts. Muslims across the Indian empire were grateful.

Jinnah attended his first meeting of the League in Bankipur in 1912, but did not become a member. He was in Bankipur to attend the Congress session. When he went to Lucknow a few months later as a special guest of the League (it was not an annual session), Sarojini Naidu was on the platform with him. The bitterness that divided India did not exist then. Dr M.A. Ansari, Maulana Azad and Hakim Ajmal

cated." Gokhale that year honoured Jinnah with a phrase that has travelled through time: it is "freedom from all sectarian prejudice which will make him (Jinnah) the best ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity." In the spring of 1914 Jinnah chaired a Congress delegation to London to lobby Whitehall on a proposed Council of India bill.

When Gandhi landed in India in 1915, Jinnah, as president of the Gujarat Society (the mahatmas of both India and Pakistan were Gujaratis), spoke at a garden party to welcome the hero of South Africa. Jinnah was the star of 1915. At the Congress and League sessions, held in Mumbai at the same time, he worked tirelessly with Congress president Satyendra Sinha and Mazharul Haque (a Congressman who presided over the Muslim League that year) for a joint platform of resolutions. Haque and Jinnah were heckled so badly at the League session by mullahs that the

Muslim unity." It was from this meeting in Allahabad that Jinnah went for a vacation to Darjeeling and the summer home of his friend Sir Dinshaw Manockjee Petit (French merchants had nicknamed Dinshaw's small-built grandfather petit and it stuck) and met 16-year-old Rutlie. I suppose a glorious view of Everest encouraged romance. When Rutlie became 18 she eloped and on April 19, 1918 they were married. Rutlie's Parsi family disowned her, she separated from Jinnah a decade later. (The wedding ring was a gift from the Raja of Mahmudabad.)

As president, Jinnah engineered the famous Lucknow Pact with Congress president A.C. Mazumdar. In his presidential speech Jinnah rejoiced that the new spirit of patriotism had "brought Hindus and Muslims together ... for the common cause." Mazumdar announced that all differences had been settled, and Hindus and Mus-

OBSERVING LAND RIGHTS DAY

Towards attainment of Millennium Development Goals

MD. ABDUL KADER

THE safe, secure and affordable access to land by the poor is a significant factor in poverty reduction, which can also contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The reduction by half of the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 needs sustainable economic growth at a rate substantially higher than population growth. Securing long term economic growth involves tackling the legal, institutional and social issues which prevent the poor gaining access to assets such as land and ensuring that the economic growth is environmentally sustainable and that the quality of poor people's environments is maintained.

Considering these issues and for replicating the great success of the landless people in Ghughudah Beel as well as other parts of the country in gaining rightful access to khas land Samata and its like-minded 120 national and international NGOs, CSOs and CBOs under the platform namely Land Rights Day National Observation Committee' celebrate 10th June as Land Rights Day. The landless male and female of Ghughudah beel at Santhia Upazila of Pabna district established their rights over khas land through a heroic movement on 10th June in 1985. This was their valiant victory but in the process, many landless people sacrificed their lives among them Intaj Ali, Lokman Hossain, Lalmoan, Haider Ali and Kalimuddin are notable.

This year the committee organised 'Press Briefing' at 25 districts and 'Mass Rally and Memorandum Submission' at 200 Upazilas under 40 districts in Bangladesh as a part of its weeklong programme to observe the occasion. On 10th June the committee organised 'Big Mass

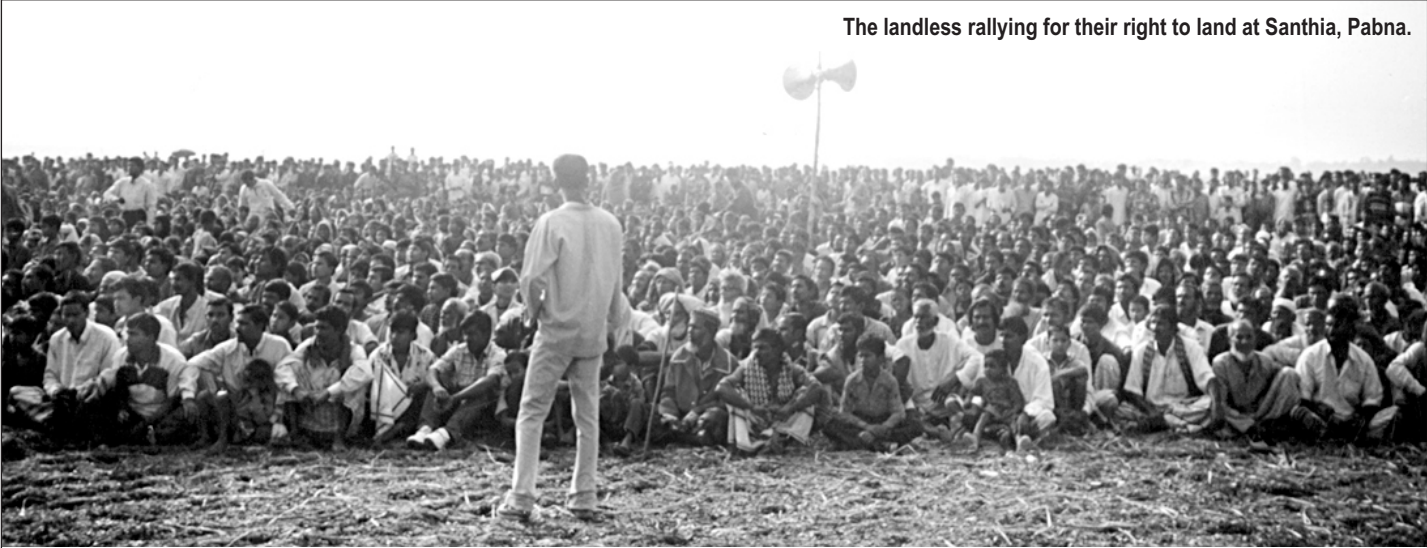
Gathering' with around 50,000 landless male and female at Ghughudah Beel in order to mark the day and raise voice of the landless people to establish their rights. The theme of the year was 'Establish, Land Rights Cause Agrarian Reform, Empower the Urban and Rural Poor'.

In the third world context, land is an important asset for the poor providing a basis for shelter, food production and other livelihood activities. A piece of land can provide a family relief from hunger and ensure right to live in the society with due respect, honour and dignity. The ownership of land has been playing a significant and active role in social, economic as well as political freedom of man. Consequently, the ownership of land has been their dream for a long time.

The countries that have reduced poverty such as India, Indonesia, China and also Bangladesh have shown a strong connection to agriculture growth. A recent study covering 58 countries concluded that a 10 percent increase in agricultural productivity was associated with a 6 percent poverty reduction in the proportion of people living on \$1 a day. The relationship between economic growth and equity is very complex; however, agricultural growth that benefits the poor is strongly associated with equitable distribution of land. Greater equity in land holding is a key to rural poverty reduction.

Land is a very scarce resource compared to the size of population in Bangladesh. However, a large amount of public resources (khas land, khas water bodies, char land, railway land, vested properties, embankments, cole etc.) remain legally under the government. In reality, an unholy coalition of local elite, corrupt government officials, such civil society people and political activists as always take shelter

Equitable distribution of assets provides a foundation for achieving broad based growth. In the last three decades, we have experimented different approaches (e. g service delivery, micro-credit etc.) for poverty reduction. However, the poverty in the country has been reduced at a very slow rate, only 1.5 percent. We need at least 7 percent of economic growth rate and 3 percent poverty reduction rate in order to achieve Millennium Development Goal.



The landless rallying for their right to land at Santhia, Pabna.

under successive governments occupying and enjoying these public resources. As per the law, all these public resources are supposed to be distributed among the genuine landless poor.

According to the research study report of Human Resource Development Center (HRDC), the estimated amount of identified khas land in Bangladesh is 3.3 million acres with 0.8 million acres of agricultural land, 1.7 million of acres of non-agricultural land and 0.8 million acres of khas water bodies. In

addition, as per the report on 'Riverine Chars in Bangladesh' prepared by ISPAN (Irrigation Supports Project for Asia and North; east) published in 2000, up to the year 1991 there was 1722.89 square kilometers charland in the flow channels of only three major rivers namely Jamuna, Padma and Meghna in Bangladesh. Besides, a huge amount of char land is lying in the channels of other two hundred rivers, which crisscross the country. It is very true that we can not satisfy all the landless families

(consisting 57.5% of the total population) through this khas resource distribution. However, we can rehabilitate at least a significant portion of the landless families on these public resources and in that way we can achieve the MDG regarding reducing by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty. In our experience, we find that the crops produced, a plot of land (1-2 acres based on the fertility of land) could provide year-long food security to an average family (5-6 members) and increase

income and savings of the family. We also found that it plays a significant role in raising extreme poor to non-poor (income poverty perspective) level.

But this is not an easy task. It needs greater public demand and political will of the government. The following need to be done for achieving success:

- Ensuring distribution of all khas lands among the genuine landless people according to the government policy.
- Increasing representation of civil

society and landless people in khas land distribution and management committees from Upazila to national level.

- Stopping eviction of the urban poor from slums and ensuring their accommodation on khas land at easy installments.
- Strictly stopping acquisition of the khas land and water bodies in the name of real estate business.
- Ensuring equal rights of women over khas land and inherited property.
- Containing all evil attempts of transferring khas land to land grabbers.
- Stopping distribution of agricultural land in the name of water bodies.
- Ensuring the share-cropping law for share-cropper.
- Resettling the minimum wage for agricultural labours and ensuring the equal wage for women.
- Allocating water bodies to the genuine professional successors of fishermen.
- Preventing false documentation and restoring khas land under government control.
- Distributing the unused khas land of Forest Department acquired by the government in the coastal area among the landless people.
- Making the alluvium and diluvium law pro-poor and registering all char lands as khas lands.
- Distributing char land among the landless giving priority to the people affected by river erosion.
- Establishing C.L.O. and modernising the land record keeping system to prevent false documents.
- Combining record, registration and settlement under a single ministry.
- Re-fixing the agriculture land ceiling according to the land classification at rural and urban areas.
- Implementing the ceiling law strictly and recovering and redi-

tributing ceiling surplus land among the genuine landless people.

- Establishing land court in every district to settle down land litigation.
- Establishing accountability in land management and appointing efficient, honest and permanent staff in land survey.
- Forming a separate land commission for indigenous people living in the plain lands and start functioning of the land commission for Chittagong Hill Tracts.
- Stopping commercial shrimp cultivation which destroys environment and threatens small farmers.
- Stopping use of chemical fertilizer and harmful hybrid seeds and pesticides.
- Distributing the urban khas land at division and district level, including Dhaka and other cities, among the Dalit people to build Dalit palli.
- Repealing the S.A.R.S records which have been reordered illegally as private property from the C.S records of khas land.

Equitable distribution of assets provides a foundation for achieving broad based growth. In the last three decades, we have experimented different approaches (e. g service delivery, micro-credit etc.) for poverty reduction. However, the poverty in the country has been reduced at a very slow rate, only 1.5 percent. We need at least 7 percent of economic growth rate and 3 percent poverty reduction rate in order to achieve Millennium Development Goal. We think poverty reduction through establishing land rights of people would be the sustained and significant approach to achieve the MDGs. This is the core objective of observing Land Rights Day.

MD. Abdul Kader is Executive Director of Samata.