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Bangladesh marches forward

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IN CELEBRATING the 28th national and independence day of Bangladesh, I wish to pay homage to the memory of the valiant freedom fighters who laid down their lives for the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

On this day, I would also like to recall, with deep appreciation, the support and assistance that the High Commission and the Bangladeshi nationals living in Malaysia have received from the Government and people of Malaysia. I wish to take this opportunity to convey my cordial greetings to all Bangladeshi nationals residing in Malaysia and wish them well in their endeavours.

Malaysia, having achieved tremendous socio-economic development under the dynamic leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is now unfortunately facing an economic crisis.

We have been watching with admiration, the commendable resolve of the Malaysian leadership and the people in taking all necessary measures to tide over the problems. We in Bangladesh, also had to contend with the ferocity of a devastating flood last year. A narrow resource base and recurring natural disasters have not, however, shaken our determination to march forward. We emerged from the crises, not subdued, but more resolute. The Government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the daughter of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has pursued a sustained policy of economic development backed by the confidence of the people and the international community.

With extensive reform measures in place in key sectors of economy, clear emphasis has been placed on an export sector-led growth strategy with a predominant role being given to private enterprise. One of the most liberal regimes exists now in Bangladesh for foreign investment. The Government is determined to improve the quality of life of the people and has focused specifically on poverty alleviation as well as infrastructure and human resource development.

I note with great pleasure that the excellent relations existing between our two brotherly countries has continued to grow in strength during the last year. The business interaction between Bangladesh and Malaysia is growing steadily although the balance of trade continues to favour Malaysia due to rising exports to Bangladesh every year.

However, Malaysia remains one of the major investors in Bangladesh. Big companies like Telecom Malaysia, Celcom and Westmont Group have already invested in the fields of telecommunication, power generation, etc.

While Petronas is expected to invest soon in the oil and gas sector, several other joint venture projects are in the pipeline. In another promising area, we are expecting the relocation of a few labour intensive industries to Bangladesh from Malaysia.

A large number of Bangladeshi workers continue to work in Malaysia. We note with satisfaction their contribution to the economies of both Malaysia and Bangladesh. Their sense of discipline, hard work and loyalty have earned them a good reputation with the authorities here. We sincerely appreciate the help and assistance extended by the Malaysian authorities to the High Commission in dealing with the welfare of our workers.

Maintaining and promoting peace and stability in the region and in the world at large is a commitment enshrined in the Constitution of Bangladesh. The positive and constructive role played by Bangladesh in the international arena flows from that commitment.

We have contributed our might to international initiatives to address issues of common concern to humanity. Bangladesh has also played a pioneering role in various regional and international cooperative efforts. The country's consistently active profile in many global organisations - the United Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Conference, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, the Non Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, the Commonwealth and in the recently concluded Second Summit of the Developing Eight Countries - is a testimony to this fact. The specific vulnerability of the 48 Least Developed Countries has been a source of profound concern to Bangladesh and we have not shied away from voicing those concerns in forums like the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Trade Organisation. It is comforting to note that in major political and economic issues affecting the developing world, Bangladesh and Malaysia have similar views, a fact that has helped us to coordinate our respective positions in many international forums.

In conclusion, I wish to convey our sincere gratitude to the Government and people of Malaysia for their support and cooperation in our efforts to secure a better future for the people of Bangladesh. I call upon all our fellow countrymen to work towards upholding and enhancing the image of Bangladesh. I seek the blessing of Almighty Allah and the support of all our people in executing the task of further enhancing all round cooperation between our two brotherly countries.⁹

* The writer is the Bangladesh high commissioner to Malaysia.

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