

Eid-e-Miladunnabi

A time for reflection not rage

PROPHET Hazrat Muhammad (Peace be upon him) whose life and works have been spoken of in glowing terms by great thinkers and social reformers remains a beacon of hope for a troubled mankind. It was George Bernard Shaw who called him the "saviour of humanity" in an early 20th Century setting with hindsight of the prophet's deeds fourteen hundred years ago.

The prophet of Islam disciplined the Arab Bohemians, steeped in dark-age superstitions, into a community of people with an ennobling set of spiritual ethos to guide them through their day-to-day material existence. That itself could be a life-time achievement worthy of tributes, even for a messiah, let alone the rapid growth of Islam into one of the largest religions in the world, of which he was the moving force, the revered architect. But Prophet Muhammad (SM)'s philosophical influence upon human affairs went beyond the Islamic domain, something that has been acknowledged on all hands over the ages. He was truly a messenger of peace, tolerance, equality, justice and fair-play in human relations, between individuals communities and nations. He would not preach a single virtue that he did not practise himself.

This year is particularly significant as this auspicious day comes in the wake of the September 11 tragedy which has catapulted Muslims into uncertain, hysteria, hate and an endless procession of self-questioning and imaging. It has become a time for reflection for many and a rage for few as well. One hopes this will provide an opportunity for all Muslims to gather themselves in the most positive light. Muslims can't leave questions unanswered nor seek the answers in the alleys of medievalism. For a very long time, Islam has been addressed exclusively by clerics and the ordinary faithful have devoted themselves to carrying out these instructions much of the time. This has to change as Islam faces new challenges of the 21st century world. Hazrat Muhammed (Pbuh) never spoke extolling the glory of war. His actions were pro-society and pro progress and any reading of Arabian history will show how quickly he advanced this nation. Today, it is struggling to cope with the challenges of the modern world.

So on this sacred day, our prayers are that the spirit of the great Prophet of Islam should enthuse all Muslims to recognize the need of the hour and accept our responsibility to modernize society in general and Islamic society in particular. It is time the rigidity of opinions we are experiencing today gave way to a flexible understanding and accommodation of each other's point of view. That way belligerence will be replaced by a disposition towards peaceful co-existence.

Awami League must join the parliament

Denying this responsibility means denying the people

THE Awami League is being very coy about joining the parliament. While refusing to do so on the ground that the environment for joining the parliament isn't there, media reports that it may join a part of the budget session for a symbolic move which of course might mean gains for the party. Meanwhile, the BNP has shown certain enthusiasm for starting a dialogue as donors are insisting that a full House is a conditionality for loans..

The Opposition's main concern is that they will not be given a chance to speak even if they join the House. This is partly inspired by the memory of the argument BNP used to stay away from the House for a long period when AI was in power.

But this is an assumption till now and not an argument. There is no proof as yet that BNP will choke the Awami League when they are in the House. Till that happens, this will be like making a major political decision based on only a hunch. Till proven by action, it does not amount to a credible argument.

In fact, if AL joins and then BNP refuses to let them speak that will be a greater political victory. Right now, this half house is becoming politically, constitutionally and psychologically redundant. People are losing interest in a House already one sided.

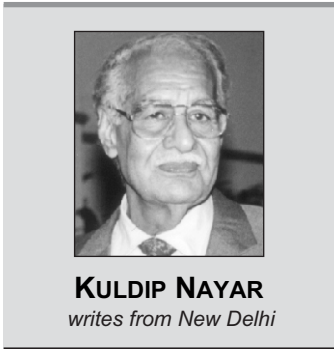
The parliament is the ultimate representative public space and body. This isn't about party activism but a matter of public representation.

It seems more than ever that the parties still remain agitation driven and haven't fully graduated to being parliamentary parties. The BNP boycotted the parliament for a long time and did well enough in the polls and that may be inspiring AL as well but with every incomplete session the crisis increases.

Awami League can in fact change this mode of politics and establish a role of a new kind. The crisis of weak institutions can be resolved by creating new ones and strengthening those that we have. By taking on the responsibility of making the parliament meaningful the AL will have an opportunity to set a very positive example and play a historic constructive role.

The parliament belongs to the people and not to the ruling party, and that is why making it operational is so vital. Failing this will extract a price that the people will have to pay which is why the matter of joining the parliament is so important. The responsibility of making the future safe for them lie with the political parties.

The vanishing grey



KULDIP NAYAR

writes from New Delhi

ASSUMING there is no war or a large-scale retaliation against Pakistan because of America's pressure and other considerations, what would India do if there were yet another incident like the one near Jammu? The limit, if there was any room, was reached after the Indian parliament was attacked more than five months ago. The outcry at that time was no less than what it is today.

Understandably, no government can sit quiet when its capability, if not legitimacy, is questioned. But has it any long-term strategy? After every attack by the terrorists, it is given out that the diplomatic activity would be widened and the border vigilance increased. But what has happened so far?

As for diplomacy, no country in Europe is willing to buy our line that General Pervez Musharraf is not sincere in suppressing terrorism against India. Winning back opinion in our favour is the real test of diplomacy, not the false claims by the Ministry of External Affairs. Regarding vigilance on the border, terrorists from across continue to strike at will despite the wall of soldiers.

It seems the hardliners are determined to sabotage every-

thing, including the coming state elections. Abdul Ghani Lone, who was shot dead, was a moderate. That slogans like Pakistan Zindabad were raised at the meeting where Lone was killed is significant. Pakistan is wrong to infer that India does not want to solve the problem of Kashmir. In all Indo-Pakistan agreements from Tashkent to Lahore, New Delhi has mentioned Kashmir. But is cross-border terrorism the solution to the problem?

The public does not count in the governance of that country. It is as much fed up with the regime as we are. The demand by political parties that a caretaker government should replace the military junta spells out popular feelings.

Our policy after the takeover by General Ayub Khan in 1958 should have been to help the Pakistanis to get back democracy. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was correct to bemoan in parliament the military

takeover in Pakistan. But then the "doctrine of necessity," the reason which the Pakistan Supreme Court used to ratify the coup by Musharraf has guided New Delhi as well. Without demur, it has accepted the military rule in Pakistan as if it is inevitable.

Instead of getting absorbed in sterile Track-I or Track-II talks between people selected by the two governments -- it was Washington's idea -- India should have worked for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan. It is true that it is up to any nation to have the government it likes. But do the Pakistanis have any choice? Military rulers have come whenever they have wanted to and withdrawn whenever they found the people's ire against them.

Without interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs or tary dictators. But then Washington has a penchant for autocrats. It believes that the ideal of democracy is dispensable if there are compensating considerations.

By pointing out to Washington that it has gone back on its promise to fight terrorism wherever it existed, we will not reach anywhere. It would not have woken up to menace of terrorism in the first place if the happenings in New York and Washington had not taken place. So it is futile to expect anything from it except sermons on restraint.

One does feel sad that Indo-US relationship that was on the up has been adversely affected. Both the Prime Minister and the Home Minister returned from Washington last year with the assurance that the tilt, if any, and his companions during their stay in Mecca before they were compelled to migrate to Medina from Mecca in the year 630 AD. Such example of magnanimity and love for fellow human beings is rare in human history. He declared general amnesty to the people of Mecca. About such forgiveness and magnanimity of

not honour the terms and conditions of the treaty of Hudaiblah executed between them and the Muslims in the beginning of the 7th century. According to the treaty the Khoja community joined the Muslims whereas the Banu Qader community joined the Quraish. One night the people of the Banu Qader community in cooperation with the Quraish attacked the Khoja community in violation of the said treaty and killed several persons who were living under the protection of the Muslims. As a result, the holy Prophet asked the Quraish to compensate the Khoja community. But the audacious Quraish did not pay heed to the Prophet's advice. The inevitable result was that the holy Prophet had to wage war against the Quraish and invade Mecca in 630 AD with 10,000 soldiers. This time the Meccan Qaraish were alarmed because of the vast and well organised Muslim forces' advance towards Mecca under the able leadership of the holy Prophet (pbuh). When the Muslim army was in the vicinity of Mecca, Abu Sufian, the Quraish leader and cousin as well as a long-time bitter enemy of the holy Prophet, who surreptitiously came out of Mecca to see the Muslim army with his two companions, was caught by Omar Faruq and brought before the Prophet. But the kind-hearted great Prophet of Islam did not retaliate and forgave him. Abu Sufian was overwhelmed and embraced Islam before the Prophet (pbuh).

The Muslim army entered the city of Mecca unopposed. After long eight years the holy Prophet entered the dear city of his birth as a victor and without opposition from any quarter. And after the conquest of Mecca the Prophet (pbuh) showed his large-heartedness and magnanimity by forgiving the Meccan Quraish and other people who oppressed him

adopting a holier-than-thou attitude, our endeavour should be to enable the people in Pakistan to rule themselves. We should openly and persistently knock at the door of countries all over the world to point out how the military in Pakistan pushes out the elected governments at will. It would be ideal if the West, particularly America, were to join in this effort. A country that swears by the charter of freedom cannot and should not be on the side of mili-

Obviously, it wants Pakistan's support in dealing with the Taliban and Al-Qaida who are spread all over Pakistan. They have the support of religious elements from within. That may explain why Islamabad has said 'no' to America's action in Waziristan on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, where thousands of Taliban and Al-Qaida militants are living after leaving Afghanistan.

It is obvious that America does not want to take a stand, which is not to the liking of Musharraf. It does not seem to realise that he has two yardsticks for measuring terrorism -- one for Washington and another for India. He believes that when it comes to India he does not have to comply with the promise he made in his January 11 speech to suppress the jihadis and religious zealots. In fact, he

also clearly indicates the unique position of the "Ummi Prophet" Hazrat Muhammad (pbuh). On the solemn occasion of his birth day (12th Rabiul Awa) let us pay homage to him and endeavour to follow the guidelines left behind for the benefit of mankind.

keep the ones he needs out of reach. On the most significant court occasions, the prosecution invariably attempts to keep his lawyers out of the loop and out of the court. When defence lawyers wait in the wings, the police does not bring him to court, citing security reasons. When they're not around, he is snuck into the magistrate's office to serve pre-signed papers extending his detention. When his lawyers are allowed to visit him in jail a basic right we took much pains to establish three or four agents from the Special Branch are always present, so that the government gets to know every legal strategy discussed.

Even after all this medical malpractice, deviation from due process, the death threats, police persecution, torture in state custody we're lucky. I spoke to him and he spoke back.

And in there is the tragedy of human rights in Bangladesh: to be considered lucky to be alive.

The writer is, Visiting Fellow at the Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, USA.

would be towards India.

No doubt, America has not spared words in condemning the acts of terrorism in India but it has never mentioned any country by name. It is difficult to believe that Washington does not know the name. With all its intelligence agencies working in Pakistan and India, in fact all over the region, and the satellites hovering in the sky, America has a full and clear picture. But it prefers to keep quiet.

has released most of the fundamentalists he had arrested. Seventy training camps of terrorists have come up already. Washington realises that Musharraf is under pressure from within and should not be driven to the wall. New Delhi does not believe this because it is well known the Taliban and the Al-Qaida are the creation of Islamabad. It is not beyond the military regime to chastise them or their supporters in Pakistan. When it could contain them during America's action in Afghanistan why not now?

Musharraf had to divert attention from the dubious referendum he held to install himself President for five years. He couldn't get the legitimacy that he wanted to earn because most people stayed away from the polling booths. He considers confrontation with India the best way to end the debate on his election.

There is little likelihood of terrorism coming down because Musharraf believes he can thus focus international opinion on Kashmir.

Islamabad must realise that for any attempt to solve the Kashmir dispute, there has to be an atmosphere of peace where India and Pakistan could sit across the table and also involve the Kashmiris at an appropriate time. The problem with the two countries is that the grey area between the two has shrunk so much that what is visible is either white or black. It is sad that no serious effort has been made even by eminent people on both sides to discuss Kashmir to find some mutually acceptable solution.

Kuldeep Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

OPINION

Police brutality and our good fortune

JALAL ALAMGIR

SAHRIAR Kabir, Bahauddin Nasim, Dr. Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir (my father), and over two dozen other political prisoners: tortured in custody. Jamaluddin Fakir, Fazlul Huq Bhuiya, Mohammed Ata: died from police torture... The disturbing turn of events continues in our "imperfect" democracy, as dubbed (euphemistically, in my opinion) by the US Ambassador.

Ever since I began to protest and raise issues of torture in state custody, I have received many letters branding me a traitor, a propagandist, an "information-terrorist", an unpatriotic soul sold to a grand Zionist-Indian-American conspiracy. Yet, in light of the turn of events, perhaps we're lucky. For the first time since I saw my father off at the airport in Boston two months ago, on a journey to hell it seems now to me, I was able to speak to him, thanks to a well-timed phone call during his court hearing. He greeted me amid a cacophony of police whis-

bles and high-pitched voices in the background. He told me to stay principled, pronouncing these words clearly in English before the police seized the phone: "Never bow down to anybody on my count." The conversation lasted some twenty seconds.

Yes, we're damn lucky. With little accountability left for what goes on under police remand, the prospect for worse always looms large. We're lucky glass bottles inserted into him didn't break. We're lucky they haven't been able to make him a vegetable yet.

Government doctors have examined my father, which came after the court ordered the government to do so for the third time. Even though he has repeatedly reported severe pain in his abdomen, groin, and legs, areas where he was tortured, doctors refuse to examine those parts. Instead, they take his chest x-ray when his chest gives him no trouble at all, or his temperature though he does not run a fever. They give him unknown medications for conditions he does not have, and try to

keep the ones he needs out of reach.

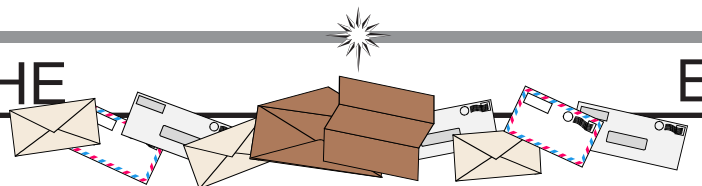
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TO THE EDITOR TO THE EDITOR TO THE



Ban still on in Dhanmondi!

Though the government withdrew its ban on 12 twelve cable channels the very next day, we the residents of Dhanmondi are deprived of these channels ever since. Our cable operator Dhaka Cable though carried on with the ban instantly, has not comply with 'the withdraw decision' yet.

Till date we are unable to watch Star World, Star Movies and surprisingly Zee TV, Star Plus and Sony as well. We tried to contact with the cable operator but of no use. We pay our charges regularly, then why would we be deprived of these channels when others have access to it?

Mohua Chowdhury
Road-9, Dhanmondi, Dhaka

This is outrageous! In Dhanmondi area we still don't have access to

Star World, Star Movies and all those previously banned satellite channels including a few others like Alpha, Zee TV etc. When the government withdrew its ban, all the cable operators started airing those channels except for Dhaka Cable--the cable operator of Dhanmondi. What, may we ask, is the reason behind such ban in one locality only -Dhanmondi!

Rashed Chowdhury
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The government banned the broadcast of 12 satellite channels but the next day it lifted the ban after reviewing the pleas by the channel distributors. But not in Dhanmondi.

The residents of Dhanmondi are still deprived of those channels. The cable operator of the area Dhaka Cable has neither bothered to air those channels nor cared to inform us the reason behind it. One the one hand, we are deprived of our favour-

ite channels and on the other still we'd have to pay our monthly charges in full. Is this democratic?

Samia Alam
Dhanmondi, Dhaka

The Editor's remark

Please refer to your remark on banning of cable TV Channels (22 May) "we hope that the government has learnt its lesson." Please be kind enough to tell the readers what kind of lessons has the government learnt? And by the way who are the "we's"?

Sir, is this comment based on a poll or just a handful of letters for and against the subject?

Billy I Ahmed
Dhaka

Bengali culture threatened!

I hope someone from the govern-

ment reads this, although I wonder whether they read newspapers at all.

We have on one side, politicians who are saying ours is a democratic country and on the other side we have extremists in the ruling party trying to prevent our rights of watching TV and denying access to free information.

If the government thinks that by this way they can improve their image abroad and prevent brain drain, they are wrong. A lot of my friends were planning to come back thinking that situations have improved but after this stunt by our Information Minister, I'm sure they would think twice before making up their mind.

Sanadina Khan
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