

Let's Learn from Him

It will be stating the obvious that Islam's numerous followers throughout the world bear testimony to the vast influence of the life and works of Hazrat Muhammad (SM). But there is more to it. For, he did not beat but softly knead into civilised shape disparate, anarchist tribes and clans steeped in a superstitious set of beliefs that, to make matters worse, was encrusted by hedonic pleasure-seeking and ancestral blood-feuding. That achievement could easily earn him a place in the social reformers' hall of fame but he was far too great, far too gifted a person to account for that limited influence on the course of world's history and civilisation. He left his indelible imprints on the otherwise shifting sands of time as a powerful messenger of monotheism, peace, tolerance and inter-communal harmony.

From the amorphous Beduin life-style he laid the foundation of what in modern political science parlance is called a state. His return to Mecca from an excruciating exile in Medina brought into full play his genius for statecraft complete with the ennobling principles of justice and fairness enunciated on state-citizen, have-have-not, man-woman, and master-domestic aid relations. He established the norms for good relations with political and religious neighbours and practised equality of treatment to all souls regardless of the colour of skin or racial origin.

Muhammad (SM)'s greatness has a transcendental appeal and authenticity because it spontaneously flowed from the nobility of a human mind and heart and not a superman's. That's where he is an ideal man, not to be idolised which is against the very grain of his teachings. And, all of this happened 600 years after Christ and for all to see and take a close look at, very much as part of a recorded, in fact, well-documented history.

There are so many things to learn from the role he so adroitly and patiently played in resolving intractable crises that came his way. Our observance of Eid-e-Miladun-Nabi will only befit the auspicious occasion if we can commit ourselves to handling our political and social problems in a spirit of accommodation and tolerance of each other's views which the Prophet of Islam stood all his life for.

A Swollen Dhaka

Dhanmondi Residential Area was a spot through which this dense city literally breathed. There was a lot of green and a lake to boot — and low houses on one-high plots. Passing a forlorn life of deserted looks for two decades — because of the owning families migrating to the west and down under — Dhanmondi RA, now given out almost wholly to real estate developers, is threatening Dhaka with a horrible concrete slum without water and electricity. The 600 acres of land taken over for the residential area was planned to house 2,000 households. A Daily Star report on the situation there says, there will be 25,000 households there in five years' time. Well, people can huddle together even more than this and compete with sardines but they will need light and power, water and sewerage. Dhanmondi then will have a load of 80,000 people to the square kilometre.

If this is what would befall Dhanmondi, what will happen to the crowded parts? What is the optimum load that a part of the city can take? Dhaka now has about 10,000 people to the square kilometre. Imagine it growing to double that and the sky would seem to come down. But that is what we are heading for and very fast indeed. Is it a beginning of the end of Dhaka? Has the government nothing to do in this respect? Doesn't the people — its intelligentsia and its professionals — have any role in stemming the rot?

The interminable influx from the villages, not unlike Chaplin's Goldrush, must be stopped. By, of course, making the villages liveable. Pauperisation through built-in social and economic exploitation must be stopped first then. Insecurity due to moneyed villagers and their sons degenerating into gangsters, must go. Village populations must again develop society.

But this is an ideal realisable only after decades of all-out effort. What happens in the meantime?

We were very happy when government decided to give lump sum loans to Dhaka's floating population — slum-dwellers mainly — to get back to the villages and begin life anew. But this alone would not be enough. As a matter of principle no labour-intensive agency or industry should be allowed to open in Dhaka. These must be spread throughout the nation.

Let Dhaka be a city of zero industry and let industrial cities grow on new grounds equitably throughout the nation.

Admirable

For all that is said or written about the essence of our existence it is probably man's destiny to lose love for his fellow man. The pressure of population, unqualified devotion to materialism and many other factors are responsible for it. It is one frightening realisation that has been haunting man for a long time now. Creative writers have waxed in imagination suggesting that doomsday fire that scriptures almost unanimously speak of is actually the fire of hatred of man for his fellow man. Fortunately for us some individuals or organisations like tiny islands of love in a sea of hate and indifference around us, always come to make light of that morbid dread. Light of love still flickers through much to our assurance.

Members of *Abol Tabol*, a juvenile organisation of Rajbari have recently done something that offers a whiff of fresh and inspiring air in a stifling atmosphere. The youngsters of this unknown organisation have decided to donate blood regularly to keep Champa, one of their peers, alive. Champa, daughter of a poor farmer is suffering from blood cancer, a fatal terminal disease. We don't know how long this supply for blood transfusion can be kept up but the resolve of these young hearts is something so compassionate and wonderful. At a time when acrimony has coloured our imagination so much so that nothing and nobody seems to remain sacred the news from Rajbari is a revelation of sorts. We would urge different social welfare organisations to stand beside this little group with a great mission. Contrary to the meaning of its name in Bangla which means nonsense, *Abol Tabol* has taken a step in the right direction. We congratulate it and look for emulation of its feat in other areas of our life. Society would infinitely be more livable for that.

Expansion Plan of Jerusalem

Against the Spirit of Agreement

The answer is to create confidence between two peoples and this is possible only by returning land to the owners — the Palestinians, and allowing them to live peacefully. Land for peace is the only answer. Tons of papers written and signed by leaders would not help unless land is given back.

MR. Netanyahu, to say the least, is as difficult as his name. Even the United States is finding it difficult to deal with him. Secretary of State Albright, despite her Jewish background, has been unable to convince Netanyahu of the need for giving appropriate concessions to the Palestinians in terms of Oslo Agreement. She faced serious problems in continuing her talks with him when she called for "Time Out" in last Summer on building new settlements in the occupied territories and particularly in and around Jerusalem. This happened when Netanyahu government went for Jewish settlement in Har Homa. Of course, Netanyahu was later encouraged by Speaker Newt Gingrich when he termed Albright as Palestinian Agent during the former's visit to Israel. During Britain's Presidency of European Community, British Foreign Secretary Rabin Cook had a row with Netanyahu when he met a Palestinian leader during his Har Homa visit for which Netanyahu acted discourteously and cancelled the official dinner.

Indeed, Israeli settlement issue kept the peace process off the track for about a year and a half. This suits Netanyahu and his rightist cabinet well as this gives them the opportunity to build more settlements around East Jerusalem and in West Bank. The settlement has been the center piece of Netanyahu government's occupation policy since it came to power. About a year and half back during our visit to Jerusalem when we were driving up the Mount of Olives the Jewish guide was telling us about the new settlement plan in the outskirts of East Jerusalem. The recent approval for building Jewish homes at the base of Mount of Olives cemetery was another step towards strengthening of the expansion activities.

The painful expulsion of Palestinians from Jerusalem and West Bank after the creation of Israel in May 1948 is known all over the world. This was well reflected in the recent statement of Abu Abbas, the alleged mastermind of Achille Lauro hijacking about 13 years ago. He said, "Look we feel sorry of all that happened on the ship" referring to the killing of Leon Klinghoffer, the man in the wheel chair, who was shot and thrown into the Mediterranean as he was allegedly "inciting and provoking other passengers." Abu Abbas continued, "We know how hard and painful it is when someone is killed who is not related to the conflict. We have seen it happen to thousands. Millions more have been displaced from their homes and the world never apologised to us. We hope one day the world hears our cries as loud as I heard Klinghoffer." That displacement Abu Abbas talked about made so many Palestinians stateless whereas Israel has been encouraging Jews from different parts of the world including Russia and Ethiopia to come and settle in the territories which belonged to the Palestinians. There has been some systematic uprooting of Palestinian families from different areas of Jerusalem and West Bank all of which may now be seen as another form of "Ethnic cleansing". Indeed, according to some recent report, the expulsion of Palestinians even during 1967 war was deliberate. Some positive steps taken by an army officer like Roman Lurie minimised the then expulsion onslaught. According to the same report, Israelis at the highest level were involved in the expulsion process which was nothing but ethnic cleansing. Netanyahu government appears to have followed the same pattern and seem determined to change the demographic situation of Jerusalem which the international community must take up seriously. There are series of reports of forced occupation by Jewish rightist groups of Palestinian homes by expelling Palestinian families. Often Jerusalem Municipal authority demolishes homes of Palestinians by declaring them as unauthorised homes. These are unauthorised because no Palestinian ever gets permission to build new homes in Jerusalem. This privilege is enjoyed only by the Jewish people. Israeli government itself has been building housing complexes with a view to encouraging the Jewish people to move to Jerusalem and particularly in the newly built areas of East Jerusalem. The main idea behind this is to increase the Jewish population in Jerusalem.

The new expansion plan is certainly "for strengthening Jerusalem's status" as Netanyahu himself said while introducing the plan to his cabinet which approved it. The "strengthening Jerusalem's status" means change of city's status which is against the spirit of Oslo agreement as no change should take place before the final negotiations on Jerusalem's status which is scheduled in May 1999.

The present expansion plan appears to be the first step towards annexation of the Jewish settlements east of Green Line — the line that divides Israel and West Bank before 1967 war. Indeed, there are settlements and new government buildings east of Green Line and we saw some when we crossed the Green Line from Israel. It has been said that the effort is to put municipal services by extending Jerusalem's "Municipal Umbrella" but this could be done through temporary measures without going for such an extensive formal expansion plan which has been rightly termed by the US administration as "provocative". Secretary Albright personally called up Netanyahu to express her displeasure over the expansion plan. Her spokesman James Rubin denounced it in harsh terms and said, "It is extremely hard to understand why Israel would even consider taking such a provocative step at the sensitive time in the negotiations."

Palestinian negotiator Erekat turned it as "a declaration of war on the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem". Netanyahu in subsequent statement tried to clarify his intention on the expansion plan. He said, "the plan has no political ramifications and was intended to expand the Municipal authority of the city of Jerusalem into areas beyond the Green Line. The US administration "appreciated the clarification" but remained sceptical about the ultimate aim of the Netanyahu government in terms of implementation of the plan. Mere expression of "displeasure and asking for "time out" on issues like expansion plan and settlement construction in Palestinian land do not seem to be enough for a difficult person like Netanyahu and his rightist government. Even President Clinton's refusal some months ago to see Netanyahu at Washington also did not soften Netanyahu's obstinate attitude on settlement policy. The US and international community must guard against Netanyahu's policy of

grabbing East Jerusalem to fulfil his rightist government's ultimate aim of making Jerusalem the "undivided city" as he put it as the Jewish capital. This must be resisted without any further loss of time otherwise it would be too late as the process of engulfing East Jerusalem has been going on from all directions since the takeover of Netanyahu's government.

The US administration's scepticism is justified as settlement and expansion plan are indeed designed to create barriers against Israeli withdrawals. Israel knew that a stage would come when it would be under international pressure to withdraw from the occupied territories. This is why Israel encouraged settlements in and around the towns in West Bank and particularly in East Jerusalem. As various reports indicate the settlers have already formed a council which is now a veritable political force and having direct contacts with the rightist Knesset members of Netanyahu's government. Thus Netanyahu is also in difficulties. He knows he has to order Israeli withdrawal one day but withdrawal may lead to fall of Netanyahu government. The Religious Party is threatening to withdraw from the government if more land is transferred but the other coalition partner the Third Party is saying that if an agreement on ceding land is not arrived at quickly it will quit the government. To get out of the political stalemate he called for a Referendum but this was later discarded as he got no support for his proposal.

Last week Israeli President Ezer Weizman publicly called for an early general election. He said, "If I were in his place, I would move for early elections. The sooner we go to early elections the sooner we'll know what the public thinks." President Weizman

has been very bitter recently with Netanyahu as he felt that he was repeatedly duped by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Netanyahu dismissed President Weizman's call for General Election and said the President was a supporter of Palestinians. Netanyahu will soon detect to his surprise that majority of the Israelis are now the supporters of peace and would, therefore, be in favour of ceding land to the Palestinians for peace. President Weizman would not have come down so heavily on the Prime Minister himself if he had not sensed some changes in the attitude of the Israelis. Though President Weizman does not have any constitutional authority to order general elections his words have a lot of political implications. The Peace Now Movement in Israel has been working for sometime on the issue of ceding land for peace and reportedly the movement has already gained considerable support from Israeli public. Majority now appears to be in favour of ceding land for peace and security as they know that only peace can bring security and not land.

The US Administration has to take a very firm stand on two points: building of new settlements must stop which would be in line with Secretary Albright's "Time Out" announcement as new settlement will further complicate the Israeli withdrawal. Already there are 18 settlements in the West Bank which already have about 160,000 Jews, among 1.6 million Palestinians. In any case the settlements in Jerusalem and West Bank are small ones with most of them temporary makeshift houses. Various reports show that number of families in various settlements in West Bank varies from 25 to 100. With Israeli withdrawal most of these settlements in West Bank will fall within Palestinian administration. Once the decision is made on withdrawal, the option may be given to the settlers to resettle in areas within Israel proper and they have to be provided with housing facilities or cash financial support to build houses. As the number is not big these families can be accommodated within Israel.

Israel should first accommodate the settlers before inviting foreign Jews to come to Israel and settle there. After the option if some families decide to stay back, Palestinian Authority should accept them as their own people and provide security and other facilities. After all Palestinians are also living in Israel. One cannot have total transfer of population. The Israeli constructions around East Jerusalem and those situated east of Green Line may have to be treated differently keeping in view the city limits to be determined at the negotiations on final status of Jerusalem. It seems that shape of outer part of East Jerusalem (Sacred areas and Old city must remain unaffected) may change somewhat if there will be an agreement to transfer most of the settlements and other Israeli government constructions to Israel. If that becomes a necessity on the basis of any future agreement, East Jerusalem which Palestinians rightly claim as the capital of their future State has to be compensated appropriately in terms of area and facilities.

The US has been working for sometime on the second withdrawal of Israeli forces from occupied territories which has been stalled for several months. On this issue the Washington Summit of Netanyahu and Arafat with President Clinton was cancelled some time ago as there was no agreement on the extent of withdrawal.

Washington rightly insisted on 13 per cent of which Palestinians agreed, but Netanyahu started with 9 per cent and later very reluctantly went up to 11 per cent and that also tagged with security issue. However, that fell far short of even the moderate withdrawal plan proposed by Washington. Security issue is undoubtedly important for Israelis but land cannot provide security. This has been amply proved in South Lebanon as self declared security zone for 15 years could not provide security to Israel. Scores of Israelis and particularly Israeli army personnel were killed during this period within and around self declared security zone.

Therefore, the only answer to this is to create confidence between two people and this is possible only by returning land to the owners — the Palestinians, and allowing them to live peacefully. Land for peace is the only answer. Tons of papers written and signed by leaders would not help unless land is given back. The peace process is virtually dead. An urgent initiative is needed to be taken by the US to revive the peace process otherwise the control will soon pass on to the radicals.



Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad

US' Middle East Policy

It is not surprising that the moral veneer of the US is fast wearing thin. Even her Arab allies except, of course, Israel are turning away from her. Doha summit of November last was a fiasco as was the more recent attempt to mobilise Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan into anti-Iraq military action.

DURING the 20th century the fate of the predominantly Arab Middle East remained in the hands of the imperialist powers, Britain and France. Before the end of the World War-I the geopolitical map of the region had already been drawn up. Under 1916 Sykes Picot Agreement the two imperialist powers had appropriated the entire region between themselves. It was only after the Second World War that the United States appeared in Middle East scene and has been exercising great influence in the region from the time of the Truman Doctrine (1947) and especially since the days of Eisenhower Doctrine (1957). During the cold war period she catalysed important changes taking place in the area while the former Soviet Union remained a countervailing force. After the cold war and with the Soviet retreat from the Middle East the US, the sole superpower of the World wields with her overwhelming clout an influence in the region never experienced before.

A US role in carving out a place for Israel in Arab heartland in the late 40s, its hobnobbing in the internal affairs of Iran overthrowing Dr Musaddeq in early 50s, constant support to conservative Arab Camp to contain a popular wave of anti-West Pan-Arabism, strengthening Israel as her strategic outpost and propping up Saddam Hussein during the 80s as a bulwark against revolutionary Iran were all pointers to long standing interests of the US in the region. They did hurt local sentiments and fuel discontent but an increasing American role and presence in the area went largely unnoticed at least in the initial stage. To a people long accustomed to years of colonial subjugation it

was another experience of extra regional influence. But when such experiences were stitched together to form a composite whole with the backdrop of a bigger time frame the emerging picture was not pleasant. The American role in the region once thought to be innocuous and even benign gradually turned out to be monstrous with its imperial grip firming up in the whole of the Middle East.

The US, even during the Cold War, accorded the Middle East an importance, sometimes surpassing the one given to the area of central strategic balance — Europe. The Middle East is only one region of the world in which the US military has grown in the post Cold War era as exemplified by the institutionalisation of the US central command and the forming of the US Navy's fifth fleet for patrolling the Persian Gulf, in addition to as many as four aircraft carriers positioned in the Gulf at the height of the tension in last February. All these were done in the face of no visible threat to the US. By now many of the region's states have virtually become American protectorates whether because the US would defend them and help deter their adversaries on a day to day basis as with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, the UAE, Jordan and Israel or whether it exerts influence through the power of its purse as with Egypt. The US has also "access to the facilities" of some of these countries like in Qatar and Bahrain. All these arrangements are not for nothing and, in fact, the US pursues her cold blooded strategic objectives through them. Evidently, the US today has, after fifty years, of hide and seek, openly assumed the imperial mantle in the Middle East.

The American Middle East policy clearly smacks of a brand of arrogance that was possible only during the imperial era. By amassing huge body of troops and a formidable arsenal in the Gulf, the present US administration has revived the naked gunboat diplomacy and imperial prerogatives. The US is exactly doing what the imperial seats of authority did in the past: Despatching the generals to the front to cut to size the rulers it did not like. Moreover, America's military-industrial complex itself is an empire nourished by such warlike activities. Yet, during the last century the European imperialists often responded to public sensibilities with the talk of the "white man's burden" to give law to the "lesser breeds" of the human kind or "la mission civilisatrice" to justify their imperialism. For the US, however, her military superiority, economic prowess, "soft power" born of the appeal of American values and of course her relative tenacity are good enough for imperial policy to promote her strategic pursuit: hegemony and control over the Middle-East and supremacy of Israel over the Arabs. She owes no explanation to any one for the imperial policy she pursues in the volatile region.

However, the Americans pursue and practice imperialism in the Middle East with a subtle difference. It is not an imperial vocation identical to that of 19th century empires of Europeans. There is no intention to annex or colonise. There is no plan to stay in perpetuity. Rather the US military projection is conceived of as a tool of deterrence and coercion. There is no master plan that considers influence in peripheral areas — the Balkans or Central Asia, as necessary to firm up control over the core imperial zone as the British, for example, sought influence over Ottoman empire to control the route to India. The key economic motive is

also indirect. It is not the corporate but a devotion to preserving the scope and vigour of an order created by the US itself. But can an American imperialism in the Middle East sustain it for long — even in spite of its size and potential?

It cannot. Because the size and authority are not the same thing. The authority, to a great extent, springs out of its moral content with which a nation pursues its policy. The US has since jettisoned that content at least in the Middle East. Having for years behaved like an international gangster, flouting international law, bullying the weak, supporting its clients in the most blood thirsty exploits, resorting to subversion in order to destabilise the adversaries and displaying a series of double standards in its dealings, the US is suddenly trying to play its role as a moral arbiter in the Gulf region of the Middle East. The US, after all, is the country which killed three million Vietnamese, which was behind the massacre of the 10 per cent of Guatemalan population during the 50s, which collaborated with Suharto both in the invasion of East Timor and killing of half a million Indonesians suspected of communism, which connives daily in Turkish attack on Kurds, which illegally engaged itself in the mining of Nicaraguan ports and funded subversion against the Sandinistas throughout the 80s, which invaded Panama and Grenada and which subsidises Israeli conquests and pillage without any restraint. That it has done and continues to do all these and, at the same time, arrogates for itself the right to speak of international law and justice to the Arabs while



PERSPECTIVES
by Brig (Rtd) M Abdul Hafiz

searching for a phantom weapon in Iraq, not traceable for long eight years is nothing short of a hypocrisy of its kind. And the only authority she uses for it is her own dictates opportunely expressed in a handful of resolutions of the UN whom she treated with utmost cynicism. So much so that she was delinquent in its back payment to the world organisation amounting to more than one billion dollar. No member state has used the veto to demand international condemnation because she did for Israel for all the latter's crimes which also like no other state openly vented its contempt for the world body. The same UN — the plant one — is now her vehicle to push forward her designs in Iraq. What a mockery!

An embattled President Bill Clinton — squirming under a whole series of investigations as to his sexual and financial misadventures — had the remarkable gale to address the Arab people treating them more like a collection of morons. He told them that the US had no quarrel with the Iraqis; the quarrel was with Saddam Hussein. But so far all the punitive actions incurred by the people of Iraq while Saddam remained immune to all the punitive actions directed against Iraq. During the operation "Desert Storm" alone more than three thousand fighter planes took part in the war alongside half a million heavily mounted troops. America utilized 70 per cent of its entire global airforce and 40 per cent of its total tank force to kill the Iraqi "sparrows". It used 6800 tons of bombs over Vietnam during eight and half years while in Iraq 106,000 bombs were dropped within 43 days thus turning Iraq almost into an occupied land. Was it for any love for the Iraqi people? Since 1991 Gulf War 1.5 million Iraqis were killed either during the war or as a result of its aftermath including sanction. Children under five years of age whose mortality was 500 per month has risen to 6500 per month and those of above five years has increased from 1600 per month to 1800 per month. Isn't it a cold blooded genocide!

Discovering the "underground" Iraqi weapon of mass destruction is another scandal. It has already taken seven years for more than 450 weapon inspectors. They have destroyed nuclear potential of Iraq while Israel's is still thriving. As many as 36,000 atomic bombs and artillery shells 690 tons of chemical agents and 817 out of 819 scud missiles have been destroyed besides total annihilation of most of the industrial plants. The irony is that the prices of these "services" is also cleverly and cunningly charged not only from the Arab rulers but from the poor Iraqis also who themselves are deprived of even life-saving drugs and food for their infants as a result of crippling sanctions imposed after 1991 Gulf War.

It is not surprising that the moral veneer of the US is fast wearing thin. Even her Arab allies except, of course, Israel are turning away from her. Doha summit of November last was a fiasco as was the more recent attempt to mobilise Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan into anti-Iraq military action. The brazen duplicity of American rhetorics embodied in the US Middle East policy no more impress its earlier adherents. Within the UN Security Council Russia, France and China have taken positions that are at variance with the dictat from Washington and most EU nations are keen to resume their business with Iraq. Would then the end of the tunnel be visible soon for the hapless people of Iraq?

To the Editor...

Indifferent DCC and RAJUK

Sir, The old part of Dhaka city is very congested. Sutrapur area is the best example having narrow lanes and by-lanes.

When there is very little possibility of broadening the existing lanes and by-lanes, many unscrupulous owners of houses are raising their buildings encroaching upon the lanes and by-lanes. The balconies of such buildings hang directly over the passers-by. The pipes from the roof-tops jut out over the lanes, passages, by-lanes etc., sprinkling dirty water on those pass by.

In this respect, among others, the Nababdi Basak Lane, Shyamaprasad Lane, Nandatal Dutta Lane, Molligoll, Patla Khan Lane and the adjacent inter-connecting lanes centring Luxmibazar, covering the whole Sutrapur are such sites.

On the Luxmibazar main road, opposite DIT Building, there were two open spaces. In the past, some truck owners used to park trucks there. Recently, some iron cages are erected and the spaces are being rented out to some influential people for keeping their private cars. Some are using the spaces as vehicles-repairing workshops. The whole place is in a mess. The spaces could be used for some worthy purposes.

The DCC and the RAJUK are giving blind eyes to such encroachment.

May we request the Ministry (probably LGRD) concerned to look into the matter and take measures.

A Concerned Citizen
Dhaka-1100

Developing images

Sir, The present regime has developed its own unique style of state working — fast and confidential (shrouded in secrecy, consensus not sought, JS bypassed, and subsequently blaming absence of the spirit of consensus in the opposition). Farakka, CHT, recent trip to New Delhi, all have a common denominator, India. The relation with Myanmar is not improving. The trip to Islamabad followed. Sudan, and no proper support campaign at home.

A couple of hours of parleys enriched with half a hundred VIP entourage. Five crore spent on the national opening a bridge, and that too party-oriented, and without acknowledging the contribution of others. The credibility is slipping, as the same is questionable.

The zamindari virus still tickling? The opposition calls it fascist attitude. The neutral thinkers are perturbed (one Star editorial lashed the immature propaganda stand). What's the difference with an autocratic presidential form of government we have seen earlier? The confrontation with the opposition is getting stiffer day by

day (both parties are stubborn).

Then there is the pernicious habit of passing on the buck. No dice! Some comments in the press questioned the quality of advice the PM gets and accepts. If it is her own judgment, all the more depressing.

How about a change?

An Observer
Dhaka

Women need to be more active

Sir, Increased participation of women in the political arena is the answer to the problem of empowerment of women in the country. Actually very small number of women apply their voting rights and most of the decisions are made under the influence of the male members of their families. It has been found that women have less confidence in the election process than men. Even they don't find any interest in it.

So they need to be more active. Government and NGOs should take effective step. Some NGOs are, no doubt, working on it. But they have to be more systematic to raise the awareness among the women. Recently, several women's organisations organised seminar on women's issues.

But I am sure there will be no impact of it at the grassroots.
Mostafa Sohel
Dhaka