

Inspiring Ekushey

A great national day and the greatest religious festival in the land have coincided for the first time in our lifetime — and perhaps for the last time too.

Ekushey is wholly an expression of a national aspiration for cultural self-determination. And it started as such and not at all on the narrow considerations of capitalising on linguistic injustice.

Yes, the political fruits of the Ekushey were reaped far more than these were ever expected to. What happened to what Ekushey set out to do in the first place and indeed its only issue?

That the political success and the crowning one at that, namely, independence, did not hold for long on the right track and have constantly been corroded from within for more than two decades is mainly due to our miserable performance on the linguistic, literary and overall cultural front.

Let Ekushey, as ever, inspire us to get out of it.

Far from the Reality

The Prime Minister's keenly-awaited post-election remarks before the national and international press have unfortunately ended up adding to the controversy generated by the just-held polls rather than subtracting from it.

The BNP's perception of the low turn-out in the election may differ with that of the rest. That is quite understandable. One could even allow that the polls were necessitated to meet a constitutional or legal requirement.

This is indefensible in the face of the very one-sided and uncontested character of the polls followed by transparent reports of discrepancy between the voters' physical presence and the unusually large turn-out, repeat voting, stuffing of ballot papers, snatching of ballot boxes, absence of returning and asst. returning officers and suspension of elections at several polling stations.

The news that the Election Commission has retracted from its earlier stance of going into some such alleged irregularities on the plea that the existing law does not permit it to question any results of the parliamentary elections casts a further shadow on the credibility and authenticity of the polls.

The election has been a moral disaster but the lessons it has thrown up in its trail can be utilised for rebuilding the chances of a fresh dialogue provided the BNP brings itself to making a realistic assessment of the poll outcome and the opposition comes forward out of a sense of contentment that its demand for a non-partisan conduct of elections stands vindicated.

Field-day for Mugging

It was newsy yesterday on the mugging front. A middle-aged Babubazar shrimp trader Abdul Hannan was shot in his thigh and robbed off Tk nine lakh he had just drawn from a bank.

Although the incident took place in the afternoon, the Kotwali Police Station officials who reportedly had gone to the place of occurrence were yet to return, as late as 10 pm, so that no case was filed till then.

On Sunday again, and in broad day-light an elderly cloth merchant was knifed, beaten up and then robbed of Tk 75 thousand — in presence of some policemen in front of the Gulistan cinema hall.

Muggers get vigorously on the prowl prior to the Eid festival. We know that Dhaka Metropolitan police deployed special squads to keep vigil. One would be interested to know how many were apprehended under the action programme.

Thoughts on Shaheed Day

by Prof Roushan Ara Hoque

TWENTYFIRST February or Shaheed Day is the most significant day in the history of our Bengali nationhood. After 1952, we have been observing it as a Day of showing respect to the language martyrs who sacrificed their lives on that day to establish our right to speak in our mother tongue.

As time passed on, the Language Movement gained more and more momentum due to the repeated attempts by the then Government of Pakistan to repress and suppress it through violence. Then it no longer remained a movement for mother tongue only but a new inspiration of nationalism added to it.

As years passed on more and more economic exploitation and political control of the then Pakistan Government inspired and united the entire nation to achieve not only the right to speak in mother tongue but to establish equal rights in all aspects of national life.

The second phase of the effect of the Shaheed Day began after the achievement of freedom. We all know that freedom is the price of eternal vigilance.

The third phase of the effect of the Shaheed Day began after the achievement of freedom. We all know that freedom is the price of eternal vigilance. The demand for provincial autonomy was most forcefully expressed through the 11-point programme and the whole country was united under the banner of the Awami League.

The third phase of the effect of the Shaheed Day began after the achievement of freedom. We all know that freedom is the price of eternal vigilance.

The Spirit of February Twentyone

by Nuruddin Amjad

THIS is my humble offering in the commemoration of February Twentyone — the day in 1952 we stood up for the recognition of Bengali as a State Language.

This is admittedly unfortunate but not shameful, since it was not entirely my own fault. When I was born, the English ruled India.

Contrary to our fond expectations, this job-related situation did not change significantly after independence. Speeches and exhortations apart, all of my generation even if they now try to conduct their office work in Bengali continue to think in English and translate these thoughts into Bengali as fast as their nervous system would permit them.

I personally am working hard to improve my written Bengali but I am old enough to admit that I shall never be able to beat my son at it.

I personally believe that the spirit of February Twentyone is not fully expressed in the ritual of placing floral wreaths at the Shaheed Minar and closing an English language office memorandum with a signature in Bengali, at the bottom.

I guess February 21 teaches us to think and speak out fearlessly. It teaches us that one man with courage can make a

mission conference discussion. The government might have ignored all these pertinent questions, but people will judge the performance of every one while exercising their voting right as to in whose hands the best interest of the country — its well-being, integrity and sovereignty — will be safe.

Azizul Qadir, 5, Malibag, Dhaka

To be late

Sir, I had an opportunity to read the article 'It's Divine to be Late' written by Chintito which was published in your paper on January 30, '98. The writer has rightly pointed out that this is a dangerous attitude. But he did not suggest any remedy to those.

Even some high officials of the government failed to show up at the Secretariat when it was visited to see the attendance. So it seems that we are at the mercy of these officers.

If this is the condition of a country, it cannot expect any development in any sector. This loss can be termed as 'time economy'. Since we cannot think and speak out fearlessly, we are unable to improve our lot.

M. Ali, Dhaka

Sangsad and on that issue the opposition resigned from the Sangsad. All attempts of settlement failed due to egotistic stance of the leaders none of whom gave any importance to the interest of the people and the future of the democratic process.

The Ekushey Book Fair held in Bangla Academy every year has direct solidarity with the Shaheed Day and the success of the Language Movement. It is the most desired meeting place of the readers, writers, publishers and the lovers of mother tongue, arts, national culture and heritage.

Another fundamental condition of democracy is the right to elect a govt. of people's choice in a congenial atmosphere which is only possible in our country under a neutral caretaker government as was proved by the election of 1991.

On the eve of the Shaheed Day of this Silver Jubilee year of our victory of 1971, let us now take new pledges to revive the spirit of the Day to begin a new struggle against all these irregularities diminish us and to establish the envisaged proper democratic process in the country, so that the blood of the martyrs really does not go in vain.

majority. It teaches us that one has nothing to live for; unless one has something to die for. Bengali is dear to us but Bangladesh is dearer. We must, if we want speedy economic development, place all our resources at the service of this very poor nation.

To my way of thinking, language should be viewed only as one of the resources with which modern business with its need for fast and accurate information, is conducted on a global scale.

Our state functions are already being conducted in Bengali. The national anthem is in Bengali. We have won the battle. We must no longer behave as frightened men unwilling to face the truth.

The spirit of February Twentyone whispers to us that we have nothing to fear but fear itself!

A R Choudhury, Uttara, Dhaka

My vote — to whom?

Sir, if one faces bandits on one side and ferocious animals on the other (for his possession of value to them), then with whom will he side to save himself? If none, then how will he survive!

Arms recovery versus armed battle

Sir, Every citizen of this country knows that army has been deployed all over the country to recover illegal arms and punish their belonging.

Dr T Hossain

Detail descriptions of Thursday's election have come out in the national dailies. These give a clear picture of how it was conducted for the 6th Parliament.

The election has not solved the national problem at all. The controversy is rather leading the country from frying pan to fire as evidenced by the reaction reflected in the newspaper reports.

Indulgence in further violence will hurt the Nation. More innocent people will suffer in the process. A satisfactory solution is the most urgent need of the hour.

Md Firoj Alam, Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall, Dhaka University

Significance of Eid

by Abu Imran

IT is said that the month of long fasting brings in two rewards — (1) the attainment of piety which is carried over the next eleven months in its real spirit, then peace and violence-free society may be guaranteed; and (2) Eid, i.e. happiness, on the day following the day on which Shaawal (Arabic calendar month) moon is sighted — after which the faithful are not required to observe obligatory fasting for the next eleven months.

How far and to what degree the piety is practised by the Muslim community as a whole is a million dollar question since even during the Ramzan (the month for fasting) many people do not fast. Those who do, among them, many don't really fulfil its demands — i.e. they only keep themselves hungry from dawn to dusk but don't leave their bad habits nor do even good things which are the prime objectives of fasting.

It is aimed at attaining piety through month-long training of restraints and following strictly the do's and don'ts. As a soldier achieves perfection through undergoing rigorous training, so does a Muslim if faulty training or obtaining it loosely does not help in mundane affairs, then how can one expect attaining higher form of piety through faulty fasting? It is said, one who has not abhorred his evils during fasting, such fastings are not acceptable to Allah.

Whatsoever may be the outcome of (1) above (piety, peace etc.), at least (2) i.e. Eid or happiness on Eid day is generally observed by almost all the community members — sometimes ignoring the fact that in Islam a festivity is supposed to be observed with reservation unlike the practice in other communities. Eid day should rather be observed as thanks giving, of course with restrictive festivity. It, therefore, starts with community prayer in fields, mostly, and mosques too where there is no

arrangement for prayer in the field or if the weather is inclement. People go there in festive mood in good or at least clean clothes using perfumes etc.

A question may arise as to how the poor can also share the happiness the rich do. It is possible because Islam has an in-built system which, if followed properly, there would be no scope for one in the whole world to be poor or at least remain in need, unaided or unsheltered. It has made obligatory on Muslim (rich) to pay zakat (poor tax @ 2.5% on his savings once in a year) which is distributed amongst the needy and for furtherance of the cause of Islam. History has rich record to prove that when this system was in vogue, the rich used to roam in the streets of Medina Sharif to find poor to give their Zakat to them so as to absolve himself of the responsibility imposed on him by Allah. But they hardly found one. However, in Islamic state, rich people don't have to worry because it is the responsibility of the state to collect and distribute the Zakat money.

A relevant story even in these days was hard sometime back. It went like this: 'In one of the Gulf states, a Shaikh caught hold of a Muslim from Bangladesh and wanted to give him some zakat money. The Bangladeshi Muslim said that he was not that poor to receive such money. Then the Shaikh forced him to take the money saying that had he not been a miskeen (poorest of the poor) then why had he come to his (Shaikh's) country, and hence he could take the money since such money could be enjoyed by the way-farers, miskeens etc.' This could be a story wrong or right but is surely indicative of a system that is quite capable of wiping out poverty not by option but by compulsion. Besides zakat, prior to Eid, Muslims of means are required to pay 'Fitr' a kind of dole on his and his family's dependents behalf @ little less than 2 kg or 3 kg (here scholars differ with regard to quantity) of the main cereal one takes. This time,

the concerned committee has declared around Taka 23/- per person to be paid to poor as the amount of 'Fitr'.

The other arrangement is that one can't be considered as true Muslim if he eats to his fill while his neighbour sleeps hungry. Under this arrangement, neighbours have not to be differentiated. He could be any body, a Muslim, a relation or even a non-Muslim since food is the basic need of human being and even of animals.

With all the above arrangements, the poor are supposed to get modest amount of food or money to share happiness with others on this day.

As said, the day starts with offering thanks-giving prayer in the field. Prayer is followed by 'khutba' (sermon) where the Imam (one who leads the prayer) after praising the Lord, gives valuable speech reminding people of their obligation to the Creator and the creation and wishes peace and happiness for the brothers the world over. People assemble in joyous mood and after prayer is over they embrace each other and exchange greetings and return home and share special dishes with family members, friends and neighbours. The day itself takes a festive look. Eid therefore brings happiness after month-long restraint of food, feast and even other permitted things. As Eid is observed within the limits prescribed, so normally untoward incidents are not noticed which in other communities on festive days become a commonplace, as observed from media. But, regrettably, incidents of minor nature take place sometimes because of cross culture effects and for not following the do's and don'ts of Islam. For this, however, neither Eid nor Islam is responsible but it is the person who violates the codes is responsible.

On the whole, Eid day is the day of happiness and one wishes such day to be every day so that life becomes comfortable and worth living meaning fully since Eid day helps Muslims to forget and forgive bitterness and be brothers.

WORSHIP IN ISLAM

Ramadan Perspective

by Akhter-ul-Alam

IN Islam worship or prayer is not only a silent mediation. It is also not an apathy or something like escapist tendency for silence and solitary seclusion. The term 'ibadat' itself is indicative of service. The fasting of Ramadan is one of the glaring example of such worship.

Worship is nothing but a process to achieve or reach the ultimate goal. This goal is to live in peace and harmony and to work in an atmosphere of friendly co-existence and co-operation. This harmony is needed (a) within oneself i.e. within his heart and mind; (b) between his body and soul, i.e. within his very existence; (c) within his circle of environment i.e. family and social life; (d) within wider circle of his environment i.e. in his national and regional life; and (e) within international perspective.

The five pillars of Islam — the Kalima, the Salat, the Siam, the Jakat and Haj — are the five stages of religious service. All these stages are prescribed for a person to perform his 'ibadat' : to render service to keep the balance of peace and harmony of this physical and spiritual existence of one to all in this worldly life.

It is wellknown that in the struggle for life, the victorious man could achieve worldly wealth and prosperity. Such successful man could easily deny the role of soul in the human existence. He could also easily ignore the spiritual side of human nature. He may not have the idea about the deplorable conditions of have-nots. Fasting of Ramadan teaches this person such a lesson, so that he could feel the closeness with the whole human race. On the other hand, a person may have to fast for want of food. He may think that he is alone in the world suffering such agony of fasting. The Ramadan shows him that he is not alone. The entire society share with him in spite of their affluence or richness. This situation creates a harmony among the have and have-nots: one for all and all for one.

Ramadan is indeed a special kind of ibadat or worship by which the uncontrolled physical passion and unclean soul of a person could easily be controlled, rectified, cleaned and purified. 'Ibadat' has two phases: (i) service towards God and (ii) service towards creatures. The first is a due obligation to the Supreme Creator; and the second is the duty — also no less than an obligation towards the fellow creatures. In Islam, this two-fold dues and duties are termed as 'Hogqullah' and 'Hoqqul-Ibad'.

By uttering a Kalima, a person becomes a believer of the existence of the soul and as such existence of a Supreme Creator. By establishing Salat regularly he could be deeply devoted to the Creator of his soul. By declaring the Kalima and by performing the regular Salat along with observing the fasting of Ramadan, a person could easily establish his power over his mind, over his own self, over his physical elements of his body and ultimately over the inborn passions of his nature. As such he could understand easily that apart from performing the duties towards the Creator, he has also responsibilities towards his fellow creatures. If he is capable upto the mark, he could easily understand that the Zakat is also obligatory for him; he will have to spend a certain portion of his wealth towards the welfare and well-being of the needy and deprived persons of the society. By this way a person could

also purify his wealth and earnings through Zakat.

According to the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah (tradition) of the Prophet (SM) the able and the wealthy believer has to visit the Kaba — the perennial goal once in a life time, uttering loyalty towards God. This Kaba is a place for assembling. (Quran 2: 125). There he has to perform the Towaf and Sayee and after day-long standing at Arafat, he has to sacrifice a living animal according to the traditions stretching from Prophet Ibrahim (a) down to Prophet Mohammad (SM). The person concerned knows it already that 'It is not their meat/Nor their blood, that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him.' (Quran 22: 37)

With this, the journey of life of a believer becomes complete. It reaches the ultimate goal and makes a person complete — full human being.

Historically and spiritually this journey started in the month of Ramadan when the Quran was revealed to the Prophet (SM)

This Quranic message teaches a person how to perform his service, which is called 'ibadat' and which is the true sense of worship. It starts with a mental proclamation 'Kalima' with personal and personal mental and physical performance of the 'Syam' (of Ramadan).

The Quran says: 'Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Quran, as a guide/To mankind also clear (sign) For guidance and judgement./Between right and wrong./So every one of you/Who is present (at his home) during that month/Should spend in Fasting. (2: 185)

OPINION

Dr B Choudhury's Press Briefing

Dr T Hossain

The 17th February made me sad. He said, the number of respectable persons are depleting in the country. This is a blow to Dr Choudhury's respectable image. It hurts me. I wish, this responsibility could be better discharged by the Minister in charge of information.

The election has not solved the national problem at all. The controversy is rather leading the country from frying pan to fire as evidenced by the reaction reflected in the newspaper reports. No well-wisher of the country will be happy if an agreeable solution is not reached by consensus soon.

Indulgence in further violence will hurt the Nation. More innocent people will suffer in the process. A satisfactory solution is the most urgent need of the hour.

Prof B Choudhury possesses a pleasant personality to act as a buffer in the midst of hot controversy. Under the circumstances, if a preface is impressed upon the admirers of Prof Choudhury, it will be unfortunate. Of course, he did say before the election that this is not the end of the election; there will be more elections in future. There was a ray of hope in that statement. It was assumed that this Parliament will pass necessary law to arrange an all-party election in near future. In this respect, I do hope Prof B Choudhury's statement should not disappoint his non-political well-wishers.

But, if morning shows the day, the shape of things being thought to come does not offer any optimism. So very cautious statements are expected from persons like Dr Choudhury.