

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

What's Mamata victory all about -- for us?



IT is only natural to pore over the results of Bidhan Sabha elections in the neighbouring Indian

state of West Bengal to try and assess its likely bearing on West Bengal-Bangladesh ties, and more important, on Indo-Bangla relations.

Look at the equation between Trinamool Congress (TMC) and Sonia Gandhi-led Indian National Congress, the majority partner in the UPA government at the centre, to emerge from the West Bengal polls. And you have a clue to the potential of how it might impact Indo-Bangla relations.

The Trinamool has bagged 185 seats to its electoral partner Congress' 42. Despite being the single majority party TMC is keen to form the government with the Congress, clearly considering how it would ensure the centre's cooperation with the state government. The disconnect between Left Front government and Union Home Minister Chidambaram on the question of Maoist insurgency can be recalled here to reinforce the point.

But to think Mamata owes to Congress more than the latter to her would be grossly erroneous. At heart, the Congress must be feeling indebted to the Trinamool wave as personified by Mamata, on the crest

of which it rode to tally a sizeable chunk of seats. The Congress (I), long since banished from West Bengal, by the seven times election winner Left Front, has posted a foothold in the state -- thanks to the Mamata chariot.

In this overall context, Bangladesh can expect a favourable concerted policy approach and direction from both the union and the state governments to her outstanding issues with India. The question is how serious, forthcoming and focused the combine would be to place Bangladesh atop its regional list of agenda. For our part, we hope to see a vigorous hands-on policy towards Bangladesh.

From records of agreements inked between our two countries it appears, however, that the first Ganges water sharing accord was signed by the Janata government, and the second was consummated in 1996 courtesy of a minority government in India. And the Chittagong Hill Tracts agreement was signed with the PCJSS at the time of a caretaker cabinet headed by I. K. Gujral. What clinched the CHT accord was India demanding that the tribal refugees and their leaders encamped in Tripura return to Bangladesh.

In other words, the legacy of problem-solving so far as Bangladesh is concerned somehow has had little to do with stable and strong governments in India. Time has now come to grapple with outstanding Indo-Bangla issues from a position of strength in both countries. We reckon the conditions couldn't have been more conducive to resolving



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bilateral disputes than at present. The first words to come from Mamata Banerjee sounded both pragmatic and optimistic. She said: "The relations between our two countries are good but can be improved further." Clearly, she is aware of the predominant role of the centre in shaping bilateral rela-

tions between two countries, especially in matters of common water sharing, border demarcation, and delineation of maritime boundary.

There is, of course, a West Bengal say on the issues like, for instance, the former Left Front chief minister Jyoti Basu played his part in bringing about the Ganges water sharing

agreement with its review clause. As for the borders, we share most of these with West Bengal so it can influence and help the centre in delimiting the 6.4 kilometres of the un-demarcated land border besides ratifying the Mujib-Indira land border agreement of 1974.

Incidentally, one recalls an obser-

vation from Left Front leadership that if a greater proportion of Bengali-speaking BSF personnel is employed on the borders this could be an answer to border killings of Bangladeshi citizens.

The memoranda of understanding signed between Indian PM Manmohan Singh and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina in January last year laid a pathway for intense engagements between the two countries at the government-to-government and people-to-people levels. The understanding encompassed transit-related infrastructure building, credit line to Bangladesh, freeing up of the list of tradeables from Bangladesh, exchange of enclaves in adverse possessions, deferring signing of interim Teesta water agreement until after the West Bengal elections et all.

Bangladeshis would like to see just and equitable solution of issues with India as tangible benefits are derived by Bangladesh for all to see. Clearly, India's generosity as a big neighbour is on test.

A final word on trust-building and taking things forward from here. There is just no issue between India and Bangladesh that doesn't admit of negotiated settlement based on mutual respect for sovereignty and equality of states. Since the cultural bonding is enormously strengthened following the epochal *Rabindric* celebrations, it is turn for the political will to help build an era of peace and prosperity in this part of the world.

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The un-fairy tale of Obama and Osama

ALAMGIR KHAN

OF the 98 Nobel Peace Prize winners from 1901 to 2010, which Nobel Peace Laureate ordered and watched with relish the killing of an unarmed person before his family members and disposal of his body into the sea? If this question is given in any school exam nowadays, every boy and girl will correctly answer: American President Barack H.

Obama and Osama are real persons, far away from any character in a fairy tale, but the Bush-Laden story has run along the same line. How many more times is the same fairy tale going to be enacted on this world-stage before our eyes?

Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize winner of 2009.

President George W. Bush wanted Osama bin Laden "Dead or Alive," in September 2001 after the demolition of the Twin Towers in New York. George Bush's act did not match his words; he was more interested in occupying Afghanistan and Iraq sidestepping his rhetoric of catching Osama, who had been a long-time friend and business partner of the Bush family. To him, winning control of those two countries were more important than catching Osama dead or alive. Bush's successor has gone one step farther; Obama caught Osama alive, killed him and sent into the depths of the ocean.

Who thought Obama was softer than Bush? Maureen Dowd did never think so. In her column in the

New York Times (May 3), she compared President Obama to Michael Corleone, who became the American king in the world of terrorism after the death of his father Don Corleone in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. Ms. Dowd has also enlightened me with the knowledge that *The Godfather* is the president's favourite movie.

Everyone could not be as moved as Ms. Dowd by the words of the



new Michael Corleone of America after eliminating his enemy Osama from the world. The tear-drawing words were: "The empty seat at the dinner table. Children who were forced to grow up without their mother or their father. Parents who would never know the feeling of their child's embrace. Nearly 3,000 citizens taken from us, leaving a gaping hole in our hearts."

In his column in the Cuban newspaper *Granma* (May 5), Fidel Castro paid Obama in the same coin (or dollar). He said: "It does not deter honest people from remembering the unjust wars unleashed by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan, the hundreds of thousands of children forced to grow up without their mother or their father and the parents who would never know the feeling of their child's

embrace." And in the *Guernica* (May 6), Noam Chomsky's words are scathing: "We might ask ourselves how we would be reacting if Iraqi commandos landed at George W. Bush's compound, assassinated him, and dumped his body in the Atlantic. Uncontroversially, his crimes vastly exceed bin Laden's, and he is not a 'suspect' but uncontroversially the 'decider' who gave the orders to



commit the supreme international crime."

Laden was created by the CIA to oust the pro-Soviet communists from Afghanistan. And he has paid the price America's many political friends paid in the past. Their fate is that of the girl on the back of the tiger in the English rhyme, "There was a young lady of Niger, who smiled as she rode on a tiger. They returned from the ride with the lady inside and the smile on the face of the tiger."

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Scientists and economists for development

LUTFOR RAHMAN

PROFESSOR Muhammad Yunus is an economist and the only Nobel Laureate from Bangladesh. He started his academic career as a lecturer in economics at the University of Chittagong in early '70s. His research activities started from the grassroots level. At that stage he realised the importance of creation of the Grameen Bank with the unique idea of a mobile bank that moved from door to door to lend money to women. This very concept enabled him to touch the sky and made him world famous.

In September 1996, it was really shameful for me when I failed to answer most of the questions asked by Professor Mohammad Isa on Grameen Bank at his office in Dar es Salam, Tanzania. Many scientists from other countries were present at that event and they were very surprised at my silence.

As soon as I came back to Bangladesh I made a phone call to Prof. Yunus and conveyed to him the message of his recognition and acceptance in Africa. He invited me to his office in Dhaka. I was amazed to see the simplicity of his dress and his office.

In March 1998, while traveling from New York to London, I met Dr. Biruti, a Russian lady, who was going to attend the Microcredit Summit. During the long journey, Dr. Biruti talked a lot about Grameen Bank, and I enjoyed it. Since then, I have felt proud of being a citizen of Bangladesh where Dr. Yunus succeeded in changing the concept of the traditional banking system.

Recently, too many reports on him have been published in the newspapers. The purpose of my writing this article is not to comment whether he should hold the position of MD or not, but to request all concerned to come to a solution instead of harming national prestige by making irrelevant comments. Let us respect one another.

Professor Muhammad Yunus is the founder of Grameen Bank and nobody else can claim this position. Whether he works as MD or Chairman of the Grameen Bank does not matter, he is the creator of the concept. He should widen his field of work through introducing new concepts to other developing countries that need his help.

It is true that Dr. Yunus started the project when the financial and

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social conditions of Bangladesh were not like they are now. Both the social and the financial conditions of the country have improved significantly since then. Even the poor women in remote villages hate

begging, and they do not like taking loans from banks due to the complexities and sufferings. They expect respects through their works and to become self-dependent.

Thousands of women and girls work in the garment industries. They are not given good salaries but they get scope for utilising their expertise. They feel proud in handling costly embroidery machines. This has developed their self-confidence for survival. A recent study shows that rural girl students prefer science and technology to arts and commerce. They bring better results than the boys do for their technical schools.

It is high time to change our atti-

tude towards women. Let us empower them with relevant technologies so that they can utilise their knowledge and skills at the right time for the right purposes. Initiatives may be taken from a remote village such as Ikrail where the girls are trained in traditional technologies like textile technologies (dress making and tailoring), food processing, civil construction and building maintenance. Khairunnessa Technical Institute (KTI), affiliated in 2001 with Bangladesh Technical Education Board, has changed the scenario of Ikrail and its surrounding villages.

The girls and boys of Ikrail are equally empowered in traditional and modern technologies, including ICT. The most important point to note is that day labourers and farmers with no formal education have become proud parents of engineers and scientists.

The difference between the Grameen Bank and the KTI is that one makes people dependent on banks and the other makes people self-reliant, confident, financially solvent and socially respected. The founder of the Grameen Bank took the initiative and it worked like medicine, and the KTI has succeeded in diagnosing the social problems and prescribing the right medicine based on needs.

The Grameen initiative was taken at Jobra village of Chittagong and the KTI initiative was taken at Ikrail village of Alfadanga in Faridpur. The founder of the Grameen Bank is an economist and the founder of the KTI is a scientist. Both are university professors with Doctorate degrees in their respective fields.

Cooperation between scientists, economists, political leaders and the government has become very important for social, financial and technological development of the country in the present global situation.

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