

Our Eid greetings

Let's live by its quintessential spirit

AFTER a month-long tryst with self-abnegation, spirituality and alms-giving Muslims throughout the world rejoice in the prospect of Eid-ul-Fitr being at hand. The month of Ramadan, associated with the auspicious revelation of the Holy Quran, is coming to a fitting end on a note of joyous celebrations. That this is the greatest festival in the Islamic calendar is borne out by the stupendous enthusiasm and fervour it generates among the people as the occasion draws nearer.

At a mundane level, however, the prelude to Eid has been eventful, albeit in the wrong way. There have been roasting alive of people at Bashkhal, murder in a hospital, slaughtering of a businessman and abductions, unmercifully out of sync with the supposedly self-restraining month of Ramadan. While the number of people fasting in the month of Siam is growing as a positive sign, on the flip-side seem to be the growing ranks of that particular brand of people who do not blink in making profits out of the miseries of common people. Otherwise how could one explain the skyrocketing market prices that defied all exhortations and public-spirited appeals of saner segment of people? Extortion at all levels marred the pre-Eid atmospherics to no small extent.

Internationally, the confabulations at the OIC meet at Putrajaya in Malaysia poignantly portrayed the sordid realities of disunity and discord facing the Muslim Ummah. Mahathir's famous speech was basically an indictment on the leadership bankruptcy in the Islamic world being duly cashed in on by the Zionist-led scheme of things.

The stereo-typing of Islam with a terrorist stigma, slightly at a disadvantage though, as a result of the demolition of all so-called justifications for a war against Iraq, still continues. Solidarity in the Islamic world can be a fitting answer to this as the modern, timeless, scientific and liberal traditions of Islam are powerfully articulated across the world.

Eid comes with its messages of equality, fraternity and brotherhood for mankind. Let's be imbued with its quintessential spirit and prosper along the path of peace and progress. Eid Mubarak.

Dhaka implicated in ULFA issue

The Indian minister has overlooked some essential points

INDIAN North-East Affairs Minister CP Thakur has brought some outlandish charges against Dhaka. The minister has accused it of supporting the ULFA, a militant group fighting for an independent homeland in Assam. Bangladesh has also been bracketed with Pakistan as a country playing a big game to destabilise India, he didn't clarify, though, what 'big game' really meant.

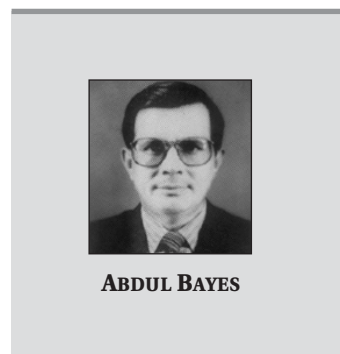
The sweeping and unsubstantiated comments by a man holding such a high public office in a neighbouring country cannot help the cause of bilateral ties. The minister gave vent to his ostensibly ill feelings towards Bangladesh following a meeting with the chief minister of Assam and the union state minister for home affairs. The background is important because it is a clear pointer to the truth that the decision to implicate Bangladesh in a sensitive internal affair of an Indian state was taken at a high-level meeting.

Our position on all such issues is, however, quite clear. Bangladesh believes in the policy of peaceful co-existence which precludes the possibility of the country getting involved in any kind of activities running counter to the interests of a neighbour.

Furthermore, Mr. Thakur has overlooked certain facts which make the recent spate of violence in Assam a strictly ethnic outburst, centring on recruitment to the Indian railway, leaving little space for a neighbouring country to have a role in it. The All Assam Students Union was campaigning for a hundred per cent reservation of seats for the locals. The campaign ultimately turned violent and there was very unfortunate loss of lives when the Hindi-speaking people became the target of the militant groups. Where do Bangladesh stand in this inter-state rivalry over recruitment to a government agency? This is a question that Mr. Thakur doesn't appear to have asked himself when he blamed Bangladesh.

The Indian minister has set an example of aggressive diplomacy extended a bit too far-- a rather regrettable one at that.

Dr B, BNP and Bangladesh



ABDUL BAYES

PROFESSOR AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury (Dr B for short) seems to have hit news headlines over the recent past few days. Of course, he had long been in the headlines either as President of the country, as the founder secretary general of the ruling BNP, as Minister holding different portfolios or even as a renowned physician. But we are talking about his absence from the media coverage during the recent past, say of a year or so, when he was 'forced' to resign from the post of the President and was placed forthright in his Moghbazar chamber. We still remember with great sadness (and also with a bit of shame) his smiling face and waving hand to the crowd while leaving Bangobhavan after his resignation. We were sad not because he was no more the President of the country. After all, President may come, President may go but the chair remains there forever. Painfully, many of our Presidents have not been famous in setting good precedent but many of us wanted to see Dr. B as an exception to that.

Grapes are sour?

But we were shocked because of his 'timid' stance to be a 'gentleman' of

worth with no protest at the time of his removal from presidency in an undignified manner. The reason could be that, he might have thought, that anything other than a 'soft stand' would put him in jail, his family in trouble and above all his medical profession in peril. His apprehensions could be correct in a regime where dissent invites assault, truthfulness invites torture. But that should not have been the attitude of Dr B who is,

present day Bangladesh are correct but could invite a million questions too. Of course, the complaints are not new either. The opposition parties, leading intellectuals, and the press have been speaking out about the rot reigning since the assumption of power by the present government. He rightly remarked that a reign of terror, a rise in prices of essentials, a sign of suffocation, a demise of democracy -- all sweeping

confusing comments. His remark that "if people want me, I will not fail them" does not specify who these people could be and where would they come from. Quite obviously, a portion would come from his fellow colleagues in BNP who are sidelined, superseded and suppressed. Dr B perhaps knows it well that not many such people could be in the pipeline as long as Begum Zia and her son carry the flag of BNP. By any standard of judgment, they are

able to bag the sympathy of a section of intellectuals, journalists and politicians who failed to reap home fruits from BNP but blatantly bred anti-Awami League phobia. To this group of people, both sunrise and sunset are equal. They even fail to distinguish between a failure and an utter failure, between bad governance and no governance. The only thing they know is a 'no' to Awami League. In any way, they are likely to be too

cal, how can the solutions be civil? Civil society can at best create a pressure group and supply intellectual inputs to the ongoing movements. But it cannot bell the cat first. His anger against the opposition boycotting parliament is opportunistic since his party BNP boycotted parliament under his leadership or deputy leadership during 1996-2001. The allegations about creeping corruption and crimes that he brought are not new to his party. Even when he was Minister or deputy leader of the treasury bench, crimes and corruption were pervasive although, admittedly, things went worst later.

No light!

We therefore see no light at the end of the tunnel through the paths that Dr. B has suggested so far. It is not guaranteed that civil society members are away from all evils. Dr. B should bear in mind that the objective should be to purify politics. To this effect, he will have to float a new political party or join a new one or rejoin the earlier one to press home his ideas.

Or else, he could produce a new documentary called "Sabash, Shabash Bangladesh" based on his present-day observations about government and Bangladesh. At least that would shed some light on what his BNP has been doing for Bangladesh. After all, learning is light and we shall owe a great deal to him for enlightening us not with words only but also with visual documentary.

Abdul Bayes is a Professor of Economics at Jahangirnagar University.

BENEATH THE SURFACE

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as we can read from his public statements, proud of putting people's cause first. We were sad because Dr B miserably failed to diagnose the disease that was going to kill it called Bangladesh and left the patient unattended. We also reckoned that he should have faced the 'impeachment', of the court and all that was required to nullify -- as he appear to have argued -- an 'unjustified' and a 'conspiratorial' move. Had it been so, possibly, it would have created an example, a history and a respect to the norms of business that Bangladesh has, allegedly, lost under Dr B's BNP rule. Now whatever he or his associates tend to say would tantamount to 'grapes are sour'.

Anger and ambivalence

Many of Dr B's comments about the

Bangladesh at the moment than ever before. He is, again, a right critic of a big cabinet of 60 or so (even though he was one of them), of constitutional amendments for absorbing "good people" in the cabinet (although some of the "young Turks" are reported to be his recruits), of deviation from democracy (although an ardent admirer of February 15 election without voters!), of nepotism (although his son sat on his vacated seat by his blessings) etc. We should remind the readers that the bracketed observations point to the ambivalences raised by his critics.

BNP basics again?

But with all the allegations on board, Dr. B went back to the basics of BNP and seemingly has been trying to turn the table in his favour by making some

likely to lead the sentiment that hovers around the late President Zia.

To justify the argument, we can only recall a picture shown in TV. When Tareq Zia was made joint secretary general of BNP and he was to visit Zia's mazar, senior members of the cabinet like Abdul Mannan Bhuya and Saifur Rahman had to wait there under scorching heat to welcome the leader of the "young Turks". Just imagine! As many as five to ten cabinet members were standing to see that the son of the PM arrive and depart safe and sound. Dr B also, we assume, had to perform almost the same kind of exercise during the whole course of his long political career.

At the end of the day, therefore, Dr B would have to bank on a rather small segment obviously coming from small parties. Besides, Dr B would, probably,

good to raise any protest even in the face of their own bread being burnt.

Dr B is also likely to get more media coverage than any body else for the simple reason that no past President stood up and got pitted against the party in power, especially his own party. Only on this count, Dr B might get sympathy and support from independent groups. But he has to come up with active plans and platform rather than showering sermons. And active plans and platforms will also need courage to face any kind of consequence for the sake of the people.

Lacking line and length

In the recently held Iftar party hosted by him, Dr. B proposed to go ahead with a civil society platform. While evil-doings are purely politi-

Returning to America in time of war

RON CHEPESIUK

AS the great English bard William Shakespeare once put it: "Parting is such sweet sorrow." That sentiment hit home a few weeks ago when I returned to the U.S. after an exciting ten-month assignment as a Fulbright Scholar at Chittagong University. On one hand, I was sad to leave a country where I had made many new friends and had a chance to experience a fascinating culture and society. On the other, I was excited -- and a little nervous -- about returning to a country that I suspected had changed much since I left. When I embarked upon my foreign adventure last January, the U.S., under the Bush administration, was a confident -- if not arrogant -- nation, secure in the fact that it was the powerful empire in history and in the belief that it could bend the world community to its will and agenda. Given the perception of the American public that Bush was the kind of tough leader it needed in the War on Terrorism, his popularity ratings were sky high. Those of us who viewed a war with Iraq as folly were in the small minority and not eager to express that opinion openly.

But it's remarkable what being bogged down in the sands of the Middle East can do to a country's psyche and confidence. The strong mandate that Bush had to lead the War

on Terrorism as he saw fit has eroded dramatically since last May 1 when he stood on that aircraft carrier and declared the war to be over. The opinion polls show that now more than half of all Americans say George, Jr. is not the right statesman to lead the country in its War on Terrorism.

ons of mass destruction and the alleged Saddam-Bin Laden link -- the two major reasons why the US went to war with Iraq. Are there still 3,000 weapons of mass destruction inspectors in Iraq and what are they doing there? Have the inspectors made any progress? Found anything? Nary a

Sounds like he might be trying to prepare the nation for a long-haul stay, if the quagmire in Iraq gets deeper.

I say 'quagmire' because that's the word the press and the citizenry have been using to describe the US presence in Iraq. Quagmire, you may

inability to identify the enemy, the evidence of declining troop morale, the tendency of the government to blame the press for its problems, the Bush administration's eagerness to put a cheerful face on events, and oh yes, the rising body count.

On one point at least a big differ-

leadership, less than a year away from the 2004 presidential elections, Bush is a strong bet to stay in office.

Analysts with no ties to the White House are saying all recent indicators -- including the economic ones -- favour Bush's election. As economist Robert Samuelson put it: "Other factors -- Iraq-terrorism -- could doom Bush. But the business cycle is moving in his direction." The respected Gallup opinion poll predicts that Bush is virtually a cinch to win in 2004.

Sure, it's nice to see the economy moving again, but, as I get back to normal here, the thought of Bush serving a second term is a real depressing. A leader who doesn't seem to understand the big mistakes he's made during his first administration will be given a chance to repeat them in the second. Only in America.

Ron Chesepiuk is a Rock Hill, South Carolina journalist, a Visiting Professor at Chittagong University, and a former Fulbright Scholar to Bangladesh.

INSIDE AMERICA

The respected Gallup opinion poll predicts that Bush is virtually a cinch to win in 2004. Sure, it's nice to see the economy moving again, but, as I get back to normal here, the thought of Bush serving a second term is a real depressing. A leader who doesn't seem to understand the big mistakes he's made during his first administration will be given a chance to repeat them in the second.

Coming home has verified this startling about face. I have been stunned by the number of friends and associates, some of whom are Republican Party types, who now openly question the Bush administration's motivation and wisdom in going to war with Saddam. They still feel it's important to support "the boys" in Iraq but aren't so sure that they, our soldiers, are risking their lives for a worthy cause... whatever it is.

I say "whatever it is" because it has become increasingly unclear why we went to war with Saddam. Since my return, there has been scant mention in the press or Bush public utterances about those weapons, elusive weap-

peep in the press about those important questions.

There have been plenty of press reports, though, about the Bush administration's latest justification for the war with Iraq: Uncle Sam's supposedly good intentioned mission to bring democracy to Iraq and the region. Bush's latest spin on the Iraq War mess -- believe it or not -- is to declare that the war was an historical turning point for the future of worldwide democracy. Talk about trying to cover the truth with sand. Moreover, Bush is now warning the American people that the country should commit itself to perhaps a decade-long transformation of the Middle East.

recall, was the word used to describe aptly the US disaster in Vietnam. The term's use has sparked a debate about whether the Iraq War (that's the war that has been raging since Bush's May 1 declaration) is another Vietnam. Those who dismiss the comparison cite the marginal differences between the two wars to make their point; for instance, the length of the two wars and the relative troop strengths.

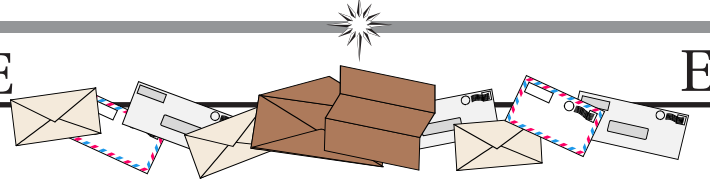
Well, the US continues to talk about sending more troops to Iraq and rumours have suggested that the military draft may be revived. Besides, there is no guarantee the war will end, even if Saddam is captured or killed. I like to talk about the similarities: the

ence exists between the two wars and the Texans who lead them. Lyndon B Johnson kept a high profile in dealing with the casualties of the Vietnam War. Bush, meanwhile, keeps out of sight and has said little about the mounting casualties.

He writes personal letters of sympathy to the families of deceased soldiers and quietly meets with victims' relatives at military bases. By adopting such a position, Bush risks appearing to be insensitive as well as isolated from the consequences and real pain of war.

So is Bush in trouble? Not really. Despite the disaster in making Iraq and the growing questions about his

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Letters will only be considered if they carry the writer's full name, address and telephone number (if any). The identity of the writers will be protected. Letters must be limited to 300 words. All letters will be subject to editing.

An appeal

I write this to express my feelings from my heart. I am a computer engineer. I do hard work honestly at my institution. I hope and dream that my beloved country will progress in future. For that, a perfect leader is essential in the driving seat. There are too many educated persons in our country but I feel worried when I see that many educated persons like university teachers, doctors, engineers, judges and journalists are not doing justice to their position in society. I am not a supporter of any particular party. I did support BNP in 1991, AL in 1996, BNP in 2001, but I am really too much disappointed with their performance.

There is no democracy in those parties. So I am sure that they can never do anything good for the country. So it is very essential to go for a new option. I can't think of the Jamaat for their role in 1971 and the Jatiya Party is also not reliable. So I think the new initiative by former president Badruddoza Chowdhury is

the only option open to us. Now the world is controlled by media. So I request you to try your best to free the nation from the hands of dishonest politicians.

Rafiq
One-mail

War on Terror

These days we are hearing a lot about War on Terror thanks to BBC and CNN particularly. Looking at the meaning of these words makes one wonder who are those involved in war and what is the terror, and who is terrorising whom?

The meaning of 'War' and 'Terror' in Advanced Oxford Learners Dictionary is:

War: a situation in which two or more countries or groups of people fight against each other.

Terror: the threat of violent action that is intended to cause fear, usually for political purposes.

Let us now pragmatically analyse the situation about war on terror according to this meaning, vis a vis the situation between UK and US against Iraq and Israel against Pales-

tine. Was there threat by Iraq on UK or US? The direct answer is No. The threat was perceived by these two Western powers as subjectively identified by their unintelligent intelligence agencies! Independent third parties like UN or other countries in Europe did not perceive these threats. Therefore terror, if any, was and is being caused by the US and UK who started with an unprovoked armed attack against Iraq and now that the Iraqi people are fighting their war against illegal occupation, US and UK call it terrorist activity! What logic!

In consequence of US and UK's illegal war the people of Iraq now waging a war against occupying powers. Groups of people are fighting against UK and US armed forces in Iraq. Logically therefore the terror created by the UK and US troops has created a situation for fighting a war by groups of people in Iraq, who have not accepted the illegal presence of UK and US troops. Then who are the terrorists, Iraq or US and UK? All is fair in war. Death of innocent people in war situation is covered under the

well coined US word 'collateral damage'. In case of poorly armed Iraqi people without armed military force taking on the might of UK and US forces naturally collateral damage could well be high.

Exactly the same scenario is taking place in Israel. It is the Israeli illegal occupation of Palestinian land that is causing the war by groups of Palestinians with naturally high collateral damage of ordinary Israeli citizens, as the Palestinians have no armed might and are illegally occupied. The number of UN resolutions flouted by Israel is beyond counting but for Iraq ignoring one, it had to be punished! Why? The whole thing looks like the proverbial kettle calling the pot black!

A dispassionate analysis of the situation leads to the inescapable conclusion that it is the occupied and down trodden Iraqis and Palestinians who are actually waging a war against terror let loose by USA, UK and Israel. Being occupied they have no option but to wage guerrilla war of which both the USA in the Philippines and UK in Europe were the

champions during WW 2. Unfortunately now the shoe is in the other foot, so guerrilla war has become metamorphosed to acts of terrorism and the erstwhile champions of guerrilla war now react to it in the dubious format of war on terror anywhere at any time!

A conscientious citizen, Dhaka.

Secularism: Constitution, Law and Representation

In his 11/19 response to my letter dated 11/14, Mr. Shibly Azad defends Bangladesh's record on secularism: "more than a dozen MPs from minority communities in the current parliament as well as the presence of minority cabinet members."

As far as I know, there are six minority MPs, not a "dozen". Dharendra Nath Saha, Gautam Chakrabarty, Moni Swapan Dewan (CHT) from BNP; Suranjit Sengupta, Panchanan Biswas and Bir Bahadur (CHT) from AL. This makes a total of 6 out of 330. Direct democratic

representation would be around 36.

There are no minority Ministers, only Junior Ministers. Chakrabarty is Junior Minister for Water Resources and Swapan is Junior Minister for CHT and Tribal affairs. Although CHT is 70% tribal (Pahari), a Pahari was given Junior portfolio, while the full portfolio went to a non-Pahari -- hardly anything to brag about.

Mr. Azad also writes, "Constitution of Bangladesh does not allow superiority of one religion at the expense of others, but grants equal status to all creeds"

In the 1972 Constitution of Bangladesh, this was indeed the case. However, in 1977, Zia government amended the Constitution, replacing "Socialism" and "Secularism" with, respectively, "Social Justice" and "Absolute faith in God Almighty." They also inserted "In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful" (in Arabic) into the preamble to the Constitution. Finally, the 1972 ban on religion-based political parties was lifted.

In 1988, the Ershad government passed the 8th Amendment to the

Constitution, making Islam the "State Religion". Although a general protest strike paralyzed Dhaka, the Jatiya Party-dominated Parliament (most of the opposition had boycotted elections) easily passed the measure.

At present, the Bangladesh Constitution reads as follows: "8. Fundamental principles of State Policy: The principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism meaning economic and social justice, together with the principles derived from them as set out in this Part, shall constitute the fundamental principles of state policy. Absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah shall be the basis of all actions." (<http://www.bangladeshgov.org/pmo/constitution/const2.htm#2A>)

Finally, do not forget the "Vested (Enemy) Property Act" (set up during '65 Indo-Pak war), which has yet to be repealed after four decades. According to "An inquiry into causes and consequences of deprivation of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh through the Vested Property Act"

(Abul Barkat, ed., PRIP Trust, 2000), 2.1 million acres of land were confiscated from Hindu families (by GOB and individuals) since the VPA was enacted.

Naem Mohalemen, Shobak.Org

Hypocrisy!

One of our present-day social and moral problem is hypocrisy ie the practice of pretending to be different from what one really is: (Oxford dictionary)

There are some educated and well-to-do persons who speak a lot about the moral values but unfortunately they themselves never practice those in reality. This type of person is called a hypocrite.

I am afraid, for hypocrisy our nation is facing many problems in socio-economic and socio-cultural fields.

Is it possible to control hypocrisy? I wonder if the esteemed readers could suggest some measure?

Prof.M.Zahidul Haque
Shere-e-Bangla Agricultural University
Dhaka-1207