

Eid-e-Miladunnabi

An occasion of great significance

EID-e-Miladunnabi, observed on the 12th day of the Hijri month of Rabiul Awal throughout the Muslim world, marks the birth of Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) and he embraced death on the same day 63 years later, leaving behind his universal message of peace and tolerance for not only the Muslims but also mankind as a whole.

The Prophet of Islam, the religion that he preached to bring about a just social order, has rightly been termed even by followers of other religions as the greatest leader and the truest man that humanity has ever produced. He was born at a time when the Arab society was plagued by all kinds of social ills. Islam did come as a divine blessing and enabled its genuine followers to attain a unique level of perfection as human beings. The Prophet (Pbuh) led them from the front as the new religion undertook its arduous journey to establish itself in the face of all kinds of hostilities. The truth triumphed in the end as the enemies of the Prophet (Pbuh) and his religion crumbled before the unflinching faith of the Muslims.

The teachings of the Prophet (Pbuh) would have transformed the entire human race had the teachings been followed in the right spirit. The point will be made clear by GB Shaw's observation that the world would have been a much better place to live in today if it were administered by a leader like the Prophet of Islam.

However, fair-play, brotherhood and tolerance that were central to all that the Prophet (Pbuh) did and preached during his lifetime appear to be missing in what is being done today by some self-styled saviours of Islam. Their highly aggressive postures and militant activities, based on the erroneous notion that Islam prescribes an obscurantist lifestyle having nothing to do with mundane affairs, has blurred the image of the great religion. Nothing can be further from truth since the Prophet (Pbuh) himself laid great emphasis on acquisition of knowledge and peaceful conduct of human affairs. The Prophet taught us to live in peace and be respectful of the rights of others.

Mankind owes a lot to the Prophet of Islam for lifting us from the abysmal ignorance and darkness prevailing in the Arab society before his emergence as a liberator. Peace be upon the man who gave us the guidelines for attaining both worldly success and spiritual refinement.

Administrative shake-up

Wholesale reshuffle can be counterproductive

FOR the civil administration to suffer from uncertainty and transfer phobia is not a healthy sign. But that is what the state of the civil bureaucracy is at the moment.

It is unfortunate that the phenomenon has been repetitive; with every change of government since 1991 we have seen large-scale transfer, officers made OSD, promotions that had bypassed many rather unfairly, and premature retirement, in varying degrees, but enough to sap the spirit of the civil servants.

Just to put the matter in perspective, apart from the changes in appointment of seven secretaries, five additional secretaries and 34 joint secretaries recently, several such changes have been made in the last two months. Regrettably, the Grand Alliance seems to be following the bad example set by the past government of 4-party alliance, which during its tenure had prematurely retired more than five hundred officers of various ranks including from the police, and had kept more than seven hundred officers as OSD till the time of its relinquishment of power to a caretaker government in October 2006.

Such indiscriminate and wholesale changes usually prove counterproductive. It appears to us that the postings and transfers are following no rational pattern in the professional sense as these are being done in a rather haphazard manner. One could almost discern favouritism, unfairness, and even victimisation through marginalisation in some of the changes. The net result could be a general demoralisation among the civil servants.

We accept that in the past some civil servants had excelled in demonstrating their loyalty to the party in power. They served with partisan outlook to the detriment of state interest and outclassed party men in their loyalty to the party in power. That might hold some rationale for a little shuffling and changing here and there, but what we are witnessing now appears to be crossing the threshold of normal postings and transfers and may be interpreted as reverse politicisation.

Politicisation of the bureaucracy is totally unacceptable, and the government must come down hard on those civil servants who try to gain undue favours of the government by trying to show their loyalty to the party in power. Unfortunately, the bureaucracy has been split along AL-BNP lines, and the two major parties must take the major share of the responsibility for such a state of affairs. Should the AL do anything that might belie its call for change in governance?

Days of thunder

We had shed blood in February 1952, and had turned around to defeat the enemy to uphold the honour of our mother tongue. We are proud of that legacy. We have shed blood again in February 2009, and we have taken the resolve to defeat the enemy once again. Be informed, we never let our sacrifice go in vain.

SHAHNOOR WAHID

THE two months of the English calendar -- February and March -- come to our lives to remind us of our glorious history. These two months are blood-soaked all right, but some of our greatest achievements came in these two months. We had shed blood in February 1952, and had turned around to defeat the enemy to uphold the honour of our mother tongue. We are proud of that legacy. We have shed blood again in February 2009, and we have taken the resolve to defeat the enemy once again. Be informed, we never let our sacrifice go in vain.

This is March and this month reminds us of our collective voice that resonated throughout Bangladesh in the single voice of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: "Ebarer shongram shuadhinotar shongram" (this battle is the battle for independence). So, March is another important month in our history.

This is the month when we had taken our final decision in 1971, to hoist our own green and red flag permanently. Thus, March fills our hearts with the spirit of freedom. So, in this March of 2009, we shall have to take the correct decision, like we did 38 years ago. March is the month that provides us with the direction.

Today, hungry predators watch us from the dark bushes, waiting for the right

moment to pounce with their full might. They are extremely ferocious animals, having no regard for human life. They have been waiting since December 16, 1971. They had launched attacks intermittently in the last 38 years, but every time they have been chased back to the bushes by the people of Bangladesh.

Like 1971, we are again faced with a national crisis, but fortunately we have our own history to learn lessons from and take actions accordingly. We do not have to borrow from the history of any other country. Only the other day, on March 7, we heard once again the historic clarion call of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on TV and radio. He told us to be united and be prepared with everything we had. We have to take cues from that speech.

Therefore, we shall get united again (divided we fall). We shall collect all our resources and shall be ready to strike back. If it was the battle for freedom (shuadhinota) in 1971, now it is the battle to protect our freedom. We can see hundreds of vultures circling overhead to swoop down on us. We can see the glowing eyes of the predators in the bushes. So, united we must be.

We have a lot to learn from March. We have the unequalled history of how a handful of leaders, men and women of unwavering integrity, matchless courage and profound wisdom, had given leader-



Indomitable we stand.

ship in the absence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the brutal crackdown on March 25, 1971. They did not lose the sense of direction, no matter how close to death they were. Against all odds, they had carried the war through until achieving victory.

At such difficult times, when numerous conspiracies and schemes are being brewed against the nation state, we remember the iron-nerve of Bangabandhu's able deputies like Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam and AHM Quamruzzaman and how judiciously they had handled the War of Liberation. They had kept their cool against all sorts of provocations and faced the conspirators both within and outside. They knew they had to push on towards the ultimate goal -- victory.

So, with all the splendid deeds of these

sagacious leaders in our history, the younger leaders of the day need go nowhere for drawing inspiration. It is said that no one takes lessons from history. Let us prove this age-old saying wrong. Let us take lessons from our own history of the War of Liberation. Therefore, let us keep our cool, take iron-solid decisions and implement them without fear or favour.

The battle for protection and preservation of our freedom might prove to be as bloody as the War of Liberation, as the enemies have consolidated power over last 38 years. They are bigger in number today and are well-armed. So, young leaders of today, prepare your battle plans cleverly so that you may take the enemy by surprise. And fight for all-out victory.

Shahnour Wahid is a Senior Assistant Editor of The Daily Star. He can be contacted at shahnourwahid@yahoo.co.uk.

Easy money

Lack of readily available funding means a reduction in business operations and employment, forcing businesses to hold on to their cash reserves to survive worsening business conditions.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

"AS GM goes -- so goes America." GM is going (bankrupt) and America is going deeper into a downturn. General Motor's stock plummeted to close at its lowest since 1935 to \$1.45 a share on March 5. The Dow Jones Industrial Average lost nearly 60% of its market value in less than a year. Stock market investors are now buying low and selling lower for fear of losing it all as the market keeps plummeting.

Home foreclosure continues unabated, and the government is unveiling a plan to bring down loan value and mortgage payments to affordable levels.

Citigroup, Bank of America and insurance giant AIG (80% stakes now owned by tax payers) are asking for more bailout green packs. The financial crisis is debilitating the banking system so depressingly that an unthinkable prospect of limited nationalisation of large banks in return for more assistance is looming large.

With February's job loss of 651,000, the unemployment rate has peaked at its 25 years high of 8.1% (based only on jobs seekers over the last four consecutive weeks). Counting the underemployed and the full timers forced to work half time, the unemployment rate is around 14.5%.

The easy credit-driven consumer spending is at a near standstill. Consumer confidence dropped to a new low of 25 in February, from 37.4 in the preceding month -- the lowest since 1967. The 2008, fourth-quarter real GDP fell at an annual rate of 3.8%.

The \$787 billion stimulus package (in addition to the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Recovery Program) will be channeled to the destinations. For example, tax rebate checks of \$800 for married couples are being sent out by the Treasury to boost immediate consumer spending. With this year's Federal budget of \$410 billion, the deficit will hit an unprecedented \$1.75 trillion.

The economic climate is getting worse because the credit markets that are essential for small businesses and consumers are strained. Because of the underlying risk and uncertainty, fund raising in the capital market is nearly non-existent. Banks have become more stringent in applying their lending criteria as they return to risk, rather than market-led, pricing.

Lack of readily available funding means a reduction in business operations and employment, forcing businesses to hold on to their cash reserves to survive wors-

ening business conditions.

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner stressed that the salvation of the economy lay in both job creation and in the restoration of credit flow.

This involves stabilising the shaky financial markets to restart the flow of credit, strengthening the banking system, and providing aid to homeowners and small businesses. Geithner accentuated a "comprehensive and forceful" response to the financial crisis and warned: "There is more risk and greater cost in gradualism than in aggressive action." He said that the afflictions of the Great Depression and the Japanese recession of the 1990s were prolonged because of halting of fiscal activism too early.

Investments will be placed in a new Financial Stability Trust, in addition to a Public-Private Investment Fund. The latter is set to start out at around \$500 billion, then expanded "based on what works."

In addition, the Federal Reserve's Term Asset Backed Securities Loan Facility (TALF) will be radically expanded with capital from the Treasury and financing from the Fed. The size of TALF could reach \$1 trillion.

TALF is intended to help investment companies' purchase of securities backed by auto and business loans. The outcome is expected to ease the credit markets in accommodating consumers and small businesses' credit needs by facilitating the issuance of asset-backed securities and improving their marketability.

Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke told the

Senate banking committee that the Fed was making an all out effort to unfreeze credit markets and persuade lending and borrowing. However, he said: "A full recovery is potentially at least a year away."

The Bangladesh economy, so far, hasn't felt much adverse pressure from the global financial crisis partly because its capital market and the financial institutions have little or no exposure to foreign capital markets.

Also, most household transactions are made in cash. However, some adverse effects are bound to impinge on the economy through declining exports and expatriate remittances. Besides, foreign aid and disaster management funds may not come as generously as in the past. It is, therefore, important that policy makers learn how the US and other countries are coping with the crisis.

The World Bank predicts a falling global GDP in 2009, along with global trade shrinking for the first time since 1982 and the biggest since the 1930s. Many economy watchdogs believe that global recovery is dependent on the recovery trajectory of the US economy.

Last week, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown proposed initiation of a global "New Deal" to President Obama. Will the credit-driven consumer-spending US economy ever return to "credit-driven higher living standard" in the near future as a forerunner of global recovery?

Abdullah A. Dewan is Professor of Economics at Eastern Michigan University.

Clearing the air

Anyway, it is the government that will have to come out loud and clear about the present position, and the sooner does it do so the better will it serve the government's credibility. One cannot afford to forget that mistrust should not be allowed to take root.

KAZI S.M. KHASRUL ALAM QUDDUSI

WHILE the government's handling of the Pilkhana incident has been well appreciated, the questions that continue to surface are not only perplexing but have also turned out to be extremely disturbing for the democracy-loving people of the country. Why should there be questions about the government, and why should there be fingers pointed at the people in the government?

There are reports that the Pilkhana carnage was planned some two months back and that the murderers took control of the arsenal hours before the gruesome killings. Where were the members of our intelligence agencies? Following the Pilkhana incident, however, we have not yet heard of any intelligence man being questioned.

How can one forget the Pilkhana tragedy? The whole nation is united in sorrow and deep respect for the heroes of the land, all agree that the scar that February 25-26 has left will not heal unless the plotters and perpetrators of this heinous act are brought to justice.

It is true that every member of our armed forces suffered immense grief at this barbaric incident, and so did every sane human of the land. The nation, however, salutes the army for the self-possession they have shown at such provocation. Some political parties are now blaming the government for not going for rapid military action.

Can one, however, imagine what the scale of massacre in and around the Pilkhana BDR headquarters could have been had there been a combat between two armed wings of the country, along with the chain reaction throughout the

country?

Moreover, our beloved army might have been depicted as a marauding force despite being attacked by a gang of well-trained criminals masquerading as BDR jawans.

There was also the possibility of all the traces of the crime and conspiracy being wiped out. It is also difficult to say whether the 40 odd army officers and their families could have come out alive had there been a confrontation between the two groups of heavily armed soldiers.

Many such previous experiences of "storming" also more than justified the government's negotiating approach.

Though only objective and thorough investigation can pin down the real culprits behind the mutiny, there are similarities to previous acts of barbarity. Many have compared the mayhem of February 25-26 to March 25, 1971 and December 14, 1971.

However, such barbarity in an independent country, and that too against the armed forces, boggles one's imagination.

Many have suggested that a well-orchestrated conspiracy is in operation against the very existence of the nation. The government has, thus, one way to

salvage and reassure the nation, and that is to unearth and crush the real culprits within the shortest possible time.

In the past, there were rumours and reports of people inside the government having an unholy nexus with terrorists and criminals engaged in heinous activities.

Even in the previous 4-party government's rule, there were such incriminations against many. Actually, criminals do not belong to any particularly party; rather they use the cover of political parties to indulge in their acts against humanity.

Unfortunately for the nation, this country has no dearth of such people. For the very existence of democracy, such people should be rounded up irrespective of party affiliation.

Anyway, it is the government that will have to come out loud and clear about the present position, and the sooner does it do so the better will it serve the government's credibility. One cannot afford to forget that mistrust should not be allowed to take root.

Kazi S.M. Khasrul Alam Quddusi is Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, University of Chittagong. E-mail: khasru74@yahoo.com.