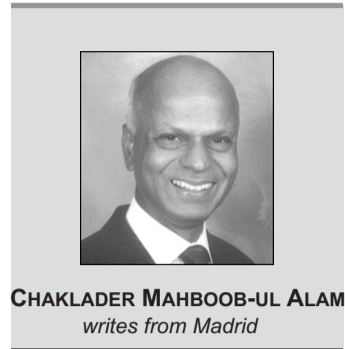


Interpreting and cultivating democracy



CHAKLADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM writes from Madrid

European countries were heavily represented. It is interesting to mention that in the list of the participating countries, I did not find the name of any Arab country. Besides the king of Spain and the former Spanish Premier Adolfo Suarez, whose contribution to Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy is recognised all over the world, the meeting was also attended by Bill Clinton.

In the inaugural session, a joint declaration recognising a country's right to legitimate defence against

permanent dialogue and consultation for countries involved in the complex process of transition to democracy". The club's central objective is to "foster democracy in a globalised world".

No attempts were made to define democracy. Dogmatic discussions were avoided. King Juan Carlos of Spain went so far as to say that there were no universal models of democracy. As an independent analyst, it is my impression that everything at the conference was too gentlemanly. Although some

countries, the percentage of people who actually bother to participate in the democratic process is low, which effectively leaves politics and power in the hands of interest groups and professional politicians. Needless to say, this often leads to a situation, where the masses live in a cocoon of material comfort and ignorance and a relatively few clever political bosses manipulate public opinion at will to serve their own interests. Can this still be called democracy where a significant number of the "demos" has opted out of the system living the "kratos" in the hands of a clever few (creating an oligarchy)? What measures can be taken to prevent a situation of this nature?

In Chile, Turkey, Indonesia and Algeria, the military finances its activities in part or in full through its control over a significant part of the national wealth. It literally functions as a state within a state. Can these be considered as real democracies?

Today, when almost everywhere in Western world universal suffrage has been introduced, can democracy be considered as the panacea for all evils? After all, German democracy produced Adolf Hitler and Israeli democracy has given birth to Ariel Sharon. In this globalised world, can any system of government without certain universally accepted ethical values and a deep sense of universal social justice be accepted as a good system? After the tragic events of September 11, American-led Western democracies have been very quick to launch a global war on terrorism. Now, one may ask, instead of paying mere lip service to social justice for so long why have they not yet started a global war on poverty and state-terrorism? Western democracies, in the past may have practised the basic principles of democracy within their borders but have inflicted enormous suffering on human beings in other parts of the world. From an ethical point of view, have they (the Western democracies) been faithful to the true spirit of democracy?

In my opinion, democracy based on universally accepted ethical values, is a noble ideal and a credible political goal to pursue. I agree with King Juan Carlos of Spain, when he said, "building a solid and enduring democratic base is a complex and delicate task." He could have added that the task never ends.

LETTER FROM EUROPE

Today, when almost everywhere in Western world universal suffrage has been introduced, can democracy be considered as the panacea for all evils?... In my opinion, democracy based on universally accepted ethical values, is a noble ideal and a credible political goal to pursue. I agree with King Juan Carlos of Spain, when he said, "building a solid and enduring democratic base is a complex and delicate task."

terrorist acts" was endorsed. No one, of course, bothered to define terrorism or to ponder over whether carpet bombing of an impoverished far-off country like Afghanistan by the most powerful nation on earth and killing innocent civilians including men, women and children could be justified as legitimate acts of self-defence. Everybody took great care not to upset the big brother.

More than one hundred experts on good governance and democracy were at hand to give advice on subjects as diverse as how to go about framing a constitution, how to ensure individual liberties, how to democratise the armed forces, how to obtain a safe balance (for democracy) among the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, how to fight corruption, the role of political parties, how to develop a pluralistic culture, the rule of law, freedom of expression etc. etc. The conference also emphasised the need for a fair distribution of wealth and the creation of proper economic and social conditions for democratic stability.

One of the legacies left behind by the conference was the establishment of the Madrid Club for the purpose of creating "a space for

controversial subjects were touched upon, no attempts (at least openly) were made to have serious debates on them.

Democracy (as opposed to totalitarianism) literally means rule of the people (from the Greek words "demos" and "kratos", meaning people and rule). But since democracy and political power always go hand in hand, the term has often been manipulated by different people to mean different things. Conceptually, in democracy everybody is equal and therefore, no one or no group should be "more equal than others". Yet even in ancient Greece, which is attributed to be the cradle of democracy, slaves were not considered as human beings but as personal chattels. Therefore, they did not have any votes. Women (all women), who were considered as human beings but as lesser ones. They did not have any votes either. Even today, in the most advanced democracies, big business and certain religious lobbies exercise unfair and undue influence on the entire democratic process. Does it not go against the very essence of democracy? What can be done to lessen their power?

In many industrially developed

Lest we forget

Moulana Bhasani--the leader of the oppressed

M INAMUL HAQUE

M OULANA Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani is that great leader who first expressed his dream of an 'independent East Pakistan' at the Kagmari Conference in 1957 and on 25th November 1970, he declared it. In 1971 he was the Chairman of the Advisory Committee of the Mujibnagar Government. Moulana Bhasani is a legendary figure of the subcontinent. He will live in the hearts of the vast multitude of common people whose rights he fought for during his entire life.

Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani was born at Dhangara village near the Sirajganj town in 1885. In 1917 when Deshbandhu Chittaranjan Das arrived at Mymensingh, Bhasani was highly attracted by his lecture. In 1919 Bhasani joined the Indian National Congress. In 1923 when Deshbandhu formed the Swaraja Dal, Bhasani worked for organising this party. In 1924 he went to Assam and organised a big congregation of peasants at Bhasani Char. After this congregation he was named as 'Bhasani Moulana'. In 1932 when he organised another big congregation of peasants at Sirajganj, he became famous all over the country. In 1937 the Assam government introduced a repressive 'Line Law' against the migrating Muslim peasants. Moulana Bhasani formed 'Assam Chashi Mojar Samiti' and organized agitation against this law in Dhubri, Goalpara and other areas.

In 1945-46 there was a drive to evict Bangalees from Assam and organised a big congregation in riots. Moulana Bhasani toured to Mangaldoi, Barpeta and Guahati areas in Assam to save the Bangalees. After creation of Pakistan he returned home and settled at Santosh, Tangail. He was elected to the State Assembly of East Bengal as a member of the Muslim League. He was the first to demand the right to speak in Bangla and spoke in Bangla in the Assembly. On the 23rd June of 1949 the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League was formed under his leadership.

Khawaja Nazimuddin, soon after becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan on the 16th February, 1951, termed Moulana Bhasani and Suhrawardy as the agents of India. At the start of historic language movement, Moulana Bhasani became a central leader of 'Sarbadaliya Rastrabhasha Sangram Parishad'. Moulana Bhasani was a key figure of the Jukto Front formed in 1954. At this time A K M Fazlul Haq, Moulana A H K Bhasani and H S Suhrawardy of the Front, were very popular leaders in East Bengal. The Jukto Front led by this trio captured 228 out of 237 seats in the election and got absolute majority in the Assembly. But differences emerged between Moulana Bhasani and his partners on the formation and running of the government. On 30th May 1954 the central government dissolved the Jukto Front government of East Bengal on the charges of failure to check the communist disturbances.

Before dissolution of the Fazlul Haq Ministry, Moulana Bhasani left for London on 25th May 1954 to attend the International Peace Conference in Germany. The Pakistan government put obstruction to his visit labeling him as a 'communist' and put embargo on his return to homeland. After removal of this embargo Moulana Bhasani returned home from Kolkata on 25th April 1955. At this time, East Bengal was being increasingly deprived of its due share in economy and its people were being increasingly suppressed by the government of Pakistan. Moulana Bhasani called for a council session of the

Awami Muslim League on the 7 and 8th February, 1957 at Kagmari. It was a large congregation of intellectuals and political leaders. He told the audience in his speech that, if West Pakistan did not halt its repression over East Pakistan, East Pakistan shall soon say 'goodbye' to West Pakistan. Moulana Bhasani severely opposed the policy of Suhrawardy-led Pakistan government for participating war treaties like SEATO and CENTO. Moulana Bhasani left the Awami Muslim League and formed his National Awami Party. He led the historic 1969 mass movement, which forced President Ayub Khan's military government to fall. On 12 November 1970 a severe cyclone hit the southern coastal areas of Pirojpur, Barguna, Patuakhali, Bhola, Lakshimpur and Noakhali districts. Several lakhs of people died and more people were affected badly. Moulana Bhasani visited the areas but found total indifference in the attitude of the government. Returning to Dhaka he said in a mass meeting 'goodbye' to West Pakistan on 23rd November 1970. Moulana Bhasani fought uncompromisingly for the oppressed people during his whole life.

At the time of the war of liberation, the exiled leftist forces at Belegata, Kolkata, formed the 'Bangladesh Jatio Mukti Sangram Samannoy Committee' under his leadership. On the 9th September 1971 the Bangladesh Government in exile at Kolkata, formed the 'All Party Advisory Committee' under his leadership. The members of this committee were Moni Singh, Mozaffar Ahmed, Monoranjan Dhar, Tazuddin Ahmed, Khondokar Mushtaq Ahmed and other veteran leaders.

After independence of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman took his advice to run the country. Moulana Bhasani spoke of the need of a strong opposition to establish democracy in the country. On 14th May of 1973 he declared at a public meeting to go for hunger strike to bring the prices of food, clothing and consumer goods down. During the month of April, 1975 India started unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water through Farakka Barrage. After the assassination of Bangabandhu on 15th August, the relation between India and Bangladesh became cold. In 1976 Moulana Bhasani took a 'long march' programme to resolve the Ganges water dispute. But

after this events his health further deteriorated. Moulana Bhasani died on 17th November at Dhaka Medical College on account of old age complications. The year after in 1977 the Ganges Water Treaty was signed between India and Bangladesh.

Moulana Bhasani was like Mahatma Gandhi who never sought power but fought for the oppressed people. Moulana Bhasani was like Ho Chi Minh who did unite all parties under his umbrella during the Liberation War. The other day was his 25th anniversary of death. On the occasion I put forward the following proposals to the government to pay due honour to this great personality.

1. The Open University of Bangladesh be renamed as Moulana Bhasani Open University.
2. The Ramna Garden of Dhaka be renamed as Moulana Bhasani Udyan.
3. The Moulana Bhasani Road from Shahbag be extended down to Shapla Chatter.
4. The proposed Ganges barrage be named as Moulana Bhasani Barrage.



Ramadan--the month of the months

KAZI AULAD HOSSAIN

M USLIMS all over the world prepare themselves to heartily hail the holy month of Ramadan, the month of the months, nay the best month in the Islamic calendar. Before I make an attempt to throw light on the importance and significance of the month of Ramadan vis-a-vis observance of Siam (fasting), I would like to state here that this particular month, that is, the month of Ramadan, was very dear and important to our holy Prophet (pbuh) before his attainment of prophethood at the age of forty. In the beginning of the sixth century when most of the people in Mecca and its neighbourhood were idol worshippers there were few people who "felt disgust at this idolatry which had prevailed for centuries, longed for the religion of Abraham, and tried to find out what had been its teaching. Such seekers of the truth were known as "Hunafa" (sing "Haniif")..... " Our holy Prophet (pbuh), it may mentioned here, was a "Haniif" like this, that is, he was also one of the few such seekers of truth and it was his practice to retire with his family for a month every year to a cave at Mt. Hira for medita-

tion. And the month he chose for this purpose was the month of Ramadan, the month of heat. While at this cave one night toward the end of the month (on the night of 27th Ramadan i.e. Shab-e-Qadar) he heard a voice from the Archangel Jibril (A.S.) and a little later the first few Ayats of Sura Alaq of the holy Qur-an were revealed to him.

So, the holy month of Ramadan was very important to our holy Prophet (pbuh) and it is also very important to Muslims the world over for two reasons viz (1) the holy Prophet (pbuh), as has been indicated about, used to retire with his family to the desert cave at Mt. Hira for a month of every year and the month was Ramadan and (2) while in this cave during this very month of Ramadan Allah Rabbul Alameen revealed for the first time His first five Ayats (Verses) of Sura Alaq (or the clot of Congealed Blood) of the Holy Qur-an to him.

We may now see what Almighty Allah says about observance of Siam (Fasting) in the Holy Qur-an. He says in Ayat (Verse) 183 of Sura Baqara (or the Heifer) of Al Qur-an: "O ye who believe Fasting is prescribed to you As it was prescribed

To those before you. That ye may (learn) Self-restraint."

The grand edifice of Islam stands on five strong pillars and Siam (Fasting) is one of such pillars besides other four pillars viz; (1) Faith (Iman), (2) Formal Prayers (Salat) (3) Pilgrimage (Hajj) and (4) Poor's due (Zakat). As enjoyed by Almighty Allah in the aforesaid Ayat (Verse) of the Holy Qur-an it is obligatory on the part of all eligible Muslims to observe "Siam" (fasting) for full thirty days in the month of Ramadan. By fasting we mean abstention from food and drink for certain hours. But when judged or considered from the point of view of Islamic terminology the connotation of Siam is something else, something basically different from fasting of other communities. In Islam Siam is not simply self-denial nor it is self-torture. It is certainly a means to an end, not an end itself. Siam teaches us not only abstention from food and drink for certain hours every day during this month of Ramadan, it also teaches us that we must refrain ourselves from all kinds of evil deeds including dacoity, theft, murder, loot, arson, rape, robbery, terrorism, mastani, collection of toll,

occupation of land, backbiting or speaking ill of others, etc.

Abstention from food and drink during the holy month of Ramadan without glorification of Allah Rabbul Alameen and proper supplication to Him entreating His Forgiveness and also without offering Him thanks for unbounded bounties bestowed on us is of no use to us. So, our Siam or "Roza" (Fasting) should be meaningful and fruitful. Our Siam should please Benign Allah. Since Siam teaches us self-restraint, the fasting Muslims can surely achieve self-purification through self-restraint and glorification of Lord Creator. The holy month of Ramadan gives the Muslims all over the world that unique opportunity. And the achievements made during this month should not go in vain. Lessons we will learn through self-restraint during this month (Ramadan) should be carefully applied not only during the next eleven months, if possible during the rest of the life. So Muslims should hail the holy month of Ramadan and discharge their concomitant sacred duties with due solemnity as ordained by Allah Gafur-ar-Rahim.

Garfield®

by Jim Davis



TOM & JERRY

By Hanna-Barbera

