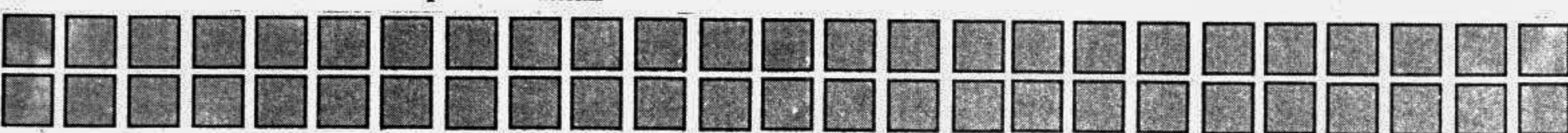




A partial view of the Prophet's Mosque at Madinah



Muhammad (SM) — the Beacon-light for Mankind

by Abu Imran

PROPHET Muhammad (PBUH), was sent as the last in the chain of prophets as the beacon-light for mankind in the dangerous sea of life. He came as the messenger of peace for the whole of mankind. And the religion or the way of life encompassing all aspects of life whether political, social or moral, was perfected by him (PBUH) and given the approved name — Islam. The two prominent meanings of Islam are — surrender and peace. It is exemplified as peace through surrender to the will of Allah. Again the prophet (PBUH) was given the book of guidance in the form of the Holy Quran revealed to him (PBUH) through the arch Angel Gibrael in phases. The Holy Quran and the practices of the prophet (PBUH) became the guidelines for the faithfuls to follow. And in that lies their salvation both in here and in the here-after.

The prophet (PBUH) himself demonstrated the ideal way of life which if followed in right earnest will ensure personal, local, community, regional and international peace, and war or disturbance will be a remote consideration. This is because all his (PBUH) principles and practices are divinely guided, based on justice and fairness and hence infallible. The historic Farewell address at the last Hajj known as Hajjatul-tauhid of the holy prophet is a well documented evidence pertaining to the rights, duties, obligations of men, women, children and slaves and some other aspects of life worth quoting.

He said: "O people listen to my words with understanding for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be among you in this place."

"Your lives and properties are sacred and inviolable unto each other, until you appear before your Lord, even as this day and this month are sacred for all and remember you will have to appear before your Lord, who will demand from you an account of all your acts."

"The Lord hath prescribed to every man his share of inheritance; no testament to the prejudice of heirs lawful."

"The child belongeth to the parent, and the violator of

wedlock shall be stoned."

"Whoever falsely claimeth another for his father or his master, the curse of god of the angels and of all mankind shall be upon him."

"O people, ye have rights over your wives and your wives have rights over you, it is their duty not to break their wifely faith, nor commit any act of manifest indecency. If they do so, ye have authority to confine them to separate rooms and to punish them, but not severely. But if they refrain, clothe them and feed them properly. Treat your women with loving kindness, for they are with you as prisoners and captives. They have no power over anything that concerneth them. Lo ye have taken them on the security of Allah and made their persons lawful to you by the words of Allah."

"Be faithful to the trust imposed on you, and shun transgression."

"Usury is forbidden, debtor shall return only the principle; and the beginning will be made with the loans of my uncle Abbas, son of Abdul Muttalib."

Henceforth, the vengeance for blood practised in the time of ignorance is forbidden and feud of blood abolished, beginning with the murder of my cousin Rabia bin Harith Ibn Abdul Muttalib."

"And your slaves! See that ye feed them with such food as ye yourselves eat, and clothe them with the staff ye yourselves wear; and if they commit a fault which ye are not ready to forgive, then part with them, for they are servants of your Lord, and must not be ill-treated. The slaves who say their prayers are your brothers."

"O people! Listen to my words and understand them. Know that all Muslims are brothers one to another; ye are one fraternity. Nothing belonging to one of you is lawful to his brother unless given out of free goodwill. Guard yourselves from committing injustice."

"Let him that is present tell it to him who is absent."

Happily he who shall be told will remember better than he who hath heard."

At the end of his discourse the Holy Prophet, moved by the sight of devotion of that multitude, most of whom had been

the enemies of Islam not too long ago, exclaimed:

"O Lord, I have delivered my message, and accomplished my work."

The voices of the hosts below affirmed:

"Aye, that thou hast."

He said: "O Lord, I beseech Thee, be Thou witness to it!"

Had man ever such fullness of success? Was man ever more humble in his hour of triumph? (Ref: Islam and its holy prophet as judged by the non-Muslim world, Adhunik Prokashani, 1982, Dhaka pages 141-143).

The greatness and completeness of the mission of Muhammad (PBUH) was such that even non-Muslim scholars/statesmen spoke highly of him. The men of letters and high standing who paid tributes to him are too large to be accommodated here. Hence only the comments of a few are given below.

"I believe that if a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world he would succeed in solving its problems in a way that would bring it its much-needed peace and happiness. I have prophesied about the faith of Muhammad that it would be acceptable to the Europe of tomorrow as it is beginning to be accepted to the Europe of today."

If any religion has the chance of ruling over England nay Europe within next hundred years it can only be Islam. It is the only religion which appears to me to possess the assimilating capacity to the changing phase of existence which can make its appeal to every age." (Ref: George Bernard Shaw on Islam and its founder, ibid, Page-14).

"The first gift of Muhammad to us was the charm, the sweetness and the innocence of his childhood. The second gift was the truthfulness and integrity of character as a youth which characterised his whole life. The third gift of Muhammad to us was the secret of the success of his life, which gave him strength to overcome insuperable difficulties in his life and carried him victorious to his goal. Prayer and communion were the necessary complements of his faith. The fourth gift of Muhammad to us was the Hope which sustained him in

the hour of peril gave vigour to his nerve and soul. The fifth gift was his mystic vision which was a sort of search-light for scanning the darknesses of life."

The sixth gift of Muhammad to us was his charity which made him the friend of the poor and the lowly and made him minister unto them."

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accorded to the Islamic calendar. Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi is celebrated all over the Muslim world on the 12th of Rabiul Awwal. This day is the birthday as well as the death anniversary of the prophet of all prophets — Prophet Muhammad SM.

The 12th of Rabiul Awwal comes to our life through the centuries to remind us about the Holy Birth that Allah has blessed us with. Nabi Karim SM is Allah's blessings to Muslims and to the entire mankind. He is the best among Allah's creations, and the next best to Allah Himself.

Prophet Muhammad SM was born on the 12th of Rabiul Awwal, 570 AD. He belonged to the Bani Hashem family, which was part of the Quraish tribe. His father, Abdullah died before the birth of his son, and his mother Aminah died when he was six years old. Prophet Muhammad SM then went to live with his grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, but he too died after two years. At the age of eight, Prophet Muhammad SM went to live with his uncle, Abu Talib who was extremely fond of his nephew.

When Prophet Muhammad SM was twenty-five years old, he married a wealthy widow, Khadijah RA who was forty years old. They had a very happy marriage together. She bore him two sons and four daughters.

Prophet Muhammad SM regularly spent some time at the cave Hira in Mount Noor not far from Mecca, to pray to Allah. One night in Ramadan, in 610 AD on the night of Lailatul Qadr, Angel Jibrail appeared in front of Muhammad SM and told him that Allah had chosen him as His Prophet. The verses of Iqra (Surah Alaq) were recited to him. Thus Muhammad SM became Rasoolullah SM. He was forty years old when this happened.

In the eleventh year of his prophethood, Rasoolullah SM was invited by Allah to visit the seven heavens to meet Allah where no human being or angels have ever been before. Rasoolullah SM's ascension to the heavens is known as Miraj.

In the thirteenth year of his prophethood, Rasoolullah SM was ordered by Allah to migrate to Madinah. In Madinah he became extremely cruel to the Muslims. So along with his companion, Abu Bakr Siddique RA, Rasoolullah SM left the city of Mecca and migrated to Madinah where he lived for the rest of his life. This was the first Hijrah and the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

Rasoolullah SM preached the words of Allah for twenty-three years. He died at the age of sixty-three in 632 AD in Madinah. He is buried at the Masjid-un-Nabawi where thousands of Muslims go each day to offer Salam and Fatehah to our beloved Prophet SM.

The message brought by Rasoolullah SM is final. It is the Holy Quran — the words of Allah. He is the last messenger of Allah. Allah says in the Quran: "Prophet Muhammad SM was

sent as a mercy to all human beings. Although our beloved Prophet SM is no more with us, Islam continued to grow and spread. Today about one-fifth of the world's population are Muslims.

Rasoolullah SM has left behind all his ideals and teachings (Sunnah) and the Holy Quran for us to follow.

On this day (Eid-e-Milad-un-Nabi) Allah answers all our prayers for the sake of our beloved Prophet Muhammad SM.

Before the Holy Birth

When Bibi Aminah RA was expecting the Prophet SM, she dreamt that the baby was to be a leader and a guide of his people and be named "Muhammad" meaning "The Praiseworthy."

Allah's first creation was the "Noor" and the "Soul" of the Prophet SM even before the Holy Birth. This Noor was Allah's blessing for the Prophet SM. He was destined to be the Prophet and Messenger of Allah in the first place, before all others received prophethood; his name was written on the throne or "Arsh" of Allah. Prophet Muhammad SM was the object of all creations. Next, Allah created the heavens, hell, angels, jinns, earth, sun, moon, stars, Prophet Adam, Bibi Hawwa, human beings, etc.

All earlier prophets and messengers of Allah received the blessings of the Holy Prophet SM even before he was born, because Allah created all the earlier messengers from Muhammad SM's "Noor". Adam, our forefather, learnt the name of Muhammad SM from Allah's Arsh where the first Kalimah of Islam is written. "La ilaha illa lahu, Muhammadur Rasoolullah".

At birth, Prophet Muhammad SM was gifted with the Seal of the Prophethood or "Muhr-e-Nubawat" on his shoulder. His name is also called to the Muslim call to prayer or "Azan" and "Iqamat."

During the Holy Birth

During the Birth of Prophet Muhammad SM, a light appeared enlightening the entire sky and the Kabah, and it seemed that all the stars were coming down. The time of the Prophet's birth has been said to be close to the time of Fajr Salah and there were bright stars in the sky.

Another miracle during the Holy Birth occurred when an earthquake destroyed the palace of the then Emperor of Persia, and the religious fire of the temple of Persia suddenly went out after a continuous burning for a thousand years, both the events suggesting the Persians changing their religion to Islam.

The Prophet's Behaviour, Character and Personality

Prophet Muhammad SM, the last messenger of Allah was most generous by nature and good at heart. He never refused anyone and if he could not offer any assistance to a beggar he would politely explain him the situation or promise him to fulfil the request as soon as he

could. He was always trustworthy and kind-hearted. He was very particular and thoughtful towards his companions and others and never gave any human being any sort of trouble or expressed lack of respect or humiliated them in any way.

Prophet Muhammad SM never caused any trouble for the members of his family. If he had to go somewhere at night, he used to put on his shoes and dress making least noise, open the door quietly, walk about softly without disturbing the others in sleep. Similarly, his night prayer he used to say "Salam" or greet in such a low voice that anyone awake may hear him and reply, but a sleeping person may not be awakened. When ever he came home and found everybody sleeping, he used to do everything very quietly and never disturbed anyone in sleep.

Prophet Muhammad SM always used to walk behind others when with a group. He used to be the first one to greet or say "Salam" when meeting anyone. He behaved humbly, ate like poor people, never on a full stomach. One could always notice the fear of Allah on his face. He used to think and meditate, and never enjoyed lying carefree time.

Prophet Muhammad SM mostly remained silent but did talk when necessary and did so quite clearly (so that he was properly understood by others). But he never spoke longer than necessary nor was he too brief to be misunderstood. There was no trace of rudeness or harshness in his conversation, behaviour and in treating others. He never insulted, humiliated, dishonoured or disgraced anyone who met or visited him. He never interrupted anyone in his or her conversation except when the conversation was against Islam, then he either stopped the conversation or left the place and company.

Prophet Muhammad SM always regarded any favour or blessing of Allah as very great, however small it may be and he never found any fault with anything. He was never provoked to anger or lost his temper on a worldly affair.

Besides fulfilling all the obligations of religion, he offered so much "Nafil" or optional prayers that his feet used to swell due to standing too long in the Salah. On hearing or listening to recitation of the Quran, he used to weep out of fear and love of Allah. He was so humble in nature that he ordered his followers never to raise him too high. He was ready to help even the poorest servant or slave wherever or whenever he or she wished.

The Miracles of Rasoolullah SM

The miracles of Rasoolullah SM can neither be counted nor measured. So the followings are only a few of the miracles of the world's greatest prophet:

1. Rasoolullah SM was often assisted and supported by angels such as in the battle of Badr, Uhud and Hunain.

2. Rasoolullah SM once put

his hand on the head of his companion Hanzalah-bin-Hazim and blessed him. After this, Hanzalah had the power of curing people from illness.

3. The father of Habib-bin-Fadeek who was blind, could see again after Rasoolullah SM blessed him.

4. Rasoolullah SM once asked a person who was eating with his left hand, to use his right hand. The man lied and said he could not use his right hand, and Rasoolullah SM said, "So it shall be", after that the man could no longer use his right hand.

5. During the battle of Hudaibiya there were about 1500 people and only one jug of water. Rasoolullah SM kindly put his hand in the jug and water started gushing out of the jug so much so that all his companions drank to their hearts content and also washed themselves.

6. Once there was a drought and famine in the country and Rasoolullah SM was delivering the Friday sermon, and was asked by his companions to pray for rain as the people and cattle were dying. Rasoolullah SM raised his hands in prayer and immediately it started raining and it rained throughout the week. It rained so much that the houses started to fall down and Rasoolullah SM was asked again to pray for the rain to stop, which he did.

8. During his free time when Rasoolullah SM used to walk around his vicinity, all the trees, mountains, and other creations of Allah used to say "Salam" to the Messenger of Allah.

9. Once during a meeting with his companions, Rasoolullah SM had just one glass of milk, but he told his companions to drink one by one from the same glass and he welcomed content. After everyone drank to their satisfaction, Rasoolullah SM finally had his share and the glass was still full!

After the Death of Rasoolullah SM

The earth cannot destroy the body of the Messenger of Allah. He is alive in his grave. Not a single day passes by when 70,000 angels of Allah come down to the tomb of the Prophet SM in Madinah every morning. In the evening, they are replaced by another 70,000 angels who look after the Prophet SM. This will go on the end of the world when the tomb will be opened by Allah and Rasoolullah SM will arise and be welcomed by 70,000 angels gathered outside.

The 12th of Rabiul Awwal unfolds before us the supreme sacrifices of Prophet Muhammad SM made during the 23 years of his prophethood for the salvation of his followers through the ages.

Today is the day when all of us should search our hearts to find out how far we can claim ourselves to be real Muslims. Let us conclude by chanting in praise of Prophet Muhammad SM:

"Balagat Ula Be Kamalehe Kashafat Doja Be Jamalehe Hasnat Jameuke Sulehe Salatu Alai He Wa Aa Lehe"

The Holy Prophet Joined the Chorus Too

by Kazi Aulad Hossain

THE Prophet of Islam Hazrat Muhammad (peace be on him) was no doubt a versatile genius. He was not only the greatest of all men of all times, he was also the leader of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) left Mecca and was proceeding towards Medina with his Companions he entered into a village known as Koba situated at a distance of three miles from the city of Medina. In the meantime, it may be mentioned here, quite a number of people of this village had already embraced Islam and of them the most influential and respectable man was that of Amar-Ibne-Auf and at that moment Kusum Ibn-e-Hadam was the head of that clan. So, the Muslim inhabitants of the village of Koba were overjoyed for obvious reason to find the Messenger of Almighty Allah and his Companions in their midst. On their arrival they gave them a standing ovation and there were repeated

shouts of joy from all sides. Here in this village of Koba something remarkable, something new and something unique did happen in the very presence of holy Prophet (PBUH). The first mosque of the Muslims was constructed under his leadership after Almighty Allah bestowed Prophet-hood on him.

Now the question is how and exactly where construction of this unique mosque (the Kuba mosque) began in the said village of Koba where the holy Prophet was staying at that moment? It has already been mentioned that during his stay in that village the holy Prophet and his Companions were the guest of honour at the house of Hazrat Kusum (RA) and she has a plot of land which she gladly bequeathed for construction of this historic mosque. The work started in full swing. The revered companions of the holy Prophet (peace be on him) and the local Muslims carried

large pieces of stones which were being used for foundation-laying work. In this work of carrying stones the Messenger of Allah also participated and at times when his body bended due to heavy weight of the stone his faithful and loving companions used to run to him and sought his permission to make over the heavy load to them. But after handing over the heavy stone to them he again picked up another of similar size and weight.

While working as an ordinary worker Hazrat Abdullah Rawaha (a natural poet) sang a few lines of his song eulogizing the activities and services of the faithfuls ("mumeneen") with a view to encouraging his co-workers. The holy Prophet (peace be on him) hummed appreciating the meaning of the said lines and joined the chorus too sung by his companions and others engaged in the construction of the Kuba mosque.

Process of Democratisation: Role of an NGO

by Md Amjad Hossain

ABRAHAM Lincoln's "Government for the people, by the people and for the people" still remains the most popular definition of democracy. However, of late democracy means not only a system of government but also a social system and a philosophy of life. The main objectives are equity, freedom, transparency and accountability for all in a state.

People in Bangladesh, a democratic country, as well as those in many third world countries, have been fighting against poverty not to speak of other social ills that have crept up alongside poverty.

Due to the lack of democratic experience, unstable political situation has tended to remain in the country. This in turn has impeded government as well as non-governmental development efforts. So even after 25 years of independence, we have not been able to properly address this problem, only a handful of people have grabbed most of the resources of the country and have used most of the institutions and power structure to their own benefit. Mass awareness and mass relatedness are most important aspects in all spheres of democ-

racy and development activities. There is no alternative to mass participation in national decision making, planning and, above all, implementation. Presently, there is little or no participation of the poor in the democratic power structure and system while the poor is the most productive and the largest class in our country who constitute 80 per cent of total population. As yet they have not been able to come out of their distress. In this context of reality, every development or democracy programme should be designed in favour of their participation in the interest of maximum derivation.

Again the largest part of these poor people are still living in underdeveloped villages and most of them are socially and economically dependent on agriculture. But Bangladesh remains as one of the poorest countries of the world despite having the fertile most soil in the world.

Meanwhile, government efforts towards poverty alleviation being not so effective, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have come forward with their own initiatives. Samata, an NGO as such thinks that the main causes of poverty are un-

awareness, illiteracy and no hold on property and power. It is very essential to establish the rights and ownership of the landless poor over resources in order to make them educated, active and powerful. The organisation believes that there are three kinds of resources in our country which are very important in alleviating poverty: Human resource, natural resource and power sector's created resource. Bangladesh government has its own programme. But those have failed to play any significant role in favour of the hard core poor.

The main objective of democracy and development is to assist the people irrespective of classes to free themselves from any difficulties. In our country as elsewhere in many a developing country, government and NGOs are working towards that end through their different programmes and activities. Government has been implementing various programmes such as education, health, infrastructure development, land and agriculture development, improving law and order situation etc. But with insignificant success, however. On the other hand, NGOs are implementing their

traditional credit programmes to realise the objective. But on the whole majority of the poor have not much benefited from these types of development programmes.

Again, half of the total population of our country are female. In the context of reality, the female are still very much disadvantaged in our society due to traditional male domination. But keeping half of its members disadvantaged a society cannot advance. So it is imperative to ensure women's participation in development activities as well as power structure and build up a gender equity based society. It has to be a possibility to reach our envisaged national development target.

While most of the NGOs are working in the villages, where the most poor live depending on agriculture, their activities are not spread all over the country. Government however has been implementing various development activities through local and national government bodies which are spread all over the country. The nearest institution of the local government is union council. A four-tier de-

centralised structure has been proposed to facilitate the participation of the local people. In this regard legislations related to the village and union levels have already been approved. Much authority has been entrusted thereto involving greater responsibility, resource and power. These institutions can play a great role towards alleviation of rural poverty.

Here the poor people have special scope to enter these institutions. Even if they cannot serve as employed officials, they can participate as elected representatives. And if organised, they can make local institutions more effective and accountable. In order to legally access available resources and identify other potential resources, it is necessary that the poor exercise their right of participation. Earlier such participation and accountability were absent and women specially were excluded from decision making. But by dint of recent approved decentralisation local government plans, women are now being elected directly.

Samata has been working for a long time towards practicing in and contributing to the

creation of a democratic tradition through expanding people's participation in the local institutions and influencing decision making process. In this regard the first objective is to promote meaningful political practice through voter education and mechanism to ensure free and fair elections. The organisation gives special attention to programmes that include women more fully in the electoral process. Activities include campaigns to strengthen people's understanding of polling procedures, their voting rights and the standards to which they should hold political actors accountable; training programmes for electoral officials and candidates about their responsibilities and election monitoring. The second objective is to enable members of local elected bodies (Union Parishad and Poursabha) to be informed about and more responsive to citizen's interests, and elected officials, of their roles and responsibilities; establishing fora for constituent relations; and encouraging systems for transparency and accountability. And the third objective is to increase people's awareness of legal rights. Such knowledge is necessary to exer-

cise rights and achieve positive change in family and community attitudes regarding the rights of the poor, especially women. The NGO believes these strategies would increase political participation by women and enable the poor to have a broader transformative effect on local governance and policies and make local government institutions more responsive and accountable.

In Pabna and Sirajganj districts, there are 43 persons who, although once a deprived lot, are now well established in society. They have been elected as members to Union Parishad in ten thanas of Pabna and Sirajganj. It has been made possible with the assistance from Samata. This organization helped them get khas land from the government and provided credit and awareness messages on various subjects as part of their empowerment programme. It may be mentioned that the NGO organizes landless poor people in small groups and works towards their empowerment through training and other awareness raising activities. Ultimately they emerge as pressure groups, especially for the issue of khas land distribution and other public facilities.

As a result the group members become more aware of their social, economic, legal and political rights and are better able to raise their voices against injustice and exploitation. In the last UP election, several such members were candidates. The organisation held group discussions in each ward and selected candidates. It also supported like-minded non-member candidates where there was no candidate of its own. Among 53 Samata-supported candidates, 43 including 13 women were elected members to Union Parishad.

With a view to promoting meaningful participation in the local government by members and beneficiaries, the NGO organised voter's education programmes. All newly elected members were given training in legal and civil rights and responsibilities. Besides, to ensure their empowerment programme, it has formed two thana based "Elected Female UP Members Forum" at Santhia and Sujaganr thanas in Pabna district while two more are in the process of being formed and one district based "Elected Female UP Members Forum" at Pabna district also has been formed.