

Fiftieth anniversary of Ekushey

This national event must not be politicised

THIS year marks the fiftieth anniversary of our Language Movement. Immediately after the birth of Pakistan in 1947 conspiracy was on to colonise the new country's eastern wing. The most insidious aspect of this conspiracy was to try to make Urdu the only state language of Pakistan though the Bengalis constituted 56 per cent of the country's population. The question of accepting this did not arise and the Bengalis started to protest from as early as 1948. On 21 February 1952 several Dhaka University students were shot during a protest rally and strike on the issue of making Bangla a national language. This was the beginning of movement that ultimately led to our Liberation War in 1971. Thus *Omor Ekushey*, as the day is popularly called, became and remained as the most sacred commemorative event in our national life.

It was the commemoration of our Language Movement Day -- *Ekushey* -- that gave us the strength, the unity and the political direction to rise against all sorts of oppression and military rule of the Pakistan era. Though we call it our language movement day what *Ekushey* and the associated events collectively symbolises is really the series of events that galvanised our cultural regeneration, development of political consciousness and creation of our national identity. Our fight for independence all hinged on the consciousness triggered by *Ekushey* fifty years ago.

Over the years the celebration of this event has become a month long affair starting from the first of the month, as it did yesterday with the inauguration of the *Ekushey* Book Fair by the Prime Minister. Arguably the fiftieth commemoration of this singular event must be appropriate both in terms of magnitude and quality. We want to see this event celebrated throughout the country and in as many ways as possible. But most importantly we do not want to see this event politicised. The forced resignation of Prof. Anisuzzaman as the chairman of Bangla Academy, a man of impeccable credentials as an intellectual and writer, has given rise to serious confusion in the public mind as to the government's policy in dealing with writers and thinkers. The whole act smacked of politicisation of a very sacred institution and a more sacred event. The excuse that previously something similar may have happened is not acceptable to us simply because we want to move forward and not repeat the mistakes of the past.

We conclude the plea not to politicise the fiftieth anniversary of *Omor Ekushey*.

The Leftist call to hartal is irresponsible

With limited support it now risks its moral position

AND now the Leftists Alliance has got into the hartal act proving that alienation from public sentiment is the key to identity as a political construct in Bangladesh. The Leftists in the last decade have steadily lost support and now stand close to disappearing down the waterways of history. Unable to gather even one percent of the total vote and with no more than a few thousand in their best attended meetings, the Leftists are recognized more as 'also exist' in the political canvas of Bangladesh. This hartal call seems to be a desperate attempt to prove that. But the method they have chosen is contrary to the moral high ground, which the Left always claims. By calling hartal they prove that in spirit they are no different than the two parties that call the shots in Bangladesh.

Hartal as a political weapon is a discredited tool that causes destruction but exists like the two-stroke engine or polybags. It causes suffering for many and discomfort for all. But the Left has proven that when it comes to lack of imagination, it is not far behind the other major parties operating.

One does not dispute the political demands made by the Leftist Alliance but the method they have chosen is unacceptable. Had they wanted publicity for their demands, the media would have gladly helped out as they always do.

By calling a hartal without having much political clout, they risk being ridiculed at the national level. As it is, the electoral results have shown that the entire Left has less vote pulling power than the Pir of Charmonai and that indictment should have driven most Leftists to introspection. But if the hartal fails, they will have belittled the space they occupy in the world.

This is a bad day and sad day, a statement of force that has lost support, ideas and now moral purpose.

Bush's state of the union address: Taking on new frontiers of terrorism?

ZIAUS SHAMS CHOWDHURY

A FIERCE resolve to continue the campaign against terrorism and a stern warning to nations that are regarded as potential abettors of terrorist movements highlighted President Bush's state of the union address. The speech reflects a strong and unambiguous intent to follow up on the remarkable success accomplished in the enterprise in Afghanistan and not let the momentum to flag. Quite understandably, a crucial factor that conditioned the tone of the speech and the special emphasis on anti-terrorism effort was to ensure that the surge of Bush's domestic political support remains intact and that the fear and insecurity that has troubled the Americans in the aftermath of 11th September is adequately addressed.

President Bush also touched on some other issues of concern to the America people -- revival of the economy, improving the employment situation, providing retirement security and health coverage for older citizens etc, but the anti-terrorism theme was by far the most dominant feature of the address.

A notable thing in the speech is the naming of three states -- North Korea, Iran and Iraq as sponsors of terror and terming them as an axis of evil. This was meant to pass a variety of messages to a variety of quarters. First of all let us consider Bush's domestic backdrop and constraint. After 11th September events, life in America has changed and the widely held assumption of the Americans about their security,

invulnerability and freedom was destroyed. A fear has come to grip the nation that the next assault might come in a most unexpected manner and its scale could be far more catastrophic -- such as the use of nuclear or biological weapons supplied to some terrorist groups by one of the rogue states. Analysts in the US have been warning that unless the country is on its guard, the next terrorist attack

Muslim state. The message is that the anti-terrorism focus is not on some Muslim countries alone.

After 11th September, a troubling phenomenon in US was that some Americans tended to identify Islam with terrorism. In the view of these particular sections, all Muslims were suspect. President Bush and his advisers recognising the dark implications of such a trend, swiftly moved to quash such a perception

America needs to be careful about. Clearly, the unilateralism that is so stidently articulated in the address stems from the spectacular success that America's smart weapons and well honed military techniques achieved in Afghanistan. The danger in the unilateralism is that it inevitably undermines a world order based on the supremacy of international law. Whenever Mr Bush and his advisers, in the wake of 11th

admire the strong leadership of President Musharrarf". These can be little doubt that India will be unhappy with this commending remark on what President Pervez Musharrarf has been doing to rein in the terrorists in his country. India has been persistently saying that Pakistan is not doing enough to contain terrorist groups, and has in fact wanted America to put more

This analysis of the Bush's state of union address may be appropriately concluded by an observation on one significant omission. He did not say anything on the Middle East situation. In today's global scene, a fair humane resolution of the Palestinian problem has an equal urgency as the need to combat international terrorism. What Sharon is doing to the Palestinians is the most gruesome and reprehensible trampling of civilised norms of international behaviour. Sharon has made a mockery of international law. Sadly, he does so with complete impunity. Before US moved into Afghanistan, and when it was focused on mobilising support of other countries and Muslim nations in particular, Mr Bush indicated that they would have a constructive and evenhanded engagement in the Middle East. With Afghan success, it now seems that Mr Bush's administration has become indifferent to the fate of the Palestinians. They are unmoved by Sharon's savaging of the Palestinians. Some suitable reference to the Palestinian problem was very much in order. Mr Bush's complete silence on the issue will deeply disappoint the Muslim world while encouraging Sharon on the bloody and brutal path he has embraced towards extinguishing the prospect of a Palestinian state.

Ziaus Shams Chowdhury is a former Ambassador.

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will kill not four or five thousand, but millions. Bush therefore made a point of telling the Americans that the rogue states were on watch and America will act if need arose, and act alone if necessary.

The second point to note -- about specific mention of these three states -- is that they are being unmistakably forewarned that they had better not contemplate any mischief against America. The warning carries a lot of credibility against the backdrop of US action in Afghanistan. It is, however, difficult to visualise a situation in which America can launch an attack against any of these countries without convincing evidence or some minimum diplomatic underpinning.

A third point that needs to be noted is that two of the states mentioned are Muslim states but the third one -- North Korea -- is not a

In the state of the union address, there is again a positive and appreciative reference to Islam: "Let the skeptics look to Islam's own rich history -- with its centuries of learning, and tolerance and progress." It would have been a good thing for Mr Bush to say a little more on this subject. Both for US and the Islamic world, it is of paramount importance that in the fight against terrorism, the US makes a clear distinction between moderate (and relatively silent) forces in the Islamic countries and those radical groups like Al Qaida and the Taliban who have utterly abused and subverted the name and values of Islam to do things that are against the real Islamic ideals and teachings.

One element in Mr Bush's address, an inclination towards unilateral action, if such a thing comes to be seen in America's national interest, is something that

September, talked about a strike on Iraq, it raised disquiet among Muslim countries and unease among America's European allies.

Carefully reading the state of union address, an impression emerges that Mr Bush's administration minimises, if not altogether dismisses, the difficulties and problems that arbitrary action by US against any other nation or nations may create enmity with its allies and with countries like China and Russia. It is reasonable to assume that Mr Bush's speech will make Russia and China somewhat uneasy and push them to come closer together to create a counter weight against America's excessive hegemony.

The supportive words in the speech about Pakistan represents the only significant focus on South Asian region: "Many nation are acting forcefully, Pakistan is now cracking down on terror, and I

pressure on Pakistan. Mr Bush's remark shows that at least for present, America wants to maintain closeness with Pakistan and that it does not want to see India create tension with its western neighbour. Mr Bush might be telling India that America does not quite concur with India's repeated complaints against Pakistan.

The doubling of defence expenditure announced in the speech, appears somewhat puzzling. Perhaps this move is calculated to tell the 'rogue' nations that the warning that has been served on them is meant to be serious and should be taken as such. One fall out from the higher defence expenditure will be to impel countries like China and Russia to do likewise. One wonders how increased outlay on military will impact on America's effort for economic recovery.

Suicide : A malady of mind or social mayhem?

SYED KAMALUDDIN AHMED

SIMI and Kashfia, two very bright and vibrant young women have chosen the same fate for their own life. They have committed suicide. Simi left a suicide note, very clear and specific. It is rather a protest note or note of remonstration, very strong and convincing. Simi did a great job for this manifestly sleeping nation through her death, which she could not do, with her utmost effort, when she was alive. She apparently failed to stir up the social conscience against injustice done by perverted and often disregarded societal behaviour like eve-teasing and discriminative attitude towards woman ingrained in our everyday miseries since antiquity. Newspaper sources with their very formidable effort tried to portray the days of Simi with both factual information and emotional essence. A talented and natural creative artist Simi left this arduous job for media people and they complied. Information sources detailed it quite clearly and vividly how often-ignored social behaviour, demonstrated by local delinquent youths, social leadership and law enforcement people, deduce to such a dreadful conclusion. Simi's decision for this deliberate self-harm does not seem to be an impulsive behaviour or hesitant aggression towards self, rather it was a kind of learned helplessness where the family, friends and the society could help her very little.

Kashfia, a promising youngster with multiple talents left many subtle messages for us. We often disregard and close the eyes to the needs of a generation. Previous

generation, let it be an individual, family or society, very frequently behave almost identically. May be, Kashfia wanted to say something we did not have time to listen. May be, Kashfia had chock-full of emotional distress that she could never ventilate or was not allowed venting. But the bottom line is Kashfia's death, another sad and heartbreaking deliberate self-harm, is an irreplaceable loss, for such outstanding talents are not very many

explain at this moment, I felt again the deaths to be a personal loss. In this brief communication, instead of critically looking at the cause and effect relationship of social attitudes and these two deaths, I would rather like to take the opportunity of using my professional wisdom to focus, in short, upon suicide as a phenomenon from our social perspective.

People of different disciplines define suicide differently. Health scientists call it a 'major public

Cumulative statistics shows that nearly 1,000 people commit suicide a day worldwide. Here in Bangladesh we do not have any scientific information about its incidence. But anecdotal information available from certain parts of the country about suicide cannot be ignored, although, in general, suicide rate is lower in less affluent countries. In Western world, suicide is identified as one of the 10 most prevalent causes of death. Still, very little is

vented if adequate attention is paid to the sufferers and their sufferings. However, many other deaths are nothing but consequences of social injustice, ignorance, social inequality, lower status of women and at times disordered social attitude and behaviour.

Since olden days, suicide is always considered an act of cowardice, despair and despondency. It has always been treated as a stigmatized behaviour and the victim has at all times been dealt with indignity and disgrace. If the suicide is not complete and the victim survives, he or she may have to face legal proceedings and is often penalized. Perspective of the victim is almost always disregarded, as if the victim should have found some other alternative whatever might be his or her intensity or degree of emotional turmoil.

Deaths like those of Simi and Kashfia clearly call our attention to address the issue of suicide, a preventable cause of premature death, from a multidimensional perspective. An individual to become suicidal or to attempt such a deliberate self-harm is not a one-factor consequence; rather it is a multifactorial corollary. Research findings revealed that the factors lie within the length and breadth of personality and upbringing of an individual, his community and social

milieu, his workplace and economic environment, his health and well being, his stresses and miseries, his grieves and bereavements, and finally, the way the very suicidal act itself is looked at by contemporary social value system. Therefore, any measure or effort to assist the victims, minimize its proneness and reduce its incident would require a comprehensive planning and support service that would address all the above issues. It needs many changes to accomplish the tasks, changes within ourselves, our beliefs and understanding, our social norms and conventions, and finally, our community attitude and behaviour. It is really a gigantic responsibility that needs overhauling of whole social structure. It may seem a long way to go and an unachievable task ahead, but there should always be a beginning, the beginning of an end.

Dear Simi and Kashfia, as parents and conscious social beings we owe you many apologies. We could not give you guarantee for a full-blown life and a natural death, we could not provide you opportunities to grow up, develop and flourish. Most important of all, we could not protect you, neither could we promise your safeguard.

Dr. Syed Kamaluddin Ahmed is a mental health professional.

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among our population.

I did never know these two young women; neither did I know their families. Incidentally, Kashfia was a friend and class fellow of one of my nieces. I found her so much distressed and heart-broken after the loss of her friend that I could not ask my niece many questions about the incident. Only thing I came to know that she was a lively youngster with bubbling youth and many creative endowments. She was a natural poet and prolific writer. Years back, when Shazneen, another teen-ager of enviable personal profile and with loads of dreams and aspirations, fell prey to a wildly vengeance and was brutally murdered, I looked at our pre-teen daughter and somehow found Shazneen's murder as a personal loss. Similarly, coming back home after two weeks of staying abroad when I heard the incidents, for reasons I cannot

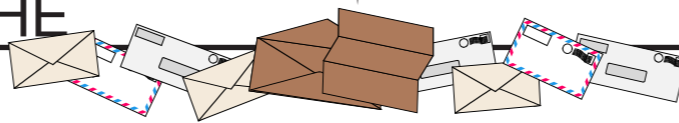
health problem', psychologists explain it as a 'conscious act of annihilation of individual's multidimensional malaise', and social scientists as a 'manifestation of poor social interactions or socio-economic adversity'. Whatever may be the definition, the conventional understanding about the purpose of the act is 'seeking a solution'. Conscious urge to escape to a state of unconsciousness to avert unendurable and frustrating psychological stress may lead an individual in need to this fatal deliberate self-harm. There is always a state of learned helplessness, and combined with ambivalence and hesitancy, one's realm of thought is narrowed down to a singular decision making. The act of suicide is an exit phenomenon where, in majority of cases, the intention is communicated overtly or may be perspicaciously.

done to prevent or minimize its incidents while rest of the conditions, understandably, got their priority in logistic investment for research and intervention. Why it happens like that? Is it because suicide does not cause an epidemic, it does not have any visible impact on socio-economic condition of a community, or is it considered as an individual and personal behaviour that is forever stigmatized and socially undesirable?

Sociologists tried to establish a relationship between lack of meaningful social and family ties and suicide. Social isolation, social mobility and disorganized family and social events have significant relationship with suicide. Many of the suicide incidents are related to disease and disability. Depression, psychosis, chronic pain and life threatening diseases may lead to suicidal deaths that can be inter-

individual, his community and social

TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR



Replacing old vehicles

The government has rightly withdrawn old vehicles, especially passenger vehicles, from the street relieving the city dwellers from air pollution.

But it should have been followed by replacement with new vehicles--either by BRTC or by letting businessmen import vehicles from abroad. The policy makers in the government now move faster with their cars along the streets having an impression of throughout change.

I would humbly request them to think for a moment of those general people who don't own a car or any other vehicle but have to solely depend on public transport, scarcity of which is causing them immeasurable sufferings.

Farhad Ahmed Khan
East Shewra Para, Dhaka

"Plastic cases not firearms"

The arrest of the importers of the plastic cases is needless harassment by the police. There is nothing illegal in importing or owning plastic gun carriers for licensed firearms. It is also the right of every law-abiding citizen to own firearms.

Rather than cracking down on illegal weapons, the customs and police waste their time in such pursuits.

MA Dhaka White paper: lucky we are!

We thank BNP for publishing a white paper on corruption committed by the Awami League leaders during their tenure in government. We will thank AL if it now publish a white paper on corruption committed by the BNP leaders during its previous tenure in government, though the publication will be extremely belated. It's better late than never. The AL has no right to deprive the people of this country from the right of having information. Mere filing cases in the court of law against the corrupt people is not enough.

Taking action against corruption or any other crime committed by political people is not a political vengeance, not at all, as the vociferous political leaders want to make us believe so.

The clamour AL made during the publication of the white paper has considerably been able to distract public attention from that paper. It is a good strategy. Hope BNP has learnt it and will apply the lesson when the party will be in the opposition in future. Or does BNP think as AL used to think while in power, that it would stay in power forever?

The people of this region have a long history of being exploited and being suppressed. The only difference is our own political leaders are

playing the role of the colonial masters now. People are now lucky enough that they have, at least, started to know, through white paper, the extension of the exploitation they are being subjected to in their own independent country.

Faruque Hasan
Dhanmandi, Dhaka

An unwise and unpoplar decision

It is unfortunate that as per our present Constitution the President hardly enjoys any authority unlike the President of Pakistan and India. Even then the President of the country is the last hope of the nation in many respects during the national crises particularly the political ones when the whole nation helplessly looks forward to him for the recovery.

It was expected that the BNP Government would elect a neutral personality for the position, but to our utter frustration they have elected a party member. BNP should have learnt their lessons from the recent past. Had the President of the country been a party member of Awami League other than Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed the fate of BNP and that of the nation would have been different. May we hope that in the greater interest of the Nation BNP would revise their decision and re-elect a neutral person as the Head of

Indian Muslims are target of Draconian Laws

The BJP-led coalition is converting India into a police state in which legislation bypasses Parliament and targets ordinary citizens especially minorities.

Using the September 11 attacks in America as an excuse in October 2001, POTO-I, was passed by Ordinance. Its predecessor, TADA was passed in 1987 due to the Punjab crisis controversial.

Controversy ensued on POTO. POTO-I was not approved by Parliament. In January 2002, POTO-II surfaced again by Ordinance along with three minor changes. But, the story does not end there. Now, we have the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999, (MACOCA) which has been extended to Delhi.

POTO-I, POTO-II and the MACOCA have all been enacted or extended without reference to the Legislature. So, after POTO-II we now have MACOCA. There are extended provisions for phone tapping by the Superintendent of Police (Section 14-16). 'Big Brother' has arrived in the form of the Delhi Police. MACOCA signals the death of civil liberties in every conceivable sense to allow the police to go on a rampage while limiting and tying down the powers of the courts to provide relief and effective oversight.

The offence provisions are too harsh. Pre-trial custody could extend to 180 days. Denial of bail is inevitable. The admissibility of confessions to the police is an invitation to brutality. Virtually anyone and everyone fall within the definition of a 'terrorist' or 'organised criminal'.

Once trapped under these statutes, a person stands to forfeit several years of his life and his properties even if eventually proven innocent. As it is, the SIMI ban in Gujarat has led to arbitrary arrests. SIMI like Muslim groups will be specially targeted.

Using the excuses of the Afghan war, the global anti-terrorism mood and the attack on Parliament, the BJP-led national coalition is converting India into a police state in which legislation bypasses Parliament and targets ordinary citizens with arbitrary police action for the rest of the duration of this Government.

Ravi Krishna
Manama, Bahrain



India's Muslim question

State? It is also high time to empower the President in line with the President of India as he is the last hope for the nation.

A.B.M. Zakaria
Dhaka

Politicians should learn from the West?

Mr. Akbar Hossain's view on the subject is very superficial and lacks any insight in the historical process necessary for social development.

Yes, the third world countries have to learn science, technology and management from the advanced capitalist countries, but not morality, social value, and politics from the West. The Western politicians are no less corrupt than their counterpart in the third world countries. Only difference is that the Western politicians are smarter in beating their own system and covering up their misdeeds and deceiving their own people, and, to a large extent, rest of the world.

The main problems of the third world countries are due to poverty and lack of education for which the West is partly to be blamed. For example, in the 18th century Bengal had reasonably well up economy. It was no historical coincidence that the vanquished British General Lord Cornwallis who signed the surrender treaty with the Americans in 1776 was sent Bengal as the Governor General, soon after his return to

England. In 18th century Bengal was one of the most rewarding British occupation. Lord Cornwallis plundered Bengal with his "permanent settlement" policy and thereby, breaking the backbone of peasantry of Bengal.

The inherent causes of poverty and absence of socio-political integrity in our society can be traced in the colonial occupation by the West and West's domination in the contemporary world. I would request Mr. Akbar to read the history of human civilisation thoroughly and try to understand the causes of lopsided global development instead lecturing third world politicians to learn politics from the west.

We have to find our own solutions for our own socio-political problems.

Amitava Rahman
USA

Israel enters South Asia at India's expense

The basis of the new Indo-Israeli friendly relationship is their common hatred towards Muslims.

The other attractions are Jewish State's access to big Indian market and India's purchase of military equipment or know-how from Israel on mutually beneficial terms.

New Delhi has taken a dramatic risk to lose its Arab friends by

making a common cause with their number one enemy--an expansionist Israel. The blossoming new "equation" between New Delhi and the Jerusalem establishment will also give perceptions of similarities between the Kashmir issue and the Palestinian question.

Within the larger Islamic bloc of nations, Iran is already reported to have voiced concern over Israel's new "activities" in India.

The Vajpayee administration must not succumb to the temptation of Israel's military hardware at the risk of loosing sweet Arab oil.

In laying out the red carpet for Mr. Peres at the time when Israel is mercilessly killing Palestinians, the Indian officialdom has resented the Arab world.

While the BJP led establishment may be inclined to dismiss such concerns, India can ill-afford to strain its ties with the Muslim bloc for economic compulsions.

An oil embargo with the lethal combination of cutting off trade ties and expulsion of Indian manpower from Gulf States will totally crumble Indian economy.

The teams being sent to Muslim capitals will not offset the damage. India needs to show sincerity rather relying on diplomatic tricks.

Mohsin Meer
Lahore, Pakistan