

For Siam and Sobriety

The month hallowed by the advent of the holy Quran and enjoining upon us to put ourselves through a process of self-purification, has begun on its intrinsically auspicious note. Our respectful welcome to the heralding of it.

The essence of Ramadan would be lost on us if we confined ourselves to merely feeling a sense of spiritual elevation without trying to translate some of it in our behavioral pattern that have gotten rather awkward lately.

During this month, the Rojdars will be thirsty and famished for the whole day and then would be drinking water and eating food as darkness descends. They will find themselves at both ends of feeling the hardship of hunger or thirst as well as getting relieved of it at the day's end — the two-some experience binding them in an empathetic relationship with the have-not multitudes. Add to this the prayerful supplication before the Almighty and one has a powerful blend of a worldly concern with a spiritual redressal.

It is the training the Ramadan imparts in self-control, restraint and sobriety which must be regarded as its hall-mark. The showering of invectives and extreme positionings by the major political parties in relation to one another have landed them in a tight corner, a veritable blind alley.

Let the Siam's message of sobriety be understood in an extended sense by our political leaders who are expected universally now to lower the political temperature by a conscious avoidance of provocative words against each other. Not just for the month, beyond it as well.

Unhelpful Even Provocative

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has threatened with by-elections in case the opposition MPs fail to turn up at the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) sessions for 90 consecutive working days. So far as the constitutional provision is concerned, by-elections fall due upon continuous absence of MPs for the stated duration. But when the opposition MPs in a body abstain from Parliament over a political row, the wisdom of going for by-elections must be seriously questioned. Moreover, it is too early for the prime minister to think of — let alone publicly speak about — by-elections. We find this premature and definitely unhelpful. We regretfully add that this sounds rather provocative.

Has the prime minister exhausted all her efforts to bring the opposition back to parliament? We think not. But her statement is bound to send all the wrong signals and the prospect of a political compromise between the government and the BNP might elude our grip. The spectre of political uncertainty, chaos and unrest we have left behind need not be raised once again with portents to plunge the whole country into gloom. The political situation is not that grave, nor have we reached a precipice of sorts. With efforts, the fault-line in the relations between the government and the opposition can be mended.

The sticking point with the BNP so far has been fair coverage — or the lack of it, as the BNP claims — of JS proceedings by the electronic media. TV in particular. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's agreement in principle does not quite help. Why does she say, if necessary a second channel will be opened to cover the JS sessions in full? Commissioning a second TV channel will take time. What are we to do till then? Better come up with a clear instruction that TV will cover the proceedings of the treasury bench and the opposition on a fifty-fifty basis. Or, give them a coverage slot time through consultations so that it is acceptable to them. On the question of neutrality of the speaker the BNP must have to be conciliatory. Now that it has made its point clear, the chair will be under constant focus. We believe, the speaker has also taken the point. So the BNP must test his neutrality in the House, not outside of it. Then about the third contentious issue of releasing BNP party cadres who have been allegedly imprisoned, the onus is on the party, we say that again, to supply the government with a list of names and make it public, too.

The BNP leadership must know that their complaints do not constitute enough of a justification to boycott the parliament. So, they need to show a genuine interest to return to the JS.

An Open Secret, it Seems

Our Chittagong Correspondent's story on arms trafficking into the port city, purportedly at the behest of four major political parties has taken the veil off a surreptitious criminalisation of politics.

The allegations of a nexus between political god-fathers and sources of arms-smuggling, political party leaders financing illegal purchase of arms by their activists and the Shantibahini and Rohingya insurgent elements giving weapons in exchange for huge payments smack of mafia-like operations in the not-so-invisible underworld, after all. Despatch of weapons to 'secret' destinations has been stopped on the tracks by our vigilante agencies a few times over and from such incidents have we learnt a great deal about the operational routes, methods and sources of origin, etc.

All this knowledge has to be now put to good use by the agencies concerned with the full backing of the ruling party which must feel emboldened and visionary enough right now to strike at the root of a mini arms possession race going on between different party cadres.

Except for the purposes of further investigation planned to arrive at a conclusion that still eludes, the basic facts of the arms-haul cases must be made known to the public for the sake of transparency and their greater motivation to come forward and cooperate in such matters in the future.

The ruling party will do well to make bold like they have done in Tangail to do whatever it takes for ridding our politics of the extremely dangerous arms deals which seem to have become open secrets now.

National Water Council: Needed Policy for Judicious Use

The National Water Council must prepare urgently a National Water Policy including National Ground Water Policy for judicious use of water covering the interest of all water using sectors, writes Amjad Hossain Khan.

Although, the Council, the highest body, is to prepare a National Water Policy for water resources development and management for the country, we have failed to prepare a national water policy. The Council never reviewed the works of any water resources development plans of the country nor reviewed the investment plans and fix up any priority in the water sector.

During the period of President Ershad only three meetings were held during his five-year period. The MPO final report was placed to the Council. But due to adverse criticism of the report, the meeting had to be adjourned. The second meeting did not discuss anything substantial on water sector problems. The third meeting was for approving the PFCCO for 5-year Flood Action Plan.

During the period of former Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the Council was reconstituted in 1993 after two years. No meeting of the National Water Council was held.

In a seminar held jointly by

BUP and The Daily Star in August 1996. On sharing of Ganges water in pursuit of a solution, the water resources minister Abdur Razaque said that the government is considering to reconstitute the National Water Council and a National Water Policy will be prepared soon. On 21 December, 1996 a section of the press printed a news, quoting the Water Resources Minister, that a National Water Council headed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had been formed. And, that another committee headed by Water Resources Minister for 'Water Resources Management' had been formed to monitor the works.

The Council consists of the Prime Minister as Chairman, nine Ministers, ten Secretaries including the Cabinet Secretary, one Member of the Planning Commission dealing with water sector, representative of Dhaka University, president of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, president of the Institution of Diploma Engineers, four MPs from four divisions, three water experts to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

With the signing of the Ganges Water Treaty for 30 years, Bangladesh now is in a position to undertake the water resources development and management plans for maximising the use of water. However, the water that will be available under the Ganges Water Treaty and the proposed Brahmaputra Water Treaty and treaty for sharing all other common rivers will not be enough to meet the entire needs for irrigation and other water use sectors and to maintain the ecology.

To meet the situation, Bangladesh has to prepare her future Water Resources Management Plan by conjunctive use of surface and ground water.

The National Water Council must prepare urgently a National Water Policy including National Ground Water Policy for judicious use of water covering the interest of all water using sectors in the country.

A thorough review of all water resources development pro-

jects needs to be done to monitor these projects, ongoing and proposed. The Council should prepare a profile of priority projects to establish our water rights.

The MPO study clearly indicated that by 2000 AD all surface water projects with the available surface flow will be exhausted and for future developments there is no alternative but to go for Barrage projects on the Ganges and the Brahmaputra.

The National Water Management Plan under WARPO will be taken up soon. The plan after the completion of PFCCO study has identified a number of projects. This needs a critical review by the Council.

The National Water Council failed in the past to give proper guidance in the Water Resources Development of the country. But this should not discourage us. With the formation of reconstituted National Council and another Water Management Committee under the Ministry of Water Resources, these should be able to guide us in future plans.

In the absence of such policy guideline, the donors suggested their own project with all sorts of conditions. It is high time we should have a close look into the activities of the donors and their projects. In such issues, Bangladesh's national interest must be kept in mind.

Floods are a recurring phenomenon for Bangladesh causing colossal losses of lives and property. The TOR of the Council does not cover this aspect. The Ganges Water Treaty of 1996 provides for making optimum utilization of water resources of this region for Flood Management and river development and augmentation of the dry season flows of the Ganges. The TOR of the Council should cover such issues in the newly reconstituted National Water Council. The deliberations of the Council for all water related issue, both national and regional, will guide future negotiations including transparency and consensus.

The reconstitution of the National Water Council should be announced immediately with clear terms of reference and meetings of the Council should be held regularly. It is high time we have started working.

The writer is ex-Chairman, Bangladesh Water Development Board.

"Britain will Be there to Help You"

by John Major

Advance text of the British Prime Minister's speech, delivered to the FBCCI yesterday.

TRADE runs deep in the instincts of both our countries. So I was delighted to receive your kind invitation to address the Federation this morning.

My central message is that we in Britain are keen to develop our business links with you. We would like to increase our trade with you, and we would like to increase our investment in Bangladesh. You Prime Minister has in turn stressed to me your determination to move from a heavy reliance on outside aid to the inter-dependence which unites us all in the international trading community.

Trade is, of course, only one of the many links between us, although for this audience it is the one on which I would like to concentrate. We have a common business language. In important ways we have a shared history. Bangladesh's legal system is based on that of England and Wales, and the Bangladeshis are 'common-law' in the UK, with its distinctive and important contribution to modern Britain, forms a particularly unbreakable bond.

Another important but perhaps less frequently remarked upon link is our shared membership of the Commonwealth, which draws together a unique cross-section of countries with a shared commitment to democracy and is increasingly prepared to tackle the critical issues of the day.

Bangladesh, like Britain, has a key role to play and I much look forward to welcoming your Prime Minister to the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting which Britain will be hosting later this year in the historic setting of Edinburgh.

A theme of key importance, for the developing world as well as the developed, is the promotion of international trade; and it is one which the Commonwealth is well-suited to tackle. So I am pleased that it has now been agreed, at our suggestion, that the theme for the Edinburgh CHOGM should be the issue of trade, investment and development as the road to Commonwealth prosperity. These elements — trade, investment and Development — have a key role to play in the relationship

between the UK and Bangladesh, so perhaps I could say a little more on each.

Trade: Britain already has, I am glad to say, the largest foreign commercial presence in Bangladesh. Over 47 of our companies are now operating here, in a wide range of sectors. British American Tobacco (now the Bangladesh Tobacco Company) is the largest single foreign investor in the country. Many others are household names like Lever Brothers, GEC, Glaxo-Wellcome, British Oxygen and the Hong Kong/Shanghai and Standard Chartered Banks.

Many of these 47 are already seeking to expand their presence, and I hope that many more British companies will follow their example. Meanwhile, trade between our two countries over the last three years has grown by more than half.

But it is still too low and I am convinced that we can and should do more. For our part, we shall be taking active steps to do so, and I am delighted to be accompanied here in Dhaka by a number of leading British businessmen, who have precisely that aim in mind.

Investment: But just as important as increased trade is increased investment. The United Kingdom is now the world's second largest outward investor, and the second largest investor in Bangladesh, with over \$300m of direct investment registered here.

That figure, I know for a fact, is about to increase further. I have just come from witnessing with Sheikh Hasina a new \$150m gas production sharing contract between Britain's Cairn Energy and Petrobangla. From early 1998, this promises to bring gas supplies to Chittagong, and to supply the Midlands Power Generation Plant proposed at Haripur.

I hope that final agreement on that project, too, can be reached soon, to give both a much-needed boost to power supplies in this country and the clearest possible signal of encouragement to foreign investors that Bangladesh wel-

comes foreign investment in upgrading your infrastructure. This seems to me an important message.

I know that Bangladesh too has been working hard to make yourselves an attractive location for the fierce global competition for foreign investment. Your current approach seems to me to provide a good base for future development. Your provisions for 100 per cent foreign ownership, repatriation of capital gains, tax holidays and low duties on the import of capital machinery have all evidently weighed with foreign investors. I am sure this is the right approach.

There are still difficulties, of course. It may not surprise you to hear me saying that although procedures for gaining approvals for new investment have been streamlined, they can still be cumbersome. The multiple permissions required can lead to bureaucratic delay and consequent discouragement. So I hope that you will continue to apply your scissors ruthlessly to the red tape!

Liberalisation: What potential investors need above all, however, is a stable and transparent regime in which to operate. For trade and investment can be most beneficial if they are allowed to flow with a minimum of government interference. So, in the UK, I have been determined to unshackle the British economy from the bonds of bureaucracy, to leave the market free to operate without excessive interference by government.

We still have more to do. But by insisting on deregulation and by remorselessly bearing down on inflation and unnecessary government expenditure, Britain is now enjoying the best economic conditions for a generation. And the strongest recovery of any of the leading European economies: inflation about 3 per cent, output growing at 7.5 per cent, base rate at 6 per cent, unemployment now under

7 per cent of the workforce.

And with deregulation goes liberalisation, and particularly pulling down trading barriers to the outside world. The recent evidence indicates that it is those countries that are most integrated into the world economy that achieve the fastest growth in output.

That is why I am such a passionate supporter of free trade and open markets. And why I have called for the developed world to abolish tariffs on imports from developing countries. Providing we all work on a level playing field, the opportunities for us all are enormous. And, in any event, I have always thought there is something ludicrous in the developed world offering aid to countries in difficulties and then not opening their markets to those same countries, thus ensuring they stay in difficulties.

Therein lies the importance of the World Trade Organisation. It provides a framework of rules for international commerce that foster economic growth instead of hindering it. The WTO held its first Ministerial Conference in Singapore last month and achieved some useful progress — and I was glad to hear that our two delegations cooperated particularly closely together in the course of it. In Europe, we have found that there is a wider reason, too, for pursuing open markets and free trade: that they help to bind countries together, encouraging wider forms of cooperation and so promoting security and stability.

For the plain truth is that, in the end, trade and investment will only flourish against a stable political background. Thus,

the EU not only provides a single market of some 400 million people, it has also armed itself with a common foreign and security policy. It is not only a market, but a club. You will understand that I have therefore been particularly encouraged by the recent progress which Bangladesh and your fellow members of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) have made in promoting greater regional cooperation. With a potential market of 1.2 billion, 3 times the size of the EU — the potential commercial benefits are self-evidently huge.

But greater cooperation also offers, I believe, an opportunity to build in South Asia a region of shared prosperity between countries whose previous history has been rather more difficult. I was particularly pleased to see the conclusions of your recent water-sharing agreement with India. Nor have the two sides stopped there. Deve Gowda told me only the day before yesterday of his very productive visit here earlier this week. This is a tremendous achievement, enormously to the credit of both sides.

How Can the EU Best Help?: Whether for Central and Eastern Europe, or for countries further afield, I am convinced that the most effective way for the Union to encourage democracy and prosperity is for its markets to remain open to the products and investment of developing countries. So we shall continue to lead the way within the EU in arguing for it to be generous and open to the products of developing countries.

Development: But our belief in the benefits of free trade does not mean that we underestimate the difficulties of getting there. And therein lies the role of development assistance. So

in Britain, we concentrate on using our aid budget both to help the poorest of the poor and to support countries in introducing or strengthening market disciplines and the other elements of good government.

Bangladesh in fact receives more British bilateral aid than any other country bar one, and we are delighted to be working so closely with you. But you have also been active in helping yourselves. The development of micro-credit has been a particular area in which your pioneering work can justly claim great credit. Together with your programmes for non-formal education, health, human rights and rural development, micro-credit has helped millions of your people to dignity, knowledge and greater economic independence.

So the message that I want to leave with you today is that in all of these three key areas — trade, investment and development — Britain is keen to be your partner, and to increase our work together. As fellow members of the Commonwealth and firm friends, Bangladesh and the United Kingdom have a solid foundation on which to build.

As governments and as business parties, we can look forward to an exciting future and to a long and mutually beneficial cooperation. The opportunities are there. Together, let us seize them. I am sure that we can.

And I am sure that you must. For trade touches us all. It touches the upper strata. It touches the business classes, of course. But it also touches others too.

So I wish you all much success in your endeavours, and I give you a firm assurance that, in so far as it lies in our power to do so, Britain will be there to help you — and to trade with you.

Nawab Sir Salimullah: Contribution to Society

by Prof. Roushan Ara Hoque

TODAY (January 12) is the 82nd anniversary of the death of Nawab Sir Salimullah, the pioneer of Muslim revival through education and participation in politics. He was the first political philosopher with great foresight who united the neglected people of the eastern part of India under one political banner.

Sir Salimullah was born in 1871 in the aristocratic Nawab family of Dhaka in Ahsan Manjil. He was the son of Khawaja Ahsan Ullah and grandson of Khawaja Usman Gani who was also renowned as the 'Hatem Tai' of Bengal. Though brought up in a affluent family, Sir Salimullah dedicated his life for the well-being of the poor and tried his best to mitigate the sufferings of his downtrodden countrymen. On completion of his education he joined government service as a Deputy Magistrate. He was awarded with the title of KCIE (Knight Commander of the Indian Empire) by the British govt. in 1903 for his commendable service. But for his patriotism and love for his people he resigned from the job and began active politics. His political mission was to revive the past glory of the Muslims. He tried to educate them and make them politically conscious to struggle and for equal social and political rights. His great contributions to the people of this region were, a) the installation of the status of Dhaka as a provincial capital, b) formation of All India Muslim League in 1906, c) establishment of parity rights and separate electorate for the Muslims, d) encouraging higher education, and philanthropic activities for the poor.

To revive the past glory of Muslims as a capital city and to open new avenues for the people of eastern region Sir Salimullah strongly supported the plan of Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon. Thus Dhaka regained its past glory as a capital of East Bengal and Assam and quickly prospered with establishment of new government offices, official residences, business centres and new industrial units at its suburbs. A new spirit of rejuvenation grew among the people as many jobs and business opportunities were opened to them.

Being thus inspired they began to join in all political and social activities of the country and gradually became conscious of their equal rights. Though the partition of Bengal was withdrawn in 1911 the spirit of regaining the political rights continued. As a consolation of the loss of Dhaka's status as capital and for the shock to Sir Salimullah, the then Viceroy gave him words to establish a university at Dhaka for the education and progress of the people of the abandoned capital. According to that after a few years, Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq took a strong initiative to materialise the vision of Sir Salimullah and the University of Dhaka was established in 1921.



The most important political contribution of Sir Salimullah was the formation of a new political party for the Muslim minority of this region as a counterpart of All India Congress. He called an All India Education Conference of the Muslims at Dhaka in Ahsan Manjil which was attended by the Muslim scholars from all over India. Then he called a separate meeting of leaders on 30th December, 1906. The meeting was presided over by Nawab Viquear-ul-Mulk. There according to the proposal of Sir Salimullah, a new political party for the Muslims known as All India Muslim League was formed. Its main objectives were, a) to unite all the Muslims on a platform to demand equal rights for them, b) to create

brotherly relation among all the communities, and c) to help them prosper. In 1907 All Bengal Muslim League was formed with himself as its President.

In 1906 Sir Salimullah arranged a meeting of 36 Muslim leaders under the leadership of Aga Khan with the then Governor General Lord Minto and placed the proposal of parity of rights for the Muslims by granting them separate electorate. Therefore, in the Morley-Minto Reforms of 1909 separate electorates for the Muslims was introduced to help them get proper representation in all the Local Councils, Provincial and National Assemblies.

Sir Salimullah was a great pioneer of higher education for the people of this region. To encourage technological education he had established the Ahsan Ullah Engineering School which has ultimately been developed into a full-fledged Engineering University, the only alma mater in technology of this country. For higher education he had established the Imperial Salimullah College which still bears the testimony of his strong patriotism. To encourage higher education to the students of distant areas he had established the Salimullah Muslim Hall for their accommodation at Dhaka. He had donated a huge amount of money for the establishment of Aligarh Muslim University. He used to give scholarships to many poor and meritorious students for higher education. In recognition of his contribution towards higher education when the Miford Medical School was upgraded it was renamed after him as Sir Salimullah Medical College.

Sir Salimullah was a great philanthropist. To give food, shelter and education to the destitute Muslim orphans he had established the Salimullah Muslim Orphanage at Azimpur which is rendering a great humanitarian service till now to innumerable orphans. This great patriot breathed his last on 12th January 1915 at the age of only 44. The people of East Bengal are greatly indebted to him for the creation of the spirit of political unity and giving them guidance to realise their political rights.

Justice Murshed: A Protector of Civil Rights

by Diwan Shafiul Alam

THE hero in history is not an isolated phenomenon, and his life and work cannot be viewed divorced from the times he lives through. A proper understanding and appraisal of the contemporary time thus is necessary in order to correctly assess the hero's impact and influence on the course of history. All those great ones who lived and tirelessly worked for the generations were patriots par excellence whose names are and should be recorded in golden letters in history to help guide us rightly at times of need. When the people are in the grip of odds and oddities facing trials and tribulations, they begin to struggle for a way out. History often presents at such moments of crises a hero, who having faith in destiny, love for the compatriots and zeal to make supreme sacrifices leads his people to the cherished goal of glory.

Such a leader is never given to the popular tricks of oratorical rousers nor does he indulge in commonplace art of political gimmicks. He is a man of principle and of course courage, ready to cast off the greed or glamour for a royal throne or the high pulpit of judgment. In stoic silence he makes trust with destiny and his silent voice of intuition finds utterances through the voice of the millions.

Justice Murshed was the personality, history presented us, who proved his mettle and merit during the turbulent days of later sixties when people struggled hard to wriggle out of the monstrous clutches of a political mechanism that nearly putrefied the body politics.

Scion of an ancient Muslim family of Bengal and nephew (son of the full sister) of Sher-e-Bangla, Murshed was born at a time treated as an era of giants moulding the destiny of subject people groaning under the British yoke. His whole upbringing, the entire gamut of

experience at the time in which he lived had given him good enough insight shaping his thinking, mental attitudes and above all his character. He seemed to carry on his broad shoulders the unwieldy load of the sorrows of his countrymen and at the same time his doughy mind enriched by all the excellence and sophistication of thorough-bred was prepared to encounter any hurdles in life. It was his magnetic touch which once produced a storm that shook the founda-



Bangabandhu congratulating Justice Murshed on his speech at RTC, Rawalpindi, 1969.

Yesterday was Justice Murshed's 86th anniversary of birth

tion of the government while he was ornamenting the highest seat of judiciary in this part of the world. Some called him a turbulent judge, since he strode the arena of law like a colossus, never compromising the principles he loved so dearly. As a lawyer and a judge he upheld the rule of law as an unflinching protector of civil liberties.

As an idealist he was never prepared to talk or think in terms of other alternatives or to discuss compromise solutions. He had an unshakable and undying faith in the principles

of justice and fairplay and proved it with unflinching spirit when he resigned his place as the Chief Justice of erstwhile East Pakistan High Court. Courage and unquestionable integrity could inspire him to take such a decision. No man fitted descriptions in full measure than Justice Murshed.

In retrospect, the events in the mid-forties followed by long spells of fire in the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1962, are considered to be legal classics. He did not live long enough but all his life he had been a crusader against the tyranny of injustice and tormenting menace of intolerance holding aloft the standard of liberty, justice and rule of law. He was never down hearted nor did he feel defeated ever. He lived like a Spartan to receive the gifts of nature with outstretched hands when fate raised him to dazzling heights...

Eminently well-versed in English, Arabic, Persian and Urdu, his pride in Muslim culture and tradition was deep-seated which were reflected in many of his speeches and judgements. Be it in delivering judgements or addressing intellectuals or talking in private, he had the scintillating touch of literary flourish and adroitly selected words with some poetic flavour and incantation about them. Accomplished, Syed Mahbub Murshed was a gentleman par excellence.

Some of his judgements delivered while acting as an ad hoc judge in the Supreme Court of Pakistan in 1962, are considered to be legal classics. He did not live long enough but all his life he had been a crusader against the tyranny of injustice and tormenting menace of intolerance holding aloft the standard of liberty, justice and rule of law. He was never down hearted nor did he feel defeated ever. He lived like a Spartan to receive the gifts of nature with outstretched hands when fate raised him to dazzling heights...