

Christmas is all about transformation

The greatest miracle that He wants to effect is the transformation of the human heart. With this he wishes to transform His creation. In a world where there is disharmony and erosion of values God will not help without human will and co-operation. Jesus was decisive and he acted when there was a need to. People of good-will and conscience must also act to change. May this be a message for today.

REVEREND MARTIN ADHIKARY

GOD revealed himself to his creation in the form of a human. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14)."

God-incarnate Christ came to a lost world to redeem it from the bondage and consequences of sin; the self of man putting "me" at the centre of everything. The message of Christmas is the triumph of life over death, love over hatred, order over chaos and good over evil. Christ said: "...I have come that they may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10)."

But this does not mean that everything has changed altogether as a result of the coming of Jesus. Rather, the state of the world is such that humanity is passing through a valley of death. This is the world into which the divine being was born in Bethlehem. God sent his greatest gift for man, the gift of his Son Jesus, who gave his sinless life for the renewal of His creation.

Christmas reminds us that even though there is suffering and pain, God is

not indifferent to us, nor far away. God wants to live in and with us. One of the 101 names of Christ is "Immanuel," a Hebrew word meaning "God is with us." This name was given to Christ through the prophet Isaiah, when the world was in a situation of hopelessness. The angels' doxology at the birth of Jesus for "peace on earth" reiterates the message of hope in the face of tyranny and oppression.

There is no greater good news to be found than that in the gospel of Jesus Christ, who preached exactly what he lived: the life of selfless divine love, holiness and forgiveness.

Evil and suffering are still prevailing because we preach the doctrines of Christ, but do not practice them. We do not want to leave our comfort zones for the transformation of our lives. We forget that right doctrines must be supported by the right kind of life.

The earthly parents of Jesus, the shepherds, and even the Magi obeyed the Word of God spoken to them through the angels. That's how they were able to see Jesus. We need to strive for a world which is more just and less violent, and where mankind will live in love and peace. We



Time for spiritual reawakening.

need to discern and separate good and bad through internalising the moral values that dignify life.

Criticising the commercialisation of Christmas and lamenting over the loss of its true meaning is not enough. We need to look into the truth in a deeper way. With the coming of Christ came the "Kingdom of God," in which love, justice and holiness should prevail. Followers of Christ are supposed to carry on the mission of Christ.

God wants us to be his co-workers to achieve His rule. Life is a battle to conquer evil through goodness, hatred through love, reckless living through responsibility. Oswald Chambers, a great Christian scholar, observed: "The battle is won or lost in the secret places of the will before God, never first in the external world."

Jesus said: "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be members of his household."

God's gift to us is the transformation of our lives, which leads us to know and love God and man. We can say that Christianity does not bring peace; it brings antagonism and strife. Following Christ involves fighting evil and corruption.

In the helpless baby, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the Magi saw a warrior who was to wage war against sin and death.

It is not a cozy life and peace that is at the heart of Christmas, it is the fight against

evil with love and goodness. Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they who work for peace." He did not say that blessed are those who only love peace. Christ calls on his people to fight decay and corruption, and shine in darkness.

God's creation is marked by abundance and diversity. When God created the world everything lived in harmony. But it was man's pride and greed that alienated him from God, from his fellow-beings, from nature, and even from his own self.

True human fulfillment rests on the right relationship with God and people. God bestowed upon man the greatest value by incarnating as a human. This is both a testimony to God and to the glory of Man.

Alongside the external decorations surrounding Christmas let us not forget that the greatest gift that we can bring for Christ and to other people is in decorating our hearts with love, gentleness and peace. If we submit to God in true humility and repent for our wrong-doings he is ever ready to accept us and grant us the transformation we need.

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Reverend Martin Adhikary is a freelance Contributor to The Daily Star.

Christmas

SUNITA D'COSTA

The sun still shines, the moon still glows
The stars wear smiles, the sky hangs low
This beautiful world, so close to enjoy
Had we not learned buy to destroy

The wheels of destruction keep speeding on
Throughout the day, from dusk to dawn
Nobody to warn us, to advise to see around
To forget past deeds, to start on new ground

It's never too late to hear Christ say
To harbour peace within us every day
Should each of us try to bring a cheer
The world would be loving and nothing to fear

The days of hatred would be far behind
Overtaken with all that is sweet and kind
This life is a gift to love and hold
To bring hope to the trodden and cold.

It is in giving that we are blessed
With a life that is at its best
Let the spirit of humility reign in us
Christ in his humble birth taught us thus.

All eyes on the voters

Thanks to the TV channel networks, there is discernible political awareness among the new generation, which makes me believe that this time around voters will not vote for symbols. They will vote to bring about a change in the quality of people who will govern us. It will be a tough task, given that almost all the tainted politicians are now in the fray.

SHAMSUDDIN AHMED

THE cloud of uncertainty hovering around the scheduled December election is not there any more in the political sky. All eyes are now focused on the much-awaited December 29 election. The election campaign by the AL led grand alliance and the BNP led alliance is gathering pace and momentum.

Thanks to the TV channel networks, there is discernible political awareness among the new generation, which makes me believe that this time around voters will not vote for symbols. They will vote to bring about a change in the quality of people who will govern us. It will be a tough task, given that almost all the tainted politicians are now in the fray.

Democracy cannot be established unless the government, the parliament and the judiciary play their due roles. It is

the responsibility of the government to initiate suitable steps for democracy and good governance. While the parliament enacts laws consistent with the constitutional provisions, the judiciary must guard against any possible violation of those laws, and of the constitution.

We have failed as a nation to have a democratic polity even 37 years after independence, largely because the three state actors never worked in concert for democracy. The government, the principal state actor, is largely to blame for this. It never allowed the judiciary to be independent and powerful enough to play its constitutional role of administering justice and challenging the government's undemocratic and anti-people actions. Nor did it allow the parliament to act as the focal point for discussing and debating all major national issues through active

participation by the opposition MPs.

Much to the anguish of the people each and every elected government, regardless of its political hue, used every means to leave its own stamp on the judiciary in its efforts to make the judiciary compliant and subservient.

In the absence of parliament, and an elected government it was the judiciary that we looked to for a positive role in the transition to democracy. Undoubtedly, this government rekindled our moribund spirit of democracy as it, basking under popular support, rounded up political heavyweights, including two former prime ministers, on corruption charges for the first time in the history of this country.

It promised political reforms to democratise our politics and political parties. It reconstituted the EC, the ACC and the Public Service Commission, which were politicised by the BNP-Jamaat government. But the government over-stretched itself unnecessarily and shifted its focus away from its mandated task of holding a credible election.

Now, after two years and working with a free hand under a state of emergency, the caretaker government cannot claim to have achieved much -- except the revamped EC, ACC and Public Service Commission, the amended RPO and a

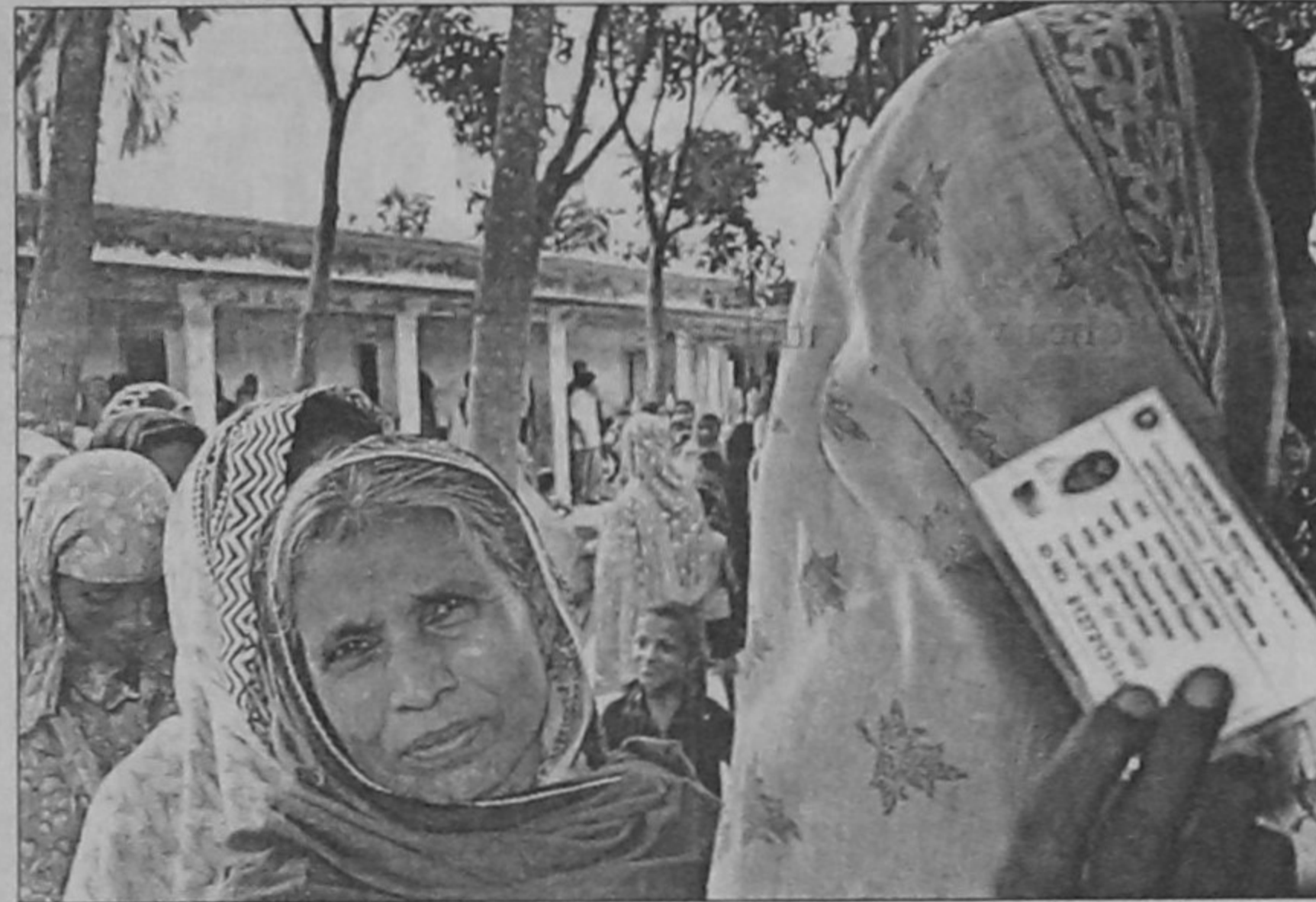
voters list with photographs and ID cards -- insofar as strengthening of democracy and democratic culture are concerned.

All corrupt politicians have come out of jails in droves, much the same way they were herded in. And to add to the embarrassment of the government, the ACC and the EC, almost all of them, including those who have been convicted, are contesting as candidates nominated by their parties. Politics remains the green pasture for those tainted leaders who had plundered state wealth and killed innocent people in the name of religion during the last BNP-Jamaat alliance government.

Why this government has failed to rid politics of black money and muscle power, corruption and criminalisation when it had the massive support of the people and the armed forces remains a question to be probed into by the political scientists.

Never before has any election generated such enthusiasm and raised such hopes and aspirations as this one. The goals which motivated the people to vote for AL in the 1970 general election, and fight a war of liberation in 1971, remain the same even after 37 years. We are still victims of authoritarian rule and exploitation by our rulers, as we were in 1970.

Democracy is still a far cry, as it used to be in the then East Pakistan. There are



Is change coming?

people who are pathologically abhorrent to pristine Bengali culture and traditions like *Pahela Boishakh* festival and *Ekushe February* celebration at Central Shahid Minar as they were in East Pakistan.

Even now there are people who are against Hindus enjoying any political rights, as they were in East Pakistan. These obscurantist elements have printed a leaflet, titled *Message of the*

Quran, urging Muslim voters not to vote for the Thakurgaon-1 constituency AL candidate Ramesh Chandra Sen.

All eyes are now focused on the electorate. Will the voters usher in a change, as desired, in the quality of the people to be elected to govern us? Hopefully they will.

Brig. Gen. Shamsuddin Ahmed (Retd) is a former military secretary to the president.

Election manifestos and WatSan sector priority

Water and sanitation issues carry major public health implications, which need to be addressed urgently to achieve health for all. Access to sanitation and safe water are now recognised to be basic human rights.

TAREQ SALAHUDDIN

THE long awaited parliamentary election is knocking at the door. To lure the voters, political commitments and lots of promises have been made in every party's election manifesto.

Water and sanitation issues carry major public health implications, which need to be addressed urgently to achieve health for all. Access to sanitation and safe water are now recognised to be basic human rights.

If elected, BNP promises to ensure poor people's right to live with dignity in its manifesto titled "Save the Country, Save the People."

Though the sanitation movement across Bangladesh and the region was first triggered by the last BNP-led alliance regime, it is really shocking to see that its manifesto promises nothing specific that would substantially contribute towards fulfilling such a basic right of the people, especially that of the poor ones.

Promising simply to expand a prototype safe water supply and sanitation program, mostly in villages, will not contribute either towards sustaining the

reduced rate of child mortality that it has promised this time or towards achieving "Sanitation for all by 2010" -- the national campaign that it has launched during its last regime.

AL titled its manifesto "A Charter for Change." As the issue of arsenic contamination in tubewell water got priority during its last regime, it promises to tackle the issue and undertake necessary measures to ensure pure drinking water for all by 2011.

It also promises to provide sanitation facility in every house by 2013. In doing so, it envisions a democratic system where people live with dignity and citizens are assured of environmental protection, human rights and equal opportunities.

While it promises such visible targets in terms of service provisions, it totally ignores the much desired outcome of such services if provided effectively, i.e. a reduced rate of child mortality. Although, during its last regime, it floated the country's first ever national policy on water supply and sanitation, it did not mention any specific measure that would help achieve the water supply and sanitation targets that it has promised.

Jatiya Party promises to undertake necessary measures to reduce the rate of child mortality. It promises to strictly enforce the laws related to industrial waste, to make the city corporations and *paurashavas* more functional to keep the cities and towns clean, and to develop the sanitation facilities in Dhaka. But it is disappointing to see that it does not promise anything specific regarding safe drinking water.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Jamaat-E-Islami promises to undertake necessary measures to provide safe water and environmental sanitation for rural and urban people, achieve 100% sanitation for all, and undertake an integrated program to reduce the rate of child mortality.

As the people of Bangladesh never had the opportunity to assess their ability to deliver the electoral promises, there are doubts whether they can live up to such promises. However, its promise to include hygiene education and prevention of diseases in the mainstream education curriculum sounds like a visionary one.

The manifestos of all political parties make a raft of promises in many sectors. Whereas, the people are more interested in analysing the political, social and economic aspects of these manifestos, it is time to assess their commitment to prioritise water and sanitation issues to fulfill a basic human right like health.

Dr. Tareq Salahuddin is Incharge, Star Health, The Daily Star.

Everything I need to know I learned on the road

NURY VITTACHI

A European friend was booking a winter holiday that would take her to several Asian cities. "Shall I bring my driving license?" she asked on the phone.

"Sure, if you want," I said. "Meanwhile, I'll organise the funeral."

Europeans should NEVER be allowed to drive in Asia unless they have medical proof of Total Invulnerability, i.e., they need to have been born on the planet Krypton.

You see, in England, if a car flashes its lights at you, the message is: "Do go first, please; I couldn't POSSIBLY take precedence."

If a car flashes its lights at you in Asia, the message is: "I'm coming through! Banzaaaaa!"

But you know what? I recently realised that learning to stay alive on the roads in this region is actually an excellent way of acquiring life skills. In fact, I would go so far as to say (ooh, I feel an aphorism coming up):

Everything I need to know in life, I learned driving a car in Asia.

1. If you unexpectedly get close to someone, give them a BIG smile.

2. If you get close to someone who hasn't noticed you are there, make a loud noise.

3. There will never be as many direction signs as you need.

4. If you have right of way, but the other party is a massive great thing,

actually THEY have right of way.

5. Rules of the game at night differ from rules during the day.

6. If everyone slows down, resist the temptation to overtake. People decelerate when there's a useful pay-off, such as Not Dying.

7. If you find yourself in a fast-moving cluster, be the one at the back with your foot over the brake pedal.

8. Anger is a blindfold.

9. Get a full check-up at regular intervals.

10. Suspiciously kind strangers who offer to drive you round the bend will eventually drive you round the bend.

11. Bright lights blind people.

12. Whenever the road ahead seems calm and clear, you are about to encounter something incredibly strange, which will require urgent, evasive maneuvers.

13. The more uneventful your journey has been, the weirder the interruptions will be.

14. Behave yourself, as you can't always see the cameras.

15. Guys: Sometimes some silly cow will get in your way and interrupt your journey. Deal with it.

16. Gals: Sometimes, some hairy gorilla will get in your way and interrupt your journey. Deal with it.

17. Multi-tasking is never a good idea.

18. Feng shui amulets, Buddhas, or statues of Ganesh all offer the same amount of immunity from disaster, ie, none.

19. All journeys are bumpy ones.

20. The fact that you believe in clearly signaling your intentions does not mean that anyone else will.

21. Momentum is something you CAN have too much of.

22. The driver's attitude is more important than the vehicle's physical condition in achieving successful forward movement.

23. Always travel with friends. (Can I be one of yours?)

24. Finally, despite the existence of this and other lists of rules, remember: there actually aren't any rules.

Life is a journey. The journey IS the destination. You don't get points for getting to the end of it more quickly than the rest of us.

Happy Christmas.

Visit our columnist at: www.vittachi.com.

