

The Holy Pravara: Wakens human qualities

The *Pravara* signifies peace, harmony, brotherhood, tranquility and integrity for the welfare of mankind. The discrimination between a friend and a foe disappears on this day, and is replaced by mutual understanding, kindness and compassion.

SUKOMAL BARUA

THE Holy *Pravara* Purnima is one of the greatest Buddhist festivals. The Buddhists of Bangladesh observe the holy day with due solemnity, religious dignity, freedom and fervour. This year, the *Pravara* is more significant and meaningful because we have observed two other national religious festival, the holy *Eid-ul-Fitr* and the *Saradiya Durgapuja* of the two major communities, Muslim and Hindu, respectively, with religious festivity.

According to *Vinaya Pitaka*, the sacred Buddhist text, the festival is observed in the month of *Ashwin*, and is also known as *Ashwin Purnima*. The three months long rain-retreat, "*Varshavasa*," of the *Bhikkhus* and *Bhikkhunis* (monks and nuns) starts in the *Ashari Purnima* and continues up to the

Pravara Purnima.

The breaking of the *Varshavasa* day is called *Pravara Purnima*. On that day, the Buddha came down to this world after preaching the *Abhidhamma* to his mother and other gods in the *Tavatimsa* Heaven during *Varshavasa*. The Buddha advised his disciples to propagate the true Dharma on this day.

On this day, the Buddha delivered his first sermon: "Go, Ye O *Bhikkhus*! Wander forth for the gain of the many, for the welfare of many, in compassion for the world, for the good, for the gain, for the welfare of gods and men. Proclaim, O *Bhikkhus*! The doctrine which is glorious in the beginning, glorious in the middle, glorious in the end, in the spirit and in the letter, proclaims a consummate, perfect and pure life of holiness." Buddhism says: "Arisel! Do not be heedless! Lead a righteous life. The righteous

live happily both in this world and the next."

Pravara means satisfaction of desire, fulfillment of wish, or the day of completion of study and meditation. Thus, *Pravara* may be called the "Buddhist joy day" because it marks the end of the rain retreat and provides opportunity to earn merits.

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After leading a pious life in *Varshavasa*, Buddhists feel happiness and spiritual pleasure. According to *Abhidhammic* tradition, the *Pravara* means abstinence from all evil deeds and purity in all aspects of our life.

Dharma and morality are the



Sabbesattha Sukita hunto.

roots of all happiness of human beings. The Buddha says in the *Dharmapada*: "If a man does something good, let him do it again and again. Let him find joy in his good work, joyful is the accumulation of good work."

Dharma means that good law, virtue, good deed, and meditation lead to the truth. Morality means discipline, rules and regulations and ways or means. These two great virtues have reciprocal relationship. Through *dharma* and morality people can achieve all sorts of self-development and self-purity.

We know that, except human beings, all other beings of the world are born with their own habits or natures. As far as we know the beastly nature of the animals is inherent. They remain as they are. But humans are not born with humanity. They have to acquire humanity through great endeavour and zeal.

The specialty of a human being lies in his *dharma*. *Dharma* and character are complementary to each other. Through the observation of rules and regulations human beings become aware of social codes, discipline, rationality, etc. The character of a human being

has two sides, one is humanity and the other is beastiality. Humanly qualities develop with the enrichment of character, which depends on self-efforts. The rules laid down by the Buddha for the formation of character are known as *Silas* (Precepts). In the *Vinaya Pitaka* four types of *Silas* are mentioned -- the *Pancasila*, the *Astasila*, the *Dasasila* and the *Bhikkhu Pratimokshasila*. These rules lead to the path of goodness and prosperity, and are not only for the monks but also for lay disciples and for all human beings. He who abides by these rules possesses real humanity.

According to Buddhism, there are two qualities that a man should develop equally to be perfect -- compassion and wisdom. Buddha said: "He is the best person who embodies virtues and insight, who is principled, who has realised the truth, and who himself does what he ought to be doing."

Buddha encouraged and stimulated each person to develop himself and to work out his for own emancipation, for man has the power to liberate himself from all bondage through his own personal efforts and intelligence without help of any power.

He, who does bad deeds brings misfortune for himself. He tarnishes the environment of the society. He leads the family to destruction. He harms the state. He throws away humanity. Defilement of the mind gradually increases. He destroys self and others, and violates humanity at every step. So, Buddhism says: "Make haste and do what is good: keep your mind away from evil. If a man is slow in doing good his mind finds pleasure in evil."

So, for the enrichment and acquirement of humanity, disciplined life is a must.

Today, we hope to enter the 21st century with a better understanding of our common humanity and values. "Let us we say, in fine, it is sweet to enjoy a lifelong virtue; and a pure firm faith is sweet. It is sweet to attain wisdom; and to be free from sin is sweet." We say again: "Do not what is evil. Do what is good. Keep your mind pure. This is the eternal teaching of the Buddha." *Sabbesattha Sukita hunto* (May all beings be happy).

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Rebels without a cause?

Our players are there because of blatant corporate marketing and the parent corporation's helplessness in the face of pressure from the powerful Indian cricket board. We may blame the BCB for being petty and draconian, but it is hard to argue that defecting to the ICL is a solution.

QUAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

FOURTEEN matches, 126 runs and six months after making his debut for the Tigers, Dhiman Ghosh handed in his retirement to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and defected

to the Indian Cricket League (ICL). It would have been, in and of itself, a matter of chagrin, but on September 14 there was hardly enough time for perspective.

Six more retirement letters reached the board in quick succession. Only one, by ex-captain

Habibul Bashar, was somewhat expected. The others from Shahriar Nafees, Afab Ahmed, Forhad Reza and the aforementioned Ghosh came as something of a shock.

That Bashar would want to make the comfort of the ICL his retirement home cannot be held against him. But his comments certainly fly in the face of reason. "ICL never asked us to stop playing for our country," he said. "That is the main reason we joined. Perhaps people back home haven't understood properly."

Perhaps Bashar himself hasn't understood properly. So the ICL has not asked him to stop playing, but he has anyway. What was then the reason for the resignation letter citing "improper structure" as the motive behind quitting?

For the others that explanation might have held sway. For Bashar, who is in his mid-thirties and has thrived under the direction of the very system he was now downplaying, it showcased the lack of commitment that characterised his last days as captain.

And what of the aforemen-

tioned Dhiman Ghosh, who was apparently frustrated at being in and out of the squad. Six months into his international career, a handy cheque from BCB in his pocket and the experience of three BCB-funded Australia trips later, the wicket-keeper decided he had given all he could to his country. Yes, the board had been very harsh with him.

Which brings us to Shahriar Nafees. Once touted as the future cricket captain, Nafees is an educated man (a relative novelty amongst his peers), a centurion against Australia, and a talented cricketer to boot. What drove him to retire from the national team?

The reasons he gave were atrocious. Frustration at being in and out of the side? Who is to blame for that but Nafees himself? If you keep under-performing, you have no place in the side. That's the rule. The time-honoured solution has usually been to put your head down and concentrate on getting your spot back. Nafees' conduct throughout the entire affair reeks not because it may be a shortcut to riches for the opener, but because he had the temerity to blame others for his own shortcomings.

The only person absolved of all blame should be Mohammad Rafique. A long and distinguished career in the game and years of service to Bangladesh cricket later, Rafique can go play wherever he likes. Bangladeshis all over will

follow his fortunes closely.

Even worse than the mass exodus is the manner in which the players are subsequently defending their actions. Hiding behind a façade of righteousness may get them sleep at night, but let's call a spade a spade. The going got tough for them, and they exited stage.

Of course the money was a sweetener, but then they weren't exactly short of that if the figures revealed by the board are anything to go by.

The mass migration towards the supposed greener fields of the ICL is not necessarily a display of "unpatriotism." But it does display a distinct lack of character, especially when combined with the manner in which it was done.

Let me point out here that the ICL is not a philanthropic, poorly-performing-nation-promoting organisation. It is the corporate plaything of a man trying to push the buttons of the organisation that did not grant him rights to a cricket series he believed he should have won on merit.

In short, our players are there because of blatant corporate marketing and the parent corporation's helplessness in the face of pressure from the powerful Indian cricket board. We may blame the BCB for being petty and draconian, but it is hard to argue that defecting to the ICL is a solution.

The ICL exists to promote the ZEE network. They do not care

about the Bangladeshi players -- who are just there to provide a service and get paid in return. A service, one might add, whose intricacies they have learnt thanks to the government of Bangladesh's patronage through the BCB.

Playing for the BCB does not equate playing for Bangladesh. Many players do not play for their nations due to conflict with coaches and governing bodies. But many more shake aside those problems in order to represent their country -- for the honour and respect it brings. And others are even prepared to go that extra distance.

Wanting to graze on greener pastures is nothing to be ashamed of, nor is it wrong in and of itself. What was shameful though were the actions that preceded that move. A mass resignation to showcase your displeasure shows not far-sightedness but a lack of moral fibre and principle.

And doing that while giving up the chance to represent your nation for the interest of corporations and personal gain shows, in my opinion, un-patriotism. It displays a lack of the basic characteristics, which define an upstanding man. There are players in the pipeline who are not ready yet, but more committed than this lot.

We look forward to them.

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The pride of representing one's country.

Pulling away

Obama appears to have broadened his coalition of support and made inroads with groups that have not reliably embraced him over the course of the long presidential campaign. He now leads McCain among both men and women and now also wins every age group of voters -- including those over 65 years of age, who back him over McCain.

JONATHAN DARMAN

THE global financial meltdown has caused a dramatic shift in the 2008 presidential race. With four weeks left in the presidential campaign, Barack Obama now leads John McCain by double digits, 52% - 41% among registered voters -- a marked shift from the last NEWSWEEK poll, from last month, when the two candidates were tied at 46%.

Underlying Obama's surge in support: An historic boiling over of dissatisfaction with the status quo. An astounding 86% of voters now say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in US, while a mere 10% say otherwise. That's the highest wrong track/right track ratio poll ever recorded.

To realise just how toxic these numbers could be for the Republican party, consider that in October, 2006, before Democrats swept control of both houses of Congress, only 61% voters expressed dissatisfaction. About 25% approved of President Bush's job in the White House, a record low for any president and close to the historic low-approval rating of 22% the Gallup poll recorded for President

Truman, in 1952.

Voters are crying out for change and, for now, believe that the Democratic presidential candidate has a greater likelihood of delivering it. Asked which ticket they thought was most likely to bring about change if elected, voters said Obama-Biden over McCain-Palin.

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He now leads McCain among both men and women and now also wins every age group of voters -- including those over 65 years of age, who back him over McCain. Supporters of Hillary Clinton, as many as a fifth of whom had at one point told pollsters they'd support McCain over Obama, now back the Democratic nominee 88% - 7%.

The topic "economy," is clearly driving Obama's spike. Asked which issue was most important in determining their vote, 48% of those surveyed said the economy followed by taxes and government and spending. Only 8% named the Iraq war as their most important issue.

Asked which candidate would better handle a variety of issues, voters chose Obama over McCain in every category with the exception of national security and terrorism; McCain still leads on that front 50% - 40%.

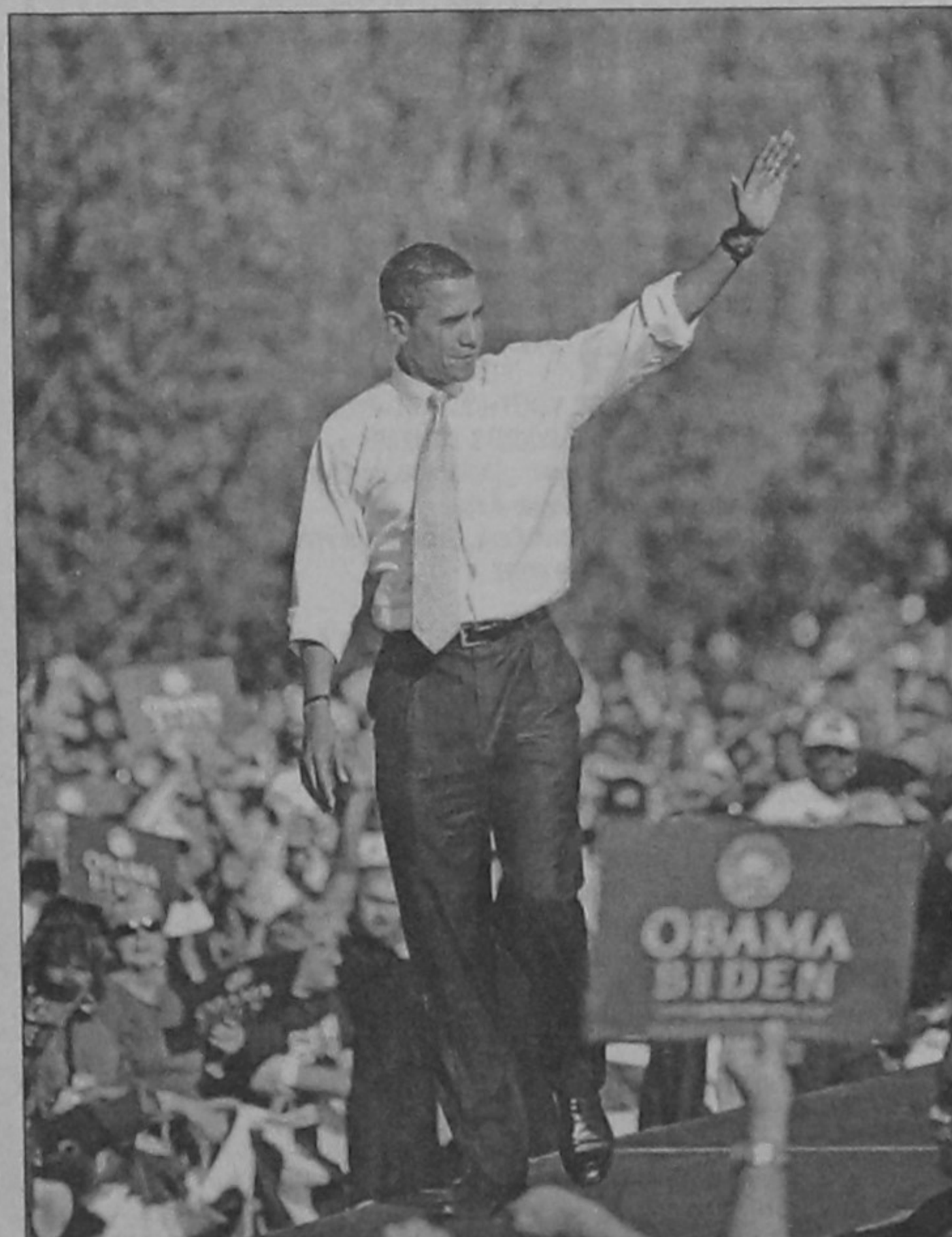
Obama now leads McCain on the economy and; on the Iraq war; on energy policy and gas prices; on health care; on taxes and government spending; on the financial problems of Wall Street and the mortgage crisis; and on issues like abortion, guns and same-sex marriage.

Still, the poll suggests that despite his lead and the extremely favourable conditions for a Democratic candidate, Obama has not yet established himself as the firm choice of swing voters.

In fact, McCain, who has banked on a large and deep reservoir of goodwill from middle-of-the-road voters, still leads Obama among independents, albeit by only two points.

That's actually a slightly better showing for McCain than in the September NEWSWEEK poll, when Obama led McCain 44% - 43% among voters who described themselves as Independent.

Party identification, it should



On his way to the White House?

be noted, can change significantly month to month, and voters may be particularly inclined to self-identify as Democrats in a year when Democrats are favoured over Republicans.

Among white Catholics, a group that has voted with the

winner of every American presidential contest since 1960, Obama leads McCain by only one point.

The poll suggests that the McCain campaign's strategy of sharp attacks on Obama's character have not yet had their desired effect and may, in

This headline is not 2 hard 4 most to read

CHILDREN in the UK are supposedly shocking their parents by using colloquial American words and phrases, such as "cookie" and "whassup" and "mortgage-backed securitisation crisis." UK newspaper columnists are lamenting that American English has won the war, and British English is dead.

This, of course, is rubbish -- and note I said rubbish, not garbage. British English is not dead. It has simply moved its head office to Asia. Most overseas speakers of English in Asia (and other places, such as Australia, South Africa and the Caribbean) use British English. We even indulge in English wordplay games Westerners have never heard of.

For example, here's a game that's played in Singapore and Malaysia. You write a story in which numbers appear in place of actual words.

To make the story below work properly, it's best to speak with an East Asian accent, snipping off the ends of words. For example, "five" is pronounced "fik" and "six" is pronounced "sik" and so on.

In this tale, Ah Lek counts up from one to ten and then back down from ten to one. See if you can follow it.

The Story of Ah Lek: "1 day I go 2 climb a 3 outside a house to peep. But the couple see me, so I panic and 4 down. The man rush out and want to 5 with me. I ran until I felt 6 and threw up. So I go into 7-Eleven and grab an 8 to throw at him. Then I took a 9 and try to stab at him. 10 God he run away."

"10 I put the 9 back and pay for the 8 and left 7-Eleven. Next day I call my boss and told him I was 6.

He said 5, tomorrow also no need to come back 4 work. He ask me to go climb a 3 and jump down. I don't understand. I am so nice 2 him but I don't know what he 1."

Get it? Here's a really tighty written one that gets all ten digits in order into just one short paragraph:

"We 1 a prize 2 go 3 of charge on a holiday 4 two. After eating foreign food, we 5 we feel 6. We went 7-Eleven, bought pills, 8 them. After a while, we feel 9 again. 10 we go home."

The shorter they get, the harder they are to decipher. Here's an even shorter one:

"I 2 go 3 climbing this 5 morning. But I was tired from having 6 with my wife, so we just lay and enjoyed the breezy 7s, 8 9 sandwiches, 10 we slept."

And here's the translation:

"I wanted to go tree-climbing this fine morning. But I was tired from having sex with my wife, so we just lay and enjoyed the breezy zephyrs, ate nice sandwiches, then we slept."

What's the point of this game? There isn't one. It's a gloriously pointless exercise. You can just picture someone sitting under a palm tree on the beach in Malacca dreaming these up. We need more activities like this.

I even know a poem with a final line in numbers, although I'm not sure where it's from. There are many versions, but I like this one best:

Juan-Juan ran a race one day. Tuturan one too.

Juan-Juan won a race that day, 22112.

Write stories using numbers and send them to www.vittachi.com.

"I'm amazed it got past the vicar"

The statistics in the articles are results from a poll conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates International. Results are weighted so that the sample demographics match Census Current Population Survey parameters for gender, age, education, race, region, and population density. Voter registration status is self-reported. Results based on smaller subgroups are subject to larger margins of sampling error.