

## Eid for All

On the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr, we wish all our readers, patrons, advertisers and supporters a very happy Eid. We hope that the supreme message of Eid finds a deep resonance in all our hearts and along with the Muslims all over the world we pray for peace in the world and happiness and prosperity for all Allah's creation.

Though Eid is meant to bring happiness for all, we have to regretfully admit that there are many — in fact too many — in our midst for whom Eid come only in name. For them the economic burden of the occasion is too heavy to celebrate it in any meaningful manner. While we utter all the pious words and the beautiful teachings of our religion about helping the poor and looking after the disadvantaged, the truth of the matter is that like everything else in our society, Eid remains a festival of only those who can afford. While the Islamic ukase of Zakat and Fitr does help to assuage the plight of the poor to some extent, our poverty remains too large to be tackled in the conventional manner. We must think of some original ways to help our poor. One of the most fundamental messages of Islam is helping those who are in need. It is this message of Islam that seems to be neglected the most in our society. The simplicity of Prophet Mohammed's (SM) life does not seem to touch us as we pile unnecessary wealth for ourselves and try in vain to capture the true spirit of the religion.

Thus, once again, on the occasion of the holy Eid, while wishing the happiest of time to our readers and people at large, we would do well to remind ourselves that Allah enjoins us to build a just, fair and democratic society, which we have failed to do until now. Let that be our resolve on this happy occasion.

## Effort Wanted

The frenzy over the desperate attempt to reach home for Eid has exerted tremendous pressure on the routes leading out of Dhaka. The mad rush which in keeping with tradition gained in momentum from the last ten days this year too awaits a dramatic spending out of passion very soon but not before making us witness to a pitiable and perilous spectacle.

It is indeed a daunting task to go home for Eid and the most problematic part of the otherwise savoury adventure is transport. Thoughts about spending the longest holidays of the calendar at out-station homes tend to fly away as soon as one lines up to avail any form of transport to join two hundred fifty to three hundred thousand people — one third of Dhaka's population that literally struggle to scramble home in time. People make light of the journeys fraught with avoidable danger just to celebrate the biggest religious festival in the loving and warm presence of near and dear ones.

One of the reasons behind this mind-boggling situation is the transport inadequacy. Although loud announcements are often heard about the rise in the number of vessels and trains just to meet the rush of home-going passengers on the occasion of Eid, there has never been any coordinated effort for a better management of the great logistical challenge these two festivals bring along in the traffic reality at the exit points of Dhaka.

Possibility of sudden death is something we all have to learn to live with. But deaths reported from the millions making a hectic bid to reach their sweet homes for Eid have a touch of added poignance than other cases of mortality. It is not only because of the ironic and cruel end of tender and human objective but also because of our responsibility in this unabated tragedy due to our callousness.

The many deaths that are reported every year before and after Eid holidays as people troop home in the first place and then retrace their ways back to the working places could have been cut down significantly in number if a spirit of concern and love for man in general had coloured the consciousness of every quarter linked with this ejection and reinstatement of city population one way or the other. For any discernible improvement in the situation this has to be a fully coordinated approach involving the government agencies in the transport and law enforcement sector as well as the transport owners.

A laying of heads together and strict implementation of the evolved measures will iron out many problems that have their roots in the unscrupulous nature of some members of the society and the general apathy about the chaos it gives rise to.

Before next Eid let there be a committee headed by the government that will ease out the yearly, fleeting but fearful phenomenon of transportive mess with the effective participation of all concerned.

## Blind Fury

The ugly face and the dangerous potential of rumour had a chilling exhibition last Thursday in a village in Pakistan as thousands of fuelled and furious Muslims torched two churches in a neighbourhood marked by predominant Christian population. So violent was the stone-pelting and stick-brandishing crowd that it called for troops to protect the isolated Christian pocket of 96 percent Muslim Pakistan.

What instigated a section of overwhelming majority population to rise in such lethal aggression against such minuscule minority population? A rumour, an unconfirmed hearsay that torn pages of the holy Quran bearing insulting remarks against the Prophet had been thrown into a village mosque. The sacrilege was blamed upon people from the Christian neighbourhood and it took no time for the local Muslims to pour the phials of wrath on anything and everything that smacked of Christianity. So much for a rumour?

Sadly but surely, religious intolerance and collective frenzy over unconfirmed rumour and instigation has been the face of Islam to the practitioners of other religions in the modern times. The saner Muslims should make it a point on their hot-headed brethren that Islam as a faith and as an idea is too great to be tainted or insulted by the mischief of some knaves at some place. Besides, its essence is all about peace and the idealisation of man as the best of creations. It simply does not have any room for violence or crime in the name of its protection and honour.

# Celebrating Eid - in Ethical and National Context

The Eid is, as usual, an occasion of reconciliation and reunion among kith and kin, friends and relations and leaders and followers. Our leaders will certainly meet somewhere in Eid Reunion as they did before. We like to be optimistic that the Eid Reunion this year be productive of greater co-operation, tolerance and mutual trust among them... writes **M Arshad Ali**

**E**ID-UL-FITR, following the holy month of Ramadhan, is the greatest festival of the Muslims, because of its universal participation, and direct sharing by all of them, both rich and poor, high and low including even people of other religions. The other two great occasions of Eidul Azha and Hajj — the first one directly observed by the well-to-do and the second by the most affluent — are in a sense and to an extent restricted on ground of direct involvement and participation so far as financial aspect is concerned.

Eid means jubilation — the rejoicing declaration and celebration of a triumph. It is the celebration of the victory of the soul over the body, of the spirit over the elements. The soul of a pious Muslim who has strictly adhered to the rigours of fasting according to the Quranic prescription gains this victory through *nazat* — the culmination of the gift the Most Merciful Allah showers upon the obedient and disciplined souls. It is a consummation devoutly to be wished by a pious soul on the successful discharge of his duties against so many challenges and hurdles, temptations and provocations — the 'thousand natural' desires that 'flash is heir to.

Islam is a religion quite in keeping with human nature. Man bursts forth into celebration after he has achieved victory. The most Merciful God who has created mankind out of love, has equally lovingly provided for His faithful servants, quite in keeping with their instinctive satisfaction, an occasion of jubilation on their successful passing out — they have fulfilled all the requirements of the training course of the Ramadhan by carrying out all God's biddings. Fasting throughout the month has entailed on a man not only total continence from carnal desires and adherence to the ritualistic canons of religion but strict observance of the principles of honesty and integrity, particularly in matters of earning his livelihood without which no prayer is maintainable in the court of God.

To our utter regret, the Muslims all over the world have been languishing in innumerable problems, most of them be-

ing their own creations issuing forth from instinctive and acquired criminal tendencies. God, the Most Merciful and the Most Gracious, is ever willing to atone His best creation on the basis of some virtuous deeds. It is from this point of view that divine prescriptions for Salat, Ramadhan and the like exercises have been made to remove the criminalities in man and to attain purification of his soul. All these religious recipes are meant for building man's character, failing which the fasting, say, of the Ramadhan, is relegated to the lifeless practice of mere abstinence from food and drink. It is with a view to purifying man and salvaging him from the problem that impinges upon his personal, social and national life that Islam imposes the rigour of the monthlong *siam* culminating in the powerful and honourable Lailatul Qadr — the night when general amnesty is granted to those who have retreated from evils and committed not to resort to crime again. The significance of the Eid lies in the month of Ramadhan preceding it and that the latter in the revelation of the Holy Quran in the Lailatul Qadr — the night better than a thousand months is a timeless time which did more than all the times preceding it could not do. For it is in this night that the fate of the mankind was decided as it occasioned the revelation of the Holy Quran that has drawn the line of demarcation between the truth and the falsehood, the good and the evil for all times to come. Except the inveterate sinners accustomed to the practice of necromancy, breach of bonds of kinship, disobedience to parents, adultery, slander, drunkenness, perpetration of malice and miserliness, the All-loving God's forgiveness embraces all with their souls regenerated. With all the baser elements in man subdued and his animal propensities spurned, he is elevated to the angelic height through the realisation of the boundless possibilities God has impregnated him with. He is then perfectly in line with what Shakespeare has delineated in Hamlet 'What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In

apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world!...'. It is really for these persons that the Eid is meant as a ceremony — celebrating their victory, symbolising their invisible annihilation.

Once the investiture is made, a man of high stature as he is, cannot and should not stoop to evil deeds but maintain, at least, the status quo, by making contribution to the welfare of the society. The good of the society accrues two-fold from his own pursuit of good life as well as from those emulating his examples to effect a decrease in the occurrence of crimes in the society.

Viewed from the point of celebration of spiritual victory and the benefit that accrues from it, the Eid plays a role conducive to social welfare. The Eid is, according to Hadith, the national festival of the Muslims. The celebration takes on a true national character when it ensures the participation of the people in general which is dependent on financial ability and peace and tranquillity. Islam has made provisions for Fitr and Zakat — the two instruments which make the well-to-do and the affluent duty bound to part with a portion of their wealth for the relief of the destitute. Payable only on the eve of the Eid, the Fitr enables the poor to share with the rich the joys on this happy occasion. Buoyed up with the prospect of receiving manifold rewards for good deeds done during the Ramadhan in comparison with other months of the year the affluent are then bent on paying Zakat which brings relief to the poor in their financial distress and happiness in their destitution.

The orphan boy finding loving parents in the Prophet Mohammad (SM) and his wife Hazrat Ayesha (R) is an example inculcating the spirit of charity and shouldering responsibility of the distressed humanity. Tradition (Hadith) teaches that people should go to the Edgah (the venue of congregational prayer) and come back from it in two different paths, making it a duty for the Muslims not only to know each other's condition but to come of help and share the weal and woe.

Apart from all the above benefits, the Eid this year is

prospective of greater national service. The Eid is, as usual, an occasion of reconciliation and reunion among kith and kin, friends and relations and leaders and followers. Our leaders will certainly meet somewhere in Eid Reunion as they did before. We like to be optimistic that the Eid Reunion this year be productive of greater co-operation, tolerance and mutual trust among them as they have already agreed upon to make the Parliament more effective. The nation has achieved the Parliament at a stupendous sacrifice and as such it should play its due role as the centre of national politics that resolves all issues on its floors and decides upon policies concerning national interest with the help of participation of parliamentarians, of all parties — a national expectation that is yet to come true.

The message of the Eid this year thus is that of sinking differences among our leaders and of their working together for the continuation throughout the year of the peace prevailing on the Eid day. This is only possible by nullifying the forces of terrorism and lawlessness that vitiate social peace by dint of a united stand of the parliamentarians of both government and opposition parties. A society where law reigns supreme and goons and masts are conspicuous by their absence can only deliver the greatest good to the greatest number with the attainment of progress in all spheres of national life including education, industry, agriculture, trade and commerce. Such a condition of the country can only be attractive to foreign investment that we are in dire need of for the all-round development of the economy.

Since our leaders have laid down the foundation of co-operation by way of an agreement, we expect that the celebration of the Eid will generate further amity and fellow feeling among our leaders to fight unitedly the forces of lawlessness and terrorism with a view to establishing the rule of law and ameliorating the lot of the teeming millions.

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## Dhaka Day by Day

### Kidnapping or Playing Prank!

by Shamsad Mortuza



1:30 PM. Mrs Islam received a phone-call, a fishy one. A strange voice, coarse as if gagged, was heard: 'Do you have a school going *shantaa* (child)?' 'Yes, why?' a chill ran down the spine of the concerned mother who had sent her son to the coaching centre in the morning.

'Don't worry. Your *shantaa* is now in our custody. Arrange a ransom of 10 lakhs and set him free. No hunky punky, no police.' Click. The telephone started sounding double dots. The SOS (Save Our Son) was screamed by the house-maid to earn the attention of all neighbours. Meanwhile, the lady of the house tried to find the telephone number of the coaching centre but to no avail. One cannot blame her because in such a state lapses are excusable.

She rang her elder son at his office and told him to rush to the coaching centre. She called a couple of friends of Helal, his son to trace his whereabouts. A collage of Helal's activities for the past few hours were made to build up the tension and dish it out to the gathered audience. ('Helal was fasting this morning. He went to the centre alone. Last night he was visited by a strange friend.') The visitors in their turn added some philosophical starch — (What has become of the world? Whom to trust? How to survive?) — to gel the kidnap drama. The telephone rang for the second time with the same mysterious voice: 'Have you got back your *shantaa*?' 'What have you done to my

child you ruffian? Where have you taken him?' 'Cool down. That's none of your concern. Tell us, where your house is located.' 'You should know it better.'

'Well, forget the 10 lakhs. Twenty thousand will do for the time being. Bring it to the second gate of Ramna Park, and the save your child.' The phone cut short. Another session to gloss over what had happened so far. This must be a prank. They do not know your house, they do not even know the gender of your child which compelled them to Refer to your son as *shantaa* again and again,' one pedantic observer deciphered the cryptic conversation and tried to console the mother.

But she was in no state to believe in such hypothesis until she saw her son in person. The telephone started ringing frequently. Concerned nearest and dearest ones tried to share their feelings. But the shock was still at large. Helal's elder brother rang from the coaching centre and informed that he was last seen there at about 10:30 in the morning. This could only help the tears of the mother.

But there was no more calls from the kidnappers. At around 4:15 Helal himself turned up. Ignorant as ever. After a good thrashing it was learnt that Helal did not attend his classes and went to his friend's place to play video games. So where did the kidnappers come from. They were just fishing with telephone wire no doubt. Well, all is well that ends well.

## NEWS ANALYSIS

# Nawaz Sharif's Victory Provides Opportunity for Improved Bangladesh-Pakistan Relations

by Mahfuz Anam, back from Pakistan

(Continued from page 1)

It might be recalled, Nawaz Sharif's election campaign was marked by a refreshing and definitely surprising, in terms of Pakistani election politics, absence of anti-India rhetoric. Observers of Pakistani politics have told this writer that this was for the first time that a front ranking Pakistani leader conducted his whole election campaign without a strong anti-India plank.

All this makes Nawaz Sharif a Pakistani leader with a difference, and an open mind about new approaches to sub-continental politics.

In contrast Benazir Bhutto had a closed mind about Pakistan's relationship with Bangladesh. This writer believes that to her Bangladesh did not matter. We were too small to count. Kashmir was her favourite issue, and the USA was the only country she was interested in. Even China, Pakistani experts feel, did not get the necessary attention that it deserved. This was well indicated by the reaction of the Chinese government after Nawaz Sharif's election, during whose term it said China had the best relations with Pakistan.

Most of her political atti-

tude towards Bangladesh she inherited from her father, the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto whose disdain for Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was well known. Having inherited her father's arrogance, Benazir herself wrote most unkindly about the birth of Bangladesh in her book 'Daughter of the East', in which she termed our liberation war as nothing more than an Indian ploy. During an interview with this writer in her Karachi residence in late '92, when she was the leader of the opposition, Benazir Bhutto denied the atrocities of the Pakistani army in '71 and flatly refused to accept any responsibility for the stranded Pakistanis, calling them Biharis, who, she said, had no place in Pakistan. 'I cannot contribute to my people becoming like the Indians in America,' she said about repatriation of Biharis to Sindh province. As can be recalled relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan during the Benazir era was 'correct' at best, with absolutely no progress made in any of the outstanding issues between us.

Just as the election of the

Awami League government broke the stalemate in our relationship with India, it is possible — just possible — that the election of the Muslim League government in Pakistan, led by Nawaz Sharif, may have some positive impact on the relations between Pakistan and India, the two bitterest rivals of our region. However it must be remembered that Kashmir remains a very serious problem between them, and no early solution on it is in the offing. The challenge will lie in the ability of the two countries in dealing with other issues while Kashmir remains on the agenda. There are already signs of expanded trade ties between Pakistan and India, which are most likely to further expand. India's opportunity lies in helping Pakistan out from its severe economic crisis ever through easy access of Pakistani goods to Indian market. Pakistan needs a friend now, and if India sincerely plays that role, it may start a process whose dividend can give South Asia a fresh start in effective regional co-operation. This writer had noticed a dramatic

decrease in anti-India rhetoric in Pakistani political and media circles. Under any circumstances this is exceptional. In election time, it's far more so. Responsibility of building on it lies with India. And Nawaz Sharif provides the best opportunity that has come about in a long time. The importance of his remarks about wanting 'dialogue' with India should not be underestimated.

The prospect of improved Pakistan-India relations must also be seen in light of the improving Sino-India ties. China has been a close ally of Pakistan, and a pivotal partner of the latter's anti-India policy. Both these countries have now been able to set aside their longstanding border conflict and make significant progress in economic and cultural ties, resulting in the mutual withdrawal of troops into inner areas, away from the borders.

Bangladesh must take full advantage of this new opportunity in improving Bangladesh-Pakistan ties. There is a perception in Pakistan that Awami League is a pro-India party. This impression has

been strengthened by the swift-ness with which the idea of a sub-regional grouping has emerged so soon after AL's coming to power. A powerful section of officials in Pakistan believe that the sub-grouping will weaken SAARC. Foreign Secretary Faruq Sobhan's recent visit was successful in removing this suspicion to an extent.

This writer has reasons to believe that the new Pakistani PM's mind is quite open about it till now. It is possible to convince him of the need for it, and may be even win him over to our point of view. He also does not suffer from personal prejudice about Bangladesh or about the Awami League as Benazir does. However it will be a mistake not to approach him early in the day, before his mind gets clouded by the conventional wisdom of the Pakistani foreign office's mindset.

Just as Awami League is considered pro-India by some circles in Pakistan, so also Nawaz Sharif is considered pro-BNP by some circles in Awami League. As the two ruling parties, BNP and PML(N) had the

usual relationship, perhaps a little more because of BNP's early roots in the army, many of whose members were trained in Pakistan, (for example, former foreign minister Mostafizur Rahman had more friends in Pindi and Islamabad than Abdus Samad Azad can be expected to have). Yes, it is true that Nawaz Sharif had hit it off well with Khaleeda Zia during her Pakistan visit, but it need not be considered anything more than cordiality between two leaders who may have liked each other. This, in no way, precludes the possibility that Sheikh Hasina may equally get along with the new Pakistani PM who is himself an extremely courteous and shy sort of a person.

The bottomline is that no preconceived notion about each other should be allowed to stand in the way of breaking new grounds in Bangladesh-Pakistan relations. The coming to power of the United Front government in India, Sheikh Hasina's in Bangladesh, and now of Nawaz Sharif's in Pakistan may see a whole new beginning of relations in the troubled South Asian region. In this new beginning, Bangladesh should, and can, play a leading role, given the goodwill it enjoys in both India and Pakistan.

## To the Editor...

### Missing a dear and near one

Sir, Everyday it occurs. Here or there in the country, some one falls victim to miscreants. Someone loses his/her near or dear one. And it is of course, not limited to one incident a day. Full many such gruesome acts of barbarity do not reach or enter the purview of media reporting and thus are lost unheard or unseen into oblivion. But memories often die hard, and more so of such cruel, unbearable, inhuman acts.

Come February 13 and my conscience recalls one such violently painful loss of one of my closest acquaintances, Debesh Bhattacharjee (Rupam) who was killed by miscreants on the day in 1995 while coming home from Rajshahi where at the University he was a 3rd year student of Marketing. I can't but feel how his parents Rathindranath Bhattacharjee and Aparna Bhattacharjee of Kalachandrapur, Pabna have been bearing the brunt of losing their dearest son at the hands of miscreants. They must have been praying for his soul to rest in peace. And what more can they do!

I know, many in the society recall such dates which must

not have come for them. Fateful that is. But should we resign to fate in quest of peace? Can we, the majority of peace loving citizens, not get rid of these miscreants in society so that no date turns out to be such fateful for any one of us?

Let our recalling yield strong and stronger determination in us to diminish the evil perpetrators.

Gopal Chandra Deb Nath  
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### Law magazines

Sir, This is very unfortunate to say that in our country we find every kind of journals such as literary, sports, cine, medical even computer magazines. But we don't have a regular 'law magazine'.

It is a fact that lawyers play very enthusiastic and significant roles in a balanced society. And they are also the part intelligentsia of a country.

So it should be our duty to take step to publish at least one weekly law magazine for the interest of the educated and conscious people.

Mostafa Sohel  
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### Immigration to Canada

Sir, I am a principal applicant for permanent residence in Canada waiting to meet my family for more than 3 years. My elder son and daughter-in-law sponsored me, my spouse and younger son as dependents on November 21, 1993. Our interviews were held at the Canadian High Commission in Dhaka on November 5, 1995.

In January 1996, we were advised to undergo a medical examination. We did that accordingly. The Immigration Authority in Bangkok asked me to undergo through some extra tests. I duly completed those extra requirements. In July '96, we were asked to submit our police certificates and my younger son's marksheet attained during 1992-95 to complete our files. We sent the required documents in September '96.

Completing all requirements which asked for, we were naturally waiting for the visa and preparing to join with our sponsors in Canada. But in November '96 the Immigration Officer in Bangkok informed me that my younger son has been deleted from the applica-

tion allegedly failed to satisfy the interviewing officer (held on November 8, 1995) that he (my son) is a regular student. What a whimsical decision at the end of processing of our files by ignoring all the documents! The Bangkok Immigration Authority did not even care to inform our sponsor in Canada about it.

My younger son passed SSC in 1982 and HSC in '85. He appeared at HSC in 1984 from Dhaka College, but the result was not up to his expectation. So he appeared again in '85. Then he got himself admitted into University of Dhaka in session 1985-86 for BSS (Hons) degree. He successfully completed his MSS in 1993. Like all other students, it took almost 8 years to complete his Honours and Masters degrees. The unusual extra 4 years was exclusively due to the session-jam which was a result of tense political situation prevailing at that time. My son submitted sufficient documents repeatedly proving the actual situation.

We welcome any investigation regarding his studentship. I would like to request the Immigration authority to reconsider the decision and make him able to join with us after

proper investigation regarding his regular studentship and dependency upon me. I hope I am not expecting too much from the immigration authority!

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### An age to retire

Sir, It is encouraging to learn that the Dhaka University has recently raised the teachers' retirement age from 60 years to 65 years. Commenting on the amendment of the university statutes pertaining to retirement age, Prof AK Fazlul Haq opined that 'the amendment would be of no affect as the teachers would lose their capacity for work with the advancing age.'

Well, Prof Haq is correct up to certain extent in his observation, but if we review the actual situation, it would be evident that many educationists and intellectuals in the age group of 65-69 in our country are doing well as experts, consultants, etc. Moreover, in my opinion, a teacher becomes more mature with his/her long successful years in teaching in

fact, in our country, a teacher when attains his or her intellectual confidence level over his respective discipline, he goes to retirement (common retirement age being 57).

Hence if a teacher who is not otherwise handicapped by ill health can easily discharge his or her professional responsibilities after sixty, I would say even more confidently and efficiently. If we look at the universities and colleges of the advanced — as well as certain developing — countries, it can be seen that many Professors in their late 60s and even early 70s are discharging their professional responsibilities efficiently.

So, I think, raising of the teachers' retirement age by the Dhaka University authority is logical. But what about the teachers of other universities and colleges? May I request the government to consider to raise the retirement age of the teachers serving in other universities and colleges including Medical, Engineering and Agriculture Colleges?

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