

Tipaimukh dam: Trust, but verify

The lessons of Farrakka Barrage make it imperative that the proposed expert committee must consist of professionals with expertise in all three areas to produce an independent and professionally sound assessment. Tipaimukh dam is not a diplomatic matter or a cross-border political issue -- it's a question of Bangladesh's national security.

ABDULLAH A. DEWAN

AFTER holding talks with Indian authorities about the pros and cons of the construction of Tipaimukh dam vis-a-vis Bangladesh, the Parliament's water resources committee chairman Abdur Razzak told *New Age* that his team members were convinced that India would do nothing harmful for Bangladesh. "We have to trust our neighbour, as the Indian prime minister and two other ministers have assured that they wouldn't take up any scheme that would harm Bangladesh," he stressed.

On receiving the team's report about the controversial 1,500 MW Tipaimukh dam (TD), Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina ordered the formation of an expert committee to assess the environmental, ecological, and economic (EEE) impacts on Bangladesh.

The building of the dam is of serious concern because of its potentially detrimental effects on Bangladesh's rivers. The plan is to build TD on the trans-boundary Barak river which channels water to the Bangladesh rivers Surma and Kushiya, both of which merge into the Meghna. Thus, any potentially destabilising water flow in Meghna should be unacceptable to Bangladesh.

Razzak's imprudent assertion that India would do nothing that is harmful for Bangladesh can be dismissed as a memory-lapse statement -- one that ignores the adverse consequences of the Farrakka barrage (FB) that both India and Bangladesh have been coping with ever since its construction.

One of the devastating impacts of the FB is the vanishing of a large village, Akheriganj of Bhagabangola, rendering 23,394 people homeless and raising tensions between India and Bangladesh. Besides, the barrage has turned parts of northern Bangladesh into a desert, raising salinity, affecting navigation, and adversely impacting the environment, agriculture and fisheries.

The government of India is now thinking of repairing the damage with a massive \$120 billion plan to link its rivers, which originate in the Himalayas, with 30 interlinked canal systems that would deliver water to so-called Peninsular India. (*India: Farrakka Barrage -- An Environmental Mistake* by Muhammad Javed Iqbal.)

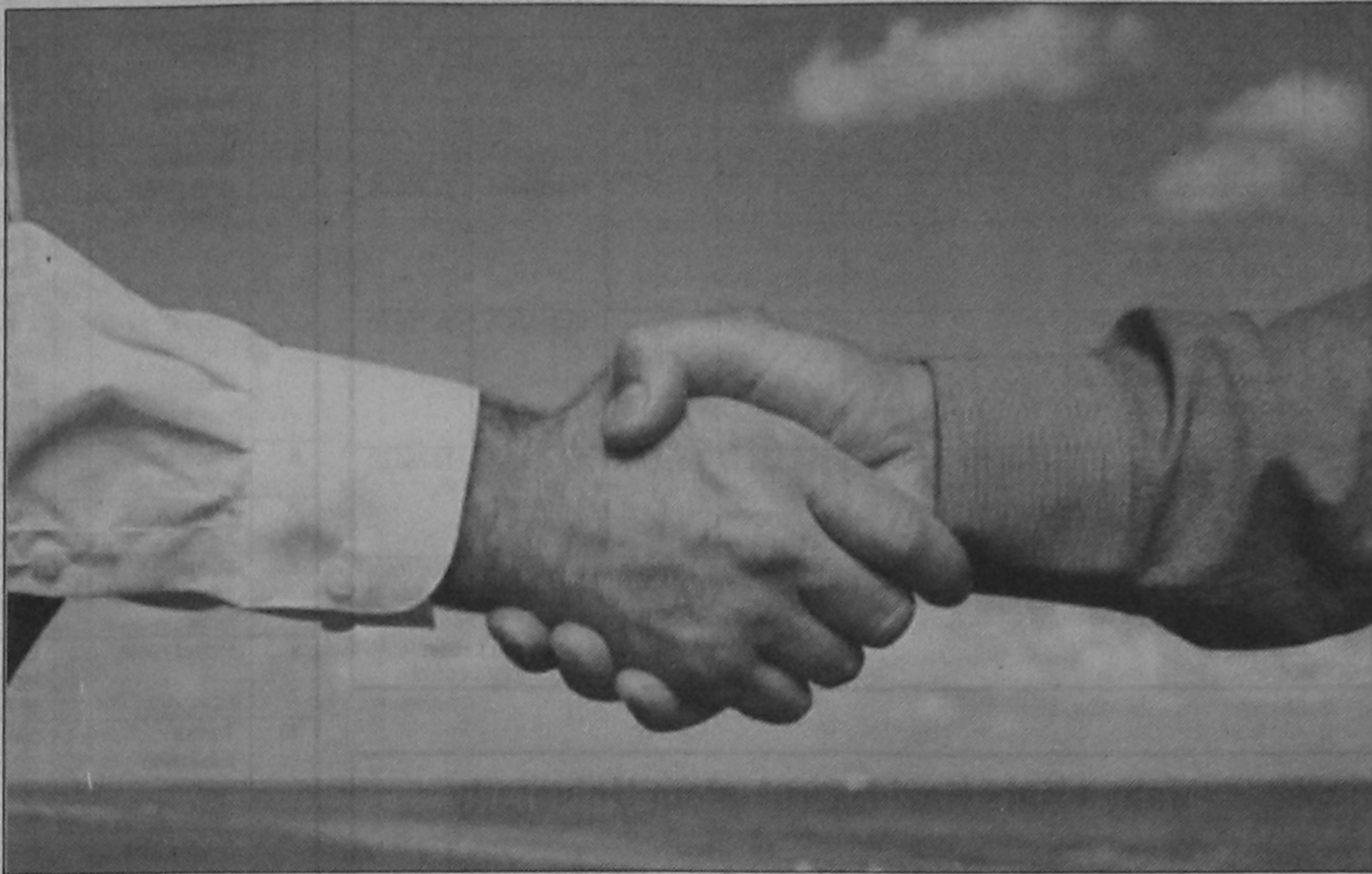
Razzaque is a politician, not a water expert -- even a "so-called" one. His assertion about the team being "convinced that India would do nothing harmful" may be deemed gratuitously friendly, diplomatically pandering,

evidentially unsubstantiated, and openly vociferous. Despite environmentalists' concerns, Razzak dismissed BNP's remonstrations about the project as nothing but an attempt to keep themselves politically alive. All his post India trip statements seem to suggest: "In India, we trust."

"Trust, but verify" should have been the mission of the Razzak-led 10-member get-to-know delegation. The Russian proverb *doverai, no proveryai* -- Trust, but verify -- had often been quoted by US President Ronald Reagan when discussing US and Soviet relationships with USSR General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. If the Farrakka barrage had taught us anything, the Razzak led delegation should have adhered to the Russian proverb before being convinced that dam would have no adverse effects on Bangladesh.

The lessons of FB make it imperative that the proposed expert committee must consist of professionals with expertise in all three areas of EEE to produce an independent and professionally sound assessment. The TD is not a diplomatic matter or a cross-border political issue -- it's a question of Bangladesh's national security.

The recent actions and concerns expressed by members of the US Congress, the UN Security Council, and retired US military officers have awakened many nations to the consequences of climate change, including the destabilising effects of storms, droughts, and floods (SDF). Experts think that the effects of climate change could easily overwhelm disaster-response capabilities in the US. Internationally, it may cause humanitarian disasters, contribute to political unrest, and undermine weak



Trust should not be blind.

governments -- leading to failed states.

Last week, in a national public radio talk show on climate change, I heard a retired US military officer refer to Bangladesh several times while discussing what could potentially happen to natural disaster prone countries. He argued that the effects of SDF brought about by climate change could lead to starvation, political violence and terrorism. As a consequence, climate change has increasingly been called a "security" problem, and there is conjecture that climate change may enhance the

risk of violent conflict.

A recent study, *National Security and the Threat of Climate Change*, projected climate change as "a threat multiplier in already fragile regions, exacerbating conditions that lead to failed states -- the breeding grounds for extremism and terrorism."

The disastrous effects of the Farrakka barrage must remind the politicians of Bangladesh not to blithely jump to hasty conclusions about the potential negative impacts of the controversial

Tipaimukh dam. The potential adverse effects are similar to those of climate change. Therefore, the government of India must abandon the project if the dam -- even if remotely -- poses a threat to the environment, ecology, and economy of Bangladesh. A rise in terrorism as a result of dam related adverse effects could easily spill over across the border into India -- which neither Bangladesh nor India would ever like to see happening.

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Tragic end of the Muslims in medieval Spain

On April 9, 1609 the king ordered the expulsion of all the Moriscos from Spanish territories and on September 2, 1609, the authorities started executing the order by driving them to southern ports and herded them into boats leaving for North Africa.

CHAKILADER MAHBOOB-UL ALAM

WHAT happened to the Spanish Muslims after the conquest of Granada, the last Muslim kingdom of Spain, by the armies of the Catholic kings in 1492? Why is the Muslim community of the Spanish peninsula today mainly composed of recent immigrants? These are questions often asked by visitors who are impressed by the rich cultural heritage left behind by the Islamic civilisation which flourished in Spain for nearly eight hundred years. The four hundredth anniversary of the expulsion of the Moriscos (Muslims who were forcibly converted to Catholicism after the fall of Granada) from Spain gives us an opportunity to write about the tragedy that befell the Spanish Muslims.

During the heyday of Muslim domination (the conquest started in 711), the new aristocracy who took over the land owned by the Christian nobles was composed of Spaniards of Arab and Berber descent. Many army commanders, administrators and top civil servants also came from this ethnic group. Therefore, the upper crust of the society was basically composed of the conquerors and their descendants.

The vast majority of the population however was composed of the Muallads, the descendants of Christian serfs (bound to the soil without any rights to move freely), who because of their precarious economic and social conditions abandoned Christianity and became Muslims. The conversion gave them considerable advantages. They were no longer serfs but freed men. It gave them opportunities for upward social mobility. They could pick and choose their trade, profession or occupation.

Over the centuries there were, of course, lots of intermarriages between the new Muslims and successive waves of settlers from North Africa, particularly because these soldiers and adventurers often came without their womenfolk. There were sizeable communities of Christians and Jews who could freely practise their religions and work in their respective trades and professions.

The Christian nobles, after losing most of Spain to the Muslim invaders took refuge in the mountains of the extreme north and started organising resistance as early as the year 722. The Church played an important role in uniting the defeated Goths under the

banner of a common cause, which was to save Christianity.

On the other hand, the Muslims, after their initial unity of purpose and military success, soon went back to their favourite pastime, which was to wage fratricidal wars among themselves. It was mainly because of this reason that the Muslims gradually started losing ground to the Christian counter offensive. It was a slow process. As the Christian "Reconquista" progressed towards the south, adding one kingdom after another to the Christian fold, most

members of the upper crust of the Muslim society either got killed in battle or took refuge in other neighbouring kingdoms to fight another day. In order to maintain their power and position some converted to Catholicism.

The ordinary people had no other option but to stay on and go about their daily business. In the early centuries of the "Reconquista," because of social and economic reasons, many of them voluntarily abandoned their Muslim ways, converted to Christianity and were assimilated into the rest of the

population. The fall of Granada marked the end of Muslim military power in Spain and the beginning of Catholic hegemony over the peninsula.

Initially, the terms of surrender were generous. The Muslims could not only practise their religion but also keep their land and work in their respective trades and professions as long as they were loyal subjects of the Catholic Kings. But the Church soon started implementing a policy of repression to eradicate everything that could be identified with Islam.

Muslims were asked to give up their faith, which eventually led to mass conversions into Catholicism by force. They were forced to accept Christian names, give up Muslim dress, ordered not to use Arabic and forced to live in specially designated areas (ghettos), very much like slaves.

In spite of all this, most of them kept on practising Islam in private. The process continued for over a century. In the ordinary Christian mind a Morisco became irredeemably "the other" -- an inferior being (because he had been defeated militarily), a sub-human to be despised and if necessary be destroyed without compassion. There was no need for any compromise.

In 1569, goaded beyond endurance, the Moriscos rebelled. The rebellion was cruelly suppressed by the king's troops, but it took nearly four years for a complete surrender. The surviving Moriscos were dispersed in small groups all over Spain. Even that was not enough for some hard-liners in the Church. They advocated extermina-

tion, castration or deportation to newly colonised territories of America.

The debate continued until 1609, when a suitable excuse was found for their definitive expulsion. The Moriscos were accused of secretly plotting with the Turks to restore Islam in Spain. On April 9, 1609 the king ordered the expulsion of all the Moriscos from Spanish territories and on September 2, 1609, the authorities started executing the order by driving them to southern ports and herded them into boats leaving for North Africa. Most of their meagre belongings were confiscated to pay for their passage.

No accurate figures are available, but historians estimate that although already quite decimated, the Morisco population at that time was between 500,000 and 750,000 (between 7% and 9% of the total Spanish population). This was ethnic cleansing on a massive scale.

Today, most historians agree that instead of being enemies of king and country "most of these Moriscos were poor farmers, agricultural labourers or small tradesmen and hucksters." Although poor, they led their lives according to a simple but strict code of conduct. According to the German chronicler Munzer and the Jesuit scholar Pedro de Leon, they were hardworking, frugal and very knowledgeable about their trade or profession. Even the widely respected modern Spanish historian Julio Caro Baroja wrote: "They were excellent workers and very frugal in their lifestyle. All they wanted was to be allowed to practise their religion."

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HISTORY OF SPAIN

Lunar months and moon sighting

Using Table 1 and 2 both these conditions are satisfied earliest after the new moons on August 22 and September 20 and, as such, new crescent moons are expected to be visible on those evenings.

ANWAR-UL KARIM

THE moon rises and sets every day, appearing on the horizon just like the sun. The time depends on the phase of the moon. It rises about 30 to 70 minutes later than it did the previous day, so the moon is out during daytime as often as it is out at night. At the time of the new moon, the moon rises at about the same time the sun rises, and sets at about the same

time the sun sets.

As the days go by (as it waxes to become a crescent moon, a half moon, and a gibbous moon, on the way to a full moon) the moon rises during daytime (after the sun rises), rising later each day, and setting later and later each night. At the full moon, the times of moonrise and moonset have advanced so that the moon rises at about the same time the sun sets, and sets at about the same time the sun rises.

| Table 1: Rising and setting times for sun and moon for Dhaka in 2009. Source: Astronomical Applications Dept, US Naval Observatory, Washington DC. | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|--------|----------|---------|
| Date | Sunrise | Sunset | Moonrise | Moonset |
| July 22 | 05 23 | 18 46 | 05 19 | 19 03 |
| July 23 | 05 24 | 18 46 | 06 29 | 19 48 |
| Aug 6 | 05 30 | 18 39 | 18 48 | 05 32 |
| Aug 20 | 05 36 | 18 28 | 05 13 | 18 19 |
| Aug 21 | 05 36 | 18 27 | 06 18 | 18 59 |
| Aug 22 | 05 36 | 18 26 | 07 21 | 19 37 |
| Sept 18 | 05 46 | 18 00 | 05 02 | 17 30 |
| Sept 19 | 05 46 | 17 59 | 06 04 | 18 07 |
| Sept 20 | 05 46 | 17 58 | 07 05 | 18 46 |
| Oct 4 | 05 51 | 17 43 | 17 32 | 05 40 |

For daylight saving time, add one hour

As the moon wanes (become a half moon and a crescent moon, on the way to a new moon), it rises during the night, after sunset, rising later each night. It then sets in the daytime, after the sun rises. Eventually, the moon rises so late

at night that it's actually rising around sunrise, and setting around sunset. That's when it becomes a new moon once again. See Table-1

The first sighting of the moon, seen as a waxing crescent, after conjunction

| Table 2: 2009 Phases of the Moon Universal Time (GMT) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----|----|---------------|----|----|-----------|----|-------|--------------|----|----|
| New Moon | | | First Quarter | | | Full Moon | | | Last Quarter | | |
| D | H | M | D | H | M | D | H | M | D | H | M |
| Jul 22 | 2 | 35 | Jul 28 | 22 | 00 | Aug 6 | 0 | 55 | Aug 13 | 18 | 55 |
| Aug 20 | 10 | 02 | Aug 27 | 11 | 42 | Sep 4 | 16 | 03 | Sep 12 | 2 | 16 |
| Sep 18 | 18 | 44 | Sep 26 | 4 | 50 | Oct 4 | 6 | 10 | Oct 11 | 8 | 55 |
| Oct 13 | 5 | 33 | Oct 26 | 0 | 42 | Nov 21 | 14 | Nov 9 | 15 | 56 | |

<http://www.stormfax.com/moon.htm>

with the sun low in the evening sky just after sunset marks the beginning of a lunar month. This usually happens when the moon's age is more than 24 hrs (i.e. from the time of conjunction to the time of observation) and moonset takes place at least about 48 minutes after sunset.

Table-2 shows, partially, the phases of the moon in 2009. Using Table 1 and 2 both these conditions are satisfied earli-

est after the new moons on August 22 and September 20 and, as such, new crescent moons are expected to be visible on those evenings. And in that case Ramadan will begin on Sunday August 23, and Eid-ul-Fitr will be celebrated in Bangladesh, Insha Allah, on Monday September 21.

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