

Dipawali -- the festival of lights

PREM RANJAN DEV

THE Indian civilisation is an unending procession of festivals. Dipawali or Diwali, one of the biggest and grandest festival of Hindus, is celebrated in the month of Kartika (October-November). Dipawali literally means row of lamps and Diwali, as it is popularly known, means the 'festival of lights'. It is an important and popular festival in India in one form or the other. As a matter of fact it is a five-day long festival, but the main celebration takes place on the day of Dipawali (the dark night before new moon). One myth says that on this auspicious day 'Laksmi', the goddess of wealth and good fortune, roams about the visits the houses of people. So, people tidy up their houses, establishments and shops and decorate them with lamps to welcome the fortune goddess. On the night she is worshipped with great devotion. The occasion also commemorates the triumph of Lord Rama over Ravana, and Rama's return to Ayodhya. It is also on this day that Lord Krishna killed the demon Norkasura.

The 'Skanda Purana' refers that people worshipped Bali on the night. They were to draw his image on the ground with different colours and worship it with fruits and flowers. They were also to give presents in his honour and light lamps. King Harsha has described it as 'Dipapratipadotsava' in his 'Nagananda'. According to him, brides and bridegrooms were presented gift on this occasion. Rajasekhara in his 'Kavyamimamsa' has mentioned it as Dipamalika. The houses were white washed and rows of oil lamps were lighted in every house, streets and the market places. It was a gay occasion for all. Somadeva Suri in his 'Yasastilaka Champu' says that on Dipawali, the palaces and other buildings in the cities were decorated with white flags and rows of lights on terraces. In the evening temples, buildings, river banks, gardens and gateway were decorated with innumerable lamps. Entertainment like bull fights, dances and musical concerts were arranged. Similar interesting details have also been provided by Merutunga in his 'Prabandha Chintamani' and Hemachandra in his 'Desinamamala' and 'Dvyasrayakavya'.

King Bhoja of Malwa in his 'Rajamartanda' describes this festival as Sukhratri. According to him on this occasion, Lakshmi, the odess of plenty and prosperity, was worshipped at dusk and lamps were lit up on the trees, temples, roads, cremation grounds, river banks, hill tops and of course in the houses of both the rich and the poor. Jimutavahana in his 'Kavyaviveka' also refers to the Sukharatri-virata (the vow for a happy night) performed in the month of Kartika.

Alberuni puts the celebration of the festival on the first of the

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new moon day of Kartika, when the sun reached the zodiacal sign Libra. People bathed, dressed festively, made presents to one another, came to temples to give alms and play merrily with one another till noon. At night they lighted a great number of lamps. He also states that the cause of this festival was that Lakshmi, once a year, on this day, liberated Bali, the son of Vairochana, who was also a prisoner in the 'seventh world' and allowed him to go out in the common world.

crosses. The new Vikrama era begins on this day and account books are opened. The famous king Vikramaditya, after whom the era is named, was crowned on this day. People greet each other and distribute sweets.

In Bengal Goddess Kali is worshipped with great fervour and devotion on this day. Swami Dayanand Saraswati the founder of the Arya Samaj attained salvation on this day. The great Swami Rama Tirtha also entered his final Jal-Samadhi on this auspicious point of time. On this occasion people ask

towards light from darkness towards enlightenment from ignorance.

We know that the Hindu festivals, fasts, rituals, holy baths and observance of sacred days are part and parcel of the great cultural heritage of Indian civilisation. They are religious and social and also great source of spiritual and moral enrichment. The Hindu festivals are in fact more than what they appear to be. They are essentially a way of living and thinking in the course of existence. A Hindu festival is, in fact, something more than a 'festival'. It is cathartic in nature, and a means of purification, strengthening and self-denial. It is more of an exploration of the colourful things of life, without being bound to or obsessed by them.

The dynamic spirituality and beauty of Dipawali can contribute so much to life and its fulfilment not only for the Hindu community but also all others. Let the greetings of Dipawali or Diwali reach all.

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It is not possible to describe at length about the many ancient, mediaeval and modern books on the Dipawali or Diwali festival. Dipawali was celebrated with equal zest by the Jains also. According to the Jaina Harivamsa Purana, the members of the community joined the celebrations because it was the Nirvana day of Lord Mahavira, the twenty-fourth Tirthankara. The festival of Diwali is even now celebrated every year also in other continents and many countries in Asia.

Dipawali is no mere occasion of congregation of men, women and children, in fact that reflects the inherent feelings of the people having a long cherished historical and rich cultural background. Dipawali also marks the advent of new season and sowing of new

for each other's forgiveness for the wrongs done knowingly or unknowingly and mutual relations are reestablished and strengthened. Thus all enmity is forgiven and forgotten as people embrace one another.

At night, Lakshmi along with Ganesha are worshipped, and old accounts are closed and new ones are opened. People throng the bazars and streets during the night in order to watch and appreciate the illumination and fire works. Special shops and bazars are also set up on this occasion, and there is brisk buying of sweets, cloths, jewelry, toys etc. The courtyards, the gates and the places of worship are decorated and illuminated and fireworks are displayed till late midnight.

Thus, this great festival of lights symbolises man's urge to move

CORRIGENDUM

In the article "An open application for CTG Chief Adviser" by Dr. Abdullah A. Dewan published on October 28, the sentence -- "Among many aspects of strengths of my qualifications are my last six months of research, based on three dozen articles on political and economic issues, which were published in two leading national English dailies" should be read as "Among many aspects of strengths of my qualifications are my last six months of research based on three dozen articles on political and economic issues which were published in two leading national English dailies."

The discrepancy between the two sentences--using "a coma" after the word "research" and then adding the word "on" after the word "based"--has caused some embarrassment amongst some readers.

Fakhruddin Ahmed: Some recollections

SYED MUAZZEM ALI

FAKHRUDDIN Ahmed, one of Bangladesh's most capable and distinguished diplomats had passed away this day four years ago. He was a career Foreign Service officer of 1954 batch and had served as Foreign Secretary twice, first time from October 1973 to November 1975 and again from 1986 to 1987. He had also served as Bangladesh Ambassador to Italy and Yugoslavia and as High Commissioner to UK.

After his retirement from service, he was called to serve as an Adviser for Foreign Affairs to Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in 1990-1991. As a member of election observer group, he observed elections in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, India, Zambia and Guyana and also participated in the United Nations Observer Mission to South Africa.

I first met this distinguished gentleman in October 1969 at the Pakistan Foreign Ministry in Islamabad during the on-the-job training of my batch. Fakhruddin had returned to Headquarters a year ago after serving in Jeddah, New York, Tehran and Accra. He was then working as Director (Research and Consular welfare).

After his friend and batch mate SAMS Kibria left for Washington on a diplomatic assignment, he took over as Director (Personnel) in the Pakistan Foreign Ministry. Naturally, as probationers our interactions with him increased. He was a low profile, high performance diplomat. His professional skill and managerial capabilities were of very high standard. He was also a fierce nationalist, always trying to protect the interest of Bengalis.

In all Ministries of the then Pakistan Central Government, the ratio of Bengali officers had been well below the quota of parity. In Foreign Ministry, there was some effort to maintain the parity in the apex cadre, Pakistan Foreign Service (PFS), from mid-sixties. Yet the total number of Bengali officers in PFS was only a quarter of the cadre. In addition, the number of Bengalis in non-diplomatic posts was even smaller. Kibria initiated the process of hiring of more Bengalis and Fakhruddin accelerated it. Within a short time, the Bengali quota at least in respect of class IV was filled up.

Furthermore, in respect of postings, majority of Bengali officials used to face discrimination and were not given good postings. When my batch's turn came for overseas posting, Fakhruddin, strictly enforced the system of inter-wing parity. For example, he proposed my name for Washington DC and a West Pakistani for New York. Likewise, he proposed two Bengalis and two Pakistanis for postings in Europe. The same pattern was followed in respect of postings in other regions.

The West Pakistani colleagues did not like this system. They started using their influence to change the postings but Fakhruddin stood like a rock and did not allow any interfer-

ence in his domain. His immediate boss Mufti Abbas, a Pathan, fully supported him. It was indeed a courageous step as all our West Pakistani colleagues had relations and well-wishers in high places in the then Pakistan Government.

After the independence of Bangladesh, Fakhruddin returned to Bangladesh through Afghanistan some time in early 1973, and took over as Additional Foreign Secretary. After the death of Mr. Enayet Karim in February 1974, he first took over as Acting Foreign Secretary and then he was given the substantive rank in November 1974. His excellent memoirs entitled "Critical Times" gives a graphic account of the role he played during the crucial years of our nationhood. After 15 August 1975, he had problem with the Khondokar Mushtaque Government and was sent out as Ambassador to Italy. The book is an important document of

I will always remember Fakhruddin as a kind, sympathetic and caring senior colleague. He was a perfect gentleman, and behind his unassuming outward appearance was a cool, composed, thorough professional.

that period and I believe every Bangladeshi diplomat should read it to learn about the role of the Foreign Ministry during that crucial period.

In his book Fakhruddin had several times mentioned the names of our two distinguished diplomats, Ambassador AKH Morshed and Ambassador Abul Ahsan, who were Directors-General at that time for their major contributions.

Fakhruddin was a caring senior colleague and I would like to recollect some of my personal interactions with him. I came to Dhaka in the summer of 1974 from Washington DC on home leave. That was the busiest year for the Foreign Ministry as 12 Heads of State and Government had visited Dhaka that year alone. In fact, I called on Fakhruddin in his office just after the visit of Indian President Giri and just before the visit of Pakistani Prime Minister Bhutto.

It was a pure protocol visit but to my pleasant surprise, he asked me to join him for a cup of tea in the evening. Then he added, "Bring your wife along, Helen will be there". They were staying in two rooms in the Circuit House at that time. This goes to show how much he cared for junior officers.

My next encounter with him was in 1980 when I was serving as Director (International Organizations) in the Foreign Ministry. Foreign Secretary Kibria and I were scheduled to attend Commonwealth Senior

Official Meeting (SOM) in Nicosia, Cyprus. Traditionally, Foreign Secretaries or Principal Secretaries attend the SOM, but something unforeseen happened and it was not possible for Kibria to leave Dhaka at that time. Kibria decided Fakhruddin, who was our Ambassador in Belgrade, should replace him. I reached Nicosia via London while Fakhruddin reached there via Athens.

When I reached the designated hotel in Nicosia late in the evening, I found Fakhruddin was waiting for me. He was tired, yet he went over the entire briefing and the draft statement that evening. Being away from headquarters for five years, he felt he needed to bring himself up-to-date on Commonwealth activities. He was his usual totally unassuming, unpretentious self.

It was a pleasure to work with him. We attended the meetings during the



day, and went to the social engagements, returning to hotel late in the evening. But every morning, I would find him waiting for me in the lobby to have breakfast together. It was a tough time for him at the personal level, as his wife was battling with cancer at that time and he had to take her to London every other month for treatment. Even in those trying moments he was cool and composed.

After attending the Commonwealth Meeting, we left Nicosia for Athens on our way to respective places of posting. He asked me in the aircraft if I have been to Athens before. When I answered in the negative, he decided he would give me a guided tour. As Greece was under his concurrent accreditation, our Honorary Consul General in Athens had sent a car for him. He spent the day showing me all the famous archeological sites in that historic city, paid the entrance fees, gave me a fabulous lunch at a traditional Greek restaurant, and then finally dropped me off at my hotel. Earlier on arrival in Athens, he had asked the local Biman Manager to arrange a decent hotel for me. I was simply overwhelmed by the kindness of this gentleman.

My next encounter with him was in New York in 1982 when he had come from London where he was our High Commissioner, to attend the UN General Assembly. I was then posted in our Permanent Mission in

New York. We were terribly busy that year with Chairmanship of Group of 77, and he single-handedly dealt with our participation at the First Committee for the first three weeks. He joked with us that "this G-77 Chairmanship is a major responsibility and you fellows have taken a bigger bite than you can chew."

Before leaving for London he fully briefed me about the ongoing deliberations in the First Committee, as I was the delegate to that Committee. He was leaving for London on a Saturday evening and he insisted that there was no need to see him off at the airport. However, I and my junior colleague Basharat Ali [currently working at FAO] picked him up from his hotel for the airport.

While checking his baggage, the airline staff found that the bag was unusually heavy and wanted to know what it contained. Fakhruddin opened his suitcase; to our utter surprise, we saw that it was full of books. He sheepishly confided to us that a few days ago he had gone to "Strand", a famous bookshop in lower Manhattan and could not resist his temptation. The airline staff smiled and passed it.

I next met Fakhruddin in Bangalore in 1986 when he had come to attend the second SAARC Summit as Foreign Secretary. I was posted in New Delhi at that time. As Bangladesh had hosted the last Summit, he chaired the inaugural session of the Standing Committee and then passed on the gavel to Indian Foreign Secretary A.P. Venkateswaran. While in Bangalore, I could see that he was finding it difficult to adjust to the whims of his higher authorities. Within a few months he quit his job. He was offered High Commissioner-ship in a relatively unimportant station, which he flatly refused. Curiously, Venkateswaran also resigned in early 1987 in view of his policy disagreement with his Head of Government.

However, within three years the table turned, Fakhruddin triumphantly returned to the Foreign Ministry as an Adviser to the Acting President in 2000. It was a critical time and, if he had not been in charge at that time a number of our colleagues, who were close to the previous regime, would have faced serious difficulties.

The last time I spoke to him was in June 2001 when he was recuperating in his daughter's house in Pittsburgh. Fakhruddin was battling with cancer and was in great pains. Yet he was in great spirits. He was happy about my taking over as Foreign Secretary and enquired about all our colleagues in the Foreign Service.

I will always remember Fakhruddin as a kind, sympathetic and caring senior colleague. He was a perfect gentleman, and behind his unassuming outward appearance was a cool, composed, thorough professional. I pay tribute to this great diplomat and pray for the salvation of his soul.

Syed Muazem Ali is a former Foreign Secretary.

Commendable compilation

MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

DEDICATED to the memory of late Shah AMS Kibria, former Finance Minister in the past Awami League government, the book consists of articles, editorials and statements published in different journals and newspapers by eminent columnists, educationists and litterateurs after the tragic assassination of Mr Kibria on 27 January this year in Habiganj, Sylhet. The publication of this volume on 30 September was a follow-up of a similar volume of reminiscences in Bengali ("Shaheed Kibria"), edited and published earlier on 20 February by Mohammad Shahjahan.

An Awami League Member of Parliament, Mr Kibria, in the past had served his country with great distinction as a diplomat, eventually becoming Foreign Secretary. He had also discharged his duties most competently as head of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with the rank of Under Secretary General of the United Nations. He was also known not only for having been a freedom fighter but also for his contribution towards the organising of the liberation struggle abroad. Always interested in upholding the rich Bangla cultural heritage, Mr Kibria is remembered by many in this volume for his dedication in the spread of the literary ethos of Bangladesh abroad.

Book Review

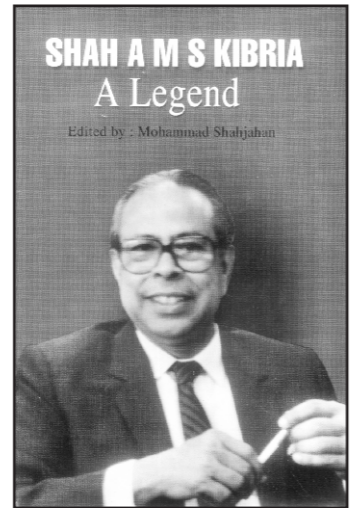
Shah AMS Kibria: A legend

Edited by Mohammad Shahjahan

Bangla Prakashani
256 pages Taka 250/-

Shahjahan, the editor of this volume deserves special thanks for his efforts undertaken by him not only to compile all the article published on the late Awami League leader but also for enhancing the quality of the contents through the inclusion of rare personal photographs of late Mr Kibria and his family.

The range and variety of the articles included in this publication has made it a must for anyone interested in understanding the socio-economic-political evolution of Bangladesh over the last few decades. It also clarifies the important role played by Mr Kibria during this period. Similarly, this publication will continue to be regarded as a significant source of information by any one interested in research -- particularly in the manner in which macro-economic and fiscal strategies were decided upon during his tenure as Finance Minister. Several



articles outline how he successfully charted a middle course in his policy making goals within the constraints of a restrictive donor agenda.

Many months have passed since the brutal murder of Mr SAMS Kibria but the assailants have not yet been identified. Justice delayed is justice denied. The government must understand that there is a cause and effect relationship in their action or absence of reaction. Empty words impact on governance and encourage criminals. The perpetrators of this heinous crime must be apprehended and punished according to the law of the land. Only then will the broken hearts of the aggrieved family members and the many admirers of late Mr Kibria be satisfied.

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Notes from Muzzafarabad

REZWAN-UL-ALAM

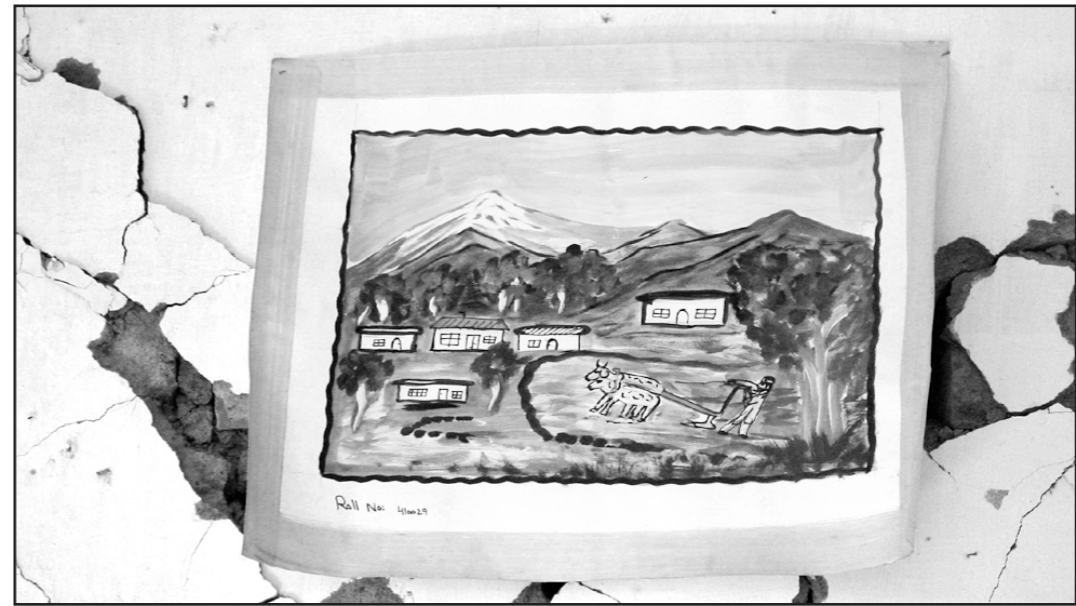
MUZZAFARABAD, 31st October: The bravest of child heroes now live in Muzzafarabad. Three weeks after the devastating earthquakes, the children here have shown remarkable resilience in coping with harshest of conditions.

At Diamond book shop in the city, now wreckage, Masroor (14) helps his father organise damaged text books, pulled from rubble. This is his father's shop and Masroor draws comfort in helping him during hours of need.

Of 1100 schools around the city, an estimated 800 have been completely destroyed by the earthquake. UN bodies quickly responded by setting up temporary schools at camps in various locations. Like two others, Nazia Gilani, a college student, volunteered to work as teacher at old campus camp and some 150 girls, aged in between 4-12, are happily responding to her very child-friendly style of teaching math and drawings. Mariam (6) of class one likes school and wants some toys after class hours that starts at 9am and finishes at 2pm.

So far, UNICEF has provided a large quantity of school-in-a-box, including school bags in several camps. The bag contains one basic book, a slate, pen, and pencil with a sharpener. Those supply brought smiling faces to children who badly need both recreational and educational materials.

UNICEF Education Officer Khaleeda is very popular among



A drawing by a child hangs in cracked wall of Centre Plate High School at Muzzafarabad.

children living in camps. Her arrival is greeted with claps and even when she departs, kids gather around car to show her their artistic drawings.

At Jalalabad camp in the city, volunteer-teacher Sayera is actively helping some 150 kids in learning from 8:30 to 1:00 PM. Her student Mariam (10) is full of energy and determination. She found time to write a story in English and asserts: "Whole Muzzafarabad is dead, because the citizens that are still alive are just skeleton of skin, as everyone has lost one or two relatives."

In all camps in the city, children are eager to continue with whatever form of learning is offered to them. These child heroes and adolescents have lost generations of friends, and

are traumatised, however, they have quickly learnt the art of surviving and that will eventually help them carry on their lives, no matter what comes next.

It was a joyous scene at Al-Abbas Institute of Medical Sciences here. Aman (10) got reunited Thursday after being separated from family for 24 hours. With this reunification, a total of ten kids have returned home after earthquakes.

Aman, a mentally challenged boy, was found stranded near hospital. With collaborative efforts of different UN agencies and Social Welfare and Women Development Departments, the location of Aman's parents' home was tracked down. His father, Jamil Shah was earlier medically evacuated to Rawalpindi. Mubarak Shah (70),

himself in fragile health, came to identify his grandson.

"We were so anxious about Aman. His father was away and I was feeling helpless. Suddenly this reunification happened. I am extremely happy", said tearful Mubarak.

Afsana (10), with badly injured left leg, is also receiving treatment at the hospital and waiting to be reunited with family. So is Aiad Hasan (13) who is eagerly waiting to read MEENA stories after his return to village.

The city of North-West Frontier Province bears all the hallmarks of a township completely destroyed by earthquake, and fittingly it has also developed the most orderly camps for the affected people.

Some 15 kilometers from Balakot, 394 tents have been erected for 2000 people at Garhi Habibullah, of which over 300 are under-five children.

For many of these children, this camp-life has offered time and space to fondly remember memories of family members, lost during devastating earthquake.

"I saw my mother falling through cracks and I don't know what happened to her after that", Fatema (13) weeped. Like her, some 413 boys and 323 girls have all similar stories to tell.

They are now receiving informal education inside camps. Clean water and sanitation

facilities are being provided and children are getting vaccination daily. The Child Protection Centre inside the camp is registering all children for providing better services.

Kids are also playing cricket and a few girls enjoyed camp moments playing with balloons.

The local army commander is overseeing the operations in this busy camp. Soldiers quickly set up tents. New entrants are greeted and escorted to marked camps and immediately enrolled for all basic services. They are also receiving hot foods every evening.

With snowing winter approaching, maintaining this discipline in camps will be a daunting task as more people and children will pour in Garhi Habibullah camps in coming days. Only few tents are in stock and more are urgently needed.

Rezwan-Ul-Alam works for Unicef, Bangladesh.