

Moment Unforgettable

Some moments, some experiences in life are absolutely untranslatable. Our cricketers have given us that eternal moment. A moment of glory that no vicissitudes of time or for that matter difference or controversy of any kind will ever jeopardise. No word can express the ecstatic experience, the ineffable feeling of Bangladesh's victory over Kenya in the ICC Trophy final. Bravo Bangladesh, bravo cricketers.

Bangladesh unbeaten ICC Trophy champions! More than the feat itself it is the manner in which Bangladesh won that catapults us in a sky of emotions. Bangladesh was always tipped to win this virtual world cup of the ICC associate members at least for the last two versions of the meet. We knew and we were told that we had all what it takes to be champions at this level yet success eluded us. It eluded us because we did not have that steely determination, that never-say-die spirit which separates a true winner from a potential winner.

Under the exemplary leadership of Akram and the inspirational guidance of coach Gordon Greenidge and manager Gazi Ashraf, Bangladeshi cricketers this time have made light of all the odds ranging from an unpredictable weather to traditional association of ill omen with the date 13. Not only these dreamsmiths have reiterated that old adage 'cometh the hour cometh the man' but have also given the nation the greatest gift for the Bengali new year — 1404.

The biggest achievement of yesterday's victory in terms of a rich and necessary legacy is that it proved once for all that our cricketers are not temperamentally brittle and they can hold their own in a pressure cooker situation.

In fact, there could not have been a more fitting finale. The cliché of glorious uncertainty about this noble game manifested itself in the weather intervention and the see-saw nature of the match. For an imaginative stretch of Bangladesh's heroic pursuit of a victory target of 166 in 25 overs at an asking rate of more than six and a half per over, it can be said Bangladesh dared a score that in a normal 50 overs-a-side game would have stood at a mind-boggling 332. Imagine!

Of age, the semi-final victory which actually adumbrated the emergence of the vital indomitable spirit of our cricketers saw its culmination yesterday in the last ball victory against Kenya. It was not revenge against our victors of yesterday but a birth of a new chapter awaiting to be filled with similar fascinating tales of daring and delight. We hail the dawning of this spirit eternal.

A Special New Year

Bangladesh had never had such a New Year gift. Let the Bengali year, now dawning to a most cherished achievement, be liberally strewn with similar breaking of grounds in every aspect of our national life.

The Bengali New Year's Day while becoming a national institution of supreme importance, represented our people's growing urge of standing out as a separate national identity. It also created and carried afield that urge. It was a cultural complement to the political and social endeavours made to realise a state for the Bengalee people. Things like the dramatic annexation of the ICC Trophy by our boys surely help consolidate the gains manifest in this nation's growth in all directions. And things like this would sustain us, as does Pahela Baishakh, in our march towards greatness as a nation.

What can one wish the nation on this auspicious morning of New Year? A more secure social existence, to be sure, and violence-free campuses. End of poverty and hunger — at least some meaningful steps towards that. But the best wish for this special occasion will be that the nation flourish in its Bengalihood. Such a national identity and cultural entity as would ensure firm ground under the feet enabling us to open up to the best of the other nations. Let our language and literature flourish and take their rightful place among the world nation's treasures, let our arts rise towards meeting world leaders at par, let our education and sciences race fast to a true take-off point.

The Bangali Year, just as the Bengali nation and its culture is in other aspects, is a synthesis of the native solar calendar and the Arabic Lunar calendar. Synthesis and union is the central point of our cultural progress and how aptly Pahela Baishakh stands for it.

Our best wishes of the New Year to all.

Passing of a Good Man

Mohiuddin Ahmed was a magnum-sized man in many ways. He was for the later part of his political career an Awami League leader and died in harness. But he was not just that.

Committed in his early years to the politics of Pakistan he proved himself a very rare gem when he made a conversion to Marxist beliefs and politics. Marxist political parties have never travelled to within miles of power and arrogated themselves the role of levers, intellectual and political, influencing the truly democratic and nationalist parties to ride to power and not forget their teachings. Mohiuddin gave himself wholly over to this politics and like his party, the National Awami Party, came to command respect and influence. In fact, the socialist populist streak in Awami League owes almost wholly to influences from the left parties. The wisdom of Mohiuddin and his peers in the progressive parties was driven home by the Liberation War and its victorious culmination.

After liberation, with the nation now waiting for the progressives to take a more active role in the governance of the new state, the leading left parties opted for what was derisively called tailism. And after the fateful early morning of August 15, 1975 they completely lost their bearings. They ran into political quicksand and not to recover again.

Mohiuddin's was a cultured background with Professor M U Ahmed, the first psychiatrist and leading educationist of the nation as his eldest brother and another MU — Mosharraf Uddin this time, the composer of the first song on Ekushey and a pioneer of ganosangeet, as his other brother. Mohiuddin's life — and perhaps also death — in a way represents the tragedy that was leftist political activism in Bangladesh and East Pakistan. A good man is gone, and a very dedicated and capable man, too.

Our condolences to the bereaved family.

THE humanist element in the Bengali ethos, or perhaps culture, finds its most apt albeit popular expression in the most quoted of Bengali quotables-shunho manush bhai, shobar uparey manush shatto tahar upar nai — listen man my brother, man is above everything and nothing is above him. It is attributed to Chandidas and there had been three poets by the same name. All three lived and composed in a time band of no more than a hundred years — that is from the mid-fifteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. The language, however, sounds a far later origin. But this becomes immaterial when we consider that such a sentiment to rise up to literary expression should call for centuries of existence in the society before that. And that should vastly antedate that great anthropocentric surge called



Italian renaissance.

The primacy of man in both the intellectual and spiritual approaches of whole societies and individuals can be tracked to the rise of Jainism and Buddhism — the godless religions that have the good of man as their central point. Indeed social management and dynamics had broad courses to opposing ethical constructs, one based on fear of god and his fearsome wrath and retribution and the other to godless appeals to man's goodness and reason. It

will be difficult to find as humanistic and materialistic ideas and beliefs as ancient eastern India's congealing into social norms and institutions — anywhere in the world.

This was in time overtaken by pantheistic and more defined deistic ideas and beliefs in the wake of the Gupta dynamism which paradoxically championed a revival of the Vedic supplication to gods through sacrifices — although divorcing this of the pristine animistic and poetic streak

that made the Rig-Veda stand out among all ancient books accepted as scriptures. But the conquests made by sanatan dharma, which came to be grouped into a pluralistic Hinduism only very recently in the Nineteenth Century, made somewhat palatable by Shankara-acharya's *advaita*, could not quite rid the Indian societies of the world-views of uncreated nature phenomena and ethical fulfillment of life as exemplified by the Buddhist-Jainist edifices. Rather it percolated down social strata as arising from a *lokayatic* tradition or people's philosophy. But the second deistic conquest — fierce and unaccommodating — all but drove away the last vestiges of humanism that came down from a hoary past.

But ideas die hard especially if carved into the soul by constant practice through the centuries. Islam was temporized by the central Asian developments of Sufism which borrowed liberally from Indian ideas of yoga-pranayama and a godhead that is all love and has only to be loved in return. Sufi positions regarding the godhead and the best course open for man's salvation — which was held as akin to the emptying of the rivers into the world-ocean — repaid their Indian borrowings by catalysing indigenous Bengal thought strands into that great surge of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. This all was but incipient humanism continuing in disguise.

These early dynamic and radical spells of humanistic developments, however, settled down in time to form dogma-ridden introverted worlds of ritualised cleanliness and love

— cleanliness disguising casteism and untouchability and love only for the deified lovers Radha and Krishna. The humanist essence of the Bengali ethos then found new pastures. And while manifesting itself in the beliefs and practices and the songs of the *bauls* — this did a strange alchemy of drawing upon *tantric* primacy of the human body. The *baul* *deha-tattva* is a strange amalgam of almost opposing and very ancient positions on the creator-created relationship, the meaning of the world phenomena and the mysteries of life and the human body.

The *baul* position continues to be radical. Lalou urges man to worship man on pain of losing the roots of all being and becoming. The best of all that the *baul* upholds is the dignity of humanity — of the human individual, to be precise. Rabindranath only echoes the *bauls* when he says without me, o lord, you simply wouldn't be. The *baul* fears no one but is all modesty before all and sundry. And neither does he terrify any. He has no use for material possession but nevertheless would not look down on those that exult in riches. His is the freest of existences, something to be attainable only through the rigours of the highest forms of *sadhana* via *dhyan*.

The ordinary human being in society lives but a hotchpotch of ideas inordinately poorer and, in fact, coarser than the *baul's*. Such is the comparison that in order to avoid the eventuality of standing his beliefs and spiritual preferences against the *baul's* the educated townsman among the Bengalee has sent the *baul*

into a perpetual exile, just outside the village. The *bauls* are making appearance in the towns through the courtesy of the selfsame townsman who but employs them to provide diversification. The *baul* agrees to a certain debasement for he has not renounced the world and must feed himself and his kins in order to be.

Alongside the idea of the primacy of man another gloriously liberal idea of the unity of man distinguished the Bengali culture. When a medieval Bengali poet says *jagat bhromiya dekhi eki mayer poot* — sojourning through the wide world I find children of the one and only mother, he gives expression to a very high point of the Bengali intellectual achievement.

The third element to distinguish the culture of the people of the Bengal basin is a concern for the weal of the collective. All properties people on death, give a part of his estate to charity or the service of the society. The *devatra* gifts have been matched by the *uaf* donations down the centuries.

All these essential distinctions of the Bengalee people's culture are now fallen among very evil days. The Bengalees of the present time are a people estranged from all these. As estranged as they are from their historical existence as a talented and specialist people giving the world the best in weaving and metallurgy, to recall only two from a wondrous gallery of achievements. They are stuck up in a post-colonial rut. No amount of mechanistic dependence of development, in terms of investment and productivity can lift them up from frustrating. Only a great cultural upsurge can add meaning and effectiveness to economic and management endeavours. And that cultural heave must be pinioned on the idea of primacy and unity of man as well as a universal concern for collective weal. This is thought that comes to me when I grope for one to bedeck my *nabo-barsho* dawn.

The Undying Humanist Tradition

by Waheedul Haque

Only a great cultural upsurge can add meaning and effectiveness to economic and management endeavours. And that cultural heave must be pinioned on the idea of primacy and unity of man as well as a universal concern for collective weal. This is thought that comes to me when I grope for one to bedeck my *nabo-barsho* dawn

CELEBRATING LIFE

Where Our People are the Real Heroes

by Azfar Hussain

While zeroing in on the need for writing down the cultural history of the subaltern classes — a history which remains largely unwritten, the author here maintains that one of the aptest ways of celebrating the *Pahela Baishakh* would be to rediscover the creative, heroic and revolutionary potentials of our common, ordinary people. The author argues that even when savaged by the scourge of disease, death and disaster, our people do not fail to exhibit strength and stamina, will and wisdom, verve and vigour, energy and *elan*, which, however, have not yet been fully galvanized into launching a large-scale cultural revolution...

middle-class discourses, has led to such a reflexive, typical characterisation of Bangladesh at the international level.

Poverty — while it is real as indicated — not only appears rhetorical, but it is also used as *capital* appropriate for investment. Over the last twenty-five years, if anything that has tellingly scaled up, it is what may be called *poverty-business* which one can see in areas ranging from politics through foreign policy down to development. In the name of poverty, almost everything is done; programmes are launched, models are evolved, consultants are brought in, funds are sought, strategies are revamped, seminars and symposia are held, researches undertaken, and in most cases, what happens is that the middle-class dealing in poverty certainly gains and also benefits their outside partners: while the poor, tragically enough, remain poor as usual.

It would be no exaggeration to maintain that over the last twenty-five years, most of our political, social and developmental efforts have increasingly made use of poverty and the poor in a way that Bangladesh has perpetuated its image as a land of poverty — or even as a thing that seems to lack its tradition and history, its spiritual *elan* and its linguistic heritage. I should mention it clearly that I am not at all trying to undermine the issue of poverty, nor am I trying to romanticise or glorify tradition and history so as to diminish the intensity and importance of this issue of poverty. But, I am interested in looking at those strengths and possibilities our common people instinctually and characteristically exhibit, while such qualities are often lost sight of, and

are part of what may be called an unwritten cultural history of the Bengalees.

Before I move onto that unfocused, neglected area of our cultural history largely constituted by our common people — peasants and workers, let me talk about two extremist middle-class positions which have hitherto negatively told on the image of Bangladesh, both locally and globally. To put it simply, one of these positions so far entrenched in the socio-cultural climate of the country is something like this; everything in Bangladesh is bad and old and poor. The idea is this: Oh Bangladesh! It's incurably a wasteland! One of our poets has meanwhile spelt a finish to things Bangladesh by singing: "waste is the air, waste is the moon, waste is the sun!" But, then, there are still others who never run short of nationalist sentiments, and who never grow tired of saying that anything Bengali is rich and good and great; that anything going contrary to the Bengali way is a threat to the essential *Bengaliness* as it were.

Both these positions, understandably enough, leave a little space for dialectically looking into the depths of our realities and life. The first position, stated above, submerges everything that is positive beneath the stock-rhetoric of poverty, and creates a kind of cultural inferiority complex; while the second position is somewhat redolent of a kind of *hubris*, and overweening confidence potentially leading to a sort of cultural superiority complex as it were, and precludes the possibilities of further growth and development. Whatever varying consequences such positions may yield, the fact still remains that our common people in this

part of the world have managed to live on their own, exhibiting their own resources and skills, strengths and stamina, insights and wisdom, courage and quality. In a land of death and damage and destruction, it is the poor who struggle most, but also celebrate life most gloriously, in the sense that they are the ones who have learnt how to live in the face of overwhelming adversities and untrammelled vicissitudes. Of course, the quality of life they lead is not to be glorified under any circumstances whatsoever, but the quality of efforts they make just to live — barely live, is something which needs to be noticed to have a feel of what massive or epic-strengths they possess and exert habitually and effortlessly. What we call celebration of life is not simply a ritualistic display of one's on-off festive mood and movement, aspiration and action; celebrating life, howsoever sub-human such a life might be, means leading a life in times of extreme dangers and difficulties, and withstanding them on one's own. Our people, poor and exploited as they are, still manage to live, and keep living, ex-

hibiting unusual *tour de force* which can further be explored and promoted to break the century-old traps of poverty and exploitation.

2

The *Pahela Baishakh* festival, as it has arrived today marking the beginning of a new Bengali year, is not just a routine ritual invested with songs and dances, it is also an occasion which can take us to that unheeded area of our political and cultural history where our people are the real heroes. The fact that our common, ordinary people are the real heroes is well borne out by the history of our protests and struggles against exploitation, foreign domination and injustice. All positive political movements that took place in this part of the world were animated by the spontaneous, large-scale participation of the subaltern classes exemplified in numerous upsurges ranging from the *Pagir* movement, the peasant revolts such as the *Neel* movement and the famous *Pabna* uprising of farmers, the movement of *tanis* and *malangees*, the protest against *Debi* *Sinha*, the Ban-

qura movement, the *Choar* movement, the *Saontal* movement down to the Liberation Movement for Bangladesh. All these movements indeed clearly attest to the scale and quality of sacrifices and the means and measures of strengths that none but our peasants and workers can bring out. In fact, whatever positive things we have achieved so far, politically and socio-economically, have been possible only through the strength, sacrifice and courage of our common people whose intense commitment to a new life, a new society, a new season always serves as a guiding principle and shaping force in our life. The role of the middle-class at times looks effectively catalytic, but mostly it tends to gravitate towards reaping benefits out of people's movements.

Under the spell and stress of artificial cultural constructs invoked and impeded by the middle-class, we often tend to forget that the most significant areas of our cultural history are inhabited by none but our common people, whose tales, fiction, myths, magic, music, songs, dances, rituals, festivals not only present an astonishingly rich panorama of diversity, but also span a long stretch of time exceeding a thousand years. The rich store of folk-tales whose signs and icons are still alive in the rural areas — which, however, remain relegated to the back-ground primarily owing to the hegemony of the artificial middle-class culture largely constituted by written words at the expense of people's oral *elan* — and the tra-

Continued on page 5

Welcome Bangla New Year

Silver Lining Over the Horizon

by Prof Rushan Ara Hoque

HAPPY New Year 1404 BS. Let us exchange greetings and celebrate the Bangla New Year with Poet Laureate Rabindranath Tagore's enchanting song — 'Esho, Hey Baishakh, Esho Esho...' Let us also fill our heart with the intrinsic message of the song and wipe out all the jealousy, ill-feelings, and frustrations of the past and begin the year cherishing a bright future for all. During the past two decades most of the time we had lived under clouds of despair. Now that democratic forces are at the helm of affairs there must also be supposed a silver lining over our political horizon. So let us renew our expectation for shiny days.

The tradition of celebrating the Bangla New Year's Day has a long historical background. In 1586 when the Mughal Emperor Akbar conquered the Subah of Bengal, a huge amount of tax and revenue began to come to the royal treasury during the harvesting season of June-July. So for the convenience of the Bengalee farmers in keeping the records of paying taxes during the harvesting season a new Bengali year had been introduced by Akbar taking 963 Hijri year as the first Bangla year as well and counting the 1st day of the Bangla year from 11 April, 1556, the date of his ascending the throne of Delhi. All the taxes, revenues and

business dues were to be cleared off by the last date of Chaitra, the last month of Bengali year and new record-books or 'Halkatas' were to be opened from the *Pahela Baishakh*, the new year's day. The royal court and the business community used to celebrated the 'Halkata' festival with music and entertain their clients with sweets. In course of time, over the centuries, the coincidence of *Pahela Baishakh* has progressed to the mid-April, and the celebration of the day with merry-making has become a part of our national culture and heritage.

In 1968 Dr Muhammad Shahidullah reformed the Bangla calendar by fixing the length of the first five months to 31 days and of the next six months to 30 days, the last month to be of 30 days in regular years and of 31 days in leap years. During the pre-liberation period the *Pahela Baishakh* was observed as a part of patronising Bangla culture and as a challenge against Pakistani overlords. The common people nourished their own culture and heritage by holding fairs of crafts and functions of songs besides the traditional *halkata*. After liberation, Bangladesh declared *Pahela Baishakh* as a national holiday. Thus the celebration of the Day received a strong national-

ist flavour and became attuned with our national life. The celebration and observance received new dimensions.

And at Dhaka, the country's capital, it is more conspicuous. It is observed with greater nationalist sentiment and fervour. In the early morning students, men and women of all ages and communities assemble at the Ramna Batamul to welcome the Bangla new year singing and listening to 'Esho Hey Baishakh...' a tradition set by Chhayanaunt in the sixties and continuing, with other cultural groups joining the force. Nearby, Bangla Academy also holds its morning session of songs. The whole area turns into a festival ground. The Institute of Fine Arts brings out a colourful procession turning the festival into a carnival, spreading out in other parts of the city.

The whole atmosphere is agog with a joyous mood. Therefore on this happy day let us wish for the silver lining over the horizon of clouds to be brighter. While relishing the traditional *Panta Bhat*, main morning course in the country, with fried *Hilsha*, the national fish, let us cherish hopes that all forget their past ill-feeling, if any, and co-operate with each other in eradicating hunger, illiteracy and violence from the soil of Bangladesh.

