

Messenger of Allah

If a man could be judged by the impact he has had on the history of mankind, or the influence his thoughts has exercised in shaping human civilisation, then no man can be said to have been a greater achiever than Arabia's Muhammad (SM), Messenger of God, Prophet of Islam.

The fact that the Quran, holy book of Islam, was sent to Earth and its inhabitants through the voice of Muhammad (SM), has over the centuries succeeded in wrapping the historical prophet in an aura of supernatural mysticism. But Muhammad's (SM) influence on Arabian society of the time, including his ability to bring the fratricidal tribes together, or the epoch-making effect of his personality and message across the world, owed nothing to mysticism nor to any claim to super-human abilities.

Muhammad's (SM) honesty, fairness and sharp intellect, which were to make him into one of the finest war-planners and statesmen this world has ever known, had made his company and counsel much sought-after among the more sober sections of Makkah's populace in the late 6th and early 7th centuries.

Muhammad's (SM) final victory over the Quraysh to regain Makkah after the long exile to Medina, was one of those events which marked a decisive turning point in the course of human history. His wisdom, as a preacher of peace, as a leader of men, as a general of troops armed with little except an undying faith in the message of Allah, and as a political administrator whose magnanimous treatment of the vanquished foe stunned even his fellow Muslims, was what made his greatness incomparable to the greatness of any other man who preceded or followed him into this world.

However, the true greatness of Muhammad (SM) was always reflected in one simple fact: he never claimed greatness for himself, defying temptations that have destroyed men before and after him. He lived, ate, and prayed like his other, fellow Muslims did. He was the Messenger of God, not God Himself; he was the last prophet, the Prophet of Islam, not Islam itself; he was the guide who showed the path, but never claimed to be the path itself.

The path Muhammad (SM) showed, through the religion of Islam passed down to mankind via the Prophet's voice, was one of spiritual peace, social emancipation and material equitability, with submission to, fear of and belief in the one Allah being the pivot of the Faith preached by him and his followers.

Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, Muhammad's (SM) real achievements began to unfold before an unsuspecting world after his death at the age of 63, in the year 633 A.D. The prophet-soldier-statesman had succeeded in unifying the peninsular tribes under the banner of one faith; his destruction of the idols at Makkah had freed men of superstitions and instilled courage into them; and his example, as a wise and supremely honest leader, had given the new Islamic state a foundation from which it expanded east, west, north and south. The achievement of every Muslim, either as an individual or as part of a bigger whole, of yesterday and today, stand as the true legacy of Muhammad (SM) of Arabia. No other mortal can claim such a legacy.

Yeltsin Goes to Japan

The four-day visit to Japan, starting Sunday, by Boris N Yeltsin, the Russian leader, is overshadowed by deep-rooted differences between Tokyo and Moscow over the four disputed Kuril Islands. While the United States has returned to Japan the territories it occupied during the Second World War, including Okinawa, the former Soviet Union has held on to the Kuril islands, even after signing a declaration ending the "technical state of war" with Japan, as different from a peace treaty signed by other countries. It has been made clear many times that Tokyo would not care much for a peace treaty with Moscow unless it regains its control over the four disputed islands. Over the decades, the issue has remained an emotional one with the Japanese people, while Russians might be looking at the prospect of giving up the islands as a possible loss of face.

Judging by statement made from Moscow and more recently by Yeltsin himself in a television interview, Russia has taken a hard line, not much different from that of the former Soviet Union, on the question of giving back the islands to Japan. It is, indeed, very strange that having seen the collapse of the former USSR, with so many of the republics breaking away with Moscow, Russia, under Yeltsin, should consider it so important to hang on to the Kurils even at the risk of jeopardising the visit of its President to Tokyo. This does not make sense unless Moscow sees a strategic importance in the Kurils which has been overlooked by others. Alternately, the maverick Russian leader may want to demonstrate to his people that he can be as tough as his predecessors in Kremlin in tackling issues in foreign relations.

The Russian leader has got his priorities wrong. Japan is in a strong position to help Russia and, indeed, the whole of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with massive economic and technical assistance if Moscow would give up its control over the disputed islands. According to a Tokyo report, at the present stage, Japan may agree to set up a token fund of \$80 million to help Russia train people for its market economy, while another report suggests that Russia is hoping to get Japanese participation in about 130 industrial projects, with a total cost exceeding a hefty, almost an incredibly massive \$50.7 billion. It is not just the direct assistance from Japan that Russia needs. Moscow also needs Tokyo's support in obtaining grants and loans from the industrialised western bloc countries which act in harmony with their G-7 partner as well as from multilateral agencies, including the World Bank. In short, Russia needs the economic support from Japan, perhaps on a scale unheard of in the bilateral relations between two countries. There should indeed be a constructive negotiation between Japan and Russia over the Kuril islands. However, Yeltsin should accept the fact that he is in no position to dictate terms, if he wants his forthcoming visit to Tokyo to be a success.

ACCORDING to a Chinese proverb 'hidden within every crisis, is an opportunity'. I have known people who take it a step further, saying that not only there is an opportunity within every crisis, but also that bigger the crisis, the greater is the opportunity. If there is any truth in these sayings then perhaps now is the time to do some soul searching, some serious rethinking about a very important aspect of our political life — student politics.

Students have formed an integral part of political life from the days of our anti-British struggle. They won the heart of our people for their vanguard role in the language movement. Since then they have never failed to do their bit in every democratic and social struggle of our people, culminating in their glorious contribution in the liberation war.

During the Pakistan phase of our history the student groupings were based on broad ideological lines with some being left leaning, others centrists and some attached with the fundamentalist parties. Even these broad categories began to converge — save the extreme right and the far left — towards a unified position as the question of economic and cultural rights of the people of the then East Pakistan sharpened and the movements to realise them gathered momentum. By the time of our independence in 1971 one could speak of a broad based unified student body with some fringe left groups being outside it. The fundamentalists being totally discredited because of their support of the genocide during the liberation war.

After independence, student politics became a different story. As the overall national question appeared to have been solved with the birth of a sovereign country, and the unifying bond of resisting the common enemy — Pakistan — disappeared, the force that held our highly politicized student community together became unglued. However it was the overall frustrations emanating from the failure of the government to live up to the ideals of the liberation war that did the

Radically shifting gears, the United States, backed by Saudi Arabia, is supporting Shiite Muslim demands for safe have in a bid to topple Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The policy shift involves a first-time decision by the United States and its Gulf War allies to cooperate closely with Iraqi Shiite opposition groups. Both Washington and Riyadh have previously refused dealing with the Shi'ites because of their terrorist past, ties to Iran and radical rejection of the West.

Factions of the Shi'ite Dawaa party are widely blamed for the December 1983 bombings of the US and French embassies in Kuwait and strategic Kuwaiti installations.

The United States also had misgivings of the Shi'ite Saudi-style Muslim orthodoxy.

But Saddam's ability to survive sustained military pressure and UN economic sanctions have frustrated Washington and its allies and now they seem to be charting a course that could change the political map of the Middle East.

Fraught with risk, the new strategy could trigger the break-up of the Iraqi nation state. But Washington seems to believe it may start a regional democratisation process and may lead to improved relations between the United States and Iran for the first time since the 1979 Iranian occupation of the US embassy in Teheran.

Western intelligence sources say they intend to tread carefully. "If we get it wrong," said a source, "there could be civil meltdown that would dampen the economies of the region the emergence of new power groups that could

Time for Some Serious Re-thinking about Student Politics

greatest damage to the ideological basis of our student politics. It is its place came party politics. Student bodies became mere extensions of their parent political parties with narrow and sectarian interests. With the advent of the un-elected and non-representative governments in Bangladesh, the student politics took its worst turn. What the new dispensers of power could not get through public support, the military and autocratic governments tried to buy or get through offers of favours and lucrative deals, and our student politicians fell victims to it. This shameful trend, however, was reversed through our student community's significant participation — some would say, critical — during the anti-Ershad movement.

One very important reason for the "larger than life" role of our student community in national politics is the failure of our political parties to build up disciplined cadres who could spear-head mass movements. Being largely filled with 'fair weather friends' the political parties have had to depend heavily upon the students to give a bite to their mass movements in the form of keeping up the momentum, doing most of the leg work and, most importantly, engaging in street fights with the police — the most potent symbol of the strength of any movement.

The heavy pressure of this tradition is made further weighty by the present ruling party's deeply held belief that they owe much of their success to the students. Being of recent origin and not having party committees in many parts of the country, the BNP was able to take on the older and nostalgic-favoured Awami League, mainly because it was able to capture the youth. Because of Zia's image as a freedom fighter and Khaleda's courageous and unwavering role in the anti-Ershad strug-

gle, the student community flocked into the BNP fold. It is again due to the BNP students spreading out into the countryside, and making up for the lack of organisational apparatus at the grass roots level that, many feel, the ruling party was able to defeat a sure-footed Awami League in the general election of February '91.

Unlikely, as it may seem, Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina have similar views as regards the role of the students. Both feel that the strength of their students wing is critical in maintaining their hold on national politics. Like the PM, the Leader of the Opposition feels that it was the work of BNP's student wing that gave

fact today is that student politics has been penetrated by a group of youth who believe in muscle power in place of political process. These youth are changing the way students behave. A new cult of raw power is what these perpetrators of brute force represent. Their activities are a far cry from what student politics ever was — in this country, or elsewhere.

Therefore time has come for all political parties, especially those that have strong student wings, to take note of the changing trends and act accordingly. A fundamental question needs to be asked — do we need to involve students in politics? If we do, then from what level should it start.

The Third View by Mahfuz Anam

the latter the critical edge in the elections. And so she is bent on increasing her own strength — at any cost. Some of her well wishers would say, at too much cost. Knowledgeable sources confide that Begum Zia's hands-off policy as far as the students go is largely responsible for the ineffective role of the police in curbing student violence. Senior police officials privately express their frustrations for not having the freedom to act in an effective and non-partisan manner.

But all this was before the recent deaths of five people — four students and one bystander — in a factional fight of the BNP's student wing, the Jatiyatabadi Chitra Dal (JCD). It was also before the cold blooded murder of Badal — a leader of AL's student wing, the Bangladesh Chitra League (BCL). It was before the factional fight which led to several gun-battles between BCL and its Montu faction. All this was before the slide of student politics into violence, crime and murder. Whatever may have been the experience, the

When we see school students parading in thousands in favour of this or that political party, is it a sign of their political consciousness or the organising capacity of the local 'big brother' or 'sister' for that matter. The students of the 11th or 12th class — we call college students — form a sizeable component of the student supporters of political parties. Are they really aware of the issues that the different political parties represent? Or are they simply being used as slogan chanters? In the olden days the issues were simple, and definitely more critical — language, cultural rights, autonomy, and later independence. One could understand that we needed to mobilize the whole society behind those demands, including the school and college students. But what about now? Do we need to drag the students out from their classes and parade them through streets to demand implementation of the 19-point programme of the BNP or repeal of the Indemnity Bill? We definitely think not. A University student is, however, different.

He or she is an adult, and as such should participate in the political issues that face the country. Originally the idea of student parties at the University level was to push forward the students own educational and related demands. Their participation in national politics was based on their own perception of which political party represented their interest most.

If we are to continue to permit student politics at the University level then what can and should be done to rescue the students from the armed gangsters who seem to have acquired a pivotal position in the student wings of the major political parties. To start with, no political activities should be permitted in the schools and colleges, and the student parties in those institutions should be immediately disbanded. As for the Universities, first all the Hall should be cleared of non-student residents. This step should be followed by the expulsion of all non-students from student parties. This itself does not solve the problem because political parties themselves ask their important student workers to register in some course or the other for the sole purpose of being able to carry out political activities in the campus. The issue of "season jam", must also be addressed in this connection, if we want to make sure that only the properly registered students are present in the campus. If a three years honours course takes double that time to complete than naturally a student will get diverted into many other things, including becoming involved in anti-social activities.

The critical first step is to recover all illegal arms from the students. The daily news of police raids into this or that Hall and recovering no weapons, just will not do. We are not convinced that the police have no idea as to who

US Backs Shi'ites against Saddam

Washington and Riyadh have banded together in holding talks with Iraqi Shi'ite opposition leaders, to develop a strategy to oust Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein. James Dorsey of IPS reports from London.

disrupt a member of NATO — Turkey — and see a further breakdown in Iran.

Iraqi opposition leaders and Western intelligence sources say the strategy involves four main objectives.

These include financial and possibly military aid for Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish groups in the Iraqi National Congress, strengthening of the Allied-protected Kurdish regions of northern Iraq and creating a similar zone in southern Iraq.

The fourth objective will be to provide more financial support for dissidents within Saddam's inner circle, who would initially take power and then bring the opposition into a provisional government.

Details of the strategy were hammered out in Washington in late July in meetings between then US Secretary of State James Baker, President George Bush's National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and an Iraqi opposition delegation.

The delegation included Shi'ite leader Seyed Mohammed Bahr al-Eloom, Kurdish leaders Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabani, along with Shi'ite Iraqi National Congress members Leith Kubba and Ahmad Chalabi.

The meetings marked a departure from past Washington and Riyadh policy. Previously, the United States had refused

to engage the opposition in any serious discussion because of fierce Saudi objection to such contacts — as well as a fear that this would deter US contacts in Baghdad from moving against Saddam. The talks have renewed confidence among Iraqi opposition groups, who feel US officials are determined to topple Saddam. But some opposition leaders remember Washington appeared to back, then abandoned Kurdish and Shi'ite rebels in Iraq in the aftermath of the Gulf War.

But Washington is said to have pledged support for the Iraqi opposition if it files a formal application to the UN Security Council for the release of some of the billions of dollars in frozen assets to the dissidents. Iraqi business sources also said the United States is privately willing to loan the opposition US\$ 100 million.

Still, it was agreed during the Washington meetings that "the Iraqi people must bring about change themselves", said an opposition leader, adding the need for military assistance was discussed. Sources like Shi'ite Dawaa party leader Mohammed Abdul Jaabar, Iraqi human rights activist Abdel Hussein Shaaban and Iraqi opposition leaders and members of the Western intelligence said the need to create a situation conducive for

either the assassination of Saddam or his overthrow in a military coup remains central to the strategy.

"The first move has to come from within the establishment," said Shaaban. "Nobody knows exactly how it will happen, but the establishment is the basic element." He claimed the opposition was already "channelling money" to top Iraqi army officers.

The Washington-Riyadh decision to involve the Iraqi opposition, and the Shi'ites in particular, was prompted by the political need to have a legitimate Iraqi face. Iraqi opposition leaders also admitted that US contacts with dissidents in Baghdad had put them in a tight spot. An intelligence source noted wryly, "There were just too many meetings in the International Hotel bar in Amman (Jordan)."

But Eloom added: "It's we who have the contacts now. We meet Saddam's inner circle in Amman."

The strategy is based on the assumption that a protected zone in the south will sandwich Saddam between areas in the north and the south that are no longer under his control. This would increase discontent in Baghdad, opposition leaders and intelligence sources argued.

Involvement of all segments

manufactures and who sells or supplies weapons to the students. In case of sophisticated automatic weapons, it is a matter of national security as to who, how and where these weapons come from and when. If all our law enforcement agencies put together cannot rid us of armed gangs from the campus, then how can we have confidence that they will deliver us from smugglers, drug dealers or foreign enemies.

A necessary condition for the success of all the above mentioned steps would be for the political parties to come together on this question. If consensus was ever a crying need, it is now, and on this question. Once again the spotlight falls on the two pre-eminent leaders of the two biggest parties. Now is not the time for either of them to think as to why else should come to any agreement because the trouble is within the ranks of the other. When factional fighting was rendering BCL apart, the ruling party was smiling, and some suspect, aiding the breakaway faction only to weaken the Awami League. Now, some others may think, that since BNP is in trouble, it is AL's turn to have its fill of laughter. BNP's smile then was foolish, as AL's laughter now would be short sighted. Both the BNP and the AL are afflicted by the cancer of armed gangs vitiating their student wings and they need to work together to eradicate it. As long as these two parties act out of deep suspicion, the miscreants will find protection under some guise or the other. But if they together tackle the problem, only then would our Universities be freed of violence and our student politics restored its dignity.

In the final analysis, the question is far bigger than that of the future of our student politics. It is about the future of politics itself. It is a question of our political process maturing to the level where students will no longer be required to jeopardise their future to realise the agenda of political parties. So ultimately, it is a question of us all maturing as a nation, so that we do not have to use our students to solve our political problems.

It would never again allow foreign troops on its soil.

But a UN Security Council resolution to create a protected zone in the south could persuade Iran to admit UN forces. This in turn could be the stepping stone to renewed relations between Washington and Teheran.

Iraqi opposition groups are lobbying Saudi Arabia to use its extensive Sunni contacts among Saddam's inner circle and military to engineer a move against the Iraqi leader. Sources said Saudi intelligence will soon be briefing Saudi King Fahd on his options, while Saudi intelligence assessment officers have reportedly begun going in to Baghdad.

But the opposition leaders and intelligence sources said Saudi Arabia suffers from lack of experiences, continued distrust of the Shi'ites and fear that the emergence of a multi-party democracy in post-Saddam Iraq would bring pressure for reforms in the Kingdom's own autocratic government structure.

Most Iraqi opposition leaders, including Eloom, Shaaban and Jaabar and the Western intelligence sources insist the creation of a second multinational protected zone in the south does not endanger the existence of the Iraqi state or Iraq's territorial integrity.

But a minority of opposition leaders see Iraq's break-up as a prerequisite to promote regional democracy. Says Shaaban: "Break it up now and put it back together later. The whole region — Turkey, Syria, Iran — will be democratically restructured. This is an opportunity for the new world order."

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the departure of US forces, Iran has insisted

To the Editor...

Relationship

Sir, The concept regarding any phenomenon changes, as one ages. It is generally believed that with the passing of time, the changing concept takes on authentic shape. I concede to the objectivity of the above law.

Relationship — its changing nature renders itself very tricky to define. However, I venture to define it as follows: Relationship has been a process through which two or more entities co-operate for their mutual benefit. I tend to opine that whatever action one refers to as 'relationship' can be explained by the above definition.

I see that material interests and relationship are very closely intertwined. Without the presence of the former, the latter is unthinkable. Even, the relationship between the parents and their wards, husband and wife which are believed to be very close; have also not been departure from the above law. A dissident of this view can be pacified with the provision of separations between some husbands and wives and bitter relationship between some parents

and some of their sons and daughters.

People learn much from their own lives since they know themselves best. There are some parents who regard less of the prospects of their wards tend to continue good relations with them. This is because of the belief system and the sense of morality and responsibility of those parents. Everybody does not require to go to prove the authenticity of any truth. Once a truth is learnt, it should be disseminated thus doing a great good to the society. As it appears to me, it is a truth that the term 'relationship' is vague. It does not have any distinct connotation; it is preconditioned by material interest.

The above truth should be disseminated. Children should be taught to be highly realistic. Our country needs a new generation with some virtues.

Arming the people with the above virtue will be an uphill task. But unless this stupendous task is done, the country's development is bound to remain a far cry.

As mentioned earlier, the concept regarding anything has been in constant change. So, the above concept does also lend itself to further

NGOs

Sir, Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. More than 65% of the total population is landless and lives in impoverished condition. Due to galloping increase of population and unchoked river erosion the number of landless people is increasing fast. The Government with its limited resources, cannot meet the requirements of these people alone. In order to mitigate the suffering of the poor, attempts were made through co-operatives, and 'swaniver' movement to give the people monetary help to take up some trade or occupation to earn their livelihood. Though the movement initially gave good results, it could not progress well.

Mr. Md. Abdur Rouf, Department of International Relations, DU

Market reform

Sir, This is to thank The Daily Star for printing Mr. Faisal Siddiqui's article "Market Reforms Require Adequate Time" confronting Prof. Rehman Sobhani's ultra-bold "Search for New Alternatives to Market Reforms".

To me the 18th Aug article of Mr. F. Siddiqui is the most cheerful and the most significant even seen in the columns of The Daily Star regarding national economic opinions.

We most surely look forward to more such articles whereby the innocent people of this country could be made aware of the disastrous policies championed by illiterate economists dominating the intellectual-economic climate since 1971.

Nizam Ahmad, President, Bangabandhu Chetana Bikash Kendra, Dhaka

Gas connection

Sir, Kallastila Gas field is located in village Fulbari of Gopalganj upazila of Sylhet district. Gas has been channeled from this place to Ashugonj and other far away places. But it is an irony of fate that despite clear assurance given by the honourable Prime Minister just after assumption of office that gas connection would be given to the local consumers, it has not been materialized as yet. Although pipeline has been laid in the neighbouring village Rankeli, nothing has been done to lay pipelines and provide gas connection to village Fulbari where the gas field is situated. This will tarnish the image of the government in public eyes. Hence, I urge the Petrobangla to come forward and take appropriate steps to honour the commitment of the honourable Prime Minister.

Saleh Ahmed Chowdhury, Vill: Fulbari, Sylhet.

without any proper planning. In a particular place more than 2/3 NGOs were found working while the other places were left uncared for. There is still little co-ordination among the NGOs. The distressed area should be identified first. The requirements be assessed. Accordingly, the NGOs should be allowed to work sharing their fields of work. Suppose one NGO will provide family planning assistance while another will provide educational facilities, and so on. If different NGOs are allotted different types of works in a particular distressed area, the area will surely develop.

NGOs should be more service oriented. It is a fact, that for capital formation savings are most essential to keep the NGOs running. But while calculating profit, the margin should be very nominal. The main motto of the NGOs should be to provide assistance to make the poor people stand on their own feet. The NGOs have medicare programme, family planning programme and educational programme among others. But the vocational programmes should be given top priority. I would request the authority to look into the matter and the nation

know the number of success stories of different NGOs.

Mahbul Haque Chowdhury, Deputy General Manager, Sonali Bank HO, Dhaka

Gas connection Fulbari

Sir, Kallastila Gas field is located in village Fulbari of Gopalganj upazila of Sylhet district. Gas has been channeled from this place to Ashugonj and other far away places. But it is an irony of fate that despite clear assurance given by the honourable Prime Minister just after assumption of office that gas connection would be given to the local consumers, it has not been materialized as yet. Although pipeline has been laid in the neighbouring village Rankeli, nothing has been done to lay pipelines and provide gas connection to village Fulbari where the gas field is situated. This will tarnish the image of the government in public eyes. Hence, I urge the Petrobangla to come forward and take appropriate steps to honour the commitment of the honourable Prime Minister.

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